Politics and Ontology in Baruch Spinoza: Individuation, Affectivity and the Collective life of the Multitude

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A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
November 2011
Abstract

The thesis examines the linkage between ontology and politics in Spinoza, and considers the extent to which his philosophy discloses novel materialist conceptions of nature, history and society. It explores the distinctive paradigm of the individual proposed by Spinoza emerging from his materialist ontology, and the ways in which this impacts effectively upon the constitution of the multitude as a political category. Arguing that Spinoza’s ontology unveils a complex process of vital and psychic individuation, I develop a contemporary interpretation of Spinoza’s writings through Simondon’s notions of collective being, disparation, emotions and transindividuality. The study of Spinoza’s ontology in the light of Simondon is crucial for re-considering the central role of affectivity within the development of human beings. This refers to the redefinition of affectivity as a powerful source of psychic and political individuation, which is the cornerstone of relation, power and transformations. The understanding of Spinoza’s process of affective and collective individuation constitutes the basis for analysing his political theory.

The inquiry focuses to the emergence of the political status of the multitude from this complex process of collective and affective individuation, and considers the extent to which the multitude impacts concretely upon the realm of the political. Specifically, the discussion draws attention to the affective state of the multitude, and the ways in which this produces fundamental relational events, meanings, power and problematic political individuals. The argument then turns to examine the model of democracy proposed by Spinoza and the role of the multitude within the constitution of the democratic body. It sheds light on the pivotal part played by the multitude within the production of democracy, and investigates the interface between affectivity and democracy more broadly.
Abbreviations and Translations


References to Spinoza’s texts follow the abbreviations shown below:

E = Ethics
TTP = Theologico-Politicus Tractatus (Theological-Political Treatise)
TP = Politicus Tractatus (Political Treatise)
EP = Epistles

References to the Ethics follow the conventions indicated below:
prop. = Proposition
dem. = Demonstration
schol. = Scholium
Def. = Definition
ax. = axiom
postul. = postulate
Def. Aff = the definition of the affects at the end of Part III.

Roman numerals before these abbreviations describe the parts of the Ethics.

References to the TTP include chapter and page number. References to the TP contain chapter followed by the paragraph. Page number of the TTP and TP refer to Shirley’s translation (2002). In chapters III and IV I have adopted the following rule of capitalisation of the terms. Conceptual personae are named and cited in capital letters- e.g., the Apostles, the Devotees of the prophet, the Subjects of Moses and the Citizens of democracy. For the capitalisation of conceptual personae, I refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s style (1994).
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Introduction

Understanding the social through Spinoza’s philosophy: New directions in contemporary political theory

There is an unexplored political reality alongside the recognised body politic: a political reality that articulates various commonalities, new gestures of insurgence and cohesion. It is situated in the zones of intersection between authorised and non-authorised places for political praxis and thought such as the state, public and civil spheres, the market and the body of law, and its political strategy is constructed around an alternative paradigm of relation. This paradigm, and the constitutive power to which it corresponds, does not originate from tensions between extant social forms, such as the inequality and rivalry between social groups, but rather from their action and thought, which exceeds the fixity of social, political and economic class.

Although not identified within consolidated models of society, the emerging subjectivities that arise from this political reality are extremely productive of meaning, knowledge and power, and impact concretely upon our socio-political context. These subjectivities have actualised a fracture between the political and politics, between the philosophy of praxis and real action, and between society and community. It is to the political cogency of this unrecognised reality that this thesis draws particular attention. The focus is to re-construct a novel materialist paradigm of the political field from the plenitude of actions, thoughts, and relational forces embodied by this other political actuality. My aim is to re-locate the centrality of a materialist ontology of individuation within contemporary political theory and philosophy. A materialist thought of individuation, I argue, might provide our search with crucial theoretical instruments for re-constructing the anatomy of the social from the zones of intersection indicated above.

The study of the theme of individuation is conducted by examining the ontology and politics of seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and determines through his categories of thought the political stakes of contemporary
forms of association. Attention is given to Spinoza’s affective and political process of individuation, and the extent to which his thesis might offer a more innovative account of the *material* process that lies at the very basis of every community. The focus on Spinoza’s theory of individuation introduces a new awareness of the relation between affectivity and politics, the genesis of mass movement and the meaning of democracy. I refer to an extensive understanding of the political role of affectivity within the construction of democracy and the constitution of the multitude as a powerful individual. It is to this linkage between affectivity and politics, I claim, that contemporary theories of democracy and community should pay greater attention.

The return to Spinoza’s philosophy advanced here is situated within the general tendency inaugurated by continental thought, which has proposed re-founding the paradigm of the political through its conclusion within the ontological field. The resurgence of interest in ontology within continental discourse derives from the recognition of the increasing level of complexity of society, which has revealed the inadequacy of our political tools. In order to establish the guidelines of the present research project, and in order to thereby explain the role of Spinoza’s philosophy within contemporary thought, I shall delineate the intellectual milieu from which this thesis originates. It is thus to a discussion of the main themes developed by contemporary continental thought that I now turn.

**A detour of politics via ontology**

In order to politically conceptualise contemporary forms of association, continental political thought, variously named post-modern and post-structuralist, has claimed an alliance between politics and ontology. Continental political philosophy has sought the support of certain ontological categories of thought, firstly, for understanding the meanings and potentialities introduced within the existing political context by these heterogeneous subjectivities; and secondly, for determining the extent to which these subjectivities act and think politically. Ontology, as we will discuss below, sheds light on the constitutive elements,
which permeate the equilibrium of the political reality of the present regardless of whether this is presumed as political or not.

The discovery of the importance of the linkage between ontology and politics within continental political philosophy derives from a more general discussion within certain currents of post-Marxist thought, which has denounced the crises of the materialist paradigm and the philosophy of praxis. That paradigm, and indeed that philosophy should be based on a more extensive account of the structure of the material world; an account that should re-explain the impact of the latter upon human actions and thoughts. A re-consideration of these themes is central for re-defining the materialist notion of production and the types of relation that can be developed from it. Althusser’s preoccupation with the poverty of the twentieth-century paradigm of materialism occupies a central position within the development of contemporary materialist conceptions of philosophy, politics and history. He poses the urgency of re-signifying the Marxist paradigm of materialism, which has been corrupted by certain orthodox readings.

The central problems of these orthodox readings, Althusser observes, is the vision of the world as a place of mechanical rules and opposing forces, within which social relations are conditioned by the economic mechanism. This generates constantly dominant and dominated individuals, ideas and behaviours, which are moulded by the dialectical logic of conflict and lack. By contrast, reality progresses throughout a variety of unexpected events developed in the absence of ‘contradiction’. Phenomena of struggle and solidarity, Althusser recognises, proceed through a more complex interaction between the structure and the superstructure, within which a variety of unsuspected events such as imagination and desires play a role in the construction of political identities. Thus, it becomes crucial to articulate alternative questions that are shaped by two factors: firstly, the reality of human beings as unique combinations of materiality and imagination; secondly, the necessity of looking through the structure of the universe as a confluence of heterogeneous phenomena, and not exclusively as a mass of struggles between forces (Althusser, 1976: 126-132; 2005: 89-128).1

1 Althusser in the later writings (1978-87) would refer to Epicurus’s notions of clinamen and atoms, which derive from Heraclites’s naturalist ontology, see Althusser (2006: 163-205).
In this light, even ideology, which expresses the power of a social class under a specific economic juncture, unveils, in Althusser’s re-interpretation, a more problematic mechanism, which does not only produce the alienation and exploitation of individuals’ needs and the preservation of the ruling class. Ideology essentially controls individuals through the reinforcement and encouragement of imaginary practises. In order to preserve and further develop the ideological apparatus of the state, the dynamics of the imaginary structure of individuals acquires a strategic role. Imagination has the power of creating social relations, common beliefs and collective desires, which forms political meaning, identity and cohesion (Althusser, 1971: 142-177). For Althusser, our awareness of the political relevance of these heterogeneous and contingent factors, through which the apparatus of the state is defended, will certainly open new possibilities for a philosophy of praxis, or will at the very least make the sovereign authority of the state less inescapable.

Following Althusser’s preoccupations, continental political thought has re-constructed the anatomy of the material world, and considered the many ways in which this transforms individuals. Strictly speaking, if the paradigm of materialism has to be re-formulated, it is only through the re-shaping of our knowledge of the material world itself that novel materialistic conceptions of history, society and politics might be articulated. As the world is not a motionless system of physical phenomena, and as it affects human action and thought in multiple ways, its study requires more complex categories of thought. These should determine the mode in which the material forces of production generate political gestures and relations. This renewal of interest in the structure of the sensible world has brought about, as mentioned before, the discovery of ontology as powerful theoretical ground, through which a more complex materialist conception of nature and its system of production might come to light.

The continental political gesture of resituating politics within ontology for re-framing the materialist field and philosophy of praxis has involved not only the re-foundation of political discourse; in addition, it also has posed the problem of the re-configuration of the domain of ontology itself. If politics alone can no longer offer defensible materialist premises, because individuals have been split
into political and non political areas and opposing classes, then ontology, as it has been traditionally considered, is not directly related to materialism either. For the conspicuous part of Western philosophy from Plato onwards, with minor exceptions, ontology has generally been included within the domain of metaphysics.

In classical metaphysics, ontological arguments concerned the investigation of the nature of God or Being. Ontology was treated as a subset of metaphysics concerned with the proofs of the existence of God, Being and nature, which investigates the first cause of the universe, the generation of matter and the relation between human being, nature and Being. Ontological analysis was mostly understood as a search for the ultimate principles beyond (meta) the universe (physiká), which attributes to the material world the status of the lower genera (particularly in neo-Platonic and Scholastic traditions of thought). Given the abstract objects examined by ontology, its categories such as substance, matter, thought, becoming and individuation came to connote mostly transcendent meanings. As a result, these have been adopted as theoretical tools by Idealistic philosophies, which postulate a qualitative distinction between matter and thought, nature and Being. This led to the discharge of ontology from any possible association with materialist theories, philosophies of praxis, and, above all, politics. In this respect, the Marxist formulation of historical materialism is exemplary.

By contrast, the novelty of the continental political move lies precisely in two fundamental retreats, which inaugurate a different approach to political theory, philosophy and society. Firstly, the retreat of the political from politics, which I have indicated above, and which I will discuss further; secondly, the withdrawal of ontology from metaphysics, and thus from Idealist appropriations. The recovery of ontology from metaphysical themes involves the affirmation of the autonomy of ontology, and, importantly, its return to the original Ancient Greek meaning rooted within pre-Socratic thought. For pre-Socratic philosophy in particular, ontology is a search through and only within the order of nature, which investigates the unseen potentialities and forces of matter. A ‘naturalistic’ approach explores the relation and interaction between different forces and
elements in nature, through which complex and heterogeneous individuals are developed. The importance of this way of thinking ontology, for contemporary political reflections, resides upon its treatment of nature as a powerful organism, which generates beings through relational movements and confluences, and not through a mechanism of opposing forces. The materialist ontology of the pre-Socratic form of naturalism opens the way to thinking nature as a productive body characterised by exchanges of elements and various potentialities.

Taking into account these themes, the return to ontology within political theory – or, better, the political ‘detour’ taken via ontology – constructs a novel path toward the reconfiguration of the political realm, and also a re-consideration of the many ways in which heterogeneous parts of reality activate political relations, individuals and actions in the absence of conflicts. It provides alternative categories of thought and brings forth the possibility of understanding the political relevance of the contemporary subjectivities lying between political and non political zones, ruling and ruled classes, and of re-thinking politics beyond boundaries.

For continental political thought, the idea of society as a mere assemblage of parts – an assemblage derived from the stipulation of a contract between self-independent and rational individuals – is untenable (see for example, Hardt and Negri, 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 2004a). Building upon Marx’s lesson of the critique of classical liberalism (Marx 1990: 279-280), for whom the latter covers under the illusion of equality a deeper set of productive relations and inequalities, beside the different theoretical positions taken, thinkers such as Balibar (1994), Deleuze, Guattari (2004a, b), Foucault (1998), Nancy (1991), Badiou (2002), Agamben (1998, 2000), Hardt and Negri (2000, 2006) argue that society has to be thought as a complex process; where elements such as language, body and emotions ground political relations and, at the same time, are consistently affected by political institutions such as the state, laws and right. In other words, relations once posited are already political and political bodies, once affirmed, immediately invade the alleged private sphere. Therefore, the enquiry into the realm of the political cannot avoid the deep analysis of its ontological foundation, which sheds
light on the relational movements and forces involved within the production of common meanings, collective desires and actions.

More rigorously, the investigation of the political cogency of the powerful subjectivities of the present has to be conducted *contemporaneously* with the ontological quest, through which alternative avenues for politics and society, *in a materialist way*, might be disclosed. This linkage between ontology and politics has brought about, on the one hand, the re-discovery of the political implications of ontological categories such as immanence and transcendence, each of which connotes a different political scenario; on the other, this detour of politics via ontology has generated the *ontologization* of certain political notions such as the state, sovereignty, right and community, thereby introducing a more extensive account of the mode through which politics forms and pervades every aspect of human life.

This thesis operates within the context of this multifaceted and almost labyrinthine debate, which has been nurtured within continental political thought. The thesis is precisely situated within the common quest to attain a novel vocabulary for politics through recourse to a materialist ontology, and brings into the present debate further and alternative issues. It focuses on the relevance – both political and ontological – of the notion of individuation, and considers the extent to which the latter’s usage within political theory and philosophy provides a multisided account of the *material* conditions through which biological, political and psychic individuals are generated.

**Reading Spinoza in the light of Simondon’s ontology of individuation**

This thesis is constructed around a fundamental problem of great concern, which arises from the continental political portrait of the material world as abundant and productive, and as a locus within which phases of both conflict and correspondence form important political behaviours. Given the multifaceted description of reality, the central question that accompanies this project concerns what paradigm of the individual emerges from this conception of the world? Strictly speaking, how do we think the realm of the individual in *a materialist*
way? Without addressing these questions, I believe, political and ontological analysis cannot proceed any further. A consideration of individuation will however engage with these issues.

An enquiry into the notion of individuation, I argue in the pages below, becomes extremely crucial in this specific cultural and historical juncture. What is at stake here is literally the re-learning of the individual after the collapse of the influential ethical and political paradigms of Liberalism and Marxism, and thereby re-building, from and through these ruins, a fresh notion of the individual. In other words, if the re-formulation of the realm of the political requires the support of ontological categories, the re-definition of the individual requires more extensive and problematic ontological argumentation. A theory of individuation aims at the discovery of the fundamental conditions of possibility and uniqueness of an individual, and also establishes the relation of an individual with its milieu, whether natural, political or psychic. The importance of returning to a thought of individuation resides in its political implications. More rigorously, the main objects of a philosophy of individuation are situated in the middle of ontological and political domains.

In twentieth-century continental philosophy, the theme of individuation has nurtured a fecund debate, which has brought about the need for re-shaping our knowledge of the relation between the individual and the material world. Figures and groups as diverse as Merleau-Ponty, Lacan and the Frankfurt school have, in different ways, all cast doubt on the validity of accepted definitions of individuality such as the self, will and egoism. Accordingly, these formulas do not exhaustively explain the role of the others and the milieu within the genesis of the individual. Rather, they situate the peculiarity of an individual within obscure forces and egoist drives, and consider its genesis somewhat detached from the external world and from other beings (human beings or not). This tendency has crucial political implications. As the genesis of the individual is understood independent from its context, the relation with others is conceived not as a constitutive moment of individuation itself but rather as a function which regulates the common life of individuals already formed. This has caused the undervaluation of the cogency of an ontology of individuation for the
development of new materialist notions of community, relation, and more generally, for the philosophy of praxis.

Building upon the twentieth-century continental orientation, our hypotheses are based on the necessity of the conception of individuation today, and the impossibility of its abandonment from contemporary materialist analyses and theories of community. The argument that I will develop throughout this thesis is principally the priority of reinstating the notion of individuation within politics and philosophy. This entails viewing the theme of individuation as an investigation into a process that is at once both *one* and *multiple*, and which generates not only specific historical human beings and society but also more complex phenomena, such as temporality and life. Understanding individuation as a process means recognising how apparently distinct events and individuals, such as political community and psychic gestures, are instead expressions of a heterogeneous confluence of forces, intensities and movements. In this way, the ontology of individuation might contribute to a knowledge of the mechanisms through which factors such as language, knowledge, body, emotions and imagination are *equally* constitutive sources of individuation.

In looking to recover the theme of individuation within contemporary materialist discourse I have discovered powerful arguments in the seventeenth-century philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza proposes an innovative materialist conception of the individual, and develops this through an intricate linkage of ontological themes and political analysis. In Spinoza’s theory of the individual, the ontological enquiry proceeds contemporaneously with the political reflections. This means that ontological claims found political notions, and that political theses are instrumental in thinking ontological categories of thought. The understanding of how political conceptions are supported by ontological categories and *vice versa* in Spinoza’s philosophy constitutes the basis for delineating his paradigm of materialism and the meaning of the individual.
Taking these themes into account, the thesis explores the ontological and political process of individuation offered by Spinoza, and considers the extent to which his treatment of the theme of individuation introduces novel materialist conceptions of history, politics, nature and society. This is articulated principally in the *Ethics*, and is developed further in the political Treatises. In the *Ethics*, nature, *conatus*, the physics of the body and the theory of affects ground Spinoza’s process of vital and psychic individuation; whereas in the political writings the vision of society as the expression of a *collective* and *natural* act of desire, the definition of the body politic as a *mens una*, the equality between natural and civil rights, the category of the multitude and the advocacy for democracy, all actualise and further expand the process of individuation commenced in the *Ethics*.

In order to examine the richness of Spinoza’s theory of individuation, and in order to thus analyse its relation with politics, I have adopted an alternative strategy of reading Spinoza’s philosophy from the *Ethics* to the political Treatises. Following and developing Balibar’s ideas (2002: 103-147), I have decided to investigate Spinoza’s thought through the ontology of individuation of Gilbert Simondon (2007). Two main reasons have motivated this recourse to Simondon’s ontology. The principal reason is that I have become concerned with Spinoza’s complex paradigm of the individual, which includes the notions of the body and affectivity. Spinoza offers a vision of the human being centred on a *conative* desire of striving and persevering into life, which organises both the activities of the mind and body. This force is constantly enriched by an endless production of affects, ideas and bodily movements.

These affects and bodily movements are shaped by a great variety of exchanges of power with other individuals and the world. Even affects, considered in themselves, seem to lie between the individual subject and the object, and to bring the two into a more complex relation. Furthermore, the body, which is defined in the *Ethics* as the primary locus of knowledge, is presented as a multifaceted domain, and its power is said to consist in the different confluences
of movements and interactions with other individuals by which it is progressively moulded. As a result, the account of the human individual that emerges from this is characterised by a form of collective nature. An enquiry into these notions is imperative for conceptualising the status and role of the multitude within Spinoza’s political thought.

As noted above, the complexity of the themes involved within Spinoza’s philosophy has led my enquiry to seek the support of Simondon’s ontology of individuation. The recourse to Simondon has been crucial for determining how in Spinoza’s thought this collective tendency of the individual does not imply the denial of its uniqueness, but rather the affirmation of its powerful status within the world; furthermore, and most importantly, in terms of political theory this brings Spinoza to the centrality of the multitude as a collective individual within the development historical and political processes.

The presence of these aspects within Spinoza’s philosophy alone constitutes a sufficient reason for attempting the novel approach of using Simondon’s ontology of individuation here. Yet, there are further important elements, which make my intervention more pertinent. These stem from the different portrayals of Spinoza’s thought – each of which is possessed of differing alliances and affinities – that can be found within the two principal traditions of philosophical thought: namely, the analytic and the continental schools. Besides reciprocal influences and points of convergences that have recently been developed, these two traditions have formulated two really distinct exegeses of Spinoza’s ontology and politics. The analytic interpretation presents Spinoza as radical exponent of seventeenth-century rationalist tradition, and considers the centrality of his theories of the mind and knowledge to his ontology. The continental approach inscribes Spinoza’s thought within a distinct materialist tradition next to pre-Socratic naturalist philosophy, Nietzsche and Marx, and assumes materiality, nature and affectivity to be the cornerstones of Spinoza’s philosophical project.

From these re-elaborations of Spinoza’s ontology, two diverse understandings of Spinoza’s political thought follow. For the analytic school, Spinoza’s political model is centred on ideals of self-mastery, profit and egoist
individualism. For the continental wave of thought, Spinoza’s political theses provides a theory of and for the emancipation of the masses from an ideological state; a theory that ultimately aims at the supremacy of the community and the collective enjoyment of freedom. These different portrayals have led my enquiry to propose a third way of reading Spinoza, that is, through Simondon’s category of thought; a third way that might advance contemporary Spinozist interpretations and open towards novel trajectories.

The importance of Simondon’s philosophy of individuation for our investigation resides, first of all, on his central preoccupation with understanding the process of individuation as a means towards thinking the individual; a preoccupation that guides his entire project. For Simondon, the conditions of uniqueness and possibility of an individual are not to be found through a deductive method that moves from the already individualised being to its constitutive process. Rather, the peculiarity of an individual derives from a more general process of individuation, which inheres within the vital and psychic production process of nature-Being. It is in this general process that the distinctive features and relevance of an individual emerge.

Simondon’s focus on the priority of determining the process before the individual leads him to affirm the bond between the forming individual and its milieu, the collective field. The collective field, which is shaped by energies, heterogeneity and potentials, is the only condition of individuation, without which both the individual and the process itself cannot take place. The centrality of the collective being involves bringing attention back to the significance of relation for the development of the individual. Simondon attributes to relationality an ontological status, and presents it as the source of the process of individuation. This brings about the discovery of relationality as a fundamental element of vital and psychic transformations, which pervades the entire system of production, and thus not only the human being. There is a process of individuation here, insofar as there are relational events and movements. This suggests that beings and the collective field are all relational by nature.

As emotions are the most powerful mediators of relations, Simondon attributes to them the role of differentiating beings into more problematic psychic
individuals. Emotions, Simondon claims, do not pass from one individual to the other: rather, they are located precisely in the collective field. From this complex process of collective and psychic individuation, the peculiarity of the individual is its being always in the middle between generality and singularity, potentiality and actuality. The individual, Simondon tells us, is profoundly disparate: it is in constant excess of an undifferentiated and individualised mass of power. The role played by the ontological structure of the individual within the development of this process is crucial and manifold. The individual becomes, in Simondon’s analysis, the theatre and protagonist of the process of individuation; a figure that poses and at the same time solves a problem of an excess of heterogeneity within the system.

These are the main notions that have accompanied my enquiry into Spinoza’s ontology and politics. Studying Spinoza’s philosophy in the light of Simondon has been decisive particularly for reconsidering the theory of affectivity examined in the Ethics, which has brought about the discovery of the role of affects and passions as the ground of relational phases of psychic and political individuation. An awareness of this process is crucial for understanding Spinoza’s political thought, and specifically for the constitution of the multitude as a proper political category and its role within the realisation of democracy. It is precisely in this context that the role of affectivity becomes the cornerstone of crucial political gestures. Affectivity sets in motion a series of relational movements, which bring into the existing domain a new order of flows of time, life and problems. Put differently, affectivity is the generative source of the production of the ‘common’, which lies at the very heart of any forming and existing community. As the expression of affectivity and passions, the multitude becomes the protagonist, sometime manifest and sometimes latent, of Spinoza’s political quest. Thus, the understanding of the process through which affectivity produces meanings, relations and actions, is the only condition for thinking the multitude in a Spinozist way.

The multitude does not only mean a composite political individuality that differs from the categories of people, mass and citizen. It is rather a place and, at the same time, a constitutive element of the production of the political. The
central role given by Spinoza to the affective status of the multitude is essential for considering the political stakes of his democratic theory. It is the affective and powerful life in common of the multitude that guides Spinoza’s enquiry into democracy; and it was through this that he recognised the impossibility of thinking democracy as a fixed model of state alongside monarchy, aristocracy and tyranny. If democracy according to Spinoza is the greater expression of human living in common, then it has to be thought as a pure open plane, which essentially means a complex and collective body nuanced by a variety of affects such as love, joy, fear and hatred. In this light, our awareness of the linkage between the multitude, affects and democracy, I believe, might open unexplored avenues for re-conceptualising democracy today, which should be able to embrace at once all the actual and forming political individuals lying in the interstices of the social domain.

In order to develop my reading of Spinoza’s philosophy through Simondon’s ontology of the individual I have structured my arguments in the following way. In chapter I, I have critically investigated the reception of the Ethics within contemporary Spinozist studies, and considered the model of materialism presented within his ontology. Attention has been given to the interpretations of Spinoza’s ontology within the analytic and continental perspectives. The discussion draws upon the ways in which these two schools have treated the status of materiality and its relation with thought within Spinoza’s metaphysics. From the analysis of these interpretations, I have introduced the position followed in the thesis as a whole and defined the meaning of materialism attributed to Spinoza. It entails an anomalous process of production. It is a process because the role of the attributes comes closer to those of phases and moments, which bring changes into the system that in turn actualise and differentiate its exiting equilibrium. It is anomalous because elements of contingency coexist within the general order of necessity. Ultimately, it is a process of production, because Spinoza defines the essence of Substance as pure power, which suggests the idea of an endless activity, folding and unfolding the actual world. These arguments set the conceptual ground of Spinoza’s process of individuation analysed in chapter II.
Chapter II analyses Spinoza’s process of the collective and affective individuation via Simondon’s philosophy. The attention is given to Spinoza’s materialist conception of the individual based on the view of the power of the affects and the collective dimension of both the individual and the generative system. Chapters III and IV discuss the political implications of Spinoza’s ontology of individuation for the constitution of the political meaning of the multitude. Specifically, chapter III addresses the relation between affectivity and politics in Spinoza’s political writings, and asks how affects give rise to complex political communities, meanings and transformations. Chapter IV explores the interface between affectivity and democracy in Spinoza’s political reflections. It investigates the centrality of affectivity within the formation of the democratic community, and considers the ways in which the multitude becomes the protagonist of the political scene. In chapters III and IV, I adopt a strategy of reading Spinoza’s political texts through the use of conceptual-affective personae, which is constructed around Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of conceptual personae (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 61-83). This strategy allows the emphasis to be placed upon the notion of affectivity as a process of actualisation and transformation of the political. A short conclusion summarizes my arguments and suggests further avenues of research.
Chapter I

Contemporary studies on Spinoza:
New perspectives and problems

Introduction

In this chapter I examine several contemporary studies of Spinoza, and consider the ways in which they have introduced a new awareness of his philosophy into the multifaceted intellectual context of the present. An analysis of current approaches within Spinozan scholarship is imperative for understanding the great complexity of his ideas, and presenting such an analysis here will serve to indicate the philosophical ground upon which this thesis is constructed. As set out in the introductory discussion above, the central aim of this thesis is to re-assess the relevance of Spinoza’s ontology and politics, and to thereby develop a fresh materialist notion of the individual. Such a return to Spinoza may afford a response to the demand for new materialist notions of politics, history, society and humankind that continental thought has inaugurated. I will argue here and in the following chapters that Spinoza's work can provide a new, innovative paradigm for materialism, and one that is based on a collective process of individuation. This paradigm can be inferred from the dynamic relation between Being, nature and the human subject within Spinoza's work, and is given more explicit form in his political discourses.

In order to introduce my arguments, and in order to also present an initial account of the form of materialism elaborated within Spinoza's philosophy, I will begin by discussing recent approaches that have arisen within Spinozan studies. This will entail drawing attention to the importance of the opposition between continental and analytical interpretations of his work, for in analysing that opposition we will be obliged to consider the ways in which the continental and analytic traditions have treated the question of materialism. According to the
analytic interpretation, Spinoza stands alongside Descartes and Hobbes as one of the most radical thinkers of the seventeenth-century rationalist tradition. The continental approach, on the other hand, identifies Spinoza’s theses with a distinctive paradigm of materialism and a philosophy of praxis, situating these next to the Pre-Socratic model of naturalism and to the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche.

Divergences between analytic and continental approaches to Spinoza emerge from the differing ways in which those traditions have addressed his *Ethics*: a text in which he presents his metaphysics and theory of humankind, but which has also proved to be the most problematic and controversial of his works. Furthermore, in the *Ethics* Spinoza addresses the themes of matter and thought, upon which the difference between analytic and continental schools of thought is based. Consequently, analysing the conceptual nucleus of the *Ethics* is a precondition for an understanding of the origins of the differences between the continental and analytic approaches to Spinoza's work. In addition, it is also crucial for determining whether or not Spinoza’s metaphysics has any materialist implications. The first section of this chapter thus offers a critical exegesis of the *Ethics*. Particular attention is given to parts I and II of the text, which contain its most problematic aspects. In these two parts of the book Spinoza establishes his theories of the infinity of matter; of universal causation; of the correspondence between nature and God, and of the structures of ideas and bodies.

Having set out the inherent problems of the *Ethics* the second part of this chapter will focus on the book's reception within the analytic and continental traditions. Whilst the analytic reading considers ideas and rationality as the central elements that drive the entire system of the *Ethics*, the continental approach claims that nature, matter and power are the constitutive principles of Spinoza’s ontology. The former concludes that for Spinoza nature is organised through the laws of universal causation, and that human actions are to be understood through the parallelism of mind and body; the latter derives a model of materialism from these same theories of nature and mind-body unity. This model addresses contingency as regards events and beings, and more significantly, it re-situates thought in a dynamic relation with matter.
The problem with the analytic exposition of the *Ethics*, in my view, lies not in its recognition of the powerful status of thought, but rather in the status that it attributes to matter. The risk of reading Spinoza’s ontology within an analytic perspective is a form of *mentalisation* of matter. By this I mean that the structure of matter comes to mirror the structure of thought, becoming an empty category. By contrast, Spinoza claims that matter is one of the infinite modalities of Being: it is thus parallel to thought, and not dependent upon it. The arguments that I will advance by way of a study of the analytic account of the *Ethics* will thus concern the necessity of re-considering Spinoza’s notions of thought, matter and universal causation from an alternative perspective: a perspective from which his notions of the absolute, immanence and power can all be seen to afford means of uncovering the more complex philosophical mechanism that underlies his determinist system. This, I will argue, greatly exceeds any rationalist logic.

Spinoza’s categories of the absolute, matter, power and immanence form the core of the continental reading of the *Ethics*, and are thus also crucial to its definition of Spinoza’s metaphysics as a radical model of materialism. The exegesis of the *Ethics* developed within the continental perspective insists that these categories re-assess the cogency of the sensible world. This approach also presents Spinoza’s conception of nature as pure activity, within which thought and matter are equally productive. Yet the main difficulties of this reading, in my view, arise as to how this account of nature as a system of pure activity effectively operate, and also as to how this system coexists with Spinoza’s determinist vision of the universe. By developing further continental analyses I will argue below that Spinoza’s ontology of Substance describes a complex process, and that reading it in this way explains at once the existence of contingent aspects within a causal flow, together with the self-generation of matter and thought.

However, from the study of these opposing views of Spinoza’s ontology, a question immediately arises: Is there any ‘third way’ to study the *Ethics*? Is there an approach that would, in certain respects, embrace and also advance existing literature? The concluding section of this chapter engages with precisely this issue. I will set out the position that will be assumed in the thesis as a whole: a perspective from which the *Ethics* is seen as a complex ontology of the actual.
Specifically, the claim that I will make throughout this chapter is that Spinoza’s ontology is based on an **anomalous process of production**. My use of the term *anomalous* stems from the fact that within Spinoza's metaphysics of Substance, as we will see, determinism and contingency coexist without contradicting one another. I refer to his ontology as a *process of production*, because within Spinoza's metaphysical system the emergence of ideas, bodies and the relation between cause and effect correspond to series of changes. It is this anomalous process of production that grounds Spinoza’s paradigm of materialism. In this regard the significance of conceiving Spinoza’s ontology of Substance as an anomalous process of production concerns the possibility of re-considering the status of matter and the individual within nature. These are constitutive elements of a *unique* and *multiple* order, and an awareness of this is crucial for developing new materialist conceptions of history, humankind and society.

1. **The Ethics: Inheriting problems and objectives**

The *Ethics* is Spinoza’s masterpiece, and represents a definitive consolidation of his philosophical project. Published posthumously (1677) with the complete title of: *Ethics, Demonstrated in geometrical order and divided into five parts* (*Ethica, more geometrico demonstrata, et in quinque partes distincta*), the work is composed in Latin and organised thematically into five sections. These are Part I *On God*, Part II *Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind*, Part III *On the Origin and Nature of Emotions*, Part IV *Of the human bondage, or the Nature of the Emotions* and Part V *Of the Power of the Intellect, or Human Freedom*. In these sections, Spinoza explores a variety of fundamental issues in philosophy, from general metaphysical questions such as the essence of God and the status of nature to more specific themes concerning the role of human being within the universe. These include a theory of knowledge, a study of affectivity and rationality, and the mechanism through which these generate distinct psychological behaviours and social habits.

A study of the *Ethics* is imperative not only for the intrinsic value of its contents, but also because it is a prerequisite for an exhaustive retrospective of
Spinoza’s early works, and especially for that of his politics. As anticipated in the introduction of this thesis, the political themes presented in the Theological-Political Treatise and the Political Treatise are grounded on ontological and ethical concepts that are explained in the Ethics, and vice versa. This means that ontological claims have political implications, and that the latter can be seen to further expand and clarify arguments made in the Ethics. An awareness of this intricate linkage between Spinoza’s ontology and politics, I will argue, is crucial for determining his distinct materialistic account of the individual, around which his theories of democracy and the multitude are constructed.

It is only through the reflections that have emerged within contemporary Spinozist studies that this connection between the Ethics and the political Treatises has come to be recognised more adequately. The ways in which Spinoza scholars have interpreted the claims of the Ethics have informed their understandings of his political thought, as we will see in the following chapters. For thinkers such as Curley and Smith, whose work falls within the analytic tradition, liberal ideals of self-mastery, rationality and liberty are constitutive elements of Spinoza’s politics, and reflect the Ethics' arguments concerning God, the mind and the human being (Smith, 2003:123-149; Curley, 1996: 315-342; 1988: 115-135). In contrast, for the continental school the direct consequence of Spinoza’s ontology is a politics centred on the values of community, mutual support and emancipation from any ideological apparatus (see for example, Balibar, 1998: 76-98; Negri, 1998: 167-234). Thus, and as stated above, the centrality of the Ethics for delineating Spinoza’s political thought renders an enquiry into its conceptual nucleus indispensable. Doing so highlights the problematic aspects of the Ethics and explains the origins of the divergences amongst scholars. However, before analysing its contents we need to discuss the method and the language adopted in the Ethics, as this contains the key elements that indicate the overall structure of the work.
We can begin by noting that the philosophical method employed by Spinoza in his major work constitutes one of the initial difficulties that a reader might encounter. The “more geometrico demonstrata” alluded to in the book’s subtitle refers to its attempt to present philosophical argumentation in a manner that accords with the axiomatic-deductive logic of Euclidean geometry, as set out in Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*. This latter book also adopts an axiomatic-deductive method, as within it Euclid establishes certain universal and self-evident principles (axioms) from which he then deduces theorems. The demonstration of each theorem follows the deductive logic of mathematics, i.e. the attempt to extrapolate from particular and contingent phenomena universal laws and properties. The resulting laws are considered universal because they are applicable to every singular event in any given time and space.

As in Euclidean geometry, each part of the *Ethics* begins with general and certain definitions and axioms from which theories of God, nature and humankind are deduced and rigorously articulated through a sequence of propositions, scholia, corollaries and lemmas. These aspire towards the same universality as that of geometrical theorems, and do so through an accurate re-elaboration of physical facts and processes. In conferring philosophical authority to the geometrical method Spinoza not only acquires its line of reasoning, but more importantly also adopts its particular style. This entails the reduction of every discursive element to concise propositions, each of which returns the reader to previous propositions and definitions. Scholia and corollaries are the most explanatory parts of the *Ethics*, which clarify preceding claims and draw further conclusions. The scholia are however especially important, in that they often seem to support a conceptual level alternative to that of the propositions to which they refer. Deleuze, for example, has envisaged in the order of the scholia ‘subterranean’ theses, which do not follow from propositions and definitions. For Deleuze, as we will see, the scholia delineate Spinoza’s authentic doctrine of Substance, that is, the
constitution of the plane of immanence (Deleuze, 1997: 21-32).

Ultimately, we need to discuss the language employed in the Ethics, that is, its Scholastic Latin. Its usage brings to light a two-sided problem, which bears upon both the reader and the writer himself. For Spinoza, the difficulty is the metaphysical meaning with which this language has been traditionally associated. Terms, fundamental in the Ethics, such as 'Substance', 'attribute', 'mode' and 'universal causality' are the heritage of a host of intellectual paradigms: Descartes, for example, employed the Scholastic style, working such expressions into his own rationalist theses. The Cartesian lexicon is in fact strongly present in the Ethics; a symptom of the degree to which Descartes' philosophy was both an important reference point for Spinoza and a difficult obstacle to overcome. Indeed, the reader of the Ethics needs to extract and distinguish Spinoza’s own usage of the classical terms from their traditional significations. It is for this reason too that so many commentators come to place Spinoza’s philosophy in close proximity to Descartes and, more generally, to rationalist approaches (see for example, Curley, 1988; Israel, 2002).  

2 Having delineated the principal problems of the structure of the Ethics we are now in a position to discuss the contents and difficulties of each part of the book. In the first part, “Of God”, Spinoza sets forth his paradigm of monism. Let us flesh out the central aspects of his thesis.

1.1 The thesis of monism

The Ethics begins from the traditional metaphysical starting point of presenting a doctrine on Substance. Yet unlike traditional metaphysical studies, Spinoza’s theory of Substance does not begin by questioning the existence of God, and by seeking support for that existence in proofs and demonstrations. Rather, Spinoza presents God’s existence as an indisputable truth, and as the precondition to all events and beings in the universe. This differs from the central preoccupation of both Scholastic (Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Anselm, 2 For a detailed study of Spinoza’s lexicon, see particularly Giancotti (1970) and Runes (1951).
among others) and Cartesian ontologies, which are directed towards human awareness of the existence of God; the focus of Spinoza’s own theological metaphysics, however, is an attempt to map the anatomy of God as a primary, originary Substance. This is the object of part I of the Ethics, where the existence of neither God nor human knowledge is in question. What is at stake there is instead a more adequate understanding of Substance, through which theories of humankind and the universe might be predicated.

In this fashion, definitions from I to VIII of part I establish the nature of Substance-God and indicate its constitutive elements. According to Spinoza, Substance is self-caused (E. I, def. I, III), absolutely positive and infinite (E. I, def. VI). What Spinoza means here is that Substance is being itself, conceived as self-generated and all-inclusive. Specifically, the positive dimension of absolute infinity states that there can be no external and opposing substances to that of God. Spinoza also claims here that Substance is characterised by an infinite number of attributes, and a variety of modes. Each attribute is directly connected with Substance, expressing a modality of its essence (E. I, def. IV). Attributes are not distinct essences and separate entities. Rather, they have to be considered as qualities of the prime Substance, which expresses and reveals its nature through them (E. I, prop. X, proof and scholium). The definition of the attribute is extremely problematic and has been interpreted in many different ways. For some analytic scholars such as Bennett, the attribute is a basic property of Substance, which indicates one of its functions (Bennett, 1984: 60-66). For other continental thinkers, such as Macherey, the attribute actualises the essence of Substance and is thus entirely equal to it (Macherey, 1997: 71-79). These divergences between Spinoza’s commentators mostly derive from differing interpretations of the verbs “to perceive” and “to express” (E. I, def. IV, VI), which describe the role of the attribute. These verbs may have been intended to perform a descriptive function, or to denote the powerful, expressive nature of the attribute. In the first case, the attribute describes a state of Being; it thus does not add any further specification to Substance. In other words, as a basic property, the attribute simply tell us in a certain and determinate way what Substance is. In the second case, the attribute is attributive of further properties which found and enrich the essence of Substance.
The mode is an affection of Substance, albeit one that relies upon an external cause for its existence. The mode does not possess an individual essence, but rather constitutes an actual state of Substance (E. I, def. V). As Spinoza will clarify later in the *Ethics*, the mode is immediately related to the attribute and implicit within Substance (E. I, prop. XXIII; E. II, prop. I-I). Via the attribute to which it refers, the mode shares the essence of Substance, and represents a determinate actualisation of one of the latter's properties. In his definition of the mode, Spinoza includes human beings, ideas, bodies and, more generally, all singular events in nature. As with the attributes, the nature and status of the mode is also a subject of great debate. Spinoza describes a mode as an affection of Substance, which exists in “something else”, and is conceived through “something else” (E. I, Def. V). The problem here concerns the effective role of singularities within Spinoza’s metaphysic. As the mode is described as an affection of Substance, the question arises as to whether the mode affects Substance, or whether it is in fact affected by Substance. As regards the first option: if the mode is considered as an affection, then it would see to modify the essence of Substance; the condition of the individual would then acquire greater importance. If however the mode is affected by Substance, affection would then seem to denote a condition of being determined by an all-inclusive God. The role of the differentiated being would then be passive and subordinated to Substance. Discussions around these questions have been many sided, as we will see in the sections below.

The remaining definitions and axioms establish the general principles around which Spinoza will base his model of monism, his determinist system and his theories of the attribute and mode. These include the meanings of finitude and eternity (E. I, def. II, VIII), and the distinction between freedom and necessity (E. I, def. VIII). This distinction introduces his anti-anthropomorphic account of God. He relates freedom to the absence of external constriction and importantly not with free will. In this way, Substance is the union of freedom and necessity, because it is not determined by other substances and also its activity towards the world could not have been different from the actual one. More precisely, God’s free will coincides entirely with the necessity of the order of reality.
Necessity and contingency

Spinoza's monism is formulated in proposition XIV, where he claims that God alone can be conceived as substance. This recognition of God as a unique substance implies a denial of any plurality of substances, and thus also of any hierarchy among them. Spinoza’s paradigm of monism embraces a variety of fundamental themes in ontology. These refer to the notions of universal causation, immanence, power, the status of matter and the anatomy of nature. In the scholium to proposition XV, Spinoza addresses the question of matter, and entirely re-configures the category of extension. The latter is viewed as an infinite and indivisible unity, whilst matter becomes an attribute through which Substance expresses its essence as infinity and eternity. This is a fundamental move within Spinoza’s metaphysics, and it opens directly onto the theme of materialism.

The inclusion of matter within the domain of Substance might be interpreted into two opposing way. In the first case, given matter's status as an attribute, Spinoza might seem to be identifying Substance with the universe of the concrete. Spinoza’s ontology of Substance therefore has a materialist implication. In the second case, because matter expresses infinity, indivisibility and eternity, it might be considered as a form of idealisation of extension. The latter would thereby lose its peculiar traits of contingency and finitude; strictly speaking, matter would lack materiality. From this second perspective, Spinoza’s notion of matter is opposed to any alliance with materialism. Instead, and because Substance is moved by a determinist structure, matter discloses in a certain and determinate way the rationality of the whole. It is from these differing views on the status of matter that the divide between analytic and continental readings arises: the former tends towards a rationalisation of Spinoza’s concept of matter; the latter, as we will see, defines that concept as the core of a materialist project.

The theme of determinism is the object of propositions from XVI to proposition XXIX. Spinoza explains that in nature every event is ordered and emerges form a precise concatenation of causes and effects; thus, for any given phenomenon there is a relating cause. The notion of universal causation does not
solely imply the dismissal of the notion of free will from divine nature, thereby corroborating the inconsistency of casting the latter in terms of anthropomorphism, but more significantly entails the refusal of contingency. For the analytic school, Spinoza’s claims as to the necessity of God, as developed through the laws of causality, constitute the key elements that structure his rationalist metaphysics.

The theme of contingency is discussed in the scholium to proposition XXIX, which affirms the distinction between “Natura naturans” (naturing nature) and “Natura naturata” (natured nature). By the former, Spinoza means the totality of all attributes, or God as free cause. By the latter, Spinoza intends nature as an affection and mode of Substance, and thus as something that is dependent on an external cause. This distinction is quite critical. It suggests that contingency is not negated as such, but that it is rather part of the universal system of causation. Given God’s unity with nature, and given that nature as 'natured nature' includes a certain form of contingency, contingent events would seem to exist within the essence of Substance, which would in turn be directly related to the world of the concrete, and thereby to materiality. If this is the case, Spinoza’s recognition of contingency within God-nature would reinforce those materialist interpretations of his ontology. It is thus around these arguments that continental thought constructs its approach to Spinoza and from which the position, undertaken in this thesis, mostly follows.

In proposition XVIII, Spinoza identifies the ontological nucleus of the laws of causation with the principle of immanence. By this, Spinoza means that the action of God upon the world should not be taken as being qualitatively, ontologically and temporally different from the effects of his activity, but rather that this action is in fact inherent within the universe. Indeed, the assumption of the immanent logic characterising Substance’s activity directly implies the exclusion of any higher dimension beyond or behind the world. In the remaining propositions, Spinoza states that the very essence of Substance is power, which coincides with its existence (prop. XXXIV). The essence of Substance is thus its most general category, and explains the universal laws of immanent causation: for God produces the world immanently because he is power, and this corresponds
directly to his actual being. The theme of power closes the metaphysics of Substance.

The themes of power and immanence, we will discuss in section two, are the core of the continental view that Spinoza’s metaphysics offers an innovative model of materialism (see particularly, Deleuze, 1992 and Negri, 1998). When developing this interpretation further in the concluding section of this chapter I will stress the indeterminacy and generality of the notion of power with which Spinoza characterises the essence of Substance. I will argue that these elements indicate that Spinoza’s system of production involves a more complex system of production; one that embraces and at the same time exceeds the rigid concatenation of cause and effect.

*The theory of parallelism*

In the first half of part II, attention is given to the attributes of thought and matter and to the ways in which they operate. Thought and matter are said to be the attributes peculiar to the human body and mind, which are the object of the remaining sections of part II and, of the successive sections of the *Ethics* as a whole. Part II begins with seven definitions and five axioms. The definitions delineate Spinoza’s conceptions of the body, ideas (and specifically of adequate ideas), duration, reality and singular beings. The following axioms signal the entrance of the human element to Spinoza's ontological argument, as they indicate basic laws which characterise human activity, such as thinking and perceiving the modifications of the body. Ultimately, axiom V specifies the nature of these affections, which derive from the modes of thought and extension. Of the first ten propositions, the key notions are contained in propositions I, II, and VII, as they articulate the passage from the metaphysics of Substance to the theory of mind and body. In proposition I, Spinoza addresses the question of thought by presenting a completely different view of its origin. In his re-formulation, thought is an attribute of Substance, which expresses its essence in a certain and determinate way. In proposition II, Spinoza reiterates the affirmation of matter as one of the attributes of Substance set out in part I, affirming its autonomy from
thought and the ontological equality between the two.

The arguments of the two propositions culminate in the thesis of parallelism presented in proposition VII. The term “parallelism” derives from the Euclidean postulate of the parallels, according to which two straight lines are called parallels when, if prolonged infinitely, they never intersect one another. In Spinoza’s usage, parallelism involves the notions identity and distinction. Accordingly, the structures of thought and matter are identical, but the attributes are distinct in themselves. By this, Spinoza means that thought is not matter and vice versa. There is therefore no causal flow between ideas and bodies, and each order follows its own concatenation of causes and effects. This also results from Spinoza’s arguments concerning the attribute, for which an attribute cannot be produced by another (E. I, ax. II, V; E. I, prop. X, proof and scholium).

The theory of parallelism constitutes one of the most controversial notions of the Ethics, and heightens the great divide between the continental and analytic readings. According to the continental view, Spinoza’s formula of parallelism indicates his complex materialist vision of reality; according to the analytic reading, it constitutes an affirmation of his rationalist ontology. Yet the central question that informs both interpretations is as to whether Spinoza’s inclusion of the thesis of parallelism within his metaphysics of Substance attests to a philosophical turn from a monist to a dualist position (as developed through the composition of the Ethics), or whether it rather consolidates his unitary vision of reality.

The separation between the orders of thought and extension suggest that the physical and mental aspects of reality are to be treated as two independent domains, each obeying their own principles and laws. In this respect the concept of parallelism would seem to tend towards a certain form of dualism that would weaken the monistic paradigm. Furthermore, the notion of parallelism opens up the theme of the consistency of matter and thought, and the ways in which these are connected with one another. Lastly, it is from the thesis of parallelism that Spinoza derives his definitions of the mind, body and nature of the human being. Therefore, the analysis of the theory of parallelism is crucial for understanding Spinoza’s account of humankind. Taking these elements into account, let us now
flesh out how the theory of parallelism operates concretely within the human context.

1.2 The ontology of humankind: Mind and body, affectivity and rationality

Spinoza’s ontology of humankind commences with the theme of the constitution of the mind, and he addresses this question by positing the mind’s intrinsic correspondence with the body. He states that the object of the human mind is the body (E. II, prop. XIII and scholium), and in the following propositions he explains that ideas are shaped by body’s affections, which in turn are generated through bodily movements and composition with other bodies. Thus, ideas are not considered as abstract archetypes contrary or prior to corporeal substances; neither are the mind and the body assumed to be two independent and self-generated components of the human being, which interact with one another as two separate entities. By contrast, they form a dynamic unity, where the enhancement of the body immediately corresponds to the improvement of the mind; vice versa, an awareness of the body enriches our knowledge of the potentiality of the mind. This implies the re-assessment of the role of the body in relation to the mind (E.II, prop. XIV,XV).

This view of the body means that an account of the mind requires an accurate enquiry into the dynamics of extended beings. In the middle of part II, Spinoza presents a concise but extremely detailed physics of bodies, explaining their constitutive elements and laws. Common to all bodies, he claims there, are the states of rest and movement, and varying degrees of solidity and fluidity. Each single body is possessed of a predisposition to compose itself with other bodies. This predisposition gives rise to exchanges of substances and movements, which leave the originary individual unchanged (E. II, ax. I, postul. VI). As with particular bodies, the entirety of nature, according to Spinoza, has to be thought as a single individual (E. II, Lemma VII, scholium).

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3In this section, I will offer a broader overview of Spinoza’s theory of knowledge, the genealogy of affects, rationality and intuitive science. A critical account of these themes will be given in chapter II.
Similarly, Spinoza explains that the human body is itself a highly complex system comprised of a great number of other individuals (E. II, postul. I). Furthermore, it affects and can be affected in infinite ways (E. II, postul. III, IV). As a result of the correspondence between mind and body, such affections do not correspond solely to bodily modifications, but also, and more importantly, to connections and series of ideas (E.II prop. XVI, XVII, XVIII). The theme of mind-body unity occupies a decisive position within the *Ethics*, and it reintroduces the question of whether Spinoza’s ontology has predominantly materialist or rationalist implications. On the one hand, Spinoza's theory of the mind – which argues for the complete union of mind and body – holds that in some cases ideas are the result of bodily affections. This would mean that thoughts have a material foundation. On the other hand, in his final propositions Spinoza ascribes to the mind alone the ability to generate true ideas and understand phenomena ‘in the light of eternity’ (E. II, prop. XLIV). If this is taken together with proposition XII, which claims that to every extended being corresponds an idea in the mind, and which also holds that bodies cannot be conceived without these corresponding ideas, it would seem to imply that the mind possesses a certain dominance over extended reality.

Illustrations of these differing ways of reading Spinoza’s theory of mind-body unity can be found in two opposing positions, which have emerged within contemporary Spinozist studies: namely, the ‘mentalist’ approach, and the materialist interpretation represented by Bennett and Curley. As we will discuss in section two, where the former maintains that the structure of the mental dominates the material (Bennett, 1984: 127-151), the latter holds that the genesis and development of ideas is strictly dependent upon the development of bodies (Curley, 1988: 51-78). Materialist conclusions are also reached by the continental reading, yet for this school the materialist component of Spinoza’s theory of mind-body unity involves a more complex re-theorisation of both idea and body. The mind and the body are recognised as extremely productive of further ideas, bodies, relations and meanings (see particularly Deleuze, 1992: 99-144, 217-253; Balibar, 2002: 86-102).

In order to deal with the question of whether or not the mental is superior
to the material, and in order to further develop the continental analysis, I will argue in chapter II for the adoption of the theory of the collective process of individuation formulated by the twentieth-century philosopher Simondon (2007). Making use of Simondonian categories, I will argue that in Spinoza’s ontology the mind and the body are more similar to functions that operate as forces, and activate exchanges of substances and movements.

Passing now from the theme of the mind and body to the theory of knowledge: concatenations of ideas and bodily affections, according to Spinoza, delineate three specific kinds of knowledge. These are: imagination (the first kind); rationality (the second kind); intuitive science or intellectual love of God (the third kind). Each expresses a particular dimension of life. By imagination, Spinoza indicates a condition in which human knowledge lacks certainty, and in which the individual observes phenomena only in terms of their contingent aspects. This first form of knowledge is thus dominated by affects and passions. However, through Spinoza's second form of knowledge, rationality, the mind is able to regard natural phenomena in their necessity, thus discerning the determinate series of cause and effects. The third kind of knowledge, intuitive science, consists in understanding nature immediately in terms of cause, without passing through the observation of contingent facts (E. II prop. XL, scholium II). Here the human subject develops a distinct form of love, which is a reflection on nature in its entirety as a multiform individual shaped by a variety of other individuals. This form of love culminates in the intellectual love of God, which in turn coincides with the love of God towards humankind.

The dynamics of these three different forms of life and knowledge are examined extensively in parts III, IV, and V. Particular attention ought to be paid towards the arguments developed in parts III and IV of the Ethics, where Spinoza’s discourse acquires more evident political nuances: for as we will see, affectivity and rationality do not only correspond to psychological behaviours, but also to political practises. Here however we can simply note that the three kinds of knowledge discussed above originate from a shared ontological ground, which Spinoza calls the 'common notions': universal categories of thought owned by all men (E. II, Prop. XXXVIII and corollary). It is also important to remember that
for Spinoza, these are not static and ultra-mundane essences, but rather inhere within nature.

Central to Spinoza’s theory of knowledge is the connection between these three kinds of knowledge, and particularly that between imagination and rationality. This is because the ways in which human beings can pass from an imaginative status to a rational one implies a specific political strategy. In the TTP, liberation from the imaginative condition coincides with the emancipation of the masses from despotic regimes. Moreover, and as we will see in chapters III and IV, given that in the TTP the imaginative state is peculiar to the political category of the multitude, its analysis is instrumental for determining the meaning ascribed by Spinoza to the multitude. The domain of imagination is also shaped by affectivity, which is the object of part III of the Ethics described below.

*Genealogy of the affects*

The third part of the *Ethics* explores the domain of imagination, which is the ground of the affects, and presents a rigorous genealogy of the latter. Its central thesis is that affectivity is a natural element of human nature in much the same way as rationality (E. III, preface). The understanding of the nature of the affects is crucial for determining Spinoza’s distinct account of the individual, which has an impact upon his political thought.

As anticipated above, in the Theological-Political Treatise Spinoza explains the role played by affectivity within a political community. For Spinoza, this indicates the degree of freedom possessed by individuals within a society. The dominance of passions such as fear and hope defines a condition of slavery; conversely, an increase in affects such as joy and love denotes a more democratic and free state. More importantly, affects and passions are the cornerstone of the category of the multitude. Consequently, a study of affects and passions affords a consideration of the multitude's ontological and psychological origins.

Spinoza begins by defining the meanings of adequate and inadequate causes, activity and passivity and the role of affectivity. A cause is said to be adequate when its effect can be clearly and immediately understood. Conversely,
a cause is inadequate when its effect is perceived confusedly and indirectly (E. III, def. I). Individuals are active, then, when they distinguish causes from effects, and when they are also the causes of such effects. On the contrary, individuals are passive when they are the partial effects of an external cause (E. III, Def. I-II). An affect is described as the affections of the body, which can increase or decrease its power (E. III, Def. III). If the human being is an adequate cause of these affections, the affect is an action; if not, the affect is a passion. In postulates I and II, Spinoza adds that the human body can be affected in many ways, from which its activity can be reinforced or reduced. Affections modify the structure of the body, which retains the impressions and images of the external object that affected the individual. Similarly to the body's propensity for actions and passions, the mind is capable of both inadequate and adequate ideas. Inadequate ideas keep the mind in a state of passivity; active ideas afford an active position (E. III, prop. I, III).

Before investigating the nature of the affects Spinoza formulates his theory of *conatus*: a term that refers to a continual striving towards the perpetuation of existence, and which in his view characterises all creatures in nature (E. III, prop. VI, VII, VIII). The *conatus* of humankind governs both physical and psychic activities, including the rational faculty (E. III, prop. XI-XIII), and affects play a pivotal role in orienting, increasing and decreasing this primordial force. Importantly, the human being’s *conatus* is driven by desire. In the general definitions of the affects, Spinoza will qualify desire as the very essence of the human being; an essence that shapes the functions of both the mind and the body (E. III, Def. Aff. I). To put this in a more contemporary fashion, *conatus* might be regarded as Spinoza’s definition of biological life, which corresponds to an irreducible drive.

This definition of biological life as a pure power to live and desire has crucial political implications. As I will argue in chapter IV, adopting Agamben’s line of reasoning, Spinoza's notion of biological life is, considered in itself, extremely powerful and inherently political (Agamben, 1998: 71-110). In the

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4 An extended analysis of the political implications of Spinoza’s notion of *conatus* will be given in chapter IV. In this chapter, I will utilize Agamben’s theory of bare life (Agamben, 1998), in order to examine the themes of sovereignty and the power of the multitude in Spinoza’s political thought.
TTP, where Spinoza explains the cause of the dissolution of any despotic regimes, a tyrant can deprive his subjects of every civil rights and freedoms as much as he pleases. Although the individuals concerned are thus reduced to mere biological life, their conatus will nonetheless drive an innate attempt to continue to live and persevere towards fuller forms of lived existence, thus equipping them with the power to react and to subvert the existing political condition.

Proceeding with his analysis of the affects, Spinoza presents the sphere of affectivity predominantly as a domain of uncertainty grounded in the first genre of knowledge, imagination. His study is constructed around two principal categories of affects. These are the couples of love and joy and sadness, from which derive a varied typology of further affects such as fear, hope, self-esteem, anger, generosity, envy, indignation and so on (E. III, prop. XV-XVII). The affective process is activated through an individual's experience of an external object or of another individual, the outcome of which can be advantageous or destructive. The resulting impressions influence successive experiences, distinct social and psychic behaviours. Specifically, joy, love and their derivatives maintain the individual in an active state, favouring mechanisms of self-awareness and socialization. Conversely, hatred, sadness and similar passions generate a passive condition, which weakens and progressively detaches the human being from his or her milieu. In this case, practices of subjection and, more generally, cruelty take place.

The difference between positive and active affects consists in their capacity to generate relational conditions. This capacity is stronger in affects of joy and love than in passions such as fear and hope, where relations are mostly dominated by external causes and tend gradually to disappear. Although affects are productive of relations, the limit of the affects envisaged by Spinoza resides in their mutable nature (E. III, prop. XVII, scholium), which prompt individuals to hate objects that might once have been desired, thus giving rise to unstable relationships.

For the purposes of the present discussion we need not enter into the problematics of each singular affect; instead, we can simply reflect on a common element that emerges from Spinoza’s attempt to theorise them. There is a relational character to both actions and passions, as affects of both joy and sadness
are explained in terms of an individual's movement towards an object or towards another individual. Such connections and interactions constitute the preconditions for varied actions and ideas. This sheds light on Spinoza’s distinctive approach to affectivity, insofar as it shows him to consider the latter as a primary locus of social relations, whether they be passive or active.

Many questions arise from these premises, and the first is as to whether or not actions and passions are assumed to be two contrary forces. On the one hand, Spinoza inscribes both tendencies within the domain of affectivity, holding them to emerge from the universal laws of nature, and thus casting them as equally constitutive of the human being. Moreover, actions and passions are generative of relations between individuals: the former develops active relations, and the latter more passive ones. On the other hand, passions considerably reduce the human subject's power of thinking and acting, producing ignorance, subjection and cruelty. More importantly, Spinoza claims that hatred can be destroyed by love (E. III, prop. XLIII, XLIV).

This leads to the view that the two types of affects are in fact opposing forces, one productive and the other somewhat destructive, and to the contention that active affects eventually overcome passions. If this is case, the question that then arises is as follows: how can love and its derivatives suppress those of hatred, given that both are grounded in the sphere of imagination, that is, the domain of falsity *par excellence*? If actions and passions do not oppose each other, the coexistence of the two considerably alters the human equilibrium. Thus, the difficulty is as to how actions and passions effectively operate within the general affective process. Answers to these questions have been multi-sided, and Balibar's response (Balibar, 1998, 2002) is decisive for the main argument of this thesis. In building upon Balibar's contention that relationality in Spinoza's conception of affectivity is a source of individuation, the following chapter will argue that affects, for Spinoza, found a collective process of individuation. Whilst applying Simondon’s ontology of psychic individuation, as Balibar proposes (Balibar, 2002), the arguments that I will advance point to the collective dimension of affectivity. This does not inhere within already individuated individuals; rather, it forms psychic beings and states. The second problem concerns the connection
between conatus, desire and passions. Whilst conatus and desire refer to an irreducible power of self-affirmation, passions reduce this power. Therefore, how do conatus, desire and passion function without annulling each other? In part IV, Spinoza addresses these questions by positing rationality as the remedy to passions and, more generally, affectivity.

*Rationality*

In part IV, Spinoza’s thesis is that the improvement of rationality corresponds to the achievement of freedom. In order to gain freedom, therefore, human beings have to undermine the power of the affects and re-situate them under the guidance of reason (E. IV, preface). These themes involve a more general enquiry into the origins of human weakness and strength. Accordingly, human weakness is in part caused by the universal laws of causation, which are common to all creatures, and to which the human being has to adapt (E. IV, prop. II, IV, V). In part, this impotence derives from the dominance of the affects over conatus, as they restrain both the body and the mind (E. IV, prop. VI, VII). In this sense, the belief in fixed notions of good and evil, virtue, fortune and misfortune are expressions of this impotence: they evidence the mind's weakness and its mutilated knowledge, which results from the dominance of the affects (E. IV, Def. I, II, prop. VIII). By contrast, Spinoza explains that concepts of evil and good, of fortune and misfortune, indicate objects and beings the existence of which is either advantageous or adverse to the preservation of conatus. Similarly, virtue is held to have no universal meaning, but rather to coincide with an individual’s very essence, that is, with his or her power. When related to humankind, virtue thus consists in the power of understanding the world exclusively through the laws of nature (E. IV, Def. VIII).

In the second half of part IV, Spinoza introduces the theme of rationality. He describes rationality not as a meditative path, achieved through the complete effacement of the body and its relating affects. To do so would be absurd, as the definition of the affects given in part III of the Ethics presents them as natural elements of humankind. The superiority of rationality does not reside in its
capacity to eliminate affectivity as such; rather, it consists in the power of narrowing affectivity’s aspects of uncertainty and passivity. The result is an individual’s self-awareness of his or her limitations as regards the capacity to dominate natural events, together with a knowledge of his or her passions. These are the bases, for Spinoza, upon which true freedom and happiness are founded and developed.

The enhancement of the rational faculty brings about the need for the creation of a community, which is constructed around practises of mutual support. It is for this reason that Spinoza rejects as contrary to reason models of asceticism, of the solitary wise men, or suicide (E. IV, prop. XIX, XX, XXI, XXII). Under the guidance of reason human beings are no longer afraid of others but rather recognise in their reciprocal assistance the greatest advantage for the improvement and preservation of their own being. This is precisely the meaning of Spinoza’s dictum “Man is God to man” (E. IV, prop. XXXV, schol.). The theme of relationality encountered in part III thus acquires a decisive position. In this context, the value of relation is directly connected with rationality. Social relations are the outcome of the mind’s power over the passions; a power that secures individuals from reciprocal acts of cruelty, and which establishes more conscious practises of sharing and support. This leads towards the creation of civil society, within which every human being can fully develop and preserve his conatus.

From Spinoza’s account of rationality and, more generally, from that of human bondage, many questions arise. First and foremost, they concern the very value ascribed by Spinoza to rationality, and whether this might be properly defined as the remedy to affectivity. In Spinoza’s studies of human weakness and rationality affectivity is, in one way or another, omnipresent. Joy and love remain essential elements of human liberation, which opens towards rationality and stable social relations. Therefore, taken in itself, what is the very nature and role of rationality, given its strict connection to the affects of joy and love? Ultimately, Spinoza’s claims presents a further order of problems, which refer to the very nature of humankind and to the type of community suggested in the Ethics. If

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5The communicative character of Spinoza’s notion of rationality has been highlighted by Balibar in his *Spinoza and Politics* (Balibar, 1998: 95-124). This will be examined in chapters II and III.
driven by passions, individuals tend to disagree with one another; if driven by rationality and positive affects they tend to come into concordance. Yet if passions are a natural aspect of the human being, one is led to ask whether the latter is in fact truly social by nature. Furthermore, if human beings require the establishment of a society for the complete development of their own being, then what model of society can best guarantee this? Given the coexistence of passions, actions and rationality – the former being destructive, and the latter positive – does Spinoza’s thesis imply a strong authority able to suppress those destructive urges? Or does it rather imply a harmonious society, in which civil and political communities are unified? Spinoza will address these questions in section V of the Ethics, and in the political Treatises. In order to consider them here, let us now flesh out the main arguments and problems of the final part of the Ethics.

Intellectual love of God and true knowledge

In the concluding part of the Ethics Spinoza defines the third kind of knowledge discussed above, i.e. the intellectual love of God or intuitive science. This entails the analysis of virtue, true happiness and freedom. Specifically, in the first half of part V, Spinoza re-elaborates his theory of rationality, focusing on the possibilities of freedom and happiness afforded by the acquisition of rational habit. In the second half, he establishes the fundamentals of intuitive science, and considers the extent to which this is the highest form of love hold by both God and humankind. To begin with, the path to freedom is through reason. This equips individuals with the power to moderate the passions through which they are conditioned by past, present and future events, and more generally by external objects (E. V, prop. X, scholium). By contrast, rationality entails the re-evaluation of random experiences through adequate ideas, which activate self-oriented responses towards the world and towards others. The result is the development of true knowledge of nature and humankind, and the ethical model that corresponds to this genre of knowledge is represented by equanimous behaviour: an inclination towards the maximisation of those affects that positively influence human beings, and which counteract passions. It is in this context that freedom lies.
Given that freedom is denied by the argument of universal causation that starts from the analysis of God in part I, human freedom cannot refer to any notion of free-will. The human subject is a part of nature, and thus cannot detach itself from the infinite chains of events and processes; nor can the subject ever gain complete control over adverse phenomena and beings. Thus, in Spinoza’s paradigm of determinism, the degree of freedom endowed to the human being concerns his or her ability to elaborate active actions and thoughts, which are derived from adequate knowledge and self-awareness. Strictly speaking, the more active the individual is the more free he is. Virtue is precisely constructed around adequate knowledge and self-awareness, which in turn opens the way to true happiness. This consists in the enjoyment of actual life and disregard for death. The enjoyment of life frees individuals from the fear of death and from hope for salvation, both of which place them at the mercy of their passions, and render them slaves to fortune. This enjoyment also maintains the mind and body in an increasing state of activity.

Adequate knowledge, virtue and true happiness are the prerequisites for acquiring awareness of God-nature through the third genre of knowledge, intuitive science. (E. V, prop. XXIV-XXVII) For Spinoza, the latter consists in understanding God directly through his attributes (thought and extension). Intuitive science is based on the recognition that any existing body, physical state, idea and mind inhere within the domain of extension and thought. As these are expressions of God’s essence, and as that essence is power, understanding them involves knowledge of God's power of acting and thinking. It also includes a different account of nature, which considers the latter in terms of its productive aspect, i.e. as 'naturing nature'. This kind of knowledge replaces both the appetites of the body and the desires of the mind with the category of 'intellectual love of God'. The latter is twofold: it is, on the one side, human striving towards a comprehension of the essence of Substance-nature in its complexity, that is to say, through the multiplicity of the attributes; on the other, intellectual love defines the very nature of God’s existence. God’s power of thinking, acting and existing connotes his love towards the world (E. V, prop. XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII).

Ultimately, and as mentioned in part I, attributes express the eternity of
Substance in a certain and determinate way. Thus, the human mind’s knowledge of Substance through thought and extension allows it to perceive and experience eternity, however partially. Therefore, knowledge of the third kind indicates that eternity is, in some respects, implicated in the structure and potentialities of humankind (E. V, prop. XXII). As part of the infinite and eternal essence of God, the human mind, according to Spinoza, is endowed with the capacity to comprehend God in the light of eternity (E. V, prop. XXIII, XXIX, XXX). With this argument, together with that as to the intellectual love of God, Spinoza unfolds decisively his doctrine of the one Substance. These arguments circle back to the themes elaborated in parts I and II, and add further conceptual dimensions to the thesis of monism. Spinoza thereby specifies the nature of the force that comprises this love – a force that encompasses and drives reality itself – and indicates the status of the human being within this cosmic system of necessity, and also the ways in which he or she might achieve a complete awareness of its mechanism. This is the highest commitment that Spinoza ascribes to humankind, and it is the ultimate objective of his own philosophical project. Intellectual knowledge of Substance and the human perception of eternity are one of the most difficult lessons that Spinoza leaves to his readers; a lesson that concludes the Ethics, and indeed one that opens it to critique.  

In this latter respect these concluding arguments as to the intellectual love of God and the mind’s grasp of eternity can be seen to generate more questions than solutions. This is particularly evident in the second half of part V, which seems to abandon the political tones of parts III and IV, and which returns to the metaphysical themes examined in parts I and II. Thus, what is the role of part V, and how is it connected to the other parts of the book? If we assume a continuity between parts III, IV and V, we are led to enquire as to the political meaning of part V, particularly as regards its concluding section. Contemporary Spinoza scholars have attempted to answer these problems. In the section below I examine the ways in which continental and analytic thinkers have re-elaborated the arguments of the Ethics. The discussion draws upon the interpretations of Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance, thought and matter that have developed.

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6 For an extended analysis of the conceptual nucleus of the Ethics and its inheriting problems, see particularly Lord (2010).
within those two traditions of thought. An extended analysis of the analytic and continental studies of Spinoza’s theories of affectivity and rationality will be given, respectively, in the second chapter of this thesis.

2. Spinoza and his readers: The *Ethics* in the rationalist and continental traditions

As discussed above, the *Ethics* presents a range of complex concepts, such as the notions of attribute, mode and the thesis of parallelism. Contemporary Spinozist scholars have all been engaged in analysing these notions, and with developing specific strategies for interpreting the more problematic elements of Spinoza’s philosophy. Decisive contributions have developed within the analytic and continental schools, which have formulated two opposing exegeses of the *Ethics*, both of which attribute a different meaning to Spinoza’s metaphysics, thereby locating the latter within distinct philosophical milieus. Thinkers from the analytic school of thought such as Bennett, Curley, Hampshire, Yovel and Smith agree on the assumption that a rigid system of determinism drives the entire thread of the *Ethics*, around which Spinoza’s model of rationalism is founded and developed. They consider Spinoza as one of the founding fathers of the modern rationalist thought alongside Hobbes and Descartes, and also as a precursor of eighteenth-century principles.⁷

By contrast, for theorists within the continental school such as Deleuze, Balibar, Macherey and Negri, Spinoza’s ontology is an expression of a complex form of materialism, which greatly exceeds empiricist and rationalist models. Nature and, more generally, matter is re-evaluated by Spinoza as a powerful and living being, which is formed by bodies, ideas and movements. Given this distinctive materialist ontology, they conclude that the *Ethics* has to be situated

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⁷The division between the analytic and continental schools assumed in the thesis is mainly a methodological strategy. I am aware that differences between the two approaches to Spinoza are more complex and also cannot be always identified within one of the two traditions. It is for methodological needs too that I have included Yovel and Hampshire within the analytic school. Although the two authors read the *Ethics* with less analytic tones, however, they tend to situate this within a rationalist perspective. For an exhaustive analysis concerning differences and convergences between the two schools of thought, see particularly Critchley (1996 a, b), Dummett (1993), Mullarkey (2006), and Patton (2006).
within anti-Cartesian philosophies in the same vein as Heraclites, Nietzsche and Marx. Although these approaches seem distanced by an insurmountable divide, they have nonetheless both introduced new concerns into Spinozan scholarship concerning the political meaning of Spinoza’s ontological claims in the *Ethics*, thus illuminating the strong continuity between that work and the political Treatises. Furthermore, these readings have completely undermined Hegel’s well-established critique of the *Ethics*. Hegel described Spinoza’s ontology as a static system, within which singularities are mere reflections of the one Substance.

The reaction to Hegel’s interpretation constitutes a central stage within the development of contemporary studies. Hegel has been opposed with a really new theorisation of the *Ethics*, and more generally, of Spinozism as a whole. Whilst for Yovel, for example, the error of Hegel’s reading is his misunderstanding of the cogency of Spinoza’s rationalist strategy, which paradoxically reveals innumerable similarities with Hegel’s own system (Yovel 1992b: 25-50), Macherey points out the great challenge that Spinoza presents to Hegel’s ontology of transcendence. Spinoza confronts Hegel with a vision of reality as a dynamic and powerful system, developed in the absence of negative phases and dialectical play (Macherey, 1979: 259-260). Given the importance of Hegel’s reading and its centrality to these new approaches to Spinoza, we should turn now to the main aspects of his refusal of Spinozism.

*Hegel’s critique of the Ethics*

Hegel has offered a very rigorous exegesis of past philosophical models from the Ancient Greek period to the Modern age, whose reading has been pivotal for various successive scholars. When dealing with Spinoza, Hegel launches one of the fiercest attacks against the purported illusions of the *Ethics*, and one that has had an enormous resonance through the history of ideas (Macherey, 1979: 17-40). Nonetheless, Hegel’s critique has been crucial for the affirmation of Spinoza’s thesis in many different ways. On the one hand, the marginal position of the *Ethics* within the history of ideas is perhaps due to the influence of Hegel’s analysis; yet on the other, its vehemence has fostered an interest in Spinoza’s
ontology amongst philosophies that aim to oppose the Idealist paradigm.

Hegel’s critique of Spinoza’s paradigm of monism is possessed of three main aspects. Firstly, it is addressed to the notion of Substance as an absolute and positive infinity. This is viewed an empty notion, because the Spinozan absolute is taken to be the initial phase of the disclosure of Being to the world, and not the conclusive state of the realisation of the power of Substance; for Hegel, the latter is ultimately subject, as it comes to full self-consciousness through its own negative movement (Hegel, 1977: 10). For Hegel, the absence of contrary, negative elements within the realm of the absolute implies a motionless system, which maintains Substance in a self-reflective position (Hegel, 1955: 261; 1977: 84-79). Secondly, Hegel’s aim is to refute Spinoza’s theory of parallelism as the identity of reality under different dimensions as thought and extension. This notion of parallelism involves the inclusion of all its predicates within the essence of Substance, and in Hegel’s reading this indicates the effacement of the cogency of the world and all singularities within an all-embracing Being (Hegel, 1955: 281). Hegel’s critique of parallelism, then, leads to his third attack, which addresses the issue of individuality. As result of his views on the theory of parallelism, and due to his contention that Spinoza's absolute is motionless and thus meaningless, Hegel contends that the constitution of the individual is a false category. For him, the status of individuality in the Ethics is entirely restrained by the all-inclusive Substance.

It is around these three main arguments of Hegel’s critique outlined above that the reaction commonly formulated by contemporary Spinoza’s commentators is constructed, and the differing strategies adopted to overcome the limits of the Hegelian interpretation mark the divergence of the analytic and continental readings. They articulate irreconcilable positions concerning Spinoza’s ontology and theory of humankind, from which derive two opposing approaches to his political theory. Let us then flesh out, firstly, the arguments raised by the analytic-rationalist school of thought.
2.1 Spinoza according to the analytic school of thought: The *Ethics* between panpsychism and materialism

Analytic scholars classify Spinoza’s metaphysics within the modern paradigm of rationalism and also his anthropology and ethics as precursors of individualist and, more generally, liberal ideals. For this tradition, the importance of the *Ethics* does not solely reside in its many affinities with the Cartesian and Hobbesian models; in addition, its originality is held to reside in the ways in which the *Ethics* overcomes weaknesses present in Descartes’ and Hobbes’ systems. In this light, Spinoza’s philosophy is acclaimed as an enhancement and, in some cases, even as a radicalisation of Descartes’s thought and, more generally, of the seventeenth-century rationalist tradition (see particularly Israel, 2002: 157-174, 230-327, 591-598; Curley, 1988).

Primary evidence of Spinoza’s inheritance within the rationalist tradition is the geometrical method. During Spinoza’s age, a great number of rationalist and empiricist thinkers such as Galileo, Bacon and Descartes were influenced by the axiomatic-deductive method, and created their own system of axioms, definitions and propositions following this same deductive method. The use of the deductive-axiomatic method in philosophy and science responds to a precise purpose: namely, the attempt to connect human rationality with the observation of nature, through which the ultimate cause of reality might be discovered. Spinoza’s interest in the geometrical method goes beyond this general cultural tendency.

Unlike Descartes, for example, who rarely formulates his metaphysical reflections in geometrical manner (see, for example, Descartes, 1996), Spinoza’s metaphysical enquiry is pervaded by Euclidean geometry. As we have seen, Spinoza adopts in his arguments both the logic and the style of a treatise of geometry. The analytic school thus concludes that this method does not merely reflect a style of espousing philosophical claims, but rather that it is philosophical in itself (Curley, 1988: 3-10; Bennett, 1984: 16-28). This is the base of Spinoza’s rationalism. The geometrical method offers Spinoza the possibility of discovering the generative principles of the universe without requiring the support of transcendental principles and obscure 'truths'. It also provides the philosophical
investigation with new theoretical instruments that are held to be able to disclose the rational structure of Substance-nature.

One of the central and common arguments that characterises the analytic interpretation is the importance accorded to the notion of universal causation. This is the key concept for understanding Spinoza’s paradigm of monism. It drives the notions of immanence, nature, absolute infinity, attribute and mode, which imply a complex system that extends the rationality of Substance to the entire order of reality. It is in this context that the great modernity of Spinoza’s rationalist gesture lies: for he replaces the theological figure of the Creator, the Aristotelian prime motor and the pantheist model with an innovative paradigm of rationality.

In this interpretation of Spinoza, the attribute acquires a central role. The attribute is not a separate essence and is not caused by other attributes, but rather exclusively by Substance. Attributes share and co-participate in the unity of Substance, and together they compose the totality of Substance’s essence, in a manner in which the existence of one requires the presence of the others (Curley, 1988: 23-36). It is precisely the absolute and positive infinity of God (as postulated in part I, definition VI), the analytic approach concludes, that expresses this specific nexus between attributes (Bennett, 1984: 60-77; Smith, 2003: 31-36). As a result, the domain of Substance reveals a well-connected and unitary system, within which each element logically follows and inheres one with the other.

In this fashion, the inclusion of nature and matter within the realm of Substance further enriches Spinoza’s paradigm of determinism. Nature is not conceived as a chaotic place, within which phenomena arise unpredictably, thus precluding their comprehension; rather, Spinoza affirms that the emergence of every event and being within the world derives from a precise concatenation of causes and effects, which is entirely intelligible by the human being (E. I, ax. III, IV). Given this determinist structure, the domain of nature becomes recognised as a composite body characterised by a linear process, which expresses the rationality of reality as whole. As nature is characterised by causal order, the analysis of its mechanism proceeds through the distinction between cause and effect, which entails solely the lumen naturalis (rational faculty) possessed by every man (E. I, Appendix).
Spinoza’s radical model of rationalism

If commentators are mostly in agreement about the rationalist character of Spinoza’s model of monism, it is, however, the definition of this form of rationalism that moves them towards diverse positions. These might be grouped into two principal theses. One identifies Spinoza’s model of rationalism with a form of conceptual determinism; the other highlights the materialist foundation of his metaphysics. The stimulating debate inaugurated by Bennett and Curley exemplifies these two tendencies within the analytic school. Bennett stresses the logical aspect of the Ethics, whereas Curley insists on the materialist and empiricist elements within Spinoza’s conception of Substance-nature. The controversy derives from the different conclusions that the two thinkers draw from Spinoza’s thesis of parallelism, and, specifically, from the way in which they connect this to his general system of universal causation. This pertains to the meaning and function of the mental and the material respectively, and to the degree to which one aspect of reality may dominate the other.

In his book A study of the Ethics, Bennett offers a very original thesis. The formula of parallelism, he claims, tends towards a dualist vision of reality (Bennett, 1984: 41-49). Accordingly, there is no causal flow between thought and extension. This is supported particularly by Axiom V and Proposition X and its scholium in part I, where Spinoza affirms that attributes have to be considered in themselves and not in something else. Therefore, thought does not imply extension and vice versa; rather, they inhere within two really distinct orders. Yet where the axioms and propositions of part I postulate the distinction between attributes, proposition VII in part II suggests a certain form of equality between thought and extension. Bennett resolves the question by ascribing the principle of identity to the properties of the two attributes, rather than to the attributes themselves: for him, it is not ideas and bodies that are identical, but their structures. The principle of identity does not then imply a causal nexus between thought and matter and their relating modes, but an equality between their systems, and thus also the modality by which they constitute the essence of
The conclusions that Bennett draws from his interpretation of the thesis of parallelism are innovative and radical in form, opening up an alternative understanding of Spinoza’s ontology. A paradigm of panpsychism, he claims, lies at the very heart of Spinoza’s notion of parallelism. By this, Bennett means that the order of the mental dominates that of extended reality. This derives not from proposition VII, where the official thesis of parallelism is formulated, but rather from part II, proposition XII. This proposition contains Spinoza’s extensive explanation for parallelism, which in turn coincides with his panpsychist position (Bennett, 1984: 127-149); as Spinoza writes, “Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind is bound to be perceived by the human mind; […]. That is to say, if the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body without its being perceived by the mind” (E. II, prop. XII). For Bennett, this proposition explains that it is not the body itself that is the first object of the mind, but rather the idea of that body. This would reinstate the predominance of the mental over extended reality, thereby reinforcing the panpsychist thesis (Bennett, 1984: 135-139).

In the same vein, but with less radical tones, Smith and Della Rocca have viewed the theory of parallelism as entailing the superiority of the attribute of thought over that of extension. Without expressly corroborating Bennett’s thesis of panpsychism, however, they suggest that the correspondence between thought and extension implies the dominance of the mental order upon the material aspect of reality (Smith, 2003: 63-69); a dominance that they hold to be explicated at the micro-level through the mind-body thesis. Smith reads Spinoza’s theory of the unity between mind and body as an account of a complex correspondence, within which the mind progressively acquires knowledge and control over the body (Smith, 2003: 69-93). This would explain Spinoza’s thesis of the eternity of the mind (E. II, prop. XLVII and scholium), and also his affirmation in part III of the autonomy of the mind from the body (E.III, prop. II) (Smith, 2003: 63-72).

Moreover, the superiority of the mind over the body is further supported by Spinoza’s definition of falsity as a privation of knowledge. Falsity is a state of the mind, in which the latter is restrained by the body’s activity, and regards
external events in their contingency rather than through the laws of universal causation. Therefore, the mind, when free from the body, is not so limited and perceives the universe in its necessity. As Spinoza states, the mind has the capacity to consider the world 'in the light of eternity' (E. II, prop. XLIV, corollary II). The primary consequence of this is that the three kinds of knowledge describe the path of the mind towards the achievement of freedom and control over the states of the body. Therefore, Spinoza holds an extremely powerful account of rationality, which has an intimate relation with the essence of Substance through the attribute of thought (Smith, 2003: 86-93).

Della Rocca (2008) has raised original arguments recently, concerning the very meaning of the theories of universal causation, the mind and the three kinds of knowledge. He has conceived these notions as precursors of the principle of sufficient reason, considering Spinoza’s metaphysics to be closer to Leibniz’s account than to Cartesian philosophy. For Della Rocca, Spinoza’s conception of the structure of the universe as a strict chain of cause and effect and his definition of God as thinking being mean that there necessarily exist an adequate cause (reason) for every event; the understanding of an event thus depends on knowledge of its cause. Given his attention to the causal aspects of Spinoza’s ontology of Substance, Della Rocca’s interpretation suggests that the system of determinism explained in the *Ethics* expresses logical structure more than any empiricist characteristics (Della Rocca, 2008:33-78). It is for this reason that Della Rocca’s position, in my view, might be situated in close proximity to Bennett’s panpsychist thesis. Besides their specific conclusions, both thinkers stress the conceptual form of determinism of Spinoza’s monist ontology, thus privileging the mental in respect to the material. In this way, the two authors reject any alliance with materialist readings of Spinoza. A position more open towards a materialist interpretation of the *Ethics* within the analytic school is advanced, as we will discuss below, by Curley. Maintaining a rationalist view, he envisages in Spinoza’s arguments a strong materialist component that would invalidate panpsychist and mentalist interpretations.
Materialist elements within Spinoza’s rationalist metaphysics

In contrast to both these mentalist and panpsychist positions, Curley affirms that the model of parallelism consolidates Spinoza’s form of rationalist materialism. For Curley the formula of parallelism indicates a one-to-one correspondence between the modes of thought and extension, constructed around the conceptual difference between the two attributes (Curley, 1988: 62-73). This difference reconciles the argument of non-causality between attributes with the principle of identity that emerges in proposition VII and, more generally, from Spinoza's monism. If the two attributes of thought and extension and their related modes are only distinct from one another conceptually, then they do not stand as two really different substances; rather, they both fall within the infinite perfection of God, thereby expressing his essence. Thus, extension is not cast as an inferior or dominant dimension of reality, but is instead ontologically equal to thought. As an expression of Substance’s essence, matter acquires a powerful status. The perfection of Substance is developed through the rational nexus of cause and effect, and this latter is embodied by matter, one of the attributes of Substance; this attribute thus reflects in a certain and determinate manner the rationality of whole. It is precisely in this context that Spinoza’s paradigm of materialism lies. Curley’s approach to the concept of parallelism is central for understanding Spinoza’s theory of mind-body unity.

According to part II proposition XIII, the mind’s first object is its body. This means that in the human being the production of ideas is fundamentally bound to the capacity of an existing body. In this way, the more the mind becomes aware of the states of its body the more adequate the knowledge of itself and the external world becomes. The various levels of awareness of the mind, Curley suggests, correspond to the three kinds of knowledge. In the state of imagination, the mind has a confused understanding of the body's capacities. Therefore, Spinoza’s theory of the mind and, more generally, the formula of parallelism, Curley concludes, are closer to the materialist tradition than to mentalist or dualistic arguments (Curley, 1998: 67-78).

A materialist vision of Spinoza’s theories of parallelism and of the unity of
mind and body is also supported by Hampshire (2005), who offers a materialist explanation of Spinoza’s metaphysics that might be best situated at the crossroads between the analytic and continental readings. Hampshire suggests that Spinoza’s form of materialism does not merely affirm the superiority of the material over the mental. More significantly, the physical universe in Spinoza's model of materialism, Hampshire explains, is not conceived as a linear concatenation of cause and effect. Rather, Spinoza upholds an extremely dynamic and active conception of matter, which greatly exceeds a mechanical model of matter (Hampshire, 2005:55-70).

*Critical reflections on the analytic exegesis of the Ethics*

The portrait of Spinoza offered by the analytic approach has brought about the re-discovery of the power of thought and rationality within his ontology. This is the leading motor of Spinoza’s system of reality, which informs Substance, nature and all existing being. Related to the human context, rationality is explicated through the potentiality of the mind, which owns the contents truth, freedom, virtue and eternity. As we have seen, these notions, taken together with the axiomatic-deductive method, are assumed to be fundamental to Spinoza’s rationalist metaphysics. However, there are other aspects of parts I and II of the *Ethics*, which do not express immediate rationalist meanings. These are the theory of parallelism, the definition of matter as one of the attributes of Substance, and the twofold status of nature (*naturung nature* and *natured nature*). As discussed above, the study of these concepts has divided analytic scholars into mentalist and materialist currents. This division is centred on the dispute concerning the very values of thought and extension within Spinoza’s ontology. The controversy between Bennett and Curley greatly exemplifies these tendencies. In my view, and as I will argue below, these different interpretations indicate the impossibility of completely assimilating Spinoza’s philosophy into the analytic school.

If we re-consider Spinoza’s metaphysics through an alternative strategy we might discover a conceptual nucleus different from the one sustained by analytic scholars; and I would suggest that just such a strategy can be constructed
around the categories of the absolute, power and immanence, which drive the notions of necessity, attribute and nature. The re-consideration of these concepts, I will argue, reveals a distinctive system of causality that includes elements of contingency, and multiplicity, and which escapes the rationalist logic tout court. In order to demonstrate the relevance of this new strategy, we need first to examine the problematic aspects posed by the analytic reading of Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance and specifically his treatment of matter.

To begin with, Spinoza’s move of including matter within the realm of Substance might be interpreted as the elevation of the category of extension to the status of attribute, thereby ascribing to it the qualities of infinity, eternity, indivisibility and autonomy (the latter stemming from the non-causal links between attributes) (E. I, prop. XV, scholium). Assuming the analytic approach, Substance expresses absolute necessity, and this means a rational development. Therefore, as one of Substance’s attributes matter holds in a certain and determinate way rationality too. Similarly, Spinoza’s definition of nature might be easily explained as the consolidation of his model of determinism. Nature, in its aspect of naturing nature, might be identified with rationalist meanings. As naturing nature, this corresponds to God intended as free cause (E. I, prop. XXIX, scholium). According to the general analytic reading, a free cause involves a system of determinism and absolute rationality. Considered as a free cause, nature thus expresses this universal rationality. Up to this point, therefore, the analytic argument is strongly defensible.

However, nature is also described by Spinoza as natured nature. As natured nature, nature embraces all the existing modes derived from the attributes (E. I, prop. XXIX, scholium), and this introduces elements of contingency into the determinist system. Contingency emerges from the constitution of the mode. Although the mode is the outcome of a causal chain, taken in itself, it is finite; more significantly, its nature does not involve “necessary existence” (E. I, prop. XXIV; E. II, ax. I; see also Deleuze, 1992: 201-215). As a set of all existing modes, natured nature consequently involves a certain degree of contingency, which weakens the rigid causal flow. Certainly, this does not entirely invalidate the rationalist thesis; yet nonetheless, the presence of natured nature within
Substance makes any attempt to frame it in strictly analytic terms somewhat problematic.

With the theme of parallelism, the ontological nucleus of the *Ethics* becomes considerably more difficult to read through analytic lenses. The theory of parallelism establishes the similarity, and not the identity, between the structures of thought and matter. Some analytic scholars (Bennett amongst others), as we have seen, tend to attribute dualist implications to the formula of parallelism. On this view, the thesis of parallelism is understood via a literal, geometric meaning, i.e. as indicating two lines that never intersect each other. The claims of part II, proposition VII are explained in terms of the similarity between the anatomies of thought and extension; the attributes themselves thus remain two really distinct properties of Substance-nature.

However, as soon as we read the corollary of proposition VII, the hypothesis of the division between the two attributes of thought and extension becomes less convincing. For Spinoza, the formula of parallelism is not exclusive to thought and matter, but is instead characteristic of every attribute (E. II, prop. VII, scholium). Thus, it is not only matter and thought that possess a parallel equilibrium, but also the whole infinite range of Substance's attributes. Consequently, if Spinoza’s model of parallelism involves a dualist split, then there must also be countless other dualist splits between all other attributes. Given the monist argument affirmed in part I of the *Ethics*, this would be absurd. Therefore, the theory of parallelism does not indicate a move towards dualism on Spinoza's part, but rather expresses his complex unitary vision of reality.

From this perspective, the unity of reality is erected upon the inclusion of nature within the essence of Substance, where the orderly attributes of thought and extension equally express the development of this perpetual rational mechanism. In this way, thought and extension mirror indistinctly the totality of Substance, and are absorbed within its domain. The two attributes do not actively constitute distinct modalities of Being and are no longer independent and qualitatively different one from another. To be more precise, matter and thought become somewhat interchangeable, and the result is that matter, somewhat paradoxically, thus lacks materiality. In order to faithfully maintain an analytic
exegesis of the *Ethics* matter therefore has to be *rationalised* and entirely incorporated within the mental structure. In other words, what lies at the outset of the general analytical interpretation, on my reading, is a tendency towards a *mentalisation* of Spinoza’s notion of matter.

This tendency to read a *mentalisation* of matter and nature into Spinoza's metaphysics is common to the two principal analytic interpretations of the *Ethics*, the materialist and *mentalist* approaches. As already discussed, Curley holds that Spinoza’s rationalist metaphysics comes close to a materialist position, where matter abandons its contingent and indeterminate traits and acquires a more rational dimension. Matter thus becomes entirely intelligible through the understanding of its causal mechanism (Curley, 1988: 42-78). By contrast, for Bennett and Smith, Spinoza’s form of rationalism is foreign to any materialist discourse: in their view, it presents a more mentalist account of reality, within which the material aspect reflects and is driven by its mental counterpart (Bennett, 1984: 125-151; Smith, 2003: 63-86).

Besides the different conclusions, these two currents are symptomatic of a more general difficulty encountered by the analytic engagement with Spinoza. This refers to the impossibility of entirely translating Spinozist matter into an analytic language. Matter is the fundamental problem with which an analytic reader of the *Ethics* is confronted. In both the materialist and mentalistic tendencies, matter is identified with the structure of thought and, in some cases, even subjected to the mental. Matter is treated, I would argue, as the disturbing category, which perturbs the linear and necessary flow of Substance. As a result, in the two readings, whether materialist or mentalist, extended reality acquires a marginal status.

As mentioned above, a radicalisation of this tendency is expressed by Bennett, whose hypothesis I shall return to below. Bennett envisages in Spinoza’s ontology a panpsychist component, which emerges from the theories of parallelism and the mind. For Bennett, these conceptions together with the notions of universal causation and the autonomy of the attribute do not imply the identity of matter with thought, but rather the strict dependence of the material upon the mental aspect of reality. This is further corroborated by Spinoza’s proposition of
the necessary existence of an idea for any given body, and conversely by the impossibility of extended beings without ideal aspects. Strictly speaking, there cannot exist bodies without ideas, and there can be no ideas without bodies (Bennett, 1984: 127-149).

If the material cannot be conceived without its mental parallel, in my view, matter would occupy a mere reflective status. Matter would mirror the structure and development of thought. If this is the case, then if taken in itself the attribute of extension would constitute an empty category, for which the attainment of meaning requires a form of sublimation into thought. In this light, Spinoza’s ontology of matter would echo to some extent the Hegelian phase of the objective mind. Certainly, this possibility goes beyond Bennett’s argument, but I do think this notion of Hegelian sublimation is the risk run by the panpsychist thesis. Furthermore, the dependency of the material upon the mental would contradict Spinoza’s definition of the autonomy between attributes and, more importantly, their modal difference, by which attributes are distinguished through grades of reality and the ways in which these latter express Substance.

Bennett’s thesis has further implications at the macro-level. If the mental is the precondition to all beings and events in the world, one would be led to identify Substance with thought. The question that then arises from this hypothesis would then be as to how we could think the relation between Substance and nature. How might we consider the two aspects of nature, especially that of natured nature? Given the priority of the mental, the result may be the effacement of nature within an all-inclusive and thinking Substance, which in turn would culminate in the negation of the consistency of the material world as such. In this way, Bennett’s thesis of panpsychism, I would argue, comes closer to the Hegelian critique of Spinoza’s ontology as a paradigm of acosmism, for which Spinozist Substance involves the dissolution of the world and all singular beings within the “abyss” of the absolute identity (Hegel, 1955: 281).

Finally, Bennett’s thesis of the dominance of the mental upon extended reality insinuates a certain form of higher rationality, or an agency that exists beyond the universe, orienting and reconciling a meaningless nature with the perfection of thought. This would conflict with Spinoza’s denials of free will and
of the creation *ex nihilo*, as well as his affirmation of the genesis of reality moved by an immanent, necessary and powerful cause. In order to free matter from this marginal status, we might attempt to read the *Ethics* from the alternative perspective that I spoke of above, which draws attention to the notions of absolute infinity, power and immanence. It is not a lack of disregarding the concepts of necessity, universal causation and thought but of re-configuring them within a new standpoint.

*Re-thinking Spinoza’s notion of the absolute: Towards a dynamic materialist ontology*

As we have seen, the analytic reading deduces Spinoza’s paradigm of rationalism mostly from the analysis of Substance in its aspects of necessity; from the refusals of free will and plurality of essence; from the non causality between attributes, and from universal causality. According to the latter, there is a cause for any given event: a sufficient reason that always explains that event's existence. This approach tends to view the notions of immanence, absolute infinity and power as direct consequences of Spinoza’s theory of universal causation: for the centrality given to causality would lead one to read Spinoza’s theory of Substance as a circular and static system, within which the emergence of beings and various phenomena is entirely embedded within the causal logic of an all-inclusive and rational Being.

However, if we begin our study with the analysis of absolute infinity, immanence and power and combine these with the necessity of God, we might discover the great dynamism of Spinoza’s system of reality. Before claiming the necessity of Substance, Spinoza poses its positive and absolute infinity (E. I, Def. VI). The centrality of this notion emerges more strongly from its explanation, as Spinoza goes on to address the theme of multiplicity, and relates this to the absolute character of Substance. Substance is absolute because it is formed by an infinity of attributes. By definition, the attribute is a modality of Being such as matter and thought, which describes the many ways in which Substance *is* (E. I, Def. IV, prop. XI). These render Substance unlimited and positive. Multiplicity
derives precisely from the explanation to definition VI. This establishes the
decisive role played by the infinity of the attributes for configuring the
*absoluteness* of Being. To put this in more contemporary fashion, Spinoza’s
conception of the infinity of the attributes might be perfectly explained through
the category of multiplicity (see particularly, Deleuze, 1992: 41-82; Macherey,

It is the multiplicity of the attributes that founds the absolute anatomy of
Substance. Therefore, the absolute is not a mere sum of its parts; instead, those
parts (attributes) compose the absolute. The role of the attribute is therefore
extremely crucial. The attributes allow Substance to pass from a self-reflective
dimension, where this is defined as *causa sui* (E. I, Def. I), towards a more
articulated state. Put differently, Substance is not only self-generative being but
also it is through the attributes dynamic and multisided. Given that Substance
constitutes the highest degree of reality, we might affirm that the infinity of
attributes comes to shape the entire order of reality (E. I, prop. IX). In this way,
reality is not a linear and static unity, but rather a diversified system.

Taken in itself, the absolute is a powerful concept, which allows Spinoza
to combine, within a unique order, necessity and rationality on the one hand, and
the multiple forms that reality might assume on the other. Absolute infinity
implies in itself the notion of necessity, without degenerating into a linear system.
It is the positive dimension of absolute infinity, I would argue, that articulates the
aspect of necessity and not *vice versa*, and it gives to the entire system a
determinate and somewhat inescapable structure. As we have seen, the analytic
reading tends to consider the absolute as an implication of the notion of necessity,
and as the totality of the attributes. The result is that Substance is defined as
absolute necessity (Bennett, 1984: 111-124). By contrast, rehabilitating the
absolute from the concept of necessity enables us to recognise that Substance
involves an all-inclusive and determinate system together with a multisided and
dynamic being. It is for this reason that the notion of the absolute is the key
concept for understanding the constitution of Spinoza’s ontology.

If as I maintain absolute infinity is the starting point for examining
Spinoza’s metaphysics, the notions of immanence and power acquire a decisive
position. These two elements indicate the ways in which Spinoza’s system is not solely rational and multisided but also productive. Specifically, Spinoza states, that “God is the immanent cause of all the things” (E. I, prop. XVIII). This proposition does not only involve the replacements of the anthropomorphic idea of God and free-will with the establishment of a well-ordered system. For Spinoza, God is not only a free and necessary cause but also immanent. The meaning of cause suggests a certain idea of activity and production. Besides its resulting effect, a cause is implicitly connected with the aspect of force, and is seen as a productive gesture. In the *Ethics*, the theme of cause is considerably more complicated, as there it is combined with notions of immanence and causality. As a result, reality does not involve a solely causal chain: more importantly, it means productivity. This could however be taken to imply a linear and fixed mechanism.

In order to dissipate any tendency towards immobility from his metaphysics of Substance, Spinoza identifies the essence of Substance with a more universal and indeterminate category, that is, power (E. I, prop. XXXIV; E. II, prop. VII, corollary). Power involves an action of production. Substance is qualified by power in its universal meaning. This means that Substance does not only embody causal production, but also opens it up to different and unexpected ways of production. As we already know, the attributes that shape Substance’s essence are infinite, and thus so too are the expressions of this force. If we re-configure Spinoza’s propositions of power and immanence within the absolute examined above, the constitution and genesis of reality becomes recognised as an extremely powerful and multisided order.

Therefore, the strategy, I have advanced here and will further expand in the concluding section of this chapter, has allowed us to discover the great dynamism of Spinoza’s system of reality. This is constructed around the categories of the absolute, immanence, power and the multiplicity of the attributes. It is precisely in this context that my reading differs from the analytic interpretation discussed above and pertains to the continental reading examined below. Whilst analytic scholars such as Curley, Bennett and Smith consider rationality as central element within Spinoza’s metaphysics, I assume the category
of the absolute as the starting point of the theory of Substance. This move has allowed my enquiry to emphasise elements of contingency, multiplicity and heterogeneity present in Spinoza’s account of reality, which importantly do not contradict the general system of universal causation. More significantly, the re-positioning of the centrality of the absolute has enabled us to escape the risk of prioritising one element upon the others such as thought upon matter. In this sense, we have overcome the problem of a mentalisation of matter and, more generally, the whole reality. By contrast, I have claimed, Spinoza’s account of reality is extremely diversified and powerful body, in which thought and matter equally play a fundamental role within the actualisation of Substance.

It is around the view of Spinoza’s Substance as a manifold and productive system that continental philosophy constructs its interpretation of the Ethics. Here the reading is centred upon the re-assessment of the notions of immanence, attribute, matter, nature, parallelism, and power. As we will discuss below, philosophers such as Deleuze, Macherey, Negri and Balibar read the same propositions of the Ethics that Curley, Smith and Bennett claim to be great examples of rationalism. They however discover powerful anti-rationalist categories of thought, which delineate Spinoza’s distinct model of materialism. It is to an analysis of these interpretations that I now turn.

3. Reading the Ethics in the twentieth-century continental thought

The engagement of continental thought with Spinoza is undeniably a distinctive one. This interest emerges from a more general discontent that initially emerged within the French academic milieu, which questioned the authority of the philosophies of Descartes, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. Twentieth-century French philosophy contested the reduction of the spontaneity of human subjectivity to a rational structure or transcendent principle that would explain the formation of knowledge in terms of a one-sided relation between subject and object. The treatment of matter as an object ignores the multiform order of nature, which exceeds the subject-object schema. This implies, on the one hand, the loss of the multiple factors, which generate thoughts such as desire, imagination and
also relations. On the other, the decrease of the status of the material world under the supremacy of a rational subject involves the dismissal of the multiple ways in which the world and subject are interconnected. In order to escape the divide between subject and object, and in order to also re-configure the meaning of matter, Spinoza became an important reference point for many continental philosophers, alongside those of Nietzsche and Marx.

My discussion here will not venture into the disputes surrounding French thought during the twentieth century. My focus lies on the role played by the rediscovery of Spinoza’s ontology within continental philosophy, and the extent to which this was utilised to develop a new approach to materialism. The novelty of the twentieth-century’s engagement with Spinoza concerns not only the definition of Spinoza’s philosophy as a form of materialism, which as signalled above has been already asserted by some analytic readers. Rather, it is the inclusion of Spinoza’s thought within a different materialist tradition, in the same line with pre-Socratic philosophies and, especially, anti-rationalist models.

In this context, Althusser’s claim that in order to read Marx it was necessary to embark upon a “detour of Marx via Spinoza” is an important one (Althusser, 1976: 142). It has enriched Marxist studies of society and placed Spinoza’s philosophy in the foreground (Althusser, 1976: 142; Montag, 1999: XIII-XXI, 119-123). Following Althusser’s suggestion, for thinkers such as Matheron (1988), Macherey (1979), Deleuze (1992, 1998), Balibar (1998) and Negri (1998), the turn to Spinoza’s philosophy signified the possibility of rescuing Marxist materialism from the negative logic of dialectics, and from certain positivist interpretations (Montag, 1999: XI-XXI). Twentieth-century thought finds thoughtful conceptions of the world, humankind, affectivity and rationality in Spinoza's theses, which, when combined with the political Treatises' themes regarding the critique of religious ideology and the role of the masses in politics, might further enrich Marxist materialism and its philosophy of praxis. Spinoza opens the way to a different mode of theorising the relations between individuals and the material forces of production, affording a means of presenting them in a manner that operates in the absence of conflicts and negative phases (Macherey,

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8For an engaging account of the question of the subject within contemporary French philosophy, particularly in Althusser, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan, see Williams (2001).
The re-situating of Spinoza’s philosophy within a diverse intellectual milieu contributed to the affirmation of the autonomy of his theses from Descartes, Hobbes and, more generally, the seventeenth-century metaphysical tradition. Whilst Spinoza’s ontology was associated with Cartesian philosophy, his political thought was associated with that of Thomas Hobbes. The inclusion of Spinoza’s ontological thesis within the Cartesian paradigm derived in part from his study of Descartes and the use of Cartesian vocabularies in the *Ethics*. The strong Cartesian tradition in France, indicated above, to which Spinoza was inevitably associated, was also responsible for this assimilation. On the other hand, the assimilation of Spinoza’s political theory to that of Hobbes was motivated by the focus of both philosophers upon the notion of the contract as the origin of the civil society.⁹

It is within this *novel approach* to Spinoza’s writings that this present study is situated, and it seeks to bring into the existing debate new, further directions. Building upon the continental interpretation of Spinoza as an innovative form of materialism, the concluding section of this chapter will return to the notions of the absolute, attribute, power and immanence discussed above, arguing that Spinoza’s ontology of Substance reveals an *anomalous process of production*. This argument is constructed around the notions of multiplicity, contingency and necessity, through which his materialist ontology comes to light.

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⁹Spinoza assumes the origin of the body politic from a collective pact between individuals. For Hobbes, instead, the contract derives from an act of subjection of singular men to the authority of the Leviathan. However, for Negri and Balibar, the model of the social contact represents only a stage within the evolution of Spinoza’s political thought, which will be replaced by the theory of consensus espoused in the later *Political Treatise*, see Balibar (1998) and Negri (1998). These themes of contract and consensus will be investigated in chapters III and IV.
3.1 Re-thinking materialism in the light of Spinoza

Continental Spinozist studies’ recognition of the *Ethics*’ potential status as a materialist ontology is indebted to the reflections of Deleuze and Macherey, which have greatly influenced the works of thinkers such as Negri and Balibar. Deleuze (1988; 1992) and Macherey (1997; 1979) have brought to light the complexity of the notions of absolute infinity, the attribute and mode, immanence, parallelism and power. These are the cornerstone around which Spinoza’s materialist ontology is constructed. The portrait of Spinoza inaugurated by Deleuze and Macherey, and which has been developed further by other continental philosophers, is strongly opposed to that presented by the analytic readings. One of the primary elements that marks this opposition is the meaning given to the geometrical method employed in the *Ethics*.

Deleuze observes that the order of the scholia differs greatly from those of the propositions and definitions, and thus finds two conceptual levels within the *Ethics*. For Deleuze, the structure of the *Ethics* does not proceed in a linear way from definitions to propositions, which would be further clarified in the scholia. The scholia, instead, follow their own logic and are disconnected from propositions and definitions. He envisages a subterranean content within the *Ethics*, which expresses the authentic thesis of Spinoza’s ontology. Deleuze concludes that the radical notions of Spinoza’s ontology lie *secretly* in the scholia, which formulate the real constitution of Being as a plane of immanence (Deleuze, 1997: 21-32). Like Deleuze, Negri also recognizes a theoretical difference between the sections of the *Ethics*. For Negri, this corresponds to a systemic caesura, which he refers to Spinoza’s turn from a Platonic position towards a materialist one. In this sense, Spinoza’s theory of Substance expresses the persistence of Platonic elements within Spinoza’s thought, wherein his ontology is still a reflection *upon* reality. In contrast, Spinoza’s conceptions of the attributes and modes in parts II, III and IV, delineate his passage to a materialistic project, which is concerned with the *constitution* of reality (Negri, 1998: 54-107).
Passing from the geometrical method to the paradigm of monism, Deleuze’s exegesis of Spinoza’s theory of Substance occupies a crucial role within the continental re-consideration of the *Ethics* as a materialist ontology, and to which the present study is largely indebted. Deleuze’s enquiry reveals the distinctive materialist foundation of the *Ethics*, indicating how Spinoza’s ideas meet the demands of post-modernity. In order to determine the peculiarity of Spinoza’s materialist ontology, Deleuze employs the theory of ontological expressionism. In Deleuze’s reformulation, the meaning of expression denotes an *attributive* role and involves the functions of differentiating and actualising. The strategy of expressionism enables Deleuze to analyse the meaning and role of each component of Spinoza’s ontology, i.e. the meaning underlying its parts rather than the whole. Following this logic, for Deleuze, Spinoza’s model of monism is centred on a triad, where “substance expresses itself, attributes are expressions, and essence is expressed” Deleuze (1992: 27).

In this light, Deleuze draws attention to every element of the *Ethics*, which is expressive of something. As Spinoza begins by ascribing to the attribute the role of expressing the infinity of God (E.I, Def. VI), Deleuze focuses upon the relation between Substance and attributes, which is explained in the definition of the absolute (E.I, Def. VI). Deleuze observes that the positive character of the absolute is constructed around a new ontology of difference. This conception of *difference* develops two modes of thinking distinction, the numerical and the one in kind. In the *Ethics*, difference is understood, Deleuze claims, as modal, and through this absolute infinity is actualised in its parts (E. I, prop. XV, Scholium). Put differently, the absolute cannot be distinguished either numerically or qualitatively; it must follow an alternative mechanism of differentiation (Deleuze, 1992: 27-95).

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10 Discussions surrounding Deleuze’s engagement with Spinoza have been multi-sided. The main problem, which still divides Spinozist and Deleuzian scholars to some extent, arises as to whether Deleuze forces the arguments of the *Ethics* in order to affirm his thesis; or whether it is rather Spinoza’s ontology that grounds such fundamentally Deleuzian notions as difference, immanence, body and desire. Concerning these questions, see particularly Hardt (1993: IX-XV, 56-111), Macherey (1998: 117-124), Howie (2002) and Zizek (2004).
In definition VI of the absolute, Spinoza tells the reader that the absolute status of Substance derives from the infinite number of attributes that express its essence. In turn, by definition, attributes are real existences, which delineate modes of Being (E. I, prop. XV, scholium). Given the centrality of the attributes, Deleuze concludes that the relation between Being and its parts is structured through the rules of modal difference, which is crucially real: it is real because attributes are existences, and these actualise the essence of God, and it is modal because they express a specific level of reality. For Deleuze, Spinoza’s account of difference has a further implication. The notion of difference is not only descriptive of a particular state of reality, but more significantly it is productive (Deleuze, 1992: 191-215). Attributes, as we have seen, express the essence of Being, that is, power. The role of actualising and differentiating Substance is directly connected with the function of producing. In this light, the role of the attribute becomes that of expressing the power of Substance (Deleuze, 1992: 41-67).

Given that the absolute expresses the multiplicity and actuality of the attributes, and given also that these actualise the power of Substance within nature, nature is not a dimension of Being, but rather a powerful body. If Spinoza’s account of the absolute implies a vision of the world as a living being, this would seem to introduce a subjective account of nature, wherein nature is idealised and consequently lacks materiality. In order to dispel any doubt, Deleuze develops the idea of the plane of immanence, which is the core of his reading of the Ethics as well as that of his own philosophy. Deleuze deduces the notion of the plane of immanence by connecting Spinoza’s definition of the absolute, the theory of parallelism, and the notion of difference (Deleuze, 1992: 99-143, 169-186).

As a plane of immanence, Spinoza’s theory of Substance becomes recognised as a unique plane of reality, which enfold a variety of bodies, thoughts and forces. In this plane of immanence, nature, matter and thought acquire novel meanings and powerful roles. Nature is not only a dynamic and differentiated body, it is also the domain of thought. This results from Spinoza’s

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11 Spinoza’s ontology of the modal difference would impact strongly upon Deleuze’s own philosophy; see Hardt (1993: 59-66).
thesis of parallelism, which, in Deleuze’s re-formulation, involves the withdrawal of thought from the dimension of the ideal to the concrete realm of nature. For Deleuze, the great achievement of Spinoza’s theory of parallelism is its account of ideas and, more generally, its presentation of thought in terms of actual and productive forms, as opposed to static and predetermined archetypes. In turn, matter acquires a crucial role: it does not denote a mechanical sequence of physical phenomena, but a complex process shaped by contingent modes and movements (Deleuze, 1992: 99-113, 169-180). It is the plane of immanence, Deleuze fiercely concludes, that lies at the very heart of Spinoza’s ontology, and which reveals his paradigm of materialism (Deleuze, 2001: 26; 1988: 122-130).

Deleuze’s claims as to the existence of the plane of immanence within the metaphysics of Substance has a significant impact upon Spinozist studies. It marks the great difference in approach between the continental and analytic interpretations of the *Ethics*. In order to better understand this difference, a comparison between Bennett’s and Deleuze’s readings is imperative. These two writers not only delineate two contrasting definitions of Spinoza’s ontology: more significantly, their accounts exemplify the distinctive strategies adopted by the analytic and continental schools of thought as regards the examination and interpretation of the *Ethics*. Furthermore, a discussion of Bennett’s and Deleuze’s interpretations provides the present study with fundamental theoretical tools for determining the meaning of Spinoza’s materialist ontology and, specifically, for addressing the ways in which this does not imply the reduction of the value of thought in relation to matter.

It is from the analysis of the theory of parallelism that the divergence between Bennett and Deleuze derives, and it is upon this that they construct two really distinct portraits of Spinoza’s ontology. Bennett, as we have seen, envisages a form of panpsychism within the metaphysics of Substance; Deleuze deduces the plane of immanence. Where the former tends to read the formula of parallelism in terms of a dualism between thought and matter, Deleuze’s interpretation figures thought and matter as two equally constitutive elements of Substance, both of which actualise its essence. Yet at the basis of both of these two approaches are the principles with which Deleuze and Bennett explain the theme of parallelism.
Bennett, in my view, tends to consider thought and matter as two opposing properties of Substance. The monist account of Substance – developed through Spinoza’s denial of the plurality of essence, his emphasis on the union of God with nature, and the importance of immanence to Spinozan philosophy – is read by Bennett through the principle of identity. In this manner, the thesis of parallelism means the divide between the mental and material aspects of one fundamental reality. From Spinoza’s model of monism, we know that thought and matter cannot coexist as two independent substance. Given the identification of the monist theory with the principle of identity and the assumption of matter and thought as contrary terms, the affirmation of the unity of reality, in Bennett’s reading, implies the effacement of the two attributes within an all-inclusive Being, or the dominance of one element over the other. For the system of absolute necessity, which Bennett conceives as a conceptual determinism, it is the mental that drives and unifies the domain Substance-nature. Yet in ascribing priority to thought, we encounter the problem of explaining Spinoza’s assumptions of the non-causality between attributes, the modal difference and the status of matter and nature in relation to Substance. Moreover, the positive dimension of the absolute tells us that opposing modalities of being cannot exist; there can only be different grades of reality. Consequently, the relation between attributes has to be thought exclusively in terms of modal difference. Therefore, Bennett’s interpretation of the connection between attributes, in my view, does not entirely address the themes of the non-causality of the attributes, the absolute and the modal difference.

By contrast, Deleuze interprets matter and thought through the principle of modal difference, by which these express various, and not contradictory aspects of reality. In this way, the formula of parallelism does not open to a dualist split between the mental and the material orders of reality, weakening the argument of monism formulated in part I of the *Ethics*. If matter and thought are not considered as contrary elements, this eludes the problem of prioritising one of the two attributes in order to maintain Spinoza’s monist account of Substance. Spinoza’s affirmation of the unity of reality, in Deleuze’s analysis, comes to
signify a highly differentiated plane, in which differences coexist not as independent substances but as fundamental parts of a complex unity. Deleuze’s attention to modal difference, and his use of the latter as a key to reading the *Ethics*, thus allows him to reconcile Spinoza’s monist account of Substance and the notions of non-causality between attributes on the one hand, with the parallel equilibrium between those attributes on the other. Yet Deleuze’s focus on the modal difference has a more crucial implication: it enables him to recognise Spinoza’s innovative model of materialism, which corresponds to the productive and the concrete status of both thought and matter. Thought and matter are concrete because they are actual modalities of Being. They are also productive because they activate concatenations of ideas, bodies and movements.

In this fashion, whilst Bennett’s reading concludes by envisaging a form of panpsychism at the heart of Spinoza’s ontology, Deleuze, as we have seen, discovers a plane of immanence lying *underneath* the determinist structure of the *Ethics*. Following Bennett’s panpsychist position, Spinoza’s account of reality appears as a one-sided system, where the material is merely a projection of the dominant structure of the mental. But if this is the case, how do we justify Spinoza’s definition of the essence of Substance as power? From Spinoza’s explanation, power is intended as the identity between the power of thinking and that of acting. Given this conception of power, it would seem highly problematic to explain it solely through the activity of a thinking Being. Deleuze’s hypothesis as to the presence of a plane of immanence within Spinoza’s account is, in my view, able to avoid this problem.

The plane of immanence, organised through modal difference, brings about the discovery of Spinoza’s vision of reality as pure activity. To be more precise, given that difference in Deleuze’s account is directly related to the modality of production, and given also that the plane of immanence unfolds varying and actual forms of Being, Spinoza’s affirmation of the essence of Substance as power means that Substance is a pure activity. In the case of the attributes of matter and thought, then, this activity is actualised *simultaneously* through the power of thinking and acting. In this way, Deleuze is able to identify Spinoza’s general assumption of Substance as power with the notion of activity.
The importance of this, for the arguments developed here, is that it affords the possibility of re-conception of Spinoza’s materialist project.

These themes of the plane of immanence and power move our discussion to another central aspect of Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance: namely, the theory of the dual aspects of Substance. This is explicated by Deleuze through the order of power anticipated above. As mentioned, Spinoza defines the power of Substance as the identity between the activities of thinking and acting. Given Deleuze’s assumption of the unity of Substance with nature, the notion of power expresses the dynamics of nature. Although Substance and nature inhere within a unique plane, they follow diverse orders. In order to avoid any dualist conclusion, Deleuze maintains that Spinoza’s theory of Substance has the dual aspect of necessity and possibility (Deleuze, 1992: 122-128). Deleuze affirms that from the viewpoint of the absolute necessity of Substance the power of thinking and acting are one and the same, whereas from the viewpoint of nature (natura naturata) the power of thinking and acting is expressed through a variety of combinations of degrees of reality (Deleuze, 1992: 123-128). For Deleuze, the power of Substance thus involves a continuous process of differentiation, which is expressed through the multiform essence of Substance. As result, as an aspect of Substance, nature means a specific modality of power, which is actualised through its contingent character.

Deleuze’s argument of the orders of power sheds light on many difficult themes within the Ethics. Deleuze introduces the way to read the metaphysics of Substance beyond its determinist edifice, without however ignoring causality as such. His study liberates Spinoza’s theory of Substance from the rigid laws of universal causality, with which it has been associated. His reading brings about the discovery that the essence of Substance means a mechanism of production, which operates through the orders of necessity and possibility. In this way, Deleuze rehabilitates the contingent elements present within nature, giving to these a powerful status. Deleuze’s re-theorisation of Spinoza’s ontology has certainly opened up towards a consideration of Substance as activity and multifaceted system of production. However, his analyses are not entirely free from problems. Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s metaphysics, in my view, remains
strongly anchored to the notion of Substance. This emerges from his theses of the plane of immanence and power.

Although Deleuze’s interpretation of the orders of power unveils a system by which reality is produced, this latter is examined mainly from the viewpoint of Substance and not sufficiently from that of possibility, i.e. from the contingent aspect of Substance-nature. In other words, from Deleuze’s account we know that Substance involves activity; yet, we do not know concretely the extent to which contingent elements are productive too. Therefore, the theme of power, I would argue, is investigated mostly from the standpoint of Being. This raises the question of whether singularities are productive too, or rather different results of this system of production. Moreover, the interpretation of the dual aspects of Substance (possibility and necessity) encounters the risk of falling into a form of circularity, which in turn would be deprived of the characteristics of dynamism and production. If we consider Spinoza’s concept of Substance as two-sided, its activity is explicited through a circular movement that goes only from the viewpoint of necessity to possibility and from this to necessity. This would narrow, in some respects, the universality of the category of power assumed by Spinoza as the very essence of Substance.

Similarly, Deleuze’s claims as to the presence of a plane of immanence tends to prioritise Being at the expenses of its parts. The plane of immanence, as we have seen, re-assesses the roles of the attributes such as thought and matter; nevertheless this does not fully explore the very meaning and potentiality of singularities. This might lead one to read in the Ethics a form of all-inclusive and powerful plane, which, however actual and multiform, embodies and is not embodied by singularities. Without fully considering these arguments, an enquiry into the meaning of materialism in Spinoza’s ontology cannot proceed any further. In the concluding section of this chapter I will explore these themes, and will determine those materialist components of Spinoza’s metaphysics that might enrich the contemporary search for materialism.
Macherey’s discovery of multiplicity

As anticipated earlier, Macherey is together with Deleuze a central exponent of the return to Spinoza that initially developed within twentieth-century French thought. Unlike Deleuze, who employs the logic of expressionism for explaining Spinoza’s ontology, Macherey suggests that an exegesis of the *Ethics* has to be conducted solely through the *Ethics* itself, without seeking the support of external strategies. For Macherey, the conceptual nucleus of the *Ethics* is rigorously constructed on its own line of reasoning. In order to discover the meaning of Spinoza’s ontology, Macherey affirms, one cannot adapt the contents of the *Ethics* to already existing intellectual models such as Cartesian, Hobbesian, Marxist and expressionist as Deleuze does, because Spinoza’s text is erected on its own specific paradigm of thought (Macherey, 1997:79-80). The reader is thus required to follow the book’s structure and development exclusively.

The reason of Macherey’s concern with the method for reading the *Ethics* derives from the recognition of an error common to many commentators of the *Ethics*, from Hegel, through Geroult, to Deleuze. This is the genetic approach to the theory of Substance, which emphasises Being at the expenses of the parts. The genetic approach searches for the primary causes and the generative process from which beings and states of reality originate. If one applies this method to the *Ethics*, the result is the primacy of Substance over its constitutive elements, because Being, within Spinoza’s metaphysics, is assumed to be the ultimate and immanent cause of all beings and a unique essence. Therefore, besides their differing perspectives, thinkers such as Deleuze and Geroult commonly end up ascribing a subjective status to Spinoza’s notion of Substance (Macherey, 1997: 74-79).

Macherey’s move consists in searching for the constitutive elements that form the anatomy of Substance, and not the origins of its parts, as pursued by the genetic approach. In this way, he discovers the powerful status of the attribute, which is more than a source of differentiation as Deleuze maintained. Macherey considers the attributes entirely equal to Substance. For him, Substance *is* its attributes (Macherey, 1997: 84-87). In order to understand the ways in which
Substance becomes real and manifest to and within nature, Macherey suggests that Substance begins with the plurality of its attributes (Macherey, 1997:79-83). It means that the attribute is not derived from Substance or is a proof of the existence of God; rather, for Macherey, Substance is no more nor less than its attributes (Macherey, 1997: 88-90). Thus, Macherey argues that the attributes constitute Substance rather than expressing it. Importantly, this leads him to conceive Substance as a “concrete Being”, the power of which depends on the plurality of the attributes (E. I, Def. IV, prop. VII, prop. XI, prop. XX).

The relevance of Macherey’s reflection for our analysis resides in the discovery of a crucial concept within the Ethics: namely, the notion of multiplicity. Following Macherey’s reading, multiplicity is the fundamental aspect of Substance, which differentiates and actualises its essence. The result is the reassessment of the value of actuality within Spinoza’s ontology. This does not only derive from Spinoza’s affirmation of immanence but also from the multiplicity of the parts (attributes and modes). In this way, Macherey uncovers the multiple and actual dimension of Substance. A consideration of these themes present within the Ethics is imperative for determining the materialist meaning of Spinoza’s ontology. In order to establish the materialist nucleus of Spinoza’s metaphysics, we need to explore the ways in which the self-generation of Substance immediately corresponds to the production of the world. Macherey addresses this question in a distinct manner. He disperses Spinoza’s Substance in every existing and thinking thing (Macherey, 1997: 83). As a result, Spinoza’s question of the ontological production of reality is related to the actuality of nature, and of all existing determinations. In this sense, for Macherey there is no Being in the Ethics, but rather an infinite plurality of existences, which form the realm of Substance (Macherey, 1979: 107-128).

Certainly, Macherey’s attention to multiplicity liberates Spinoza’s ontology from the subjective status of Substance and from a merely determinist mechanism, within which the power of beings has been restrained. Furthermore, Macherey’s recognition of the centrality of the attributes and modes avoids the possibility of narrowing the development of reality within the Ethics into a circular and self-reflective system; a problem that we have seen exhibited by
Deleuze’s reading. By contrast, Macherey stresses that Spinoza’s ontology implies notions of actuality and multiplicity, which are crucial elements of his materialist project. Yet in my view, Macherey’s analysis leaves a question unresolved, and this is as to the understanding of the mechanism through which the concept of multiplicity in the *Ethics* is able to produce reality in a materialist way. In order to address this question, we need to further expand the theme of multiplicity in Spinoza’s ontology, and to re-situate this within a more complex process of production. It is to a re-consideration of this argument that the concluding section of this chapter is dedicated.

*Behind determinism: Relations and forces of production*

Building upon Deleuze’s and Macherey’s theses, Negri and Balibar have developed fecund analyses concerning Spinoza’s theory of Substance. From different perspectives, they have pointed to the function of production, which emerges from Spinoza’s account of actual reality. In *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri has claimed that the *Ethics*, after abandoning the Platonic overtones of part I, presents a complex ontology of power. This is structured through the ontology of matter and thought in part II, and culminates in the genealogy of affects and rationality. Parts II and III especially aim at re-signifying the anatomy of the material world and developing a new awareness of the potentiality of humankind. In this way, the metaphysical sections of the *Ethics* disclose an extremely powerful and multisided vision of the universe. Similar to Deleuze and Macherey, Negri envisages in the categories of attribute and mode fundamental elements which move Substance from a mere self-reflective dimension to an actual and plural one (Negri, 1998: 96-107; 193-230). Given the concept of immanence and the unity of God and nature, Negri concludes that Substance means directly the actuality of the world, which in turn means pure power (Negri, 1998: 89-101).

For Negri, the originality of Spinoza resides in the re-conceptualisation of the notion of production and the identification of this with the material world. In his reading, Negri claims that production means neither a linear process of causes and effects, nor opposing forces, but rather an irregular and somewhat
spontaneous process. In this context, thought and matter become *equally* two constitutive elements of this process of production, and do not exist in opposition to one another. Rather, they compose a complex unity that is not based on the priority of one element over another. In this light, Negri argues, Spinoza’s paradigm of materialism, can be seen to imply the recognition of the material world not as a mere object, which requires the presence of a subject to gain meaning, but rather as a system shaped by interactive forces and beings (Negri, 1998: 176-216).

Albeit with less Marxist tones, Balibar also identifies Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance as a productive process. Unlike Negri, Balibar does not only consider this process as moulded by forces, but also as generative of different and complex forms of individuals. Balibar views Spinoza’s Substance as a universal and expansive unity, which is composed of relations between different forms of individuals (Balibar, 2002: 115-119). The importance of Balibar’s approach is his re-consideration of Substance as the place of commonalities, from which every being comes to light. Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance does not only describe a plural, active and immanent plane, but more importantly an infinite chain of causal relations between existing beings. Thus, the universal laws of causation *imply* relational conditions. In this causal flow of relations, Balibar claims, causal relations are extremely productive of further individuals, meanings and movements. The materialist component of Spinoza’s ontology, Balibar suggests, consists in the union between Substance and nature. In this way, nature is a source and primary condition for the development of these various relations. Significantly, in Balibar’s reading, the categories of matter and thought become relational elements too, and are structured through the connections between ideas and bodies (Balibar, 2002: 86-102).12

The reflections formulated by Balibar and Negri represent an important phase within the re-theorisation of the *Ethics* within continental thought, which discloses novel trajectories towards a re-situating of Spinoza’s ontology within an alternative paradigm of materialism. It is from the arguments raised by these

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12 A detailed account of Balibar’s reading of the *Ethics* will be given in chapter II, where I develop his suggestion of the similarity between Spinoza’s ontology and Simondon’s thought of individuation.
authors in particular that the following chapters are developed. Balibar’s reading has many significant implications. Without ignoring the presence of the determinist system in the Ethics, he reaches alternative conclusions to those formulated by the analytic scholars discussed above. Balibar discovers that the cause-effect nexus is centred on the category of relationality. This is a crucial move within Balibar’s analysis.

The theme of relationality passes from being considered the exclusive object of parts III, IV and V, and is found to also reside within the first section of the Ethics. This means that Balibar gives relationality an ontological significance, which precedes and founds its ethical and social denotation. It is this relational nucleus that lies at the very heart of Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance, and which drives the order of necessity. Balibar’s assumption of relationality as an ontological concept located at the outset of the theory of Substance reveals that the causal flow is fundamentally relational, and that this relational component is productive. Put differently, relation is generative of physical effects, ontological states of Being and varied changes. It thus does not only describe the ethical and social behaviour of individuals, but also the dynamics of reality as a whole. In this way, Balibar is able to directly connect Spinoza’s ontology with his politics within a materialist perspective. Given that the very essence of Substance-nature is power explicated simultaneously through thinking and acting, relationality, as prime of motor of reality, means a power of acting, thinking and existing. Thus, this contention is already nuanced by political tones. The relational aspect of Spinoza’s ontology, as envisaged by Balibar, constitutes the basis of my enquiry into the distinctive features of Spinoza’s ontology. The arguments that I advance in chapter II are that this relationality is the cornerstone of Spinoza’s collective process of individuation, which informs Being, the world and singularities.

Similarly to Balibar, and as we have noted above, Negri too tends to establish a more direct connection between Spinoza’s ontology and politics. He explains the many ways in which Spinoza’s ontology might contribute to the re-founding of Western Marxism. Negri highlights the productive aspect of Spinoza’s theory of matter, and indicates how this unfolds a variety of forces. For Negri, materiality in the Ethics proceeds through a productive process that goes
far beyond the rigid rational system. Yet following his logic, I have encountered the problem of explaining the mechanism by which Being passes from a self-reflective position (the platonic influences of part I) to the production of differentiated beings. Moreover, Negri does not entirely address the question of how Spinoza’s system of production involves a causal order and, at the same time, a more spontaneous process. The re-positioning of the centrality of the category of the absolute, in my view, might shed light on these unresolved themes: for a re-consideration of the absolute, via a fresh approach, might disclose the ways in which Spinoza’s determinist system is formed by a certain ‘spontaneous’ activity. These arguments are the object of the following section.

4. Spinoza’s anomalous ontology of the actual

Having delineated the main characteristics of the analytic and continental readings of the Ethics we are now in the position to formulate the elements of the approach adopted here. Although the two schools have examined every aspects of the Ethics, I think that there remain unexplored themes within Spinoza’s ontology. I refer to the concepts of nature, power, the attribute, the absolute and immanence. A return to these notions might indicate the form of materialism supported by Spinoza, and the extent to which this might enrich contemporary materialist thought.

As discussed above, analytic scholars have offered persuasive explanations concerning the metaphysics of Substance, pointing to the powerful status of thought within Spinoza’s metaphysics. This is assumed to be the dominant element of his philosophy, and to drive the entire thread of the Ethics. In both of the two analytic tendencies discussed above – the materialist and the mentalistic – rationality is taken to be the founding principle of Spinoza’s system. This operates at the macro-level through the theory of universal causation, and at the micro-level through the theory of the eternity of the mind and the three kinds of knowledge.

Certainly, the rational and determinist elements highlighted by analytic scholars are present in the Ethics. However, the centrality ascribed to these
aspects by the analytic reading leads one to prioritise the rational component, and to under-value other fundamental themes of Spinoza’s ontology. The analytic approach to the theory of Substance opens up towards a form of *mentalisation* of reality, and especially of matter. This possibility is common to both the mentalist and materialist currents. By this, I mean that the order of thought comes to constitute and harmonize the entire system of reality, including nature. If the mental is assumed to be dominant, and if Substance is a unique being parallel to nature, then this would seem to be conducive towards identifying the whole reality with thought. As nature is one of the aspects of Substance, it becomes entirely attuned to the rational structure.

The risk is, on the one hand, the effacement of the status of matter. This is the case of Bennett’s thesis of panpsychism discussed above. On the other hand, the statuses of matter and nature assumes the anatomy and development of the mental, as we have noted in Curley’s materialist account. Although rationality plays a pivotal role within the *Ethics*, and although thought is an attribute of God, we cannot ignore that the domain of Substance unfolds in varying elements, in such a way that thought is *one* of its founding principles. Spinoza includes in his vision of Substance the two sides of nature, *naturating nature* and *natured nature*. Certainly, as *natura naturans*, nature might obey a certain rationality. However, as *natura naturata*, it is also the ground of contingent events and beings, which escapes the rational logic.

Furthermore, from part II, propositions I, II and VII, we know that thought is only one of the infinite attributes of God-nature alongside extension. As an attribute, thought expresses in *certain* and *determinate* way the essence of Substance, in the same way as matter. Thought is not the essence of Substance but rather one of its infinite modalities. However, one might argue that Spinoza firmly insists on the necessity of Substance, which inevitably sends us back to the idea of a rational system. This is also further reinforced through the concatenation of cause and effect, from which events follow. Nonetheless, given that thought is an attribute of Substance, this suggests that Spinoza distinguishes between the necessity of Substance and thought as rationality. Therefore, I think that the necessity of Substance-nature involves a more complex process, which exceeds
the order of rationality. In order to address these arguments, we need to take a fresh approach.

Developing further the continental reading, particularly Deleuze’s and Macherey’s theses, the argument that I will make in this section is that Spinoza’s ontology supports a different paradigm of materialism, which is an alternative to that proposed by analytic interpretations. This argument refers to the ontology of the actual, which is constructed around the notions of power, attribute, immanence and nature. Together these concepts bring about the rehabilitation of nature from mere thinghood and mirror image of thought to a very complex and dynamic system. In order to determine the richness of Spinoza’s ontology of the actual, we need to draw attention primarily to the notion of power, which is defined as the very essence of Substance.

Given Spinoza’s definitions of God as a unique, real and perfect being, we might presume that power is predicated of the fundament of reality itself. This is also corroborated by Spinoza’s description of God as the immanent cause of all things, which implies the rejection of any form of transcendence. Considered in itself, the notion of cause does not solely involve the genesis of an effect. Beside this aspect, cause means the activity of producing, where, in the effect generated, we might include an individual, an ontological phase and so on. In turn, the emergence of an effect brings change into the existing equilibrium. As this cause related to Substance is immanent, and as it incorporates reality, we might conclude that the action of producing inhere within reality. Indeed, we might deduce that for Spinoza, taken in itself, reality is self-productive. Therefore, the concept of immanence together with power occupies a very decisive position within the thread of the Ethics, which indicates a new ontological paradigm; a paradigm in which the replacement of the concept of reality as a product of an higher will or transcendent principle corresponds to the affirmation of reality as a self-generating body.

Spinoza enriches his monist thesis with the statement of the correspondence between God’s power of existing and acting, by which the two phases are coextensive one with the other (E. I, prop. XXXIV, XXXV; E. II, prop. VII). The claim embraces a crucial argument in the study of ontology, that is, the
theme of the commencement of reality. This concerns the question of whether reality is generated from an external and prior disclosure of Substance, or whether it is self-generated. In the first case, the problem is as to whether Substance should be considered as a higher rationality, which founds and directs all existing beings and conditions in the universe, or as an obscure archetype from which beings descend. Through the study of these arguments we enter into the domain of transcendental ontologies, running from Plato, Plotinus, Saint Thomas, Schelling, Hegel onwards. In the second case, we face the theme of materialism. Its primary concerns are the understanding of the potentialities of matter and also the extent to which this involves in itself the production and development of individuals and various phenomena. The ways in which a philosopher addresses these problems impact directly upon the understanding of the origin and ends of historical events, individuals and societies. Given the nature of this thesis and our present concerns, we need only to trace the most representative types of materialism within the history of philosophy.

Important arguments concerning the meaning of matter have been formulated by the hylomorphic model of materialism. According to this view, all existing beings result from the combination of matter and form: matter achieves its form from itself, and is thus self-productive in some respects. Matter acquires a more central role within eighteenth-century empiricist tradition, where it becomes acknowledged as the only observable object, and thus as the exclusive source of truth. Materiality assumes the meaning of a well-ordered set of phenomena, which might be examined through the scientific investigation. Materialist tendencies, in my view, are also present in the nineteenth-century paradigm of pantheism. In this, God becomes identified with the power and becoming of nature, with which all existing beings are infused. Lastly, and as anticipated in the introduction to this thesis, there is an emerging model of materialism inaugurated within contemporary continental thought, to which I principally refer. This considers matter as a complex system, which is productive of bodies, affects, movements and heterogeneous forces. Spinoza, I argue, might be adequately situated within this emerging form of materialism. He resolves the

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13 I discuss the theme of hylomorphism in more detail in chapter II.
question of the materialist commencement of reality in an innovative manner.

From the previous explanations on the immanence and power of Substance-reality, we already know that reality is self-productive. The unity of the powers of existing and acting and the immanence of Substance do not solely mean that the reality is self-generative, corroborating more strongly the denial of the creation *ex nihilo*. More significantly, this reveals a move of self-disclosure. This move of self-disclosure corresponds *immediately* to a gesture of producing. As a result, there is not in the *Ethics* the moment of disclosure of Being towards an external universe. Instead, I would argue, in Spinoza’s ontology reality, once posed, unfolds *in* and *to* an order of production.

Spinoza refines his arguments with the notion of absolute infinity, which also involves a consideration of the role of the attribute. The absolute occupies a strategic position. It opens up to the understanding of reality not only as an all-inclusive but also as plural and heterogeneous being. Spinoza states that the absolute dimension of Substance derives from the uncountable attributes, by which infinity is formed (“for if a thing is only infinite in its kind, one may deny it has infinite attributes”, E. I, Def. IV). By definition, attributes are not independent essences or qualities of God such as eternity, truth or goodness; instead, these are expressions of Being, which are existences (E. I, Def. IV). This absolute infinity is directly related to the dimension of the actual, as Macherey has noted, where this actuality is formed by the multiplicity of the attributes (Macherey, 1979: 107-128). It is actual because the attributes are existing modalities of Substance’s essence; it is also plural because the attributes by which the absolute is formed are infinite.

Ultimately, following Macherey’s reading, given that the attributes are distinct one from the other, the absence of a causal nexus, in my view, entails a certain idea of heterogeneity within the domain of Substance. In other words, we might say that it is the absolute God, once posed, that is *scattered* in all its attributes and not the attributes dispersed in the boundless territory of Substance. As a result, the absolute is already disclosed through its determinations (the attributes), which leads one to conceive Substance more as a plane rather than as a well-ordered system. Building upon Deleuze’s lesson, as a plane, this is crucially
plural, heterogeneous and dynamic (the essence of Substance is power). Moreover, the infinity and heterogeneity of the attributes avoid the possibility of priority of one of them upon the other. This prevents Spinoza’s theory of Substance from falling into a self-reflective and one-sided dimension.

From the considerations made so far, we are now in the position to answer the initial question concerning the meaning of Spinoza’s claim as to the necessity of God, whether or not this regards the rationality of the whole reality. If we re-situate the notion of causality within the plane of absolute immanence, this expresses the impossibility of arresting and narrowing this system within a well-connected mechanism and assemblage of elements. Spinoza’s theory of Substance, I claim, unveils an anomalous process of production.\textsuperscript{14} It is anomalous because he places alongside the eternal necessity of Substance the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the attributes, the notions of power and immanence and, as we will discuss further below, the contingency of nature and the modes. It is a process because the anatomy of Substance derived from the analyses above does not solely reflect a circular system of cause and effect or a Deleuzian plane of immanence. Rather, it involves series of changes which derive from the categories of power, immanent cause and the attribute. Spinoza’s awareness of this, I think, is greatly illustrated in a concise but extremely meaningful proposition, which states: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow \textit{infinite things in infinite ways}” (E. I, prop. XVI; my italics). These elements suggest that Spinoza’s ontology proceeds through excess and various levels of complexity, which combine determinist instances with spontaneous phases.\textsuperscript{15}

In order to fully understand the dynamics of this process, we need to return to the controversial issue of the status of the attribute. For Bennett and similarly Curley, this should be considered as a universal and basic property of Substance (Bennett, 1984: 60-70). Seen in this light, Spinoza offers an advance over Descartes’s notion of the attribute. Whilst Descartes narrows the properties of

\textsuperscript{14}I borrow the expression “anomalous” from Toscano’s study on the non-linear process of individuation in Simondon and Deleuze (Toscano, 2006: 1-16).

\textsuperscript{15}The meanings of excess and process, with which I have explained Spinoza’s theory of Substance, are Simondian notions (Simondon; 2007). I will develop further these arguments in the next chapter, where I explore Spinoza’s process of individuation through Simondon’s ontology of individuation.
God to omnipresence, truth and omniscience, Spinoza extends these to universal categories such as thought, matter, infinity and eternity, which include the Cartesian ones (Curley, 1988: 9-27). The consideration of the attribute as a property generates a problem when we pass to analyse the theory of parallelism. As we have seen, for some analytic scholars this implies a form of materialism (Curley, 1988: 62-78), and for others it invites a mentalist account of reality (Bennett, 1984: 127-149). If we consider attributes as fixed properties, the affirmation of the correspondence between thought and extension within a unique order might lead, in one case, to read in Spinoza’s system a form of dualism; in another, the dominance of one over the other. If attributes are properties, this might conduce to assimilate the structure of one to that of the other. More radically, assuming the necessity of Substance as a form of universal rationality, the connection between causality, parallelism, and the univocity of God might be interpreted as the dominance of the attribute of thought upon the entire system.

In contrast, following Deleuze’s (1992) and Macherey’s theses (1979, 1997), if we assume the attribute, literally, as the expression of Substance’s essence, and as power, attributes come to delineate phases of Being rather than property. To express power is to actualise (attribute is an existing modality of Being), in a certain and determinate way, the eternal production inherent within reality. To actualise power does not merely denote the function of mirroring the essence of Substance, but rather the role of bringing into the realm of reality new elements. This is precisely true of the attributes of thought and extension, which together enrich reality. As phases, they can coexist within a unique system without annulling or opposing each other. In this way, we escape the dilemma posed by the formula of parallelism, which led us to question whether Spinoza’s proposition VII signals a philosophical move from a monist thesis to a dualist position. This also prevents our analysis from interpreting proposition VII as the consolidation of Spinoza’s unitary vision of a reality shaped by the primacy of thought upon the other attributes.

Up to this point, we have described Spinoza’s monist ontology as centred on an account of reality as an actual, self-productive and heterogeneous process. Yet this still does not imply materialism. In order to determine the form of
materialism proposed by Spinoza, we need to examine his notions of nature and matter. In the first section of this chapter, we saw that in the *Ethics* nature is twofold and united with Substance (*Deus sive Naturae*). The unity of God and nature emerges also from the conditions of immanence and positive absolute indicated above. From these elements, the status of nature becomes complex and multifaceted.

As aforementioned, from the standpoint of *natura naturans*, nature involves the activity of producing (power of existing and acting) effects, which might be events, movements and individuals (Spinoza’s physics of bodies). These are, in one word, changes. From the standpoint of *natura naturata*, this is also the outcome of its self-production, within which contingent modes such as ideas and bodies exist. By definition, the mode is an actual and contingent expression of Substance-nature’s attributes. In other words, nature means contemporaneously necessity and contingency. Given the unity of nature and God, the two functions of nature cannot be thought of as being ontologically separated, the active one referring to Substance and the contingent one to nature; rather, they should be thought of as two aspects of a unitary system. Furthermore, Spinoza reminds us that nature behaves as a one and as a multiple entity, formed by several individuals (E. II, Lemma VII, schol.). Nature is simultaneously the place of universal causality and contingent phenomena. How does Spinoza conceive both as aspects of nature?

From these premises, I argue that nature *expresses* the anomaly of the process of production discovered above. Given the unity of reality and the inescapability of immanence, nature is the condition of possibility of reality itself. It is precisely in this vision of nature that the originality of Spinoza’s philosophical gesture lies. The rehabilitation of nature from the domains of mere contingency and strict determinism crucially explains how Spinoza’s ontology of the actual *is* a paradigm of materialism. This derives from the productive status of nature and more significantly from its inherence within the order of power examined above. In this light, the novelty of Spinoza’s materialist ontology of the actual, on the one hand, consists in the discovery of nature as an extremely complex process in which contingent beings acquire cogency not in relation to the
achievement of an ultimate objective of Being, but rather possess it in themselves by virtue of their very contingency. On the other hand, this refers to the reassessment of nature as power, which embodies and exceeds the universal laws of causation. Moreover, this model of materialism is free from any possible tendency towards an idealisation of nature or its dispersion within an all-inclusive Being.

Ultimately, we need to add a further element to our discussion, that is, the theme of matter. As mentioned, this is an attribute of Substance, which expresses power. Matter is one of the primary concerns of Spinoza, which occurs at the very beginning of his metaphysics of Substance. In part I of the *Ethics*, as we have seen, Spinoza re-configures the category of extension by ascribing to it the qualities of the attribute. These are eternity, indivisibility, infinity in its kind and also autonomy (the non-causality between attributes). Besides these specific characteristics, matter acquires the role of actualising the infinite power of Substance-nature; a power that allows nature to expand itself through different modes. This is a crucial move of Spinoza. The category of extension becomes powerful not solely for its elevation as an attribute of Substance, which might be interpreted as its idealisation, but for its materiality. It expresses the world of the concrete *par excellence*. To put this more clearly, taken in itself, matter means infinite concatenations of extended modes, bodies, movements of speed and slowness. Thus, this is productive, however anomalously or rationally, and it is for this reason that Spinoza assigns to the category of extension the status of attribute. It is the anatomy and development of matter that brings Spinoza to recognise its intrinsic attributive meaning. What further marks the modernity of Spinoza’s materialist ontology is the correspondence of matter with thought, affirmed in the thesis of parallelism. Given the non-causality between attributes and also the geometrical meaning of parallelism, in Spinoza’s formula of parallelism matter is entirely equal, different and no longer opposed to thought. As a result, this cannot be attuned to the structure of thought. Equally, thought cannot reflect the series of extended beings.

In this way, there is not a form of idealisation of matter or materialisation of thought in the *Ethics*, but rather a complex unity, which unfolds the realm of
Substance-nature, and which does not involve identity. This has also important consequences for the category of thought. As an attribute, this expresses or actualises, the power of Substance-nature. As with matter, thought is productive and brings further changes into the existing order (concatenation of ideas). This implies the withdrawal of thought from the static and self-reflective position to a powerful condition. Put differently, in Spinoza’s ontology thought maintains its authoritative meaning. However, this consists in its being generative of various modes, each of which actualises the power of Substance-nature. Spinoza’s materialist ontology of the actual, I would claim, consists in this really new theorisation of materialism, which runs from the actuality of Substance, the two-fold power of nature and culminates in the productive status of matter and thought.

Spinoza’s philosophical gesture becomes crucial especially in the present debate, concerned with the revisiting the meaning of production, matter and the concrete. This might enable contemporary research to recognise the richness of the expressions of the actual world. Ultimately, Spinoza’s materialist ontology of the actual, which is the position undertaken in this thesis, has further implications. One of the more significant is the possibility of re-theorising the concepts of life and individual which, when considered from this standpoint, acquire distinct meanings that involve a more complex notion of relationality centred on affectivity, power and movements. In other words, thinking Spinoza’s metaphysics as a materialist ontology of the actual leads our study to investigate the argument of individuation in the Ethics. It is to a consideration of the themes of individual, life and relationality, conducted in a Spinozist manner, that contemporary materialist thought should play closer attention. These are the themes that I will discuss in the following chapter.
Chapter II

Spinoza’s philosophy of individuation:
The collective life of the individual

Introduction

In chapter I, I examined the reception of the *Ethics* within contemporary Spinozist studies, and considered the ways in which the analytic and continental schools have classified Spinoza’s ontology. Through studying these two interpretations I have sought to construct the key-elements of the approach to Spinoza’s philosophy that I am advancing in this thesis, and thereby of my contention that his ontology and politics affords an innovative model of materialism. For analytic scholars such as Bennett, Curley and Smith, Spinoza’s metaphysics is one of the greatest expressions of the modern rationalist tradition of thought. Spinoza’s ideas are viewed as overcoming the weaknesses and, in some cases, as even radicalising the theses of Descartes and Leibniz. This analytic interpretation often holds that Spinoza’s paradigm of rationalism is centred on a powerful account of rationality, which operates through the necessity and absolute immanence of Substance, the laws of universal causation, the mind and the three kinds of knowledge.

In contrast to the analytic exegesis, continental thinkers such as Deleuze, Macherey, Negri and Balibar have claimed that Spinoza’s ontology is founded on an innovative form of materialism, which is situated next to Pre-Socratic philosophy, Nietzsche and Marx. This is constructed around his re-assessment of materiality, which does not imply the effacement of the cogency of thought and its subjection to matter: rather, in the *Ethics*, thought acquires a powerful status as matter. Thought is not assumed as a static category above the world, rather it is dynamic and productive of ideas. From the comparison between the analytic and continental elaborations of the *Ethics*, and through developing the continental reading further, I have claimed that Spinoza’s theories of Substance, nature,
matter and thought reveal an *anomalous* ontology of the actual. This involves a non-linear system of production, which is based on the categories of the absolute, attribute, nature and power. I have defined this system as an *anomalous process of production*.

It is *anomalous* because elements of contingency and determinism coexist harmoniously within a unique order. It means that in Spinoza’s ontology, necessity does not imply the refusal of contingency as such. This results from his definition of the twofold status of nature as naturing nature (nature intended as a free cause) and natured nature (nature as the set of all the existing modes) and the constitution of the mode (E. I, prop. XXIX). Although the existence of the mode depends from an external cause, taken in itself, the mode is contingent (E.I, Def. V, prop. XVI, XXIV). Spinoza says the mode does not involve necessary existence; it is a pure actuality. As the set of all existing modes, nature, therefore, embraces a certain form of contingency.

I have also called Spinoza’s ontology of Substance a *process* because the role of the attributes comes closer to phases, which actualise and further develop the existing order. As expressions of Substance’s essence, attributes are not properties of Substance, and thus mere descriptions of power; instead, they make Substance actual. More importantly, through relating modes attributes continuously bring changes into the existing equilibrium. This anomalous process is that of *production*, because Spinoza identifies the essence of Substance with the most general category of power (E. I, prop. XXXIV). This suggests that causality is not the unique expression of the action of Substance-nature within the world.

Whilst taking these arguments into account, this chapter explores the paradigm of the individual that emerges from Spinoza’s ontology, and considers the extent to which this might enrich contemporary materialist discourses. Specifically, I ask: what theory of the individual might we draw from Spinoza’s *anomalous process of production* exposed in chapter I? Assuming that the domain of Substance is modelled by infinite and heterogeneous attributes, how can this be generative of singular individual beings? Furthermore, given the centrality of materiality, how is this productive of psychic states? I think that the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon might shed light on the complexity of Spinoza’s conception of
the individual, and that it may thus afford answers to these questions. As Balibar has contended, and as I will demonstrate and develop, Simondon’s philosophy of individuation offers pertinent ontological categories for our re-reading of Spinoza’s theme of the individual (Balibar, 2002: 103-147).

Without postulating tempting similarities, parallelism or influences between the two philosophers, however, Spinoza and Simondon base their ontological system on common categories. These focus on a strict monism, a form of materialism, and the significance of affectivity to the relational nature of human being.16 This shared ontological ground creates, in my view, the conditions through which an investigation of Spinoza’s theory in the light of Simondon acquires great cogency. Although the chapter is primarily an enquiry into Spinoza’s process of individuation, the use of Simondonian categories requires the analysis of Simondon’s theory of individuation itself. In the first section, therefore, I will give an account of Simondon’s thesis of individuation, and will point out the main differences between his ontology of individuation, antecedent and contemporary philosophies of individuality.

Proceeding from the analysis of Simondon to Spinoza, in the second section, the discussion will draw particular attention to the role given by Spinoza to relationality, body, conatus and affectivity. The arguments that I will develop throughout this chapter are that reading the Ethics through Simondon’s theory of individuation brings about the discovery of an alternative materialist account of the individual and, more generally, the theory of individuation. I refer precisely to the questions of the twofold role of the physics of bodies and common notions, which operate as pre-individual mass and collective process of individuation. Furthermore, when Spinoza is read through the lenses of Simondon’s thought, the themes of conatus, the geometry of affects and disclose a unique tendency towards a form of transindividualism. This transindividual force is the basis upon which every model of community (psychic, political and social) is developed. It is in this context that Spinoza’s materialist conception of the individual resides, and it is through the latter that the human being emerges as a mixture between universality and particularity, collective being and individuated individual.

16 As Simondon opposes monist philosophies, by a form of monism in Simondon’s philosophy I mean literally his refusal of different substances such as matter and form.
1. Re-positioning the question of individuation in contemporary thought

The theme of individuation has been a central concern in the history of philosophy, politics and science. The focus of an enquiry into the notion of the individual tends to be addressed towards the discovery of the conditions or archetypes from which individuals are generated. When related specifically to the human context, the concept of the individual involves the analysis of a variety of interlocked arguments. These refer to definitions of life, or more precisely to the different forms of life, such as the ethical, the biological and the political; to the degree to which these forms are proper to the human being, and also to the distinctive elements of knowledge, whether they derive from the nature of the individual being or rather social and historical junctures.

Moreover, the study of the individual investigates the meaning of the body, and enquires as to how the latter operates; it asks whether or not this operation is guided by the mind; it investigates the origins and aims of moral principles, and questions whether such principles should regulate, follow or restrain the affective disposition of individuals. Ultimately, the study of the individual considers the extent to which political categories such as the state, civil society and the social class are expressions of individuality; and if the answer to that question is affirmative, it asks further as to whether those political formations are artificially or naturally constructed upon the characteristics of the human subject. Given the indeterminacy of these questions, the discussion of the genesis and principles of the individual has taken a myriad of forms and theoretical positions. Thus, the problem of defining the domain of the individual runs from Plato, Aristotle, passing through among many others Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud to Simondon, and more recently to Deleuze.

Before discussing further the significance of individuation in contemporary thought, we need to distinguish between a philosophy of individuality and an ontology of individuation. The importance of underlining this distinction resides in the different strategies adopted for determining the
fundamental aspects of human beings; strategies that each delineate completely different political, ethical and social scenarios (Toscano, 2006: 4-16; Agamben, 1993: 9-22; Combes, 1999: 10-25). Put differently, the ways in which we qualify human nature impact directly upon our awareness of politics, ethics and the material world.

Broadly understood, a philosophy of individuality posits individuality prior to its constitutive process. This assumes the genesis and development of the individual isolated from its milieu, focusing exclusively upon the study of the structure of the formed human being. This tendency is present in different ways within various philosophical paradigms: for example, in Medieval philosophy such as Saint Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Abelard; in modern rationalist thought, such as that of Descartes and Leibniz; more recently, in Gestalt psychology (Simondon, 2007: 9-54). Given the exclusion of the material world from the genesis of individual beings, the better to discover the peculiar features of the human being per se, attention comes to be directed towards the analysis of the latter’s structure as an independent unit that already contains within itself the causes of its own generation and evolution. Yet taken in itself, the human being is a composite of mind, body and affectivity, and as a result arguments have been characterised by disputes surrounding the question of the priority of one of these elements among the others. This approach has generated a categorisation of the heterogeneous potentialities of an individual being into determinate forms of life such as biological, intellectual and passionate life, only one of which is defined as peculiar to humankind. Political and ethical discourses have been constructed around the privileged function assumed to connote the human being, such as rationality, selfishness and sociality. Consequently, within the history of thought many political and ethical conceptions have been erected around the identification of individuality with notions of egoism and self-mastery, through which concepts of state and community have been explained.

These aspects are direct consequences of the fundamental limit that

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17 I am aware of the philosophical and historical diversity between the mentioned authors. In this context, the inclusion of different philosophers within the model of philosophy of individuality is motivated by the common strategy of investigation employed for defining singular beings. For an analysis of this theme, see particularly Toscano (2006: 4-11) and Agamben, (1993: 11-12, 19-22) from whose reflections I mainly refer.
characterises a philosophy of individuality; a limit that entails the impossibility of knowing the generative system of the individual, and thereby the unintelligibility of the principle of individuation. Given that the constitution beings is detached from its process, the conception of individuality is based on anthropomorphic, or at least upon zoomorphic models. In this light, we simply bind the richness of expressions of individuality within *a priori* formulae such as matter and form, rather than understanding the reality of an individual (Simondon, 2007: 9-30).

Unlike the philosophy of individuality, the ontology of individuation focuses on the general *process* through which individuals come to light. For an ontology of individuation, it is crucial to determine the conditions of individuation, as opposed to focusing on the individual itself. This implies a more extensive account of the relation between the individual and its generative system. The study of the process of individuation brings about the discovery of the multiple confluences between individuals and the material world. This introduces a different awareness of the ways in which phenomena such as affectivity, movements of speed and slowness impact concretely upon the genesis and becoming of the individual, and equally of the role of the individual for the actualisation of these events (Toscano, 2006:7-16, 199-201; Simondon, 2007: 31-65, 98-103). As an ontology of individuation stresses the notion of process, it re-defines the relation between the individual and the environment as part of a more complex system of production. The individual thus follows and inheres with the becoming of one unique order, which unfolds countless modalities of individuality. To consider the question of individuation as a process means to theorise the realm of the individual as a complex reality that is constantly traversed by transformations and exchanges with the material world (Simondon, 2007: 9-30).

In order to re-found the paradigm of contemporary materialism formed by this dynamic vision of the world and human being, the re-positioning of the theme of individuation is imperative. This need for an ontology of individuation within contemporary philosophical and political debate is instrumental in re-shaping our understanding of the material world. The order of the real expresses itself in very complex and creative ways, re-configuring the boundaries of inert matter. Fecund
arguments have been elaborated within contemporary physics and biology that aim at undermining the traditional division between the organic and non-organic domains. Attention has been directed in this regard to re-defining the anatomy and potentiality of matter and body: in physics, for example, theories of “solitary waves” and chaos have forwarded the idea of the universe as a self-organising system.

The claim is that matter is continuously exposed to transformations, which originate from unseen movements. These transformations and movements reveal a unique source of generation between living and non-living beings, which implies the discovery of a single spontaneous order for all forms of reality (De Landa, 1992: 128-161; Newell, 1985: V-XVII). Non traditional biology, such as Gaia and prokaryotic theories, refute the conception of the body as a unitary and single entity, and propose instead that it should be seen as a relation between movements and exchanges of energies (Sagan, 1992: 362-385). An awareness of these aspects of modern science must be integrated into future materialist discourses, because the genesis and development of the individual inheres within this structure of nature. Such arguments suggest that is by investigating the unseen operations behind matter that we might discover the unique features of the individual.

This recognition of the complexities of nature, the body and individuality has recently nurtured a rich debate within the social sciences, political theory and philosophy. The central concern that occupies contemporary thought is the search for a more extensive paradigm of the individual: one that considers its unavoidable linkage with the material world, the potentiality of the body, its affective anatomy, and also its relational state. The attention given to these elements has brought into question the inadequacy of consolidated theories of individuality, which have constructed the relation between the individual and its context on the schema of a subject-object relation. Furthermore, contemporary discourse has questioned the validity of certain models, which have assumed human existence to be regulated through distinctive functions such as rationality, affectivity, and through biological and social determinants; models that to some extent split the life of the psyche from those of the body, and from ethics and politics as indicated above. Thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Guattari,
Deleuze and Simondon have contributed to the recent formulation of important ideas that bring to light the impossibility of thinking the individual as an atomised and rational subject. In this fashion, the focus has been upon the analysis of language, relations, emotions, imagination and the embodiment of the mind as fundamental conditions of the genesis and becoming of an individual subject. The emergence of these conceptions indicates the need for an alternative grammar of the individual, which might elaborate new categories of thought able to express its multiform state.

In order to re-think the constitution of the individual, in my view, a return-or perhaps simply a turn-to the philosophy of Simondon is crucial. Simondon replaces the notion of individuality as a rational and independent unit with that of the individual as a problem. His focus is primarily on the analysis of the general process of individuation, through which beings are generated. Attention to this process, he argues, brings about the discovery of the collective as a fundamental source of individuation, without which the individual would not exist. Furthermore, Simondon’s ontology of individuation holds particular importance for the central argument of this chapter and for its investigation of the notion of the individual within Spinoza’s thought. Through Simondon’s ontology, I will argue in section two, Spinoza’s paradigm of the individual will disclose a distinctive model of the individual, which re-situates singular beings and the external world in a more dynamic relation. In order to re-configure the domain of the individual within the present, I will claim, Spinoza might constitute an important reference from the past, and one to which contemporary thought should pay greater attention. Taking these arguments into account, let us first flesh out the main aspects of Simondon’s theory of individuation.
1.1 Simondon’s ontology of individuation

Simondon has occupied a somewhat marginal position within twentieth-century continental thought, and his originality has been recognised only recently. The scope of his philosophy is very extensive and heterogeneous, and encompasses aspects of biology, psychology, Marxist political theory, science, ontology and phenomenology. It emerges from a combined study of Pre-Socratic ontology, quantum mechanics, cybernetics and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, with whom he completed his doctorate. The convergence of these different areas culminates in a complex and extremely rich theory of individuation, albeit one that did not immediately find a vast intellectual audience. It is Deleuze’s discovery of the great originality of Simondon’s ontology of individuation that contributed to a renewal of interest in his work, which has been pursued by a group of contemporary theorists that includes Stiegler, Combes and Latour.

Simondon’s ideas reflect the intellectual turn initiated in twentieth-century French academia referred to in chapter I, and also the new tendencies that have developed in the philosophy of science and the social sciences. Like many of his contemporaries, Simondon actively participated in the intellectual campaign against Idealist philosophies, existentialist ontology, and against Cartesian and empiricist theories of the subject. Furthermore, given his particular interests in science and psychology, he fiercely opposes consolidated scientific and psychological studies such as the theory of information, cognitivist models, Gestalt psychology and the psychoanalytic tradition of thought. Central to his critique is the mode in which the genesis and development of the individual has been explained in philosophy, science and psychology, each of which has assumed that the individual can be conceived in abstraction from and prior to its generative process. Despite the different perspectives involved here, Simondon holds that a common problem lies at the outset of many such paradigms: namely, a tendency to consider the individual as the principle of the process of individuation. Focus is thus directed within these accounts towards the analysis of
the individual as a given reality, upon which the process of individuation depends.

In Simondon’s account, this has inverted the terms of the problem, as one should not simply question what a human being is, but rather how he or she is formed, and what mechanism and forces are involved in this process of becoming singular. To take the individual as given implies its detachment from its context, that is, nature. Addressing its origins, however, affords the discovery of its location within a more general process of production; a process in which it is not the founding principle, but rather a constitutive element. Whilst the conception of the individual as an incontrovertible truth has generated zoomorphic and anthropomorphic doctrines of individuation, this attention to the generative mechanism of individuation delineates the multiple ways in which the material world impacts upon the evolution of every being. A unique process of individuation is assumed for all singularities; one that discloses the common elements and potentials between living beings and also, as we will see below, the many convergences between them and non-organic forms of life.

Attending to this process serves to highlight, on the one hand, the powerful role played by nature within the becoming of the individual; a factor that exceeds the biological phases of its constitution. On the other hand, the centrality of the process to the constitution of the individual being entirely re-shapes our understanding of the latter, which comes to be recognised as a result of various interactive phases and factors. This account of the genesis and anatomy of the individual has further implications. As the individual is a mixture of heterogeneous elements inherent within nature, the definition of its peculiar character cannot be based on a hylomorphic schema. This latter reduces the complexity of the individual to the dualism between matter and form, which also considers the world as an inanimate object. For Simondon, many contemporary and past models of individuation heavily rely on the paradigm of hylomorphism, which runs from the Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy through to Gestalt theory and the Freudian school of thought.\(^{18}\) This, in Simondon’s view, support the

\(^{18}\)The hylomorphic definition of beings derives from Aristotle’s philosophy. For Aristotle, Substance is the union of matter and form, and beings are a composite of soul and body, Aristotle (1985; 1986). For an accurate account of the question of the principium individuationis in Scholastic philosophy, see Spade (1994).
division of the individual into substances such as the mind and the body, vital and psychic forms of life, etc., and ascribes a privileged status to one element of each such pairings. Simondon does not only refute this division, but also – and more significantly – the validity of these categories as such.

The move made by Simondon in his attempt to re-formulate the paradigm of the individual is radical. He does not propose the re-theorisation of a specific theory or concept, which would remain anchored within a particular philosophical tradition. Instead, he constructs an alternative ontology that introduces novel conceptions of materiality, subjectivity, life, ethics and politics. The novelty of Simondon’s philosophical project lies, first of all, in the different questions that guide his enquiry, and also in the new categories of thought, around which he constructs his philosophy. In his ontology of individuation, Simondon uniquely adapts cybernetic theories, which were particularly influential in his time, Pre-Socratic physics, and Merleau-Ponty’s notions of the body and perception.

As indicated above, the fundamental concern of Simondon's work is the unveiling of the process of individuation, which he presents as the sole possible means of knowing the individual. Simondon relocates the genesis and development of the singular human being within the more complex process of production of nature. This has two essential implications. Firstly, the assumption of the inheritance of all singularities within the structure of nature delineates a primordial common mass of undifferentiated energies and movements at the basis of the process of individuation, from which individual thought, body, temporal flows, space, affectivity, humankind and community emerge. Simondon calls this primordial mass “the pre-individual” (Simondon, 2007: 177-181, 194-197). This replaces the category of the universals of classical metaphysics.

Whereas the universals are pre-defined and fixed principles, from which the individuals depend and strive toward, the pre-individual is undifferentiated and heterogeneous; it is more than a unity, and dynamic. It is an open domain of potentials, from which various beings and events follow (Virno, 2009: 61-65; Del Lucchese, 2009a: 183-185). This is a process that continuously invents itself, where individuals add something to the existing equilibrium (Virno, 2004: 75-80; Stiengler, 2009: 46-48; Toscano, 2006:140-143). Secondly, this brings about the
discovery of the collective realm as the constitutive element of the process of individuation. The collective is the exclusive condition of actualisation and further differentiation of beings, which signifies and re-signifies the potentials and degrees of energy embodied by the pre-individual mass. The collective is concrete, plural and extremely powerful, and it is through and within the collective that the individual emerges and lives. The significance of the collective is its relational tendency, and the ways in which this tendency generates individuation. Relation is the cornerstone of an individual, and also the force that drives the entire process of individuation from the biological, psychic and social phases. The centrality given to the notion of relation by Simondon delineates how his ontology contains within itself political and ethical nuances: for although he does not explicitly address political theses, his enquiry indicates the strategy upon which political theory might be constructed.

As indicated earlier, Simondon employs distinct and novel categories of thought in order to investigate the ontological process of individuation. Simondon recovers the concepts of transduction and the disparate from the domains of cybernetics, biophysics and mechanics (Simondon, 2007: 23-31, 73-83). These notions enable Simondon to highlight the operation through which exchanges of energy between states of beings generate new structures (Simondon, 2007: 77-83; Toscano, 2006: 151-156). In Simondon’s usage, transduction means the exchange and creation of new quantities of energies between beings and states of beings (Mackenzie, 2002; Toscano, 2006: 140-144). In each of these transductive movements, the quantity of energy exchanged and formed is defined as a disparate degree. The disparate is precisely an excess of heterogeneity and potentials, and it emerges from the composition between phases of being and individuals. The disparate delineates a certain quantity of power, which exceeds a preceding phase of individuation.

In turn, this excess of heterogeneity sets in motion a new moment of individuation.\(^\text{19}\) The notion of the disparate is the fundamental category within

\[^{19}\text{There is disparation when two twin sets that cannot be entirely superimposed, such as the left retinal image and the right retinal image, which are grasped together as system, allowing for the formation of a single set of a higher degree which integrates their elements thanks to a new dimension}^\text{"Simondon 2007, quoted in Toscano, 2006: 139).}^\]
Simondon’s ontology, through which he characterises the vital, psychic and social aspects of an individual. The disparate explains the status and role of the individual within the process of individuation (Toscano, 2006: 136-147). In his review to Simondon’s text, Deleuze finds in the notion of the disparate the great originality of Simondon. For Deleuze, the disparate means asymmetry, which involves a continuous problematic state within the process of individuation (Deleuze, 2004b: 86-89 ). The Simondonian concept of the disparate will play an important role in Deleuze’s theory of individuation (see for example Deleuze, 2004a: 307-329). Furthermore, the disparate acquires a fundamental role for understanding the intricate theme of the individual in Spinoza. In section two, I will employ this concept for determining the status of the singular beings and humankind within Spinoza’s theory of Substance.

The theme of transductive movements, together with that of the disparate structure of beings, are both linked to Simondon’s more general re-theorisation of the concept of information. In Simondon’s theory of individuation, information replaces notions of form, language and communication as a source of meaning and relations. In his application, information becomes recognised not as transmission of coded messages but as a passage from one state to another. The exchanges of potentials between disparate beings imply a transmission of information, which is productive of a further state of individuation. In this sense, information allows a transmission of grades of intensity (Toscano, 2006: 142-147; Garelli, 1994: 50-62). These exchanges and excesses of power and heterogeneity maintain the equilibrium of the system, which is constantly kept in tension. Simondon defines the collective field shaped by a metastable equilibrium. Metastability connotes a regime of pure potentiality (a false equilibrium), which calls for the creation of more articulated structures able to actualise the potential energies created in the already constituted order (Simondon, 2007: 31-33). These are the main categories of thought that guide Simondon’s ontology of individuation. Furthermore, an understanding of these notions is essential for our enquiry into Spinoza’s theory of the individual. Having considered these elements introduced by Simondon, let us investigate how these effectively operate within the development of an individual.
1.2 Ontology of relation

Simondon’s ontology of individuation is set out in his book *L’individuation psychique et collective à la lumière des notion de Forme, Potentiel et Métastabilité* (1989) (*The psychic and collective individuation in the light of the notions of Form, Potentiality and Metastability*), which constitutes the culmination of his doctoral studies. The starting-point of Simondon’s ontology is not a doctrine on Being, in which the latter is assumed as a unitary and prime principle from which the universe and all creatures are generated. Instead, his enquiry commences with a thesis about becoming, which he holds to be the only condition of possibility for thinking Being, reality and beings. For Simondon, Being is not what is, but rather what becomes; and Being becomes solely through individuation (Simondon, 2007: 13-24; Del Lucchese, 2009a: 180-181). This delineates the path through which Being passes from an undifferentiated position towards an actualised and heterogeneous dimension.

The attention given to the theme of becoming explains the central claim that guides Simondon’s inquiry, that is, knowing the individual through individuation rather than individuation through the individual (Simondon, 2007: 12). It is for this reason that Simondon’s enquiry begins with the theory of ontogenesis. Ontogenesis is a branch of biology, which studies the development of an organism from its earliest stages (its genesis) to maturity. Ontogenesis allows Simondon’s analysis to emphasise the interstitial zones between human beings and other individuals (Ansell Pearson, 1999: 90-96; Combes, 2001: 6-18). This brings to light the shared ground from which singularities emerge. The result is the recognition of the relational structure of beings at every stage of individuation. Therefore, Simondon’s recovery of ontogenesis from biology reveals his intention to study the anatomy of relationality, and the multiple ways in which this is productive of transformations. To be more precise, Simondon’s central postulate is that relation has the status of Being (Simondon, 2007: 18-

In this fashion, Simondon distinguishes two fundamental phases of individuation: vital and psychic. These stages do not proceed through a causal progression, such as a dialectical play and evolution towards the better. Rather, it is a modal individuation, in which each moment does not depend from any particular factor or principle (Virno, 2009: 60-63). It is characterised by levels of heterogeneity and potentials, through which transductive movements generate a complex state that in turn exceeds the existing formation in a new more problematic structure. The novel equilibrium formed is not more perfect than the previous one but more complicated, which means more heterogeneous. In this sense, differences between vital and psychic forms of life, organic and non-organic beings reside in the degree of potentials remained to be released, which sets forth further problems, movements and transformations (Simondon, 2007: 22-30). In both phases, the process of individuation unfolds through a collective field, within which potentials are actualised into novel beings. This collective is both the individual and the environment and at the same time it is more than the individual and the environment. As mentioned above, the collective is a relational condition, and a powerful source of biological, psychic and social meanings. Furthermore, the collective delineates the role of an individual within the general process of individuation.

The presence of the individual within the collective means the actualisation of unexpressed degrees of power, and also the emergence of further levels of heterogeneity derived from the disparate status of beings. This moves both the individual and the collective toward further phases of individuation. In this respect the individual, Simondon claims, is an open domain, and is nuanced intensively by a variety of heterogeneous potentiality. In Simondon’s words, the individual is a “theatre” of individuation, and not the latter’s result. This means that the individual is intended as a continuous activity and that this activity has an effective impact upon the development of the process (Simondon, 2007: 14-20). In other words, the individual adds something to the process and vice versa (Simondon, 2007: 19-22; Virno, 2009: 63-64). This category of the collective is

21 “According to this hypothesis, we might consider that every authentic relation has the status of being, and develops within a new individuation” [translation mine], (Simondon, 2007: 18).
one of the fundamental Simondonian categories around which I will base my re-
reading of Spinoza’s ontology of humankind, addressed in section two of this
chapter. In Spinoza, I will argue, the nature of beings, whether biological,
political, psychic and ethical, originates and develops on a collective plane. The
notions of the body, for example, and affectivity reveal this collective structure,
which drives all beings in their evolution.

_Vital process of individuation_

We have already seen that relation is the cornerstone of Simondon’s
ontology of individuation, and that it organises the equilibrium of both the
individual and collective field. Simondon traces the origins of this spontaneous
relational disposition of beings back to a non individuated matter, which is said to
be common to all individuals, and the ground of individuation. Simondon defines
this undifferentiated mass as the “pre-individual”. This is an unlimited source of
heterogeneous potentiality, which accompanies the individual in all its phases of
individuation (Barthélémy, 2005: 37-48). In order to explain the pre-individual,
Simondon sends us back to the Ancient Greek notion of _Apeiron_ (Simondon,
2007: 196-197), which was originally formulated by Anaximander in the 6th
century BC. He uses the term in his physics, in order to describe the genesis of the
world (_cosmos_). By _Apeiron_, Anaximander means an endless and undetermined
_natural_ mass, from which every element (water, air, fire) comes to light. In this
sense, the _Apeiron_ is a generating source of production that inheres within nature.

Simondon’s reference to Anaximander acquires great importance in our
search for a contemporary model of materialism, within which the re-positioning
of the meaning of the individual might be predicated. Firstly, Simondon’s citation
of the _Apeiron_ denotes his fidelity to the conception of nature as productivity
itself. He also differs from Aristotle’s view, and more generally from that of the
hylomorphic tradition of thought, insofar as the power of matter is said to be
entirely intelligible when considered in itself. It is, he claims, a source of

22Concerning Simondon’s notion of pre-individuality, Massumi defines this as the emergent
dimension, which is out of phase (Massumi, 2002a: 208-256). Similarly, Ansell Pearson refers to
the pre-individual realm as the ground of potential forms of life, see Ansell Pearson (1999: 90-96).
production. Secondly – and to put this in contemporary language – as the *Apeiron* is an indeterminate and never-ending quantity of mass, nature-matter is becoming, production, and, in consequence, power. Lastly, Simondon’s usage of *Apeiron* tells us the ways in which movements can generates beings and events such as space, time, history and humankind. The meaning of the *Apeiron* is thus crucial for our understanding of Simondon’s notion of the pre-individual.

If the pre-individual reality resembles Anaximander’s *Apeiron*, then one is led to think of the pre-individual as a pure power; a power that is, importantly, matter itself. In this light, matter discloses an unconditional force, which traverses individuated beings. Further, this pre-individual force shapes both the collective and the singular, thereby entailing the impossibility of theorising the development of an individual in abstraction from the becoming of the collective (Simondon, 2007: 196-197). The primary consequence of this is that the notion of the pre-individual involves the re-signification of the world of the organic and the importance of the vital process of individuation. This implies a renewal of interest in the organic world, which comes to be seen not as a place of mechanical and biological functions, but rather as a system of transductive exchanges of disparate degrees of energy and metastability. Furthermore, Simondon’s rehabilitation of the organic and materiality brings to light his dismissal of the definition of inert matter in favour of a more extensive account of the relation between living and non living forms. The study of organic structure is cogent not because it expresses human characters potentially, but rather for the potentiality and relational transformations that connote its domain. It is for this reason that Simondon’s ontology of individuation begins with an enquiry into the vital process of individuation. The importance of his arguments, for the purpose of this work, concerns the application of the notions of intensity, exchanges of energy and collective to the vital individual. These will form the theoretical ground around which my analysis of Spinoza’s physics of the bodies and common notions will be constructed.

In order to define the individual, Simondon adopts the notion of the quantum from the physical sciences. In this sense, there is an individual insofar as there is a variation and successive propagation of energy between and within
quanta. For Simondon, for example, the crystal might be rightly identified as an individual, because it satisfies the instances of intensity, pre-individual mass and collective field in tension (metastable) (Simondon, 2007: 83-84). The crystal does not connote a mere geometrical form, but is instead a dynamic organization, and is open to further individuation. Further, as the crystal’s structure is seen as a knot of intensity, disparation, pre-individuality and collective organisation, its relational status is also brought to light (Hottois, 1996: 7-24). This is a very crucial move within the general theory of individuation: it indicates the distinctive characteristics of Simondon’s materialist paradigm, and pertains to the latter’s reinstatement of the value of biological life. Given its dynamic and powerful structure, a biological reality within the natural world is for Simondon no less important than ethical, theoretical and social life; equally, this does not acquires meaningful position as expression of political and psychic gestures potentially. Simondon re-focuses attention on biological life as it is. The latter is presented as powerful, relational and fundamentally plural, and, given its relational level, as already involved in the political.

In this way, Simondon rejects not only the divide between the organic and the non-organic, but also, and more significantly, the uncontested Aristotelian classification of the genres of life into the political and the biological, according to which only the former deserves to be lived and defended. Simondon certainly does not explicitly claim that biological life is political, but he does nonetheless tell us that it is relational, problematic and thus productive of forces and new possibilities. The significance of biological existence lies in these confluences of different movements. Our awareness of the great relevance of every expression of life must, I think, be included within those contemporary materialist discourses that are concerned with the search for a different grammar of the individual.

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23 I follow Agamben’s critique of the Aristotelian categorisation of human life. He sees in the Aristotelian model the origin of the division of the unity of life into the political and non-political, and also that of the attendant view that it is only the latter that occupies a privileged status (Agamben, 1998. 15-30). I will return to the political implication derived from this distinction between forms of life in chapter IV.
Psychic process of individuation

Similar to the vital process of individuation, the process of psychic individuation is, first of all, articulated through the collective field, the disparate and pre-individual matter. It is in this context that Simondon gives a very complex account of the status of emotions and affectivity, and also of the ways in which these activate novel relational meanings and individuals. In the analysis of the psychic process of individuation, Simondon inaugurates (a not always explicit) dialogue with Freud and Marx. Particularly in relation to Freud and his heirs, Simondon rejects the notions of unconscious, within which a knot of unknown conflicting forces and desires orient the individual into the world. He accuses the psychoanalytic approach of splitting psychic life into an interiority and exteriority, and of locating the power of an individual within an obscure and self-organised unit (Simondon, 2007: 97-100).

By contrast, Simondon re-situates psychic life in the publicity of the collective. As we have analysed above, in the collective field transductive movements of differentiation and complication give rise to novel individual realities. For Simondon, the psychic process of individuation is equally traversed by these transformations (Simondon, 2007: 98-104). A psychic being emerges and lives within relational conditions, which expose its pre-individual reserve of being to the multiplicity of the collective.24 For Simondon, then, there is a process of psychic individuation insofar as an individual perceives, acts or makes other beings.25

Simondon claims that the core of psychic life is positioned in the dynamics of emotions and affectivity. As psychic individuation is always in relation, both emotions and affectivity establish practises of participation within the collective domain. To participate involves sharing and exchanging information. These

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24By “reserve of being”, Simondon means a quantity of undifferentiated power, which persists within the individuated individual (Simondon, 2007: 106-135).
25In his Du monde d’existence des objets techniques (1958), Simondon defines as phases of psychic individuation the interaction between the technical objects and the individual. The re-evaluation of the technical objects undeniably indicates, in different ways, the influences of Marx’s notion of the General Intellect, and also Heidegger’s account of Dasein and technique. For an analysis of the differences and similarities between Simondon, Marx and Heidegger, see particularly Virno (2004: 34-47, 78-81).
exchange and alterations of information transform the psychic individual (Massumi, 2002a: 1-21, 229-230; Manning, 2007: 90-100). Affectivity and emotion, Simondon argues, are precisely transformations, which model the psychic life of the individual within the collective. It is through affectivity and emotion that being comes to experience the world and others. In this sense, affectivity and emotion do not inhere within an already constituted individual, as they are not internal parts of an individual being; rather they are located in the interstices between an individual, the collective context and the pre-individual. In the following section, I will propose a re-reading of Spinoza’s theory of the affects through the definition of affectivity advanced by Simondon. His theory will help us to understand the problematic role of affects and passions within Spinoza’s ontology and politics.

Simondon distinguishes between the role of affectivity, emotion and perception within psychic individuation. Whilst affectivity defines the relation between the pre-individual mass and the forming individual, emotion moves the individual towards acting, thinking and orienting himself within the world. Perception establishes cognitive practices through the direct relation between the individual and world. To perceive, Simondon claims, means “placing oneself across” (Simondon, 2007: 91). It is precisely in this gesture that knowledge lies. Knowledge does not result from an interaction between the subject and the object, but rather from a *relation* between relational beings (the individual, the milieu and the others) (Simondon, 2007: 91-92; Del Lucchese, 2009a: 187-188).

The theme of affectivity, in Simondon, is manifold. He replaces the meaning of affectivity as expressions of desire (Eros) and fear of death (Thanatos) – concepts inherited from certain psychoanalytic discourses – with those of relation and tension. Affects delineate the tension between two forms of

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26Affectivity-emotion [*affectivo-émotivité*] is not solely the repercussion of the result of the action in the internal structure of the individual being; it is a transformation, it plays an active role: it expresses the relation between the two domains of the same subject. Affectivity-emotion modifies the action according to this relation, harmonizing it, making the effort also to harmonize the collective” [*translation mine*] (Simondon, 2007: 106).

27Simondon’s distinction between affectivity, emotion and perception reflects the influence of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) of Merleau-Ponty.

28Concerning the theme of perception and knowledge, Del Lucchese has drawn an interesting parallel between Simondon’s theory and Deleuze’s definition of “simulacrum”, (Del Lucchese, 2009a: 186-189).
heterogeneity, the one of the pre-individual and the other of the individual. For Simondon, this tension founds spirituality. The treatment of affectivity as a source of spirituality casts doubt on an entire tradition of thought, which explains desires and affects as a defence of the individual from the innate fear of death. In Simondon’s reformulation, spirituality emerges from the domain of affectivity and connotes the problematic relation between the individual and the pre-individual. The singular being perceives himself to be perceptibly smaller and contemporaneously inherent within the pre-individual matter. It is in this problematic relation that the desire for eternity, and not of death, comes to light (Simondon 2007: 104-111).

If the individual is frightened by the pre-individuated mass, at the same time, this pre-individual mass exists within the individual as a part of his reserve of being. This fluctuating phase brings about a form of recognition between the individual and its pre-individual realm, which gives rise to the emergence of eternity. In the history of philosophy, Simondon observes, many notions of eternity have been proposed. The Scholastic and, in different ways, the Cartesian arguments of the immortality of the soul and intellect greatly exemplify the attempt to explain the encounter between the pre-individual and the individual (Simondon, 2007: 104-105). It is solely Spinoza, Simondon affirms, who fully understood before his contemporaries the dynamics of the psychic state of eternity (Simondon, 2007: 104). In the proposition “sentimus experimurque nos aeternos esse” (“Nevertheless, we feel and experience that we are eternal”, E.V, prop. XXIII, Scholium.), Simondon recognises, Spinoza has given voice to the reality of a crucial phase within the psychic life of beings.

Beside the arguments as to the nature of eternity and what is eternal, Simondon’s focus is upon the unveiling of the mechanisms that lie at the very heart of spirituality. Spirituality expresses the problematic status of the individual, which is constantly in the middle between generality and the particularity, between the pre-individual and the collective. It is in this context that the process of collective psychic individuation takes place. This process occurs only within and through the collective, which functions as mediator between the pre-individual and the individuated reality. It is in this moment that Simondon
introduces his notion of transindividuality as the founding condition of psychic individuation.

The transindividual anatomy of the individual

The theme of the transindividual occupies a pivotal role within Simondon’s enquiry into the conditions of psychic and collective individuation. The fundamentals of the transindividual are emotion and affectivity (Simondon, 2007: 106-111). Simondon makes a fundamental distinction between interindividuality and transindividuality: the former goes from one individual to another and establishes relations between already formed beings; transindividual action permeates individuals and makes them constitutive elements of a more complex system.29

The role of the transindividual operates within the pre-individual, the individual and the collective and vice versa, without however coinciding with these categories. It re-organises the relation between the individual and the pre-individual, re-situating and harmonizing this relation within the domain of the collective. In this way, the singular individual is no longer disoriented and does not recognise the pre-individual as an external reality, but rather as an element of more complex order. This allows the individual to structure and participate in a novel phase of individuation. As discussed, the structure of individuals is disparate: they are essentially asymmetric (Deleuze, 2004b: 86-88). In the collective, the action of the transindividual is focused on the integration of these disparate degrees of intensity into a more problematic structures, which incorporates potentials and metastabilities that in turn articulate a more problematic phases of collective individuation.

In other words, during the process between the vital and the psychic moments of individuation, pre-individual potentials exceed the individual being.

29 “The interindividual relation goes from individual to individual; it does not permeate individuals; the transindivial action is that which makes it, so that individuals exist together as the elements of a system that carries potentials and metastability, […], then the discovery of a structure and a functional organization that integrates and resolves the problematic of incorporated immanence. […]. The transindividual does not localise individuals; it makes them coincide; it makes individuals communicate through significations” [translation mine] (2007: 191-192).
These pre-individual masses of intensity maintain a constant order of asymmetry, which articulates – which literally problematises – further moments of individuation. It is in this asymmetry, with its excess of potentialities, that the notion of relations lies. The transindividual action structured through the emotive context actualises the relational status (the disparation between emotive states) of emotion throughout the psychic individuation. For the relational nature of emotion, the process of psychic individuation cannot be conceived as anything other than collective, and this places the quasi-individual being permanently in the middle of pre-individuality and collective individual. As this account presents the individual as being constantly exposed, the process of individuation brings about the discovery of the amphibian character of the individual (Virno, 2004: 78-80). The individual is permanently in the middle between pre-individual force and the collective plane. The peculiarity of an individual lies precisely in its permanent location in middle of these factors. This leads one to think the quidditas of an individual being as a series of complex relations between disparate grades of intensity, which operate in the interstices between the vital and psychic levels.

Lastly, we must emphasise that the transindividual does not only structure psychic states but also ethical and social practises. The transindividual is the force, Simondon affirms, that moves political and social realities. Given the psychic and social meaning of the transindividual, that we cannot conceive social and psychic communities separately. Instead, there exists only a psychic-social community (Simondon, 2007: 192-193). By this, he means that there is a unique process of individuation, which unfolds the social and vice versa. It is for this reason that Simondon firmly states that a society becomes, and it is not created by a social contract.

New possibilities for the individual of the present

We might now present some conclusions based on Simondon’s theory of individuation. The importance of Simondon’s theory concerns his gesture of re-founding the paradigm of relation itself. Simondon does not address the question of why individuals enter into relation, or of whether or not human nature is
relational. Simondon’s philosophical gesture is the analysis of the ontological status of relation itself. Simondon raises important questions concerning relationality itself, and consequently asks how it is possible to signify the reality of relation.

These guiding questions lead Simondon to reject the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic definitions of relation. The essence of relation brings about the discovery that behind the transformations within the material world there are relational states and movements. In this fashion, individuation as a process of transformations is seen in terms of a becoming of disparate forms of relation. There is individuation insofar as there are relational events. As it is the place of transformations, nature is therefore a system of dynamic relations, which individualise and problematise individuals. Our awareness of the material world as a relational framework might improve the contemporary vocabulary of materialist philosophy. In this sense, the arguments, I will develop in this chapter and those that follow are intended to offer a contribution to this grammar.

The theme of relation becomes crucial when Simondon passes to analyse psychic individuation. Since relation is the generative source of psychic life, emotion and affectivity found the psychical life of beings. Simondon’s arguments about emotion and affectivity are based on the assumption that they are prior to individuated being. Emotional and affective activities pass through the individual without inhering within them. This means that different emotional states are in truth moments of individuation, without which the process of individuation would not take place. Simondon’s theory of emotion and affectivity imply a quite different understanding of the relational and emotive constitution of the individual, upon which novel ethical and political theories should be predicated. Simondon’s theory sheds light on the collective dimension of emotion, which pervades every social and political organisation. The consequence of Simondon’s arguments calls us to question theories that present the social contract as the basis of civil society, and also those ethical and anthropological conjectures, which rely on the definition of human nature as social and egotistical.

Taking into account the main arguments and implications of Simondon’s philosophy of individuation, the questions that I will now move on to discuss
concern how and to what extent his ontological categories might clarify Spinoza’s theories of conatus, body and affectivity. In the following section, I will examine how an interpretation of Spinoza via Simondon’s philosophy will raise important theses regarding the richness of the expressions of Spinoza’s geometry of affects, to which contemporary thought should pay greater attention. In order to look for an adequate language of affectivity able to express its materiality and cogency, the claim that I will develop in the section below is that Spinoza’s thought, when seen through a Simondonian lens, offers crucial theoretical resources.

2. Spinoza’s paradigm of the individual

As anticipated in chapter I, Spinoza’s study of the individual is developed from part II to part V of the Ethics. In the second half of part II, the main arguments concern the analysis of the anatomies of mind and body and how these are related one another. In this section, Spinoza presents his theory of knowledge and explains the mechanism through which the mind acquires self-awareness and awareness of the world. He gives an account here of the constitution and the role of the body for the attainment of knowledge. The body is regarded as the first object of the mind, through which the latter develops various forms of knowledge, adequate and inadequate ideas (E. II, prop. XIII).

Central for the purpose of the present discussion is Spinoza’s definition of the human body, which is introduced in the physics of bodies. The human body is a dynamic composite of a great number of individuals, each of which is extremely complex and varies continuously (E. II, postulate I). The importance of this resides in the concept of the body as a mixture of different parts, which are constantly in movement. This statement suggests the idea of the body not as an already-made substance, but rather as a domain of various functions.

In part III, Spinoza addresses the theme of human bondage, which is caused by a life lived under the dominance of affectivity. In this context, we enter into the domain of imagination (the first kind of knowledge), within sets
forth primary forms of self-awareness and perception of otherness. The analysis of the dynamics of the affects involves a variety of fundamental themes such as the theory of conatus, the essence of human being, and relationality. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned in chapter I, Spinoza’s arguments on affectivity are central for determining the political status of the mass within society and also the constitution of the authority of the state. In the political Treatises, Spinoza will employ affects such as fear, hope and indignation to describe both the characters of the mass and that of the ruler.

In part IV, Spinoza describes the importance of rationality and positive affects such as joy and love for the complete development of human nature. These are the sole conditions through which the human being experiences freedom. Spinoza explains what a life under the guidance of reason truly consists of, and how from this individuals might obtain the highest satisfaction. This results in the development of values of friendship and mutual support. The respect of rational prescriptions coincides with the recognition of other human beings as advantageous for the improvement of one’s own nature (E. IV, prop. XXXV, schol.). In this section, political and ethical meanings become more explicit. Furthermore, it is in part IV that Spinoza introduces the theme of life and connects this with active affects such as joy and love (E. IV, prop. XIX, XX, XXI, XXII).

The focus of part V of the Ethics is the conditions, through which men might attain the Amor Dei Intellectualis (the intellectual love of God). This represents the highest form of human knowledge, freedom and joy. By this, Spinoza means that human understanding operates directly through the attributes of thought and extension. This genre of knowledge is expressed through a particular type of love, which is twofold: namely, the love of the human being towards God, and the love of God toward humankind. From the divine standpoint, the action of God upon the world is his love toward humankind. This opens up an innovative meaning of love, which replaces the conception of divine love as piety and goodness with the power of acting and producing. In turn, this implies the recognition of love, in its highest expression, as a generative source of beings and of various levels of reality.
From the human standpoint, knowledge of the third kind means to understand God in its entirety and complexity. This involves perceiving God under the light of a certain eternity (E. V, prop. XXII, XXIII). For Spinoza, this means to love God immediately. He gives only one historical example of human experience of the third kind of knowledge. In the Theological Political Treatise Spinoza indicates in the figure of Christ a model of understanding God directly through the latter’s attributes, as he explains “Christ communicated with God mind to mind” (TTP, Chapter I, p. 399). In the following chapter, I will investigate the political relevance of the life of Christ as the embodiment of this form of love and the ways his existence structures decisive political gestures.

Having taken the general plan of the three sections of the Ethics into account, we are now in a position to examine the resulting paradigm of the individual and the extent to which this might enrich our awareness of the individual of the present. The starting point of Spinoza’s thought of the individual is his genealogy of the affects. His theory of affectivity, as we will see below, is the subject of one of the great debates amongst scholars; one that signals the great difference in approach between Spinozist analytic and continental studies. Let us flesh out the problematics involved within Spinoza’s genealogy of the affects.

2.1 Geometry of the affects and its problems

In part III of the Ethics, Spinoza’s dictum is that humankind is a part of nature and not a “kingdom within a kingdom” (E. III, Preface). The human being obeys to the universal laws of causation in exactly the same manner as all other creatures in nature. As an expression of human weakness, affectivity has to be investigated as a natural phenomenon, which originates from a precise concatenation of cause and effect. The discovery of these causes indicates the conditions through which the human being might reduce the power of the affects upon his or her life.

As described in chapter I, Spinoza distinguishes between actions and
passions (E. III, Def. III). If we are an adequate cause of these affections, then the affect is an action; if however we are an inadequate cause of the effects, then affect is defined as passion. By 'adequate cause' Spinoza means a cause that gives rise to effects that can be understood clearly and distinctively. Individuals are active, when they distinguish causes from effects, and importantly when they are the causes of the effects. On the contrary, individuals are passive when they are partial effects of an external cause (E. III, Def. I-II). In the postulates I and II, Spinoza explains that the human body can be affected in many ways, from which its power of acting can be increased or decreased. These varied affections alter the structure of the body without changing the whole individual. In postulate II, Spinoza literally refers to a vestige of preceding experiences, which has been impressed on human being.

Proceeding from the definitions of affects, passions and actions to the theory of conatus, Spinoza defines this latter as the striving to exist and persevere into life. This is held by every being in nature. Related particularly to humankind, conatus structures human behaviours and cognitive phases. It plays the pivotal role of orienting one self to the world (E. III, prop. VI, VII, VIII). The theory of conatus presents Spinoza’s conception of life, upon which his paradigm of the individual is constructed. As I will discuss here and in the following chapters, the meaning given to Spinoza to the concept of life (conatus) is crucial for determining the distinguishing features of psychic, biological and political individuals. Lastly, in the human context conatus corresponds to desire, which is the very essence of a human being (E. III, Def. Aff. I). By this, he intends a transition from a lesser to a greater level of perfection. Desire is referred to both the mind and the body (E. III, Def. I Aff., explanation).

In the theory of the affects, conatus activates the affective process and operates through the active and passive affects. Affects function through an individual’s experience with an object and of another individual, the outcome of which can be advantageous or destructive. The resulting impressions influence successive experiences, distinct social and psychic behaviours. Specifically, joy, love and their derivates maintain the individual in an active state, favouring mechanisms of self-awareness and socialization. Conversely, hatred, sadness and
similar passions generate a passive condition, which progressively weakens the human being’s conatus (E. III, prop. XV-XVII).

Spinoza’s analysis of the affects presents many problematic theses. The primary source of difficulties is represented by the concept of conatus. Ambivalences are contained in the verbs “preserving” and “striving”, which define the origins of individual actions and thoughts. The former might be identified with the instinct of self-preservation, the latter as an innate struggle for the improvement of individual condition. Whilst the term “preserving” might be easily assumed as expressing a form of individualist egoism, the verb “striving” presents two different meanings. Firstly, to strive might indicate an egoistic desire of an individual for extending his power over others. In this case, striving would further expand the egoistic instinct of self-preservation. The result would be a paradigm of the individual centred on a strong egoist individualism. This would involve a politics based on ideals of self-mastery, profit, and conflict for power. An individualist portrait of human nature would also imply a conception of the state and society as a mere assemblage of individuals, which functions as a guarantor of singular interest and prevents reciprocal offences.

However, the verb “striving” might also delineate a tendency towards the achievement of the highest form of perfection. Thus, the term might express a teleological meaning, that is, a goal-directed individual existence. This would, on the one hand, coincide with Spinoza’s system of determinism and also his refusal of free-will; on the other hand, the teleological hypothesis would weaken the first aspect of conatus as a self-preserving drive. In this second case, Spinoza’s ethical and political project would support a form of agency behind-beyond human gestures, the vision of a political society above individuals, and the highest form of perfection. Lastly, the verbs “preserving” and “striving” might be read together as expressing the meaning of pure power. In this case, conatus would suggest Spinoza’s idea of the life of an individual as activity. This would converge with his definition of Substance’s essence as a power (E. I, prop. XXXIV). The ethical and political implications would be a theory of society erected not on the value of self-interest and result of an higher will, but instead an expression of many different individual desires.
As with the theory of \textit{conatus}, Spinoza’s thesis of affectivity is not free from difficulties. At the outset of these is the question of what theoretical tools we should employ for understanding the theme of affectivity in the \textit{Ethics}. In other words, how do we read Spinoza’s notions of affects, passions and rationality? Do they describe states of mind’s awareness, or rather ethical and political behaviours? In the first case, we analyse Spinoza’s affective process from a cognitive standpoint. Affects would connote more or less perfect phases within the general process of mind’s awareness. Spinoza’s conception of affectivity, as a whole, would aim at the description of human process of knowing and the psychic models emerging from this. In the second case, the dynamics of the affects delineate the mechanism through which human beings develop an idea of well-being, of norms and practises of socialisation. Furthermore, affects and passions raise the question of whether these should be regarded as opposing categories or rather as different expressions of social and ethical attitudes, which do not oppose each other. Ultimately, Spinoza’s definition of human essence as desire opens up a more complex theme: that is, whether desire presupposes a theory of lack, or rather a theory of power.

To be more precise, Spinoza defines desire as a transition from a lesser to a greater degree of perfection. This might give rise to the idea that for Spinoza human desires derive from a state of lack and need. If this is the case, then taken in itself, human essence is lacking, and requires for its complete development the attainment of higher forms of perfection and goals. However, as mentioned above, Spinoza also qualifies individual nature as \textit{conatus}, which is directly connected with the meaning of power and self-affirmation. Referred to human essence, \textit{conatus} indicates that human life is intended as union of different powers, which run from physical, ethical and cognitive desires. It is around these questions that scholars within the field of contemporary Spinoza studies have constructed their readings of Spinoza’s paradigm of the individual, from which they have deduced his politics and ethics. In chapter I, I have delineated the main characteristics of the two principal interpretations of Spinoza’s philosophy, i.e. those of the analytic and continental traditions. These two interpretations will still accompany our enquiry into Spinoza’s theory of the affects and will constitute the theoretical
ground from which the approach developed in this thesis takes shape.

Although distinctions between the exegeses of Spinoza formulated within the two mentioned traditions of thought cannot be traced definitely, and although there are many points of convergence and similarities, for the purpose of the present discussion, I want to emphasise the differences in approach to the theme of affectivity followed by analytic and continental readers of the *Ethics*. The analytic school is generally characterised by a tendency towards a reading of the affects from a cognitive perspective, whereas the continental tradition is more inclined to attribute a stronger political and ethical meaning to Spinoza’s thesis of affectivity. Let us flesh out in more detail, firstly, the implications of reading Spinoza’s theory of affectivity from a cognitive perspective.

*The analytic study of the affects*

In chapter I, we have seen that central aspect of many analytic commentators is the importance given to rationality within Spinoza’s metaphysics. They consider ideas and reason central within Spinoza’s model of Substance, which drive human beings and nature. In the analysis of the theory of the affects, this general line of reasoning results in a cognitive strategy, which identifies Spinoza’s conception of affectivity as different stages of the path of the mind towards self-awareness. A further commonality between scholars can be found in the view that Spinoza’s notion of *conatus* and desire denotes a self-preserving instinct, a desire for self-affirmation and the improvement of individual power. Whilst the arguments of part III of the *Ethics* are described as a cognitive process, the remaining sections are viewed as establishing Spinoza’s moral philosophy. This prepares the terrain for the exposition of the political theses of the political Treatises.

A decisive contribution towards the development of a cognitive reading of Spinoza’s conception of affectivity has been offered by Hampshire, whose reflections have been influential, albeit not exclusively, for many analytic Spinozist scholars such as Bennett and Curley. As anticipated in chapter I, for Hampshire, Spinoza’s metaphysics is centred on a paradigm of materialism,
which attributes to materiality a dynamic and productive status. In the human context, in Hampshire’s view, this model of materialism is explicated through the centrality of the body for the improvement of mind’s awareness. This is the fundamental ground of physical and mental states, through which the human subject orients himself within the world, constructs relations with the others and creates ethical and social norms. It is for this reason that Hampshire considers both ideas and affects primarily as physical phenomena, which derive from bodily movements and interaction with other bodies (Hampshire, 2005:110-112). In this light, Spinoza’s notion of conatus and desire are together intended as an innate drive for preserving and increasing individual power. These are the key elements around which Spinoza’s egoist paradigm of humankind is constructed. Conatus and desire structure the body’s activity, which in turn activates affective and mental processes. Moreover, conatus and desire are the prime reason and ultimate end of moral norms and socio-political practises (Hampshire, 2005: 105-110).

Given the centrality of the body for the improvement of human desire, Hampshire deduces a cognitive psychology from Spinoza’s theory of affects. Affects delineate the weakness of mind, which shape different psychological illness and personality. As a result of the material foundation of the affects, the remedy to the mind’s weakness is an accurate investigation of its causes in much the same way as we generally do for any physical phenomenon. Following Hampshire’s analysis, therefore, the arguments of part III seem to present a psychotherapy, which aims at liberating human life from psychic bondage and disorders (Hampshire, 2005: 106-110; Bennett, 1984: 347-350). From this account of Spinoza’s conceptions of affectivity and conatus, Hampshire draws a parallel between Freud’s theory of desire and Spinoza’s study of the affects. Affinities, Hampshire claims, reside on the notions of conatus and drive, on an innate force of self-preservation and extension of energy. These are for both thinkers the fundamental instruments for understanding interior life. Hampshire however clarifies that Spinoza and Freud do not claim that human beings are aware of their desires to dominate others. By contrast, their intention is to indicate a method through which human weaknesses might be investigated scientifically. It is only through this study of human nature that we might discover what truly lies at the
very heart of human imperfection and unhappiness (Hampshire, 2005: 110-112).

Building upon Hampshire’s cognitive reading of part III of the *Ethics*, Bennett too views the theme of affectivity as the weakness of the mind. Bennett envisages in the dynamics of the affects Spinoza’s account of individual ordinary psychic disorders, strengths and self-interested desire. Affects are inadequate responses that an individual provides to his natural instinct of self-preservation, that is, *conatus* (Bennett, 1984: 240-251). For him, *conatus* means a self-preserving force, which in the human being becomes recognised as self-interest and as an individualist attitude. *Conatus* derives, Bennett explains, from Spinoza’s more general thesis, for which in nature “no thing can be destroyed except by an external cause” (E. III, prop. 4). Related to the human context, Spinoza’s denial of self-destruction culminates in his rejection of suicide (Bennett, 1984: 237-240). These are the fundaments of Spinoza’s egoist and individualist paradigm of the individual.

For Bennett, Spinoza’s egoist model of the individual is developed from a rigorous study of human cognitive processes, which are rooted in the domain of the affects. In contrast to Hampshire’s materialist account of affectivity, Bennett’s reading echoes somewhat the panpsychist meaning given to Spinoza’s theory of parallelism (Bennett, 1984: 131-139). As discussed in chapter I, the formula of parallelism here means the dominance of the mental upon the material. In the geometry of the affects, this results in the inclusion of the dynamics of affectivity within the mental structure of the individual. In this light, affective states and desires indicate a process, in which the mind strives towards the acquisition of a higher state of vitality. Affects, Bennett affirms, should be regarded as moments within mind’s manifold process of self-awareness (Bennett, 1984: 254-267).

The liberation of the mind from the affects coincides in Bennett’s analysis with the mind’s highest level of vitality (Bennett, 1984: 259-262). The path of the mind toward its highest form of vitality corresponds to the distinct form of moral philosophy. At the outset of his moral philosophy Spinoza gives his definition of human nature as naturally egoist and individualist. Reason thus teaches us the best way to achieve and increase our self-interest (Bennett, 1984: 307-310). Its ‘dictates’ have both a cognitive and teleological meaning. This results from
Spinoza’s claim that self-interest is the cornerstone of human conduct. Given this form of egoism, human behaviour is influenced by this egoistic nature, which comes to shape the precept of reason. From this, Bennett concludes Spinoza’s aim in the *Ethics* is not only to demonstrate that egoism is natural, but also that it is moral under the guidance of reason. Spinoza considers the dictates of reason as moral principles, which have prescriptive value (Bennett, 1984: 299-310).

Like Bennett, Curley also draws Spinoza’s individualist and realist moral philosophy from the latter’s notions of *conatus*, affects and rationality. However, unlike Bennett, Curley’s interpretation stresses its political and ethical implications rather than the cognitive mechanism of Spinoza’s genealogy of the affects. For Curley, central within the theory of the affects is the category of *conatus*. He suggests reading *conatus* not only as an instinct of self-preservation but also as an innate desire for the increase of individual power (Curley, 1988: 107-119). In this light, Spinoza’s study of affectivity aims to provide human beings with moral precepts and remedies. In contrast with Bennett, who views affects as mind’s weakness, for Curley in Spinoza affects are negative insofar as they decrease individual *conatus*; they are in consequence positive insofar as they further expand human being’s power (Curley, 1988: 119-126).

Furthermore, positive affects move human beings towards the development of rationality. Under the guidance of reason, Curley explains, human beings discover in mutual cooperation the best way to improve their own being and fulfil their needs and desires (Curley, 1988: 128-135). The ‘dictates’ of reason in Spinoza, Curley explains, are considered hypothetical and at the same time categorical. They are hypothetical because we need to follow the recommendations of rationality as if we want to increase our own being. They are also categorical because the improvement of one’s own *conatus* it is already the innate fundament of moral action (Curley, 1979: 371-376). The conclusions Curley draws from his analysis of parts III and IV of the *Ethics* is the definition of Spinoza’s moral philosophy centred on a paradigm of egoist individualism. It is self-interest (*conatus*) that founds moral and political norms. Self-interest is the foundation and at the same time the ultimate end of society.

In contrast with the general analytic tendency toward the identification of
the theory of *conatus* as egoist self-preservation, Smith attributes a teleological meaning to it. He suggests reading the verb “striving” not as an individualistic desire for self-affirmation and power, but as a tension that motivates a higher form of perfection (Smith, 2003: 100-104). This form of perfection is represented by a life lived under the guidance of reason; a life that coincides with the acquisition of true happiness and freedom. This innate inclination directs every phases of human existence, including affective life. This is not the domain of cruel egoist desires, which oppose mind’s activity. Rather, these describe the weakness of the mind and its striving toward the attainment of self-awareness (Smith, 2003:104-113). The greatness of Spinoza’s thought of humankind, Smith concludes, does not reside in the encouragement of ascetic values, in order to gain perfection. By contrast, it consists in the enjoyment of actual life developed through political society (Smith, 2003: 137-153).

**Critical reflections on the analytic reading of affectivity**

The analytic reading has underlined the role of the affects within the development of human self-awareness and knowledge of the world, and has considered affectivity largely as an imperfect phase of the mind. Besides the different conclusions achieved by analytic scholars, the common risk, to which a cognitive approach might lead, is the possibility of failing to fully unfold the potentialities of affectivity. If we take up a cognitive strategy, we circumscribe affectivity within the domain of the mental, and this prevents us from recognising all the characteristics of the affects. If affects are viewed as the weaknesses of the mind, then this leads towards a view that casts them as states of lack. This also has direct impact upon the understanding of Spinoza’s account of the mind. The vision of the development of the mind through various states of weakness introduces a certain logic of lack at the outset of the entire cognitive process. If affects are assumed as negative, and if the mind is required to free itself in order to develop all of its capacities, then this means that the power of the mind derives from a condition of lack. In this way, the awareness of the mind does not express the power of controlling affectivity and understanding the world adequately, but
rather a gesture of poverty, from which the mind begins its journeys towards adequate and intuitive genres of knowledge.

Although affects are considered in the *Ethics* as the causes of human bondage, we cannot ignore that especially in part IV positive affects such as joy and love are constitutive elements of rational life and essential for destroying passions such as hatred (E. III, prop. XLIII, XLIV). In this fashion, the attainment of rationality would not derive from a struggle of the mind from its states of poverty (affects) but rather from a more complex process, which involves the encouragement of positive affects. As a result, mind’s awareness would emerge from joyful experiences, and not from lack. Lastly, we must emphasise that affects and passions such as joy, hope and fear do not only indicate moral or psychic moments that in turn form political concepts: these moments are in fact already political.

This aspect of Spinoza’s philosophy, together with the link between positive affects and rationality, has been highlighted by the continental interpretation. This has insisted upon the political implications that emerge from Spinoza’s theory of the affects, and from their irreducibility within rational life. The arguments that I will put forward in the conclusive section of this chapter aim to take the continental reading further, by way of an ontological analysis of the theory of the affects. This is an alternative perspective to the cognitive view, and might open up a potential re-conception of the richness of the affects’ expressions, which are productive of powerful psychic realities, relationality, and of political and social meanings. Let us firstly turn to the interpretation of Spinoza’s theory of affectivity within the continental tradition of thought.

*Affectivity within the continental tradition*

As already anticipated, interpretations of Spinoza’s theory of the affects vary greatly within the analytic and continental schools of thought. Spinozist scholars from these traditions investigate the theme of affectivity through different strategies. Analytic scholars, as we have seen, follow a cognitive approach and identify affects as phases of the mind which need to be advanced for the
acquisition of higher rationality and true happiness. By contrast, in the continental reading affects are studied in their autonomy from the mind, and are directly related to the arguments of the political Treatises. This strategy leads continental Spinozist commentators to discover in the theory of affectivity important ethical and political meanings, which will be fully developed in the political Treatises.

As discussed in chapter I, for those that follow the continental approach, Spinoza’s ontology is founded on a distinct model of materialism, in which matter occupies a productive dimension. The implications of this form of materialism become more evident within the theory of the affects. For this interpretation, affectivity is the cornerstone of Spinoza’s materialist paradigm of the individual. The key-element of the theory of the affects is the notion of conatus. Unlike the analytic reading, continental scholars translate the verb “striving”, contained within the definition of conatus, as pure power and activity. This, however, does not necessarily mean a desire to dominate others and an individualist instinct for self-preservation. Rather, conatus, activating the affective process, develops political and social relations. These aspects, indicated above, have been particularly developed by post-Marxist Spinozist scholars within the general continental interpretation. In the post-Marxist appropriation, the originality of Spinoza’s theory of the affects is found principally within the concept of conatus and also in his analysis of the domain of imagination. The notion of conatus, through the affective process, is the prime motor of social relations. The importance of this resides on the crucial implication that this has for understanding Spinoza’s political thought.

Following this view, in the Ethics as well as in the political Treatises, interactions between individuals always emerge from and within latent or explicit dynamics of power. Thinkers such as Negri and Montag more recently have strongly insisted on the meaning of conatus as an expression of a power relation (Montag, 1999: 31-53).\(^3\) Especially, Negri has read in the notion of conatus and, more generally, in that of affectivity, Spinoza’s genealogy of power, which is fully explicated in the political Treatises (Negri, 1998: 193-223; Hardt, 2000: xi-

\(^{3}\)Montag includes the analysis of the theory of the conatus within a more general discussion of Spinoza’s politics of the multitude (Montag, 1999: 62-89). I will return to Montag’s position in chapters III and IV.
xvi). Furthermore, Negri has envisaged in Spinoza’s notion of the affects the character of the multitude. Affects such as indignation generate forms of resistance within the body of the multitude against the existing authority of the state (Negri, 1998: 204-216).

Passing from the argument of _conatus_ to the general theory of imagination, this discloses a theory of for the emancipation of the masses from despotic regimes. Ideology, by which a despotic state is supported, is based on the encouragement of imaginative-affective practises which are instrumental for maintaining the dominance of the ruler over the people. Therefore, for thinkers such as Matheron (1988), Negri (1998) and Tosel (1984) Spinoza’s analysis of the origin of imagination aims at indicating the ways in which might liberate themselves through the power of thinking and acting.

*Relationality and ethical vision of the world*

With a quite different emphasis in respect to the post-Marxist reading, but whilst maintaining a materialist perspective, Balibar draws primary attention to the relational nature of _conatus_ and affects. Unlike Negri, for example, who tends to read the sphere of the affects and _conatus_ within a logic of power, Balibar, instead, focuses to the relational dynamics activated by the affects. In chapter I, I discussed Balibar’s position concerning the metaphysics of Substance, whose main theses point to the relational forces behind the logic of cause and effect. This reading continues and is further developed in his analysis of the theory of the affects. Besides their political meaning, Balibar maintains that affects describe primarily relational states. He observes that in Spinoza affects are regularly explained as movements _towards_ the others. These movements generate relations between individuals. The affect of hope, for example, necessarily requires the presence of the hoping individual and the hoped individual or object.  

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31 Balibar develops an important reading of the centrality of Spinoza’s theory of the affects for understanding the status of the masses within the state. Balibar examines, specifically, the double meaning of the passion of fear in the *Theological Political Treatise*. This means, on the one side, the fear of the mass towards the ruler and equally the fear of the ruler himself towards the mass (Balibar, 1994: 3-37). Balibar’s thesis will be treated at greater length in chapter IV, which
directly activates a relational condition. Affects, more generally, structure the actions and thoughts of two or more individuals. In this sense, Balibar continues, affects reveal a collective dimension (Balibar, 1998: 76-98).

Balibar deduces a theory of communication from the relational force of the affects. An affect does not solely bring individuals into relation; it also makes them communicate. Put differently, affectivity creates common meanings, through which individuals communicate (Balibar, 1998: 95-98). In recent writings, and whilst suggesting an affinity between Spinoza and Simondon, Balibar has argued that this relational force of the affects uncovers a form of transindividuality (Balibar, 2002: 103-147). To be more precise, conatus and human desire, by which affects are moved, activate forces that exceed singular individuals. These are the bases upon which social bonds and various commonalities are developed (Balibar, 2002; 1998:101-119). Thus, relations are more complex and go far beyond the dynamics of power. It is from Balibar’s suggestion on the connection between conatus, desire and affects and transindividuality that my reading of the theme of affectivity proceeds.

Deleuze similarly points to the relational meaning of the affects. For him, relationality is the leading concept of Spinoza’s general study of the individual, which organises every existing being. Relationality guides the physics of the bodies, the common notions, affectivity and rationality. Whilst the physics of the bodies and common notions indicate different levels of commonalities between individuals, affects and rationality form various ethical behaviours (Deleuze, 1990: 217-288). These open up to Spinoza’s ethical vision of the world, which is centred on the notion of conatus (Deleuze, 1990: 217-233). Its unique commandment is the necessity of improving one’s own being through the establishment and development of a continuous ‘encounter’ with others (Deleuze, 1990: 201-234). In Deleuze’s reformulation, the increase of power of the conatus derives from movements of composition and decomposition with other individuals, through which beings exchange parts with others and acquire further degrees of perfection.

The importance of affectivity is the capacity of an individual being to examines the anatomy of the multitude within the *Theological Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*. 
generate and live constantly in a relational condition, in which he becomes more powerful. In this light, the difference between affects and passions consists in the ability to develop more complex encounters with others. Positive affects move individuals towards others, whilst passions progressively detach beings from the world. Therefore, affects are not positive or negative per se; rather, the outcomes of these encounters have a positive or negative meaning (Deleuze, 1990: 235-288). The resulting ethical model is precisely based on this theory of encounters. For this, there are no moral differences and qualitative distinctions, for example, between the wise man and the ignorant. They are ethically equal, and are distinguished by their actions and responses to random encounters with others. The ignorant man affected by passions tends progressively to detach himself from the others, decreasing his body and mind. The wise man is more active and inclined to encounter other beings more regularly. His mind and body will therefore be more complex. However, taken in themselves, the wise and the ignorant are exactly equal and possess the same power and potentials. This is what in Deleuze’s view describes Spinoza’s ethical vision of the world, which is mainly constructed around practical suggestions (Deleuze, 1988: 17-43; 1990: 255-272).

Balibar and Deleuze’s reflections have been particularly influential for Massumi, Gatens and Lloyd, amongst others. Although Massumi’s interests are not exclusively directed to Spinoza’s philosophy, however, he has brought to light dormant aspects within Spinoza’s model of the individual, which have been crucial for the arguments of the present chapter. For Massumi, Spinoza’s paradigm of the individual is based on distinct notions of body, movements and affectivity. Developing Deleuze’s ‘theory of encounters’ further, Massumi has underlined that these encounters between bodies, as described in the *Ethics*, stem from a novel paradigm of movement. In the physics of the bodies, movements, Massumi observes, do not merely involve physic changes; by contrast, there is an endless ground of relational forces, which in turn structure cogent beings and events. At the outset of these movements there is an innovative conception of the body (Massumi, 2002a: 1-21). In Spinoza, Massumi explains, the body is not conceived as a definite unity, but rather as a complex mixture of movements, intensities and functions. Spinoza’s notion of the body, Massumi firmly
concludes, has to be intended as pure ‘openness’, that is, a continuous process of transformation and relational forces (Massumi, 2002a: 46-51). When related to the human context, the geometry of the affects, in Massumi’s view, discloses Spinoza’s advocacy of their autonomy. Affectivity is analysed in itself and not within cognitive, ethical and political standpoints. In Spinoza’s study, affects are irreducible conditions for the development of an individual, which characterise human life as a whole (Massumi, 2002a: 28-39).

Within this multifaceted portrait of Spinoza’s paradigm of the individual, elaborated within the continental tradition, we might distinguish a tendency that has emerged more recently, which draws from Spinoza’s theory of the affects a social-psychology. This is greatly exemplified by the studies of Gatens and Llyod. The relevance of their analysis to this chapter’s arguments is that the social-psychological approach that they follow does not lead them to narrowly define affectivity within the domain of the mind, and to consider affects merely as an indication of weakness. For Gatens and Llyod, Spinoza’s social psychology is also centred on the theory of conatus, affects and passions. Affectivity establishes social relations through imaginative practises of recognition and identification. Affects communicate ‘images’ of the other individual, who might be similar or different to our selves (Gatens, Llyod, 1999:66-69). Spinoza’s first genre of knowledge, imagination, has to be intended as a mimetic process, in which an individual associates joy or sorrow with the image of the other individual (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999:65-69). From this, the relevance of the affects consists in the power of generating relational practises (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 23-33).

For Gatens and Llyod, the understanding of the relational character of affectivity and imagination is imperative for understanding the form of political life proposed by Spinoza in the political Treatises. Imagination and affects are not negative or positive, but rather are productive of both social union and conflict. Gatens and Lloyd’s reassessment of the psycho-social character of affectivity is a fundamental contribution to the re-understanding of the status of affects and passions. However, in my view, a problem still remains open. If affects describe psychic-social phases, what is the resulting materialist paradigm of the individual

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32 Massumi’s proximity to Simondon’s philosophy becomes particularly evident in the formulation of Spinoza’s conception of the individual.
indicated by Spinoza? In other words, through the affective-imaginative process, what can we really know of an individual in a Spinozist way? The following section of this chapter engages these issues.

*Inherent problems within the continental reading of affectivity*

The reading offered by continental Spinozist scholars has underlined the linkage between the theory of the affects of the *Ethics* and the political Treatises. From this standpoint, the geometry of the affects functions as a theoretical basis for acquiring an extensive knowledge of Spinoza’s political thought, and particularly for his notion of the mass. This reading has brought about the discovery of thoughtful theses, which have been decisive for shaping the approach proposed in this chapter. The importance of the continental reading of affectivity resides in its consideration of the dynamics of the affects independently from rationality. In this fashion, affectivity develops actions, which, although not guided by reason, are central within the life of an individual, and are not imperfect phases of a cognitive process, as suggested by analytic scholars. Affects, *conatus* and desire organise social relations, which impact consistently upon the political body. These express the many ways in which power (*conatus* and desire) structures, through the affective mechanism, gestures of resistance and struggle which go far beyond the egoist desire for self-preservation. These are instead essentially collective, and shape the dynamics of a group rather than those of a singular human being. Thus, the understanding of affectivity is the sole imperative for determining the mechanism through which the mind might free itself from its servitude. By contrast, it is imperative for understanding the genesis of a community.

However, in my view there is a risk involved in the arguments advanced particularly by post-Marxist commentators of the *Ethics*. This is the under-evaluation of the meaning embodied by Spinoza’s theory of the affects. From this perspective, we certainly become more aware of the political meaning of the affects and of their impact upon a community. Yet, I would argue, we still do not truly know what an affect is within Spinoza’s ontology. In other words, although
we have a knowledge of the ‘effects’ of the affects, we do not fully understand their nature and the resulting model of an individual. Furthermore, the result of portraying affects, desire and conatus within a logic of power might be to view Spinoza’s conception of the individual as being restricted within struggling forces and conflict. However, in the Ethics the dynamics of the affects exceed the logic of conflict. They instead develop values of friendship and solidarity. This relational nature of Spinoza’s theory of the affects that has been identified from the continental perspective has most significantly developed, as discussed above, from the work of Balibar and Deleuze. It is to their reflections that my reading of Spinoza’s theory of affects is largely indebted. Although from a different perspective, Balibar and Deleuze have shed light on an ignored aspect of the geometry of the affects, that is, its relational character. Unlike post-Marxist readers, for Balibar and Deleuze, affectivity is a generative source of individuals, which goes far beyond political life. It is for this reason that the present research draws particular attention to Balibar and Deleuze’s arguments.

Building upon their theses, I intend to develop Balibar’s suggestion concerning the transindividual tendency embodied by affectivity, which discloses its collective dimension. In Deleuze’s arguments, I have found fecund insights for re-thinking the role of the affects and the body within human life. However, I think, the theme of the affects in Spinoza is possessed of further and more complex aspects, which need to be re-investigated by way of a different strategy. I refer to the re-positioning of affectivity within the domain of ontology. A consideration of this might enable us to determine the ways in which affects are irreplaceable conditions of psychic individuation. By this, I mean that in the Ethics affectivity does not solely involve the constitution of relations between individuals. Rather, affects disclose a multisided process of collective and psychic individuation, in which relations are not the ultimate results of this process but the primary source. It is in this context that the originality of Spinoza lies.

In order to delineate Spinoza’s theme of individuation, I propose to read the Ethics in the light of Simondon, and will apply the Simondonian concepts of the collective, transindividuality, pre-individual force, metastability and disparation to Spinoza’s work. Thinking Spinoza’s system in this way, I will
argue below, will shed light on the question of relation and the collective ground upon which the paradigm of the individual lies. Taking into account these elements, let us flesh out Spinoza’s process of individuation in depth.

3. A detour of Spinoza via Simondon

As anticipated earlier, the aim of this chapter is to develop a reading of Spinoza’s theory of humankind through the ontology of individuation of Simondon that I discussed above. By this, I do not intend to forcefully establish parallels between the two philosophers or to claim Spinoza as a precursor of Simondon whilst also inscribing Simondon within a model of Spinozism. Furthermore, Simondon’s knowledge of Spinoza’s ontology, with few exceptions, heavily relies on the Hegelian interpretation, according to which the Ethics is a static system (Simondon, 2007:160-161, 223-224; Del Lucchese, 2009a: 185-186); for Hegel, the individual in Spinoza is an empty category, and is entirely absorbed within the motionless domain of Being.

Therefore, my attempt is to employ the Simondonian line of thought in order to re-investigate the central themes of the Ethics, and to suggest the existence of a dialogue between the two philosophies. Balibar envisaged many affinities between Simondon and Spinoza, which I have indicated above (Balibar, 2002: 103-147). These affinities have also been reiterated recently by close readers of Simondon such as Combes, who emphasises the convergence between Simondon’s concepts of affectivity and relationality and Spinozian desire and conatus (Combes, 2001: 12-13). Building upon their suggestions, I will focus on analysing the paradigm of the individual in the Ethics through Simondon’s ontological concepts. In order to develop my reading of Spinoza’s thought of the individual in the light of Simondon, we need first to return to the arguments advanced in chapter I.

In chapter I, I gave a broad description of the type of process involved within the metaphysics of Substance in part I of the Ethics. I have defined this as an anomalous process of production. By anomalous, I mean the existence of contingent elements within a deterministic system. Contingency emerges from the
status of the mode and nature. Although the mode is the result of a causal nexus, when taken in itself, it is contingent. Spinoza tells us that the existence of the mode does not imply necessary existence (E. I, Def. V, prop. XVI, XXIV). Spinoza presents nature both as a free cause (naturing nature) and also as a set of all the existing and contingent modes (E. I, prop. XXIV). This insinuates the presence of contingent elements within the causal production. Therefore, anomaly, in my reading, resides on this coexistence between necessity and contingency.

As we considered Simondon’s ontology of individuation earlier, we are now in a position to refine the principal characteristics of Spinoza’s process of production. For Simondon, a process is formed and activated by phases, which differentiate Being. Each phase corresponds to a moment of individuation, without which Being does not exist. Hence, Simondon affirms that Being is becoming (Simondon 2007:13). In Spinoza, then, the role of phases, as I have argued in chapter I, is represented by the attributes, from which Substance is composed. Attributes express Substance (E. I, Def. IV, VI). In the Ethics, to “express” means to actualise. In turn, to actualise means to differentiate (Deleuze, 1992: 41-67; Macherey, 1979: 107-128). Attributes, thus, actualise and differentiate Substance, without which the latter cannot exist. Therefore, as I have claimed, these behave in the domain of Substance as Simondonian phases.

Furthermore, Spinoza states that Substance’s essence is power, which coincides with its actual being. In turn, this corresponds to a power of producing (E. I, prop. XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI). This suggests that Spinoza’s system should be intended as a pure activity. The activity of Substance is developed through a never ending generation of beings. In nature, Spinoza explains, “nothing can be destroyed except from an external cause” (E. III, prop. IV and dem.). Even the emergence of an external cause would not entirely destroy the singular being; rather, as we will see below, it would transform its existing structure. For the system of determinism, we know that a potential external cause would generate a new effect and so on ad infinitum. These notions, in my reading, indicate that the power of Substance implies a form of eternal becoming, which is not a meaningless flow. Instead, the becoming of Substance is dynamic; it is
continually differentiated by attributes and modes, and is essentially productive of beings.

More importantly, for the arguments of immanence and the linkage between God and nature (E. I, proposition XXIX, schol., prop. XVIII; E. II, prop. VII, schol.), this anomalous process of production unfolds within nature. It is precisely in this moment that Substance passes from an eternal activity to constitute beings through a distinctive process of individuation. In order to discover the constitutive phases of this process of individuation and the resulting individual, as mentioned above, I employ Simondon's ontogenetic strategy. By this, I do not intend a genetic approach to Spinoza's concepts as many Spinozist commentators from Geroult to Deleuze did in different ways. This approach looks at beings and states of beings in order to know the causes. An ontogenetic strategy aims at knowing the individual through individuation (Simondon 2007: 12). Therefore, my focus is not addressed to the search for a definition of the individual within the Ethics, but instead to its generative process. It is an enquiry into processes, from which singularities acquire an ontological relevance. Therefore, primary attention is given to every element within the Ethics that is generative of 'some forms of individual'. As Spinoza begins first with ascribing this role to both the physics of the bodies and the common notions, our focus will rest on these concepts.

Physics of bodies and common notions

In the Ethics, common notions and the physics of bodies establish general principles, around which all beings converge and are developed. The physics of bodies, as we have already discussed, define physical laws to which all individuals obey and by which all are ordered. These laws are referred to the extended beings and regulate the activity of bodies in the world. These also shape the entire order of nature (E. II, Lemma VII, schol.). In the human being, these laws acquire an important position. Given the strict relation between the mind and body, bodily movements and changes inevitably have an effect upon the mind, and thereby upon the human subject as a whole (E. II, prop. XIII, XIV).
The common notions are not predefined archetypes and principles, upon which singular ideas are modelled. By contrast, in Spinoza, common notions simply indicate certain commonalities between bodies and ideas, in which all beings converge *adequately* (E. II, prop. XXXVIII and corollary). The originality of Spinoza’s thesis concerns the transposition of the problem of universal categories of thought from the Aristotelian-Scholastic view of the transcendent Intellect to the order of nature. According to Deleuze, the physics of bodies and the common notions delineate levels of commonality between individuals, which are the bases of encounters (Deleuze 1992: 217-288). Developing Deleuze’s explanation further: I argue that common notions and the physics of bodies function as a common ground, from which all beings come to life.

In the physics of bodies, Spinoza explains that every individual being converges upon speed and rest (E. II, ax. I, II, III, lem. I) and is ordered through a mixture of fluid and hard masses (E. II, postulates I, II). The amount of fluid or solid elements involved determines different types of movement from speed to slowness, and vice versa. The different levels of speed and magnitude distinguish bodies progressively (E. II, ax. II, Lemma I). In order to re-investigate the physics of bodies and the resulting individual, a reading of this theory through Simondon’s notion of the pre-individual is decisive. Before proceeding with our interpretation, a preliminary clarification of the usage of Simondon’s notion in this context is needed.

By the pre-individual, Simondon means an emerging dimension, which is the union of power and potentials (Simondon 2007: 196-197). In Simondon, the ‘emergent’ indicates a common ground of all beings, possessed of a continuing power of individuation. Its activity permeates beings and remains always between them. Certainly, in the physics of bodies, we do not find the concept of undifferentiated mass described by Simondon. Movements and masses in the physics of bodies are not the Greek *Apeiron* evoked by Simondon. We find instead the aspects of activity, potentiality and dynamic force that precede and

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33For a study of the *universalis* in the history of philosophy from Aristotle, passing through Averroes, Spinoza, to nowadays, see Illuminati (2002: 78-80; 1998: 85-98). Illuminati argues that differently from the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition of thought and Cartesian philosophy, Spinoza considers the common notions as inhering within actual reality. This gives rise to the independence of human mind for the creation of concepts.
remain attached to beings throughout their entire development. These characteristics, in my view, present a different language for reading the *Ethics*.

In order to develop this reading, we first need to consider the laws of motion and magnitude from the standpoint of the physics of bodies. From this standpoint, motion, rest and magnitude are activities, which precede beings and surround these permanently (E. II, ax. I, II, lemma I). Moving within a Simondonian perspective, for example, axiom I of the physics of bodies, according to which “all the bodies are either in motion or at rest”, acquires a meaningful position. These movements are in truth pure activity, which are common to all beings. More importantly, this activity permeates beings; it *is always there*. It is, we might say, the emerging reality, which lies *underneath* and *through* beings. In this light, and when considered through Simondonian concepts, Spinoza’s physics of bodies does not describe physic phenomena; instead, movements and magnitude tell us the common genesis of individuals, and are, to phrase this in keeping with Simondon, a form of interstitial reality. Furthermore, given that the laws of motion and magnitude have a material character, and are a unique pre-individual, this view indicates that beings have a common material genesis. These dynamics shape nature itself (E. II, Lem. VII, schol.).

This form of pre-individual reality embodied by the physics of bodies is present, in different ways, within the common notions too. As mentioned above, common notions are not predefined archetypes above and before individuals. Spinoza does not present the common notions as universal principles, such as Justice, Truth, Humankind, and nor does he model singular ideas upon them. Strictly speaking, we do not know what each of the common notions is. We do however know that they are indispensable for the developing human beings, and that they orient them into the world. Given the generality and indeterminacy of the common notions and their role within the human context, in my view, they function as a pre-individual field, in a Simondonian sense. They express a pure activity and an irreducible force by which individuals are surrounded.

Their generality and indeterminacy is an endlessly potentiality, through which actualised concepts come to light. This aspect of Spinoza’s philosophy results more clearly from the passage within part II, proposition XXXVII, where
Spinoza affirms “those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole”(my italics). Maintaining a Simondonian perspective, it is precisely the aspect of ‘being in the part as in the whole’ that reveals the pre-individual character of the common notions. These behave as a form of emerging reality, which is potentiality and, at the same time, actuality. Spinoza states that common notions are the basis from which politics, arts and science derive (E. II, prop. XL, schol.). In this sense, common notions embody a variety of meanings and individuals, both potentially and actually.

Furthermore, regarding the literal meaning of the term “common”: common notions do not only indicate a generic field nuanced by potentials, but also a unique generative source for all beings. As with the physics of bodies, common notions tell us that the genesis of beings derives from only one, common pre-individual field. This is what in Spinoza’s language, in my view, means the agreement and commonality, to which all beings converge (E. II, XXXVIII, corollary). The importance of understanding Spinoza's physics of the bodies and the common notions as a pre-individual dimension stems from its political implications. These are the bases upon which the political concept of the 'common' lies. By this I mean a condition which unfolds shared flowings of time, meanings and actions. In the following chapters I will argue that this shapes the Spinozan multitude.

**Spinoza’s collective process of individuation**

Up to this point, we have analysed the meaning of the physics of the bodies and common notions through Simondon's work. I have claimed that both reveal a pre-individual and powerful reality, which is the unique generative ground of all beings. These aspects tell us that all individuals share and derive from a common pre-individual state. Therefore, we might conclude, in Spinoza’s ontology there is not a pre-individual field for each genre of life (animal, human and vegetative life). This inevitably implies a distinctive linkage between beings and their milieu, which is prior to their genesis, and an irreducible condition thereof. However, we do not know the extent to which beings come to life from a
common terrain. The common notions and the physics of bodies open onto Spinoza’s collective process of individuation.

Proceeding with our Simondonian strategy, we have seen that a process is constituted by phases, each of which actualises and individualises a generic mass into more or less stable beings. In the metaphysics of Substance examined in chapter I, this role is occupied by the attributes, which reveal the anomalous process of production. In this context, the function of phase is played by both the physics of the bodies and common notions. Movements of speed and slowness, hard and fluid substances and common notions function as phases within a process. Motion, magnitude and common notions bring changes into existing equilibrium. Movements bring bodies to compose and collide with other bodies, through which individuals become distinguished one from another, and through which they are composed (E. II, from ax. II to Lemma VII). This activity indicates that motion, rest and magnitude do not merely move beings but instead individuate them. The modality of this individuation is relational. The laws of motion and magnitude through the dynamics of composition and collision cause relations between individuals, from which the latter acquire a new structure (Massumi 2002a: 1-21, 46-52; Deleuze 1992: 217-238). Spinoza sustains in part II, axiom III that from movements of collision and composition the individual might alter its shape.

Therefore, I would conclude that laws of motion and magnitude express a collective process of individuation, activated by the dynamics of collision and composition between individuals. Movements and masses constitute a process of individuation because these bodies and substances literally compose new individuals. This process of individuation is also collective, because we know from the physics of bodies that this involves all bodies and individuals collectively, without which movements cannot be activated (E. II, lemma III and corollary). Ultimately, Spinoza's physics of bodies introduces a novel conception of relationality. Relationality is productive of beings and exceeds human behaviours. Common notions operate as Simondon’s ‘reserve of beings’. By this, Simondon refers to unexpressed meanings and power, which remain unrealised in the pre-individual and which continually reinforce the equilibrium of individuals
(Simondon 2007: 106-135). In Spinoza, the aspect of the common notions of “being in part as in whole”, in my reading, operates as a reserve of beings, through which beings transform their structures. This is because due to the meaning of “common” described above, this process cannot be anything other than collective. It means that the generation of new ideas proceeds through and on a collective terrain. For the language of the Ethics, these concepts have adequacy because there are agreements between bodies (E. II, prop. XXXVIII, corollary).

Lastly, we must emphasise that Spinoza’s process of collective individuation, structured through the physics of bodies and common notions, has a materialist meaning. We have seen above that the physics of bodies inheres within nature, and that common notions are not transcendent archetypes. By contrast, they are in a direct relation with bodies. In this sense, they have a material component. Given the power of individuation and the pre-individual reality constituted by both theories, this model of materialism is innovative: it does not involve the reduction of ideas and bodies to mere physical phenomena and mechanical rules, but instead shows them to be extremely rich and dynamic. The importance of conceiving Spinoza’s theories of the common notions and physics of the bodies as a pre-individual reality and materialist collective process of individuation lies in the crucial implications they have upon our ability to understand the human individual in a Spinozist way.

The anomaly of an individual

From the arguments made so far we can see that the individual is fundamentally anomalous. There are many reasons for this anomaly: firstly, the position of the individual within the process of individuation. The individual is not the principle of this process, but its role is fundamental. It is not the principle because the process inheres within the general activity of God-nature. It explicates, necessarily, the power of God. Nevertheless, the individual is a constitutive element of the collective process of individuation because its existence brings further movements and various masses into the existing equilibrium. Without the individual there could be no encounters, and thereby no
possibility of improving one's own conatus. Secondly, the anomaly of the individual is represented by its status. From the physics of the bodies, we know that a human body is composed by a great number of other individuals, each of which is extremely complex (E. II, postulate I). Complexity here refers to the heterogeneity of substances such as hard, fluid and soft elements by which an individual body is formed (E. II, postulate II). It also derives from the disposition of an individual body to exchange its parts with other bodies and individuals, which continually transform its structure (E. II, postulates III, IV).

The result is that the equilibrium of an individual is never stable, but rather echoes Simondonian metastability (a false equilibrium). Given this tendency towards transformation, and given also the movements and masses by which bodies are surrounded, the state of an individual is always in tension. It is for this reason that I have placed the equilibrium of Spinoza’s human body in close proximity to Simondon’s category of metastability. A further consequence of this tendency of a human body is that its anatomy is already somewhat relational and collective. It is relational because a human body is moved toward other bodies in a never-ending play of affecting and being affected (E. II, postulates III, IV, VI). This relational character is also the ground of further movements of individuation, which involve the individual itself and the others (E. II, postulate VI). I have also defined this tendency as a collective one, because it is the very nature of human body, as we have seen above, to be composed by a great number of individuals; it is also its primary need to live in a collective condition, in which the human body might exchange parts with other bodies (E. II, postulates from I to VI). Therefore, I would argue, the human body in Spinoza's ontology is not an already-made unity but rather a complex knot of different functions and relational movements; it is fundamentally an expression of collective life.

The relevance of thinking Spinoza's conception of the body in this way resides on the connection that it has with the mind. As mentioned above, Spinoza affirms that the first object of the mind is its body (E. II, prop. XI). Given that the body is a knot of different functions and relations, and as this is connected with the mind, the constitution of the mind is extremely complex too. This complexity is measured by the collective and relational character of its body, which
continually maintains its equilibrium in tension too. This metastable equilibrium of the mind, in my reading, is greatly exemplified in part II, proposition XIV, where Spinoza claims that “The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things and this capacity will vary in proportion to the variety of the states its body can assume” (my italics). The connection of the mind with the body, in Spinoza, has a further important implication. The structure of the mind is not only constantly in tension but more significantly it is collective in exactly the same way as the body. Spinoza tells us that the formal being of the mind is shaped by a great number of ideas, which in turn are activated by bodily movements and relations with others (E. II, XV).

As with the body, therefore, the character of the Spinozan mind is both collective and relational too. We have seen above the collective dimension of the mind. It is also relational because the mind’s capacities derive from the relational movements of the body and the ideas that emerge from these movements. The relationality of the mind, crucially, allows the development of notions of duration, recognition and otherness. It is because the mind enters into relation with other bodies and ideas that it acquires knowledge of time and otherness (E. II, prop. XVI, XVII, XVIII, XXX, XXXI).

As a mixture of body and mind, the human individual is collective and relational too. Its equilibrium is constantly in tension towards further movements of composition and collision with others. In one word, in the Ethics a human individual, I claim, resembles the Simondonian disparate. By this term Simondon refers to a constant excess of heterogeneity, which uncovers an asymmetric state (Deleuze, 2004b: 86-88). In Spinoza, this form of asymmetry is given by the states of the mind and the body. These states of the mind are continually nuanced by an excess of states and substances of the body, and by the many and forming ideas that compose the mind. The level of reality acquired by an individual depends precisely upon this form of asymmetry, which moves the human being towards others. By perfection and reality, we have seen, Spinoza means “the same thing” (E. II, Def. VI).

This suggests that the perfection and actuality of an individual are directly related to its capacity to compose and decompose itself with others (E. II, prop.
XIV). From the arguments advanced above, this involves relational and collective states. I would therefore conclude that perfection and actuality are seized upon the relational and collective equilibrium of individuals. This form of asymmetry constitutes the third aspect of the anomaly of Spinoza's concept of the individual indicated above. The understanding of Spinoza's conception of the individual and its generative process is essential for exploring his theory of affects and the ways in which these structure more complex forms of collective life. Affectivity is the core of the relational activity of individuals; this traverses and exceeds singularities, revealing a tendency towards transindividuality (Balibar, 2002: 119-147). Taking into account these arguments, let us flesh out the dynamics of Spinoza’s theory of affects as a collective process of psychic individuation.

4. Thinking the individual in a Spinozist way

Spinoza's study of the affects embraces many important themes such as the definition of human essence, cognitive mechanism, ethical, psychic and political behaviours. In contemporary Spinozist studies, as we have discussed above, affectivity has been analysed through two principal strategies. Analytic scholars such as Bennett and Curley follow a mainly cognitive approach and locate affectivity within a more general process of knowledge. Bennett, for example, includes the affective dynamics within the structure of the mental and identifies affectivity with the ‘illness’ of the mind. The resulting moral philosophy is based on the paradigm of individualist egoism, where the ‘dictates’ of reason indicate the best way to improve one’s own being and pursue individual interests.

In the continental school, Spinoza’s theory of the affects is connected with his politics. Especially within certain post-Marxist current, affectivity and conatus are acknowledged as a genealogy of power and also as a critique of ideology. Furthermore, Spinoza’s study of affectivity is assumed to be instrumental for understanding the very status and role of the mass in politics. Accordingly, affectivity shapes the character of the masses, through which gestures of resistance (indignation) and subjection (fear and hope) are developed. The corresponding ethical model is based on the creation of an emancipated
community, where freedom is a common enjoyment of life desires. The cognitive
and the socio-political aspects highlighted by analytic and continental scholars are
equally present within Spinoza’s study of affectivity. We cannot ignore that
Spinoza treats affects as parts of human weakness and, at the same time, that in
the political Treatises they play a pivotal role within the development of social
bond and common gestures of resistance. The presence of these different elements
within Spinoza's account of the affects raises the question of what is the very
nature of the affects: specifically, that of whether they involve a politics of
emancipation or rather a theory of knowledge.

In order to determine the meaning and role of affectivity within the Ethics,
I think, we need to search for a third way, which prevents us from stressing the
cognitive aspect of the affects at the expenses of the social-political implication,
and vice versa. As anticipated above, I suggest re-situating affectivity within
Spinoza's ontology. The re-positioning of affectivity within ontology does not
imply its inclusion within another field of knowledge such as politics and theory
of the mind; rather, it aims to re-assess the autonomy of the affects. The autonomy
of the affects means a consideration of the value of affectivity in itself, and not the
possible impact that this has upon the mind and social-political behaviours.

In the preface to part III of the Ethics, Spinoza firmly recommends to his
reader to treat the affects not as a “kingdom within a kingdom” but rather as
inherent within nature. This derives from his general vision of humankind as part
of nature, which obeys natural laws in exactly the same way as do all other
creatures. Spinoza’s thesis of the affects as natural elements, in my reading,
discloses his intention to analyse the ontological foundation of affectivity. An
awareness of this is crucial for understanding Spinoza's paradigm of the individual
and the extent to which his model might express the peculiarity of the individual
of the present. Taking into account these premises, let us pass to analyse the
implications of situating affectivity within an ontological dimension and the
anatomy of the individual that emerges from the affective mechanism.
4.1 The anatomy of the affects

In the preceding section I argued, by way of Simondonian concepts, that the physics of bodies and the common notions reveal a common ground from which an individual emerges and lives. They found Spinoza’s collective process of individuation, which is activated by movements of speed and slowness, exchanges of different substances, and general categories of thought. This process is collective because common notions, movements and masses are a unique generating source for all being. They also function as a collective process of individuation because from common notions, movements and masses complex individuals derive. The collective dimension of common notions and the physics of bodies have a crucial implication. This is the maintenance of the resulting individual in a permanent relational equilibrium, through which it acquires more grades of complexity, which in turn lead to further phases of individuation. In the language of the Ethics, complexity indicates a higher level of reality, and this means perfection. Therefore, I have concluded, relationality is the founding principle of Spinoza’s process of collective individuation. More importantly, the grade of reality of an individual is measured by its relational equilibrium, through which it becomes more complex and thus perfect. This collective process of individuation grounds psychic life, which is rooted primarily in the realm of the affects.

The claim that I will make in this section is that Spinoza’s theory of the affects unveils a collective process of psychic individuation that is productive of powerful psychic individuals. This process, we will see below, is rooted within the general physics of the bodies and common notions, and further operates in the social-political context, and especially in the body of the multitude analysed in the political Treatises. In order to develop my arguments, the support afforded by Simondon's strategy, adopted above, becomes even more decisive. This is because it might allow us to understand how, in Spinoza’s account of affectivity, the emergence of psychic beings coincides immediately with cogent political and

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34A detailed analysis of affects such as joy, fear and hope will be given in chapter III, which focuses on the affective tones of the multitude. For the purpose of this chapter, I will stress the power of individuation expressed by affects and passions.
social gestures. Let us then firstly return to Simondon’s general account of affectivity.

For Simondon, affectivity is the cornerstone of the collective process of psychic individuation, through which individuals acquire knowledge, awareness of the world and of others. He distinguishes between affect, emotion and perception. An affect defines the relation between an individual and the pre-individual, emotion orients an individual within the world and the others. Perception establishes cognitive practices, which are crucially developed from a relation between individuals and their milieu. Central for our reading of Spinoza's theory of the affects is Simondon's consideration of affects and emotions as transformations, which generate really new and actual beings. These transformations are relational and operate in a collective dimension. Therefore, affects and emotions do not describe the interior life of an individual; rather, they individuate beings towards more complex forms of collective lives. Affects and emotions, in Simondon's view, reside precisely in the interstices between individuals and are individuating forces, which continually re-create a collective condition. The collective is the irreplaceable ground of knowledge, because it constantly maintains individuals in relations. To put this in a more Simondonian fashion, the collective gives to individuals the possibility to 'place themselves across', through and solely through which they perceive others and the world. It is precisely through this gesture that knowledge may develop.

The result of this collective process of psychic individuation is the emergence of psychic-social groups, which change continually. By this, Simondon means that psychic groups separate from social-political union cannot exist. Rather, there are only psychic-social communities. Equally, there are not distinct processes of individuation, one psychic and the other social. By contrast, there is a unique collective process of individuation, in which the creation of psychic individuals coincides with the existence of social and political subjectivities, and vice versa (Simondon, 2007: 63-65, 130-138, 175-186 ). The relevance of Simondon's theses for our arguments here is his assumption of the autonomy of the triad affect, emotion and perception from psychological, cognitive and social spheres and the recognition of their power of individuating
collective meanings, knowledge and individuals. These, once posited, are already relational, psychic and social.

The power of the affects: Intensity, individuation and relation

In part III of the *Ethics*, we certainly do not read a clear distinction between an affects, emotion and perception as in Simondon’s collective process of psychic individuation; similarly, we do not see Spinoza connecting explicitly the affective dynamics with those of psychic individuation. What we observe is that affectivity is directly related to a primary form of knowledge: imagination. Although imagination delineates an inadequate genre of knowledge, it is nevertheless assumed by Spinoza to be an initial condition for developing self-awareness, awareness of the world and otherness. Given that affectivity is rooted in the domain of imagination, affects play a role within the formation of human imaginative knowledge. More significantly, the creation of inadequate ideas within individuals corresponds to the emergence of interactions between them; interactions which have a repercussion on political and ethical conduct. It is for this strict connection between affects, elementary knowledge and relationality that recourse to Simondon’s ontological categories becomes imperative.

Following Simondon’s dictum of knowing the individual through individuation, we need to proceed with the same strategy employed for the physics of the bodies and common notions and thereby analyse the affective mechanism in itself. From the standpoint of affectivity, this is centred on movements of affecting and being affected. Affective moments alter the equilibrium of mind and body, which pass from active to passive state alternatively (E. III, Def. III). Activity corresponds to an improvement of human *conatus*; conversely, passivity implies a decrease of *conatus* (E. III, postul. I, prop. I-XI). Activity and passivity originate from two principal couples of affects, which are joy and love, sadness and hatred. Joy and love are defined as transitions from a lesser to a higher degree of perfection, by contrast pain and hatred are transitions from a higher to a lesser level of perfection (E. III, prop. XI and schol., Def. Aff. II-III).
Taken in themselves, therefore, affects are varying transitions. The literal meaning of the term “transition” refers to a movement or passage from one state to another. Therefore, an affect is precisely a movement which contains in itself a power of transformation. This power of transformation derives from the capacity of the affects to increase and decrease the state of perfection. The varying levels of perfection coincide with concrete changes within individuals. These changes are traces (literally “vestige”) impressed by the affective transitions upon the human being, each of which delineates specific ideas and actions (E. III, postul. II).

As mentioned above, affects are transitions from and to various degrees of perfection. In the Ethics, we have seen, perfection means the acquisition of a greater degree of reality, and this implies a higher state of composition of ideas and bodies (E. II, prop. XXXVII and corollary). Hence, the actuality of beings, as I have argued in the preceding section, is linked to its degree of complexity, which in turn means to be relational and to live in a collective context. Given that affects are powerful movements of transformation and perfection implies actuality, affectivity is thus directly related to the actuality of human beings. In order to determine the effective stakes of Spinozian affective movements of transformations, analysing them through Simondonian logic is extremely relevant.

As anticipated above, affects set forth movements from and to various states of perfection, which transform the equilibrium of both mind and body. In the Ethics, we have seen perfection means actuality (E. II, Def. VI). Thus, through the affective mechanism mind and body acquire different levels of actuality. The degree of actuality of mind and body, we have seen, means that these are composed by a certain amount of other elements such as simplest bodies and ideas, which in the Ethics are broadly defined as individuals (E. II, postul. I, II, III, prop. XIV-XV) Given that a certain capacity of actualisation is implied in the dynamics of the affects, and given that this involves a new composition of mind and body, affectivity uncovers a process of psychic individuation. To be more precise, Spinoza’s genealogy of the affects is a process of psychic individuation in a Simondonian sense, which is fundamentally collective and relational.

It is a process because each affect operates as a phase, which brings
transformations into the existing order. Spinoza tells us that affects involve change. Changes are the traces impressed by the affects on individuals, which determine specific actions and thoughts that are now more, now less perfect (E. III, Def. III, postul. I, II). Each affect is a conductor of changes, and thus behaves as a phase within this process. More significantly, the transformations generated by the affective movements organise a process, which does not proceed towards qualitative phases, so to speak, towards the ‘better’. Affects, Spinoza explains, constantly vary; joy might change into sorrow and vice versa and these further transform into other affects, which might be active and passive alternatively (E. III, prop. XVI, XVIII, schol. II). Given this variability, affects cannot be described as ‘upward’ movements as Bennett maintains, and neither can they be described as downward movements (Bennett, 1984: 253-262). Positive affects such as joy and love do not exclusively cause a progression towards a superior condition, because even these may suddenly turn into passive affects such as pain.

Therefore, the varying levels of perfection activated by the affective transitions should be considered as a non-linear process. This develops through complexity, which means more or less levels of compositions of bodies and ideas, that is, perfection. It is for this reason that Spinoza’s affective transitions might be better explained within a Simondonian perspective, where a process implies continual transformations. In Simondon’s collective process of psychic individuation, these transformations are produced by the couple affect-emotion, which individuate beings into more problematic structures. The individuating power of the couple affect-emotion, in Simondon’s ontology, derives from its force of relating individuals to one another, and of relating them in turn to the collective field (Simondon, 2007: 114-123).

Ultimately, the affective process of individuation is psychic, without inhering within the interiority of an individual or the structure of the mind. In contrast with Hampshire and Bennett, and more generally with the analytic tradition, as we will see below, the affective process actualises meanings, notions of time and actions, which are collective and maintain individuals in a relational condition. Given that affectivity activates movements of affecting and being affected, which transform the entire anatomy of an individual through various
compositions with other individuals, these movements cannot merely describe the interior life of a human being. Furthermore, given that the affective movements determine the activity and passivity of individuals, which coincide *contemporaneously* with the acquisition of ideas and actions, they cannot express the path of the mind towards higher states of vitality as Bennett affirms (Bennett, 1984: 254-262). Actions imply an activity situated and constantly oriented within the external world. This inevitably brings individuals into relation with the others.

Spinoza always regards affects as dynamics between individuals. Joy, for example, is explained as a relation between individuals and a shared object. Joy, however, does not arise from an external object and the individual. Spinoza affirms that everything can accidentally cause joy and sadness and also, as we know, that these affects vary suddenly (E. III, prop. XLVIII, L and schol.). Spinoza identifies active affects with the different grades of intensity, which these cause. As Spinoza affirms “He who imagines that what he loves is affected with pleasure or pain will likewise be affected with pleasure or pain, the intensity of which will vary with the intensity of the emotion in the object loved” (E. III, prop. XXI; [my italics]). As an intensive movement, an affect, I would argue, is *transversal* to individuals.

As mentioned above, affects are transitions, and thus traverse human beings. As with the law of motion, magnitude and common notion examined above, affective transitions are movements, which operate in the *interstices* between individuals, and which make them converge into a novel collective structure. This I claim, is what Spinoza means when he presents affects as transitions. These transitions discover a multifaceted power of individuation. The result is not a joyful individual or object, but rather a new psychic-affective phase, which is crucially collective and productive of meanings, flows of time and more relational individuals. This collective dimension of the affects emerges more clearly from the imitation of affects, which gives rise to the affects of emulation and pity (E. III, prop. XXVII and schol.). This presents a collective ground, within which individuals experience sharing meanings, actions and time.

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35 From a different perspective, Curley has pointed out the social meaning of the doctrine of the imitation of the affects, considering this as part of Spinoza’s form of realism about human psychology, (Curley, 1988; 116-119).
Individuals are only the ultimate result of this collective psychic state, but more importantly they are constitutive elements. Individuals exchange with others the affections impressed by the affects, which vary from one human being to another (E. III, prop. XXVII, corollaries I-II and schol.). Affections, we have seen, relate to the activities of both mind and body. Spinoza explains that individuals are affected in different ways by the same affect (E. III, prop. XXVII, dem. and schol. L.). This is precisely the case described by the imitation of affects, where similar affects impact upon human beings in different ways.

In this sense, individuals bring their affections into the existing equilibrium, developing more complex collective meanings and individuals. The collective results from the similarity of affects by which human beings are surrounded. This generates shared meanings, through which individuals re-situate collectively within the world. Meanings here entail the formation of self-awareness, conceptions of the others and the world. They have a collective character because the affective state is common for all individuals (E. III, prop. XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI). Furthermore, given that affects impress alternations within the human being, from which he acts and thinks in certain way, in the imitation of the affects, affective movements create a collective ground, through and within which individuals are further individuated. They commence to act and think in a certain way collectively and not as singular subjectivities.

Lastly, as anticipated above, the power of affects involves flows of time, which vary from one affect to another (Gatens and Lloyds, 1999: 28-33). Spinoza states that human beings moved by positive affects such as love and joy tend to recognise the others and their milieu at the present. If human beings are affected by hatred and sadness, they are instead inclined to consider the causes of hatred and pain through the coordinate of the past. They are inclined to destroy passive affects and prevent themselves from possible similar negative affects (E. III, prop. XII, XIII, XVIII and schol. I). Therefore, whilst positive affects proceed through the coordinates of present and future, passions remained anchored within the coordinate of the past (E. III, prop. XVII and schol.). In both cases, affects are generative of forms of time, which are not psychic states folded within the
interiority of an individual being. By contrast, they re-create a collective context, within which human beings act and think. In one word, they live.

Although affects are productive of meanings, individuals and relations, however, we cannot ignore that Spinoza regards the sphere of affectivity and specifically passions as somewhat negative. Hence, the question is whether we should consider affects and passions as lacking. From the Ethics, we know that these are a natural part of humankind and cannot be removed from human life. It is in this moment that Simondonian logic becomes extremely important. Taken in themselves, affects are not lacking in either positive or negative characteristics, rather these are, I argue, problematic. Spinoza describes affective states as mutable conditions, in which individuals are driven continually towards diverse directions. This mutability of the affects generates problems within the existing equilibrium, which transform the entire process of individuation and individuals into novel and more problematic psychic states. This results more clearly from Spinoza’s explanations of the fluctuation of the affects (E. III, prop. XVII, schol.).

Taken in itself, a passion is not assumed as a privation. Spinoza is quite clear that a passion is a “transition from and to” (E. III, prop. XI, schol., Def. Aff. III, explication). Proceeding with our Simondonian strategy, passion is therefore a movement, an intensity, just as love is. The passive intensity generates a different grade of complexity, which tends to maintain the equilibrium of the process within a more stable state. Given that passions are transitory, we might deduce that this does not reside in a singular individual or object. Passion, I would argue, is no more or less than this “from and to”, that is, a movement. This emerges more strongly from Spinoza’s description of the dynamics of hatred, where this is described as an activity between individuals. This activity organises common meanings, experiences of time, actions and inadequate ideas (E. III, XXXV, XXXVII, XXXIX). In turn, human beings moved by hatred generate further meanings, thoughts and gestures through the development of other passions such as sorrow, fear, consternation and bashfulness (E. III, XXXIX, schol., XL, XLI, XLV). In this way, a passion, as Simondon suggests, is transversal to both the individual and the world. It is collective and involves distinct forms of relationality.
Given that passive affects maintain both relational and collective movements, we must not underestimate the negative meaning Spinoza attributes to them. Thus, the question is: what is passive in passions? Assuming that passions have a collective dimension and their effects involve collectively beings, passions affect the equilibrium of an entire system, bringing new transitions within the process of individuation. The resulting equilibrium and individuals are not defective of “something”, and these individuals are not less perfect. In the language of the Ethics, a level of perfection means less complexity, that is, a lesser degree of composition.

A passive state, I claim, is a stable system, which means minor exchanges of movements and beings between individuals. Put differently, there is less of an increase of power, which would make the system more dynamic (E. III, prop. XLVI, XLII). As a consequence, a passion does not arrest the process and the individuals within it. From the Ethics, we know that self-destruction is denied. A passive state is thus simply more stable and less complex. The reading of passions in this way has a crucial implication. In chapter III, I will examine the political meaning of the passions, which characterise religious communities within the Theological-Political Treatise. This consideration of passions might enable us to understand the ways in which passions ground fundamental political gestures. Having examined the status of passions and actions, and the process inhering within them, we might pass to delineate the main elements of Spinoza’s paradigm of a human individual. For Spinoza, as we have seen, an individual is shaped by conatus, which in the human being orients its desire. It is to these notions that I will finally turn.

Conatus and desire

Up to this point, we have described the affective process of psychic individuation and the ways in which beings emerge from this. We are now in the position to answer our initial question, that is, what is an individual and specifically a human being in Spinoza’s thought? In order to address this theme, we need to return to the notion of conatus. As seen, by conatus, Spinoza refers to
striving to exist and persevere into life (E. III, prop. V, VI, VII, VIII). To put this in a more contemporary fashion, *conatus* might be intended as Spinoza’s definition of biological life, which in humankind is the basis of psychic, political and ethical lives. Unlike Aristotle and his heirs, Spinoza does not qualify life into genres such as biological, political and theoretical, in which only the political and the theoretical are proper of humankind and thereby *deserve* to be defended. By contrast, biological life (*conatus*) is a precondition to other expressions. From these premises, therefore, the question is what does it mean that a vegetative life is striving and persevering into life?

As we have already discussed, contemporary Spinozist scholars have emphasised different aspects of *conatus* such as the preservation of one’s own life, the instinct to improve an individual’s existence and dominate others. In this sense, many Spinozist commentators have concluded that Spinoza’s notion of *conatus* exemplifies his moral paradigm of egoist individualism (Bennett, Smith and, to some extent, Hampshire). For other post-Marxist Spinozist readers, *conatus* has been described as a form of conflicting power, which regulates human relations (Negri and Montag amongst others). By contrast, I suggest stressing the aspect of *conatus* as a “striving toward”, and recommend analysing this through a Simondonian logic. Specifically, striving is a power or a force, which is innate and common to all creatures in nature. For the literal meaning of the preposition “towards”, this suggests the idea of movement oriented to an ‘outside’. “Striving towards” is force, which is both internal and external to individuals.

It is internal because *conatus* is the innate tendency, which characterises the very essence of every individual being (E. III, prop. VII). It is also external because this power is shaped by movements, which drive individuals towards an external world. In this, they release their own potentialities and improve their actual existence. The importance of this milieu for the development of *conatus* lies in relating oneself to others. Therefore, to strive towards connotes a relational attitude, which is somewhat transversal to individuals. It resides within them and the same time is directly connected with the world. Furthermore, *conatus* is extremely powerful. It brings individuals towards the world, through which they
orient themselves and increase their own life (E. III, prop. VIII and schol. LIV). In this way, I argue, Spinoza’s concept of conatus uncovers a relational power, which cannot be narrowed to an egoist desire for domination or an unconscious drive in a Freudian sense.

By contrast, maintaining a Simondonian perspective, conatus reveals Spinoza’s distinct account of life. Given that conatus defines all existing beings in nature and is, as we have seen above, relational and powerful, every form of life is also relational and powerful. In this respect, in so far as beings (human beings or not) strive towards and struggle to preserve their existence, they own a relational power, which produces and reinforces their activities within the world. Thus, Spinoza’s notion of conatus brings about the discovery of the necessity of the linkage between individuals and their milieu for the actualisation of life. Moreover, given that relation is implied within the aspect of “striving towards” and given that this also involves power, relationality can be seen as the cornerstone of any expression of life and is, more significantly, generative of actions and power. This also results from the general collective process of individuation structured through the physics of the bodies and common notions. As examined before, this brings to light the anomalous status of an individual, which is relational and requires a collective field for its actualisation.

In the human context, conatus has a crucial implication. Given the nature of conatus analysed above, it means that the biological life of a human being is powerful and fundamentally relational. Considered in itself, human life is centred on a relational force, which is a precondition of all other functions. A human individual, I argue, is relational by nature. This is what regulates a human being’s activities, such as the political, ethical and the theoretical. Spinoza calls this relational force desire. In humankind, conatus is expressed by desire (E. III, Def. Aff. I). Desire structures both the mind and the body. In this light, human desire is a striving towards others, through which human beings increase their mind and body (E. III, prop. IX, schol., Def. Aff. I, explication). Similarly with the conatus of all other beings, desire is transversal and situates human beings within the world. Yet differently from conatus as such, within the human sphere the activity of orienting individuals within their milieu coincides immediately with political,
ethical and theoretical behaviours (E. IV, prop. XXI, XXIII).

Given this transversal nature of human desire, I think the Simondonian notion of transindividuation fully unfolds the power of desire. By transindividuation, Simondon means an affective movement of individuation, which traverses beings. This is a force that re-structures beings into a new collective dimension (Simondon, 2007: 104-111). This is the basis upon which psycho-social unions are generated. In Spinoza’s arguments, desire is a relational power, driven by affective movements. As discussed above, the affective transitions structure a process of psychic individuation, which creates collective psychic conditions, as we have seen with the imitation of the affects. In this, individuals are constantly in relations with the others, through which shared meanings and actions are actualised. Building upon Balibar’s arguments (2002: 119-147), I argue, Spinoza’s concept of desire embodies Simondonian transidindividuation, which lies between human beings and exposes them towards novel psycho-social unions (E. III, prop. IX, schol.; E. IV, prop. XXXV, corollary and schol., prop. XXXVII). Reading desire as a form of transindividuation, in my view, enables us to understand Spinoza’s conception of political society. In the later Political Treatise, we will see in chapter IV, he will identify the origin of society with a gesture of common desire and affective states such as fear and hope (TP, Chapter VI. 1). His claim further corroborates the vision of desire as a transindividual power, which individuates human beings into psycho-social communities.

From these premises, the status of the human individual is anomalous, that is, increasingly complex. It is complex because as a tension desire moves the individual towards a new state of transformation, through which it acquires more reality. As seen, this transformation involves relational states. Desire, therefore, brings to light a fundamental characteristic of an individual, that is, its collective life. Conatus and desire continuously move the individual towards compositions with the others, through which he becomes ‘more real’. Hence, an actual life is composed: it is relational and collective. Similarly, the entire process cannot maintain a dynamic equilibrium and proceed towards more complex phases. It follows that the human individual is a crucial element within the general process
of individuation, without however being its unique principle.

**Towards a politics of the affects**

Taking into account these arguments, we are in a position to advance some more general reflections. The importance of Spinoza’s philosophical gesture, I argue, concerns the re-characterisation of affects and passions for the development of psychic life. Spinoza, as we have discussed, raises significant questions concerning the definition of the individual, the collective and relational status of the affects, and importantly how these emerge. Through Simondon’s philosophy of individuation, the genesis and development of vital and psychic individual in the *Ethics* come to light as a very complex process, in which each phase is an expression of power that in turn sets forth novel transitions. It is in this context that the richness of Spinoza’s notion of the individual emerges. The asymmetric condition of beings calls for movements, through which relations are developed. From the physics of bodies to the geometry of affects, there is a form of pre-individual mass (the common notions), which constantly re-signify the structure of Being and beings. This pre-individual mass, as we have seen, inheres within reality.

Therefore, Spinoza’s arguments concerning affectivity and the individual realm open the way towards understanding the reality of humankind as problematic, relational, and fundamentally collective. It follows that every social and psychic community is moulded through these transindividual conditions. In order to look for a novel materialist conceptions of politics and ethics, I think we should incorporate Spinoza’s thesis into our political and ethical discourse; or at least we may question what might be the implications of thinking society and individuals in the light of Spinoza’s philosophy. The remaining chapters of my thesis explore the following questions. Firstly, what are the implications of thinking a collective and affective process of individuation for political and social practises? Secondly, what are the historical, social and ethical expressions of this transindividual reality? Let us now turn to a political analysis of these questions.
Chapter III

*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus:*

The affective tones of the political

**Introduction**

In chapter II, I explored the paradigm of the individual offered by Spinoza. I proposed that his theories of the physics of bodies, common notions, affectivity, *conatus* and desire – theories that Spinoza presents most clearly in parts II and III of the *Ethics* – should be read through Simondon’s ontology of individuation. This attempt to approach Spinoza through Simondon was motivated by the discovery of a distinctive model of individuation within Spinoza’s philosophy; a model that can be discerned in the *Ethics*, and which can also be found in the political Treatises. Spinoza’s notion of individuation, I have argued, is constructed around a *collective process of individuation*. This is a *process* in a Simondonian sense because laws of motion, magnitude and common notions operate within it as powerful phases that introduce constitutive changes into an existing equilibrium. These movements, masses and ideas transform individuals into more complex forms of life. This process is also *collective*, because common notions, movements and masses constitute a unique generative source for all beings, and function as a common ground from and within which individuals emerge and live collectively.

In the human context, this collective process of individuation grounds psychic life. This process is rooted in the domain of the affects. Employing Simondon’s logic, I have concluded that Spinoza’s study of affectivity uncovers a complex *collective process of psychic individuation*. Affectivity is the cornerstone of this process, which is centred on relationality and the collective field. Relationality emerges from the constitution of the affects. These are *intensive* movements (literally “transitions”), which involve both affecting and being affected. These movements or transitions, which relate individuals to one another, impress traces upon them; each trace shapes distinct actions and thoughts, giving
rise to a really new individual. The affective process, I have also claimed, does not describe the interior life of an individual being, and nor are affects subordinate elements of a more general cognitive system internal to the structure of the mind. Rather, affective movements are intensities, which lie on the interstices between individuals. These intensities function within a collective field. The collective is the common ground generated by the affects (Spinoza’s theory of the imitation of the affects), in which individuals participate and further produce shared conceptions of time, otherness and actions.

It is for this reason that I have claimed that in Spinoza’s process of psychic individuation the individual is not the principle of individuation, but rather a constitutive element of a more general process of individuation. As a consequence, the peculiarity of a human being is characterised by a relational power (conatus), and his or her life is driven by a form of transindividual tendency (desire). This tendency determines human desire for constructing psychic, social and political communities. The importance of thinking Spinoza’s theories of the affects and humankind in this way resides in the impact that they have upon his politics. Affectivity is the protagonist of Spinoza’s enquiry into different models of political organisation and the role of the mass in politics. Therefore, the awareness of affective process and human desire towards the others is the prerequisite for understanding the genesis, anatomy and development of a community in a Spinozist way.

Taking into account the arguments developed in chapter II, this chapter explores the relation between affectivity and politics in Spinoza’s thought. The focus is addressed to the manifold and somewhat ambivalent status of passions and affects in the theological section of the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (hereafter TTP), and the various ways in which these form complex political communities. Particularly in the theological part of the Treatise, passions and imagination occupy a central position within the political life of the individuals, shaping entirely the action and thought of the masses. Spinoza’s treatment of the affective condition of the mass, which he developed through his reading of the Old and New Testaments, brings about the discovery of the problematic status of passions and imagination within the political context. These are, on the one hand,
the origin of human misconceptions about God, the state and the Church, and thereby of the exploitation of people’s desires and needs; on the other hand, passions, grounded in the domain of imagination, are powerful source of relations, common values, mutual support, which undeniably reinforce the entire political body.

The analysis of the multi-sided power of passions over a community constitutes the basis upon which the multitude, as a political individual, progressively emerges within Spinoza’s political arguments, becoming the principal protagonist of the political section of the Treatise and the Tractatus Politicus (hereafter TP). Therefore, the understanding of the ways in which affectivity produces political individuals, meanings and forces is crucial for determining the genealogy of the multitude within Spinoza’s thought. In consequence, this chapter will not draw attention to the multitude itself; rather, it will examine the role of affectivity within the production of the political. As passions and imagination represent the most ambivalent notions within Spinoza’s theory of affects, the discussion here will focus on the passive and imaginative aspects of the body politic of certain communities examined in the theological section of the Treatise. An enquiry into Spinoza’s conception of the political dimension of the affects brings about the discovery of affectivity as a powerful and collective source of actions, thoughts and relations, through which the constitution and development of the multitude as a political individual and, more generally, as a community, takes place. This vision of affectivity might contribute to the re-founding of a political vocabulary for passions and affects, affirming their autonomy from the spheres of ethics and psychology. These latter have fragmented the power of affectivity into social and cultural codes, and have viewed it in terms of an obscure and unconscious natural drive.

In relation to these arguments many questions guide this chapter. Firstly, how and to what extent does Spinoza’s ontology of individuation effectively re-shape the way in which the origins of political society are theorised? If the ontology of individuation that Spinoza develops through affects, passions and bodily movements in the Ethics is already political, then the difficulty is as to how his philosophy of individuation re-founds traditional paradigms of the origins of
civil society, as it would seem to go far beyond theories of social contract and self-interest. If this is indeed the case, then the main problem that arises here is whether this collective and affective process of individuation implies a return to teleological arguments, or a transcendent agency behind human association. Secondly, how does Spinoza’s account of affectivity as relational and powerful concretely produce and transform political individuals and communities? Thirdly, if passions and the imagination are causes of partial knowledge and of decreases in power, then what different form of political praxis and problems do they introduce within society?

In order to address these questions I will continue to read Spinoza through Simondon. The latter’s ontological categories, in my view, may shed light on the originality of some of the themes within the Treatise that would otherwise remain obscure. I refer here to the question of whether society should be viewed as a process of becoming, rather than as a contract between rational and self-interested men. Viewing society as a becoming implies understanding actual and past human associations as a complex process traversed by problems, solutions and potentialities. Furthermore, if one reads the Treatise in the light of Simondon, the theme of the political role of affectivity in politics – particularly as regards the passions – leads one to understand that the affects are a fruitful topic for the theorisation of temporality, history, politics and society.

The claim that I will make throughout this chapter is that in Spinoza’s analysis of affectivity becomes recognised as the generative source of the production of the political. It is precisely in this context that the great modernity of Spinoza’s political gesture lies. Spinoza puts forward the idea that affectivity is not only the mediator of social relations, but also a powerful and endless process of producing the ‘common’; a process that covers the political scene in its entirety. As a full expression of affects and passions, the multitude, although not explicitly named in the theological section of the Treatise, is the actor and, at the same time, the theatre of the production of the ‘common’. In order to explore the affective production of the ‘common’ and how affectivity configures the body politic, I will present a reading in this chapter of the theological section of the Theological Political Treatise, which is structured around Deleuze’ and Guattari’s
account of conceptual personae (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 61-83). For Deleuze and Guattari, conceptual personae express the *becoming* of a particular philosophy and unveil the internal dynamics and problems that lie at the heart of the thinker’s theoretical project. Conceptual personae, in Deleuze’ and Guattari’s view, enable us to examine a philosophy by looking at the elements and forces of its development.

Building upon Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of conceptual personae, I analyse the facts and personages of the first part of the Treatise as constitutive aspects of more complex conceptual personae. In this light, we will encounter the personae of the Devotees of the prophet, Subjects of Moses and the Apostles, each of whom brings problems, transformations and relational beings into the realm of the political. The importance of analysing the themes of the Treatise through conceptual personae concerns, on the one side, the possibility of stressing the notion of affectivity as a process of political individuation. On the other, the usage of conceptual personae will disclose alternative trajectories towards the conceptualisation of the role of affectivity within the foundation of the theory of the multitude. Although this chapter is a study of the political significance of affectivity within Spinoza’s thought, the intrinsic relation between affects and the multitude requires an analysis of the affective characteristics that Spinoza gives to the multitude in the theological section of the Treatise, and of the ways in which these characteristics structure specific political behaviours. In the following section I will examine the structure of the theological section of the Treatise, drawing particular attention to the passive conditions of the mass. The analysis of these problematic aspects will frame our attempt to read the TTP in relation to conceptual personae.
1. The Plan of the *Theological Political Treatise*

In the *Theological Political Treatise*, Spinoza presents a multisided account of the multitude. As the book’s narrative develops, the multitude is nuanced by a variety of affective denotations such as fear, hope, ambition and indignation, which makes a conceptualisation into a specific category of people, mob and citizens quite problematic. In order to examine this multifaceted character of the multitude and the role of affectivity within its constitution as mob, people and mass, we need first to look at the structure and the main arguments of the *Theological Political Treatise*. These offer a preliminary account of the function of affectivity within a political context and of the mechanisms in which this shapes the body of the multitude. As indicated above, attention will be given here to the theological section of the Treatise; the political thesis developed in the Treatise and in the TP will be discussed in chapter IV.

The *Theological Political Treatise* consists of a *pars destruens* (chapters I-X) and a *pars contruens* (chapters XVI-XX). As the title suggests, the Treatise is grouped into two main sections, the theological and political parts. In the theological section, which corresponds to the *pars destruens*, we are immediately projected into the affective status of the multitude, through which Spinoza introduces the causes of superstition, a critique of the ideological apparatus of faith, and thereby the ability of the clergy to exploit religion for the control and manipulation of the needs and acts of the people. In this part of the book Spinoza is concerned with undermining the entire metaphysical nucleus of theology, through which the Church has surreptitiously constructed its influence over the mass, political affairs and philosophical arguments. To this end, Spinoza adopts a new method of examining holy texts: he considers the historical, cultural and linguistic context within which the stories of the Scriptures occurred (Strauss, 1997: 111-144; Balibar, 1998: 25-48; Montag, 1999: 1-25).

Spinoza employs a very accurate exegesis of the New and Old Testaments, through which the extraordinary origins of certain unusual natural phenomena (miracles and signs), the alleged divinity of the prophets, and the metaphysical

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36 For an historical background of the TTP, see Nadler (1999), and Pollock (2005).
nucleus of faith are brought back to the realm of imagination. The knowledge of the prophets, their prophecies and speeches, are on the one hand viewed as being simply based upon an understanding of the laws of nature that relies on the first kind of knowledge, imagination, which is also the ground of the passions of fear, hope and devotion. On the other, the messages of the prophecies and the symbolic language adopted by the prophets are directed to the mass, who are easily inclined to believe in myths and extramundane forces. It is through the power of imagination, Spinoza explains, that people are persuaded of the esoteric meanings of the Scriptures and the belief in an ultimate end beyond the order of nature. This causes the emergence of superstition and ignorance within a community; as a result, human beings come to be moved by both fear of misfortune and hope for good fortune.

The hegemony of the Church over society, Spinoza warns us, is erected on this superstitious apparatus, which plays deceitfully with the fear, hope and ignorance of the people.37 Spinoza’s attack on religion is thus intended to invalidate not religion itself, but rather the causes of human misconceptions about God, the authority of the clergy and nature; misconceptions that lead them, as he announces in the preface, to “fight for their servitude as if for salvation” (TTP: 389-390). As opposed to this, Spinoza, affirms that the true object of faith rests upon moral precepts, which aim at the development of obedience and piety between individuals (credo minimum). However, many problems arise from these first stages of the Treatise, pertaining to Spinoza’s ambivalent position regarding the role of the multitude and affectivity within a political context.

On the one hand, Spinoza gives a somewhat negative account of the multitude, framing it via the categories of plebs, mob and mass. He refers to the multitude as ignorant, superstitious and unreliable, and claims that they can be easily mobilised against this or that authority. On the other hand, Spinoza includes within these categories the exponents of the Church too, who encourage and increase the passions of the mass through the expedients of miracles, prophecies, and also the notions of evil, sin, and grace. Furthermore, for Spinoza, as we will discuss further, the passions of fear and hope are experienced by both the clergy

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37 Concerning political authority of the Church and conflicts between the different faiths in seventeenth-century Holland, see Balibar (1998: 1-20), and Nadler (1999:116-244).
and the masses, although both are said to be afraid of each other. There is also an apparent contradiction here: Spinoza conceives the domain of imagination as the ground of the human misconceptions, through which superstition is founded and developed. Yet, it is also through imagination that the growth of ethical values and cohesive practices and mutual support take place.

Prior to the political section there are a series of chapters (chapters XI-XV) that prepare the terrain for the themes of the political part. It is in the arguments articulated in these chapters that Spinoza’s notions of the multitude and affectivity become increasingly more ambivalent (Balibar, 1994: 3-38). This transitional part considers the ethical function of religion, precisely that of the New Testament; attention is also addressed to the separation between philosophy, religion and politics. In these chapters, Spinoza moves on to analyse the very object of faith, firmly drawing a line between philosophy and religion. For Spinoza, the focus of any faith should be solely addressed to the encouragement of positive affects such as love, joy, devotion, through which practices of mutual support are developed. As anticipated in the pars destruens, Spinoza consequently re-defines the domain of religion by narrowing its importance to ethical habits: pietas. This form of faith (credum minimum) does not negatively affect the development of political institutions; rather, it favours social relations, contributing to the growth of the sentiment of community (the common good). Spinoza refers here to the doctrine of the apostles.

However, in the same part of the Treatise, Spinoza states further that the advantage of this conception of religion stems from the increased obedience of people. It is precisely in this context that Spinoza’s arguments of the multitude become ambivalent. The main difficulty concerns how Spinoza combines the two aspects of religion as reciprocal love and obedience. If the apostolic message of universal (Catholic) love leads to cooperative practices, why and to what extent does this have to be formulated in terms of obligation? Seen in this light, it might seem as if the affective constitution of the many is predominantly shaped by negative passions of fear, rivalry and egoism, which are not naturally disposed towards cooperation and, more generally, to a life in common. This would suggest

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38 The twofold status of fear within the Treatise has been acutely analysed by Balibar (1994). I will discuss his approach in chapter IV.
that the object of the faith of the apostles serves to teach the masses how to love one another. Nevertheless, Spinoza repeatedly points out that the knowledge of the apostles and the certainty of the prophets of the Old Testament are based on the same natural understanding that all human beings possess. This would indicate that there are no ontological and ethical differences between the apostles and the mass. The implication is thus that everyone should, spontaneously, follow the Catholic teachings of love without concurring to external devices of obedience (Deleuze, 1992: 255-288).

The reception of the theological section of the TTP within contemporary Spinozist studies

In general, contemporary Spinozist studies have viewed these themes within the theological section of the Treatise as an attempt on Spinoza’s part to establish a theoretical method able to grounds the political thought that he presents in the Treatise’s second part. Specifically, the theological chapters have been viewed as the foundation of a philosophical method that links the hermeneutics of the sacred Scriptures to the systematisation of Spinoza’s democratic thought. Yet the analytic and continental Spinozist scholars that follow this reading offer different interpretations of Spinoza’s political project. They also differ as regards the meaning and role of this first section of the Treatise. This has given rise to a wide range of views on Spinoza’s philosophical method.

As we see below, for thinkers such as Curley (1996) and Smith (1998, 2003) within the analytic tradition, Spinoza’s re-reading of the Old Testament aims at affirming a rational strategy for intending religious arguments and the role of faith within society. Seen in this light, Spinoza’s replacement of the extramundane origins of miracles and prophecies with natural phenomena, and his denials of the divine status of prophets and the philosophical authority of religion, delineate his scientific method of studying historical and religious events and personages. Spinoza’s scientific method aspires to enlighten people from ignorance through the rehabilitation of the authority of reason. This gesture has
direct political implications. In invalidating the philosophical power of faith, Spinoza undermines not only its authority over philosophy, but also – and more significantly – the influence of the Church over the state. This prevents political systems from degenerating into forms of despotic theocracies and it allows the development of rational and free individuals. It is for this reason that thinkers such as Curley (1996), Smith (1998), Israel (2002) and Feurer (1987) have viewed the theory of democracy explained in the political section of the Treatise as a model of liberalism, and have located this in close proximity to Hobbes, Tocqueville and Voltaire. Chapter IV will discuss the analytic interpretation of Spinoza’s paradigm of democracy in greater detail, whilst addressing the political section of the Treatise and the *Political Treatise*.

In contrast to the analytic reading of the theological section of the Treatise, continental theorists such as Tosel (1984, 1997), Balibar (1998), Matheron (1988), Negri (1998) and Montag (1999) have more recently considered Spinoza’s exegesis of the Old Testament and New Testament in terms of his model of materialism and his philosophy of praxis, which continue and further develop the theses of the *Ethics*. This also prepares the terrain for the establishment of the politics of the multitude treated in the political section of the Treatise and the TP. In this light, and as we will see below, Tosel, Balibar and Montag have interpreted Spinoza’s attention to the linguistic, historical and cultural context of the stories narrated in the Sacred Scriptures in terms of the central importance that he gives to the material conditions and experiences in which miracles, prophesies and prophets originated (Tosel, 1997: 155-166; Balibar, 1998: 36-48, Montang, 1998: 1-25). Spinoza’s attack on the metaphysical nucleus of theology, they have claimed, reveals a precise strategy of liberation of the mass, which proceeds from the rejection of the divine origins of prophets through the apostolic formula of universal love to the advocacy of freedom presented in the political section of the TTP (Matheron, 1988; Negri, 1998). Therefore, Spinoza’s philosophical method, which is framed through the exegesis of the holy text, is founded on the theory of praxis. The formation of the multitude as a powerful political subject is predicated upon such praxis.
There have been important attempts, made from differing perspectives, to extrapolate a socio-psychology from the theological section of the Treatise. These attempts are central to the arguments of this chapter. Although they have reached diverse conclusions, Rice (1990), Gatens and Lloyd (1999) have offered fruitful insights into the social and psychological elements derived from Spinoza’s description of the role of passions and imagination within civil society. Significantly, the works of Gatens and Lloyd (1999) have stressed the social function of imagination and passions in the theological section of the Treatise. The power of imagination, they argue, does not only allow for the growth of superstition, ignorance and alienation. Rather, this refers to a more complex mechanism, which brings to light the centrality of the notions of the body, relations and identity. Spinoza’s thesis of the origins of prophecy, rituals and sacrifices, for example, discloses the ways in which imagination and passions give rise to collective identities, common rules and ethical practise, upon which a community is founded and developed (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 23-40, 87-107). Furthermore, given Spinoza’s definition of imagination as the domain of the fluctuation of actions and thoughts, this crucially introduces within the constitution of the social and political body a certain contingency, which enriches the political with dynamic elements (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 28-40, 51-57).  

Taking into consideration these readings – and with a view towards developing the continental and psycho-social approaches further – I think that the political meaning of passions in the theological section of the Treatise might be explored further through a different path. I refer to a more extensive definition of affectivity, which considers its role within the production of notions of time, relationality, and of powerful and collective political gestures and individuals. The different affective tones of the mass that emerge from Spinoza’s discourse, in my view, derive from a process of political and ontological individuation, which transforms the realm of the political as whole. It is precisely this process of

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39 The relation between imagination, affectivity and politics in Spinoza’s thought has nurtured an extensive literature that has done much to advance the importance of his notion of imagination within contemporary political theory; see Manning (2007) and Massumi (2002a). Significantly, Williams (2007) has further developed the significance of Spinoza’s notions of imagination and affectivity within democratic theory (Williams, 2007: 350-369).
individuation that signifies the anatomy and power of the multitude, explaining its centrality within the political part of the Treatise and the successive TP.

In order to re-consider the political meaning of affectivity, specifically that of passions, and thereby their importance for understanding Spinoza’s notion of the multitude, an alternative strategy of reading the TTP has to be adopted. I propose to insist further on reading Spinoza’s thought through the philosophy of Simondon, as initiated in chapter II. An enquiry into the role of affectivity within Spinoza’s political discourse, I suggest, becomes of crucial importance when viewed via Simondon’s philosophy of individuation. Simondon’s ontological categories might shed light on the processes and relations that affectivity brings into question, and on how they impact effectively on the political. Simondonian notions of the collective being, emotions, transindividuality and disparateness give Spinoza’s treatment of passions great cogency, and infuse it with a new awareness of the reality and potentialities embodied in the community. The arguments that I will make throughout this chapter will thus concern understanding passions and, more generally, affectivity as natural and unavoidable conditions of the becoming of society as whole; conditions that enrich the domain of the political with unpredictable problems, meanings and relations.

2. The conceptual personae of the Theological Political Treatise: Guidelines for re-reading affectivity within Spinoza’s politics

Despite their differences, we have seen that the various ways of reading the TTP commonly begin with the analysis of the theological section (the pars destruens) before proceeding through the transitional chapters on the separation of religion and philosophy to the political part (par construens) on democracy and freedom. Without contrasting and denying the importance of these methods of reading the TTP, my enquiry into the theological section of the TTP is organised through a different, perhaps unorthodox, strategy. In order to re-investigate the meaning of affectivity within Spinoza’s political theses from a Simondonian standpoint I will extrapolate from the historical facts and personages narrated
within the theological section of the Treatise conceptual-affective personae. Each of whom embodies particular affective events and problematics present within Spinoza’s political quest. This strategy will also accompany our study of the political section of the TTP and the TP.

This approach will allow us to emphasise the role of affectivity as a process of political and ontological individuation in Simondonian sense. It is for this reason that I have adopted the strategy of conceptual-affective personae as a means of reading Spinoza’s political texts. In this chapter and the one that follows, the notion of conceptual personae is built upon the formulation given by Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 61-83). Without venturing into a detailed discussion of the problematics and intricacies inhering in Deleuze’ and Guattari’s theory of conceptual personae, the usage made in this thesis of their concept requires only that we consider its key-elements and philosophical meaning. It is around these that I construct the conceptual and affective personae of the TTP and TP.

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of conceptual personae

For Deleuze and Guattari, a conceptual persona embodies the becoming of a particular philosophy. It actualises the multiple potentialities of a philosopher’s concept (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 62-65). A conceptual persona is the subject of the life of a thinker, which presents him with a problem and glimpses of its solution. The role of such a persona, they claim, is to indicate to the philosopher the territory of thought through and within which he is to develop his theoretical project. Strictly speaking, conceptual personae express the actualisation of the principal problem of the philosopher, and open up towards its solution (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 68-70). It is for this manifold role, in Deleuze’ and Guattari’s view, that conceptual personae do not coincide with the ideal types employed in psychology and sociology, such as the migrant and the stranger. Whilst ideal types function as empirical instruments for constructing theories, conceptual personae are not prior, other than, or subsequent to the philosopher (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 66-68). Conceptual personae live within the philosopher and are his closest friends and severest enemies.
Deleuze and Guattari explain that in the history of philosophy conceptual personae have accompanied the genesis and development of the works of Plato, Descartes, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx and so on, engaging with them in an ideal dialogue throughout the entire journey of their philosophy. In some cases, they are sympathetic to the philosopher, as in Nietzsche’s Dionysus; in others, they are antipathetic, such as the Idiot that leads Descartes to discover the cogito (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 61-62). Furthermore, we might observe Marx playing with a varied range of conceptual personae from abstract labour, the bourgeois, the proletariat and the Jewish people, each of which does not express an ideal model, but rather a different actualisation of a principal problem and the possibility of its solution.

My interest in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of conceptual personae stems from its ability to reveal the multiple ways in which a philosophical problematic and system are activated within a philosopher. Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of conceptual personae enables us to discover the path of the philosopher’s thought. Put differently, conceptual personae allow us to emphasise internal dynamics, and to understand what confluence of forces lie underneath and between the elements of a philosophical project. They thus offer the opportunity of analysing a philosophy not retrospectively, i.e. by tracing its conclusions back to their origins, but rather by looking at its development and at the experience of its becoming. My re-reading of Spinoza’s political thought is constructed around these characteristics of Deleuze’ and Guattari’s account of conceptual personae adapting the latter to the language and structure of the TTP. My use of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s view of conceptual personae as a means of reading Spinoza’s political thought is intended to grasp the latter’s development and problematics. The strategy of conceptual personae proposed here enables us to enter into the middle of Spinoza’s philosophical project, or, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s phrasing, into the interstices of its territory.
The presence of conceptual personae is less explicit in Spinoza’s political theses than in Nietzsche and Descartes, and we cannot clearly observe Spinoza playing with sympathetic and antipathetic personae as in Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Descartes and Marx. This might also explain the absence of references to Spinoza’s conceptual personae in Deleuze’ and Guattari’s discussion. Yet despite their silence, I have found cogent conceptual personae in the TTP and the TP, with which Spinoza can be seen to initiate an intense dialogue. These personae are not sympathetic or antipathetic; rather, they are multifaceted and problematic interlocutors, with whom Spinoza interacts throughout the entire development of his thought.

Some preliminary clarifications are imperative before we analyse these conceptual personae. In both Treatises, Spinoza does not mention, even indirectly, conceptual personae. In his exposition, as discussed above, Spinoza examines historical and biblical figures and facts, and draws political reflections from them. The conceptual personae to which I refer map the path of Spinoza’s political philosophy. These are, in my reading, the complex interlocutors with which Spinoza confronts himself. Therefore, the conceptual-affective personae assumed in this chapter and the one that follows are not the historical personages narrated in the political Treatises, such as Moses, the apostles and Christ. Instead, Spinoza’s conceptual personae embody the affective and conceptual processes and events that bring him to analyse these personages and figures.

The attention given here to the affective elements present in Spinoza’s political arguments – and also my identification of his conceptual personae as the power of the affects – follows from the claims advanced in chapter II, or more specifically from the reading of Spinoza via Simondon that was initiated in that chapter. It is also intended to reinforce the understanding of Spinoza’s theory of affectivity as a collective process of psychic individuation, and will draw out the latter’s political implications. Thus in order to delineate the affective mechanism surrounding the conceptual-affective personae of the Treatises we need to return briefly to the arguments made in chapter II. In chapter II, employing Simondon’s
categories, I argued that Spinoza’s ontology should be considered as a collective process of individuation. This led to the recognition of Spinoza’s original paradigm of the individual. In Spinoza, the anatomy of the individual is viewed as an open structure, traversed by continuous transformations. In this, the action of entering into relations with others is literally a *movement* of individuation. Related particularly to human beings, reading the *Ethics* through Simondon’s philosophy gave rise to many significant implications. Affects and passions could thus be seen to play the pivotal role in developing the process of psychic individuation, and led to re-shaping our awareness of the richness of affectivity and its central role in the individuation of psychic individuals. In the latter, affects and passions such as hatred, love and fear do not pass from one already individuated being to the other, and neither are they located in an obscure interiority of the individual. Rather, they are collective and – crucially importantly – irreplaceable phases of individuation.

We have seen that in the *Ethics* Spinoza describes affects not, or not solely as auxiliary functions of human beings, which appear subsequent to the constitution of physical and psychical beings. Instead, affectivity activates the relational movements upon which the individual is formed. Thus, Spinoza’s conception of humankind brings about the need for re-positioning the constitutive role of affectivity at the centre of the human theatre. The reinstatement of the significance of affectivity has immediately political implications, which can still offer thoughtful theoretical insights for contemporary thought and society. Taking these preliminary arguments into account, the conceptual-affective personae that we encounter in this chapter are the Devotees of the prophet, the Subjects of Moses and the Apostles. As explained above, they do not coincide with the biblical figures and events discussed in Spinoza’s exegesis of the sacred Scriptures. Rather, they delineate the path through which affectivity *produces* psychic-political realities. Given that in the theological section of the Treatise passions are the protagonists of Spinoza’s analysis, the conceptual-affective personae examined in this chapter indicate how passions uncover a complex process of political individuation.
As the names I have given to them suggest, these conceptual-affective personae are essentially plural, i.e. relational, disparate and collective. The linkage between these conceptual-affective personae is not centred on a dialectical play of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and nor do they develop through teleological processes ‘towards the better’. By contrast, each conceptual-affective persona embodies a specific affective tone and actualises a different production of the political, which brings new orders of problems and solutions into the existing political scenario. Furthermore, differences between conceptual-affective personae are not qualitative; the Apostles, for example, are not superior or inferior in respect to the Subjects of Moses and the Devotees of the prophet. Following the notion of difference presented in the *Ethics*, the conceptual-affective personae of the TTP are distinguished one from another modally (E. I, prop. XV, Scholium). This means that each conceptual-affective persona expresses a distinct confluence of affects, which delineates specific political moments and individuals. delineates specific political moments and individuals. The first conceptual-affective persona that I will discuss is the Devotees of the prophet. This conceptual persona introduces a crucial phase within the thread of the TTP: namely, the constitution of the political and the necessity of the collective for the latter’s complete development.

3. The Devotees of the prophet

In chapter II, “Of the prophets”, Spinoza tells us that the prophets “were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagination” (TTP, chapter II: 404). The certainty of the prophets is based not on an extraordinary faculty or an intimate relation with God. The knowledge of the prophets, Spinoza asserts, is based simply on signs, *lumen naturalis*, memories of past events and stories and, more importantly, their own physical and psychic attitude.
As he summarises,

Therefore the certainty of the prophets was based entirely on these three considerations:

1. That things revealed were most vividly imagined, just as we are wont to be affected by objects in our waking hours.
2. The occurrence of a sign.
3. Lastly and most important, that the minds of the prophets were directed exclusively towards what was right and good.
   (TTP, Chapter II: 406)

Spinoza, then, proceeds with analysing the historical figures of Isaiah, Moses, Abraham, Joshua, Amos, Nahum and Christ, and investigates how they experienced and divulged the idea of God. As Christ understood God without the use of images, signs and revelations, Spinoza sets his doctrine aside from the circle of the prophets that form the tradition of the Old Testament (TTP, Chapter IV: 431). Excluding Christ from that tradition, Spinoza addresses the demystification of the divine status of the prophets, through which their actions and beliefs have been considered as indisputable. In order to clarify the mundane origins of prophets, Spinoza gives a detailed account of their respective historical, emotional, social and linguistic milieu, upon which the alleged divinity of their authority has been grounded. Spinoza contextualises their actions, beliefs and writings through a very accurate exegesis of the holy texts. This replaces the sacred reputation of the prophets with ordinary imaginative abilities, affectivity, bodily movements and, importantly, the environment (TTP, Chapters I-II).

Each of these personages, examined in the TTP, reveals a particular use of imagination, which denotes an immature mode of intending the order and connection of natural phenomena (TTP, Chapter II: 409). According to Spinoza, the prophet explains the mechanism of nature through picturing images of fire or flood, and also through emotional states such as joy, hope, astonishment and prostration. Moreover, the prophet’s ignorance of nature produces the perception of events as gifts, miracles and punishments for his devotion or impiety (TTP, chapters I, II, III, VI). These are the causes of the growth of the anthropomorphic idea of God and nature.

As discussed in the preceding part of the thesis, continental thinkers such as Matheron (1971; 1988), Tosel (1984; 1997) and Negri (1998) have considered
Spinoza’s arguments concerning the false divinity of prophets as a move against the ideological apparatus of the Church, through which people’s needs and desires were manipulated. Spinoza’s critique of the sacred status of the prophets has been commonly viewed as his political commitment to the emancipation of society from the enslavement of theology. Analytic readers however, such as Smith (1998) and Israel (2002, 2006), have interpreted Spinoza’s critique of prophecy, miracles and prophets as the establishment of his rational method, which aims at affirming the autonomy of philosophy and politics from theology. This autonomy forms part of the conditions through which freedom of people might be developed and liberal democracy founded. It is for this reason that analytic commentators tend to consider the arguments of the theological section of the TTP as anticipating the Enlightenment tradition of thought.

The arguments formulated by Balibar (1998), Gatens and Lloyd (1999) have been crucial to the formulation of the position assumed in this chapter. From a continental perspective, Balibar has envisaged a theory of communication in Spinoza’s study of the origins of prophecy, miracles and the divine authority of prophets. Spinoza’s attention to the language of prophets, prophecies and miracles reveals, Balibar claims, the central role given by Spinoza to dissemination of ideas. The influence of prophecies over people derives from the expressions, symbolic elements and images employed in describing natural phenomena and past events. Similarly, the authority of prophets derives from the ways in which they present to others their perceptions of nature and ideas of God. This creates collective meanings and common identity, through which individuals recognise themselves as parts of a community (Balibar, 1998: 88-98 ). Beside its role as a critique of theology, Balibar concludes, Spinoza’s enquiry into prophecies and prophets brings about the centrality of a theory of communication within the constitution of a political subject, however passive or active (Balibar, 1998:105-124 ).

Developing further Balibar’s thesis, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) have recently placed an emphasis on the social function of passions and imagination that emerges from Spinoza’s study of prophets and prophecies. According to this view, passions and imagination establish psychic practises of recognition between
individuals, around which they create collective identity and meanings. These collective identity and meanings do not only have a psychic and social dimension, but more significantly a political significance. Passions and imaginations generate cooperative practises, which are already political and extremely powerful. These practises also actualise conceptions of time and history, which characterise the actions and thought of a specific political union (Gatens and Lloyds, 1999: 87-95, 124-132).

Building upon these arguments, I think, Spinoza’s portrayals of prophets and prophecies uncover a multisided process, which exceeds the production of social habits, ethical and political norms. Spinoza’s account of the imaginative status of the prophets and devotees brings to question the anatomy of a group within a forming political context and the production of the ‘common’ through affective movements. The claim that I will present in this section concerns the understanding of passions as fundamental elements of a process of individuation, through which political realities and individuals emerge. In other words, we must consider the multifaceted realm of the prophet and prophecies as a process of individuation, which embraces contemporaneously the political, the social and the psychic.

In order to discover these aspects, a different path has to be followed. I propose to re-conceptualise Spinoza’s conceptions of prophecies, prophets, rituals and miracles (chapters I, II, V, VI) within a more complex conceptual persona, that is, the Devotees of the prophet. The analysis of these arguments through a conceptual persona might enable us to determine what lies at the very basis of the production of the political and how affectivity is generative of meanings, individuals and temporal flows. In order to delineate the anatomy and development of this conceptual-affective persona I will employ Simondon’s categories of the collective psychic individuation, as these might shed light on the manifold status of the prophets and their devotees. Simondon’s theory of the collective individuation might translate into contemporary language the political meaning of passions, through which the originality of the political stakes of Spinoza’s notion of affectivity might come to light.
Prophet and devotees: The threshold of the political

In chapters I-II (“of prophecy” and “of the prophets” respectively), Spinoza describes the genesis and meaning of prophecy. As with the knowledge of the prophet, imagination grounds the prophetic messages too. This implies the interpretation of prophecy as a direct consequence of particular affective circumstances such as the prophet’s emotive disposition, linguistic expressions and the ignorance of certain natural laws. Spinoza defines prophecy or revelation as the understanding and communication of God’s power and existence through images and words (TTP, Chapter I: 396). The prophet is the interpreter (in Hebraic nabi) of God’s messages, and he also plays the fundamental role of divulging God’s will to the members of a group (TTP, Chapter I: 394). The message of prophecies, Spinoza explains, concerns an immature mode of understanding the laws of nature, albeit not a false one. For Spinoza, therefore, the foci of revelation are on the one hand addressed to the unveiling of the structure and becoming of nature throughout the employment of affective discourses and figures; on the other, the aim of revelation is directed to the establishment of moral behaviours within a group. This leads to the creation of common beliefs, opinions and actions, through which new forms of relations between individuals come to light. The prophet’s gestures of revealing God’s will to others sets in motion a mechanism that produces a series of commonalities, which re-organise and differentiate the equilibrium of the existing system.

Prophecy therefore expresses here not – or not only – an ingenuous way of thinking God, but rather a more complex process that transforms and expands the domain of the individual on the realm of the ‘common’. In other words, behind the vague and mutilated opinions generated through the prophet’s speeches, there is the re-organisation and re-signification of the equilibrium of a collective body. Following Spinoza’s arguments, the prophetic message gives rise to a sense of closeness and participation between ignorant individuals, through which they recognise their role within the world. They become devotees, importantly, not of

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40 “[…], God’s testimony to Abraham implies only that he was obedient and commanded his household to the ways of justice and goodness” (TTP, Chapter II: 411).
God but of the prophet collectively. As the occurrence of the collective ground is moulded though the prophet’s speeches and images, it is through his body, stories, dreams and memories that common actions, ideas and tendencies are individualised.

In order to prophesise and narrate stories, the prophet requires a group to whom he can address his messages. Without the group the prophet is directly confronted with the undifferentiated nature, which reveals his impasse in thinking God. The encounter of the prophet with nature is nuanced by the passive tones of fear, hope, sorrow and astonishment, which structure two movements. The prophet, on the one side, is frightened by the boundless force of nature, which is greater than the singular individual. On the other, a form of recognition occurs between the prophet and nature. In this respect the prophet considers himself as a constitutive element of the natural order. It follows that the prophet experiences the power of nature as Otherness and, at the same time, Sameness, which reveal his incapacity to signify himself through God.

It is precisely at this moment that passions of fear, sorrow and hope activate a process, through which the individual enters into the realm of the collective ground. In order to solve the prophet’s impasse of orienting himself within the world, passions bring about the re-discovery of the group of the devotees. However, this group is not a mere assemblage of listeners; rather, they are followers characterised by devotion (faith). On the one hand this moulds the message of the prophecy through collective meanings, which lead a group of

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41 “For Moses commanded them [Israelites] to love God and keep his Law, to regard to their past blessings […] as bestowed by God; and he further made terrifying threats if they should transgress these commandments, while promising many blessings if they observed them” (TTP, Chapter II: 413).

42 Adam, to whom God was first revealed, did not know that God is omnipresent and omniscient, for he hid from God and attempted to excuse his sin before God as if he had to do with a man. […]. For Adam heard God walking in the Garden, calling him and seeking him out, and then seeing his guilty bearing, asking him whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree” (TTP, Chapter II: 410).

43 “Therefore, if Moses spoke with God face to face as a man may do with his fellow (that is, through the medium of the two bodies), then Christ communed with God mind to mind” (TTP, Chapter I: 399; [my italics]).

44 Concerning the figure of the prophet, Deleuze and Guattari strive towards the dramatic relation between the prophet and God. Referring to Spinoza’s description of the prophet, they view the condition of the prophet as a mere instrument of God’s will, whose role is signified and dependent on the power of God. The prophet, they conclude, is only a messenger of the Lord, insignificant in himself (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b; 135-141),
listeners to become devotees of the prophet. On the other, the devotees attune their actions and thoughts to the stories narrated through the prophet’s voice.

Given the central role of the action of communicating images for the creation of collective habits and opinions, one certainly might argue that Spinoza’s analysis of prophecy, and more generally imagination, delineates a theory of communication as Balibar (1998) has claimed, as have also Gatens and Lloyd (1999), Visentin (2001) and Williams (2007), albeit in different ways. In this sense, prophetic messages indicate the ways in which these develop commonalities within a society. Spinoza, undeniably, gives full account of the language, speech and writings of prophets and of how they have been used to influence people’s actions and thoughts. However, the significance of the prophecy in the Treatise, I think, does not only rely on unveiling the mechanisms of language. It is not communication that lies at the basis of prophetic discourses, which would organise a community of devotees.

The affective structure, which grounds the art of prophecy, develops a process of individuation in a Simondonian sense, which is collective and already political. For Simondon, as we saw in chapter II, to individuate means to exchange forces and undifferentiated masses and energies within a collective field (Simondon, 2007: 23-31, 73-84). The couple affects-emotions inheres within this process and generates psychic beings. Their emergence reinforces the collective and transforms the entire psychic process of individuation. Affects and emotions, Simondon explains, have a collective nature. Relating individuals one with another, they traverse and go beyond the individual. Affects and emotions activate a collective process of psychic individuation, which generate a powerful psychic-social union (Simondon, 2007: 98-111, 114-123). Therefore, the role of affects and emotions, in Simondon’s account, is contemporaneously social and psychic (Simondon, 2007: 197-214). More significantly, this role corresponds to the power of individuation.45

In the Devotees of the prophet, the art of prophesy might be re-explained through a Simondonian logic. As mentioned, prophecy means the act of

45 For Simondon, the group is always a mixture of psychic and social realities. For him, groups are not exclusively psychic or social; instead, they are a confluence of these two poles of Being (Simondon, 2007: 175-214).
interpreting and communicating God’s gestures; and also it involves the art of predicting future events, which, however real or illusory, influence actions and thoughts of the Devotees in their actuality. Although the prediction concerns coming events, however, this guides and transforms the present actions and thoughts of the Devotees (TTP, Chapters II and V). Spinoza tells his readers that the prophet communicates through images and words, which implies a very extensive understanding of the status of revelation. Bodily movements here play the pivotal role of divulging God’s stories. It is through a combination of the prophet’s voice, eyes, memories and dreams that the *common* sense of devotion is developed (see particularly chapter V).

It is precisely in this phase that passions become crucial, as they actualise and individualise relational forces, entirely re-configuring the realm of the collective. Fear, hope and devotion are mainly the conditions which re-form the domains of the prophet and the devotees. In the *Ethics*, part III, Spinoza defines fear as “inconstant pain arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt” (E. III, Def. Aff. XIII). Similarly hope is “inconstant pleasure arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt” (E. III, Def. Aff. XII). Lastly, by devotion Spinoza means “love toward one at whom we wonder” (E. III, Def. Aff. X). In our affective-conceptual persona of the Devotees of the prophet, it is the devotion toward the prophet that lies at the very heart of the ‘common’.

In this state, devotion constitutes the fundaments and the purpose, through which desires and *conatus* are actualised into the political ground. The relational movements generated through the devotional force re-signify the realm of the common. Although devotion is a passion, it structures collective actions and thoughts, which notably do not pass from one individual to the other as from the prophet to his devotees; rather, devotion re-organises the equilibrium of the collective being into a political individual. Given Spinoza’s definition of affectivity as traces impressed upon individuals through movements of affecting and being affected, which delineate specific actions and thought, devotion might better function within a relational context (E. III, Def. III, postul. I-II). To act and
think within a relational realm – however moved by fear, hope or devotion – and within a collective structure means to behave politically.

In his critique of theology, Spinoza gives full rights to the political meaning of passion without narrowing its role to ethical habits and alienating practises. The creation of rituals, laws and ceremonies within religious communities of the past exemplifies the political consistency of passions such as devotion and piety (TTP, Chapter V: 439). In this fashion, the novel political individual emerging from the devotional relations between devotees and the prophet brings to light multiple levels of heterogeneity such as time, ethics, humankind and history, each of which is embodied by the passionate tones of the Devotees of the prophet.

As expressions of devotion, miracles, for example, do not only describe the misinterpretation of the causes behind the natural phenomena; in addition, they also explain how the collective individual of the Devotees moulds time, life and the becoming of nature. In the case of the miracles, the Devotees conceptualise (“understand”) the past (history) and organise their future through wonder, which includes political actions such as the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. As “admiration toward” devotion gives rise to novel political practises, this transforms the community as a whole. In consequence the miracle is always described as a relational, collectively experienced event. Although with a negative meaning, Spinoza clearly states that the miracles are essentially created for the “common people” (TTP, Chapter VI: 444-447).

If we now take into account the political and relational status of devotion, piety and wonder, we cannot ignore that Spinoza defines them as passions and that in the Treatise the devotees are described as vulgus (plebs). According to the Ethics, passions delineate a passive state, within which individuals are dependent on external forces (E. III, Def. II, III). To put this in political terms: fear, hope and devotion are the causes of the manipulation of devotees’ needs and desires, through which ideological apparatuses are erected. If devotion, fear, piety and hope progressively reduce the actions and thoughts of individuals, in our case those of the Devotees, then no one can deny that they nevertheless constitute relational states that transform the parts of a group, and thereby the whole.
Furthermore, by definition, devotion is “love toward”, which advances the idea of certain active movements and desires (E. III, Def. Aff. X). The questions that thus immediately arise are firstly as to what Spinoza truly means by passivity, and secondly as to who or what is passive in the relation between devotees and the prophet.

In the chapters of rituals and miracles, for example, Spinoza seems to attribute a quite passive role to the devotees. Therefore, the devotees, at first sight, appear as the locus wherein passions are grounded and developed. When we read further, however, we discover that the state of passivity pervades the entire conceptual-affective persona of the Devotees of the prophet, and not only parts of it. This is because both the prophets and the devotees are ignorant of the laws of nature and God. It means that devotion and wonder affect equally the actions of the prophets and their devotees. Both prophets and their followers institute sacrifices because they are moved by fear of misfortune and hope of fortune. These religious practices emerge from a collective process, which operates in the domain of passions. Fear, hope and devotion transform individuals into novel forms of collective life. Seen in this light, sacrifices and ceremonies exemplify the ways in which passions are productive of the ‘common’.

In order to better situate the political meaning of passions within the TTP we need to return briefly to the analysis of affectivity developed in chapter II. I have argued through the adoption of Simondon’s categories that passions do not express a fracture within the process of individuation. They instead refer to different combinations of relational movements. In the case of passions, relational movements are less intense, and exchanges between beings rare. Passions delay the series of transformations within the collective individual. Similarly in the Devotees of the prophet, I would argue, the tendency towards passivity reveals the predominance of the pre-individual over the actions and thoughts of the devotees, as exemplified by their conception of God as otherness. This leads to a progressive stabilising of the entire equilibrium of the collective body, within which relational movements are not the ground of novel meanings and individuals, but instead simply a repetitive system of rules and regulations. As a

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46 See for example, the anger of Moses toward the pharaoh (TTP, Chapter II: 407), and how this generates political gestures.
consequence, the temporal life of the Devotees is constantly structured through moments of expectation and forgiveness. The time of the Devotees expresses an enduring state of expectation. Expectation means, in my reading, that the present does not actualise the infinite possibilities of the collective ground embodied by a group, but rather that potentialities, actions and thoughts remain enclosed within a time that lies between the past and the future.

Taking these arguments into account, we might now offer some reflections. The passivity of the Devotees of the prophet, I would argue, does not refer to a condition of lack. The Devotees of the prophet, we have seen, enfold a variety of emotive tones such as fear, hope and piety, each of which signifies different relational phenomena. The drama of the entire conceptual persona of the Devotees concerns the condition of stability of the entire process of individuation, which shapes relational conditions such as ceremonies, laws and sacrifices ordered through expectation. These situate political individuals (human beings, laws, institutions, ethical norms), however collective, within stable organisations, where relations are not productive of possible transformations and individuations. From Simondon, we know that a stable equilibrium (political, ontological and ethical) means the effacement of any possibility for transformations and movements, through which the advancement of the process of individuation is avoided entirely (Simondon, 2007: 49-65).

The importance of the conceptual persona of the Devotees of the prophet, is on the one hand, that its emotive status brings about the discovery of a complex process, which forms psychological as well as social behaviours between individuated beings. This involves the re-actualisation of a political reality, which becomes differentiated and signified through intensive relational movements nuanced by devotion, wonder and piety. On the other hand, the Devotees bring to light a problem within the system, which refers to the possibility of being excluded from the general process of individuation. However, we cannot ignore the fact that this conceptual persona leaves many important questions unresolved.

47 Concerning the notion of time derived from passions and imagination, Gatens and Lloyd have pointed out in differing ways that imagination introduces a time of contingency within the social context, which gives special priority to the present (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 29-51).

48 Concerning a more general account of the theme of the time of prophecy: Agamben, by contrast, affirms that the time of the prophet takes the only form of the future (Agamben, 2005:59-60).
regarding the political meaning and the role of passions within the production of specific political behaviours such as struggle, resistance and pacts of fidelity. In order to determine what other forms of politics and society might be produced by passions we need to look at the story of Jewish people, which plays a pivotal role within the thread of the Treatise. The theme of the formation and development of the Hebrew state discloses how passions and affects give rise to important political events such as the collapse of the state of Israel. It is to the history of the Jewish people that I now turn.

4. The Subjects of Moses

The theme of the Jewish state is a central issue in Spinoza’s political thought, which raises many fecund arguments, running from specific questions about Judaism such as the messianic vision of the world and the role of Moses for the development of Jewish nation, to more general political analyses such as the limits of the confessional foundation of political states, the origin of the pact, the necessity of the separation of religion, politics and philosophy, and the nature of power. Spinoza gives a very accurate account of the Jewish question, which plays a strategic role both in the theological and political sections of the Treatise. Spinoza’s focus is on questioning the belief in the divine vocation of the Jewish people, upon which the latter's alleged conviction that they are the nation chosen by God before all others has been based (TTP, Chapter III). For Spinoza, the distinctive status of the Jewish state resides on a well-organised system of laws and social cohesion, which overshadowed the other political governments of the time. This implies the recognition of the value of the Jewish nation independently of the faith professed and also the importance of the right of Jewish laws for the stability of society. This is a decisive move within the thread of the TTP, which has political and religious implications.

In contemporary Spinozist literature, thinkers such as Yovel and Smith have considered Spinoza’s analysis of Judaism as his attempt to develop a laic vision of Jewish Society. Accordingly, Spinoza opens the way towards the secularisation of Jewish culture and history. For this, Spinoza does not deny the
great achievements of the Jewish community obtained in history, which becomes an exemplary administration of society. Through his exegesis of the holy texts, Spinoza instead questions the sacred origins of the state and the idea of the divine election of the Jewish people. For Spinoza, there is a stipulation of a pact at the very basis of the Jewish nation, through which people have transferred part of their power to Moses. Spinoza’s critique of the divine vocation of the Hebrews thus opens up directly to the refusal of the paradigm of messianism, around which the entire apparatus of Judaism has been constructed (Yovel, 1992a: 15-126; Smith, 1998: 1-24, 166-205).

Differently, post-Marxist scholars within the continental tradition of thought have emphasised the political implications that derive from Spinoza’s arguments on the Jewish nation. Thinkers such as Moreau (1996), Matheron (1988), Balibar (1998) and Negri (1998) have envisaged in Spinoza’s study of the Hebrew state a more general theory of mass movement, which situates the latter at the centre of political and historical processes. Spinoza’s analysis of the Jewish nation, they have claimed, reveals his awareness of the role played by the masses for the stability of the state. In this regard, the history of the Hebrew state provides Spinoza with fundamental elements, which enable him to understand how the masses form the real form of antagonism within any constituted political authority. This principle of antagonism is greatly exemplified by the history of the Hebrew nation, in which the Jewish people’s gestures have been the determining factor in the dissolution of the state. Therefore, Spinoza introduces through the analysis of the Jewish model of messianism and theocracy the fundamental political problematics of the nature of sovereignty and the linkage between this and the power of the mass (Negri, 1998: 128-149, 182-189; Moreau, 1996: 98-104; Balibar, 1998: 36-49).

Within this general interpretation, Balibar in particular has raised important arguments that have been decisive for constructing the present approach. For Balibar, the biblical events of the evolution of the Jewish people reveal Spinoza’s innovative conception of history, which is organised through the constitution of the masses as a political subject. The masses, which in the case of Jewish history are exemplified by the Hebrews, are the real subject of historical
and political processes. The action of the masses, however passionate or active, impacts concretely upon the existing political organisation. As the example of the Jewish story indicates, the masses have been decisive for the maintenance and dissolution of the state of Israel (Balibar, 1998: 42-49; 1997: 178-204). Operating within a continental perspective, and whilst developing the general post-Marxist reading, Montag has recently shed light on other important themes contained in Spinoza’s exegesis of the history of Jewish people (Montag, 1999). Spinoza’s attention to the structure of Jewish government is connected to a crucial argument within political theory: namely, that of sovereignty. Spinoza explains, as we will see below, that the authority of the Jewish state was organised through a severe observance of rituals and ceremonies. These regulate both the private and public aspects of individual life. Montag concludes that Spinoza’s description of the organisation of the Jewish state through ceremonies and rituals discloses a lucid analysis of the genesis and anatomy of sovereignty. Through the example of the Jewish nation, Spinoza explains that the authority of the state is erected and reinforced not through the administration of the public sphere but rather by an invasive control of the private life of the people as the history the Jewish people narrated by Spinoza corroborate (Montang, 1999: 46-61). It is in these arguments, Montag claims, that the great actuality of Spinoza’s politics lies.

Spinoza’s study of the history of the state of Israel, undeniably, involves a laic vision of Judaism, as noted especially by Yovel and Smith, and also novel political theories of mass movement, as post-Marxist scholars such as Balibar and Negri have underlined. It also addresses the fundamental theme of the origin and structure of sovereignty, as Montag has acutely observed. Developing the continental reading further, I think that there are still unexplored elements within Spinoza’s critique of the Jewish nation, and that we might uncover them via a different hermeneutic strategy. In order to investigate these aspects of his work I will bring our attention back to the affective tones of Moses and the Israelites, and to the pivotal role that their affectivity has played within Spinoza’s account of early Jewish society. An enquiry into the affective tones of Moses and the Israelites underlines the relational process which operates within the constitution of a community. My interest in affectivity here is not intended to deny or
invalidate the interpretations considered above. Rather, it aims to bring new arguments and trajectories into the present debate that may help us to re-assess the originality of Spinoza’s politics.

In order to examine these themes, Spinoza’s analysis of the Jewish nation will be re-considered through the narrative of conceptual-affective personae. In this light, the historical figures of Moses and the Israelite community will be incorporated within a more complex personage, that is, the Subjects of Moses. The importance of this conceptual-affective persona lies in its ability to unveil some of the ways in which affectivity structures relational movements within a process of collective individuation. The enquiry into the conceptual persona of the subjects of Moses brings about the discovery of the notions of obedience, law, and the messianic tendency as results of a process of individuation, which constantly signifies the realm of the political. It is precisely in this context that Spinoza’s conception of the anatomy and becoming of a community as a complex political individual comes to light.

I will use the narrative thread afforded by this conceptual persona to argue that passions, desires and affects should be re-located at the centre of a process that generates the realm of the ‘common’. This is structured, as we will see, through collective forces, meanings and individuals. Whilst in the conceptual persona of the Devotee of the prophet, devotion, fear and hope shape the domain of the ‘common’ and disclose the necessity of the collective field; in the case of the Subjects of Moses, wonder, anger and desire generate a different political reality. It is through the dynamics of the Subjects of Moses that Spinoza’s conception of society as a mixture of incompatibilities and potentials emerges. Taking into account these arguments, let us map the affective dynamics of the conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses.
4.1 The time and the becoming of the Jewish people

In chapter III, entitled “of the vocation of the Hebrew”, Spinoza makes the following, fundamental claim:

Everyone’s true happiness and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of the good, not in priding himself that he alone is enjoying that good to the exclusion of others. He who counts himself more blessed because he alone enjoys wellbeing not shared by the others, or because he is more blessed and fortunate than others, knows not what is true happiness and blessedness, and the joy derives therefrom, if it be not mere childishness, has its only source in spite and malice. (TTP, chapter III: 415-416, my italics).

This general statement means, on the one hand, that happiness and wellbeing do not consist in an individualist and possessive fruition of these conditions. This might suggest that “true” happiness and blessedness, instead, require a state of sharing and participation or, at the very least, an enjoyment that is not ambitious or immodest. On the other hand, Spinoza’s affirmation might be considered as the recognition of the central limit of the Jewish people, which searches and enjoys happiness and fortunes for their own advantage, and also with the pretence of being more fortunate or blessed than other nations. Following the thread of Spinoza’s arguments, the supposed divine vocation of the Jewish people concerns a well-organised political and social government (TTP, Chapter III: 418). This refers to the sharing of fortunes, rules and regulations collectively, rather than as independent beings.

These factors come to constitute the sole exceptional character of the Hebrew state. From these initial explanations, however, many questions soon arise. Firstly, are there ruptures, messianic figures or inexplicable events that bring about the genesis of the Israelites? Secondly, what conditions or individuals prepare the terrain for the affirmation of this political body? A consideration of these aspects is crucial for determining the foundation of society within Spinoza’s politics more broadly. In order to address these questions, I intend to follow that one must recognise the priority of process in order to understand the individual (Simondon, 2007: 12). This dictum becomes crucial, particularly for delineating
the genesis and peculiarity of the Jewish nation. Therefore, we need to take a step back, and should turn our attention towards the conditions and phases which have led to the emergence of the state of Israel. This emerges from the event of the exodus. In the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses the exodus discloses a variety of powerful affective tones, which shape and transform politically those same subjects.

Exodus: Slaves and claimants

Spinoza tells us that the Jewish people after the exodus from the empire of Egypt find themselves in an unexpected situation that closely resembled a state of nature (TTP, Chapter XVII: 539). The exodus expresses a very crucial moment, within which they passed from a condition of servitude to one of freedom. This passage is structured by passions of fear, anger and hatred, which move the Jewish people’s condition of servitude towards freedom. This insinuates the idea that passions or “passive affections” are productive of important political actions. If this is the case, it would contradict the thesis of the Ethics. In the Ethics, as discussed in chapter II, Spinoza conceives passions as a dependence of one’s action upon an external cause. The exodus, however, represents an active and productive action. The Jewish people are moved by passions of fear and anger. Thus, how should we explain the exodus of the Hebrew people given the passivity of their relations? In order to re-investigate the problematic aspects of the biblical event of the exodus narrated by Spinoza, the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses addresses these questions. This allows us to emphasise all the affective nuances characterising the political individual of the Jewish nation. Similarly to the conceptual personae defined by Deleuze and Guattari, and examined above, the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses constructed here captures the political individual in its emergence and becoming.

The Subjects of Moses who precede the exodus are nuanced by their wonder toward God and their hate for the empire of Egypt. Although the Jewish people are moved by passions of hatred and fear towards the pharaoh, they are, overall, a group. They recognise themselves as an individual claimant – however
multiple – of the Promised Land. As such a claimant, the Israelites express desire, which is represented by their demand for the Promised Land and by their rejection of the empire of the Egypt. Furthermore, the act of claiming brings to light the anomalous status of our conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses under their servitude. In the state of slavery, they are in the middle of individuated and potential political realities.

This group claimant is located in the *middle* of a political context, the state of the pharaoh, which brings about a confluence between already individualised realities (the Egyptian rules, hierarchic equilibrium and customs) and forming political individuals (the hope of the promised land). The wonder of God structures and reinforces the equilibrium of this emerging individual towards the individualisation of more productive relations, which should overturn the passivity of the state of servitude. These elements, in my reading, play an equally pivotal role within the transition from the phase of servitude to the one of refugees. However, there is another crucial aspect of this transitional moment, which might shed light on the dynamics of the exodus. This entails the affective status of Moses. In the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses, Moses expresses a specific affective tone and phase within the more general process of political individuation.

Spinoza describes the wisdom of Moses as a vivid attitude towards mercy, devotion and the wonder of God (TTP, Chapter II: 412-413). Moses, Spinoza claims, communicates with God as one friend does with another (TTP, Chapter I: 399). These emotive tones structure a positive force, which re-signifies the moments of fear and hatred. It is in truth the love of Moses towards both God and the Israelites that surpasses and expands the passive relations of the phase of servitude. This positive tension is located and operates only within a collective individual, which corresponds, in this case, to the Israelites. The encounter between the affective states of Moses and the Jewish people opens the way to the possibility of undermining slavery and constructing a different political reality. The two affective states expressed by the Israelites’ hope for the Promised Land and Moses’ friendship with God re-shape the passive relations of fear of the pharaoh towards the production of novel forms of political being. From the *Ethics*,
we know that hatred, however strong it might be, is always destroyed by love (E. III, prop. XLIII). This suggests a very different mode of intending passions and servitude, which discloses new trajectories towards its possible subversion without deferring to any external force or agency.

It is not Moses that liberates the Israelites, neither God nor the Israelites themselves: instead, it is through the encounter between Moses’ affectivity and that of the Israelites that the exodus can be realised. This encounter, in my reading, structures a collective body, which carries confluences of affects and novel tensions. These, I would argue, create the conditions through which slavery might be destroyed. Strictly speaking, there is always a possibility of overturning hatred and servitude insofar as there are productive tensions, relations and exchanges of meanings, which, in our case are nuanced by the tones of Moses’ love toward his subjects and the Israelites’ desire for the Promised Land. As the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses revealed, these affective tones, crucially, are not merely psychic states, which reside, secretly, within the intimacy of the group of claimants; according to the Ethics, affects and passions, however self-oriented or hetero-directed, are already actions (E. III, Def. III, postul. I, II).

The significance of Spinoza’s philosophical gesture acquires great consistency, particularly in relation to the political event of the exodus. For the Israelites and Moses, what is at the stake is not only the turn from a polytheistic position to a monotheistic one. Rather it is life itself (the attainment of the Promised Land) that is at risk. The arguments of the exodus and servitude move our discussion towards the centre of our conceptual persona. This refers to the condition of the Jewish people within the unexpected state of nature. The analysis of the status of the Subjects of Moses within the state of nature is crucial. This might enable us to discover the genealogy of a community and the ways in which this signifies more complex political beings such as theocracy, anarchy and monarchy.
The community of God

In the natural condition, Spinoza explains, the power of each person corresponds exactly to his right to act (TTP, Chapter XVI: 527). Furthermore, this implies recovering of the conception of the natural condition from its Hobbesian meaning as the domain of cruelty to a boundless territory shaped by desires, power and tensions. Related particularly to the Subjects of Moses, the regained condition is more complex and manifold. This expresses a situation that stands in the middle between existing political reality (the hierarchic system of the pharaoh) and the one to be formed (the state of Israel). As anticipated above, in this phase, the status of the Israelites is an anomalous one. They are not yet subjects of the state of Israel and the followers of Moses’ laws; at the same time, they are no longer the slaves of the pharaoh. They are mixtures of individuated realities, potentialities, affects, passions and desires grounded upon the collective being. Spinoza describes the repossessed state of nature as a boundless territory, where the Hebrews were “at the liberty to sanction any new laws that they pleased or to establish new ordinances, to maintain a state wherever they wished and to occupy any lands they wished” (TTP, chapter V: 439, my italics).

Given the complete absence of external constrictions, the Promised Land connotes an open structure, which is densely populated by desires, potentialities and affects. This confluence of elements expands the collective being of the Subjects of Moses towards further and more problematic stages of political individuation. These stages involve the re-signification of the Israelites within an unknown context, which becomes the ground of further relational movements. Desires play a pivotal role for the re-colonization of the state of nature, re-organising ventures, actions and events. As we have analysed in chapter II, Spinoza defines desire as the very essence of humankind (E.III, Def. Aff. I). He considers desire as a transition, which exceeds the individuated being and continuously exposes him towards moments of individuation within the collective

49 The theme of the anomalous condition of the Jewish people from the exodus to the present has been re-explored by Yovel. Referring to the situation of the Marranos as a split identity, Yovel has highlighted the fragmented condition of the Jewish identity. This psychological state derives from the state in the middle between two cultures and politics, in which he includes Spinoza himself (Yovel, 2009; 1992b).
Following Simondon, we have called this tendency a transindividual force that is contemporaneously individual and yet at the same time more than the individual (Simondon, 2007: 104-111, 156-160).

In our conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses, desire lies at the very basis of the state of nature. It is through the gesture of desiring that Israelites pass from being claimants and refugees to people of a new political body. As a collective (or better: transindividual) force, desire resolves the anomalous condition, in which the Israelites found themselves following the exodus. As mentioned above, they were precisely in the middle between actuality (the status of claimant and slaves) and potentiality (the people of the state of Israel, the nation of God). In the persona of the Subjects of Moses, the state of nature moulded through desires does not only express a condition of potentiality, but also a ground of cogent political activity. As Spinoza says, in the state of nature, natural right corresponds to the power to act (TTP, Chapter XVI: 527). This means that desires already connote actions, movements and relations. What is at stake here is the actualisation of the state of Israel, within which the Subjects of Moses become both the theatre and the actors. The actualisation of the political body comes to light through a pact between the Jewish people and God. In this first pact, they decided to transfer their natural rights collectively to God, electing him as their only ruler. The emergence of the pact raises fundamental themes for the understanding of the anatomy and development of a community as such.

First of all, the pact does not delineate a rupture between the state of nature and the political state. Given the collective alienation of natural right to God, the pact expresses a transitional phase. In the language of the Ethics, this is an expansive movement from a state of lesser perfection to a greater one. Secondly, as a transitional phase, the pact emerges from an act of desire. For this, Spinoza grounds at the very basis of any community—including the Jewish one—different degrees of desire. These are knowledge through primary causes, the acquisition of a habit of virtue, and the enjoyment of a secure and good life (TTP, chapter III: 417). Ultimately, the pact with God is structured through emotive tones. Spinoza stresses the states of fidelity and devotion for the actualisation of the pact. It is through fidelity toward and admiration of Moses, as well as devotion
toward God that a new political individual emerges. Unlike the exodus, the figure of Moses plays a relatively marginal role. In this phase, Moses simply denotes a degree of affectivity, which enriches the movements of the Israelites towards the political.

These elements, I would argue, bring about Spinoza’s innovative paradigm of community, which marks the great difference between Spinoza and his contemporaries. The thread of the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses has disclosed to us that Spinoza considers the creation of the community of God to be grounded on a spontaneous and joyful becoming. The re-colonisation of the state of nature through the occurrence of the pact with God, Spinoza argues, proceeds from a collective gesture of desire (“Without much hesitation”), which crucially does not derive from fear and anger or from an egotistical attitude (TTP, Chapter XVII: 539). In this regard Spinoza describes the phases of the actualisation of the agreement with God as not conditioned by “forcible coercion or fear of threats” (TTP, Chapter XVII: 539). It is in this context that the great modernity of Spinoza’s political thought lies. Spinoza’s conception of the pact opens the way towards re-shaping our awareness of the meaning and origins of society itself. Given the formation of the pact as a transitional and expansive movement nuanced by desires and affectivity, society simply becomes: it is not created by obscure forces and rational choice; rather, societies are processes, carrying various levels of incompatibility, problems and solutions.

To consider society as a process does not imply the return to any form of agency, absolute spirit or God, which would guide and determine human history and practices. In this sense, no one would find in Spinoza’s analysis of the different types of society (the Jewish community, the state of nature, the English commonwealth under Cromwell and monarchy) a linear progression by which humanity becomes increasingly civilised, and within which human beings are

50 “Finding themselves thus placed in this state of nature, they hearkened to Moses, in whom they all placed the greatest confidence, and resolved to transfer the right not to any mortal man, but to God alone”. (TTP, chapter XVII: 539).

51 Concerning Spinoza’s notion of the social contract, Negri suggests that Spinoza in the second foundation of his political thought replaces the idea of the pact with that of consensus (Negri, 1998: 235-355). My interpretation of the foundation of society in the Treatise follows Simondon’s theory. For Simondon, the emergence of society corresponds to phases of individuation structured through emotive exchanges, potentials and preliminary tensions (Simondon, 2007:183).
merely instruments of a higher mind; neither is there a dialectical vision of history and society developed through moments of opposition and reconciliation. Society is instead a non-linear process, which proceeds through expansive movements.

In this light, the structure of every society is fundamentally problematic, affective and collective, which unveils unsuspected phases of individuation, differentiation and transformations. However, the fact that the system follows a non-linear process does not mean that the solution to a precedent problem creates a qualitative change toward the better; rather, transformations, as we will see shortly, predominantly tend to expand the existing structure of the individual, increasing the level of incompatibility. It is for this reason that Spinoza claims in the Ethics that the more grades of reality a thing has, the more perfect it is (E.II, prop. XIV). As I have concluded in chapter II, the perfectibility of an individual resides solely in the progressive complication of its asymmetric structure: its being constantly incompatible with.

By the expression “incompatible with”, I do not intend the ontological and political status of the collective individual as lacking, and nor do I refer to the Marxist notions of contradiction and class struggle, which Negri instead employs in his interpretation of Spinoza’s politics and, more generally, his theory of the power of the multitude (Negri, 1988: 235-253; 2005: 170-208). I also do not mean to refer to Balibar’s definition of the aporetic meaning of the mass in the Treatise (Balibar 1994: 3-37). Instead, and by developing Simondon’s presentation of the individual as something that is both problematic and disparate, my use of the term ‘incompatible with’ pertains to an ontological and already political state of being which is both anomalous and in tension. Incompatibility, advanced here, involves the formation of new forces, desires and potentials, which transform and do not oppose the existing equilibrium. The conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses expresses the complex dynamics of this process and enables us to understand the political and ontological meaning of this form of incompatibility. The creation of the community of God expresses a great improvement over the condition of servitude and the state of nature. However, the political territory reveals considerable problematic moments, which disclose somewhat dramatic aspects of the disparate composition of the Jewish people.
The transfer of natural rights to God gives rise to the re-signification of the Subjects of Moses through the realm of the political, and equally to that of the political through the group of the Israelites. This involves, on the one side, the re-positioning of the collective individual within the political context, within which the Israelites pass from the state of nature to constitute the community of God. On the other, the realm of the political becomes re-populated through relational movements, which bring into the system different modes of thinking time, ethics and language. It is precisely in this context that the status of the Subjects of Moses becomes complex and dramatic. As mentioned, they are in an intermediary location between pre-existing meanings (the condition of slavery under the Egyptian state) and a potential one (the Promised Land). This means that they are not only the ground of desires and potentialities, but also an already individuated reality. In the new political body of the community of God, the status of the Jewish people is twofold: as claimants of the Promised Land, they are a mixture of desires, and devotion towards God and Moses. They are expression of power, tension (devotion is always towards something or someone) and actions. This implies the re-characterisation of the collective individual as a productive force, which re-defines the equilibrium of the system as an enduring theatre of transformations. The Subjects of Moses, in this stage, constitute a form of invasive and intensive power, which can be partially predetermined and controlled.

Moses hence invokes God’s help for the obstinacy of his people. The Israelites, Spinoza observes through Moses’ plea, are essentially an obstinate and passionate group, which can hardly be dominated and defeated.\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, Spinoza himself (through Seneca’s discourses) points out the impossibility of fully restraining passions and desires of the mass (TTP, Chapter V: 438, and the same quotation recurs in chapter XVI: 530). From the Roman Empire onwards, Spinoza comments, any attempt to restrain the mass and impose resistance upon it

\textsuperscript{52} “The fact is that when Moses realised the character and obstinate spirit of his nation, he saw clearly that they could not accomplish their undertaking without mighty miracles and the special external help of God, and must assuredly perish without such help; and he besought this special help of God so that it would be evident that God willed them to be saved. For he speaks […]”“If now I have found favour in their sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people”” (TTP, Chapter III: 422).
has been vain, damaging the political system itself. Given the impossible effacement of passions and desires, thus, the political body can only accustom itself to the affective dynamics of the group. For this, Moses gives voice to the collective forces and desires of his community. In order to modulate and not to dominate, rules, ceremonies and sacrifices are instituted (TTP, Chapters III, XVII). Obedience and gift come to re-configure the realm of the political, within which the collective individual is the ground of transformations.

As anticipated earlier, desire expresses a productive power, which calls for structural changes in time, relations and society itself. In this way, the establishment of rituals and sacrifices goes far beyond moral religious habits, re-shaping modes of counting and perceiving time. In the realm of the Subjects of Moses, rituals invade every singular moment of the life of the community. The affects of devotion, wonder, piety and hope structure time through gestures of remembrance and expectation. Rituals and sacrifices arise from the expansive force of the Subjects of Moses, through which the entire political body re-situates itself within the realm of the collective individual. Religious festivals, for example, express some of the way in which the invasive and joyful force of affects exposes and further complicates the equilibrium of the political society of God. Certainly, Spinoza claims that these ceremonies are instrumental for reinforcing people’s obedience. However, religious rules become a common habit of both the ruler and the subjects to the point that the political body becomes a theocracy (TTP, Chapter V: 439-440; Chapter XVII: 540).

As mentioned, in his plea Moses asks for a gift from God. In order to give voice to the unavoidable force of his subjects, in my analysis, Moses demands a recompense for the past servitudes of his people. In other words, as claimants, the Israelites are still waiting for the gift, the Promised Land. In turn, Moses communicates to them that they are, first amongst other nations, the elected nation of God. The gift brings about a further mode of conceptualising time. This becomes recounted through the affective tones expressed by the gratitude and expectation of God (TTP, Chapter III). These elements therefore bring to light how desires, passions and affects have a concrete impact upon the boundaries of the political. The desires of the Jewish claimants, I would argue, individuate and
transform the community of God from a form of democracy (the first pact with God), through theocracy and monarchy (from the second pact with Moses onwards) to its collapse.

*The collapse of the Jewish Nation*

These arguments about the gift and the divine vocation of the Hebrews move our enquiry directly to the second aspect of the Subjects of Moses. As mentioned, they are in the middle between the status of claimant and that of slaves to the pharaoh. In our conceptual persona this opens up directly to the dramatic phase of the messianic vision of politics and the return to servitude. Although the Israelites have left Egypt and founded their own state, nevertheless, Spinoza observes, they have so long been habituated to the condition of slavery that the structure of the political body still echoes the hierarchic order embodied by the pharaoh (TTP, Chapter V: 439). For this, they collectively elect Moses as the representative of God’s will on earth, instituting theocracy and then monarchy (TTP, chapter V: 439-440; Chapter XVII: 540-552). This phase becomes crucial in the conceptual-affective persona of the Subjects of Moses. It is through the stipulation of the second pact with Moses that the messianic mode of structuring time and relations comes to light. Spinoza describes the occurrence of the pact with Moses as deriving from the astonishment of the Hebrews following the encounter with God. He observes,

But on this first appearance before God they were so terrified and so thunderstruck at hearing God speak that they thought their last hour had come. So, overwhelmed with fear they went to Moses again, saying, “Behold, we have heard God speaking in the midst of the fire; now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will surely consume us; […]. Go thou near therefore, and hear all that our God shall say. And speak thou (not God) to us.” (TTP, chapter XVII: 540, my italics).

In the first part of the extract quoted above, Spinoza uses very suggestive expressions to explain the affective state of the Jewish people in relation to God. Expressions as “terrified” and “thunderstruck” connote the impasse of the Jewish
people in understanding the voice of God. They recognise God as Otherness. Similar to the state of the prophet in the persona of the Devotees of the prophet, the vision of God as Otherness involves the fear of death (“why should we die?”) and the search for eternity and forgiveness. Whilst the drama of the prophet derives from the absence of the collective ground, here the Subjects of Moses are already in a collective condition. They are the political community of God following the first pact. Therefore, the question arises as to why they are so “overwhelmed” by the fear of death. Simondon’s conception of anguish might shed light on this critical moment within the conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses. If we take into account the different philosophical grounds upon which Simondon focuses his analysis of anguish (psychic individuation), his reading can be seen to offer alternative answers for understanding the problematic status of the Jewish people within the political scene.

For Simondon, the psychic state of anguish arises from the relation between the pre-individual and the disparate being in the progressive disappearance of the collective field. The disparate being comes to experience the pre-individual force as greater than the individual. The individual begins by signifying himself as an ephemeral and meaningless entity in opposition to the all-inclusive power of the pre-individual realm. This moves the disparate being towards a progressive withdrawal from the collective ground, experienced as redundant. In solitude the individual recognises his fragility, which causes his exclusion from the process of actualisation and differentiation. In other words, the ‘anguished’ being ceases to actualise himself within and through the dynamics of the collective ground, giving rise to a process of displacement between meaning and time.

Simondon explains that what appeared before as closer is now experienced as distant and disconnected from reality; by the same token, what was perceived as distant now becomes closer and disorienting (Simondon, 2007: 111-114). The present becomes spoiled of all its actualising forces and replaced by the thought of the past and future. As Simondon says, anguish corresponds to the dramatic moment, in which the individual being is enfolded in himself. Dissociated from the collective ground, the disparate individual ceases to constitute the theatre and
actor of the process of individuation, entailing the loss of crucial moments of transformation, actualisation and complication. Therefore, Simondon concludes, anguish brings about the gradual disappearance of the individual as such (Simondon, 2007: 113-114).

Certainly this account of anguish greatly exceeds the astonishment of the Israelites in relation to God. However, Simondon’s arguments might unveil some dormant themes within the overwhelmed Jewish community. Given Spinoza’s attention to the emotive origins of the second pact, and also the collective context from which that pact emerges, an analysis of the emotive status of the Israelites in the light of Simondon acquires great consistency. Before venturing into the realm of God, the Jewish people were already a political individual. They collectively stipulated an initial pact with God, assuming the status of the nation of God. Considering themselves alone the people of God, they believed that his power and not their actions could save and protect from possible risks (TTP, Chapter XVII: 540). It is precisely in this moment that the state of anguish emerges gradually within the Subjects of Moses.

In order to understand the mechanisms of anguish and its political implications, we need to look back at some fundamental propositions within the *Ethics*. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that thinking is on a par with acting, and also that the perfection of a body (its grade of reality) is sized upon its degree of complexity (E. II, prop.VII, XIV, prop. XXXIX). For Spinoza the complexity of a body depends upon the capacity of being affected, and the capacity to affect other individuals in turn (E. II, postul. I, III, IV). As we have analysed in chapter II, the capacity of being affected refers to a more problematic process of collective and psychic individuation through which affective exchanges transform the equilibrium of the individual within a collective ground.

In the conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses, the first pact with God and the following encounter give rise to a mechanism through which the individual begins by regressing towards an unchangeable position. The fidelity of the Jewish people to the external aid of God involves the suspension of any productive forces and tensions, which instead have characterised the states of the claimant and refugee. Therefore, the Jewish people’s abstinence from acting and
thinking precludes the possibility of signifying and being signified within the process of individuation. As a consequence, I would argue, the community of God is brought towards a progressive stabilisation, which involves a break with the crucial phases of transformation, actualisation and differentiation. This involves the re-shaping of the realm of the political being, which becomes not a place of affective relations and productive forces, but a linear and motionless system.

If desire and affects previously exposed the collective ground of the claimant to intensive changes and new meanings, thereby complicating it, these factors are now folded within a static body of rules, regulations and the moral norms of punishment and recompense. In particular, devotion and wonder pass from constituting relational movements and tensions to simply denoting a set of God’s laws and commands. Significantly, the affect of piety, Spinoza observes, as a source of relations, becomes redefined as justice; incompatibilities and differences are refigured as injustice and crime (TTP, Chapter XVII: 540). In other words, the collective body of the Subjects of Moses regresses to an inoperative position, implying the estrangement of the individual from time, becoming and affectivity. As in Simondonian anguish, this causes the disjuncture between time and meaning, for which the other nations become distant and viewed as enemies of God. In this light, notions of cruelty, exclusion, invasion, rivalry and jealousy come to re-signify the community of God, upon which the divine vocation of the Hebrew relies.53

The productive flows of time moulded by festive rituals and sacrifices revert to a linear and repetitive remembering of the past adventures of the exodus, servitude and the regained state of nature. God becomes dramatically closer and recognised as the Other, who scrupulously oversees the actions and thoughts of the Subjects of Moses. The all-embracing presence of God brings about the emergence of the fear of death and the hope for salvation. It is in this moment, I would argue that the conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses enter the

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53 “As to their continued existence for many years when scattered and stateless, this is no way surprising, since they have separated themselves from other nations to such a degree as to incur the hatred of all, and this is not only through external rites alien to the rites of other nations but also through the mark of circumcision, which they most religiously observe. That they are preserved largely through the hatred of other nations is demonstrated by historical fact” (TTP, Chapter III: 425).
threshold of Simondonian anguish. Spinoza’s description of the astonishment of the Jewish people in hearing the voice of God, I think, goes far beyond the passions of fear and anger and the status of ignorance of the Hebrews. For the sudden feeling of fear and the certainty of death, this encounter between the Subjects of Moses and God is the result of a more complex mechanism of exclusion from the collective process of individuation, which gives rise to the emergence of a state of anguish. It is through this state of anguish that a messianic vision of politics and, more generally, of the world comes to light.

As we have seen, Simondon explains that the condition of anguish bounds the individual within two coordinates of time – the past and the future – which can never be actualised insofar as the collective ground is excluded. The Jewish form of messianism derives from the regressive movements of exclusion, stabilisation and remembrance. This folds the realm of the individual within a never-actualised present, casting the Subjects of Moses in a gap between past and future. In this gap, the past events of the exodus and the Promised Land become materialised through the repetitive movements of ceremony and sacrifice, and the potentialities of the future are narrowed to the time of the expectation of the Messiah to come. Given the refrain of the Israelites from actions and thoughts, the productive flows of time are re-defined as a linear sequence of events. This re-configuration of time has a strong impact on the political body.

The messianic vision of the world and time brings about the return of the Subjects of Moses to a state of servitude towards the Messiah, Moses, and his heirs.

Taking these themes into account, we might now raise some conclusions. The conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses reveals the centrality of the collective ground for the complete development of the relational function of affects, passions and desire, without which the transformations of the political body are entirely lost. As we have seen with the phases of claimants and anguish,

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54 Agamben proposes an alternative reading of the messianic structure of time. Discussing the form of messianianism in the figure of Saint Paul, Agamben claims that the constitution of messianiac time is not that of a time of expectation. Instead, he claims that it is in fact the time of the present, in which he includes the kairotic moment, the ‘right moment’, (Agamben, 2005a: 59-87).

55 “The people [the Jews under Moses] could do nothing without being required at the same time to remember the law and to follow its commands, which were dependent solely on ruler’s will. […] they had to have certain signs on their doorposts, on their hands and between the eyes, to give them constant reminder of the duty of obedience” (TTP, Chapter V: 440).
the collective process of individuation calls into question crucial elements such as time, humankind and society, whilst affective and relational movements re-shape the realm of the political being. Therefore, the Subjects of Moses present a different understanding of affects and passions, disclosing their relational and productive power. This vision of affectivity introduces, in my view, a new awareness of the political meaning of the affects within contemporary Spinozist studies, opening up towards a different consideration of the relation between Spinoza’s ontology and politics, the *Ethics* and the TTP.

The themes of the productive force of affects become crucial in the second part of the Treatise, the *pars construens*. In this section, Spinoza advances a conception of religion that presents it as the expression of love and joy. For Spinoza, these affects are instrumental in the realisation of democracy. The originality of Spinoza’s philosophy lies in his *politicisation* of joy and love, which have been traditionally restrained within the psychological, ethical and religious domains. In this light, the apostles and Christ express the productive political meaning of affectivity, through which the actualisation and transformation of the collective ground of the political are developed still further. I will now move to a consideration of these themes.

5. The Apostles

In the *Theological-Political Treatise* the exegesis of the New Testament occupies a very central role. This constitutes the passage from the *pars destruens* to the *pars construens* of the text, which prepares the terrain for the political section on the fundamentals of the democratic society. Proceeding from the deconstruction of the ideological apparatus of theology, Spinoza examines the real object of religion throughout the stories of the early Church, which refer to the Acts of the Apostles. Given the non-divine and non-scientific account of the doctrine of the Old Testament, Spinoza examines the aims and implications of the precepts of the Catholic doctrine. Assuming that the dogma of faith is not concerned with the attainment of any extraordinary faculty and reality, and also that it does not imply the improvement of philosophical knowledge, Spinoza first
questions what notions remain to be used from the theoretical nucleus of religion, and secondly what categories (if any) might be qualified as being properly religious. In order to address these questions, Spinoza looks back at the lives and speeches of the apostles as fundamental expressions of an authentic doctrine of faith, to which both the organised church and state should pay closer attention. He finds in the doctrine of the apostles, structured through teachings, dialogue, and encounters with people of different cultures and nations, the expression of the key tenets of Catholicism. These tenets are based on an exercise of love, piety and devotion, which are the ground of the Catholic paradigm of universalism.

Proceeding with the analysis of the historical figures of the apostles, Spinoza’s enquiry is focused, on the one hand, on a reinstatement of the independence of philosophy from religion; on the other, the re-affirmation of the genuine concepts of the early Church, such as joy, love, piety and devotion that have been corrupted by the ambition and ignorance of political and theological authorities. Spinoza does not reject the value of religion as such. He neither contrasts religious principles with ontological notions, nor replaces religion with philosophy. For him, there is a form of epistemic rupture between the object of faith and that of philosophy (TTP, Chapter XV: 523). Spinoza demonstrates the true object of faith through religion itself, showing its original message through the exegesis of the holy texts and the example of the apostles (Balibar, 1998: 5-9).

As analysed earlier, Spinoza’s critique aims to invalidate the alleged philosophical authority of the church, and the mystification of the religious principles, upon which superstition, ignorance and servitude have been constructed. The speeches, writings and the mission of the apostles represent the true object and aim of the Catholic religion, which together disclose a practise of joy and love. For Spinoza, the authentic message of religion is based on ethical norms, consisting of affects such as joy, love, devotion and piety (Spinoza’s notion of the *credo minimum*). This involves re-positioning religion within society rather than suppressing it, so that it may become an important instrument of social cohesion. Whilst Spinoza considers religion to be an important element of social cohesion, this does not alter his position vis-à-vis the claims made by Machiavelli and Hobbes. For Spinoza, religion is a part of a more complex process, which
exceeds Machiavelli’s definition of faith as *instrumentum regni*; and Hobbes’s divide between the official credo professed by the state and the private beliefs of the subjects allowed under the “silence of the law”. For Spinoza, religion is important insofar as joy, love, piety and devotion found its messages (TTP, chapter XIV: 515). The social function of faith is not simply a device of the state; it is located, instead, in the body politic, passing from the political authority to the community and vice versa.

Given the assumption of the authenticity of religion as an exercise of the affects of love, joy, piety and devotion, many questions arise. Firstly, assuming the impossibility of the suppression of faith from society, the problem of the place given to religion within the political domain emerges. Secondly, what paradigm of society arises from Spinoza’s idea of religion as joy and love? Thirdly, assuming the figures of the apostles to be the embodiment of true religion, how did their message impact effectively on the communities that they visited? In Continental Spinozist studies, these questions have generated a fruitful debate. Spinozist scholars, generally, are inclined to view Spinoza’s conception of the “credo minimum” as the reduction of the ideological apparatus of the Church to simple (minimum) ethical norms and practices, which further encourage people’s commitment towards the civil society. Thinkers such as Matheron (1988), Balibar (1998), Strauss (1997), Deleuze (1992), Negri (1998) and Giancotti (1995) share the conviction that the very role of the figures of the apostles within the Treatise derives from a precise political strategy.

This involves, on the one side, the political emancipation of the masses from the obscurantist policies of states and churches. Spinoza’s move, in this respect, is intended to foster the replacement of moral concepts and rules as evil, truth, punishment and gift with an ethical habit of joy and love. On the other hand,

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56 I am aware of the dispute among scholars concerning the relation between religion and the state in Machiavelli’s thought; and also, the differences between the *Prince* (1532) and the *Discourses* (initiated in 1513 and concluded between the 1517-18). My reference to Machiavelli, in this context, has the sole purpose of showing the difference in approach to the problem of religion that can be found between Machiavelli and Spinoza, see Del Lucchese (2009b).

57 Although Hobbes agrees with Spinoza on the non scientific and philosophical value of religion, in the body of laws of the *Leviathan* (1651) religion and certain forms of freedom are allowed insofar as these are not formally prohibited by the state. For the stability and unity of the government, it is better that subjects in the public sphere follow the official religion of the state, whereas in their private life they can profess a different faith, Hobbes (1998: 139-160).
these writers argue, Spinoza’s definition of the apostolic mission as the development of the affects of joy, love and piety within a community expresses his awareness of the social function of religion, when it is purified from its metaphysical framework. In this light, the implications of the teachings of the apostles concern the improvement of cooperative actions, through which individuals recognise themselves as constitutive parts of the body politic. As joy and love are active affects, the development of an ethical habit through these affects structures the social relations, mutual needs and, more generally, commonalities, upon which the progress of society relies.

Taking these interpretations into consideration, I think Spinoza’s engagement with the figures of the apostles unveils a more complex process that founds and greatly exceeds ethical praxis. Certainly, the aim of Spinoza’s exegesis of the Acts of the Apostles is the description of how the pursuit of positive affects within a political context gives rise to practices of sharing, commitment and participation. Beside these ethical and political implications underlined by continental thinkers, a multifaceted notion of the role of the positive affects emerges from Spinoza’s arguments, which require further consideration. This refers to the status of joy and love not only as ethical habits but also as productive forces, which bring concepts such as time, relations and life into the political. I argue here that the political meaning of the active affects does not, or does not only reside in the formation of an ethics of mutual love and support within a given society. Rather, they should be thought as generative sources of relational movements, which transform the entire political equilibrium, and not solely an already formed community. By this, I mean that affectivity discloses a process of individuation that signifies the domain of the political. Taking into account these prerequisites, I shall now move on to discuss these issues in further detail.
5.1 “The Good News”: Life

Compared to his analysis of the stories of the Old Testament, Spinoza’s study of the Acts of the Apostles is not amply developed. Certainly, references to the discourses of the apostles, and particularly to the Pauline doctrine, can be found throughout the entire Treatise, yet they are not fully developed as with the history of the Jewish people. Although the apostles embody the true religion, strikingly, in the Treatise Spinoza dedicates no more than one chapter to the specific description of the apostolic doctrine. In this chapter Spinoza offers a concise but extremely meaningful account of the mission of the apostles towards society, within which a dynamic conception of religion is proposed. In chapter XI of the apostles, at the very beginning, Spinoza draws a line between the status of the apostles on the one hand, and Moses and the prophets on the other (TTP, Chapter XI: 499). If the protagonist of the Old Testament was Moses, the storyteller of the *images* of God, the protagonist of the New Testament is the apostle, who divulges the *life* of Christ. These aspects delineate two different modes of knowing and experiencing nature and God. The knowledge of the prophet, Spinoza explains, is structured through images, visions, signs and revelations, which are grounded in the domain of imagination (TTP Chapters I, II, and VI). These are nuanced by various and different affective tones, which run from fear, devotion, anger and hope to wonder.

The knowledge of the apostles differs profoundly from that of Moses and, more generally, from that of the prophets of the tradition of the Old Testament. The apostles, Spinoza affirms, are the expression of the new religious formula, which establishes a different relation with God, nature and humankind. The Catholic faith is based on the life and precepts of Christ, who recovers the notions of love, piety, devotion and joy from the domain of Mosaic commandments to general suggestions and admonitions. These simply delineate a mode of living. As simple and general styles of life, the precepts of Christ pass from being an exclusive gift of the Jewish nation to universal (Catholic) recommendations for pursuing a better life, which can easily be followed by every human being regardless of nation, culture and language (TTP, Chapter XI: 501). Thus, the idea
of God as legislator and judge of human actions is replaced by the role of Christ as teacher and friend. The encounter with Christ leads the apostles to re-situate themselves directly within the world, without passing through an initial relation of fear with the obscure power of God. This involves the conversion of the fear of death and hope for salvation into love and piety for humankind.

The brevity of this portrait of the apostles renders an analysis of Spinoza’s view of these figures and of their effective role within a political context very difficult, and yet its significance also makes such an analysis crucial. If the objective of both the prophecy and the Mosaic laws is the development of obedience, the epistles of the apostles aim at obedience too. Two questions arise: what is the distinctive strategy of the apostolic message, and how does this effectively contrast with prophecy? What are the political stakes, not only of the doctrine of the apostles itself, but also of the form in which these arguments are realised? In order to investigate these issues it becomes imperative to employ, once again, the strategy of identifying conceptual personae. Through such an alternative approach these questions might, perhaps, find a response. Therefore, and as above in relation to the *pars destruens* of the Treatise, I extrapolate in what follows from Spinoza’s analysis of the biblical figures of the apostles all the affective tones and events that characterise their statuses and gestures, and from these abstractions I construct the affective-conceptual personae of the Apostles.

As with the persona of the Subjects of Moses encountered before, the Apostles emerge and are situated within an affective plane, which is a terrain of political and ontological individuation. In this sense, the affective anatomy of both the Subjects of Moses and the Apostles delineate a path of actualisation of the ‘common’. Differently from the Devotees of the prophet, both personae are already a collective individual, through which complex political subjectivities come to light. What distinguishes the Apostles from the Subjects of Moses, we will see below, is their affective tones, which develop and are developed from different confluences of affects. It is important to note that this difference is not

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58 “For Christ was not sent to preserve the state and to institute laws, but only to teach the universal law. Hence, we can readily understand that Christ by no means abrogated the law of Moses, for it was not Christ’s purpose to introduce new laws into the commonwealth, His chief concern was to teach moral doctrines, keeping them distinct from the laws of the commonwealth” (TTP, Chapter V: 436).
intended to suggest, however implicitly, Spinoza’s support for Catholicism and his rejection of Jewish religion. A discussion around these arguments is beyond the scope of the present chapter. As indicated earlier, attention is given here to affectivity, and to the ways in which different confluences of affects embodied by the affective-conceptual personae generate crucial political actions.

In the conceptual-affective persona of the Apostles, Spinoza’s divide between the knowledge of the prophets and the apostles, and also the Catholic formula of universal love are the fundamental conditions around which the political body of the Apostles is constructed. Love and piety, as we will see, structure a relational process, which re-configures the realm of the Apostles towards new modes of actualising the political. The persona of the Apostles brings about the discovery of multiple meanings that emerge through and within the political context. These involve understanding the political as generative of relations, time, tensions and forces that greatly exceed, and which do not oppose the notions of state, law, justice and equality. The claim that I will make through this conceptual persona is that Spinoza’s definition of the apostolic mission as love and piety opens the way towards re-shaping the meaning of the political, whilst including within the latter's domain unsuspected notions such as desire, love, becoming and time. These crucially express life.  

_Pilgrims, doctors and communities_

Spinoza describes the apostles as teachers, messengers and pilgrims of the “Good News”. These multiple functions bring to light the manifold status of the Apostles within the political body. Like the Subjects of Moses, the persona of the Apostles is already folded within an established political domain, i.e. the state of Israel. As we have seen with the Israelites before and after the exodus, the apostles are the group of the disciples of Christ and the Jewish tradition. They are not only apostles collectively, but also they experience the life of Christ as a

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59 Concerning the theme of the _politicisation_ of the concept of life, or better the widening of the definition of the political to physics and, to some extent, biology, there has been a flourishing literature recently, inaugurated by the works of Foucault (1998, vol.1). For the purpose of this work, the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (2004a; 2004b), Simondon (2007), Hardt and Negri (2006; Negri,2005), and Agamben (2000; 1998) have been particularly influential.
This means that the realm of the Apostles is a political and collective individual formed of individuated reality (the Mosaic laws, system of rituals, sacrifices, Jewish history) and forming one specific reality (the presence of Christ).

Importantly, and unlike the Subjects of Moses, they do not pass progressively from being disciples, teachers, messengers and pilgrims as the Israelites did from the phase of servitude, through the state of nature, to subjects. By contrast, the apostles are teachers, messengers, pilgrims and disciples contemporaneously. Spinoza remarks, on many occasions, that their peculiarity concerns the fulfilment of all these roles, for which the apostles differ from the prophets of the Old Testament (TTP, chapters XI, XIII, XIV, and XV). This indicates, on the one side, that the anatomy of the Apostles is consistently more complex and diversified than the previous conceptual personae examined, revealing a structure traversed by a higher degrees of relational movements and a variety of forces. On the other, this multi-sided constitution portrays the body of the Apostles as an open system, within and through which a never-ending process of actualisation and transformation takes a place.

These elements, in my view, lead us to conceive the apostles as fundamentally a collective and problematic individual, which is the ground of powerful exchanges of meanings and actions. The roles of pilgrim, teacher, disciple and messenger create not only a relational status; they also function to maintain the equilibrium of our conceptual persona in an enduring condition of exposure toward the multiplicity of the world. These roles, firstly, presuppose a community or, at very least, other disciples. Secondly, they imply a movement toward something or someone, which is the owner of further meanings and demands in turn. It is in this context that the collective individual of the Apostles becomes an element within and the place of the production of the political, within which positive affects acquire a pivotal role. The multiform dimension of the Apostles throws light upon a range of affective states, which actualise the

60 Concerning the collective formation and development of the apostles, there are many places in the New Testament, showing this collective condition. Overall, I think that the image of the “Last supper” offers a quite illuminating example; see for example Saint Paul, Epistle to the Corinthians 11:23-26, to which certainly Spinoza pays attention.
collective individual. Differently from the persona of the Subjects of Moses, which is traversed by positive and passive affects alternatively, the persona of the Apostles is, instead, nuanced predominantly by the active affects of piety, love, joy and wonder. In the case of the Apostles, the affect of wonder is not addressed to an obscure God but rather to nature itself, embodied by the life of Christ. These affects shape the body of the Apostles as an open structure, which is traversed intensively by relational and affective movements.

Love and piety: The actualisation of the present and the potency of action

In chapter II, I argued through Simondonian logic that in the Ethics the realm of the individual is moulded through affects, desire, conatus (forces), common notions, movements of speed and slowness, and grades of intensity (hard and fluid bodies). These are constitutive elements for further developing the collective process of individuation, which is psychic and, we will analyse below, already political. In our conceptual persona of the Apostles, these elements set forth the actualisation and differentiation of a novel political being. It is in this context that love becomes a powerful source of political transformation, through which life enfolds the political and vice versa.

As in the states of claimants of the Subjects of Moses, the affects of love and piety operate as expansive and productive forces, through which different forms of time, relations and meanings come to light. In the persona of the Apostle, the encounter with Christ in his actuality re-positions the apostles within the world, exposing their naturale iuditium (natural understanding) towards the production of new modes of structuring the present, actions, meanings and commonalities. Following Spinoza’s arguments, it is from the simple human (natural) understanding that the Epistles of the apostles derive, each of which expresses a different mode of thinking the life of Christ (TTP, Chapter XI: 500). Furthermore, the differences and disagreements between apostles, which have caused varied controversies within the Catholic Church, are the results of this productive force of the lumen naturalis shaped by love and piety (TTP, chapter XI: 503).
In the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains that the positive affects of joy and love give rise to a transition from a condition of lesser perfection to a greater one, through which the power of acting, existing and thinking (*conatus*) of individuals is increased and further developed (E. III, postulate I, prop. XI; schol., Def. II, VI). Related particularly to singular beings, the increase of the level of perfection indicates that individuals are formed of a great number of elements such as bodies, potentials and thoughts, which intensify the power of mind and body (E. II, postulates I, III, IV; prop. XIV, prop. XXXVII, corollary). Perfection determines the level of complexity of the individual beings. In this sense, positive affects are fundamental conditions, which transform individuals (E. III, prop. XV). From studying the “geometry of the affects” through Simondon’s ontology of individuation in chapter II, we have discovered that Spinoza’s conception of joy and love as transitional phases unveils a more complex process, which greatly exceeds ethical and psychological habits. These latter are located in the middle of the collective field or, to use Simondon's terms, active affects are *transversal* to both beings and the collective field.

Given the assumption of these affects as important instruments for the increase of the level of perfection, this means that joy and love re-actualise and re-signify the entire equilibrium of individuals. In this light, joy and love become recognised as powerful sources of intensive and relational movements, which individualise individuals within the collective context, advancing the process of individuation. This view of affects as productive forces impacts effectively on the existing system, setting forth concrete actions, ideas, and, more generally, collective beings. The role of joy and love acquires great consistency within the political context of the Treatise, specifically through the affective tones of the apostles. These re-organise the equilibrium of the political body throughout the emergence of more complex flows of time, incompatibilities and relational individuals.

Returning to the affective-persona of the Apostles, if in the Subjects of Moses the becoming of time suddenly collapses in the gap between the past of exodus and the future of the arrival of the Messiah (the state of anguish), in the Apostles past and future take only the coordinate of the present. The present
becomes an enduring process of actualisation of the future and the past. The apostles that Spinoza refers to are disciples of Christ. This means that they do not wait for the advent of the Messiah: rather, they enter into relations with the materiality of Christ, and engage with his life (TTP, Chapter XI: 499). As life, Christ abandons all the divine properties of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience by taking the form of pure materiality. Christ becomes a body, expressing the abundance and potentialities of the material world. As we have seen, Spinoza gives full rights to the status of the body as an unavoidable element of transformations, relations and actions. This conception leads Spinoza to consider the body a fundamental condition for the constitution of time. In the Ethics, Spinoza states that it is solely through the existence of the body that various modes of organising time come to light. To be more precise, it is through the plenitude of the actuality of the body that our awareness of time emerges. Thus, the actuality of the world, I argue, is the only condition through which the past and future can be thought.

As a body, consequently, the presence of Christ becomes crucial within the development of the conceptual persona of the Apostles. The corporeality of Christ re-configures the notion of time, through which the mode of the present becomes the only source and condition for the flow of the past and for the realisation of the future. Put differently: it is through the actuality of Christ that the present does not mirror the events of the past; neither is it a mere consequence of previous gestures. By the same token, the constitution of the present is not a place within which the future can be prepared or simply expected. The materiality of Christ reinstates the importance of the present, which acquires the pivotal role of producing the past and actualising the possibilities of the future.

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61 The theme of the notion of the present as the form of actualisation and differentiation of the individuals is central in Simondon’s process of the collective and psychic individuation, to which I refer. For Simondon, the role of collective process of individuation concerns the re-signification of past and future within the domain of the present (Simondon 2007: 97-132, 175-214).

62 “The mind can exercise neither imagination nor memory save while the body endures” and in the proof: “It is only while the body endures that the mind expresses the actual existence of its body and conceives the affections of the body as actual […]. Consequently […], it does not conceive any body as actually existing save while its own body endures. Therefore […], it cannot exercise either imagination or memory save while the body endures […].” (E. V, prop. XXI and proof; [my Italics]).

63 Concerning the theme of the incarnation of Christ as the expression of the richness of the material world, see Hardt (2002: 77-84).
Christ's gesture of *indignation* for the vain Hebrew rituals, followed by the commitment of the apostles to the re-foundation of the community of God, greatly exemplifies the path of the present.\(^6\) In the persona of the Apostles, this implies the replacement of both the messianic time and the motionless remembrance of the glorious gestures of the Old Testament with the richness of the expressions of the present. This actualisation of past and future within the becoming of the present leads directly to the production of actions developed through relational movements; exchanges of individuated meanings and potentials. It is precisely in this moment that the affective tones of the persona of the Apostles re-populate and complicate the political.

As we have seen with the figure of Moses, what is at stake here is not solely the re-founding the temple of God, returning the Church to its origins. It is the affirmation and the realisation of the “Good News”. For as the meaning of the term “News” suggests, good news should indicate qualitative changes and certainly not a return. The power of the apostolic message, Spinoza tenaciously reminds us, resides in its open structure, upon which the Catholic paradigm of universalism is founded and developed. For this open structure, the revealing of the “Good News” goes far beyond the simple re-organisation of religious rules within a given political context. The potency of the “Good News”, as we will see, concerns, on the one hand, the destabilisation of the existing political orders as the state of Israel or the Roman Empire; on the other, this sets forth different actions, thoughts and tensions, which prepare the terrain for the constitution of the community of God (the universal Catholic Church).

In this fashion, the tension encapsulated by the “Good News” opens the collective body of the Apostles towards complex modes of actualising and individuating the life of Christ. Importantly, these are not only different ways of narrating the precepts of Christ; instead, they re-signify the structure of every political being encountered by the apostles, re-configuring religious communities, laws, human relations and states. For this open structure of the “Good News”, Saint Paul, for example, considers work irrelevant for the attainment of the faith,

\(^6\) For the indignation of Christ, I refer to his visit of the temple in Jerusalem and his *whip* in seeing the moneychangers, as reported in Mathew 21-26. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines indignation as “hatred toward one who has injured another” (E. III, Def. Aff. XX).
whereas for James only actions qualify a catholic observant (TTP, Chapter XI: 503). These two modes of defining faith have direct effects on the societies visited by each apostle, which generate diverse ethical practises, relations, ecclesial groups and conflicts (TTP, Chapter XI: 503). Given this notion of the “Good News” as a mixture of force and intensity, many questions arise. Firstly, what truly are the contents of the “Good News”? Secondly, to what extent might this re-shape the boundaries of the political?

Following Spinoza’s arguments, I would argue, the message of the “Good News” does not contain metaphysical notions and obscure truths, but instead, the life of Christ as it is, (TTP, chapters XI, XIV). As reported in the Epistles of the apostles, the story of the life and teachings of Christ simply concerns the praxis of universal love, that is, an unlimited loving kindness towards others. As anticipated, Spinoza attributes to the affect of love a very fundamental role. The theme of love occupies the entire thread of the Ethics from the third and fourth to the fifth part, where it becomes recognised as an ontological political function.

Accordingly, love is viewed as an expansive force, which individualises and further develops human desires. This force augmented by love is formed through a degree of intensity that is always greater than any disruptive tendencies, such as hatred (E. III, Def. Aff. VI, prop. XLIII, XLIV). As productive sources of movements and transformations, this embraces the entire system of production of nature-God, re-populating that system with meanings, forces and movements. It is the potency of love that lies at the very basis of the whole system of production of the Ethics. It is the mechanism that governs, produces and individualises the domain of nature, which is defined in the final part of the Ethics as the intellectual love of God (the third kind of knowledge).65 The intellectual love of God is

65 Deleuze gives a very suggestive account of Spinoza’s conception of the intellectual love of God or Beatitude. For Deleuze, Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge concerns the complete actualisation of the plane of immanence initiated in part I of the Ethics, which becomes re-populated with novel forms of multiplicities such as desires, bodies, affects and, more generally, heterogeneity (Deleuze, 1992: 289-320). In successive works, Deleuze will further develop this idea of the intellectual love of God, describing this as the plane of consistency, that is, pure desire-machine (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b:170-184). Differently, Negri and Balibar, among others, read the third genre of knowledge directly connected with the two the political treatises, underlining the political implications of Spinoza’s notion of the intellectual love of God. Negri, for example, argued that parts IV and V of the Ethics together with the Political Treatise constitute the mature foundation of Spinoza’s form of materialism, upon which the political theory of the power of the multitude is grounded and developed (Negri, 1998: 193-285, 296-342).
twofold. On the one side, it refers to the mode in which the process of individuation of humankind proceeds through phases of actualisation and differentiation. On the other, it expresses the love of God towards the world, which simply is the life of nature (E. V, prop. XXXVI, corollary).

Without venturing into the vicissitudes of the third kind of knowledge, for the purpose of this work we need only to draw attention to the political implications of Spinoza’s notion of love as a productive force, which emerges from the Ethics and becomes a political category within the pars contruens of the Treatise. In the conceptual persona of the Apostles, this vision of love as force becomes crucial. It is through love enfolded within the “Good News” that the apostles act politically, advancing the process of individuation. As mentioned before, the message of the “Good News” refers to the notion of life, specifically the life of Christ. We have seen that the corporeality of Christ re-founds the conception of the present as the locus of the actualisation of the past and future. This exposure of Christ to the abundance of the world, Spinoza tells us, is shaped by love and piety toward humankind.

The life of Christ is the actualisation of the affect of love, which gives rise to the political actions and thoughts of the apostles. It is in this moment that the notion of life as the actualisation of love enters the threshold of the political, redrawing its boundaries in turn. The great modernity of Spinoza’s political move can be found here. From the pars destruens to the pars contruens of the Treatise, Spinoza only refers to the life of Christ politically without mentioning his crucifixion and resurrection. For this, Spinoza discusses the political stakes of Christ through the latter’s performance of actions and teachings that are formed by love and piety. In this light, the life of Christ discloses the political effects of the notion of love, which exposes and complicates the realm of our conceptual persona towards further transformation and individuation.66

The political implications of the affect of love do not concern the development of practises of participation, sharing and giving. Spinoza’s politicisation of love, instead, brings about the discovery of love as the expression of the potency of action, which lies precisely in the middle of a collective

66 On the figure of Christ in Spinoza’s politics, see particularly Matheron (1971), and Deleuze (1992: 290-310).
individual. As force, love traverses and transforms individuals without inhering within them.\textsuperscript{67} In the Treatise, Spinoza tells us, the mission of the apostles is directed to every people regardless of nation, language and culture. In each of their destinations, the encounter of the apostle with the community structures meanings, time, society and relations. In other words, it re-organises the entire equilibrium of both the collective body of the apostles and the community. As Spinoza affirms, the Epistles and the teachings of the apostles, on the one hand, are attuned to the different opinions, ideas and imaginations of the people to whom the apostles speak. On the other, the community itself is transformed by the “Good News”. This re-signifies and actualises the realm of the existing group into new ethical and political practises, which are nuanced by the evangelic formula of “love one’s neighbour” (TTP, chapter XIV: 515). This brings to light the production of new political and ethical notions of justice, labour, right and impiety, and of Christ and the anti-Christ (TTP chapter XIV). In other words, as force and tension, love re-shapes the boundaries of the “common”.

Concerning this view of love as an enduring source of production, one might nonetheless question the kind of political practises that the teachings of the apostles have brought to light, and also how these teachings have created novel political individuals. The political stakes, I think, of the praxis of love essentially concern the destabilising role played within the political scene. As the encounter of Saint Paul with the Roman Empire exemplifies, the apostle questions the meaningless and motionless equilibrium of the Roman state as such, challenging not the ruler or the subjects, but rather the stability of the system itself. Saint Paul as well as the other apostles brings into the existing community both problems (the corruption of the Roman system, the hierarchic structure, the question of the pauperism) and possible solutions.\textsuperscript{68} In this light, the originality of Spinoza’s

\textsuperscript{67} The theme of Spinoza’s political conception of love and joy as power has been particularly developed by Hardt and Negri. For Hardt and Negri, Spinoza’s vision of love is productive of political praxis and resistances, through which the multitude as a political subject emerges (Hardt and Negri, 2006; Negri, 2005). I will return to Hardt and Negri’s reading in chapter IV, which discuss Spinoza’s account of the multitude.

\textsuperscript{68} The political and ethical role of Saint Paul has nurtured an intense debate recently, which is centered on the essays of Badiou and Agamben. Whilst Badiou envisages in the figure of Paul the example of a revolutionary subject and universalism, a subject who challenges the Roman Empire and the Judaic law (Badiou, 2003), Agamben opposes Badiou’s ethical reading with the ontological notion of the “remnant”. By this, Agamben refers to a concept of singularity based on
political gesture concerns not only the political meaning of the notion of love, (which has been used in Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in Plato’s thought). Rather, Spinoza’s move brings about the discovery of the political significance of love as production, action and transformation; that is, love as a process. As a process of production, this consequently does not pass from one individuated being to another; rather, love resides in the collective field, without however inhering within it.

In chapter II, in order to re-conceptualise this tendency, we employed Simondon’s definition of transindividuality. Simondon affirms that religion expresses one of the ways in which the transindividual force operates. The domain of religion is the place in which a sense of spirituality emerges; a sense that is productive insofar as it remains within the collective body. In a political context, the spirituality of a group is precisely a force, which gives rise to relations, transformation and metastability. It is this expansive force that shapes the progress of a society (Simondon, 2007:175-197). From the Ethics to the political Treatises, Spinoza, I would argue, gives voice to these instances and tensions, which lie underneath any community. Towards the end of the Ethics, Spinoza describes this spontaneous need for spirituality as “the feeling and experience of eternity” (E. V, prop. XXIII, schol.). This traverses and orients every given political, ethical and ontological society and, more importantly, future ones. In the political section of Treatise, this tendency is presented by the figure of the Apostles through the notion of the credum minimum, and, as we will see in chapter IV, through the role of democracy as mens una.

The notion of the credum minimum unveils Spinoza’s awareness of the importance of spirituality as one of the conditions through which the body politic is founded and developed. The becoming and the power of a society go far behind the fulfilments of material and intellectual needs, the question of the social contract and the boundaries of the state. This involves, rather, a structural tension, which re-situates and intensively alters a collective body, gathering individuals

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what is “left”. This is a condition, in which there are no differences left between the Jew and the Greek, or a principle of beginning and end, rather the absence of all possible divisions. The notion of “remnant” embodied by Saint Paul, in Agamben’s analysis, opens up towards new perspectives in politics that might dismiss traditional notions of people and democracy (Agamben, 2005a: 44-58).
together in as many ways as the multiplicity of nature is infinite. This, however, does not mean that material and intellectual needs are irrelevant for the advancement of the social system; rather, they are fundamental parts of a more complex process, which structures and complicates the realm of a community in any given time and space. Our awareness of this, I think, should be incorporated within contemporary political discourses, which aspire to re-found a paradigm of philosophy of praxis.

**Conclusions: Towards a life in common**

This chapter has examined the relation between affectivity and politics within Spinoza’s political philosophy, and has considered the extent to which his conception of the political meaning of affectivity might open novel possibilities for thinking the anatomy and becoming of the community today. In order to examine the political status of affects and passions as fundamental elements of a more complex process, I have adopted a different strategy of reading the Treatise: the exposition of the facts and personages of the theological section of the Treatise through conceptual-affective personae. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the conceptual personae, I have re-considered Spinoza’s themes of the Jewish nation, prophecy, prophets and the apostles as parts of more complex conceptual personae, each of which expresses the ways in which affects and passions intensively re-signify the domain of the political. Related particularly to the *pars destruens* of the Treatise, the use of conceptual personae has revealed a more extensive meaning of the political role of passions, which reconfigure the political body through different notions of temporality, meanings and relations.

These arguments regarding the concrete dynamics within a community move our discussion directly to the question of the next chapter, which will investigate what form of political society emerges from Spinoza’s view of community as a mixture of affects, spirituality and passions. More precisely, it will address the problem that arises as to whether only religion is the ground of these transindividual dispositions, or whether there are in fact more complex political models, which incorporate Spinoza’s multifaceted theory of society. As
mentioned, Spinoza, in the political section of the Treatise, puts forward the idea of democracy as a place within which a community acts and thinks as \textit{mens una} (one mind). Spinoza’s conception of democracy, I think, opens up a quite different understanding of the dynamics that operate within a political context, raising fundamental questions concerning the multiple connections between desires, life, love and sovereignty. It is to these arguments – specifically those pertaining to the relation between affectivity and democracy – that the remaining chapter will now turn.
Chapter IV

Time for democracy: Towards a life in common

Introduction

In chapter III I investigated the relation between politics and affectivity in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and argued that Spinoza’s political analysis presents affects as constitutive elements of political individuals. Attention was given to the ambiguous position of passions within the theological section of the Treatise, and to the ways in which passions are productive of both social relations and subjection. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of conceptual personae, I re-considered the arguments of the theological section of the Treatise concerning prophecy, Jewish history and the apostles as phases of complex conceptual personae that express various affective tones. These have shed light on the powerful role of affectivity within the process of producing the political.

In the *pars destruens* of the TTP we encountered the conceptual-affective personae of the Devotees of the prophet, Subjects of Moses and the Apostles, which revealed the multisided meaning of Spinoza’s definition of passions. The political status of the passions expresses not only the subjection of an individual and community towards the authority of the ruler or God, but also the emergence of a new order of problems within the political domain. This refers to the progressive stabilisation of the political body, within which passions of fear, hatred and hope are founded and developed. A consideration of this issue led to the discovery of affectivity as a generative source of political individuation, through which notions of life, death, time and relationality reclaim control over the domain of the political. It is precisely in this context, I have argued, that the great modernity of Spinoza’s philosophical work lies. Affects become recognised as productive and fundamentally collective.
Taking these themes into account, this chapter explores the relation between affectivity and democracy in Spinoza’s political writings. My focus here will rest on the centrality that Spinoza accords to the affects of joy, love and indignation within the actualisation of the democratic community. Thus, I will draw attention to the emotive circumstances described in both the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, which activate and, in some other cases, defer the production of democracy. As the full expression of affectivity, the multitude becomes crucial for understanding Spinoza’s theory of democracy. Thus, an enquiry into the relation between democracy and affects implies an analysis of the anatomy of the power of the multitude, and of the ways in which this political body acts and thinks democratically. Spinoza’s vision of democracy escapes the logic of the state apparatus, identifying democratic life directly with the process of producing the ‘common good’. Affectivity lies at the very heart of the fruition of the ‘common good’, through which the political life of the multitude under democracy emerges.

Given the nature of these concerns, this chapter will also address several attendant questions. Firstly, the problem is the understanding of the very status of the multitude within Spinoza’s political analysis. From the *Theological-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza gives an ambivalent account of the ontological causes that determine the political behaviour of the multitude. In some cases, he describes the multitude as a disruptive force that is set against the constituted order, and which is nuanced by the passive tones of fear, ambition and anger. On other occasions Spinoza emphases the role of the multitude as a powerful source of social cohesion and mutual assistance shaped by the affects of joy, love and devotion, which reveal a certain tendency towards democracy.

Therefore, questions arise as to whether the multitude posits itself as a counterpart of the sovereign authority of the state, as greater than the state, or as something *other than* sovereignty as such; and if this is the case, the problem becomes that of whether the multitude is *already* an expression of a certain democratic existence. Secondly, Spinoza portrays the multitude as fundamentally affective and problematic. How this might play an active role within the construction of democracy? What forces, affects and actions are activated through
the multitude, and are they essential for the development and defence of democracy? Thirdly, and whilst bearing in mind Spinoza’s concern with the importance of increasing affects of joy and love within the democratic community, what new elements, order of problems, transformations and affectivity might introduce within democratic theory? How might these be considered politically relevant for contemporary thought and society?

In order to address these questions, I will return to my previous strategy of reading Spinoza’s political theory via Simondon’s philosophy of individuation. Simondon’s ontological categories might provide us, once more, with alternative instruments through which the interface between affectivity and democracy might come to light. The use of Simondon’s ontology of individuation might allow us to discover the novelty of Spinoza’s paradigm of democracy. I will argue that Spinoza’s political work refers to the view of democracy as pure openness, which means a complex and collective body. The importance of understanding Spinoza’s model of democracy in this way is the possibility of affirming democracy’s independence from the concepts of the state, the public and individual freedom.

In order to explore the dynamics of a democratic life within Spinoza’s writings, I think that the use of conceptual personae adopted in chapter III continue to be crucial. Having analysed the emotive gestures of the Devotees of the prophet, Apostles and the Subjects of Moses, the protagonist of this chapter is the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy. The conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy will show us an alternative mode of thinking the linkage between the multitude and democracy, affectivity and the ‘common good’, and also the relation between life and sovereignty. It indicates the way in which a ‘life in common’ might be constructed.
1. The political turn of the multitude: Re-theorising the ‘common’ today

The theme of the political role of the multitude has become a central argument within continental political thought, and has nurtured an intense debate recently. The discovery of the multitude as a proper political category embraces ontological, political and ethical issues. These concern a more extensive genealogy of the notion of power within society, the re-definition of present forms of solidarity and an expansive view of the concept of production, which should incorporate heterogeneous factors involved within the triad product-producer-producing, such as affects, relations, language, imagination and time.

As the word “turn” suggests, the political turn of the multitude indicates a novel path toward the re-characterisation of the domain of the social, opening the way to ignored possibilities for politics and society. The political turn of the multitude means a heterogeneous and complex form of political subjectivity, which posits itself as other than the notion of people, nation and class. It embodies every contemporary phenomenon of association, resistance and struggle, expressing a productive process of meanings, affects, thoughts and actions. In other words, the multitude, as we will see in this chapter, has to be understood as a theatre and, at the same time, actor of the political scene.

The increasing popularity of the concept of the multitude derives from a more general discussion within a certain strain of post-Marxist thought concerned with the re-conceptualisation of the meaning, genesis and anatomy of community, upon which a new paradigm of materialism and philosophy of praxis might be predicated. As I indicated in the thesis’ introduction and in chapter I, Althusser’s dictum of the “detour of Marx via Spinoza” offered fundamental theoretical insights for re-thinking the dynamics of social practises of cohesion, giving rise to a new approach to political theory, and in addition re-situating Spinoza’s politics within contemporary continental thought. The latter has brought about the need for re-structuring the domain of the political; a re-structuring that might disclose unexplored avenues of thinking and making community. Although this question has generated different theoretical positions, common to continental political theory is the conviction that the reality of society greatly exceeds the liberal
divide between private and public spheres, political state and civil society; and also the rationalistic formula of *homo economicus*: a figure whose acts are motivated by self-interest and rational choice. In contrast with the traditional model of society as a mere agglomerate of rational and autonomous individualities, the system of a community, continental thought has claimed, follows a non-linear path, which folds and unfolds a variety of heterogeneous elements such as desires, affects, bodies, thoughts and forces. This implies the *complication* of the domain of the political with non-conventional notions such as life, becoming, multiplicity, contingency, imagination and spirituality.

In this light, the focus of the continental enquiry into the political domain of a community, generally, has replaced the concept of individuality with singularity, self-interest with desire, authority (*Potestas*) with power (*potentia*), progress or evolution with becoming, homogeneity with multiplicity, and sequential and quantitative time (*Kronos*) with the time of contingency and productive moments (*Kairos*). These re-formulations, over all, bring to light the growing awareness of society as a complex body, for which alternative and more adequate categories have to be employed.

Concerning these arguments, many questions arise. Given the multisided account of the community of the global era, the first such question concerns whether there is any existing or past political model (democracy, republic, anarchy, socialism and communism) that might fully incorporate the complexity.

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69The works of Balibar (1994, 1998), Foucault (1998), Hardt and Negri (2006; 2000), Badiou (2005; 2002) and Nancy (1991) have recently been particularly influential as regards the continental debate around the meaning of the political, the anatomy of community and the re-definition of the status of individuals within society.

70Concerning the role of affectivity, body and desires in the production of the political, feminist thought has provided an important contribution: see for example Irigaray (1994), Cavarero (2002) Ticineto Glough and Halley (2007), and Manning (2007).

71On the theme made of the politicization of the concept of life, Foucault (1998, vol. 1), first, introduces the question of the impact of the political authority of the state over everyday life,coining the term bio-power. Hardt and Negri (2000; 2006) conceptualised the term bio-politics as the opposite to bio-power, which is seen as the insurrectional response of the multitude through the use of the body and life to the bio-political control of the capitalist state. For further readings see also Agamben (1998: 71-104).

72Concerning the theme of time in contemporary continental political thought, Deleuze and Guattari (2004a,b) put forward the idea of the flowing of time through contingency and multiple movements of composition and decomposition of planes. Negri (2005: 131-169) reiterates the two Greek conceptions of time as *Kronos* (quantitative time) and *Kairos* (the time ‘in between’, qualitative), describing the latter as proper of the multitude. For further readings see particularly Massumi (1992, 1993) and Hutchings (2008).
of this social body. Secondly, assuming that political gestures greatly exceed models of rational choice and self-interest, a further problem is as to the nature of the emerging philosophy of praxis. Thirdly, supposing that social relations go beyond the differences of class, geographical and political territory, what lies at the very basis of the political community today? Ultimately, if the process of production of a collective body does not solely reside in the dual schema of the object-subject distinction, there is a difficulty in unveiling the possible mechanisms of the contemporary system of production, and in revealing the instruments employed and the outcomes of this process. In other words, what is at stake here is the understanding of the production of the ‘common’ (Negri, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2006).

In order to re-theorise the complexity of the social, the enquiry into the anatomy of contemporary society has taken a myriad of different positions. Without embarking on a detailed discussion of the variety of theoretical approaches that have been developed in political theory recently, we must, at the very least, consider the important contributions made by certain theories of radical democracy. These have raised fundamental questions about the redefinition of contemporary mass movements through more exhaustive concepts of hegemony, power, subject and bio-politics. Central within radical democratic theory has been the recovery of the notions of freedom, equality, rights, and of the public and private spheres from the liberal tradition of thought, which has reduced these values to abstract and incontrovertible truths. In contrast with the liberal democratic approach, these principles, it has been claimed, involve concrete political practises of transformation, and the constitution of new social and political identities (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Connolly, 2002).

These themes of the autonomy of democracy from the liberal paradigm have nurtured fruitful debate concerning the meaning of community, repositioning its existence outside the boundaries of the state and civil society. This has brought about the necessity of re-considering the anatomy of community as an expression of heterogeneous, spontaneous movements; an expression that is not lacking or

73 For a complete account of debate surrounding the theme of radical democracy, see Newman (2007), Thomassen and Tønder (2005), Laclau and Mouffe (2001); Butler, Laclau and Zizek (2000); and Badiou (2002).
contrary to the state, but which is rather other to and greater than sovereign authority. In order to re-conceptualise the richness of expressions of community, notions of ‘being-in-common’, violence, and the ‘whatever’ have been proposed. These have offered an alternative account of the forces and potentials that shape the present community, and unexplored possibilities for realising a pure democracy, escaping the surreptitious violence of the state apparatus.

*The return to Spinoza’s thought of the multitude*

Although these theories have brought to light thoughtful arguments and problems on the question of the autonomy of the community, a thought of and about the multitude becomes even more crucial today. I think that the “class-concept” of the multitude (to use Negri’s term) appears to express the anatomy, becoming and dynamics of political subjectivities (Negri, 2004). Through the indeterminacy and multiplicity that the term “multitude” expresses, this concept brings to light fundamental questions such as the roles that affectivity, imagination and interrelation play in re-shaping the idea of society, thereby casting it as a *process*.75

No one can deny that the conspicuous part of the actual debate concerning the theme of the multitude is largely indebted to the works of Deleuze and

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74 Concerning the re-formation of the paradigm of community, parallel to the notion of the multitude, see for example, the stimulating dispute between Agamben and Nancy, articulated through Agamben’s reaction to Nancy’s thesis of the *Inoperative Community* (1991) with the theory of the *Coming Community* (1991); see also the debate between Nancy and Blanchot, who responded to Nancy’s thesis of the inoperative community by writing *Unknowable Community* (1988).

75 The origins of the term “multitude” comes from the Latin idiom “*multitudo-inis*”, which is a composite of the adjective *multus* (many, plural, a large number of etc.) and the suffix –*tude* (corresponding to the English -ess). By *multitudo*, the ancient Romans refer to a condition, permanent or transitory, of indeterminacy. It means the state of being numerous, within which singulars events are not visibly discernible one from the other; these are also impossible to be counted qualitatively and quantitatively. In political theory, Roman writers as Polybius (Polybius is of Greek origins, although he spent almost of his life in Rome, where he also completed his *Histories*), Seneca, Cicero and Sallust, have amply used the term “*multitudo*” in most of the cases with the negative meaning of a large number of (*multus*) people without any political authority and social cohesion. It is during the XVI and XVII centuries that the expression “*multitudo*” acquires a more neutral significance and political consistency. Machiavelli, Hobbes and, above all Spinoza, amply adopted the category of the multitude for describing the role of the mass within the state. For further readings on the differences and similarities between Machiavelli’s, Spinoza’s and Hobbes’s conceptions of the multitude, see particularly Del Lucchese (2009b), Virno (2004) and Montag (1999).
Guattari, and to those of Hardt and Negri. Deleuze and Guattari have pictured the community of the global era as a nomadic organisation that is structured through a “desiring-machine” and by movements of territorialization (maintenance) and deterritorialization (dissipation), and which opposes the homogeneity and stability of the state-apparatus (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a, b).\textsuperscript{76} Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy has played a central role within the development of the ontological and political conception of the multitude today. This has significantly formed the ontological ground upon which the multitude as an alternative political individual has emerged. It is however through Negri’s political reflections that the thought of the multitude acquires great consistency and coherence, giving rise to what we have called above the “political turn of the multitude”.

The importance of Negri’s philosophical gesture concerns the retreat of the multitude from its negative definitions of chaos, mass and mob to a positive meaning of productive force of desires, power, actions and conflicts and, more generally, commonalities. Negri does not examine the emergence of the multitude as a transitional social phenomenon derived from a specific historical or political moment of crisis within the political body, which could be re-incorporated into the categories of citizens, subjects and people as soon as the hierarchic order of the state is restored. Instead, the multitude, Negri claims, is the political antagonist of the contemporary state apparatus, which is as global (plural, decentralised and powerful) as the capitalist state itself, and as invasive as Empire.\textsuperscript{77} The multitude is opposed to the politics of Empire, as it is a praxis of spontaneous democracy that is structured through desires and by kairotic flows of time and life through

\textsuperscript{76} Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the “Desiring-machine”, roughly, affirms the productive nature of desires, opposing both the Freudian and Marxist views of desire as emerging from lack (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a). The notions of territorialization and deterritorialisation, and the theory of nomadic forms of organisation connote an expansive force (“nomadic war machine”) composed of heterogeneity and contingency strongly challenging the process of homogenization and stabilisation of the state-apparatus (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b).

\textsuperscript{77} By Empire, Hardt and Negri mean the contemporary model of capitalist expansion and dominance upon society, politics and culture, which is exemplified by the phenomenon of neoliberal globalisation. Empire, in Negri’ and Hardt’s view, expresses the present paradigm of capitalism, which is structured through the abolition of frontiers, the homogenisation of culture, politics and economic production. These elements are the emerging post-industrial forms that capitalist system adopts to exploit labour and to gain control over individual’s life (Hardt and Negri, 2000).
which the production of the ‘common’ is founded and developed (Hardt and Negri, 2000; 2006).

It is in this moment that the marginal status traditionally occupied by Spinoza within the history of political thought is undermined. Negri reiterates, in my view, Spinoza’s conception of the multitude, reinstating the central importance to the latter of Spinoza’s politics and ontology. For Negri, Spinoza’s political philosophy proposes a multisided vision of the multitude, which is not solely capable of challenging concretely the hegemony of the state and the Church, but which is also the only condition for the attainment of democracy. Within a continental perspective, Negri and other political theorists such as Balibar, Moreau, Matheron, Giancotti and Montag have consistently re-located Spinoza’s thought of the multitude and democracy within contemporary political theory. These thinkers have undeniably opened the way to a re-consideration of the great actuality of Spinoza’s notion of the multitude.

With a view towards building on the re-formulation of Spinoza’s concept of the multitude that was inaugurated by continental scholars, I would argue that there are still unexplored aspects of the Treatises that require further attention. Firstly, I refer here to a more extensive understanding of the concrete political stakes of affects of joy, love and indignation within the constitution of the multitude, which are presented in the final part of the TTP and the TP. As we have examined in chapter III, passions do not only describe an inoperative psychological and ethical condition that is rooted in a specific historical, political and religious community. Affectivity, however passive or active, sets in motion intensive and relational movements which transform the political scene entirely. In the conceptual persona of the Subjects of Moses, for example, we have seen that the Hebrews’ fear of God and hope for salvation generate a form of anguish, which signals the emergence of a dramatic moment involving not only the Jewish people and Moses, but the production of the political as whole.

In this light, if passions are capable of producing and dissolving the political, the status of affects such as joy, love and indignation in Spinoza’s political enquiry into democracy and the multitude certainly goes far beyond

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78 The reinstatement of Spinoza’s philosophy today certainly is not only Negri’s achievement. In the course of the chapter, I will further discuss the other readings.
particular practises of sharing, sedition, subjection, individual freedom and mutual assistance. As we will analyse in the following section, the affects are the ground of fundamental political notions of social contract, natural and civil rights, sovereignty and consensus, upon which the very power of the multitude resides. Therefore, the study of the ontological and political foundation of affectivity is instrumental to investigating the many ways in which the multitude produces the ‘common’ regardless of regimes of monarchy, aristocracy and tyranny. It is for this reason that in the thread of both Treatises, the multitude, obstinately, persists in any historical juncture, political crisis and restoration.

In the absence of an adequate political vocabulary for affectivity, Spinoza’s analysis of the multitude’s affective politics, I believe, becomes crucial. This might enable us to re-consider how the ‘common’ is produced, and specifically the forces, movements and tensions activated by the affects of joy, love and hatred for the constitution and fruition of the ‘common’. Furthermore, Spinoza’s concern with the affective tones of the multitude might provide us with alternative instruments for re-theorising the richness of expression of the social. The claim I will make throughout this chapter is that Spinoza’s attention to a praxis of joy and love reframes the controversial question of the relation between life (whether biological or already political) and sovereignty.

Secondly, re-locating the role of affects for the production of the ‘common’ directly questions the effective anatomy and potentials of democracy in Spinoza’s thought, which is described as the most natural system. As examined in chapter III, societies are processes that follow a non-linear path shaped by a mixture of relations, complexity and tensions. The emergence of a specific political individual does not create a community made by the establishment of laws, rules, private and public spheres. From the arguments of both the Ethics and the Theological Political Treatise, we have learnt that individuals are already collective and the order of nature is not qualitatively different from human, vital, and political systems. As the most natural model, democracy cannot be considered as a well-ordered form of government with a specific organisation of authority into laws and social division. Democracy instead refers to a process of continuous actualisation and transformation, which gives full rights of citizenship to the
actuality of the community as it is. This means that incompatibilities, relations and tensions shape a democratic realm, maintaining its body in a constant state of openness towards alternative transformations. As we have seen in chapters II and III, affectivity is the cornerstone of relation, which places individuals in the middle between generality and singularity, movements and transformations. It is in this context that the interface between affectivity and democracy comes to light, complicating the domain of the political through the production of the “the common good”.

This focus on Spinoza’s conception of democracy introduces a new awareness of the relation between affectivity and politics, the meaning of ‘common good’ and its production. In the search for a different conception of democracy today, Spinoza’s account of the linkage between affects and democratic praxis, I argue, might open unexplored avenues towards alternative modes of thinking pacts of solidarity and struggle. It is to this interface between democracy and affectivity that contemporary political thought should pay greater attention. Taking into account these arguments, in the following section I shall pass on to examine Spinoza’s multisided theory of the multitude, and the extent to which its life, political gestures and affective tones carry democratic meanings, actions and forces. As mentioned, the discussion of democracy, the multitude and affects will proceed through conceptual personae. In this chapter we encounter the Citizens of the democracy. As the name I have given suggests, the Citizens of democracy are the protagonists of the democratic community and embody the affective political phases of the multitude towards democracy. This conceptual-affective persona embraces, in my analysis, Spinoza’s engagement with democracy, that is, how a life in common might be formed.
2. Spinoza’s political strategy: Democracy, sovereignty and the multitude

The theme of democracy occupies the central part of Spinoza’s political theory, which is developed in both the political section of the TTP and the unfinished Political Treatise. Whilst in the pars contruens of the TTP Spinoza’s treatment of democracy is enfolded within a more general investigation of the typical themes of modern political thought such as the contractualist origin of society, natural and civil rights, freedom of speech and thought, in the Political Treatise the analysis of the democratic state follows a more complex discussion of the structure of sovereignty within monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. These questions involve the study of the notions of the differences and relation between natural and civil rights, the definition of political authority, the aims of the state, the meaning of the law, citizenship and the various forms of freedom. In both Treatises, Spinoza’s arguments delineate an accurate anatomy of power, through which its twofold status comes to light: power as fixed authority (Potestas) and as productive force (potentia). The description of the complex structure of power within society is the ground of Spinoza’s conception of democracy as the full expression of human association.

The theme of inalienable right plays a fundamental role in the two Treatises. In the TTP, this argument is crucial for understanding Spinoza’s conceptions of the authority of the state, the social pact and freedom. More precisely, definition of the inalienable right explains where sovereignty is located within the body politic, and more importantly under what circumstances its authority might be legitimate. In the TP, the definition of inalienable rights is instrumental for determining the emergence of the multitude as a proper political counterpart of the state, and Spinoza’s thesis of the superiority of democracy over the other political models of aristocracy and monarchy.

In the political section of the TTP, Spinoza claims that natural rights are coextensive with civil rights, and reiterates this more strongly in the TP through his adage of the “tantum juris quantum potentiae” (TTP, Chapter XVI: 527; TP, Chapter II.3). This means that the creation of the political body does not suppress the rights owned by every man in a pre-civil condition. For Spinoza, natural and
civil rights are not contradictory terms: rather, they are compatible with one another. Spinoza defines, more importantly, natural right as power, which means unpredicted and productive force. Following Spinoza’s analysis, in the state of nature the power of each individual does not lead necessarily to actions of reciprocal cruelty, as in the Hobbesian condition of perpetual war. Rather, Spinoza’s account of the pre-civil situation is multisided, where a variety of affective tones shape the actions and thoughts of individuals. This variegated structure of the state of nature produces a different kind of relational condition such as the fear towards others, humility or self-esteem (TTP, Chapter XVI: 528-529; TP, Chapter III. 3-8).

It is in this moment that the desire for society emerges. As mentioned, the civil body does not oppose the state of nature; rather it is a passage from the pre-civil context to the civil rather than a rupture. As there is no contradiction between these two forms of power, this leads Spinoza to maintain natural rights entirely within society. Furthermore, individuals surrender collectively (collegialiter) their powers for the creation of the new political equilibrium (TTP, Chapter V: 438, Chapter XVI: 528). This implies the acknowledgment of civil authority as a result of this union, and as thus being dependent upon this collective power, which is always greater than the established authority (TP: Chapter III. 6-8).

These arguments regarding the transfer of natural rights to the political body motivate Spinoza to pose the fundamental problem of sovereignty; and consequently to question which regime – monarchy, aristocracy or democracy – best maintains and guarantees the balance between powers (civil and natural) within society. In the TTP, Spinoza finds the composition of sovereignty within the systems of monarchy and aristocracy to be untenable. For Spinoza, these easily degenerate into regimes of violence and tyranny (TTP, Chapter XVI: 531). In order to justify their sovereignty, both monarchical and aristocratic governments, Spinoza explains, have to rely on religious expedients, such as the divine origin of authority or the suppression of the masses’ desires, needs and freedom. In the unfinished Political Treatise, Spinoza espouses the theme of sovereignty more rigorously, introducing the question of the maintenance of consensus within the body politic, and the extent to which this is defended and encouraged within
monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. If in the TTP the contractualist foundation of sovereignty might be interpreted as the premise for the formulation of the category of political obligation, which binds both the state and civil body, it is in the TP that the theory of consensus entirely dispels any possible recourse to a politics of obedience. As Spinoza connects directly the notion of the consensus with the multitude, this brings to light the centrality of the multitude as a powerful political individual (TP, Chapter IV).

In order to consolidate the legitimacy of the state, Spinoza explains, both monarchy and aristocracy necessarily have to be dependent upon the consent of the multitude (TP, Chapters V, VII, X). Specifically, the preservation of monarchical government resides in the reinforcement of the ruler’s alliance with his subjects, and the progressive disappearance of the nobility’s privileges (TP, Chapter VII. 20). This involve counsellors to the king who are chosen from the citizen-body, the formation of a popular army, non hereditary election of the monarch, and the definition of the king as representative of the people’s will and not as the owner of the state (TP, Chapter VI. 10, 15; Chapter VII. 12, 25). For Spinoza, these are the conditions through which subjects’ consent can be best preserved, and thereby the authority of the monarchical regime maintained.

Similarly, in an aristocratic regime, Spinoza’s attention is given to the increase of the relation between patricians and plebeians. In order to avoid the predominance of a specific cast of patrician, Spinoza opts for a solution of regular alternation between the patrician clans. This should prevent the emergence of inequalities between patricians and the formation of hereditary privileges, which would encourage sedition, ambition and rivalry among citizens (TP, Chapter X).

A central consequence of this strategy of consensus is that in each of these regimes the stability of the state is based essentially on the progressive reduction of indirect forms of representation, which would better guarantee the balance between powers. In this light, each regime seems to move progressively towards democracy, through the constitution or, at the very least, through the permission of practices of sharing, participation and freedom. Given this intrinsic tendency towards democratic customs within each type of regime, the question immediately arises as what might be the anatomy of sovereignty in a proper democratic state?
Since the eleventh chapter on democracy is missing from Spinoza’s text, we do not know how the distribution of sovereign power in a democratic body is articulated in his later thought. In order to avoid the temptation to offer conjectures as to how Spinoza might have conceived the democratic state, I think that we might instead examine, deductively, Spinoza’s paradigm of democracy from the arguments developed in the *Theological Political Treatise* and his theory of the consensus conducted in the *Political Treatise*. These reveal, we will see below, Spinoza’s awareness of the pivotal role of the multitude within the formation of democracy, and its centrality to the production of the ‘common good’.

In the TTP, Spinoza advocates democracy as the more natural form of political institution, within which the individual “transfers it [the natural right] to the majority of the entire community of which he is a part” (TTP Chapter XVI: 531, my *italics*). For Spinoza, the democratic state ensures stability, peace and freedom of speech and thought, which are the only aims of the state. In the TTP, Spinoza claims that the aims of the state are freedom and the observance of the principles sanctioned in the social pact, whereas in the TP the reason of the state is the defence and preservation of peace and stability through the preservation of consensus. Given this collective structure, it is unlikely that the democratic government will degenerate into tyranny and efface human rights. It is through the maintenance and development of these conditions that the progress of society lies.

### 2.1 Contemporary approaches to Spinoza’s politics

In contemporary Spinozist studies, the themes of the role of the multitude in the TTP and the TP, civil and natural rights, consensus and democracy have been much discussed, and many interpretations have been proposed. As mentioned several times throughout the thesis, there have been two influential ways of reading Spinoza’s political philosophy: a liberal-individualistic approach, which stems predominantly from an analytic tradition of thought, and a continental reading that has been influenced by Marxist thought, and which has been particularly prevalent in France within certain post-Althusserian debates.
The liberal-individualistic approach has been particularly influential as regards the interpretation of the political section of the TTP. As Spinoza posits a contract at the very basis of the political body, this has led to analogies between his work and that of Hobbes, Locke and Grotius. Furthermore, Spinoza’s reference to the notion of profit as the very basis of the state has allowed his philosophy to be aligned with the utilitarian tradition of thought exemplified by Bentham and Mill, and to the theory of rational choice (Israel, 2002; Smith, 1998; Feuer, 1987).

Furthermore, the category of power within the political treatises has, as Rice points out, two dimensions. Rice claims that power as Potestas denotes the authority of the state, which is viewed as an “added capacity” that is always inferior to the individual and which opposes the order of nature. In this sense, Spinoza’s notion of the state is not a further development of his ontology. Power as Potentia means the ability of the individual, which is greater than the state (Rice, 1990: 274-285). Moving within the same perspective, Curley and James have emphasised psychological implications deriving from Spinoza’s theory of the contract. Curley in particular has considered Spinoza’s theory of the social contract as the deference of the individual to the state (Curley, 1996: 318-342; James, 1996: 210-228, 1997: 136-156). Seen in this light, Spinoza’s political work reveals his advocacy of the individual’s autonomy and power, and thereby a view in which the state performs an auxiliary function.

The problems that I have encountered with the general liberal interpretation of Spinoza’s politics are that they do not pay adequate attention to crucial aspects of Spinoza’s themes of pact, power and profit. The foundation of the pact is, first of all, a form of spontaneous passage from the natural condition. This is collectively stipulated; thus, there is no singular individual at the basis of the contract, but rather a collective being. This implies that the conception of the community is to some extent prior to civil society. As it is formed collectively, the authority and the reason of the state reside in the power of the collective. Although Spinoza’s claim that interest or profit lie at the basis of the state may certainly lead one to utilitarian conclusions, it contrasts with the definition of the human being given in the Ethics as desire (E. III, Def. Aff. I). As we will see in the subsequent parts of this chapter, from the state of nature to the civil body,
Spinoza does not refer to the human being as a self-independent individual who experiences society as an attached and secondary body as Rice sustained (Rice, 1990); instead, society is an expression not of self-interest, but rather of desire, which greatly exceeds both models of the rational choice and the Hobbesian fear of death.

Furthermore, assuming Spinoza’s theory of the state and the human being as expressions of liberal and individualistic conceptions, this would mean that, for Spinoza, the individual can live under any form of government insofar as it does not limit the attainment of personal interest and self-realisation, just as Hobbesian man can exist perfectly well under the Leviathan. In this case, monarchy and aristocracy might adequately meet the needs of individuals similarly to democracy insofar as they do not degenerate into despotic and confessional regimes. However, as we have seen, Spinoza firmly advocates democracy as the best and more natural model of governance for the development of a society as a whole. The superiority of democracy, Spinoza claims, resides not in the possibility of expansion of the singular freedom. A democratic system is rather a community, within which the sharing of power is the only condition of collective freedom.

In opposition to this view, post-Althusserian approaches to Spinoza’s politics have stressed the collective aspects of his thought. They have advanced the idea of the political foundation of Spinoza’s ontology and, at the same time, the ontological or naturalist ground of his politics. Post-Althusserian analysis has highlighted how his philosophy raises fecund arguments in relation to the strategy for maintaining power over people, the mechanisms of alienation used by religious and political authorities, the multisided forms of ideology, and non-individualist conceptions of society and human nature (Tosel, 1984; Giancotti, 1995; Montag, 1999). In this light, Spinoza’s affirmation of freedom of speech and thought has been explained as a project of “disalienation” of the mass, so as to create a community aware of itself as a unity, and not as a sum of individuals (Matheron, 1988: 612). It follows that the political body, instead of representing a mere sum of singular individualities, is the result of the collective power and desires of people. Thus, Spinoza’s advocacy of democracy is understood as the affirmation of the power of the mass against the authority of the state. Above all,
these series of studies have brought about the rediscovery of the originality of Spinoza’s theory of the multitude, which is conceptualised without reference to citizens, people and subjects.

Taking into great consideration both readings of Spinoza’s politics and proceeding further with the post-Althusserian approach, I think that there are some further important arguments to be drawn from the Theological Political Treatise and the Political Treatise, which might still offer thoughtful theoretical insights for contemporary thought. Besides these disputes noted above as whether the foundation of democracy is either individualist or collective in nature, we should emphasise the hypothesis that lies at the basis of Spinoza’s democratic thought. The importance of Spinoza’s thesis of democracy, on my reading, resides primarily in the question which leads him to affirm the superiority of this institution over the other political models. Spinoza does not ask what the best form is for governing and gathering people together within the boundaries of a political equilibrium. Most importantly, Spinoza does not ask how people can rule themselves. This would imply a certain acceptance of the intrinsic incapacity of individuals to govern themselves collectively. We already know from the arguments advanced in chapter II that in the Ethics individuals are ontologically collective. Therefore, Spinoza’s principal political question is as to how this complex and collective being may act politically. By this, I mean that we should read the ontological and political status of individuals in strict continuity. This involves considering democracy as part of more complex process of individuation; a process that is both political and ontological.

Given the Greek meaning of the term democracy as the government of the many (demos), democracy might appear, for Spinoza to be the most adequate political formula for expressing the manifold status of the individuals. The structure of democracy, in my view, appears to create the conditions, through which individuals, governing themselves, develop further the process of individuation. Yet if this is the case, many problems arise. Firstly, how does this complex individual act politically once democracy is formed? Secondly, given Spinoza’s conviction of the affective and passionate nature of individuals, how does the multitude act politically, favouring the progress of a society? In other
words, how do affects and passions impact concretely on the production of democracy? Concerning these questions, for the purpose of this chapter, Balibar (1994; 1998) and Negri’s (1998) theses offer fruitful arguments for our discussion. Building upon the continental reading of the TTP and TP, indicated above, Balibar (1994; 1998) and Negri (1998) have pointed to the linkage between democracy and the multitude within Spinoza’s politics. They have also highlighted the problematic status of the multitude within historical and political processes and its powerful role in the constitution of democracy.

The anatomy of the multitude: The subject of history and the enemy of the state

As anticipated previously, Spinoza gives a multi-sided account of the political role of the mass within a political context. In the TTP, Spinoza’s rare use of the term multitude and frequent reference instead to mob and plebs appears to stress only the passionate character of the mass, which can be mobilised now against this faction now against the other. In contrast, in the TP the multitude becomes the central name for defining the political status of the mass within the state. This is recognised as the concrete counterpart of the state, which can destroy any form of tyranny; consequently any ruler has to adapt his or her authority to incorporate the consent of the multitude. The mass is the social and political faction whose consent, however passive or active, inevitably alters the equilibrium of the political system.

From this multifaceted vision of the mass, many questions arise. Firstly, how can a political body be founded as democracy without being ruled by any external authority? In other words, given the passionate tones of the masses, how does Spinoza think it possible for there to be a government of the many that could guarantee stability and peace? Secondly, given Spinoza’s refusal of any form of agency, how might the mass pass from being a passionate and violent mob to the citizens of democracy and the guardians of freedom? It is around these questions that Balibar and Negri have developed their approaches to Spinoza’s conceptions of the multitude and democracy. The former emphasises the ambivalent status of
the multitude in Spinoza’s analysis, whereas the latter focuses on the multitude’s praxis of emancipation.79

Balibar addresses the twofold dimension of Spinoza’s notion of the multitude, within which imagination and communication play a pivotal role for the attainment of democracy. For Balibar, Spinoza’s analysis of the power of the multitude within a given political context reveals an irresolvable internal contradiction, which refers to a passive tendency towards servitude, and a constitutive power of new political order. On the one hand, Balibar observes, the body of the multitude is the rich expression of collective praxis, which limits the growth and expansion of any despotic and confessional state. In this light, affectivity is the generating source of the constitution of the power of the mass against the authority. On the other, Balibar rightly notices, the TTP describes a negative aspect of the movement of the mass, which is characterised by manipulation. The role of imagination generates superstition, mystification and alienation, for which a politics of obedience and a doctrine of mutual support become indispensable instruments for the stability of a community.80 Balibar’s reading concludes by envisaging an irreversible aporia within Spinoza’s theory of the multitude, which is characterised by the internal contradiction between citizens and mob (Balibar 1994: 3-37). For Balibar, it is precisely in this aporetic status of the multitude that the great originality and modernity of Spinoza’s political work lies (Williams, 2007; 2002). The coexistence of the mob and the citizens, Balibar argues, makes of the multitude the very problem and subject of the historical process, which traverses and forms human societies (Balibar, 1998: 42-49, 64-71, 113-124; 1997: 192-204).

In contrast with Balibar’s reading and in a strong Marxist fashion, Negri opposes the definition of the masses as being marked by an inconceivable contradiction with the view of the multitude as internal to the domain of the state. Negri points to the constitutive force of the multitude, which re-signifies the

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79 For an analysis of Negri and Balibar’s interpretations of Spinoza’s theory of the multitude, and a possible advancement of both readings through a more complex theory of imagination and affectivity, see Williams (2007; 2002), to which this discussion refers.

80 Concerning the twofold status of imagination within the TTP, Balibar stresses the double meaning of the passion of fear as fear of the mass and the fear experienced by the ruler in relation to the mass (Balibar, 1994: 3-37).
political and social conception of power itself. Specifically, Negri identifies the twofold status of power. Accordingly, the notion of power refers on the one side to *Potestas*, indicating the authority of the state; on the other, power means *Potentia*, describing the productive force of the multitude. For Negri, Spinoza’s theory of the multitude reveals a radical anatomy of power, which brings to light its two meanings as dynamic force (*Potentia*) and immobile authority (*Potestas*). In Negri’s view, Spinoza’s notion of the multitude exemplifies the dimension of power as transformation of the established order, which contrasts the authority of the state. The role of the multitude becomes recognised as the counterpart of the state and the destabilising actor within the political scene (Negri, 1998: 242-253). Negri concludes that Spinoza’s thought of the multitude is an affirmation of “*potentia contra auctoritas*” (Negri, 1998: 242-253).

Balibar and Negri both underline two relevant aspects of Spinoza’s theory of the multitude. The aspect of Balibar’s analysis that I have found to be particularly relevant for the arguments of this present chapter is his recognition of the multitude as a somewhat aporetic individual, which nevertheless is the real protagonist of historical processes. Similarly, the theme of power formulated by Negri, which is internal to and yet also the concrete counterpart of the state, has been essential for shaping the position assumed in the thesis. In my reading of Spinoza’s thought of the multitude, I re-consider Balibar and Negri’s insights through the strategy of the conceptual personae, adopted in chapter III. Thus, I propose to examine both passive and active affects or actions of the mass as constitutive elements of a distinctive conceptual-affective persona, which I call the Citizens of democracy. My aim is to re-direct attention towards the role of affectivity for structuring the dynamics of the multitude and developing democracy.

The arguments that I will put forward via the argumentative thread afforded by this conceptual persona, concern the discovery of a complex process nuanced by varied confluences of emotive tones, which shape and further complicate not the singular being but rather the collective body of the multitude.81

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81Concerning Spinoza’s theme of the political actions of the mass, Balibar and Negri too view these as phases of more problematic process. Whilst Balibar stresses the notion of process in the treatise as a form of historical becoming, and where Negri insists instead on an emancipating
It is through this affective process of enduring individuation that Spinoza’s vision of democracy as *mens una* comes to light. Furthermore, this analysis of Spinoza’s thesis of the multitude as a process draws attention to the ways in which affects are generative sources of the ‘common good’, and allows the opportunity to address the question of the interface between democracy and affectivity. Taking these arguments into account, let us now flesh out the dynamics and problematic characters of this conceptual persona.

3. Citizens of democracy: Sovereign life and common good

The conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy expresses the central problem that accompanies Spinoza’s enquiry from the *Ethics*, through the *Theological Political Treatise*, to the *Political Treatise*. This concerns the understanding of the form of *life in common* that is embodied by and through the multitude. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis, if the conceptual persona of Descartes is the Idiot and the one of Nietzsche is Dionysus, I would argue here, Spinoza’s major persona is the life in common that he ascribes to the body of the multitude (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 61-83; and also chapter III of this work.). By this, importantly, I do not intend that the multitude itself is Spinoza’s conceptual persona; rather, the paradigm of the life in common of the multitude becomes the privileged concept of Spinoza’s philosophical production. It activates multiple potentialities of Spinoza’s concept, raising a problem and glimpsing a solution. It is the multiform life in common of the multitude that forces Spinoza to question the power of affects and the anatomy of the individual.

As regards to the production of the political, Spinoza is confronted with the multiple and various levels of the relational behaviour and forces that the multitude introduces through cruelty and joy within the political process. The

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progress, my reading tends to maintain a stronger ontological foundation in the same vein as Simondon’s thought (Simondon, 2007: 175-214).

Spinoza in the *Theological Political Treatise* does not use the term *mens una* explicitly. This will appear in the *Political Treatise* (Chapter II. 16). In the *Theological Political Treatise*, he instead adopts the equivalent expression “*coetus universus hominum*” (“united body of men”), (TTP, Chapter XVI: 530).

For a detailed account of the themes of the autonomy of the affects and the paradigm of the individual developed in the *Ethics*, see chapter II of the present study.
multitude, Spinoza observes, obstinately persists through historical crises and social hierarchy. The multitude’s omnipresence in history, Spinoza recognises, is not inoperative at all; rather it carries unsuspected meanings, relations, powers and tensions, which transform and further individualises the political scene (see for example TTP, chapters XVII, XVIII). Every attempt to restrain the life of the multitude within a well-organised class of subjects, people and plebs causes the collapse of the political body (in the language of the TP, “the outrage of the masses”). By contrast, as we have seen, the search for a form of consensus leads towards more democratic regimes (see particularly, TP, Chapters V, VII, X). Therefore, Spinoza questions, in my view, what the founding elements are of the multitude’s life in common, and how we might conceptualise its collective political life. It is in a consideration of these problems that Spinoza’s enquire lies, drawing a line of continuity between the Treatises.

The conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy precisely takes shape from this continuity between the Treatises, expressing the variety of affective tones given by Spinoza to life-in-common. I thus consider the arguments and problems of the pars construens of the TTP and TP as phases in the conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy, each of which expresses a crucial emotive moment within the production of democracy. In the thread of the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy, these emotive phases of the production of democracy and the multitude’s affective life are embodied by three distinctive aspects, which I identify with the figures of demons, evils and virtuosi. These figures, we will see below, structure important political and ontological behaviours within the Citizens of democracy. The aspects of demons, evils and virtuosi characterising the Citizens of democracy enable us to understand the ways in which, passions and affects such as fear, hope, indignation and love activate the production of the ‘common’ and configure the boundaries of a community.
3.1 Anatomy of the Citizens of democracy: Demons, evils and the virtuosi of community

Following the political arguments of the two Treatises, Spinoza addresses the reasons for the necessity (its natural status) of democracy. In order to expound this thesis, he considers first non-democratic systems and historical circumstances, in which the politics of consensus has been totally or partially corrupted. In the TTP, Spinoza looks at the negative examples of the Roman Empire, the Jewish state, and the recent events of the English Revolution of Cromwell. In the TP, he examines the ways in which the multitude’s agreement can be preserved within monarchy and aristocracy. In each of these cases, the multitude is the centre and the end of Spinoza’s enquiry. In his analysis of non democratic orders, the passive tones of fear, anger, hatred and ambition form the political practises of the mass. These cause instability, anarchy and the collapse of the entire political apparatus. In my re-reading of these arguments, the passive states of the mass are incorporated within the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy. In this persona, I include the passive tones of fear, anger and ambition. The Citizens of democracy will show us how these passions determine crucial phases within the process of democratisation of the political and reveal a different way of producing the ‘common’

Spinoza makes a fundamental claim at the beginning of the chapter XVII of the Theological Political Treatise, in which he affirms “Nobody can so completely transfer to another all his rights, and consequently his power, as to cease to be a human being, nor will there ever be a sovereign power that can do all it pleases” (TTP, chapter XVII: 536). As discussed above, Spinoza’s thesis of the inalienability of natural right becomes the dominant argument of the Political Treatise, upon which his theory of legitimacy of the state is based and developed (TP, II. 3-4). It is this inalienability of natural right that raises the problem of consensus and the existence of the multitude in politics. In the case of the conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy, Spinoza’s statements are fundamental. In order to delineate the political implications of these statements, recourse to Simondon’s logic is once again essential. I will thus re-consider
Spinoza’s theme of the inalienability of natural rights through Simondon’s categories of thought concerning the collective process of psychic individuation, which in his view are transversal to the social processes of individuation (Simondon, 2007: 175-214).

Within a Simondonian perspective, because nobody entirely transfers his or her natural right to an external authority, there remains a non expressed quantity of power within any given state. The anatomy of a political body is constituted by an individuated part (the civil right, laws and freedoms) and potentialities, which might suddenly be actualised. The Citizens of democracy fully express these aspects of natural right and enable us to understand its effective political stakes. The significance of Spinoza’s conception of the relation between natural and civil rights emerges more strongly in situations of fear and violence (such as the Roman Empire), which I will now move on to examine.

**States of fear: The servitude of the emperor, the freedom of the subjects**

In the states of fear and violence, the Citizens of democracy are in a condition of passivity, within which their power of acting and thinking is diminished. In this moment, however, the potentiality that has not been transferred to the political authority generates new political individuals such as revolts, anarchic phenomena and despotic regimes. These events derive from the partial transferral of natural rights to the constituted political body. This partial transfer of natural rights maintains the collective power of individuals who are naturally stronger than the established political order. The phases of fear and anger characterising non-democratic systems activate a distinct tendency within our conceptual persona. In the state of fear, the Citizens of democracy begin to act politically as demons.84 This demonic role is twofold. The Citizens of democracy incorporate the two meanings of the image of the demon: the Ancient Greek

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84I borrow the figure of demons from Hardt and Negri’s appropriation of the novel of Dostoyevsky *Demons* (1873) (Hardt and Negri, 2006: 138-140). The authors refer to the notion of demons as an inner force, which is always present within any given political context. They indicate the Greek origin of the term demon, which means a great number, and also a creative spirit. My use of the notion of demons partly follows Hardt and Negri’s usage, partly the negative meaning of ‘demon’ as a disruptive force.
notion of the inspiring and multiple forces or spirit, and the Catholic figure of evil as negative presence. As an inner force within the political system, they constitute an expansive and invasive power, which bring into the existing order tensions, problems and various forms of resistance. This aspect becomes more intense, particularly under the states of violence, tyranny and, generally, slavery, which are structured through fear, hatred and indignation. They are, whether latent or manifest, the real enemy of the established political system (TP, Chapter III. 9).

In a condition of oppression, Spinoza reminds us through the Annals of Tacitus, the power of the mass becomes increasingly stronger, causing the collapse of the entire political apparatus, the overthrow of the emperor or, at the very least, an enduring state of insecurity. In the Roman Empire, in order to maintain the authority over the subjects, every emperor had to justify his role through the expedients of the glorious and divine origins of his power (for example August’s alleged origin from Aeneas) (TTP, Chapter XVII: 538). Spinoza argues that the state of passivity, the decrease of the power of action and thinking, does not pertain to the mass, but instead to the tyrant. It is the fear felt by the emperor for a possible insurrection of the subjects and their hatred that causes him to rely upon external aids such as myth and violence. Therefore, the authority of the ruler relies on the pure image of power, whereas the force of his subjects is a concrete and effective obstacle (TTP, Chapter XVII: 537). In the case of the persona of the Citizens of democracy, Spinoza’s analysis has many important political implications.

The state of fear re-defines the political scene entirely, within which the Citizens of democracy, in their demonic aspect, play a pivotal role. They act as productive forces, which re-signify the domain of the ‘common’ through new flows of time, relation and society. The re-characterisation of the ‘common’ does not only signal a cultural or religious turn, but also a different political theatre. If one considers the historical examples given by Spinoza of the Jewish nation and the Roman Empire, this demonic force emerges more clearly. In the state of Israel

85 “It is also beyond doubt that a commonwealth is always in greater danger from its citizens than from its enemies; […]. It follows that he on whom the whole right of the state has been conferred will always be more afraid of citizens than of external enemies and will therefore endeavor to look on his own safety, not consulting the interests of his subjects but plotting against them […].” (TP, Chapter VI. 6).
after the death of Moses and the failure of the democratic experiment, it is the fear and ignorance of the Israelites that gave rise to an anarchic phase and which prepared the terrain for the complete dissolution of the political apparatus and the dispersion of the Jewish people (TTP, Chapter XVII: 541-544). In the Roman Empire, fear, hatred and the indignation of subjects maintained the equilibrium of the political body in an enduring state of tension, through which the mythic foundation of the empire, restrictive laws and various forms of violence emerged as the only defence of the state.

In the despotic regime, society is characterised by two main passions: fear and indignation. In the Ethics, Spinoza defines fear as “inconstant pain arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt” (E. III, Def. Aff. XIII); indignation is defined as “hatred toward one who has injured another” (E. III, Def. Aff. XX). In the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy, the tyrant is nuanced by the passive tones of fear and the mass is mostly shaped by indignation toward the ruler. These two passions generate crucial political moments, which question concepts of life, death, relation and time. The emperor, Spinoza reminds us, is constantly dominated by the fear of the imminent upheaval of the subjects against his domain. For this, he calls for the support of friends and seeks alliance with Greek and Christian gods, through which he attempts to placate the anger of the mass (TTP, Chapter XVII: 538). These attempts are, on my reading, the results of a more complex process, the origin of which lies in fear and passivity. The sacred origin of the figure of the ruler goes far beyond the establishment of the ideological apparatus of the state, revealing instead the emperor’s fear for a secure death. It is this fear, I would argue, that paradoxically causes the death of the ruler and thereby the dissolution of the entire political body.

Spinoza’s definition of the ontological state of fear as pain emerging from the uncertainty of a future or past has an effective impact on the realm of the political. This concerns a different constitution of time, the re-definition of the form of government, and the institution of slavery. Like the Subjects of Moses under the phase of anguish analysed in chapter III, in this context, the two coordinates of the past and the present are played out in the drama of the emperor.
In order to avoid the future possibility of death, the emperor’s fear brings back echoes, however real or illusory, of the past and the authority of his predecessors. In this light, the present abandons the forces and multiple possibilities of the future, and becomes a mere reflection of the past. Spoiled of the potentialities of the future, the realm of the emperor tends progressively toward a stable equilibrium, which implies the loss of opportunities for transformation. This fear of death goes beyond the constitution of time, re-structuring the political reality of the emperor’s authority.

As mentioned before, this fear of the future shaped by the need for the past produces the divine status of authority, which implies the entire re-casting of the form of government. The emperor, under the state of fear, ceases to be the absolute ruler of the state, and becomes now the son of Jupiter, now the heir of Aeneas. The emperor’s need for Greek gods, I think, brings about the discovery of the progressive process of enslavement of his state. As Spinoza explains, emperors such as August and Alexander declare to simply follow someone’s desire, in order to persuade the mass of the legitimacy of their authority; Alexander, for example, will motivate his power as the realisation of an higher policy rather than an act of pride (TTP, Chapter XVII: 538-539).

These examples, in my view, indicate the growing condition of servitude that emerges from the state of fear, which becomes two-sided. On the one hand, the emperor is a slave to the epic gestures of his fathers, which exclude his dominion from any possibility of change and becoming. On the other hand, as we already mentioned, the tyrant is subjected to the anger and indignation of the mass. As anticipated, the passion of fear activates this condition of servitude, upon which despotic regimes are based and developed. It is precisely the fear of death (“you will find more who died at the hands of their own people” recites Alexander’s plea) that lies at the very basis of the emperor’s enslavement. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza affirms that only one whose acts are motivated by fear of death and hope for salvation is a slave (E. IV, prop. LXIII), whereas a free man is concerned solely with the enjoyment of life and thinks least of death (E. IV, prop. LXVII). The political consequence of this fear of death concerns the realisation of the emperor’s anxiety, that is, death (TP, particularly Chapters VI, VII). In the
Roman Empire, Spinoza comments, subjects have made their rulers destitute six times, and in the state of England, for the first time in history, a popular assembly has condemned the king to death (TTP, Chapter XVIII: 556-557).

Many questions arise from this analysis. First of all, the main problem concerns who or what is the real enemy of the emperor; an enemy possessed of such power that it can reduce the emperor to servitude? Secondly, given Spinoza’s claim that it is the subjects of the tyrant who are most feared, the question arises as to how their forces are structured, and what elements might give rise to the death of the ruler. These questions bring us to the core of Spinoza’s political philosophy, that is, to the origin of sovereignty. Without addressing this theme our enquiry could go no further.

_Sovereignty: Bare and Sacred life_

In order to examine the problem of sovereignty it is necessary to investigate Spinoza’s definition of the reason of the state. In the opening of the _Political Treatise_, the question of the relation between life and sovereignty is posed as soon as Spinoza comes to define the aim of the state. For Spinoza, the purpose of the state is “peace and security of life” (TP, Chapter V.2), which is centred on a well-organised balance between duty and freedom. From the position of individuals, the creation of the state apparatus guarantees the improvement of their lives. This is because the state is the higher expression of human association and is always desirable to the state of nature, and the preservation of its form is necessary (TP, Chapters III. 4-8, VI. 1-8). Following these general elements of Spinoza’s conception of sovereignty, one might argue that his notion of the political authority tends towards a certain vision of an all _invasive_ state, which decides upon human life and death through laws and punishments. If we include in this notion of the state Spinoza’s claims regarding the inalienability of natural right, the power of affects, and his definition of the political body as the union of individual powers, then his paradigm of sovereignty becomes more complex.

In Spinoza’s analysis, as we saw above, the conception of sovereignty, once affirmed, is not only linked to the notion of the state, but more importantly
has an intimate relation with the concept of life. In order to explore this relation
between sovereignty and life I propose to employ Agamben’s reflections on
sovereignty, as this provides fruitful insights for developing the arguments of the
present chapter. Agamben, in my view, underlines in an innovative way the
linkage between life and sovereignty. I want to emphasise that for the purpose of
this work, a discussion of Agamben’s philosophy per se is not in question. Rather,
I intend to utilise his notions of bare and sacred life as theoretical tools to analyse
the theme of sovereignty and life in Spinoza’s political writings. These notions
add a new conceptual level to the conceptual-affective of the Citizens of
democracy, disclosing its political stakes more strongly. Therefore, my recourse
to Agamben’s political concepts and reflections in relation to Spinoza’s politics is
not intended to present a dialogue between him and Spinoza or to examine
Agamben’s enquiry regarding the structure of contemporary sovereignty.

In order to describe the very status of the human being in relation to
contemporary sovereignty, Agamben looks back at the ambiguous figure of the
sacred man defined in Roman law. The sacred man (*homo sacer*) is a person
whose life lies between an inclusion and exclusion from the state. The sacred man
is excluded from civil rights; he may thus be killed, but will not be elevated to the
status of religious sacrifice. In Agamben’s own re-formulation, the paradigm of
the sacred man defines the existing condition of the individual in relation to the
state, in whom life “is sacred but yet may be killed” (Agamben, 1998: 15-28, 72-
85). For him, the political position of human life resides in the paradox of the
inalienability of human rights (the sacredness of human being sanctioned by the
Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen), which, given certain
“exceptional” circumstances, may be abrogated (such as during wartime, and in
the case of refugees).

Deprived of sacred status, individual life returns to its original meaning of
bare life (biological existence), which in turn may be killed. It is precisely in the
schism between bare life and political life, Agamben claims, that the power of
sovereignty lies (Agamben, 1998: 71-110). Agamben envisages the origins of
this paradox in the history of Western thought from Aristotle onwards, which has

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86 Agamben’s definition of bare life has been strongly influenced by Arendt’s description of the
refugee as “naked life”, as presented in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).
classified qualitatively the unity and complexity of human existence into two capacities, vital and political, negating the relevance of the biological one (Agamben 1998: 15-30). Certainly this reading goes far beyond Spinoza’s definitions of the relation between the state and citizens, natural and civil rights. Nevertheless, I think, Agamben’s concepts of bare life and sacred man might offer very thoughtful points of discussion for developing further the theme of life, affects and sovereignty in Spinoza’s thought.

In the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy, the state of fear examined above resembles the “exceptional” circumstances described by Agamben, where citizens are deprived of all their rights and reduced to bare life. In the Citizens of democracy under the state of fear, the relation between the sacred authority of the emperor and the passionate life of his subjects re-defines the domain of tyranny, provoking the enslavement of the despot and the uprising of his subjects. In the state of fear, it is the life of the emperor that is considered sacred, whereas the life of the subjects is deprived of any political significance. The emperor’s life is sacred in Agamben’s terms because the emperor cannot be killed or elevated through sacrifice. The emperor is, we have seen above, the son of Jupiter or the heir of Aenas. As with the exceptional circumstances of the refugee in Agamben’s reflections, in a regime of fear, Spinoza reminds us, the only form of life permitted by the emperor is that of a pure biological life, a bare life in Agamben’s terminology (TP, Chapters V. 4, VI. 4). Yet whilst they are reduced to bare life, the emperor’s subjects do not only resist slavery; they are also capable of political action. It is in this context that the interface between affects, sovereignty and life comes to light, re-configuring the state of fear.

In Spinoza’s political analysis, the notions of conatus, desire and passions that are explained in the Ethics occupy a strategic role. A bare life, in the language of the Ethics, is conatus, which is power (literally: striving) of preserving and persevering into life. Thus, life, even at the biological level, is intrinsically linked to the idea of individuation (E. III, prop. VI, VII, VIII). Strictly speaking, conatus is a power of acting and thinking that pervades beings without coinciding with them. As I have argued in chapter II, it is a process, which is organised through relational phases located within a collective ground. With particular reference to
human beings, *conatus* is a *power of desiring* that is structured through relational movements of affecting and being affected, through which individuals re-signify themselves within the collective and vice versa (E. III, Def. Aff. I).

This *vital* force of affecting and being affected incorporates political action too. In other words, stripped of all its predicates (vital, affective, rational, political and ethical), life is fundamentally abundant (desire) and politically cogent. Following Agamben’s critique of the categorisation of life into genres, and following also the negative political implications derived from this, I argue that a bare life in Spinoza’s philosophy is not only powerful; crucially, it is in addition political relevant. Therefore, unlike the general tendency in Western thought highlighted by Agamben, Spinoza presents a paradigm of life, which even in its vital stage is always powerful, relational and thus implicitly politically cogent. It is precisely in this context that the great originality of Spinoza’s philosophical gesture lies, to which contemporary political theory should pay closer attention.

The political implication of Spinoza’s notion of bare life emerges more strongly through our persona of the Citizens of democracy in the phase of fear. In the case of our conceptual persona, under the state of fear, the bare life of the emperor’s subjects gives rise to effective political actions, meanings and time. These are, on the one side, the ground of the enslavement of the tyrant, which is characterised by the imaginary constitution of its power through the recourse to the myths of the past; on the other, the rise of the mass to freedom. In chapter XX of the TTP, Spinoza re-formulates in more political terms the affective anatomy of the power of subjects under a despotic regime. This power, he claims, is always stronger than any restrictive laws. Spinoza holds that in the state, where freedom is avoided,

*Those who are conscious of their own probity do not fear death* as criminals do, nor do they beg for mercy, for they are not tormented with remorse for shameful deeds. On the contrary, they think it an honour, not a punishment, to die in a good cause, and a glorious thing die for freedom (TTP, Chapter XX: 570, my italics).
In this argument for freedom, we might discover the political constitution of the power – whether dormant or manifest – of every community under a repressive state. It is this indifference to death, I argue, that transforms the emperor’s subjects into his cruel enemy. The subjects oppose to the despot’s fear of death their own attachment to life (conatus), which is a pure abundance of forces, desires and tensions. As anticipated above, in the Ethics, the lack of concern for death makes individuals free, which implies in turn a pleasure for life.\(^87\) The indifference to death, which in the Ethics is freedom and plenitude of life, forms a concrete structure from the political resistance of not only enlightened men, but also of a heterogeneous group of individuals deprived of political status. Strictly speaking, everyone who lives under a regime of despotism rebels against the ruler regardless of the forms of life and rights allowed by the state.

Thus, in the TTP Spinoza warns his readers that human beings under coercive laws naturally react against the state, causing rebellions and disorders.\(^88\) Whilst laws against freedom originate from fear of death (the sacredness of the tyrant’s life), a group’s revolts derives from its desire for life (conatus). The former condition, as we have seen, generates the progressive enslavement of the emperor – or, in Simondon’s state of anguish, the enfolding of the individual within himself (Simondon, 2007: 111-114) – whereas the concern of life opens the way to freedom. I would conclude that no matter how many times a sacred power attempts the de-politicisation of life, the latter always turns to the political again.

Spinoza’s definition of bare life as already and always political has more radical implications. It is not only an expression of defence and care of life; in addition, it is also capable of transformations. Deprived of all of its predicates, the

\(^87\) “A free man, […], is not guided by fear of death […], but directly desires the good […]; that is […], to act, to live, to preserve his own being in accordance with the principle of seeking his own advantage. So he thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation upon life” (E. IV, prop. LXVII, proof, my italics).

\(^88\) “Men in general are so constituted that their resentment is most aroused when beliefs that they think to be true are treated as criminal, and when that which motivates their pious conduct towards God and man is accounted as wickedness. In consequence, they are emboldened to denounce the laws and go to all lengths to oppose the magistrate, considering it not a disgrace but honorable to stir up sedition and resort to any outrageous action in this cause” (TTP, Chapter XX: 569, my italics); and (TP IV. 4).
life of the Citizens of democracy is *conatus* (perseverance in life). It is this perseverance in life that connotes the aspect of the Greek demon, which acts as an inner and invasive force of the body. In the political individual (when some of its parts are damaged), this force passes from a condition of potentiality to actuality. In order to signal the total or partial corruption of the system, the demons internal to the structure of the state operate through the actualisation of concrete actions and thoughts (TP, Chapter X. 1). This is the case of despotric regimes structured through repressive laws. The administration of authority of these political orders, Spinoza explains, inevitably produces the indignation of its subjects, giving rise to rebellions, disorders and the dissolution of the entire state (TTP, Chapter XX: 569-570).

However, these themes pertaining to the demonic force of the subjects of the emperor leave two fundamental questions unanswered. Firstly, how might bare life, however powerful and demonic, produce the ‘common’? Secondly, how and why is the people’s power *always* greater than any established authority, even under the guidance of the passions? In order to avoid the temptation of populist answers and alliances with certain Marxist explanations, we might find a response to the origin of the power of the mass in Spinoza’s definitions of the social contract and natural rights. Spinoza’s arguments regarding the pact and the power of individuals in nature, I think, are the basis of the multitude’s natural (ontological and political) condition of superiority over every established authority in any given time and space. Further, these explain the reasons for Spinoza’s thesis of the primacy of democracy over other forms of government such as monarchy and aristocracy.

The power of our conceptual persona thus derives from two crucial elements. Firstly, it is the form of the pact stipulated between individuals, from which civil society emerges. As analysed at the beginning of this chapter, the contract signals a passage and not a rupture from the state of nature to a political one. This leads to a view in which society is seen as a process, and not as an artificial institution that is merely *added* to the lives of human beings as proposed by Rice (Rice, 1990: 274-285). In accordance with the claims made in chapter II, society is a process from a lesser phase of perfection to a greater one, which
signals the increasing level of complexity within the collective field. More importantly, this contract occurs between individuals who are already in a collective state, through whom the stipulation of an agreement acquires political cogency. In this way, the community is prior to and founds the state, which is always dependent upon the power of individuals as a collective body. Furthermore, Spinoza insistently reminds us that the status of individuals within the state must not be considered as a “state within the state”, but rather as a mens una (TP, Chapters II.2; III.2-6). Spinoza’s statement has crucial implications for determining the very role and persistence of the Citizens of democracy.

Since the state is not divided into different organs that perform specific functions separated from the others, but rather it is conceived as a mens una, individuals occupy a powerful position. Spinoza’s idea of the body politic as a mens una does not allow a dialectical mechanism or a strict divide between the public affairs of the state and the private interests of the citizens. Citizens, instead, are the constitutive and indestructible force of the more complex processes of signification of sovereignty itself. In other words, and whilst paraphrasing Agamben’s expression, the Citizens of democracy are not sacred and yet may be sovereign; they thus cannot be killed. It is for this reason, I would argue, that they are the demons of the state: plural, powerful and, importantly, inherent within the body politic. In the case of the despotic regime examined before, they become operative when dismissing the ruler and advancing the process of transformation.

Secondly, as Spinoza claims, individuals do not entirely surrender their natural rights to the point of “ceasing to be a human being”. As we have seen, this means that the collective being preserves in any individualised social system a potential mass of power (natural rights), which constitutes, to use a Simondonian expression, the reserve of being of the individual (Simondon, 2007: 125-132). In a political context, I think, this reserve of being is (potentially) the ground of the production and fruition of the ‘common’, upon which the boundaries of the political are constantly signified and re-signified. It is precisely within the power of producing the domain of the ‘common’ that the natural (ontological) supremacy of the collective body, whether mob or citizens, lies. This power of producing the ‘common’ secures, generally, the equilibrium of the system from
possible tendencies toward stabilization, which would prevent movements of exchange of meanings and powers. In a particular situation, this generative power of production orients and constrains the actions of any form of government, however democratic or despotic, as the events that occurred in the Roman Empire have shown (TP, Chapter VI.2).

In chapter III the affective and relational gestures of the Subjects of Moses brought us to the need to re-shape our understanding of society through a conception of its complexity. This vision of society as part of a more problematic process does not suggest the idea of a form of agency behind and beyond the constitution of the political order, which would direct the system toward the better, or towards the truth. Rather, historical events amply testify to the impossibility of conceptualising the development of societies within fixed categories of Truth, Spirit and obscure forms of agency. A theory of complexity, instead, implies the understanding of the human modes of association as intensively problematic, and as moving through confluences of forces, problems and solutions.

As there is no pre-established project beyond human societies, this means that the development of society follows unsuspected movements, which can hardly be predicted. For this, spontaneous movements might lead in some cases to dramatic phases, such as the state of anguish of the Subjects of Moses, or the joyful moments in the emergence of the “Good News” within the conceptual persona of Apostles. In the conceptual-affective persona of the Citizens of democracy, the complexity of the system becomes more problematic and multi-sided. This is, on the one hand, the aspect of the Greek demon, which we have analysed above. On the other, our conceptual-affective persona brings to light a destructive tendency, which gives birth to cruel political gestures. It is in this moment that the Citizens of democracy behave with as evil actions within the body of society.
The evils of the state: A defence of life

As we have analysed above, Spinoza does not only refer to the productive aspect of the mass (as in the figure of the Greek demon); in many circumstances he describes it in quite negative tones. On several occasions, Spinoza develops severe attacks upon the masses, accusing them of ignorance, servility and ambition. Spinoza’s hostile vision of the many opens up to the other aspect embodied by the Citizens of democracy, that of the meaning of demon in a Catholic sense. This refers to an inclination to act as an evil force within the state, which brings about the emergence of a blind cruelty.

As we have seen above, in repressive states, passions of fear, ambition and indignation shape the political actions and thoughts of the entire society, passing from the ruler to the ruled. Although passions of indignation and anger might lead to concrete and constructive actions, such as the collapse of despotic regimes, nevertheless, Spinoza explains, they still remain passions. From the arguments of the Ethics, we know that passions decrease the power of acting and thinking of individuals, which implies the reduction or stabilisation of the level of complexity. To put this in more Simondonian terms: passions are negative for the individuals insofar as they detach the singular being from the collective field. Strictly speaking, in a passive state an individual loses the possibility of being a constitutive part of the process of individuation.

Seen through the argumentative thread provided by the conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy, Spinoza’s account of passions has important political implications. These concern the role of evil played by the mass within a civil context, in which the objects of the social pact are partially or totally corrupted. As mentioned above, this aspect is significantly highlighted in the

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89See for example Spinoza’s claim that the multitude is easily manipulated by theological superstition; as he says, “Following this example of the Pharisees, the vilest hypocrites, urged on by the same fury which they call zeal for God’s law, have everywhere persecuted men whose blameless character and distinguished qualities have exited the hostility of the masses, publicly denouncing their beliefs and inflaming the savage crowd’s anger against them” (TTP, Chapter XVIII, p. 555, my italics).

90For Spinoza the notions of evil and good do not exist in terms of universal categories of thought. Rather, Spinoza claims that the conceptual couple of evil and good refers to what can increases or decreases the individual conatus, see (E. IV, Def. I-II; TTP, Chapters XVI-XIX). My use of the image of the evil is addressed to simply conceptualise a disruptive force, which operates within the body of the Citizens of democracy.
Theological Political Treatise. Commenting on the events of the English Civil War, Spinoza observes that people were only able to change the monarch without extinguishing the causes of tyranny effectively (TTP, Chapter XVIII: 556). This has led, Spinoza claims, to the re-creation of the monarchical system under a different ruler, who behaves politically as the former king in all but in name.\textsuperscript{91} It is through the example offered by the English events that the passive tones of our conceptual persona entirely re-define the political scene.

As discussed before, in a despotic regime fear shapes the political action of the emperor, whereas indignation structures the reaction of its subjects. The consequences of the emperor’s fear were the progressive enslavement and the death of his empire. The limit of the subjects’ indignation concerns the incapacity of structuring actions, which go far beyond the defence of actual life. Although the subjects of a tyrant are a powerful and free community, Spinoza observes, their political gestures are unable to defeat tyranny. This inadequacy is caused mainly by indignation and anger, which, as Spinoza explains in the Ethics, are generated from hatred, and not from joy. This causes, as I have argued in chapter II, the effacement of movements of exchange and alterations of meaning and powers, and thus of the possibility of transforming and being transformed (affect and being affected by the others in the language of the Ethics).

This absence of expansive movements in the political body immediately implies a different constitution of time, which becomes restricted to the form of the present. The present is no longer the actualisation of the infinite possibilities of the future or the meanings of the past; rather, it is a static place characterised by retreats and restorations. Deprived of the multiple potentialities of the future, the care of life nuanced by indignation and hatred cannot produce political gestures other than destructions and the sudden re-establishment of extant forms. Consequently, the Citizens of democracy can kill and overthrow monarchs as many times as they please without abolishing monarchy. As the English revolt has shown, after having executed the king and caused cruel massacres, people searched for the return to monarchy.

\textsuperscript{91}Spinoza specifically refers to the execution of Charles I (1649), the establishment of Cromwell’s protectorate (1653-58), and the Restoration of monarchy (1660).
It follows that the care and defence of life, however free from the fear of death, do not directly mean joy and love of life, which instead are the ground of productive movements. By contrast, in its more evil aspect, our conceptual persona lacks a future, as it loses its power to actualise the possibilities of the future within the present. Concerned more with the defence of actual life rather than an enjoyment of it, the Citizens of democracy understand all the new and unpredictable events as possible risks (such as a new king) to their life, which consequently have to be destroyed as soon as these enter the threshold of the community (TP, Chapter V.6). As a result of this lack of future and of joy of life, they will kill Christ. The masses, under the guidance of hatred, Spinoza warns us, do not hesitate to prosecute Christ, philosophers and intellectuals (TTP, Chapter XVIII: 555).

A consequence of this evil tendency is that the body of our conceptual persona tends toward a stabilisation of the political order, which implies the progressive decrease of the power to re-signify the ‘common’. In this light, every emerging political reality will be necessarily re-defined and bound within the pre-existing order. In this same respect, Cromwell’s protectorate and Augustus’ empire are a repetition of the former ruling order. This, notably, does not mean that the collective body under the control of hatred ceases to be the ground and the generative source of the ‘common’. As we have analysed, it is the very ontological (natural) constitution of the collective beings that produces the ‘common’ and which makes them impossible to kill. The evil character, rather, involves a mere reproduction of the present order and the occlusion of the future.

From the arguments made so far, I would conclude that Spinoza’s enquiry into the cruelty of the mass reveals his concern for the loss of political life under the domain of hatred, and thereby the necessity of giving a sacred status to people through civil rights and laws. As discussed before, whilst the lives of individuals might be reduced by a politics of hate, life is always political. Spinoza’s analysis brings to light a more complex process, and one that is at risk under the states of fear and hatred. This process pertains to the development and fruition of the ‘common’, through which – and solely through which – relations, meanings and further transformations are founded. A fundamental question arises in relation to
these arguments. Assuming Spinoza’s refusal of any form of agency, higher mind and a society of philosophers, how might this complex collective being constitute a democratic state? To answer this question, we must examine the constructive elements in Spinoza’s discourse, which encourages the development of a community and the prevention of its possible dissolution.

Spinoza observes that the political life of every community, nuanced by the affects of joy, love, piety and hope, has been directed towards the stability, peace and unity of the entire society. In the TTP, Spinoza reflects upon the “amor patriae” (love of one’s nation) of the Israelites under Moses’ governance, and the apostolic doctrine of love and piety. Although the Hebrews’ love for their nation ultimately caused the exclusion and successive failure of the Jewish nation, Spinoza notes how this amor patriae in itself favoured a politics of fidelity and solidarity, which certainly reinforced the entire political order (TTP, Chapter XVII: 547). This was based, Spinoza explains, on the use of a popular army, a certain respect for the principle of unanimity in issuing laws, decision making, and common ethical habits. Concerning the religion of the New Testament, Spinoza finds many fruitful insights in the precepts of the apostles and teachings of Christ, which might consolidate an ethics of mutual assistance and cohesion. Specifically, Spinoza’s interest is directed to the apostolic principle of “love of one’s neighbour”, which reinstates the importance of relations, sharing and tolerance, favouring the development of democratic values. The Jewish form of patriotism and the apostolic ethics shaped by love and devotion provide Spinoza with important instruments for conceptualising in more political terms his theory of consensus and thereby democracy. Spinoza’s enquiry into the dynamics of the democratic community is intended to unveil some of the mechanisms in which joy and love structure powerful political behaviours and transformations.
States of love and joy: Democracy

Beside the question of the apostolic doctrine and the patriotism of the Jewish people, the importance of Spinoza’s references to *amor patriae* and universal love concern his recognition of love, devotion and wonder as important counter-arguments to the state of fear (despotism). Affectivity, once again, features in Spinoza’s political discourse as a basis and not as an instrument for the establishment and progress a community. In his search for more adequate conditions for the development of society, the role of affectivity becomes increasingly central and multi-sided. It is through the affects of love, devotion and piety that democratic values are founded and developed.

These affects, I will argue, are recognised as proper political categories, which open the way to a new path of *making* and thinking the *polis*. Spinoza develops the idea of a possible linkage between democracy and affectivity, specifically between love (piety) and democracy, through which notions of life, flows of time and relations *re-colonize* the domain of the political. The novelty of Spinoza’s political move, I think, concerns the way his arguments are not limited to unveiling the mechanisms in which sovereignty invades every moment of the lives of a community, but rather show how life as an expression of joy and love determines the production of the political. In other words, Spinoza’s democratic formula offers important insights into how life can reclaim control over the sovereign power.

Although a detailed description of the democratic institution is missing from the TP, its absence does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle. This work is mainly focused on how the affective life in common of the multitude tends *naturally* towards democracy, and both the Treatises amply address these themes. Drawing upon the final chapters of the *Theological Political Treatise* with the theoretical support of the *Political Treatise* and the *Ethics*, we might determine the modes in which the multitude behaves democratically, and more

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92 The political relevance of Spinoza’s notions affects and life has been particularly emphasised by Hardt and Negri, influencing also the development of Hardt and Negri’s own theory of bio-politics (Hardt and Negri’s, 2006: 93-95; Negri, 2005: 170-229).
specifically how affects are powerful sources of democratic actions, thoughts and tensions.

Having explained the collective foundation of the social pact and the negative consequences of a politics of fear, Spinoza makes a fundamental claim at the very beginning of the *Political Treatise*, which enriches the thesis espoused in the TTP. Spinoza affirms that a “common desire” gives birth to civil society, and this reveals Spinoza’s awareness of the emergence of society as the abundant and collective production of desires, and certainly not that of poverty or need. The significance of Spinoza’s position is that he identifies desires and tensions at the very basis of the origins of society, thereby opening up a reading of human forms of association as complex confluences of problems, potentials and forces (TP, Chapter III. 6-9). It is at this moment that Spinoza’s quest for democracy commences.

Spinoza describes democracy as “a united body of men (“*coetus universus hominum*)” which corporately (“*collegialiter*”) possess sovereign power over everything within its power” (TTP, Chapter XVI: 530). For Spinoza, the superiority of this political model is that the authority of the state (*Potestas*) relies directly on the power of its members, who, through their original pact, have founded the civil body. It is for this reason, Spinoza argues, that democracy is the closer form of political organisation and coherent transformation to the state of nature, in which the right of everyone is coextensive with on individual’s own power (TTP, Chapter XVI: 531). These primary definitions form the basis of Spinoza’s advocacy of democracy, that is, the defence and expansion of consensus and freedom within the commonwealth. In the TTP, Spinoza clarifies his treatment of democracy before the other forms of state by claiming that the notion of freedom is immediately implied in the democratic system (TTP, Chapter XVI: 531). A democratic life inaugurates a practise of freedom, which is never simply individual liberty circumscribed within the private sphere of the citizen. From the arguments of the TP, we know that freedom is concerned with a

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93 Since men, […] are led more by passions than by reason, it naturally follows that a people will unite and consent to be guided as if one mind not at reason’s prompting but through some common emotion, such as […] a common hope, or a common fear, or desire to avenge some common injury” (TP, Chapter VI. 1)
collective ("collegialiter") production of consensus and unanimity (a mens una), which is fundamentally political and inherent within the domain of sovereignty.

Related particularly to the TTP, the vision of democracy as a collective production of consensus moves Spinoza to advocate freedom as the very object and end of the state, without which the entire body of a society loses its power and potential (TTP, Chapter XX: 567). Spinoza claims that the organisation of the political body should be based on the inalienable freedom of speech and thought, upon which the progress of the whole society resides (TTP, Chapter XX: 568). The importance of Spinoza’s arguments as to the inalienability of the freedom of judgement stems from the direct impact that he claims it exerts upon the political life of a community, and from the way in which it thereby collectively re-characterises and further transforms practises and ideas. Moreover, Spinoza’s advocacy of freedom is immediately nuanced by affectivity, and specifically by love and piety, which consequently become the sources and, at the same time, the outcome of a politics of freedom.

Agorà: A “common desire”

Spinoza’s claim as to the linkage between democracy, freedom and affects becomes a crucial element within the thread of our conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy, which we have examined under the state of fear. The affects of love and piety that derive from the democratic state give rise to more problematic relational movements, which connote the political actions of the collective body of the Citizens. In the state of democracy, they behave politically as virtuosi and demons of the state. In democracy, demons are the virtuosi of the state and virtuosi are the demons of the polis. It is in this moment that the affective production of the common good emerges.

In the states of fear and violence, we have seen that our persona incorporates the two meanings (Ancient Greek and Catholic) of the image of demon, which alternately characterise its political actions as a productive (the enslavement of the emperor) and as a disruptive force (the execution of Christ). In

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94 I follow Hardt and Negri’s analysis (2006) of the ways in which the multitude, in its aspects of demons and virtuosi, act within democracy,
the state of democracy, the citizens still express the Ancient Greek conception of
demon as inspiring force, which plays a pivotal role within the dynamics of the
community. Unlike the state of fear, in this democratic stage, the Catholic figure
of evil is replaced by the constructive function of the virtuosi of the polis.

As mentioned before, freedom is the ground of the development of the
democratic body. In the Ethics, we have seen, the notion of freedom has a direct
relation with the concept of life, which is in turn connected with the theme of
desire as the very essence of humankind (E. IV, prop. LXVII, prop. LXIII and
schol.). For Spinoza, a free life is nuanced by the affects of joy and love, which
individualise beings through desires and tensions (E. III, prop. XI, schol.; E. IV,
prop. LX, prop. XLI). In chapter II, we saw that these affects do not express a
private virtue or ethical attitude. Rather, love and joy are expansive and invasive
phases of a more general process of individuation. Importantly, these phases do
not coincide with already individuated individuals; instead, they create
individuals coinciding one with the other. Thus, joy and love increase the
relational composition of individuals (the level of complexity). Given these
conceptions of love and joy as relational and powerful forces of individuation, and
also as conditions of freedom, Spinoza’s theory of a free democratic community
necessarily exceeds practises of sharing, mutual assistance and political principle
of unanimity. In the conceptual persona of the Apostles, discussed in chapter III,
we saw that the actualisation of love through the body of Christ has produced not
only a different religious and cultural move, but also complex political
transformations. In Spinoza’s political enquiry, affects acquire a more radical and
powerful position.

To assume the necessity of founding a democratic body on love, joy and
thus freedom suggests an idea of democracy as an open structure that allows for
transformations and the exchange of forces. In this way, the time of democracy is
structured through unexpected phenomena that activate the multiple potentialities
of the future. In aristocracy, for example, democratic time proceeds through the
interstices of the patrician assemblies and the rumours of the plebs, and suddenly
accelerates each time a state of fear collapses (TP, IX. 14- VII. 27). I would
however argue here that democracy is not solely a political project or possibility
that can never be fully realised. Such a view would inevitably imply a return to a form of messianism, and thus to a time of expectation. In contrast, the openness of democracy means an actual political individual, the equilibrium of which is in a condition of actuality and potentiality. In this respect, a democratic system is a concrete political organisation, which is actualised in many different forms; and it also contains unexpressed meanings, individuals and actions, which will be transformed into more complex political subjectivities. Paraphrasing Negri, I would claim that for Spinoza democracy is that which is already achieved and yet that which is also yet to come.

However, the open structure of the democratic state does not imply that it is qualitatively more perfect, or the embodiment of truth. Rather, it denotes the level of complexity of a society. This complexity results from emerging problems, individuals, conflicts and pacts, which densely populate the democratic community. It is in this moment that the Citizens behave as demons within the domain of the political. In a free democratic system, Spinoza warns us, there are many possible problems, such as internal enemies and conflicts. Spinoza refers here to the possible phenomena of subversion (TTP, Chapter XX: 567-568) and, more generally, to disagreements amongst citizens. As in the state of fear, the demons imbued within the body politic pass from a condition of latency to an actual one. The actions of the demons, we have seen, do not tend to remove or exclude the emerging political being, but instead transform it into a more complex reality. Importantly, the emerging reality will not be integrated and attuned within the existing community. This would direct the process toward movements of retreat and restoration, such as those that occurred in the crucifixion of Christ analysed above. Yet, as argued above, in the state of joy and love (democracy), the collective body is affected by and affects the emerging reality, thereby enriching the present with the possibility of the future.

In this respect the Citizens of democracy certainly place the existing political order under constant threat, and it is in this constant risk that the superiority (its openness) of democracy lies. For this, Spinoza concludes, “what

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95 I do indeed admit that there may sometimes be some disadvantages in allowing such freedom, but what institution was ever so wisely planned that no disadvantages could arise therefrom?” (TTP, Chapter XX: 569).
cannot be prohibited must necessarily be allowed, even if harm often ensues” (TTP, Chapter XX: 569, my italics). In other words, Spinoza tells us that a life in common is always placed on the edge of incompatibilities, and that it is always better to release the latter than to restrain them. Thus, as with the state of fear, the life in common of the citizens of democracy expresses a pure excess of desire, through which they move towards tyranny. This form of the life in common of individuals – a form that originated through their “common desire” – cannot, I would argue, be destroyed. Collective individuals, in every community (historical, political, ethical) in which they live, express a constant condition of incompatibility. As I have argued in chapter III, it is in the very anatomy and power of individuals to encounter this incompatibility. Therefore, a political institution founded on this ontological structure necessarily has to give rise to the complete actualisation of these problems and incompatibilities, and also to be the place itself of these tensions.

Spinoza’s complex description of a democratic life, populated by relations, tensions and various forces, evokes the Ancient Greek notion of agorà (literally: “place of assembly”). The Ancient Greek agorà was a place of assembly that was not recognised by the sovereign state as politically relevant, but in which political ideas, discussion, struggles and sedition were nonetheless organised. The agorà delineated an alternative political life outside the boundaries of the state that impacted upon the stability of the body politic. In Spinoza’s own re-formulation, the agorà acquires a more radical political meaning. It becomes the fundamental place of the actualisation of the “common desire” and the production of the “common good”. In the TTP, the structure of the agorà is not conceived as a “state within the state”, but instead becomes the condition for the production of the political itself. It is precisely in this context that our conceptual persona embodies the role of the virtuosi of the state. In the Spinozan agorà everyone who intervenes within the administration of democracy is a virtuosi rather than an enemy of the state. A good citizen is, for example, a man that views,

[…] a certain law is against sound reason, and he therefore advocates its repeal. If he at the same time submits his opinion to the judgement of the sovereign power […], and meanwhile does nothing contrary to
what is commanded by that law, he deserves well of the state, acting as a good citizen should do. (TTP, Chapter XX: 568).

This active role given to the virtuosi of the state, shaped by love and piety, reinforces the image of the demons, which expose the political domain to novel realities. As we have analysed in the state of fear, the power of the demons is fundamentally founded on the capacity to produce ‘the common’, through which Greek gods, divine fathers and epic gestures have been developed. It is in this context that the originality of Spinoza’s notion of democracy lies. Spinoza’s definition of the political status of virtuosi as fundamentally productive and invasive leads us to directly relate the meaning of democracy to the fruition of the “common good”. To situate the production of the “common good” at the very heart of democratic praxis is to set aside the construction of the democratic body from the logic of the state apparatus. The identification of democracy with the production of the “common good” suggests a vision of democracy as an actual and complex process that is structured through the intensive and expansive forces of the affects of joy, love and piety. From the Ethics, I have argued that these affects are transversal to the collective body, and that they expose and complicate the realm of the individuals. This implies an understanding of democracy as a political individual located between generality and singularity, and between individuation and potentiality. This view of democracy, as essentially a hybrid individual, brings about the discovery of a different paradigm of the democratic body, which is constituted by and through a theory of complexity. As anticipated, a thought of complexity in political theory is based on a process of collective and affective individuation. Understanding democracy through a theory of complexity might provide us with an approach to political philosophy able to exceed dialectical process, logics of poverty or lack, or notions of transcendent agency.
Conclusions: Towards a new grammar of democracy

This chapter has investigated the relation between democracy and affectivity within Spinoza’s political writings, and has considered the extent to which his democratic theory might offer relevant insights for contemporary thought and practice. Attention has been given to the affects and passions of joy, love, fear, hatred and indignation within the political section of the TTP and the unfinished TP, and to some of the mechanisms by which they produce important political individuals, meanings and transformations. In both treatises, Spinoza gives full attention to the political status of affectivity within the constitution and development of the democratic community, locating affects directly within the realm of the multitude. This has led us to investigate the anatomy of the power of the multitude, and to ask whether or not the multitude can be an expression of democratic practises.

The protagonist of this chapter was the conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy. This latter has shown us an alternative mode of thinking life under democracy, within which affectivity and the multitude occupy central positions. The Citizens of democracy have brought to light the fundamental problem and thesis of Spinoza’s philosophical production, that is, how a life in common might be constructed. The manifold status of the Citizens of democracy exemplified by the aspects of demons, evils and virtuosi has indicated how affects of joy, love, hatred and indignation have a concrete impact upon the political body, and how they reconfigure notions of temporality, sovereignty and relations. It is precisely in this context, I would argue, that the originality of Spinoza’s philosophical gesture lies. Spinoza presents the idea that the ‘bare’ life of individuals is structured through a confluence of desires, affects and passions, which are powerful sources of political meanings and actions. These sources always make individuals stronger than any formed sovereign state.

As a full expression of collective and joyful life, democracy is an open plane moulded through continuous transformations. This means that Spinoza’s vision of democracy is not merely a project or a possibility; instead, it is a
concrete political individual. This definition of democracy as pure openness has a further political implication, which refers to the relation between the democratic body and the state apparatus. The novelty of Spinoza’s thesis stems from its identification of the realisation of the democratic order with the fruition of the “common good”, without passing through the constitution of any form of sovereign authority; democracy is thereby located in the collective body of the multitude. I would thus argue that in relation to the search for an adequate paradigm of contemporary democracy, Spinoza’s account, which presents democracy as an open structure that is both individual and engaged in a process of transformation, may disclose alternative trajectories able to lead towards a different political vocabulary. Such a vocabulary should include a more expansive view of the relation between affectivity and democracy, as it is through that relation that the power of the multitude might be conceptualised.
Conclusion:

The individual as a powerful problem

This thesis has investigated the convergence between ontology and politics in the work of Baruch Spinoza, and has considered the extent to which his philosophy might disclose unexplored possibilities for re-theorising the social in a materialist way. Its enquiry into Spinoza’s thought is situated within the general tendency inaugurated by Continental thought, which has seen the rehabilitation of the materialist ontology within political theory. My contribution in the existing debate has been an argument for the re-positioning of the importance of a materialist ontology of individuation in order to re-define the realm of the individual within the present. The return to a thought of individuation, claimed in the thesis, has been motivated by the continental portrayal of the social body as a complex system; a view that requires a fresh notion of the individual. A materialist ontology of individuation does not offer a formula, principle and archetype of the individual being, but rather explains the mechanism through which individuals come to light. For a materialist theory of individuation this mechanism is common to all beings and inherent within nature.

The study of Spinoza’s philosophy has been decisive for the re-assessment of the importance of a thought of individuation today, and my investigation of his philosophy of individuation has been constructed around a specific object. Following Balibar’s suggestion as to a certain affinity between Spinoza and Simondon’s philosophical views, I have re-interpreted the arguments of the Ethics and the political Treatises through Simondon’s ontology of individuation. My aim has been directed neither to the establishment of similarities between Simondon and Spinoza, nor to influences of the latter upon the former. Rather, the recourse to Simondon’s reflections has re-situated Spinoza’s thought upon an alternative theoretical ground. This involves a materialist model of individuation, which analyses the genesis and development of ontological, ethical and political beings.
I have argued that Spinoza’s theory of individuation is based on an intricate paradigm of materialism. This interpretation of Spinoza’s materialist discourse has been conducted in chapters I and II. In chapter I, the central theme has been the analysis of the fundamentals of Spinoza’s materialist ontology, focusing on the categories of the absolute, power, immanence, nature, the attribute and, specifically, matter and thought. These notions delineate the distinct model of materialism presented by Spinoza, from which his theory of individuation follows. In order to develop this chapter’s arguments, I have examined the receptions of the *Ethics* within continental and analytic schools, and considered the ways in which they have treated the themes of matter and thought within the *Ethics*. A consideration of these interpretations has been decisive for understanding the richness of Spinoza’s system of reality and, specifically materiality. More significantly, these readings, in different ways, have contributed to the construction of my approach to the theme of materialism within the *Ethics*.

Whilst the analytic reading assumes ideas and rationality as the central elements that drive the entire system of the *Ethics*, the continental approach affirms that matter, bodily movements, immanence and power are the constitutive principles of Spinoza’s ontology. The former concludes that rationality organises reality entirely, and holds that reason ultimately shapes human actions. The latter draws a model of materialism from Spinoza’s theories of nature, matter and the metaphysics of Substance. The risk, to which the analytic approach might lead, I have claimed, is that of falling into a form of *mentalisation* of matter. By this I mean that the structure of the mental comes to shape extended reality entirely: matter either simply becomes thought by another name, or materiality becomes an empty category. Such an approach fails to fully evaluate the richness of Spinoza’s account of matter, which in the *Ethics* is assumed as one of the modalities of Substance-nature.

In order to re-assess the status of matter, the thesis then moved to a discussion of the continental study of the *Ethics*, which defines Spinoza’s ontology as radical form of materialism. The interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics developed within the continental perspective insists on the centrality of the themes of immanence, absolute and power, and also on the infinity of
matter and its correspondence with thought. These elements re-assess the cogency of the sensible world and delineate the productive statuses of materiality and nature within Spinoza’s account of reality. As a result, Spinoza’s ontological system is recognised as pure activity, within which thought and matter are equally productive. The main problem that I have encountered within this approach, however, is that it does not fully explain how various individuals and events might follow from a system of pure activity. Strictly speaking, how does such a pure system, which produces itself, also produces the world and all existing beings?

Building upon the continental approach to the Ethics, the arguments made in chapter I re-consider Spinoza’s ontology as a complex system of production. Specifically, I have claimed that Spinoza’s ontology presents an anomalous process of production. This is a process because the modalities of Being, by which Substance-nature is surrounded, express phases, which actualise and constantly differentiate the entire ontological system. It is anomalous because in Spinoza’s metaphysics of Substance - determinism and contingency coexist without contradicting one another. Lastly, I also define Spinoza’s ontology as a process of production because the essence of Substance is defined as pure power; and also because the emergence of ideas, bodies and the relation between cause and effect correspond to series of changes. It is this anomalous process of production that, in my reading, grounds Spinoza’s paradigm of materialism. This materialist model of production necessarily opens up an alternative mode of thinking the emergence of singular individuals and their interrelation within the world.

Having delineated the fundamentals of Spinoza’s materialist ontology, chapter II explores the paradigm of the individual emerging from this anomalous process of production. Spinoza’s conception of the human individual is centred on an accurate study of the dynamics of affects and passions and rationality. It is preceded by an enquiry into the structure of the body and the development of ideas, self-awareness and knowledge of the world. These arguments suggest Spinoza’s primary interest to lie in knowledge of the generative process through which individuals are formed. As mentioned above, given Spinoza’s attention on the genesis and development of beings, I have suggested a detour of Spinoza via
Simondon’s paradigm of individuation, focusing to the Simondonian categories of pre-individuality, collective field, disparation, metastability and transindividuality. These notions delineate the value of the collective as an irreducible condition of individuation, the definition of the individual as an excess of heterogeneity, and the crucial role of emotions within the formation of psychic beings.

By reading Spinoza’s theses of the individual and affectivity via Simondon, the arguments that I have put forward concern the way in which Spinoza’s ontology unveils a manifold process of vital and psychic individuation. This is constructed around the notions of relationality and affectivity. More rigorously, for Spinoza, vital and psychic individuals are created through relational confluences and exchanges of power. Related particularly to the psychic process of individuation, this resides in the realm of the affects, which individuate and further differentiate beings into more complex forms of collective life. The status of the individual emerging from this process of individuation is very complex. This is not the principle of individuation and yet it is extremely powerful.

For Spinoza, the individual expresses an unstable mixture of various grades of reality, the perfection of which consists in its capacity to affect and be affected by other individuals. Considered in itself, the singular being is possessed of abundant individuated and non individuated parts, which are actualised and further differentiated within the collective context. The role of the individual within the process of individuation resides in constituting a problem and a solution within the system. As a problem, the individual is introduced into the collective power. As a solution, the individual singular exchanges and transforms a mass of power with the collective, moving further the process of individuation. In this light, the power of the individual, I have suggested, concerns its being one and more than one, in the middle between collective and particular realities. In other words, it is the unavoidable and powerful problem in every context (political, psychic and natural) in which the individual lives. The understanding of this is imperative for determining the political stakes of Spinoza’s thought.

In chapters III and IV, I have discussed the political implications of Spinoza’s ontology of individuation for the constitution of the multitude as a
political category. In these chapters, I have adopted an alternative strategy of reading the political Treatises. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of conceptual personae, I have constructed conceptual-affective personae around facts and historical figures discussed in Spinoza’s political writings. These pose or resolve a question within Spinoza’s political reflections. In chapter III, the passionate-conceptual personae of the Devotees of the prophet, Subjects of Moses and the Apostles have been crucial in addressing the problem of the ambiguous position of passions within the Theological Political Treatise. These are, on the one hand, the origin of human servitude and, on the other, productive of social relations, common values and practises of sharing and participation. In both cases, passions impact effectively upon the dynamics of a community, generating new meanings, relational events, collective life and flows of time. These factors consistently re-shape the existing political theatre.

The exposition of these themes via conceptual personae has revealed a more extensive role attributed by Spinoza to passions within the political context. In each conceptual persona examined, passions of fear, hope, devotion and wonder indicate the emergence of a problem that affect not the individual community, but rather the entire political body. Thus, the domain of the political is not the place of exchanges and transformations of thoughts, actions and potentials, which inevitably modify the development of the process of individuation. The conceptual personae of the Treatise do not signal a rupture within the production of the political, but rather the presence of incompatibilities in the existing system. For example, we have seen in this light that the Apostles and the Subjects of Moses are not the political and ethical revolutionary subject; neither are they the oppressed class. Rather, they are fundamentally incompatible with the homogeneity of the state of God, the pharaoh and the Roman Empire, for which they constitute a powerful problem. The great modernity of Spinoza’s political thesis resides in his idea of community, structured and individuated through levels of heterogeneity, incompatibilities and problems. These do not proceed through logics of social contract, rational choice and transcendent agency. Affectivity, even its passive aspect, is the ground of this process, which introduces
and further problematises the political domain with more complex flows of time, collective life and tensions.

Having examined the affective tones of the political within the *Theological Political Treatise*, in chapter IV, I have discussed the interface between affectivity and democracy, which Spinoza describes as the greatest expression of political society. I have drawn attention to the affective politics of the multitude, and considered its role within the development of democracy. The protagonist of chapter IV is the Citizens of democracy. This affective-conceptual persona articulates the central thesis and great preoccupation that accompanies Spinoza’s project from the *Ethics*, through the *Theological Political Treatise*, to the *Political Treatise*. This is the conceptualisation of the paradigm of the *life in common* embodied by the multitude. Spinoza envisages in the life in common of the multitude an alternative form of democratic praxis, which lies, obstinately, in the interstices between the authority of the tyrant and the power of its subjects, the revolutionary and reactionary movements of the mass.

The analysis of the affective status of the multitude through the conceptual persona of the Citizens of democracy has shown that the power of the multitude emerges from its life. Spoiled of its predicates (ethical habits and political rights), the life of the multitude is a mixture of affects and passions such as joy, love and hatred, which, as we have seen in chapters III and IV, are continually productive of complex political meanings, individuals and actions. These form the domain of the ‘common’, which is produced and further developed by the affective politics of the multitude. It is for this reason, I have argued, that in Spinoza’s political writings the multitude tenaciously persists in every historical juncture and is greater than any form of sovereignty such as monarchy, oligarchy and tyranny. It means that the multitude is not only a political subject such as the people, class and subjects, but more significantly it is the theatre of the realisation of the ‘common’. In this manner, the multitude cannot be thought as a social category in opposition to others, but rather as a problematic and incompatible individual.

In a *Spinozist way*, democracy is an open individual, which embodies and further develops the collective and affective life of the multitude. This marks the difference between Spinoza and his contemporaries, indicating his modernity.
Spinoza does not associate democracy with the concept of sovereignty, but instead, with the fruition of the ‘common good’, which in turn resides in the realm of the multitude. More significantly, democracy is not a final goal, to which human society should tend, but rather a concrete political reality. This lies inside and between the state apparatus, which is actualised in infinite ways, as are the many lives of the multitude. The discovery of these democratic practises is the challenge that Spinoza’s thought launches to post-modernity.

It is for this reason that the position taken in the thesis has not meant to re-draw a manifesto for the multitude of the present or to establish new principles for democracy. Rather, it aims at the understanding of these ignored concrete forms of political life, and to learn from their analyses a novel democratic grammar. Spinoza’s ontological politics of individuation provides contemporary thought with alternative theoretical instruments for re-conceptualising the connections between affectivity and politics, life and sovereignty and the a-temporality of the multitude.
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