The Body and its Passions

In the previous chapter we saw that Deleuze is keen to argue that the mental and physical realms are irreducible and mainly because this would be consistent with his substance monism and attribute pluralism. We also examined his argument that ideas and bodies are numerically identical; that they are the same thing. I suggested that he confuses the proposition of numerical identity with the quite different claim that the actual content of the idea is the body or the physical alteration of the body. I showed how this confusion would be exacerbated if we, as Deleuze proposes, consider the term ‘idea’ to be coextensive with the term ‘mind’. By putting these different postulates together, we saw how Deleuze’s account of the mind and body, although explicitly something like a double-aspect theory, is in fact much closer to an extreme form of materialism. I concluded that Deleuze’s attempt to flesh out a non-reductive materialism fails due to the twin problems concerning privacy and ideational content. Although I have reserved judgement as to Hegel’s explanation for the ‘blotting out of the principle of subjectivity’ in the Ethics, I have advanced the suggestion that we can find the same phenomenon in Expressionism appearing in three guises. It appears first in the way that Deleuze is unable to account for the existence, necessary or otherwise, of finite modes. It next appears in the logic of the mind–body argument, such that what is manifestly a double-aspect theory has, as its latent content, a reductive form of materialism.

Deleuze draws his inspiration from Spinoza’s On the Correction of the Understanding, which he describes as falling into two parts. In the first part Spinoza considers the purpose of philosophy and concludes, according to Deleuze, that through analysing the form of a true idea we come to know our own cognitive abilities. A connection is then
established between the acquisition of this knowledge and the acquisition of a higher human nature. The second part of the *Correction of the Understanding* is concerned with the content of a true idea. Once we grasp the content of a true idea, Deleuze believes, we can address ethical problems. The ethics and the epistemology are thus thoroughly entwined. Jaspers claims that this is because both bring awareness of what man is. ‘The highest good’, he writes about Spinoza, ‘is attained through the growth of the philosophical insight in a vision of what is eternal (metaphysical total vision). Such insight is secured by the theory of knowledge. The attainment of such insight is freedom and has as its consequence freedom in practical life’.3

It is my contention that when we examine Deleuze’s portrayal of human nature we find two things. Contrary to appearances, the individual must be subject to universal and necessary laws. Secondly, the individual is disposed to act in ways we might associate with possessive individualism.4 To demonstrate the flaws in his argument I shall follow his ethical programme, apparently leading towards ethical maturity, which, I contend, actually leads to the final blotting out of subjectivity. The first step in the programme requires us to become conscious of natures of things. Because it is crucial to take this step, and because Deleuze is more than happy to ruminate on the qualities of the natures in question, it would be a mistake to erase the role and function of ‘biology’.5 The second step is the exertion of our ability to form adequate ideas of these natures. As we climb from the first to second step, we should find ourselves rattling the shackles of our overly passionate and determined natures. Incidentally, we will notice the seeds of an alternative to Freudian psychopathology, germinating from Spinoza’s account of active and reactive forces.6

**The individual**

At the first step then we must become conscious of the nature of things and Deleuze wishes to connect descriptions of these natures with an account of the ways in which bodies behave. His theory of individual behaviour is the result of hooking the theory of modal essences into an analysis of the laws of motion and rest and then inferring a number of things about consequent behaviour.7 He believes that there are two ways of approaching the natures of bodies. The first is mechanical and relates specifically to the structure of the body being identified. Deleuze analyses the structure of the body into three components:8 the