Nothing Matters: Skepticism, Spinoza, and Contemporary French Thought

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Abstract: This essay examines the influence of Spinoza on contemporary French philosophy, and in particular the work of Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. Rather than seeing Spinoza as just another rationalist philosopher in the tradition of Descartes, the focus here is on the different methods at play in Descartes and Spinoza—the method of analysis for Descartes and the method of synthesis for Spinoza. It is the latter method that enables Spinoza to confront the skeptical challenge Descartes himself raises, and it is the implications of this response to skepticism that paves the way for how Althusser and Deleuze will employ Spinoza's thought. In particular, what is important for both Althusser and Deleuze is that Spinoza begins with God, or Spinoza 'begins with nothing' as Althusser stresses the point, an absolute that involves an 'absence of all relations'. Deleuze's philosophy of difference, I argue, can be seen to be developing an account of identity on the basis of this reading of Spinoza as beginning with a non-relational, univocal substance, or becomes multiplicity in Deleuze's own work.

Keywords: Deleuze, Spinoza, Metaphysics, Skepticism, Descartes

In his influential study of Descartes, Martial Guéroult[1] stresses the distinction Descartes makes, near the end of his reply to the second set of objections, between two methods of demonstration—analysis and synthesis. Descartes claims that demonstrating by way of analysis entails presenting matters in a way that allows 'the reader [who] is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points...[the opportunity to] make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself.'[2] This is the method Descartes claims he used in his *Meditations*[3], or what Guéroult calls the 'order of discovery' whereby what is crucial is that it proceed 'according to the requirements of our certainty,'[4] or by way of that which is already known to us, and for Descartes this is the fact that we are a thinking thing, a *Cogito*. The attentive reader of the *Meditations*, therefore, will come to acknowledge (i.e., discover) the certainty of their own *Cogito*, and from there they can then follow Descartes' reasoning for the existence of God and the external world.

Demonstrating by way of synthesis, by contrast, entails for Descartes arriving at a conclusion by way of 'a long series of definitions,

1 Guéroult 2981 [1952], 1985 [1952].

2 Descartes 1984 [1641], p. 110

3 Ibid. 111: 'Now it is analysis which is the best and truest method of instruction, and it was this method alone which I employed in my *Meditations*.'

4 Guéroult 1984 [1952],p. 9

postulates, axioms, theorems, and problems, so that if anyone denies one of the conclusions it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before, and hence the reader…is compelled to give his assent.'[5] For Guéroult this method follows the 'truth of the thing…the order of the ratio essendi,'[6] and thus it does not depend on what we know with certainty but rather on the nature and essence of things themselves. Demonstrations done in accordance with the method of synthesis will thus begin with what is primary in the order of things, namely God, rather than the *Cogito*, for as Daniel Garber puts it, God is 'the real cause on which all else, including one's own existence, depends.'[7] As Garber goes on to argue, however, despite attempts by some commentators, among them Guéroult, Curley, and others, to argue that Descartes will follow the method of analysis in the *Meditations* but the method of synthesis in his *Principles of Philosophy*, the reality, Garber claims, is that despite differences in their manner of presentation, they are both 'constructed on largely the same plan. Both works,' Garber claims, 'begin with doubt, both proceed from there to the Cogito, from the Cogito to God, and from God to the external world.[8]' Both works, in short, appear to follow the method of analysis, despite other differences, and Descartes himself lends support to this view when he claims that the method of synthesis is 'not as satisfying as the method of analysis,' because, he adds, 'it does not show how the thing in questions was discovered.'[9] More to the point, Descartes claims that while demonstrating by way of synthesis may work well in the case of geometry, where the 'primary notions which are presupposed for the demonstration of geometrical truths are readily accepted by anyone, since they accord with the use of our senses' (ibid.), this is not the case with metaphysical truths that are not readily accepted by anyone and may well 'conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses…' (ibid.), such as Descartes' claim from the second meditation that the mind is better known than the body. If we are going to do metaphysics, therefore, it would appear that the method of analysis would be better suited than the method of synthesis.

One reason some commentators may have been quick to assume Descartes was open to adopting the method of synthesis may be the fact that Spinoza wholeheartedly does adopt this method, with the assumption here being that Spinoza is continuing down a path already found in

5 Descartes 1984 [1641], p.111

6 Guéroult 1984 [1952], p.9

7 Garber 2000, 55 Garber 2000, p.55

8 Ibid., p.47

9 Descartes 1984 [1641], p.111

Descartes' own work, and most notably his *Principles of Philosophy*.[10] In support of this reading, one can turn to Lodewijk Meyer's preface to *Spinoza's Parts I and II of Descartes'* "Principles of Philosophy", where Meyer expresses satisfaction in having found someone 'who was skilled both in the Analytic and Synthetic order...[who] would be willing...to render in the Synthetic order what Descartes wrote in the Analytic,'[11] with the implication being here that Spinoza's own philosophy follows an approach that Descartes could have developed, had he chosen to do so. Spinoza was quick, however, to note that the philosophy laid out in the *Principles* is not Spinoza's own. As Spinoza explained in a letter to Henry Oldenburg, he only had his reworking of Descartes' *Principles* published on the condition that it include 'a short Preface warning Readers that I did not acknowledge all the opinions contained in this treatise as my own, *since I had written many things in it which were the very opposite of what I held*...'[12] More importantly, and as will be argued for here in this essay, Spinoza comes to conclusions that are 'the very opposite' of Descartes' because of the very different manner in which Spinoza addresses the problem of skepticism. As noted earlier, in both Descartes' *Meditations* and *Principles* he begins with doubt, with skepticism, and it is the method of analysis, the discovery of the certainty of the *Cogito*, that allows Descartes, or so he believes, to meet the problem of skepticism. For Spinoza, by contrast, we can never address the problem of skepticism through the method of analysis, by beginning with what we know, but we must begin with what is primary and essential in the nature of things—that is, we must begin with God and follow the method of synthesis. Spinoza's response to the problem of skepticism, therefore, and as will be detailed below, does not amount to a minor variation to and extension of Descartes; to the contrary, it marks a wholesale rethinking of a number of metaphysical assumptions, and a rethinking that leads Spinoza to conclusions that are 'the very opposite' of Descartes'.

The Spinozist metaphysics that emerges in response to the problem of skepticism will have a profound influence upon a number of contemporary French philosophers, most notably Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze. Althusser, for instance, draws particular attention to Spinoza's method, noting that Spinoza 'confesses in a letter that "some begin with the world and others with the mind of man; I begin with God."'[13] For Althusser what Spinoza is able to do by beginning with God, unlike Descartes who begins 'with the mind of man', is to set

10 See, for example, Curley 1969, and Bennett 1984.

11 Spinoza 1985 [1663], p.227

12 Letter 13, ibid. 207 emphasis in original

13 Althusser 2006, p. 176. As the editors note, Spinoza does not confess this in a letter but it was Leibniz who wrote this comment down after having a discussion about Spinoza with Tschirnhaus.

forth a philosophy that is out of the reach of any skeptical challenge. As Althusser puts it,

> [Spinoza] deliberately takes up his position in God. Hence one can say that he occupies, in advance, the common fortress, the ultimate guarantee and last recourse of all his adversaries, by starting with this beyond-which-there-is-nothing, which, because it thus exists in the absolute, in the absence of all relations, is itself nothing. Saying that one "begins with God," or the Whole, or the unique substance, and making it understood that one "begins with nothing", is, basically, the same thing: what difference is there between the whole and nothing?...[14]

To clarify these claims, we will show that the nothing with which Spinoza begins, the unique substance that entails 'the absence of all relations,' is to be understood in the context of his response to the problem of skepticism. In the first section of this essay, therefore, I will set forth the key premises that give the skeptical arguments their force, in particular the problem of criterion one finds in Pyrrhonian skepticism, arguments that would have a profound influence among early modern philosophers.[15] With this in place, we will then sketch some of the important responses to skepticism, of which Descartes' is an example, in order then to highlight the originality of Spinoza's approach. In the second section we will further clarify Spinoza's approach by homing in on the nature of God as substance. By stressing the absolutely infinite nature of God, Spinoza heads off the problem of the criterion before it even gets a chance to get started. It is this understanding of substance as absolutely infinite, or as the nothing beyond all relations as Althusser puts it, that Althusser will draw from in setting forth his understanding of the 'problematic' nature of ideology (Althusser), an understanding Deleuze will push this even further by developing claiming substance to be a multiplicity, or a problem. In the third and final section we develop the political implications of the problematic nature of substance, for it is the problematic nature of Spinozist substance, I will argue, that best brings the work of Spinoza and Marx together, and it is just this convergence that allows for a critique of ideology that would become an inspiration to the likes of Althusser, Deleuze, and many others.

The Challenge of Skepticism

As Richard Popkin has famously argued, early modern philosophers took the challenges they saw in Pyrrhonian skepticism very seriously, and the

14 Ibid.

15 See Richard Popkin's classic account of this influence (Popkin 2003 [1960])

varied responses to these challenges would set the stage for many of the key philosophical developments in modern philosophy. Descartes' response to the Pyrrhonian challenge is perhaps the most noteworthy, and the method of doubt employed in the *Meditations* sets out to make use of skepticism to the point where it becomes undone, and he does this, as we saw, through the method of analysis. It was for this reason that the givens of perceptual experience, although perhaps suitable for the geometers and their use of the method of synthesis, was not suitable for overcoming the skeptical challenge. As Sextus Empiricus argues in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, for instance, experience teaches us that there are numerous animals whose senses reveal more than ours do.[16] Dogs can track a scent that humans cannot even detect; sharks and other ocean predators can detect the electric fields of prey; and so on. Given such differences, the skeptics goes on to ask how it is that we humans can presume to attain knowledge of the world given our limited abilities? Picking up on this line of argument, Descartes extends it even further by subjecting to doubt our very sense of bodily awareness in time and space through his example of dreaming.[17] We may think we are by the fire, having philosophical thoughts that we write down on paper, but in actuality we are asleep in bed dreaming a scene that is not real. How can we be sure we are not dreaming now?

Descartes brings these doubts to an end with his famous argument for the *Cogito*, for the fact that there must be something that is thinking it is awake and writing when it is in fact asleep. For Descartes, the method of analysis leads him to the discovery of the fact that we cannot doubt we are a thinking thing, for this very doubt proves we are thinking, and thus we have the experience of certainty, or clarity and distinctness, that becomes the basis for Descartes' subsequent arguments. As Michael Della Rocca, among many others, has pointed out, however, this does not close the door on the skeptics: 'No matter how clear and distinct the ideas are, the skeptic says, they do not amount to knowledge or genuine normative (and not merely psychological) certainty.'[18] In other words, the psychological certainty that comes with clear and distinct ideas is not sufficient in itself to provide the normative certainty that one indeed knows what they take to know with such clarity and distinctness. It was for this reason that Descartes required the assurance that God is not a deceiving God, an evil genius who causes us to have clear and distinct ideas of things that are not true; or, as Della Rocca argues, 'For the skeptic, the epistemic status depends on epistemic features of ideas,

16 See Sextus Empiricus (1933), I.44-49, pp. 27-31.

17 Descartes 1984 [1641], pp.13-14

18 Della Rocca 2008, p.128

typically other ideas,'[19] such as the idea that God is not a deceiver. The minute we separate the epistemic status of ideas from the clarity and distinctness of these ideas, however, 'the door is left open for the skeptic.'[20] In particular, the dual Pyrrhonist threats of the regress argument and the problem of criterion come to cast doubt on our claims to know, for if the normative status of our clear and distinct ideas depends on the normative status of other ideas, then these ideas are subject to the same question. As Sextus Empiricus states the argument, and in a text that is the *locus classicus* for this discussion in the early modern period, the regress argument is one of 'Five modes leading to suspension [of belief] that have been handed down by skeptics.'[21] This particular mode, he goes on, is 'based upon regress *ad infinitum*...whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension, as we possess no starting-point for our argument.'[22] If we need an idea other than the idea we hold to be clear and distinct to justify its truth, then what is the idea that justifies this idea? What we need, as Sextus Empiricus himself notes, is a 'starting-point,' a definitive, non-arbitrary justification that requires no further justifications. The Pyrrhonian skeptics, unsurprisingly, denied there were such starting-points. Descartes had hoped his method of analysis, and the resulting discovery of the *Cogito*, would bring about such a starting point, but many others, including Spinoza, would find that this was not the case.

A guiding premise in the argument of the Pyrrhonian skeptics is that an infinite regress undermines any claims to know. There must be a starting point. The options that are commonly taken in response, therefore, are either to end a regress with an indisputable, unquestioned fact, such as Descartes sought to do with the *Cogito*, or accept the regress and the skeptical consequence that no claims are ultimately justified and all are open to doubt. Spinoza adopts neither of these strategies. For Spinoza, beginning with God as the absolutely infinite, that beyond which there is nothing, is to begin with a truth that is true precisely because it entails the absolutely infinite, a truth that entails no starting point. Pierre Macherey will allude to this point when he discusses Descartes' example of needing tools or a method in order to arrive at the truth. If this were so, Macherey argues, then we would need tools to make these tools, but then, Macherey adds, 'just as the Skeptics...demonstrate the impossibility of attaining the truth, one could demonstrate by the same regression the lack of capacity confronting humans in forging

19 Ibid. p.129

20 Ibid., p.130

21 Sextus Empiricus 1933, I.166

22 Ibid

metal, because they needed instruments to do this, which they also had to create, using already existing tools, etc.'[23] For Spinoza, by contrast, Macherey claims that 'Because "humans think"[24]...no threshold was needed for a first tool, and at the same time, to understand things, no threshold was needed for a first idea...'.[25] Put simply, for Spinoza we are always already installed in thinking, in an idea that expresses the absolutely infinite nature of substance (God), and it is only once we begin representing this truth, the truth that is expressed in human thinking, that we then open up an infinite regress. This is the basis for Spinoza's widely cited claim, from his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, that

> A true idea (for we have a true idea) is something different from its object. For a circle is one thing and an idea of the circle another... And since it is something different from its object, it will also be something intelligible through itself; that is, the idea, as far as its formal essence is concerned, can be the object of another objective essence, and this other objective essence in turn will also be, considered in itself, something real and intelligible, and so on, indefinitely'[26]

Spinoza will add, a few paragraphs later, that 'certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself, i.e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence is certainty itself';[27] and again, in the *Ethics*, he will reiterate this point: 'What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false' (E2P43S). Stated differently, human thinking always already expresses the absolutely infinite nature of God, or presupposes a reality that explains that which is, including the human mind and the truths regarding that which is, while this absolutely infinite reality is irreducible to any of these particular truths, or to any particular finite reality and relationship. This was precisely the point of Althusser's claim regarding Spinoza's 'starting with this beyond-which-there-is nothing, which, because it thus exists in the absolute, in the absence of all relation, is itself nothing.'[28] We need neither end an infinite regress in a brute, inexplicable fact or given—e.g. the *Cogito*—nor does the regress

23 Macherey 2011 [1979], p. 46

24 Ethics 2A2

25 Macherey 2011 [1979], p47

26 Spinoza 1985 [1677], p.17; TdIE 33

27 Ibid. p.36

28 Althusser 2006, p.176

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of determinations undermine the true idea that 'serve[s] as a standard of truth,' but we need simply to begin with an infinite reality that always already accounts for determinate facts and relations. In short, we need to turn to the method of synthesis which entails accounting, as Garber summarizes Guéroult, for things in terms not of what is known by us but rather by the 'order of being,' and thus the method of synthesis presents 'things in an order that reflects the real dependencies that things have with respect to one another, independent of our knowledge of them... [and thus it] must begin not with the self and the *Cogito*, but with God, the real cause on which all else, including one's own existence, depends.[29]' We will turn now to explain what this means for Spinoza, and how Deleuze in particular picks up on Spinoza's embrace of the absolutely infinite.

God or Problem

To understand the manner in which 'truth,' as Spinoza puts it, 'is the standard of both itself and of the false' (E2P43S), we need to turn to the nature of adequate ideas. As Spinoza defines an adequate idea, it is 'an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations, of a true idea' (E2D4). In other words, an idea is adequate, and thereby true, not because it is an accurate representation of a reality external to it, but rather it is adequate and true to the extent that it follows from its own nature and not the nature of another idea or reality. Taking Spinoza's claim that 'humans think' (E2A2), combined both with his famous assertion of parallelism whereby 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (E2P7) and his claim that 'The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the Body' (E2P13), then the conclusion to draw is that the idea constituting the human Mind is adequate if it is caused by the reality that is the body and not by anything external to the body. Spinoza thus claims that 'the Mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused knowledge, of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies... so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things,' and not, he adds, 'so long as it is determined internally...For so often as it is disposed internally...then it [the Mind] regards things clearly and distinctly...' (E2P29S). Ideas garnered through imagination, through external causes, are confused ideas, and confused precisely because they tend to be confounded (i.e., con-fused) with following from the nature of reality, the order of being as Guéroult puts it, when instead they follow merely from our 'fortuitous encounters with things.'

It is at this point where the influence of Spinoza's thought on contemporary French thought becomes most pronounced. Returning again to Althusser's claim that by starting with God, he starts 'with this beyond-which-there-is-nothing, which, because it thus exists in

29 Garber 2000, p.55

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the absolute, in the absence of all relation is itself nothing,' we can see that indeed God must not be limited, or determined by anything external, anything God is not, for then the ideas that follow from God would be inadequate in that God is in the end determined by something external. It is for this reason as well that Spinoza understands God to be 'a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence' (E1D6). If God were to consist of simply two attributes, there would be a determinate, numerical limit to God's nature, and thus God's nature would ultimately be determined by what God is not. As Macherey has stressed, however, and in sympathy with Althusser's claims,

> There is only one substance [i.e., God], but it comprises an infinity of attributes; its unity is incomprehensible outside this infinite diversity, which constitutes it intrinsically. The result is that substance has multiplicity within itself and not outside itself, and from this fact, multiplicity ceases to be numerical, which Spinoza expresses exactly by saying it is infinite...[30]

Deleuze will also place tremendous importance on the concept of a multiplicity, arguing that 'Multiplicity, which replaces the one no less than the multiple, is the true substantive, substance itself.'[31] In other words, multiplicity is not to be thought of in terms of that which is numerically distinct, whether this be a single substance or totality that is one, or a totality of multiple substances and elements, each one of which is numerically distinct. God as multiplicity, therefore, as 'true substantive, substance itself,' is not to be confused with anything determinate, nor with any relations between determinate entities, and thus to start with God as Spinoza does is, as Althusser put it, to place oneself 'in the absolute, in the absence of all relation, [that] is itself nothing.' At the same time, however, Althusser places great weight on the ideas of the imagination, or on confused, inadequate ideas as Spinoza understands them. In particular, when Althusser defends the 'thesis that, for Spinoza, the object of philosophy is the void,'[32] the void he has in mind is the Epicurean void, the 'void [that] pre-exists the atoms that fall in it,' and thus the object of philosophy is to 'set out from nothing,' the void, 'and from the infinitesimal, aleatory variation of nothing constituted by the swerve of the fall.'[33] In a rethinking of the Epicurean claim that there was nothing but void and falling atoms until a random, fortuitous swerve of an

30 Macherey 2011 [1979], p.99

31 Deleuze 1994 [1968], p.182

32 Althusser 2006, p.176

33 Ibid., p.175

atom set about a cascading process that gave rise to the reality we have, similarly for Althusser the task or object of philosophy is to create the opportunities for random, fortuitous encounters to bring about change, just as capitalism was born, Althusser argues, citing Marx, 'from the "encounter between the man with money and free laborers," free, that is, stripped of everything, of their means of labor, of their abodes and their families, in the great expropriation of the English countryside.' [34] On this point Althusser echoes Deleuze and Guattari's claim, from *Anti-Oedipus*, that the encounter that allowed for 'capitalism to be born' involved the 'contingent nature of this encounter' between flows of deterritorialized workers and money, and '[i]t is the singular nature of this conjunction that ensured the universality of capitalism.'[35] In other words, it is the fortuitous, contingent nature of encounters, the *singularity* of the event as Deleuze will also put it (and to be clarified below), that allowed for the birth of capitalism, and it is the task of philosophy, as Althusser reads and takes on Spinoza's project, to make way for the void, for the nothing that matters, that allows for encounters that may transform capitalism and seed the conditions whereby it becomes something other.

At this point, however, it may seem that Althusser, and likewise Deleuze and Guattari, have parted ways with Spinoza's project by stressing the contingent, fortuitous, singular nature of encounters. Does this approach not simply give undue emphasis to the role of the imagination and the inadequate, confused ideas this entails, and in the process overlook the importance of the adequate ideas that follow immanently and intrinsically from the nature of one's own mind (and hence body) rather than from anything external to the mind or body? There are two points to stress here. First, and most straightforwardly, Spinoza does not dismiss the inadequate, confused ideas of the imagination. Spinoza is quite clear: 'Inadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas' (E2P36). By virtue of the fact that God is absolutely infinite, and thus without determinate limitations, and following from E1P15—'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God'—the result for Spinoza is that even ill-conceived, inadequate ideas, to the extent that they are conceived at all, presuppose the absolutely infinite nature of God and thus 'follow with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas.' The difference between them, and this brings me to the second point, hinges upon how we understand the manner in which something

34 Althusser 1997, p.13. Althusser does not provide a reference, though Marx makes roughly this claim in the *Grundrisse*: 'For the encounter with the objective conditions of labour as separate from him, as capital from the worker's side, and the encounter with the worker as propertyless, as an abstract worker from the capitalist's side – the exchange such as takes place between value and living labour, presupposes a historic process...a historic process, which, as we saw, forms the history of the origins of capital and wage labour, 'Marx 1993 [1858], pp.488-89.

35 Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p.224

follows with the same necessity. In interpreting Spinoza's claim, at E1P16, that 'From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes,' it is frequently assumed that the manner in which things follow from the necessity of the divine nature is in accordance with a law of nature, a law or rule that predetermines, and necessarily so, all that has and will happen in accordance with the necessity of this law (or rule).[36] If this were how Spinoza were to understand the manner in which something follows with the same necessity from the nature of God, then it could fall prey to the skeptical challenge Wittgenstein posed with his famous rule-following paradox.

As a brief aside, but one that will clarify the issues involved here, we can turn to the rule-following paradox, which Wittgenstein states as follows: 'This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule...if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it.'[37] For example, and drawing from Saul Kripke's famous study of Wittgenstein,[38] if in doing arithmetic one's actions are thought to be done in accordance with the rules of arithmetic, then the question for Wittgenstein is how we are to determine whether one is to follow the plus rule or quus rule when one is given the problem of adding 68 + 57? If in all previous cases of doing arithmetic one had never added a number greater than or equal to 68, and if the quus rule says that a summation that involves a number greater than or equal to 68 always results in 5, then how are we to determine whether or not to follow the plus or quus rule in this case? Is the answer to this problem 125 or 5? The point of Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox is that if doing arithmetic entails following a rule then we would need another rule to verify that we are following the correct rule, plus or quus, but then we then need a rule to verify this rule, and so on. Wittgenstein, however, does not accept the skeptical paradox, and he argues instead that 'there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call "following the rule" and "going against it."'[39] This 'way of grasping a rule' that does not require another rule or standard of interpretation, a rule that needs its own interpretation and hence opens us to the skeptical regress arguments, was left unclear by Wittgenstein, and it has become the subject of much discussion among commentators.[40] Wittgenstein nonetheless does not

36 See, again, Curley 1969.

37 Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], §201

38 Kripke 1982

39 Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], §201

40 For more on this, see Bell, *Truth and Relevance: Vol. 2 Politics* (forthcoming)

accept the skeptical implications of the rule-following paradox, calling for an understanding of 'following a rule' and 'going against it' that does not open us to a regress. Similarly for Spinoza, I argue, the manner in which things follow from the nature of God is not such that it is to be thought of as being done in accordance with a rule, or a law of nature. In clarifying how this is so for Spinoza, we can gain both greater insight into how Wittgenstein avoids the skeptical implications of his rule-following paradox and we will be able to account for the emphasis Althusser and Deleuze place on the fortuitous, singular nature of encounters.

The reason for Deleuze's stress upon singularities, and the fortuitous nature of encounters, is because this is how we can account for the nature of abstract rules, rules that are then taken to predetermine that which follows or acts in accordance with the rules. A key claim for Deleuze is that 'Abstractions explain nothing, they themselves have to be explained: there are no such things as universals, there's nothing transcendent, no Unity, subject...there are only processes, sometimes unifying, subjectifying, rationalizing, but just processes all the same.'[41] It is in *Difference and Repetition*, and in his discussions of learning in particular, where Deleuze most clearly explains how abstractions and rules come to be. Deleuze does so by way of the example of a 'well-known test in psychology [that] involves a monkey who is supposed to find food in boxes of one particular colour amidst others of various colours...'[42] As we might imagine, a hungry monkey may fortuitously stumble upon food under a box and then begin to search for food under the remaining boxes, regardless of their color. At some point, however, and as Deleuze continues, 'there comes a paradoxical period during which the number of "errors" diminishes even though the monkey does not yet possess the "knowledge" or "truth" of a solution in each case....'[43] Deleuze will refer to this 'paradoxical period' as the 'objecticity [*objecticité*] of a problem (Idea),' whereby the elements that constitute the problem are drawn together—for instance, the boxes, their varied colors, food, hunger, etc.—

41 Deleuze 1995, p.145

42 Ibid, p.164. Deleuze does not cite the experiment he has in mind, but he may be thinking of Wolfgang Köhler's experiments during the First World War. The most famous of these were the problem-solving experiments with Sultan the chimpanzee who was able to "figure out" how to attach two sticks together to reach food and, in another experiment, stack boxes on one another to reach bananas that were out of reach. Merleau-Ponty cites the latter experiment in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and hence Köhler's experiments certainly qualify as 'well-known.' Köhler's interpretations of the results to justify what has come to be called 'insight learning' also track the manner in which Deleuze interprets the results of the experiments he refers to in *Difference and Repetition*. Whether or not Köhler's work is what Deleuze had in mind, I could not find the experiments Deleuze cites among those Köhler conducted. Harlow's learning set studies with monkeys from the late 1940s and 1950s do more closely match those described by Deleuze (though not exactly), but the results of his own study lead, he argues, to the rejection of Köhler's conclusions regarding insight (see Harlow 1949,1959). Harlow's studies were also well-known, especially his more notorious studies with attachment in monkeys, and what happens when a monkey is placed on a wire mother rather than a fur mother.

43 Deleuze 1995, p.164

in a way that allows for the solution to appear, a solution that then enables the monkey to "know" that the food is under boxes of 'one particular colour.' This process of encountering a problem (Idea) is precisely how Deleuze understands learning: 'Learning is the appropriate name for the subjective acts carried out when one is confronted with the objecticity of a problem (Idea), whereas knowledge designates only the generality of concepts or the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions.'[44] Moreover, the determinate solutions that result from the process of learning do not exhaust the nature of a problem, a nature that is in-finite and indeterminate. When a child learns to tie their shoes, to take a simple example, they confront the problem of arranging and tying the laces of their shoes such that, among other things, (1) the laces remain tied together and do not unravel, (2) the shoes are tightened and don't fall off, and (3) the laces can be easily untied. As anyone who has watched several children who have recently learned to tie their shoes will know, there are multiple solutions to this problem, or the solution a particular child comes to does not exhaust the problem. It is this process of learning that Deleuze claims accounts for the abstractions and rules we come to follow and employ when we possess "knowledge."

In transitioning back to the Spinozism at the heart of Deleuze's discussion, we can turn to the very next example he offers, and to the Leibnizian interpretation he brings to the example of learning. In this case it is the example of learning to swim:

> To learn to swim is to conjugate the distinctive points of our bodies with the singular points of the objective Idea in order to form a problematic field. This conjugation determines for us a threshold of consciousness at which our real acts are adjusted to our perceptions of the real relations, thereby providing a solution to the problem. Moreover, problematic Ideas are precisely the ultimate elements of nature and the subliminal objects of little perceptions.[45]

The key to this passage is understanding the process whereby distinctive, singular points are conjugated 'to form a problematic field.' In the case of the monkey finding food under boxes of a particular color, these singular points are the boxes, colors, food, feelings of hunger, etc.; and in the case of learning to swim they are, as Deleuze put it earlier in *Difference and Repetition*, the singular points of the body, waves, etc.[46] It is here where Leibniz enters the scene, for these singular points are not extensive, numerically distinct points, but rather they are intensive differentials that

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p165

46 Ibid., p.23

make extensive relations possible. When Leibniz brings up '[t]he idea of the sea,' according to Deleuze Leibniz did so to show 'a system of liaisons corresponding to the degrees of variation among these relations – the totality of the system being incarnated in the real movement of the waves' (ibid. 165). Deleuze is referring, of course, to Leibniz's famous example of the 'roaring noise of the sea'[47] in order to clarify the relationship between the subliminal, little perceptions and the actual, clear perception of the roaring waves. To hear the roaring noise of the waves, and to hear them clearly and distinctly, 'we must,' Leibniz argues, 'hear the parts which make up this whole, that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others, and would not be noticed if the wave which made it were by itself.'[48] In other words, each of the little perceptions is not heard by itself, as numerically distinct from others, but it is only as con-fused perceptions that have crossed a threshold whereby we can then come to have a clear and distinct perception of the roaring noise of the sea. Similarly in the case of the 'objecticity of a problem (Idea),' it too consists of singular points that are not to be confused with being numerically distinct points, and yet when they are brought to the threshold and 'objecticity' of a problematic (Idea) then it makes possible the extrinsic relations between determinate points and the rules and solutions that relate such points.

We are now in a position to return to Spinoza, and in particular to the distinction Spinoza makes, as noted earlier, between adequate and inadequate ideas. An adequate idea, as Spinoza defined it, is 'an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations, of a true idea' (E2D4). An adequate idea, in other words, is one that is determined intrinsically, or immanently, and without any extrinsic reference to anything other. As we have seen, for Spinoza this is most certainly the case for God, which as an absolutely infinite substance 'has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations, of a true idea' without any relationship to anything other, to anything extrinsic. Moreover, it is precisely this reading of God as intrinsic, immanent cause that Deleuze brings to bear in his interpretation of Spinoza's claims regarding non-existent modes.

When Spinoza raises the possibility of non-existent modes at E2P8—'The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God's attributes'—some have found this to be problematic. If God, as absolutely infinite substance, is a substance without limitation, then it would seem that this substance should be fully actualized, that there should be no

47 Leibniz 1996 [1704], p.54

48 Ibid.

possibilities that God has not realized for this would appear to be a limitation on the nature of God. There is something that God has not yet actualized, and thus something that delimits the actualized nature of God from the non-actualized. The mistake in this view is to prioritize the numerically distinct and extensive over the intrinsic and intensive nature of God. Stated differently, the mistake is to think one can understand the essence and nature of a singular thing by listing off its determinate properties, the actually existent properties one may think individuates the singular thing as being the thing that it is. In a late letter to Tschirnhaus, Spinoza uses his example from E2P8 to highlight this mistake:

> For example, in investigating the properties of a circle, I ask whether from the idea of a circle according to which it consists of infinite rectangles, I could deduce all its properties. I ask, I say, whether this idea involves the efficient cause of the circle. Since it doesn't, I seek another: viz. that a circle is the space described by a line one end of which is fixed and the other moving. Since this Definition now expresses the efficient cause, I know I can deduce all the properties of the circle from it, etc.[49]

The determinate properties of the circle, the properties thought to constitute the essence or nature of a circle—e.g. 'that it consists of infinite rectangles'—are not to be confused with its nature but are merely 'beings of reason,' to use Spinoza's phrase,[50] tools we use as finite beings to make sense of our world (more on this in the next section), whereas for Spinoza it is a causal process that accounts for the true nature of a circle. This same mistake extends, Deleuze argues, to thinking of non-existent modes as possibilities—that is, as determinate, already individuated and distinct but not yet actualized modes. As Deleuze puts it, in just a few critical pages from his major work on Spinoza, 'a mode's essence exists, is real and actual, even if the mode whose essence it is does not actually exist,' to which he adds that a mode's essence 'is not a logical possibility, nor a mathematical structure, nor a metaphysical entity, but a physical reality, a *res physica*.'[51] A mode's essence 'can only be assimilated to possible,' Deleuze adds, echoing Spinoza's comments to Tschirnhaus, 'to the extent that we consider them abstractly, that is, *divorce them from the cause that makes them real or existing things*.'[52]

To clarify the causal process that accounts for the nature of singular things, or namely the process of individuation, Deleuze highlights

49 Spinoza 2016 [1674], Letter 60, p.433

50 Spinoza 1985, p.301

51 Deleuze 1990 [1968], 192

52 ibid. 194, emphasis added

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Spinoza's distinction between eternity and duration. 'It is through duration,' Deleuze argues, following Spinoza, 'that existing modes have their strictly extrinsic individuation,'[53] or the determinate properties we come to identify with a singular thing, but 'any extrinsic distinction,' Deleuze adds, 'seems to presuppose a prior intrinsic one. So a modal essence should be singular in itself, even if the corresponding mode does not exist. But how?.'[54] If we return to the example of the circle that contains infinitely many rectangles, the question Deleuze asks is how there can be a singular modal essence of a rectangle if the determinate, extrinsic rectangle does not exist? To answer this question Deleuze draws upon Scotus. In taking the whiteness of a wall, for instance, Scotus argued that whiteness may have varied intensities, none of which alters the quality of the whiteness itself, or as Deleuze states it, these various intensities 'are not added to whiteness as one thing to another, like a shape added to the wall on which it is drawn; its degrees of intensity are intrinsic determinations, intrinsic modes, of a whiteness that remains univocally the same under whichever modality it is considered.'[55]
The circle in Spinoza's example is thus the attribute, or better 'God's infinite idea,' that 'remains univocally the same,' and the infinite, though non-actualized, rectangles are the intrinsic determinations and modal essences of this attribute or infinite idea, the modal essences presupposed by any actualized, determinate rectangle. A non-existent mode, therefore, is on Deleuze's reading an intrinsic mode, an intensive, quantitative difference that makes possible the extensive, numerical differences that differentiate and individuate the durational existence of singular things. Deleuze is clear on this point: 'modal essences are thus distinguished from their attribute as intensities of its quality,' to which Deleuze adds that the 'difference of being (of modal essences) is at once intrinsic and purely quantitative; for the quantity here in question is an intensive one...Individuation is, in Spinoza, neither qualitative nor extrinsic, but quantitative and intrinsic, intensive.'[56]

Restating Deleuze's reading of Spinoza in the terms of problems (Ideas) he will use in *Difference and Repetition*, we can say that something becomes numerically distinct with the extrinsic relations that are capable of being represented through the law-like rules of mathematics, among other ways (as we will see in the next section), on the condition of intensive differences. Deleuze will in fact echo Spinoza in the opening page of Chapter V of *Difference and Repetition*, which

53 Ibid., p.196

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid. Deleuze cites *Opus Oxoniense* I.3.i, ii. (or see *Ordinatio 1.3*, part 1, question 2, paragraphs 55, 58, in Scotus [2016], pp. 63-4, 65).

56 Ibid., p.197

begins with the claim that 'Difference is not diversity,'[57] namely, it is not a difference between a diverse set of already given, and extrinsically distinct phenomena; to the contrary, for Deleuze, 'difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse.'[58] More to the point, Deleuze argues that the given presupposes its modal essence, to bring the Spinozist term into play here, or an intensive, quantitative difference. As Deleuze puts it, every phenomenon is an expression of an intensity, and 'every intensity is differential, by itself a difference';[59] that is, every intensity is a Leibnizian little perception, an intensive, quantitative difference, an element of the objecticity of a problem (Idea). 'Every intensity,' Deleuze argues, or every differential, is E – E', where E itself refers to an e – e', and e to ε – ε' etc.: each intensity is already a coupling…thereby revealing the properly qualitative content of quantity. We call this state of infinitely doubled difference which resonates to infinity disparity. Disparity – in other words, difference or intensity (difference of intensity) – is the sufficient reason of all phenomena, the condition of that which appears.'[60] In his own way, therefore, Deleuze has set forth his own Spinozist assumptions, calling upon an absolutely infinite substance, a disparity of infinite, intensive differences that is 'the sufficient reason of all phenomena' and from which follows all that is given, and given as a diversity of numerically distinct, extrinsically related phenomena.

With these arguments in place, we can now return to our earlier question regarding whether or not Althusser and Deleuze prioritize the role of inadequate ideas that follow upon the fortuitous, contingent nature of imagination over the adequate ideas that follow from our intrinsic nature. We now see that our intrinsic nature, including the intrinsic nature of God as absolutely infinite substance, is best understood as a problem (Idea), and thus when Spinoza says that '[i]nadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas' (E2P36), we can see that on a Deleuzian reading that both adequate and inadequate ideas follow from the nature of God as problem (Idea). We can also see that for something to follow from the necessity of God's nature as problem (Idea) is not for it to follow in accordance with a rule; rather, such determinate rules, as well as our determinate ideas (both adequate and inadequate), are to be understood as solutions or modes of God's infinite nature as problem (Idea). This is not to say, however, that there are no important differences between adequate and inadequate ideas. There are, as we will see in the next section, and the key

57 Ibid., p.222

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid

60 Ibid.

here is to understand the manner in which our ideas express the nature of a problem. This is how we will read Althusser's claim that an ideology can be characterized 'by the fact that *its own problematic is not conscious of itself*... So a problematic cannot generally be read like an open book, it must be dragged from the depths of the ideology in which it is buried but active, and usually despite the ideology itself, its own statements and proclamations.'[61] As we will see, the imagination plays an important role in allowing us to embrace the problems that allow for learning to occur, for problems to be expressed and given voice in their solutions, with learning understood writ large in the Deleuzian sense. The imagination plays, in short, a critical role in transforming sadness into joy.

Joyful Thinking

As Spinoza recognizes throughout his writings, we human beings are limited in our capacity to understand the nature of singular modes. This is unsurprising given that we ourselves are singular modes subject to the strictures of duration, meaning our existence is dependent on the existence of other singular modes, which in turn are dependent on others, and so on to infinity. As Spinoza argues in his famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer (Letter 12, On the Nature of the Infinite), 'it is only of Modes that we can explain the existence by Duration,'[62] and such explanations entail thinking the singular thing in duration which exists and 'has God for a cause [but] not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists; and of this idea God is also the cause, insofar as his is affected by another idea, and so on, to infinity' (E2P9). As finite beings, therefore, we will forever be limited in our abilities to explain modes, but Spinoza argues that 'we can explain the existence of Substance by Eternity, i.e., the infinite enjoyment of existing.'[63] In our attempts to explain 'existence by Duration,' Spinoza claims that we rely heavily upon notions of 'Measure, Time, and Number [which] are nothing but Modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining.'[64] Moreover, Spinoza goes on to argue that 'if someone strives to explain such things [as Substance, Eternity, etc.] by Notions of this kind [i.e., Measure, Time, and Number], which are only aids of the Imagination, he will accomplish nothing more than if he takes pains to go mad with his imagination.'[65] If we ever seek to explain, understand, and hence participate in the 'infinite enjoyment of existing,' therefore, it is

61 Althusser 1997 [1965], p.69

62 Spinoza 1985 [1663], p.202

63 Ibid., p.202

64 Ibid., p.203

65 Ibid

not to the imagination that we should turn if we are to grasp the nature of substance and eternity, 'but only by the intellect[66]' will this happen.

With Spinoza's critique of imagination, it is unsurprising that most commentators subsequently turn to stress the role and nature of the intellect, or the second and third kinds of knowledge, for it is only in this way that we can appreciate and grasp the 'infinite enjoyment of existing.' Although this is certainly the case, for Spinoza, it would be premature to ignore the role the imagination plays in our daily lives. In particular, with respect to the politics of daily life, and politics more generally, the imagination, I would argue, plays for Spinoza a crucial role in facilitating the power of living and thinking, or joy as Spinoza understands it. Spinoza is quite clear, in E3P11, that 'The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking.' Ideally Spinoza would like for us to come to the third kind of knowledge and attain 'The intellectual Love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, [and which] is eternal' (E5P33), and thereby attain an infinite enjoyment of existing where we are less acted on by affects and ideas that diminish our powers. That said, however, Spinoza is acutely aware that 'the idea of any thing,' including an idea of the imagination, an inadequate, confused idea, may also aid or restrain 'our Mind's power of thinking.' If the ideas of the imagination aid our powers, then we have joy—'By *Joy*, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection*'—and if it restrains our powers, we have sadness—'by *Sadness*, that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection*' (E3P11Sch).

Returning now to Althusser's claim that an ideology can be characterized 'by the fact that *its own problematic is not conscious of itself*...,'[67] I would argue that an ideology is to be understood as a narrative construct of the imagination. In her reading of E3post2, where Spinoza recognizes that 'The human Body can undergo many changes, and nevertheless retain impressions, or traces, of the objects, and consequently the same images of things,' Susan James argues that it is helpful to think of such imaginings of the fortuitous encounters of the human body, and the manner in which they are retained, processed, and used in one's life, as narratives.[68] These narratives, moreover, as constructs of the imagination, involve inadequate ideas, but even these ideas follow, as we saw earlier, 'with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas' (E2P36). Furthermore, in light of our argument that following from the divine nature (God) does not entail following

66 Ibid.

67 Althusser 1997 [1965], p.69

68 James 2010, 253 James 2010, p.253

a transcendent rule or law, but rather it is the immanent, problematic nature of substance that is the condition for transcendent, abstract rules, and for both adequate and inadequate ideas, including narratives and ideologies. To the extent that a narrative facilitates a process whereby fewer restraints stand in the way of expressing the problematic nature of substance in our lives, then this is a narrative that facilitates joy, or the passing '*to a greater perfection*'; and to the extent that a narrative places restraints in the way of expressing the problematic nature of substance, or presents a narrative as a solution without a problem, a solution that has exhausted and eliminated the nature of the problem the narrative expresses, then this is a narrative that brings about sadness, or the passing '*to a lesser perfection*.'

To clarify this point further, we can turn to Marx. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx acknowledges the productive activity of animals: 'They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc.'[69] There is a crucial difference, however, between the productive activity of humans and animals: 'an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, while man reproduces the whole of nature.'[70] To state this in the terms used here, humans produce universally not because they possess a determinate universal Idea which they then proceed to instantiate in each of their productions, by the rule-book so to speak; rather, the universal is to be understood as the problematic nature of substance from which follows each and every determinate identity. A production is universal, therefore, in that every determinate human production presupposes a problem that the determinate production actualizes, but the problem is not itself a determinate problem, Idea, or universal. Animals, by contrast, reproduce their determinate identity without engaging in the nature of substance *as* problematic, even though the determinate identity they reproduce, as with everything for Spinoza, follows from the problematic nature of divine substance (God). With this Marxist distinction in mind, we can say that a narrative that simply reproduces itself, or presents things as if they were solutions without a problem, is a narrative that restrains our capacity to embrace the problematic nature that remains inseparable from our narratives, from our ideologies. When Althusser thus proposed a critique of ideology that entails encountering and bringing forth the problematic 'from the

69 Marx 1988 [1844], p.77

70 Ibid.

depths of the ideology in which it is buried but active,'[71] Althusser was in effect seeking to transform a narrative thinking that has perpetuated a thinking of sadness and transform it into a joyful thinking, a thinking that embraces the problematic nature inseparable from its ideas, thoughts, and narratives (ideologies). If we take, to offer the sketch of an example, the prevalent narrative and ideology of contemporary society which makes the case that commercial culture, and the capitalist free market that fuels this culture, is the greatest source of our freedom of choice, and a choice that enhances our powers, we can see that this narrative portrays itself as one that brings about joy. A Marxist, Althusserian critique of this ideology would bring the problematic from the depths of this ideology to reveal that far from bringing about joy, such narratives reinforce the already determined options we have before us, and they ultimately present the free market itself as a solution without a problem, as a natural phenomenon that is offered to us as being in line with the universal rules and laws of nature itself. As Marx himself had already recognized, the processes inseparable from capitalism do not enhance the powers of human beings but limit these powers to fewer and fewer human beings, reducing the rest to a diminished status. Far from bringing about joy, the capitalist narrative and ideology brings about sadness.[72]

Returning to Spinoza we are now in a position to characterize the difference between narratives that instill joy and those that bring about sadness. Narratives that instill joy are free, and those that bring about sadness are forced. In line with Marx's claim that whereas animals are forced to produce from physical need, human being produce even when they are 'free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom,' we can say that a narrative is forced and inclines toward sadness if it predetermines and restrains the manner in which it is to be understood and interpreted, if it presents itself as a solution without a problem, as an exceptionless rule; and a narrative is free and inclines toward joy when it affirms the problematic nature inseparable from the narrative. We can see this distinction at work in Spinoza's most political work, his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, where the freedom to philosophize is seen by Spinoza as necessary for the enhancement of the powers of both the people and the republic that protects the people's interests. In a key passage, and one where Spinoza echoes the classical republican tradition, he summarizes his earlier arguments and points out that 'From the foundations of the Republic explained above it follows most clearly that its ultimate end is not to dominate, restraining men by fear, and making them subject to another's control....'[73] In good republican

71 Althusser 1997 [1965], p.69

72 For more on this, see Bell, *Truth and Relevance: Vol. 2 Politics* (forthcoming).

73 Spinoza 2016 [1670], p.346

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tradition, therefore, the purpose of a good government is to put in place institutions and practices that avoid the arbitrary domination of its citizens, or situations where citizens may be forced to act in accordance with the will of another. What is more important for Spinoza than allowing for unlimited, unimpeded freedom within the limits of the law, or what has come to be called negative liberty, following Hobbes,[74] is to have a republic that sets out 'not to dominate,' and through fear and arbitrary exercises of power *force* its citizens to become 'subject to another's control.' Consequently, in setting out 'to free each person from fear, so that he can live securely, as far as possible,' the goal of a proper republic, Spinoza argues, 'is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but to enable their minds and bodies to perform their functions safely, to enable them to use their reason freely...'.[75] In other words, the proper end of a republic is to enable us to express God's power more fully and to realize our nature as expressions of God as 'infinite enjoyment of existence,' as the freedom that is our nature as an expression of problematic substance.

In following through on his use of the method of synthesis, we have seen that Spinoza does indeed begin with God. The God that Spinoza begins with, however, is an absolutely infinite substance that is not to be confused with anything determinate, and more precisely God is a problematic substance that accounts for the determinate rules and ways of thinking that come to be used when we think in terms of 'Measure, Time, and Number.'[76] By arguing for an understanding of Spinozist substance as problematic, we have been able to offer a way to reconsider the role the imagination plays both within the context of the goals of Spinoza's *Ethics*—namely, as facilitating the process whereby we can attain the blessedness and freedom that comes with the intellectual love of God—as well as with Spinoza's political arguments concerning the importance of the freedom to philosophize. This freedom to philosophize, to return to and conclude with Althusser, is a freedom inseparable from the absolutely infinite problematic substance that is God, a substance irreducible to any determinate thing or relation between things, and thus a God that is the 'beyond-which-there-is-nothing, which, because it thus exists in the absolute, in the absence of all relations, is itself nothing.'[77] To regain the 'infinite enjoyment of existing' that accounts for who we are in our singular, determinate nature, Althusser, following Spinoza, encourages us to live a life where nothing matters.

74 See, especially, Berlin 2002 [1969] for the work that popularized the distinction between positive and negative liberty

75 Spinoza 2016 [1670], p.346

76 Spinoza 1985 [1677], p.202

77 Althusser 2006, 1976

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