As long as thought is free, hence vital, nothing is compromised. (Deleuze)

Introduction

In this paper my focus is on how Deleuze weds naturalism to a novel reworking of ethics and centred on the tasks or labours of the art of life. His interpretations of Epicurean and Spinoza’s naturalism are propelled by an ethical motivation. Deleuze, as I read him, is primarily a practical philosopher keenly interested in the ethical art of life, where it is a ‘manner of living’, a style of life, and he wishes us to live in a Spinozist manner. His naturalism fuses together in an instructive way the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of life, and where ‘life’ is not simply an idea or a matter of theory but centres on, and concerns, a way of being.

If philosophy has a use it is to be found in the doctrine of the Epicureans, as well as in later thinkers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche, namely, the creation of the free human being and an empirical education in the art of life. The object of naturalism, and in terms of both its speculative and practical aspects, is to distinguish in the case of human beings what belongs to nature and what belongs to myth. This is why for Deleuze the first philosopher is a naturalist, simply because he speaks of nature rather than the gods.
what follows I focus first on Deleuze’s reading of naturalism through Lucretius; I then turn my attention to his reading of naturalism through Spinoza. In the final section I seek to highlight some key features of Deleuze approach to the art of life.

Deleuze and the Tasks of Naturalism: The Case of Lucretius

Deleuze’s commitment to, and conception of, naturalism is to be found in two main sources: his essay on Lucretius from the 1960s and his book on Spinoza, also from the 1960s. Although well known today as an appendix to *The Logic of Sense* from 1969, Deleuze’s essay ‘Lucretius and the Simulacrum’ was first published in 1961 in *Les études Philosophiques* as ‘Lucrèce et le naturalisme’. Deleuze speaks of Spinoza’s ‘realization of naturalist program’ that has both mechanist and dynamic aspects (EPS p. 229). In fact, he locates a ‘new naturalism’ in both Leibniz and Spinoza and articulates a clear preference for the latter. I shall come to this shortly. For Deleuze, Spinoza belongs to a tradition of practical philosophy that involves a naturalism. This naturalism consists in the critique of superstition since it is this that cuts us off from our power of action and diminishes it, and induces in us sadness: naturalism exists, says Deleuze, to defeat this sadness (EPS p. 270). Spinoza is a materialist in the importance he places on the body and on bodies. One might also wish to appeal to Spinoza’s atheism, though here Deleuze has a specific understanding of his atheism: it consists in the insight that the moral pseudo-law is simply the measure of our misunderstanding of natural laws (p. 253). In nature there is neither good nor evil. For Deleuze the question of Spinoza’s atheism is without interest if it depends on arbitrary definitions of theism and atheism, and we can
only pose the question in relation to what is commonly referred to as ‘God’ from the religious viewpoint. The new materialism is, for Deleuze, first and foremost, a philosophy of immanence (p. 322). In this materialism, centred on immanence (or more traditionally, ‘pantheism’), there is the attempt to recognize the positivity of Nature and penetrate its depths and to grant the human being the thinking capacities necessary to penetrate these depths. Deleuze speaks of an ‘expressive’ nature, a nature of causal explication, and argues that there is an immanence of expression in what expresses itself (substance and modes). Deleuze acknowledges that in this thinking of immanence ‘insinuates itself among the transcendent concepts of emanative or creationist theology’ (EPS p. 232). The transformation effected, however, is radical since there is no transcendence of the One beyond or above Being or the transcendence of a Being above its creation. Being is univocal in all its expressions: ‘The One is said with a single meaning of all that differs’.

For now, let me focus on Deleuze’s exacting and highly intricate reading of Lucretius. For Deleuze, Lucretius follows Epicurus by effecting a double determination in which naturalism is made the speculative and the practical object of philosophy. In his essay from the 1960s Deleuze writes: ‘From Lucretius to Nietzsche, the same end is pursued and attained. Naturalism makes of thought and sensibility an affirmation’ (LS p. 279). This passage is a clear indication that Deleuze is wedded to naturalism as a theoretical and practical program. In a declaration that seems indicative of Deleuze’s lifelong commitment to pluralism and multiplicity, he argues that nature is not collective but distributive, not attributive but conjunctive: it proceeds not through being (the ‘is’) but
through becoming (the ‘and’). In the worlds of nature we observe ‘alternations and
entwinings, resemblances and differences, attractions and distractions, nuance and
abruptness’ (ibid.). Nature, then, whilst not a whole can be conceived as a sum, the
image of the Harlequin’s cloak, ‘made entirely’, Deleuze says, ‘of solid patches and
empty spaces, she is made of plenitude and void, beings and nonbeings’ (LS p. 267). For
Deleuze, what is ontologically prior and primary is the ‘outside’ and the conjunction
‘and’, so the stress needs placing not on predicative judgement but an independent logic
of relations. He locates the same lesson in empiricism when he writes:

The real empiricist world is thereby laid out for the first time to the fullest: it is a
world of exteriority, a world in which thought itself exists in a fundamental
relationship with the Outside, a world in which terms are veritable atoms and
relations veritable external passages; a world in which the conjunction ‘and’
dethrones the interiority of the verb ‘is’; a harlequin world of multi-coloured
patterns and non-totalizable fragments where communication takes place through
external relations. (p. 38)¹

The ‘Outside’ simply means that ‘things’ exist in relations and as becomings: there is no
simple ‘is’ and it is not to be privileged.

In Lucretius we encounter a novel philosophy of nature, one that resists the seduction and
temptations of the false kind of philosophy, namely, the theological form with its desire
for fatum (providential meaning or the meaning of the whole and of the goal or end).
How is this naturalism, in its essence, to be conceived? For Deleuze, it requires a highly
structured principle of causality to account for the production of the diverse since there
are only different and non-totalizable composition and combinations of the elements of
nature. It is the nature of the atom that needs to be clarified first, and this is what Deleuze focuses his attention on. It is the atom that challenges our sense perception and our consciousness or awareness of temporal existence. Deleuze begins with a surprisingly simple proposition: the atom is that which can only be thought and it is to thought what a sensible object is to the senses. Moreover, the atom is what gives food for thought: as we cannot perceive the atom we have to think its nature or character, and to do so rigorously precisely, and non-anthropomorphically. The atom is imperceptible not because of some deficiency in our senses but on account of its own character. Deleuze identifies an ‘Epicurean method’ of epistemology by which we may come to know something of the atom, and this method proceeds by analogy and by passage or transition. First, we draw the analogy between the sensible object, which we endow with (sensible) parts, and the noetic object that is also endowed with parts, and we posit in this act a minimum thought that represents the smallest part of the object just as in the instance of sensibility there is a minimum sensible that represents the smallest part of the object. Second, guided or steered by this analogy between the sensible object and the noetic object, we move from the sensible to thought and in reverse by means of a series of transitions.

Deleuze now advances several key theses on the nature of what is, the nature of the atoms. In the first one he states some key aspects of the atoms and the void, such as that the sum of atoms is infinite and precisely because they do not combine or synthesize to form a totality. This is followed up in points 5-7 on the shapes, sizes, and possible configurations of atoms. However, it is the third point that is clearly the decisive insight
for Deleuze, and this concerns the clinamen or swerve. When atoms collide, as they do, they do so not account of their different weights but due to the clinamen and it is this ‘differential of matter’ that relates atoms to one another. This is Deleuze’s main claim and insight, and it removes him from the Bergsonian reading of Lucretius: ‘The clinamen or swerve has nothing to do with an oblique movement which would come accidentally to modify a vertical fall’ (p. 269). On Deleuze’s reading it is an error to construe the clinamen as something haphazard and capricious. On the contrary, for Deleuze it is not at all accidental but always there, and he likens it to the conatus, speaking of it as a differential of matter. Thus, for Deleuze, we go astray when we conceive the clinamen as a secondary movement since there is only an originary movement and this movement is characteristic of matter. The causality of the clinamen is, therefore, more ‘unassignable’ (incertus, or uncertain) than it is ‘indeterminate’, and this is because it takes place at such a velocity that we have to think it in terms of a time smaller than what can be thought in a minimum of continuous time. It is this set of insights that leads to Deleuze to an important conclusion regarding the lex atomi, chiefly, that there is an irreducible plurality of causes and in any causal series a whole is not brought together. This means that nature cannot be totalized, and it is on account of this that causes are said to be ‘unassignable’. The structured principle of causality Deleuze is after works, as Brooke Holmes helpfully puts it, ‘inside the various compositions and combinations that populate the cosmos. As a result, diversity emerges within a world that is also characterized by pattern and resemblance’. In point 7 Deleuze arrives at the conclusion that difference is primary, which means that in the philosophy of nature we find ‘the heterogeneity of the diverse with itself, and also the resemblance of the diverse with
itself” (p. 271). Worlds and bodies have their similarities in time and space. Deleuze insists, however, that resemblance proceeds from the diverse and is implicated in diversity. Of course, for Deleuze there is determination: a body is born from determined elements but there is also a ‘vitalism of seeds’.

The next move Deleuze makes in his essay is of crucial importance for it centres on how we make the move from physics to ethics, including the motivation for doing so. As every student of Epicurean teaching knows such a move is its most fundamental aspect. The task of physics – to be thought in terms of naturalism – is to determine what is really infinite from what isn’t and to demarcate the difference between the true infinite from its false form or appearance. The true infinite, according to Deleuze, consists in the sum of atoms, the void, the number of atoms of the same shape and size, and the number of combination of atoms and of worlds similar, or different, to ours. What is not infinite are the parts of the atom and the body, the sizes and shapes of atoms, and every worldly or intra-worldly combination. This determination of the nature of the infinite is said to be ‘apodeictic’; and yet the real task is to show why this determination is the necessary means of ethics and practice.

Epicurean ethical practice suggests to us ways of supressing or conquering pain. However, as Deleuze correctly notes, our attainment of real pleasure, including a sense of being in the world in a joyful manner, has much more powerful obstacles to confront, such as phantoms, superstitions, terrors of existence, and the fear of death. The humanity that Lucretius depicts it in the book is a melancholy one. As Deleuze notes, the plague
not only inflicts pain and suffering but equally disturbs the soul. The disturbance of the soul has two main elements: first, the illusion that arises from our spurious idea that the body has an infinite capacity for pleasure; and, second, the illusion that the soul endures forever and that gives rise, once it has taken root in the mind, to the notion of an infinity of possible sufferings and torments after death. We can even see a link between the two illusions since the fear of an infinite suffering and punishment is but the natural price to be paid for having desires without limit. Here the life of the fool becomes a hell on earth, as the poem so instructively depicts. For Lucretius, as for Spinoza after him, the religious person displays a curious complex of avidity and anguish, and of covetousness and culpability. We live in fear of dying when we are not dead and the fear of not actually being dead once in fact we are.

Deleuze will then explain these operations of the mind in terms of how bodies or atomic compounds emit subtle and fluid elements, and they emanate either from the depths of bodies (such as sounds, smells, and tastes) or as detachments from the surface of things, including the simulacra (such as forms and colours). I will not follow Deleuze’s instructive treatment of this. For me what is key is Deleuze’s account of a third species of simulacra, which emanates neither from the depths of bodies or the surface of things, and that he calls ‘phantasms’. These are images that enjoy a high degree of independence and assume a life of their own, and they can be theological, oneiric, and erotic. We develop images that take the place of actual objects, from giants to ghosts. This happens for instance when the mind becomes isolated from the external world and when the body lies dormant, as in sleep. In the case of the erotic, although there is an actual love object
it can be neither possessed nor absorbed, and so the mind contemplating such an object is prone to all kinds of fantasies, including ones motivated by jealousy.

The ethical task is, with the aid of naturalism, to dispel the illusion of the mind and that generate fears, torments, and superstitions. It is in this sense for Deleuze, and this sense only, that physics is made subordinate to ethics: the task is not to limit knowledge or prevent its development, as is often said of Epicurean teaching, but rather to demonstrate the range of its practical application. Deleuze writes, then:

The speculative object and the practical object of philosophy as Naturalism, science and pleasure, coincide on this point: it is always a matter of denouncing the illusion, the false infinite, the infinity of religion and all the theological-erotic-oneiric myths in which it is expressed. (p. 278)

If philosophy has a use it is to be found in the doctrine of the Epicureans, as well as in later thinkers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche, namely, the creation of the free human being. This freedom consists, at least as an initial task, in freeing oneself from the realm of illusions produced by the image of the false infinite. Other, more complicated tasks will then come into view and motivate the free mind or free spirit to undergo various metamorphoses. It is not a question, for Deleuze at least, of opposing nature to custom, to convention, or to invention: there can be natural customs, conventions and nature are not opposed and the fact that the law does depend on convention does not preclude the existence of natural laws (here the ‘law’ would measure the illegitimacy of desires against the disturbance of the soul that accompanies them), and inventions are discoveries of nature itself. For Deleuze, then, what nature actually opposes is the whole domain of
myth. When we examine the history of humanity we discover that human unhappiness stems not from customs, conventions, or inventions and industry but from the aspect of myth that gets mixed with them, including the false promises of happiness offered by wealth, power, and luxury.

The object of naturalism, and in terms of both its speculative and practical aspects, now comes clearly into view: it is to distinguish in the case of human beings what belongs to nature and what belongs to myth. This is why for Deleuze the first philosopher is a naturalist, simply because he speaks of nature rather than the gods. Humanity has suffered from three main forms of myth in its history: the myth of religion (the active gods); the myth of a false physics (that humankind is destined to a particular fate); and the myths of false philosophy under the influence of theology (Being, the One, and the Whole). The critical task here is not to introduce new myths since these would only serve to deprive nature of its positivity. Lucretius carries the ‘enterprise of “demystification”’ to its limit. In addition, Deleuze thinks there is a ‘constant’ of naturalism and evident in its history from Lucretius to Spinoza and Nietzsche: this constant consists in the denunciation of sadness, in particular denouncing everything that has sadness as the basis of its power (such as the rule of priests and political tyranny).

**Spinoza and a New Naturalism**

Deleuze sometimes writes of Spinoza’s ‘new materialism’ and mostly of his ‘new naturalism’. The former centres on the thinking of immanence and a focus on the body, and the latter focuses on an expressive nature. For Deleuze, Spinoza is a materialist in the
importance he places on the body. One might also wish to appeal to Spinoza’s atheism, though here Deleuze has a specific understanding of his atheism: it consists in the insight that the moral pseudo-law is simply the measure of our misunderstanding of natural laws (p. 253). In nature there is neither good nor evil; good and evil do not ‘express’ anything, they are reifications and abstractions from the compositions and decompositions of bodies, and here we can speak of ‘good’ and bad’ relationships. Let me add: for Deleuze the question of Spinoza’s atheism is without interest if it depends on arbitrary definitions of theism and atheism, and we can only pose the question in relation to what is commonly referred to as ‘God’ from the religious viewpoint. Here God is inseparable from a ratio boni, and proceeds by a transcendent moral law, and acts as a judge.

What is a body? Deleuze understands it as the permanence of a relation of movement and rest through all the changes that affect all the parts of the body under consideration. For example, the relative constancy of an eye is defined by a certain relation of movement and rest through all the modifications of its diverse parts (the eye in turn is part of a face and that belongs to one’s body as a whole, and this gives all kinds of relations that combine with one another to form an individuality of such and such a degree). More than this we can define a body by the ensemble of relations that compose it and, specifically, by its power of being affected. To learn what power a body has to be affected we need to acquire philosophical wisdom and not live thoughtlessly on the level of chance encounters. In the case of a bad encounter one’s force of existing gets concentrated and invests the trace of the body that has affected one in order to reject the effect of this body, and this effort serves to diminish one’s power of acting. A bad
encounter can be anything from having a migraine to encountering the vehement negativity of another personality. In thinking through the interaction of bodies and how one can become capable of active affections – an agent as opposed to a patient of life – Spinoza forges a fundamental difference between Ethics and Morality. The concern is not with what one must do but with what one is capable of, that is what lies in our power and what is revealed in our mode of existence. For Deleuze, Spinoza, taken as an ethicist, is a superior empiricist and not a rationalist for whom there is the world of reason and ideas of the good life. For Spinoza being reasonable, or being wise, is a problem of becoming, and this empirical education changes significantly the contents of the concept of reason. So, from birth, and until I become wise, I only know chance encounters. Learning means coming to know myself through understanding my body and other bodies. Deleuze rejects, then, the non-materialist Cartesian philosophy for its abstract conception of a pure cogito; and he also rejects Adam as the model of the perfect human being since he is born perfect and does not have the chance to develop knowledge. Adam is like a child that is ignorant of the causes of things and so takes God as morally forbidding him something, whereas all that is being disclosed to him is the natural consequence of ingesting the fruit.

In Spinoza we find a naturalism where what is at stake is an expressive nature. In Spinoza nature is characterised as a positive and productive power. It is from within infinite nature that all finite things exist as a plurality of modes: nature is not the creation of a transcendent God and the thinking subject is not placed outside the order of nature. For Spinoza teleology is not at work in nature: “Nature is a complex process without any predetermined end…There is no ultimate foundation outside of nature, but immanent
powers, relations, and bodily compositions constitutive of nature itself” (p. 110).

Deleuze holds Leibniz’s finalism to be an inverted mechanism in which, although there is an expressive nature, this nature is given by God and the pre-established harmony.

Things are very different in Spinoza. In him we find a pure immanent causality that is to be thought in terms of the endowment of things with their own force of power and that belongs to them as modes. On this conception of nature finality is excluded, and this is the true significance of the notion of conatus. This means that there is no given moral harmony, no metaphysics of essences, and no mechanics of phenomena: ‘Expression in Nature is never a final symbolization, but always, and everywhere, a causal explication’ (p. 232). It is not that there is no mechanism or determinism in Spinoza for Deleuze; rather, he is pointing out that, although everything is ‘physical’, there is also a level on which a physics of force and a dynamism allows for essence to assert itself in existence and espouse the variations of the power of action.

For Deleuze, Spinoza is most definitely engaged in a philosophy of nature. But for Deleuze it is also the case that Spinoza belongs to a great tradition of practical philosophy and whose chief task is that of ‘demystification’: myths and superstitions. The two projects are inseparably linked since it is through an understanding of what nature is – asking questions about it works and coming to know that we are fully implicated in it – that we can acquire and cultivate a ‘superior human nature’, moving from a human condition of passivity and reactivity to a superior one of activity. Amongst other things, superstition is what cuts us off from our power of action and diminishes it, including fear
and the hope linked to fear, as well as the anxiety that leads us to phantoms. I quote from Deleuze:

Like Lucretius, Spinoza knows that there are no joyful myths or superstitions. Like Lucretius he sets the image of a positive Nature against the uncertainty of the gods: what is opposed to Nature is not Culture, nor the state of Reason, or even the civil State, but only the superstition that threatens all human endeavour. And, like Lucretius again, Spinoza assigns to philosophy the task of denouncing all that is sad, that lives on sadness, and all those who depend on sadness as the basis of their power… The devaluation of sad passions, and the denunciation of those who cultivate, and depend on, them form the practical object of philosophy… (SE p.

Of course, it’s a little more complicated than this since, as Deleuze acknowledges, some sad passions have a social function and can be socially useful (hope, humility, remorse, etc.). Still, for Deleuze, naturalism – from Lucretius to Spinoza and Nietzsche – is directed towards and moved by a philosophy of affirmation: ‘Spinoza’s naturalism is defined by speculative affirmation in his theory of substance, and by practical joy in his conception of modes’ (p. 272). Deleuze cites Spinoza’s well-known piece of wisdom that the free human being thinks of nothing less than death and that true wisdom is a meditation on life and not death.

How does Deleuze develop a normative ethics from this new naturalism? He writes of Spinoza developing a theory of natural right from the insights of Hobbes and that is opposed to the classical theory of natural law. The antique tradition of natural law (Cicero) advances the following theses: (a) our being can be defined by its perfection within an order of ends (we are naturally reasonable and sociable); (b) the state of nature does not precede society but rather we live in conformity with nature in a good civil
society; (c) in this state what is primary and unconditional are ‘duties’: our natural
powers are only potential and require an act of reason to realize them in relation to the
ends they need to serve.

Spinoza transforms this in a specific manner, the details of which we do not need to trace
here, grounding everything in natural right or power. The key development that needs to
take place in our thinking for Deleuze is this: it is a matter of capacities and powers, in
which ‘law’ is identical to ‘right’ and this means that natural laws are to be conceived as
*norms of power* rather than rules of duty:

Thus the moral law that purports to prohibit and command, involves a kind of
mystification: the less we understand the laws of nature, that is, the norms of life,
the more we interpret them as orders and prohibitions – to the point that the
philosopher must hesitate before using the word ‘law’, so does it retain a moral
aftertaste... (EPS p. 268).

These norms are ones of life in the sense that they relate to the ‘strength’ and the power
of action of individuals. We are normative types or animals out of a specific motivation:
we do not wish to be only the subject of chance encounters but rather to seek a rational
organisation of our natural powers and to enhance the cultivation and enjoyment of these
powers.

The difference between natural law and civil law is minimal on Spinoza’s naturalistic and
monistic account. Human laws, i.e. civil laws, pertain to human interests in a specific
manner, whilst the laws of nature do not. Still, human laws are ‘expressions’ of natural
law in the sense that in their invention human beings are following their natural impulse (the natural law) to preserve themselves. As one commentator has expressed it:

Nature herself does not deliver civil law in its detail, but she certainly provides the impetus for it, and the human being who conceives statutes is just as much a natural being heeding the call of self-preservation as is the caveman who hunts for food (Firmin De, p. 90).

In nature we do not see a moral difference – of Good and Evil – but we can posit in relation to it a legitimate ‘ethical’ difference, such as the difference between the wise man and the foolish person. The content of Reason is strength or freedom. Deleuze notes that this difference does not relate to conatus since fools and ignorant human beings seeks to persevere in their being as much as ‘reasonable’ and ‘strong’ human beings. How, then, do we think this ‘ethical’ difference and locate it? For Deleuze this centres on the kind of affections that guide our conatus, and this involves developing adequate ideas and active affections: ‘Reason, strength, and freedom…are inseparable from a formative process, a development, a culture. Nobody is born free, nobody is born reasonable. And nobody can undergo for us the slow learning of what agrees with our nature, the slow effort of discovering our joys....’ (p. 262) For Deleuze, Reason is involved in all the stages of our becoming-ethical and normative subjects, enabling us to move from the badness of chance encounters to common notions and adequate ideas, and so helping us make the effort to organise our encounters, including agreements and disagreements, in a more thoughtful and rational manner (EPS p. 280).

**Deleuze and the Art of Life**
For Deleuze to situate oneself on the modal plane of immanence ‘implies a mode of living, a way of life’ (p. 122). This plane exists but is also to be constructed, and it allows for this construction. Deleuze is interested in how we define a body and its powers of being and acting. For him a body can be almost anything: and can be defined in two ways: first, it is composed of an infinite number of particles in which it is characterised by relations of motion and rest, speeds and slownesses; second, a body is an ‘affective’ one in that it affects other bodies and is in turn affected by them. Deleuze thinks the Spinozist characterisation of a body is far-reaching since it means that what truly defines a body is neither form nor functions, but the relations of movement and affect. Once we appreciate this insight, we can then understand the core matter of ethics: how is one to live?

It is the second proposition just outlined that interests Deleuze the most and leads him to discuss biology and ethology, especially the work of von Uexkull. He writes:

You will not define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the number of affects it is capable of (p. 124).

So, he suggests, long after Spinoza we find biologists and naturalists, such as von Uexkull, describing animal worlds in terms of affects and their capacities. As is well-known, Uexkull gives the example of the tick and its three main affects (the attraction to light, the olfactory affect, and the thermal affect) and optimal and pessimal thresholds.
Now, Deleuze acknowledges that there is a difference between the human world and animal worlds but holds that this novel ethology can be made use of in the case of the human. We do not know what affects we are capable of in advance, and this suggests that there is an ‘empirical education’ in life, involving ‘a long affair of experimentation, a lasting prudence’ and a wisdom that implies constructing a plane of immanence. In terms of our becoming-ethical we can say that we do not know what a body can do: it is a mode of practical living and experimenting, as well as, of course, furthering the active life, the life of affirmative activity (for example, cultivating the active affects of generosity and joyfulness, as opposed to the passive and sad affects of hatred, fear, and cruelty). Deleuze even thinks ethology has a political implication and application since it becomes ‘no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities’ (p. 126). In terms of human community we might say the task is to form a higher individual, and all the classical questions of modern political thinking then come enter onto the horizon, such as: ‘How can a being take another being into its world, but while preserving or respecting the other’s own relations and world?’ We can also explore the different types of sociabilities that may be available to us as human animals, such as the difference between the community of human beings and that of rational beings.

One important task, in reading and interpreting his development, is to compare what Deleuze is doing with empiricism and practice in his Hume book to with how he tackles the relation between naturalism and practice in the Spinoza book, and in terms of the concerns of ethics and political theory. I can only touch on a few salient points here. The concern with empiricism remains – at one point in the book Deleuze speaks of the need for a ‘slow empirical education’ with respect to how we can conceive the coming
together of our encounters, especially the limits of ‘chance encounters’. The concern
with norms persists. Deleuze speaks, for example, of ‘the norms of life’ and ‘norms of
power’. The word ‘law’ leaves us with a moral aftertaste and so instead of thinking of
the commands of reason as ‘duties’ it is more fruitful to think of them as ‘norms of life’
that relate to our ‘strength’ and power of action. It is at this point in his reading of
Spinoza that Deleuze introduces a distinction between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’:

*The Ethics* judges feelings, conduct, and intentions by relating them not to
transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose and imply: there
are things one cannot do even say, feel, and think, unless is weak, enslaved,
impotent; and other things one cannot do, feel, and so on, unless one is free or
strong. *A method of explanation by immanent modes of existence* thus replaces the
recourse to transcendent values. The question is in each case: Does, say this
feeling, increase our power of action or not? Does it help us come into full
possession of that power? (p. 269

Why as an ethicist would you be a naturalist? We perhaps see the reason best when we
reflect on a distinction we might want to make between ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’. Morality,
Deleuze notes, is founded as an enterprise of domination of the passions by
consciousness. Such a remark should not lead us astray: Deleuze is in favour of the need
for self-mastery but what he is attacking here is ‘consciousness’ conceived as a reified
entity that is ignorant of true causes which lie in the body. As he puts it: ‘The fact is that
consciousness is by nature the locus of an illusion. Its nature is such that it registers
effects, but it knows nothing of causes’ (Deleuze 1988: 19). For Deleuze the order of
causes is of the order of composition and decomposition of relations and that infinitely
affects all of nature. The problem for us as conscious beings is that we only apprehend
the effects of such compositions and decompositions; in short, we are condemned to
having only ‘inadequate ideas’, confused and mutilated ideas that are divorced from their real causes. For Deleuze this should make it laughable that children are judged to be happy or that the first human being is held to be something perfect: ‘ignorant of causes and natures, reduced to consciousness of events, condemned to undergo effects, they are slaves of everything, anxious and unhappy, in proportion to their imperfection’ (ibid. 19-20). Consciousness is like a dream where one’s eyes are wide open and is a veritable field of illusions and their sources.

Our task, then – a task of both life and thought, of knowledge and experimentation – is to get beyond consciousness since by taking in only effects it misapprehends nature, and ‘all that one needs in order to moralize is to fail to understand’ (ibid. 23). In ethics we need to be surprised by the body. As Nietzsche has Zarathustra pronounce: “‘Body am I and soul’ – thus talks the child. Any why should one not talk like children? But the awakened one, the one who knows, says: Body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is merely a word for something about the body’ (2005a: ‘On the Despisers of the Body’). Deleuze is fond of citing Spinoza’s famous statement in the Ethics that no one has yet learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, providing for Spinoza, ‘clear evidence that the body, solely from the laws of its own nature, can do many things at which its mind is amazed’ (Spinoza 1992: part III, proposition 2, Scholium). For Deleuze we only know what a body can do by knowing what its affects are and how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 257). In ‘becomings’ involving different bodies and their affects, it is not, Deleuze insists, a
question of experiencing feelings of sympathy, pity, or identification, but rather of new participations on the plane of nature in which experimentation can take place (ibid. 258).

In his chapter on morality and ethics in his book on Spinoza’s practical philosophy Deleuze will make an important distinction between the good and bad human being (which replaces, following Nietzsche, the distinction between good and evil). ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ designate two modes of our existence: the ‘good’ individual (free, rational, strong) seeks to organise his encounters and join with what agrees with his nature, and in an effort to increase his power; by contrast, the ‘bad’ individual is servile, weak, and foolish because they live haphazardly (without knowledge or the joyful science) and are content to merely undergo the effects of their encounters, they wail and accuse ‘every time the effect undergone does not agree with him and reveals his own impotence’ (1988: 23). Here the self destroys itself through guilt and destroys others through resentment. In part, such a distinction between the types of human being explains Deleuze’s keenness to come up with the distinction between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’. Whereas ‘ethics’ refers to a typology of ‘immanent modes of existence’, ‘morality’ always refers existence to otherworldly, spiritual, or transcendent values: ‘Morality is the judgment of God, the system of Judgment’ (ibid.). Thus the transcendent opposition of the values good and evil is replaced by the qualitative difference of the modes of existence that we call good and bad. The problem Deleuze identifies with the moral law is exactly the same problem marked by Jean-Marie Guyau and Nietzsche: ‘Law, whether moral or social, does not provide us with any knowledge; it makes nothing known’ (ibid. 24). This is why Deleuze can say that for Spinoza the tragedy of theology is not merely speculative: ‘In this…there
is a confusion that compromises the whole of ontology: the history of a long error whereby the command is mistaken for something to be understood, obedience for knowledge itself, and Being for a Fiat’ (ibid.).

In his essay entitled ‘To have done with judgment’ Deleuze suggests that it is judgement that prevents the coming into being of new modes of existence. These modes create themselves through their own forces and are valid insofar as they bring the new combination of forces into existence. It is here, he further suggests, that we can locate a secret: ‘to bring into existence and not to judge’ (Deleuze 1998: 135). Deleuze argues the same point in Cinema 2, where he stresses that we mustn’t succumb to the temptation of judging life in the name of some higher authority such as the good and the true, but rather evaluate actions, passions, and values in relation to the life that they involve: ‘Affect as immanent evaluation, instead of judgment as transcendent value’ (1989: 141). He thus interprets Nietzsche as proposing an important evaluative shift in thinking, substituting affect for judgment and replacing ‘good and evil’ with ‘good and bad’. The ‘bad’ can be understood as ‘exhausted and degenerating life’ and the ‘good’ as ‘outpouring, ascending life’, and it is here that Deleuze provides a Spinozistic interpretation of Nietzsche on forces and the will to power, as when he conceives the ‘good’ as a power of metamorphosis which transforms itself ‘according to the forces it encounters…always increasing the power to live, always opening up new “possibilities”’ (ibid.). On the model of physics ‘noble energy’, in contrast to the base kind, is the kind capable of transforming itself, and although Deleuze acknowledges that there is will to power on both sides, one creates new possibilities whilst the other is little more than a will to dominate in an
exhausted becoming of life. The will which gives as an ‘artistic will’ is nothing other
than power conceived as ‘generosity’ (ibid.).

Like Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze challenges the transcendent and ignorant demands
of ‘morality’ because they work against ‘Life’, including the coming into being of new
possibilities of life. What poisons life are the categories of good and evil, blame and
merit, sin and redemption, to say nothing of the hatred that runs back against the self in
the form of guilt. All the values, especially good and evil, in the name of which we
disparage life, need to be denounced. When we live in accordance with the dictates of
‘morality’ we lead only a semblance of life in which ‘we can only think of how to keep
from dying, and our whole life is a death worship’ (ibid. 26). It is, then, in the name of
life and its possibilities, that we champion ethics and appeal to human beings to learn
how to make the move from morality to ethics.

1 Hume’s empiricism inverts rationalism for Deleuze but in a particular manner. It insists on the
exteriority of relations, or ‘relations being external to their terms’. Rationalism attempts to
reduce the paradox of relations by making them internal to their own terms or by locating some
deeper term to which the relation would itself be internal, as is ‘Peter is smaller than Paul’: it this
internal to one of them, to their concept, to the whole they form, or to the Idea in which we
suppose the participate? Empiricism’s success in demonstrating the exteriority of relations has
been obscured by reflection on the origin of knowledge and of ideas, and according to which the
source of both is the realm of the sensible. For Deleuze, Hume brings about an inversion that
takes empiricism to a higher power, in which if ideas contain no more than what is contained in
sensory impressions it is owing to the fact that relations are external and heterogeneous to their
terms, be they impressions or ideas. The difference, then, is not, as commonly supposed,
between ideas ad impressions but between two sorts of each: between those of terms and those of
relations.

3 For further insight see Warren Montag, ‘From Clinamen to Conatus: Deleuze, Lucretius, Spinoza’, forthcoming.

4 p. 327.

5 Holmes p. 323.

6 The classic study of myth in Lucretius is by Monica R. Gale, *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). She understands myth to be a body of traditional stories distinct from other fictions, and maintains that Lucretius makes use of myth in support of Epicurean demythologization: ‘The mythological passages in the DRN thus act a powerful polemical and didactic tool: at one and the same time, Lucretius is able to dispose of rival theories of myth satisfactorily by substituting his own account of its origins and nature; and to use myth didactically to illustrate his own argumentation’ (p. 230). From this we can say that Deleuze’s appreciation is misleading if the suggestion is that Lucretius dispenses with ‘myth altogether. As Gale ably shows the poet rejects myth but, at the same time, he appropriates mythological imagery so as to invest his argument, including his presentation of the god-like figure of Epicurus, with attractive and impressive qualities.

7 Here Deleuze surely has in mind the ‘gift-giving’ virtue that Nietzsche presents at the end of part one of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. For further insight into the relation between generosity and the gift-giving virtue see Hunt 1991: 91-94.