

## **From Cause and Effect to Effectual Causes: Can we talk of a philosophical background to psycho-social studies?**

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### **Introduction**

The contemporary dawning of a realization of another, more complex truth to the understanding of human cognition did not emerge ‘out of the blue’, so to speak, but had its roots in an alternative line of philosophical thought which had, until recently, been situated on the fringes of debate and discussion. This article aims to trace the development of this philosophical alternative from its roots in the seventeenth century Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, to the contemporary emergence of what I call the ‘psycho-social attitude’, the adoption of which, in my opinion, is necessary to the successful practice of psycho-social research.

I begin, therefore, by discussing Spinoza and the explicit links between his philosophy and that of post-modernist philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and the ‘deep ecologist’ philosopher, Arne Naess. I make a clear distinction between these philosophers and the Cartesian line of thought that has been so deeply influential for the last three hundred years or so. In particular, the article sets out to demonstrate that Descartes’ linearity and its consequent cause-and-effect duality, have been increasingly questioned in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In discussing this challenge to Cartesian thought I show how various different thinkers all question Cartesian linearity in their own ways, thinkers as diverse as Bergson at the turn of the nineteenth century, Freud, the ‘father’ of psychology, Merleau-Ponty and his work on phenomenology, Foucault and his ‘histories’, and Lacan and his analysis of language. I make a special case of Deleuze’s work on the concept of ‘affect’ (defined below) as a holistic form of emotion because this seems to me to be the crux of the psycho-social attitude. Finally, I link this to Naess’s holistic ecology.

By finishing with ecology, the article touches upon one of the vital issues of our modern world. This is deliberate. I wish to suggest that an understanding of affect, of a world of ‘effectual causes’, might help us to improve our research into the organic relationships

that we intersubjectively share between ourselves and our environment. Psycho-social research thus framed can help us move forward in this respect with greater hope and creativity for the future.

### **Spinoza and Process**

Spinoza was persecuted and ignored in the seventeenth century and for years afterwards and it is only recently that his philosophy has been reassessed, largely thanks to the appreciation and acknowledgement of Gilles Deleuze and, in a way that is not obviously connected at first sight, of the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess. I believe that by understanding in what way these two areas of philosophy – that of Deleuze’s post-modernist France and Naess’s Norwegian ‘Deep Ecology’ – are linked we will be able to open up some interesting and heretofore unperceived insights into a philosophy that has the potential to provide us with an encompassing framework of thinking for the psycho-social outside what are generally understood to be the parameters of psychology and sociology.

To begin with, however, it needs to be said that an understanding of what I see as the philosophical demands of the psycho-social attitude relies not only on adopting, (whether one is aware of it or not), a Spinozian approach to thought, but also a certain rejection of Cartesian postulates. By ‘psycho-social attitude’ I mean the acceptance, on the part of the researcher, of that non-judgmental, listening role implied in Wilfred Bion’s advice to the psychoanalyst to approach all emerging thought without memory or desire (Bion 1998, pp. 15-19) making it possible to allow the flow of emotional undercurrents of holistic ‘affect’ as ‘effectual causes’ that move ‘as links in a circular series’ (Bion 2000, p.101). This complex and vital notion is further explored in the course of this article. By ‘Cartesian postulates’ I mean the general idea that thought and understanding is necessarily understood in terms of cause and effect. It is both impossible in this brief article and unnecessary to delve into a much more detailed account of what I understand by ‘Cartesian’. In sum, I mean the following:

1. A conception of the world as governed by a logic of dualities and a linear sense of causes and effects;
2. An understanding of nature and man as being intelligible as mechanical constructs; and
3. The consideration given to the existence of God as a separate entity to Man.

For Descartes, then, the very thinking process and the definition of life was reduced to the action of the brain. That is to say, that for Cartesian logic the being thinks and therefore exists. The thought of the brain is, as it were, the cause of our awareness of existence. Existence is the 'effect' caused by the thinking process. Consequentially, existence without thinking would not be possible. This led to the sweeping aside of the importance and value of a wider, more embracing attitude to existence, which might have included, for example, emotion and feeling as part of an 'embodied mind' and as legitimate ways of 'thinking', learning and understanding. The alternative idea, that we might learn and therefore understand through processes which were not founded in the thinking brain, has not been generally acceptable as science and only admitted in the expression of the creative arts, that is to say in the 'unscientific' world. Cartesian concepts of duality and processes of linearity became accepted as necessary truths in our understanding of the world, for development, evolution and progress. In this way we made the machines of the industrial revolution as logical constructs that depended on each part being causally connected to the next, its 'effect'. Machinery as a concept was applied equally to science and people. In science, 'the world as a perfect machine governed by exact mathematical laws', was epitomised by Newtonian mechanics (Capra 1997 p. 20), and in human organisation, 'Taylorism' converted people management into a 'science' and human collectives into 'systems' (Taylor 1911). The mechanical flowering of human life in all its aspects gave people hope of being able to control the human environment, and created the appearance of understanding. We were given the opportunity of creating causes for all observable effects in never ending linearity.

It is this concept of linearity that has been questioned in post-modern philosophy and other contemporary philosophy, such as in the work of Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan and Naess, all of whom are discussed below. Linear ways of seeing the world are also singularly unhelpful for the theory and practice related to the psycho-social attitude that is predominantly subjective and emotional in nature.

### **Foucault and the Move Away From Descartes**

Foucault's work in general is instructive in this respect. We can see, for example, in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* an indication of how Cartesian thought unconsciously rejected a Spinozian approach.

To begin with, the very basis of Foucault's work – the facts of history – is in itself a questioning of Cartesian 'truths'. Does Foucault really present us with the history of society's approach to the problem of madness? On the face of it, yes he does. The book appears to be researched as a history and is full of data of the kind you would expect to find in a history text. However, the 'history' soon becomes unsatisfactory as a '*history*'. The reader soon becomes aware of a kind of sub text, an ulterior purpose, as this history becomes more and more open to interpretation, as Foucault opens out the facts and, almost indirectly, as if we were *thinking* a history but *feeling* something else, we become aware of a profound understanding of the nature of 'civilization' and 'madness' and its relationship with the error of Cartesian thought. What Foucault demonstrates is how Cartesian thought could not bear the presence of folly, and called it 'madness'. In doing so the 'madness' became dangerous so that mad people were treated firstly as a diseased kind that had to be expelled from society, secondly as criminals that had to be locked away and finally as an illness that needed treatment, but this last solution was a kind of self delusion imposed by the thinking brain as a kind of excuse to rid our thinking society of such anomalies which were unacceptable to rational thought, threatening, even. It is difficult not to see some parallel here between 'civilization's' rejection of 'madness' and society's rejection of Spinoza, both Spinoza the man and Spinoza the philosophical thinker. Foucault suggests that actually 'civilization' was attracted to the fantasy and imagination of the 'mad', and hence the morbid interest in Sade, to take Foucault's example, and it does not seem too far fetched to imagine that the Dutch Jews and society found Spinoza simply too attractive, which would help to explain the extremity of their reactions and the absolute nature of Spinoza's exile. But Foucault's style, his use of history to create a semblance of 'fact' is brilliantly used to contrast that Cartesian 'fact' with how we feel about the 'mad' victims of that 'fact'. And as we read the 'facts' they are presented to the reader in such a way that we suddenly realise that we are participating in the voyeurism that intellectually we would reject. In this way we get to feel what we could not have thought. This is why Foucault's 'history' is full of dates and names on the one hand (the 'facts') and on the other hand quotation after quotation that describe the spectacle of madness. We ourselves, representatives of the Cartesian society as we read Foucault, are drawn into that mode of thought that is being criticised because, as Foucault says, 'madness is not linked to the world and its subterranean forms, but rather to man, to his weaknesses,

dreams, and illusions...it insinuates itself within man, or rather it is a subtle rapport that man maintains with himself.' (Foucault 2005, p.23) Consider, for example, the horrid attraction of being able to see something prohibited, a thing securely confined, away from the safety of reason, in fact with 'reason' giving the spectator a good excuse for surreptitious enjoyment, in the following example from Foucault:

...in 1789, the dream of the Abbé Desmonceaux, in a little work dedicated to *National Benevolence*; he planned to create a pedagogical instrument – a spectacle conclusively proving the drawbacks of immorality: “these guarded asylums...are retreats as useful as they are necessary...The sight of these shadowy places and the guilty creatures they contain is well calculated to preserve from the same acts of just reprobation the deviations of a too licentious youth; it is thus prudent of mothers and fathers to familiarize their children at an early age with these horrible and detestable places, where shame and turpitude fester crime, where man, corrupted in his essence, often loses forever the rights he had acquired in society.” (Foucault 2005, p. 197)

What could be more inviting? Elsewhere, Foucault makes it clear to the reader what it is we are experiencing. By being 'rational' the sane close themselves into their minds to think their thoughts and to stave off the insane imagination. The quoted 'historical' example given above is a metaphor of a similar process: the reasoning of rational thought turns the viewing of the irrational into a learning process: the vision of the madmen is kept in a separate compartment from the inner vision, a splitting, as it were, of the individual mind: the sane, rational Cartesian mind is able to view the danger of the insane mind and its passionate imagination at a safe distance: 'The savage danger of madness is related to the danger of the passions and to their fatal concatenation' (Foucault 2005, p. 80). The Cartesian link in relation to this idea is also made clear by Foucault:

Descartes closes his eyes and plugs up his ears the better to see the true brightness of essential daylight; thus he is secured against the dazzlement of the madman...In the uniform lucidity of his closed senses, Descartes has broken with all possible fascination, and if he sees, he is certain of seeing that which he sees. (Foucault 2005, p.102)

In order to understand Foucault's message we have to become voyeurs ourselves, as readers, we have to feel the sensations that are being denounced. We find ourselves moving away from the idea of a 'pure thought' in a Cartesian sense and towards a more embracing and holistic way of thinking, a feeling thought, so to speak. It is not simply a question of the objectified 'content' that is presented in these texts, but the process of expression too.

### **Affect: the 'Feeling Thought'**

The idea of the 'feeling thought' is another way of defining the key word 'affect' in the writing of Gilles Deleuze. It is a term that has acquired a sense of complexity largely due to a conceptual difficulty in translation. Deleuze uses the term 'affect' from the Spinozian use of the Latin word 'affectus'. Spinoza, who wrote *The Ethics* in Latin, uses a word that has no direct translation into English, although it is usually translated as 'emotion'. In the words of Samuel Shirley, the translator of one of the more recent editions of *The Ethics*, emotion 'is the usual translation of 'affectus', and the translator had best retain it in default of a more accurate term. It certainly seems odd to speak of 'the emotion of desire', and this is sufficient indication that 'affectus' is not quite the equivalent of our 'emotion'.' (Spinoza 1992, p. 28). The best definition of 'affectus' is, naturally, Spinoza's own:

By emotion (affectus) I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections. Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity. (III, def. 3) (Spinoza 1992, p. 103)

The essential nature of 'affectus' then is that it combines body and mind, and it is always in activity. This is the way Deleuze understands Spinoza and therefore adopts the term 'affect'. In Deleuze, the idea of 'affect' always being active, never passive, is connected to the concept of 'becoming'. Affect is always in a state of becoming, always in transition between other states that may be passive. Similarly, for Spinoza, the principal emotions ('affects') are pleasure, pain and desire, and are only existing in activity. In this way, they too are 'becoming', although Spinoza never used this term. So, pleasure is the movement away from less pleasure, pain, a movement away from

less pain, and desire only existing in a hunger for what the subject has not. These, Spinoza calls 'primary' affects and all other secondary 'affects' arise from them.<sup>1</sup>

The holistic understanding of 'affect' as a Deleuzian process that is heavily influenced by Spinoza, means that an 'affect' is 'true', in the sense that mind and body have combined in a single activity which is, as a result of this wholeness, under natural though autonomous control of the subject and his or her relationship with the exterior world. That is to say, any image of the mind of an emotion is equivalent to the reality of the body. There is no difference between the image of the mind and the reality. This is different, for example, to the hold of a passion, where the image of the mind is not in tune with the reality of the body. Unrequited love, for example, means that the body is not in action with the image of the mind and passivity ensues. Affect implies a harmony of action based on a union of the actions of the body and images in the mind that are in active communion with the exterior world. In this state, affect does not 'belong' to either the subject or the exterior world, it is a thing in itself. In Deleuze's words: 'Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived.' (Deleuze 2003, p. 164, D.'s italics). Later, Deleuze defines affects as '*nonhuman becomings of man*' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 169, D.'s italics) and gives an example from *Moby Dick*: 'Ahab really does have perceptions of the sea, but only because he has entered into a relationship with Moby Dick that makes him a becoming-whale and forms a compound of sensations that no longer needs anyone: ocean.' (Deleuze 2003, p. 169) Affect, then, has a space and a duration: 'It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernability, as if things, beasts, and persons (Ahab and Moby Dick...) endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. This is what is called an *affect*.' (Deleuze 2003, p. 173, D.'s italics) The reason this is so essential to contemporary thought is that the idea of affect requires an understanding of a holistic space that indissolubly connects what otherwise would be dualities. This connection is a process, thus the emphasis on activity, action and transition, rather than content, with its corresponding inactivity, passivity and stasis.

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<sup>1</sup> See (III, Definition of the Emotions, 1, 2 and 3) (Spinoza 1992, p. 141)

### **Holistic Thinking**

The idea of process over content is, therefore, an essential feature of contemporary holistic thinking, with its roots in Spinoza, its development in Deleuze and its antithesis in Descartes. This is what Deleuze means when he says that ‘the unit of understanding is not the form or function or organism but the composition of affective relations between individuals, together with the “plane of consistency” on which they interact, that is, their “environment” where ‘environment’ is ‘a field of forces whose actions await experiencing. In a human sense it can be called the unconscious, or at least the ground on which the unconscious is constructed.’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.ii) This ‘composition of affective relations’ can be seen in the example above from Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* where it is composed of: the reader, the Abbé Desmonceaux, Foucault himself, and the split between the thinking mind and the passionate mind personified through metaphor. It is the metaphorical personification of the mind which enables the affective relations to come into play and releases the reader from, in Deleuze’s terms, his or her role as a ‘functioning organism’, that is to say, an objectified thinking brain which in turn analyses thought as its object as we would understand it in Cartesian terms. The Spinozian term used to express this process is the ‘common notion’, which Deleuze links to his preferred use of the term ‘composition’: ‘In short, a common notion is the representation of a composition between two or more bodies, and a unity of this composition. Its meaning is more biological than mathematical...’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 54). And the importance of the ‘common notions’, of this ‘composition’ as a combination of relationships of thoughts, understandings and affects, is in the truth of its complete existence in and around itself as opposed to any existence possibly engendered through any particular cause leading to an identifiable and separate effect, what Spinoza had defined as ‘self-cause’: ‘By that which is self-caused I mean that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing.’ (Spinoza, 1992, I, Def. 1, p. 31) It follows that that the importance of any ‘cause’ is not in its ‘effect’ but in the relationship between the two: ‘The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause.’ (Spinoza, 1992, I Ax.4, p. 32) What this eventually suggests is that life itself is defined by a cyclical and web-like process of relationships rather than by any lineally arranged individual features of any particular thing or object. In this way, Spinoza links all things into a process called ‘life’, and this is what Deleuze later calls a ‘common plane of immanence’ in his discussion of Spinoza:



...the plane of immanence, the plane of Nature that distributes affects, does not make any distinction at all between things that might be called natural and things that might be called artificial. Artifice is fully part of Nature, since each thing, on the immanent plane of Nature, is defined by the arrangements of motions and affects into which it enters, whether these arrangements are artificial or natural. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 124)

Thus, in Deleuze's own work on philosophy and the brain, he can define life as encapsulating the inorganic and the organic as a whole life process: 'Not every organism has a brain, and not all life is organic, but everywhere there are forces that constitute microbrains, or an inorganic life of things.' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 213) Similarly, instead of identifying brains as being the property and life-defining element of the higher species of individual organisms, that is by rejecting the Cartesian concept of thought as a definition of existence, Deleuze is able to talk of the life process as a whole as a 'collective brain.' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 212). The 'collective brain' is the constitution of all the 'microbrains' of everything. A 'microbrain' is anything which lends itself to 'contemplation' and 'contraction', so that a plant could have a 'microbrain':

The plant contemplates by contracting the elements from which it originates – light, carbon, and the salts – and it fills itself with colors and odors that in each case qualify its variety, its composition: it is sensation in itself. It is as if flowers smell themselves by smelling what composes them... (Deleuze, 2003, p. 212)

That is to say, the plant 'contracts' and synthesizes primary materials<sup>2</sup> and produces a new reality. This reality becomes its 'composition' and in its 'composition' an 'affective relation' is established with another subject through the affect of pleasure experienced by the action of smell: The sensation of smell can only exist in each subject – human and plant – through the existence and collaboration of each other. The moment of affect is both the moment of the smelling action and the emission of the smelling sensation.

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<sup>2</sup> For Deleuze, this would be much in the same way as Bergson's memory 'contracts' different elements to produce a new reality, (see below).

### **Merleau-Ponty and intersubjectivity**

There is much here which is to be found in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty. Deleuze makes a distinction between his philosophy and that of phenomenology, claiming that the latter, while moving away from Cartesian thought, still sees man as a subject and relationships between men as intersubjective, as opposed to Deleuzian thought which takes away subjectivity of individuals by turning the very brain into the subject, that is to say whatever sensations that come into the brain are subject and since all enters the brain, all is one subject, as it were. Thus sensations are 'brain', ('Sensation is no less brain than the concept' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 211)), and the subject is in the painting of an empty landscape as it is 'peopled' by this brain, ('We will speak of the brain as Cézanne spoke of the landscape: man absent from, but completely within the brain' (Deleuze, 2003, p. 210)). It is, however, debatable that Deleuze's vision is so very different from Merleau-Ponty's. Note how similar to Deleuzian thought, for example, is the following from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*:

...to look at an object is to inhabit it... Thus every object is the mirror of all others. When I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can 'see'... I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of hidden aspects... (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 79).

Whatever the subtleties of difference that may or may not exist between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, certainly, phenomenology was already moving away from linearity and Cartesian influenced thought in general. Thus we find concepts such as the interconnectivity of the universe through what Husserl called 'intersubjectivity' (Husserl, 2006, p. 171) and a tendency to view inter-relatedness as patterning:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's my own. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. xxii).

This intersubjectivity and patterning is also a means of bringing the organic nearer to the inorganic in a single relationship, (reminiscent of Deleuze's 'collective brain' above), which is what Merleau-Ponty means when he talks about 'the organic relationship between subject and world'. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 176) It then follows that as a result of patterning and intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty denies objectivity because perception depends on context: '...the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous, the shifting, and is shaped by its context.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. 13) Ultimately, the very concepts of space and time, necessary for any idea of 'cause' and 'effect' are brought into doubt as existing as separate entities, rather they are part of a whole which includes our perceptive beings:

We must therefore avoid saying that our body is in space, or in time. It inhabits space and time...I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time: I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them...The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh.  
(Merleau-Ponty, 2005, pp. 161-162)

Perhaps it is in this question of time and space where the difference between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze becomes most apparent. As we have seen, for Merleau-Ponty, the essential element in any consideration of the universe is the self, so time, for example, is defined according to the 'I'. For Deleuze, however, the idea of time is not necessarily or only linked to the 'I', but, taking his thought from that of Henri Bergson, time is a universal concept which can be considered as a something in itself, as true in linearity, or, in its relativity, as relative to all other relativity, not just the phenomenological subjective self.

### **Henri Bergson and Time**

For Bergson, and this more often than not means for Deleuze as well, the self as a subject does include Merleau-Ponty's subjectivity, and that is understood as 'affectivity'.<sup>3</sup> However, in Bergson, the concept of time in the self is related to a sense of memory which is two-tiered: the memory inside the mind, 'recollection-memory', and the memory of perception, 'contraction-memory', which is also in the mind but fed inside from an external perception of matter which is then 'contracted' into ideas of

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<sup>3</sup> Affectivity 'assumes that the body *is* something other than a mathematical point and which gives it volume in space.' (Deleuze, 2002, 25, D.'s italics)

what is perceived both ‘objectively’ and in association to the experiences of the self, so that perception is never ‘pure’ but a mixture of that original objectivity of what is really there and the associations attached to perception through the action of memory. The perceived elements are ‘contracted’ in the processing of the mind so that perception becomes a relationship, or patterning, of matter and memory. This pattern of perception is at the same time linked to the ‘historical’ duration of the memory in the mind. In both cases, which are in constant movement and fusion, there is always a sense of the present, so that it is possible for the past to exist in the memory but be forever brought up into the present in the instance of perception and the constant state of processes of the self. Furthermore, memory is what transmits sensations to present perception, and matter is what transmits a sense of movement within that space, and therefore the possibility of future by defining the space within which future action will take place. Both of these constitute a state of ‘becoming’ that we define as being the ‘present’, and this present can, therefore, only exist through my body in space, because it is my body that feels and moves. The self exists for Bergson not as a thinking brain but as a feeling body which moves in space, and the body does not exist in isolation but is ‘extended’ in its connections in time and space. The ‘non-extended’ can only be conceived of through the possibility of a ‘pure memory’ which exists in Bergson only as a concept that can demonstrate its practical non-existence. That is to say, ‘pure memory’ must be situated in the non-extended self, the being as a separate entity as opposed to the extended self. In this state, ‘pure memory’ has neither action nor utility because it cannot act or interact with space and time. Memory which is brought to bear upon the present must be created in a sensorial image:

Memory actualised in an image differs, then, profoundly from pure memory.

The image is a present state, and its sole share in the past is the memory from which it arose. Memory, on the contrary, powerless as long as it remains without utility, is pure from all admixture of sensation, is without attachment to the present, and is, consequently, unextended. (Bergson, 2005, p. 129)

In Bergson, therefore, we have the possibility of a time, (and a space within that time), which is both linear *and* patterned and relative. What is important here in our discussion of post-Cartesian thinking is that linearity, if it exists in time, does not depend on cause and effect. Rather, an idea of the existence of the dynamics of cause and effect in certain circumstances is only one of many different ways we have of understanding the

universe and its multiple realities. What is linear is the totality of time as we perceive it in our bringing forth our past memory to our present perception, what Bergson called 'duration' (Bergson 2005 p. 262), within which there are multiple layers of seamless, interconnecting time capsules.

But to see linear movement as a feature of existence does not mean that we have to identify this with Cartesian ideas of cause and effect. Thus, for Bergson, the future is not the effect caused by the present, and it is both a continuum and a multiple combination of inter-relatedness at one and the same time:

The future then appears as expanding the present: it was not, therefore, contained in the present in the form of a represented end. And yet, once realized, it will explain the present as much as the present explains it, and even more; it must be viewed as an end as much as, and more than, a result. (Bergson, 2005, p. 192)

The idea of 'result', which I am going to equate with 'effect', in Bergson is, therefore, only part of an intellectual contraction of an understanding of the present. The continuous passing of time ensures that the 'result' can only exist in the moment 'once realized'. It is in that moment that the effect is intellectually contracted to include its cause, an illusion of cause and effect which is immediately vanquished by the passing of time. This illusory state is, however, at the same time, simultaneously instantaneous and ephemeral and continuous, as one state of the present is constantly replaced by another, in Bergson's words, 'a present ceaselessly reborn'. (Bergson, 2005, p. 205) The 'result' is consciousness and exists in a moment of duration that combines movement of time and 'effectivity' or action in space. (Bergson 2005, p. 129) The unconscious is, on the other hand, that which is 'ineffective' (Bergson 2005, p.129) in the sense that it does not 'preside over action' or 'enlighten choice' (Bergson 2005, p.205).

However, although for the purposes of illustration we can make these distinctions, there are, in fact, no real dividing lines between the parts and we can never answer the question what is 'consciousness' in relation to where does 'unconsciousness' begin:

To tell the truth, it is impossible to distinguish between the duration, however short it may be, that separates two instants and a memory that connects them, because duration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what

does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived. This is also any conceived time, because we cannot conceive a time without imagining it as perceived and lived. Duration therefore implies consciousness; and we place consciousness at the heart of things for the very reason that we credit them with a time that endures. (Bergson, 2005, p. 208)

### **Bergson's Time, Foucault's History and Freud's Symbolism**

Understanding the various possibilities of perception of time - which is crucial to Bergsonian thought - is fundamental in considering the nature of 'cognition'. The meaning of 'history' for Foucault, for example, can only be grasped through an understanding of these different perceptual possibilities of the passing of time, its multiplicity of application and its naturally emergent form. If history has something to teach and, therefore, if we have something to learn from it, we cannot ignore the fact that any attempt at such an understanding can only be that which is filtered through the historian's concept(s) of time. For Foucault, the study and understanding of history is very close to a Bergsonian concept of time. Thus, Foucault's use of the word 'archaeology', is an attempt to illustrate his understanding of time as the essential element of history in terms of linearity and layering or patterning. The word 'archaeology' exemplifies, for Foucault, the idea of history existing in strata, ready to be uncovered, as if the past existed in the ruins of the present waiting for a future to uncover it. 'Linear successions' are replaced by 'a set of deeper uncouplings' within 'various sedimentary strata', each of which has its own potential time scale: 'each contains a periodicity that belongs only to itself'. In this way, what used to be an historian's struggle to seek for the continuous in the discontinuous, that is to say trying to impose a linear and causal feel to a series of events that may just as well be viewed as discontinuous and linearly unconnected, can now be viewed as a multiplicity of strata which are linked, (or not), in many different ways, including, maybe, linearly. And the over-simplicity of the historical search for links between a pre-established series of events, (the pre-establishment being already imposed by a simplified view of sequence in time), is now replaced by what Foucault describes as:

...a series of difficult interrogations: which layers should be isolated from each other? What type and criteria of periodization need to be adopted for each of them? What system of relations, (hierarchy, dominance, inter-arrangement,

univocal determination, circular causality), can be established between them?  
(Foucault, 1998b, p. 298)<sup>4</sup>

In other words, Foucault sees time and history as being a complex non-linear 'system of relations'. And because history is, for Foucault, about an effort to understand mankind rather than being simply an endeavour to record events, that is to say, because history and time have to be understood from a psychological perspective of the unconscious rather than just from that of realism and consciousness, the study of history and time are studies of cognition in its deepest sense. Foucault demonstrates how Freud's 'discovery' of the unconscious has had to change all our thinking:

...one can say that, starting with Freud, all the human sciences became, in one way or another, sciences of the psyche. And the old realism à la Emile Durkheim – conceiving of society as a substance in opposition to the individual who is also a kind of substance incorporated into society – appears to me to be unthinkable now...all there is now, basically, is psychology. (Foucault, 1998a, p. 252)

Psychology, in the discovery of the unconscious, made it possible to remove causal linearity from contemporary thought, and to replace it with layers of meaning. Once again, we can compare this to Bergson's 'psychological' view of historical evolution in time that admits the linear and the layered:

But evolution has actually taken place through millions of individuals, on divergent lines, each ending at a crossing from which new paths radiate, and so on indefinitely. If our hypothesis is justified, if the essential causes working along these diverse roads are of psychological nature, they must keep something in common in spite of the divergence of their effects... Something of the whole, therefore, must abide in the parts... (Bergson 2005, p. 193)

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<sup>4</sup> Further on, Foucault makes his concept of history clearly part of the historian's concept of time and overtly criticises the historian who imposes a concept of time on the facts of history: 'For history in its classical form, discontinuity was both the given and the unthinkable: it was both what presented itself in the form of scattered events, institutions, ideas, or practices; and what had to be evaded, reduced, effaced by the historian's discourse in order to reveal the continuity of the concatenations. Discontinuity was that stigma of temporal dispersion which it was the historian's duty to suppress from history.' (Foucault, 1998b, p. 299)

It is, of course, with Freud that these concepts questioning the Cartesian approach finally take a significant hold of an expansion of what we understand to be ‘cognition’. For Foucault, history is psychology, because Freud’s ‘discovery’ of the unconscious turns all thought into something resembling psychology:

...the simple discovery of the unconscious is not an addition of domains: it is not an extension of psychology, it is actually the appropriation, by psychology, of most of the domains that the human sciences covered – so that one can say that, starting with Freud, all the human sciences became, in one way or another, sciences of the psyche. (Foucault 1998a, p. 252)

It was the birth of psychology that created the difference between the ‘line’ of thought, as expressed in writing or the verbal utterance and the symbolic layering action of the unconscious. It is this difference that is parallel to Foucault’s history of sequential time and facts as opposed to his ‘psychological history’, the former being akin to rational linearity and the latter to the workings of the mind in its all-embracing sense. The act of writing is itself an act of history and sequential thought: hence Foucault’s dual activity of conscious and unconscious expression in his ‘histories’.

But for Freud, the conscious and rational mind could still be used to ‘interpret’ the unconscious symbols, so that conscious and unconscious were clearly delineated, and there was a linear mode of expressive language appropriate for the former and another mode for the latter.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Freud was using a rational linearity typical of Cartesian thought, despite his discoveries. The further development of Freud’s ideas by Lacan brought out the essential impossibility of this method by demonstrating that the ‘signifier’, (that is to say, the word used in the context of a sentence to denote an objective ‘thing’), has a limited linear quality, a limitation which is to be found in the complexity of the unconscious mind as reflected in language itself. That is to say, the signifier is sequential in as much as it forms a sentence in time, but it is layered in the sense that it never has one ‘signified’ objective ‘thing’ only but many overlapping layers of meaning that can proliferate within the time created by and within the psyche.

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<sup>5</sup> So Freud was interested in using the language of the rational conscious mind to ‘decode’ or ‘decipher’ the symbols of the unconscious language of the mind as expressed in dreams and/or free association: ‘His problem, finally, is not a problem of linguistics, it is a problem of decipherment.’ (Foucault 1998a, p. 253)



In this way, Lacan was able to talk of a 'signifying chain' which nevertheless was simultaneously a 'polyphony':

There is in effect no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended 'vertically', as it were, from that point. (Lacan 2001, p. 170).<sup>6</sup>

### **Lacan: Language and Communication**

This now brings us to the crux of the matter with regards the problem of communication, because it now seems that neither time, nor linearity, nor cause and effect, nor consciousness and rationality, all in a Cartesian sense, can be taken for granted. So what kind of communication are we talking about when we 'communicate' if we cannot necessarily understand it to harbour all or even any of these qualities? This question is crucial because the tools of psycho-social research depend so much on language and communication. This is why Lacan himself was so interested in language: 'Bringing the psychoanalytic experience back to the Word and to Language as its grounding is of direct concern to its technique.' (Lacan 1981, p. 53)

To begin with, we should note that for Lacan communication is not about the conveying of information, that is to say it does not correspond to the primary function of rational thought: 'For the function of language is not to inform but to evoke' (Lacan 2001, p. 94). And clearly this evocation has to do with the unconscious, the fact that the 'signifier' cannot mean any single concrete 'thing' for any length of time, before being converted and metamorphosed into another 'thing' and then another for as long as the unconscious mind continues to think and within a time scale which is recreated by that same mind, what Lacan calls 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (Lacan 2001, p. 170). As a matter of fact, Lacan goes on to say that language is precisely anti-information, (rather than simply non-information):

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note how both Lacan and Derrida use the same image of the musical stave to describe this effect which Saussure had failed to notice: 'But one has only to listen to poetry, which Saussure was no doubt in the habit of doing, for polyphony to be heard, for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score' (Lacan 2001, p. 170). 'It is a point on which Jakobson disagrees with Saussure decisively by substituting for the homogeneity of the line the structure of the musical staff, "the chord in music". What is here in question is not Saussure's affirmation of the temporal essence of discourse but the concept of time that guides this affirmation and analysis: time conceived as linear succesivity, as "consecutivity"' (Derrida 1991, p. 44).

What this structure of the signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have, precisely in so far as I have this language in common with other subjects, that is to say, in so far as it exists as a language, to use it in order to signify *something quite other* than what it says. (Lacan 2001, p. 172, L.'s italics).

And the significant clue to how this can be so is in Lacan's concept of language as existing not in itself or in relation to a 'thing' which is 'signified' but rather in relation to 'other subjects': 'What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be.' (Lacan 2001, p. 94) In this process of identifying communication as only existing in a relational sense, Lacan also identifies a relationship of time between subject and object which is not that of sequential logic and is, rather, reminiscent of Bergsonian time: 'What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.' (Lacan 2001, p. 94) We should remember here that when talking of 'time' in a Bergsonian sense, we are really talking about memory and duration, as discussed above. In this sense, there are connections between Lacan's 'temporality' and Bergson's 'duration'. For Bergson, the significant moment of perception is the instant of present duration which is always a combination of perception of the exterior reality combined with interior memory. This instant is conceptually similar to Lacan's capturing of the patient's desire in a given moment that comes from another (interior) place that exists apart from the language of (exterior) information. Language, then, for Lacan, has an exterior communication similar in concept to Bergson's exterior perception. At the same time there is a moment of fusion of languages, of interior desire and exterior information, similar to Bergson's duration that fuses past memory and actual perception. This is how Lacan puts it:

This Language...has the universal character of a language which could make itself understood in all other languages, but at the same time, since it is the Language which seizes desire at the very moment in which it becomes human desire by making itself recognized, it is absolutely particular to the subject. (Lacan 1981, p. 57)

So language and ‘communication’ is, in this sense, primarily a self discovery rather than a communication of information from one person to an Other. The Other exists not as a recipient of information but as a link in a relationship with the subject. That is to say, the language relationship is one of a creative web between people rather than the giving of something for a purpose. The latter effect, that of communication reduced to the simplicity of information for the purposes of action, might be the kind of use of speech we associate with an act of communication as direct as giving an order in a hierarchical structure which permits this form of communication, for example, a military organization. And here, of course, the only response can be acknowledgement of receipt of information: “Yes, Sir”. This form of communication, which permits only rational and conscious conveying of information is very much one of cause-and-effect: the order is the cause of the action/effect. It is unequivocally linear and definitively inhuman, and this accounts for the highly controlled and artificial structures that are an integral part of military design. For Lacan, language is not an artificial conscious thought structure, language is actually physical and felt by the body and as a body: ‘...language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is. Words are trapped in all the corporeal images that captivate the subject.’ (Lacan 2001, p. 95). Language, therefore, is not simply an abstract thought that can be separated from the entities of our own beings: If we look at nature and consider humanity in all its aspects as part of nature, then a completely different design is revealed.

### **Arne Naess, Spinoza and the Psycho-Social**

For Arne Naess, the understanding of ‘nature’ is not simply, as some may assume from an ecologist such as Naess, a question of respecting our natural surroundings, as Naess himself has pointed out:

As long as one retains current concepts of nature instead of Spinoza’s *Natura* or other broad, profound concepts of nature, the placement of ecology within the framework of natural sciences favours the shallow ecological movement. (Naess 2001, p. 39).

Spinoza’s ‘nature’, then, is what defines Naess’s so called ‘Deep Ecology’. This is similar to Deleuze’s ‘process’ and ‘becoming’ in its understanding of ‘nature’ as a holistic inter-connection of parts that necessarily includes man *within* that nature rather than as an outside agent. In Deleuze’s work, Spinoza’s ‘nature’ is most closely alluded

to in *What is Philosophy?* Nature is, for Deleuze, a way of thinking that is necessarily far removed from the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am’ and close to Spinoza’s concept: ‘Thinking consists in stretching out a plane of immanence that absorbs the earth (or rather, “adsorbs” it).’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p.88) In this sense, both Deleuze and Naess’s acknowledged source, Spinoza, would agree with Naess in saying that an effective relationship with nature depends on the process of active participation in an inter-subjective fashion that cannot contemplate the subject-object paradigm: ‘To ‘only look’ at nature is extremely peculiar behaviour. Experiencing of an environment happens by doing something in it...’ (Naess 2001, p. 63) This idea of nature is an understanding of the indissoluble interconnections between everything that exists, including humanity in every respect. In terms of the psycho-social attitude, this is an acknowledgement that ‘objectivity’ can only exist as a concept of the mind, rather than as a ‘truth’. That is to say, all is necessarily (inter-)subjective in the sense that the holistic all embracing nature of existence does not allow for the duality implied in a subject-object relationship. This further implies an error in the conception of lines of cause –and-effects and a correlating limitation to Cartesian approaches to thinking. For Spinoza, the nature of thinking is necessarily simultaneously a body and mind phenomenon: ‘...mental decision on the one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand, are simultaneous in nature; or rather, they are one and the same thing...’ (Spinoza 1992, p. 106) This acknowledgement of the emotions, or ‘affect’, as ‘thinking’ features of Spinoza’s ‘body/mind’ is a philosophical stance that sits well with the psycho-social attitude as defined in the psycho-social approach by Clarke and Hoggett:

First...recognizing the role of the unconscious mind in the construction of social realities, with its suggestion that feelings and emotions shape our perception and motivation, constructing the way in which we perceive others. Second, the psychoanalytic method recognizes the role of the researcher in the interpretation of realities...Finally, there is an integration of social, cultural, and historical factors at a conscious level...(Clarke & Hoggett 2009, p. 6)

The value given to the unconscious in the psycho-social attitude is also alluded to by Spinoza when he discusses how ‘subjective’ dream thoughts are from the ‘body’ (i.e. emotion/affect) rather than from the ‘mind’, as evidence that thinking does not emanate only from conscious, awakened ‘objective’ thought, (Spinoza’s ‘mind’):

So I would very much like to know whether in the mind there are two sorts of decisions, dreamland decisions and free decisions. If we don't want to carry madness so far, we must necessarily grant that the mental decision that is believed to be free is not distinct from imagination and memory...and those who believe that they speak, or keep silent, or do anything from free mental decision are dreaming with their eyes open. (Spinoza 1992, p. 107)

For the philosophy of Arne Naess, then, 'Deep Ecology' is a perception of nature as an infinite web of interconnectivity. By understanding ourselves as human subjects in this inter-relationship with our environment, we come to understand our existence. Human beings are not, therefore, passive 'effects' resulting from 'causes', but kinetically active contributors to their mutual existences. As such, human beings are active participants in evolution, rather than mere survivors: 'In view of the defensive passivity suggested by the term self-preservation, I prefer Self-realisation or Self-unfolding' that implies Bergson's 'creative evolution'. (Naess 2001, p. 166) This 'creative evolution' depends, according to Naess, on 'sharing joys and sorrows with others', developing from 'the narrow ego of the small child into the comprehensive structure of self that comprises all human beings'. (Naess 2001, p. 85) For the psycho-social attitude, this Naessian/Spinozian philosophy can provide the backdrop for understanding how psycho-social practices work, by providing a collective opportunity for that 'comprehensive structure of self' to emerge.

### **Final word: The broadening out of psycho-social studies**

At these final stages of this article, I would like to ask the question what possible benefits could a philosophical understanding bring to psycho-social studies and research? As I suggested above in discussing Arne Naess and the Deep Ecology movement, it seems to me that psycho-social approaches to the understanding of complex problems such as our relationship with the environment and serious global issues such as dealing with climate change can be enhanced in the knowledge that the psycho-social attitude can also be a way of developing solutions or ways forward in areas of human endeavour that are not confined to (group) psychology and/or sociology. These other areas may be, for example, 'philosophy', 'politics' or 'ecology'. But all of these may also be grouped together by the embracing nature of a 'holistic' philosophy such as has been discussed in this article. In other words, I would suggest that the

philosophical background to the psycho-social proposed here encourages a greater potential extension and reach of the psycho-social than might otherwise be considered appropriate. This implies that when we talk of applying certain concepts derived from psychoanalysis and applied to sociology we should not limit our references to those areas of relevance alone, as defined by Clarke and Hoggett (2009, pp. 1-22). By *not* doing so and by placing the psycho-social within another flow or some overall philosophical tendency, we are open to new creative thoughts for and applications of an expanding discipline that is still in the throes of definition.

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