

**“MENS ET CORPUS”
IN
SPINOZA AND NIETZSCHE:
A PROPAEDEUTIC COMPARISON**

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Whenever Spinoza and Nietzsche are studied together, what is usually attested is their striking similarities in respect to ethical modes of thinking. In this paper we shall attempt to formulate the *ground* of that thinking. Thus we are only concerned with Spinoza's and Nietzsche's reactions to the question of the relation between “corpus” and “mens.” These reactions shall be examined on the basis of the dimensions of convergence and divergence in reference to the traditional dichotomy of sensuousness and intellectuality.

I. Spinoza

Prior to Descartes, who constituted the sharp antithesis between “substantia cogitans” and “substantia extensa,” Thomas Aquinas¹ and Nicholas of Cusa² also conceived man as substance. Spinoza does not accept traditional interpretations which state that human beings as well as all concrete beings of material and formal nature are substances. He sublates the conventional concept of man in proposition 10 of part two in his *Ethics*:

The being of substance does not appertain to the essence of man — in other words, substance does not constitute the actual being of man.³

¹See Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode, Oeuvres*, ed. Adam et Tannery, vol. VI, p. 33. According to Aquinas man exists “ex spirituali et corporali substantia” (Sum. Th. I, qu. 75).

²“Mens est viva substantia” (Idiot, III, 5).

³The second part of the *Ethics* includes among other themes also the theory

Man is neither "substance" nor "res," but rather a mode of thought and extension. The being of nature, the necessary existence, does not exist in man's essence. His nature follows from the two discernible attributes of God and consists of "mens" and "corpus."⁴ The mode of extension is the body in man; the mind in man is the mode of thought. Whereas thought and extension can exist through themselves, the modes "corpus" and "mens" can only *be* and be *conceived* through another. Thus Spinoza regards man "sub specie dei." In his finality and contingency the human mode expresses "God's nature in a certain conditioned manner."⁵

What makes the essence of man's mode? A principle statement of Spinoza's theory of the body⁶ reads as follows: "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, and nothing else."⁷ Man appears as idea and body conjointly. The being of mind is the idea of body from which the study of the human mind begins. The introduction into the nature of the human body follows in the note to proposition 12: the first postulate states that the body is individually and uniformly determined by and composed of many parts. The second postulate indicates the three kinds of corporealities (fluid, soft, and hard). Postulates three and four formulate the thesis that the human body needs other modes in order to exist. The remaining postulates elucidate the relativity of human bodies.

A definition of the human body can be found in the appendage to the *Short Treatise*: "The human body is nothing else than a certain proportion of motion and rest."⁸ Motion and rest are modes of extension, which cannot be determined by thought.⁹ The modifications of the body enable us to know how these two forms of existence react toward one another. Our "amor naturalis" provides for

of ideas and bodies, which, when in union, sketches Spinoza's epistemology. Already the first definition refers to the body, which becomes for Spinoza the condition for the possibility of the cognition of the human mind. The concept of the body remains relevant in chapters three, four, and five of the *Ethics*. In these parts, this conception manifests itself in conjunction with the theory of emotions and later in the experience of "Amor Dei intellectualis." Also chapters 19, 20, 22, 23 and the appendage to the *Short Treatise* emphasize the importance of bodily knowledge.

⁴See corollary to proposition 13, *Ethics* II.

⁵Corollary to proposition 10, *Ethics* II.

⁶In this paper we are limiting the theory of the body to the theory of the human body.

⁷"Obiectum ideae humanam mentem constituentis est corpus, sive certus extensionis modus actu existens, et nihil aliud" (Prop. 13, *Ethics* II).

⁸Spinoza's *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*, tr. and edited by A. Wolf, New York, Russell and Russell Inc., 1963, p. 161.

⁹"Nec corpus mentem ad cogitandum, nec mens corpus ad motum, neque ad quietem, nec ad aliquid (si quid est) aliud determinare potest" (Prop. 2, *Ethics* III).

the preservation of the body, "which far surpasses in complexity all that has been put together by human art."¹⁰

The ideas of these modifications constitute the human mind, which one should not understand to be independent of the body.¹¹ The mind or the soul — Spinoza generally makes no essential distinction — is the capacity of perception of the human body. The mind does not apprehend the body as such; it perceives the emotions and the ideas of these emotions. Consequently, the idea of the human body forms the nature of the human mind. The ideality of the soul subsists in corporeality. In the *Short Treatise*, he views the soul as a "representacion"¹² of the body. He believes that the soul is like the body and loves the latter. Sometimes Spinoza even speaks of the "soul or body." Hence, we cannot find the orphic idea of body-soul separation¹³ in his philosophy which had its historic climax in Descartes' thought. Spinoza does not agree with negative considerations of the physical. Man is therefore represented as body of the mind and mind of the body. When he thinks, he at first thinks physically.¹⁴ Nothing manifests itself to the soul more magnificently than the body.¹⁵ Spinoza's philosophy remains incomplete without the "influxus physicus." His theory of emotions is based entirely on his philosophical accentuation of the bodily. The affirmation of physical "Dasein" brings to light the general tone of his life: "Mens quantum potest, ea imaginari conatur quae corporis agendi potentiam augent vel iuvant."¹⁶

Knowledge of the soul's reality is for Spinoza "the idea of the idea." "For, indeed, the idea of the mind, that is to say, the idea of

¹⁰Demonstration to proposition two, *Ethics* III.

¹¹"The order of the state of activity and passivity of our body is coincident in Nature with the order of the state of activity and passivity of the mind" (Note to prop. 12, *Ethics* II).

"Hence we see not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what is, is to be understood by the union of the mind and body (Note to prop. 13, *Ethics* II).

¹²"Our soul being an Idea of the body derives its first being from the body, but it is only a representation of the body, both as a whole and in its parts, in the thinking thing" ("On True Knowledge, Regeneration, etc.", Chapter 22, *Short Treatise*, p. 134).

¹³The ancient Orphics believed the body to be the jail of the soul. (See Plato's *Phaedo*).

¹⁴"And as the first thing which the soul gets to know is the body, the result is that the soul loves it so and becomes united with it" (*Short Treatise*, Chapter 19, "On Our Happiness," p. 123).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Proposition 12, *Ethics* III. "The first and chief thing belonging to our mind is the effort to affirm the existence of our body" (Demonstration to proposition ten, *Ethics* III).

the idea, is nothing but the reality of the idea."¹⁷ The "idea mentis" is one with the soul and its body. It forms the nature of self-consciousness which lies both in man and in God.¹⁸ The "idea mentis" thinks the unity of body and soul. It has the capacity to understand the human mind, and comprehends the nexus between man as *body-soul* and *God*. However, the oneness of body and soul as the presupposition for a contemplative-religious ethic depends upon the knowledge of the nature of the human body.

The latter is not only the condition for the possibility of knowing the mind, but also the condition for the possibility of knowing the world.¹⁹ It unfolds the "being-understanding" ("Seinsverstehen") of things, insofar as it lets the human mind apprehend the attractions of the external bodies. The modifications of external things are always determined by the nature of man's body. In this manner we do not perceive the things in themselves, but rather the affections the body receives from the things. "Mode-knowledge" turns out to be a perspective reactive cognition. The multiplicity of physical affections influences the subjective method of mode-perception. The source of this knowledge lies in the *subject as body*. This anticipates an inversion of Kant's idea of the subject.

Thus, the medium of empirical reality is the human body. It is the faculty of material representation. The perceptive activity²⁰ of this mode also constitutes memory, that is, the concatenation of ideas based on the concatenation of bodily affects.²¹ Man's feeling of his body illuminates the faculty of his memory. The disposition of one's body is decisive for the knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, this knowledge remains incommensurate as long as it is merely relative to the nature of man.

The object of man's thought is not only "corpus,"²² but also the "ideae," the most significant of which are "idea Dei," "idea mentis," and "idea corporis." The "idea Dei" is simple and unique; it is the highest idea.²³ The "idea mentis" and "idea corporis" are both complex and composed of many ideas. The idea of the human mind takes on a mediating position among the three kinds of ideas. It

¹⁷Note to proposition 21, *Ethics* II.

¹⁸See propositions 20 and 21 in *Ethics* II.

¹⁹"Mens humana nullum corpus externum ut actu existens percipit, nisi per ideas affectionum sui corporis" (Prop. 26, *Ethics* II).

²⁰See the note to proposition two, *Ethics* III.

²¹"Hinc clare intelligimus, quid sit memoria. Est enim nihil aliud, quam quaedam concatenatio idearum, naturam rerum, quae extra corpus humanum sunt, involventium, quae in mente fit secundum ordinem et concatenationem affectionum corporis humani" (Note to prop. 18, *Ethics* II).

²²See proposition 28, *Ethics* II.

²³See proposition four, *Ethics* II.

unites the "idea corporis" with the "idea Dei" and thereby expands our knowledge of Spinoza's substance. Insofar as "mens" relegates the ideas of bodily modifications to the sphere of "nature", it transcends the perspectivism of empirical cognition as *physical* subjectivity. God or the substance liberates, as it were, knowledge from the multiple aspects of the human soul and becomes the condition for cognitive certainty.²⁴ "Natura" renders possible the clearness of ideas, for it is their very source. It directs the ideas from the modes to their essence, nature itself.

According to Spinoza, it would be a mistake simply to grasp the human body.²⁵ Man's conviction of free causality effects fallacy of thought. As the necessary oneness of body and soul,²⁶ man cannot disregard the "cosmic communality," if he wishes to perceive the distinguishing mark of totality. This "communality" as the identity of "natura naturans" and "natura naturata" is the ground of Spinozistic epistemology. With the assistance of reason and "scientia intuitiva," the human mind goes on its way to the "adequate ideas" and eventually from the contingency of modes to the eternity of nature.

The ground of adequate knowledge is "idea Dei." Man encounters a "regeneration" in his experience of the unity of "corpus," "idea corporis," "idea mentis" and the inevitable dependence of this oneness of the "idea Dei." The possibility of this experience of identity rests at first upon the speculative transcendence of the perspective cognition of the modes, sublating any final meaning of physical subjectivity, and secondly, upon the conscious direction toward the "idea mentis," which clearly apprehends the essence of the substance and the nature of the modes through the "scientia intuitiva." To see things through "scientia intuitiva" is for Spinoza the highest human perfection. It does not represent nature à la "imaginatio," nor does it grasp the existence of modes with general concepts according to the discursive manner of "ratio."

As the highest type of knowledge "scientia intuitiva" posits reason itself and *sees* the given directly. It looks into the being of nature and discovers a body beyond the body, the incorporeal object of nature itself.

For our first birth took place when we were united with the body, through which the activities and movements of the vital spirits have

²⁴"Omnes ideae, quatenus ad Deum referuntur, verae sunt" (Proposition 32, *Ethics* II).

²⁵Not the excess of will-power is the cause of falsity, but the privation of adequate knowledge (Proposition 35, *Ethics*).

²⁶"The soul (was) never without the body, nor the body without the soul" (20 Chapter, *Short Treatise*).

arisen; but this our other or second birth will take place when we become aware in us of entirely different effects of love, commensurate with the knowledge of this incorporeal object. And this may, therefore, all the more justly and truly be called Regeneration, inasmuch as only from this love and union does Eternal and unchangeable existence ensue.²⁷

II. Nietzsche

The phenomenon of the body is the richer, clearer, more tangible phenomenon: to be discussed first, methodologically, without coming to any decision about its ultimate significance.²⁸

Contempt for the body played a substantial role in the history of thought. Numerous Western philosophers attached little value to sensuousness, and if they did, then only to stimulate the elevation of the spirit. Nietzsche characterizes this philosophical inclination as "Platonism," a metaphysics he also has in mind, when he thinks of modern thought from Descartes to Schopenhauer. He honors only the Dionysian explanation of the world in antiquity and the "Renaissance"²⁹ in our millennium as countermovements to a negative understanding of the body.

"The awakened one, the knowing one, says: Body am I entirely, and nothing else."³⁰ Nietzsche radicalizes Spinoza's accentuation of the physical. The reversal of Platonism is here shown to be more effective than in any other period of philosophy. The ground of life is no longer the intelligible world of pure ideas (Plato), of the "One" (Plotinus), of the reality God (Anselm), of the certainty in "ego cogito" (Descartes), of the "absolute spirit" (Hegel) and of the "will" as "thing in itself" (Schopenhauer). Man's body in nature as the "will to power" and in one's experience as the "eternal return of the same" determines the direction of future philosophy. As master of many souls (the "wills to power"),³¹ he guides the entire man with his "great reason."³² "Ratio magna" is not content with *one*

²⁷"On True Knowledge, Regeneration etc.," Chap. 22, *Short Treatise*.

²⁸*Will to Power*, p. 489.

²⁹"For me, the Renaissance remains the climax of this millennium; and what has happened since then is the grand reaction of all kinds of herd instincts against the 'individualism' of that epoch" (Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche, tr. and edited by Christopher Middleton, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 195. Nietzsche to F. Overbeck, Leipzig, October, 1882).

³⁰*Zarathustra*, II, p. 300 (Schlechta).

³¹"Man is a multiplicity of 'wills to power'" ("Umwertung aller Werte," Bd. 1, her. von Wuerzbach, München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969, p. 301).

³²"The body is a great reason, a plurality with *one* meaning, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd" (*Zarathustra*, II, p. 300).

thinking "ego." It finds a multitude of thoughts and feelings in the subject, a plurality of "I's" that are jointly struggling as both those who are "commanding" and those who are "obeying" according to one meaning, the self, their higher power. The self, which surpasses the "ego cogito," is the complete man.

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage — whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.³³

The self as *the* will to power in man "created for itself the spirit, as a hand to its will."³⁴

Man's will to power is comprised of many wills to power, each of them in continuous competition with and interplay among themselves. The goal is always the elevation of one above the other. It is an assiduous play of overcoming. Each will strives for *more* power, not because it lacks power, but because *power* (the will is itself power) desires more power. Nietzsche does not interpret this power politically, nor does he understand the will to power primarily psychologically. He perceives it rather perspectively with dialectic-aesthetic dimensions. In other words, it is the task of the human will to power to actualize the "re-evaluation of all values" by negating the identity of truth and pure reason, by denouncing the spirit of revenge against time, and by affirming this world, this life, eternity as time, self as body.

Nietzsche does not interpret autonomously the agents of consciousness, traditionally known as the "soul," the "spirit," or the "subject." They are all expressions of mental phenomena, which cannot be conceived as independent from the body. Nietzsche's representation ("Vorstellung") of the human body as the sum of many subjects, of many wills to power, in no way negates the idea of the soul. However, the value of the concept of the soul is still depreciated. Priority over the soul and the spiritual — if with that one understands pure rationality — is given to a more distinct and more powerful phenomenon, the *self*.³⁵

The soul is part of the body and cannot be divided from the latter.³⁶ The oneness of sensuousness and intellectuality consti-

³³*Ibid.*, p. 300.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 301.

³⁵"Soul is only a word for something in the body" (*Zarathustra*, II, p. 300). "Faith in the body is more fundamental than faith in *the soul*: the latter arose from the unscientific observation of the body's agonies" (III, p. 497, Schlechta).

³⁶"We philosophers are not free to divide body from soul as the people do; we are even less free to divide soul from spirit" (The Preface to *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann).

tutes in an unique manner the nature of the self: man's *body thinks*. Nietzsche discovers corporeality in reason and reason in corporeality.³⁷

An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call "spirit" — a little instrument and toy of your great reason.³⁸

Contrary to Descartes, Nietzsche discerns "nihil facilius aut evidentius"³⁹ as the body. The power of the mind does not depend upon the power of an absolute intellect, but rather upon the corporeality of the wills to power. This corporeality refers to the dynamic movement of the wills to power within the human being.

The emphasis of the physiological element in philosophy induces at the same time the significant regainment of the "instinctive" in the history of thought. Neither discursive thought, nor experience in the Kantian sense can create an enlightened morality. For that we must have an affirmative consciousness, which aspires to the formation of the "higher body" and attempts to abolish the bad negation within Platonic-Christian thinking. The body as the symbol — among other things — of the unconscious, the instinctive, the conative ("das Triebhafte"), is a better thinker about questions of morality than the *fictitious* subject of a transcendent condition.

The preface of the *Gay Science* points to Nietzsche's interest in the affinity of thought and body. He asks the question, whether "philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*,"⁴⁰ and simultaneously consents to this consideration. According to Nietzsche the highest valuations in the history of Western thought evolved from the ground of contempt for the sensuous. Thinking remained merely an immaterial activity. The "rationale" was isolated from the "animal," disregarding the nature of the body's unity. Nietzsche unified the Cartesian separation of Aristotle's definition of man, however, without a teleological intention. He radicalized as never before in the history of thought the unity of "animal" and "ratio," a synthesis, whose actuality would in the future be attained by "philosophical physicians" working in the interest of cultural convalescence.

I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of that word — one who has to pursue the problem of the total

³⁷"Your body and its great reason: it doesn't say, I, it does I" (II, p. 300, Schlechta).

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹"Aperte cognosco nihil facilius aut evidentius mea mente posse a me percipi" (Descartes, "Meditatio" II).

⁴⁰Preface to *The Gay Science*.

health of a people, time, race or of humanity — to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all "truth" but something else — let us say, health, future, growth, power, life . . .⁴¹

Thought and culture become diseased when faith in sensuousness is destroyed.

Is there a more dangerous aberration than contempt for the body? Would not with that contempt our entire spirituality also be condemned to becoming diseased, doomed to the *vapeurs* of idealism.⁴²

Only the voice of affirmative corporeality enables the original experience of world-affirmation. This Dionysian theory of life forms the foundation for a sincere philosophy.

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.⁴³

III. Spinoza and Nietzsche

Spinoza and Nietzsche are perhaps the most renowned advocates of body-soul oneness in the history of Western thought. Nevertheless, they both relate the essence of this oneness, each to distinct entities and thereby conceive the relation between thought and body differently. Whereas Nietzsche's philosophy includes no absolute, monistic principle constituting the "authority" of the spirit, Spinoza's theory of the body rests upon the power of the one eternal substance. Sensuousness and intellectuality ultimately secure their unity through the "idea Dei." This potentiality of the *idea*, which would be unthinkable without Plato, no longer plays a significant role in Nietzsche's thinking.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Nietzsche does not heed the suspen-

⁴¹Preface to *The Gay Science*, p. 33, tr. W. Kaufmann.

⁴²III, p. 787.

⁴³*The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 37.

⁴⁴"Form, species, law, idea, purpose — in all these cases the same error is made of giving a false reality to a fiction, as if events were in some way obedient to something — an artificial distinction is made in respect of events between that which acts and that toward which the act is directed (but this *which* and this *toward* are only posited in obedience to our metaphysical-logical dogmatism: they are not 'facts')" (*The Will to Power*, 521, Kaufmann).

"He who is always busy, retains his general views and standpoints almost without ever changing them. Also everyone, who is in the service of an idea: he will never examine the idea itself, for that he does not have any time; it is even against his interest to think that the idea is still discussable" (I, p. 697).

sion of the perspectival cognition in Spinoza's absolute valuation of the nature of "idea." The "creative self," whose function lies in the activity of synthesizing the many, diverse wills to power, intends neither the transcendence of intellectual perspectivism nor the uncritical reception of Plato's luminously powerful ideas. The "influxus physicus" in Nietzsche's thought is based much more on the corporeality of the wills to power, than the experience of absolute substance.

Nietzsche's knowledge of the underlying moments of Spinoza's metaphysics does not appear to have been very erudite. This can easily be discerned from his many scattered references to Spinoza. He knew even less about the body-theory and the epistemology represented in the second part of the *Ethics*. However, he was aware of his agreements with Spinoza in reference to the starting point of their philosophy, namely, the non-teleological idea of nature. The oneness of body and soul in Spinoza's thinking also caught his attention, since the thought of absolute identity in the latter's philosophy is unmistakable. A general knowledge of Spinoza's thinking Nietzsche acquired from his readings of Kuno Fischer's study on Spinoza.

These indications do not offer any conclusive evidence for the supposition that in the fundamental dimensions and in the question concerning the relation between "corpus" and "mens," Nietzsche stood directly under the influence of Spinoza's philosophy.

Indirectly, there may have been a receptive influence, first, in Nietzsche's consciousness of the idea of power and freedom of purpose in Spinoza's philosophy and secondly, in the critical reception of the continuous chain of metaphysical thought.⁴⁵

Nietzsche's persistent criticism — even to the end of his creative period — of Spinoza's metaphysics as "ideally interpreted desensuousness"⁴⁶ left no possibility open for an authentic understanding of the first and second part of the *Ethics*. His free interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics as a "theodicy," the result of a "theologistic" philosopher, simply overlooks Spinoza's thought of bodily joy, the happiness of the entire man ("homo liber"), the experience of the "cognitive genius." Consequently, Spinoza's physiological cognition had no essential effect on the development of Nietzsche's thinking despite their astounding concordance regarding the subject of body and thought. Whereas most modern philosophers based their thinking on the dialectical movement of the *ego cogito*, Spinoza and Nietzsche

⁴⁵For a complete study of Nietzsche's relations to Spinoza see my book, *Nietzsche und Spinoza*, Verlag Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan, 1975.

⁴⁶*The Gay Science*, p. 327.

independently pursued a path that can be regarded as significantly different from the general path of subjectivity. Although they both have different ideas on nature, one thinks of it as *one* substance, the other, as wills to power, they have in common the very ground of this difference — nature itself. Determining the power of "mens" this ground does not dominate the phenomenon of "corpus."

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NIETZSCHE AND THE
CORRESPONDENCE
THEORY OF TRUTH

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Ever since a recent interpretation of Nietzsche's thought put forward the claim that he criticized the correspondence theory of truth, it has more or less been accepted as an accurate characterization of a central aspect of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge. Moreover, it has been placidly accepted that this particular version of Nietzsche's criticism of this theory of truth is accurate. That Nietzsche does seek to undermine the validity of the theory that truth is a "correspondence" between thought or judgment and states of affairs in the world is certainly correct. However, the various accounts given of this radical critique of correspondence are not completely accurate nor do they go to the heart of Nietzsche's epistemology.

Since the question of the relation between thought or judgment and the "world" or "facts" is an important one, and since Nietzsche's analyses of this issue have often been misstated, there is room for a detailed examination of what is, in point of fact, an implied critique of the correspondence theory of truth. It is implied because he does not formulate his position as a criticism of the notion that truth is expressed in a correspondence between statements and states of affairs in the world.

Versions of Nietzsche's Critique of Correspondence

In Danto's *Nietzsche as Philosopher* a number of remarks are made concerning Nietzsche's implicit critique of the correspondence theory that raise interesting questions about what precisely he means by his criticism of traditional conceptions of truth. Before presenting some disputable versions of this critique, it should be said that Nietzsche himself does not explicitly claim to attack the theory of correspondence nor does he present a single, unambiguous analysis of the question in any one place. In order to see what he was driving at in his sustained assault on traditionally propounded ideas of truth, it