

## INTRODUCTION

This is a book on ethics, although it never addresses morality, the question of what is to be done. It is also a book on ontology, the substance, structure, and forms of the world, this one world in which we live and that we share with all forms of life, although it rarely addresses being as such. I aim to develop an ontoethics, a way of thinking about not just how the world is but how it could be, how it is open to change, and, above all, the becomings it may undergo. In this sense, an ethics always passes into and cannot be readily separated from a politics, which addresses social, collective, cultural, and economic life and their possibilities for change. An ontoethics involves an ethics that addresses not just human life in its interhuman relations, but relations between the human and an entire world, both organic and inorganic. Insofar as we create ontologies that reflect not only, or primarily, beings but also becomings, that is, insofar as ontologies can be considered ontogeneses, an ontoethics cannot but address the question of how to act in the present and, primarily, how to bring about a future different from the present. This question is simultaneously ontological, ethical, and political; it may require new forms of technology and new kinds of art to prepare for and accompany the transformations of a present that is never fully present, composed of beings existing in their self-identity,

always divided and complicated by the becomings that characterize and continually transform them.

The open-ended nature of the future, its capacity to deviate from the present and its forms of domination and normalization, necessarily link an ethics, how one is to live, with a politics, how collectives, and their constituents, are to live and act together and within what protective and limiting parameters. An ethics does not form a politics in itself, though it is a necessary ingredient in the organization and operation of political collectives or movements, those established with a specific project or aim in social life. It is even more unusual that an ethics or politics consider itself in connection with an ontology, an account of what constitutes the real, what exists in this world that we collectively share with all forms of life. Only rarely has ethics been considered a first philosophy, a philosophy logically prior to an ontology (this project has been limited, for over a century, to the writings of Emmanuel Levinas);<sup>1</sup> more commonly, ethics has been reduced to a morality, which I understand as a set of principles, a list of preferred practices, with generalizable or even universalizable criteria of virtue or goodness, by which we should all act and through which we are capable of providing judgments about moral or immoral activities. It is only rarely that ontology is addressed not only in terms of what is but also in terms of how what is may enable what might be. Ontology has been increasingly directed toward explaining scientific and mathematical models, for which ethical considerations seem conceptually extrinsic. Yet an ontology entails a consideration of the future, not only of what we can guarantee or be certain but above all what virtualities in the present may enable in the future. This is the possibility of the future being otherwise than the present, the openness of a future which is nevertheless tied to, based on but not entirely limited by, the past and present. Such considerations of the future are the concerns of precisely ethics and politics and are the implications — open to heated and frequent dispute, no doubt — of whatever one commits to as an ontology.

For over a century ontology has become increasingly diminished as a concern of philosophical, political, and cultural reflection; it has been submitted to the domination of epistemology, theories of what

knowledge is and does. It is through largely epistemological considerations that ontological hypotheses or claims have been directed and evaluated. If we know what there is, it makes sense that we come to what is through what we know. But when epistemology questions itself and its own conditions of knowledge, its own lacunae and places of nonknowing, there is a residue or remainder of ontological issues and concerns that is untouched by epistemology and that may not always be submitted to existing schemas of knowledge, existing forms of grammar and syntax or forms of representation. This was clearly true of the emergence of subatomic physics and especially quantum field theory, which seems to defy the protocols that privilege epistemology over and in place of ontology. We do not have a clear, rational, logical conception of quantum fields and their components, nor, indeed, of many biological and especially microbiological processes. We cannot ascertain what position the knowing observer, the quantum scientist, is to occupy in scientific knowledges. Atomic and subatomic components and their fields exist beyond our everyday, and perhaps even scientific, understanding, and biological processes are far from well-understood and explicable in terms that mark much of twentieth-century thought and beyond. We know that there are things we do not know. These things we do not know confirm the independent reach of ontology outside and beyond what our current epistemologies allow us to understand—indeed they are the continuing condition of an ever changing and more refined epistemology. What things are, how they connect with each other, what relations exist between them may be beyond our capacities for knowing at any moment in history: this in no way lessens what there is. Indeed these limits add an ethical and political dimension to the processes of knowing: they signal what is funded, supported, normalized as a research paradigm. They also signal how new forms of knowledge may be developed, new paradigms can emerge that may address what exists quite differently, even, perhaps, in incommensurable terms. It is because ontologies have ethical and political—as well as aesthetic and cultural—resonances that they provide limits and obstacles, an outside, to epistemological frameworks. Ontologies have ethical and political implications in the sense that they make a difference to how we live and act, what we value,

and how we produce and create. While I do not consider what follows to be a critique of epistemology, I aim to bypass epistemological questions in favor of a focus on an ontology sensitive to and engaged with the realities of space and time, of events and becomings, not just things and their knowable, determinable relations.

In the following chapters I will explore a counterhistory or genealogy of the conceptual connections between ontology, ethics, and politics, which brings together what is with questions of how to live a good life and a generous and productive collective existence-lives that resist oppression, coercion, and prevailing social constraints—that enhance and produce values, that expand social and collective existence and the lives of nonhuman things. Although such an intimate entwinement of ethics, politics, and ontology is uncommon, especially in contemporary philosophy, it is not without precedents: indeed, it has an illustrious lineage, dating from the very rise of philosophy with the pre-Socratics and undertaking numerous transformations and reformulations between then and the present. I do not undertake a systematic analysis of this lineage, but aim to present more a piecemeal overview of some of its key moments and figures, particularly of the concepts that populate this conjunction of ontology and ethics, the formulation of an ontoethics. There are, of course, many other philosophers that I could have included in this genealogy, the pre-Socratics, the Epicureans, and the Cynics, the work of Leibniz and, most obviously, of Henri Bergson, who, perhaps more than any other philosopher in the last 150 years, aimed to link our thinking about ontology, ethics, and collective existence together. I seriously considered writing a chapter on Bergson's contributions for this book, but I believe that I have dealt with his writings in enough detail in previous work for readers interested in this connection to infer it from these earlier texts.<sup>2</sup>

The kind of genealogy I have undertaken here could be greatly expanded; however, for my purposes, I need to show a long and not always consistent, indeed sometimes erratic, strand of thought in the history in Western philosophy that has tenaciously resisted all forms of reductionism. I have sought the strongest and clearest expressions of a position for which I do not have a proper name but that, however

inadequately, I will describe as "the incorporeal," the subsistence of the ideal in the material or corporeal; although that is a concept derived directly from the Stoics and not used in the writings of the other philosophers I discuss here. It is an inadequate term for addressing the immanence of the ideal in the material and the material in ideality. These philosophers have understood the problems and limits of the impulse to reductionism, the loss of explanatory force, in any thoroughgoing materialism. This is not, however, an enterprise of antimaterialism; on the contrary, this book is an attempt to produce a more complex, more wide-ranging understanding not only of materiality but the framing conditions of materiality that cannot themselves be material. I propose here to explore the intimate entwinement of the orders of materiality and ideality, the impossibility of a thoroughgoing and non reductive materialism, a materialism that cannot and should not be opposed to ideality but requires and produces it.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Stoics, I have described as incorporeal the immaterial conditions for the existence and functioning of matter, including those configurations of matter that constitute the varieties of life. This book is an exploration of the incorporeal conditions of corporeality, the excesses beyond and within corporeality that frame, orient, and direct material things and processes, and especially living things and the biological processes they require, so that they occupy space and time, have possible meanings and directions that exceed their corporeality. I am interested here in an extramaterialism, in the inherence of ideality, conceptuality, meaning, or orientation that persists in relation to and within materiality as its immaterial or incorporeal conditions. This book explores a philosophical "lineage" that addresses the incorporeal and its relations to materiality, the ways in which materiality (in all its forms) exceeds materialism and requires a different kind of philosophy, available but usually latent within the history of Western thought. The particular philosophies I explore in what follows, however, cannot be understood as idealist either, although each assigns a central place to ideality without subordinating it to materiality. However, none can be considered dualists, those committed to the logical and ontological separation of mind from body or the material from the ideal. For each, the question

of how we think materiality and ideality together remains central. These philosophers do not necessarily concur; indeed there are a number of differences, even incommensurabilities, that mark their relations. I am not undertaking the analysis of a coherent history but rather precisely seeking the various shifts and forces that have gained purchase on and transformed a concept, the incorporeal, that has no proper name.

I begin with the Stoics. As committed and thoroughgoing materialists, the Greek and Roman Stoics provide a counter to the Platonic separation of materiality from ideality and the Aristotelian impetus tohylomorphism that distinguishes form from and privileges it in relation to matter. The Stoics demonstrate that a consistent commitment to materialism is unable to explain the order and cohesion of material things and events—for them, matter itself, whether on a microscopic, social, or a cosmological scale, requires extramaterial conditions by which it is framed and through which it can be thought and spoken about. In chapter 1 I explore this apparently paradoxical materialism which is not one that emerges during the birth of Western philosophy. The Stoics make it clear that another kind of ontology (than Platonism, Aristotelianism, and their many offshoots) is possible, one with cosmological aspirations, that aims to understand not only the orders of our experience but also the orders of the world well beyond our experience and to link this understanding to an ethics of existence and an art of living well, beyond received accounts of morality. The Stoics provide philosophies that follow with an aspirational understanding of what philosophy might do—when practiced at its best, philosophy can address the world, the place of all things, and particularly ourselves, within this world, and invent ways of living that experiment with and develop new forms of living in accord with our understanding.

In chapter 2 I explore Benedict de Spinoza's Ethics, aiming to analyze his account of substance, with a particular focus on his understanding of the attributes of mind and body, a relation commonly considered one of parallelism but which understands that every material entity and relation brings with it ideas, concepts more or less adequate to understand material (causal) relations. These ideas are not simply ideas we humans who contemplate the world create; rather they exist in God, or nature,

which is to say, in themselves in the same way as things. Spinoza provides a self-conscious alternative to the Cartesian opposition between *res cogitans* or mind, a thinking thing, and *res extenso*, an extended or material thing, a body. Descartes's dualism can be seen as a "modern" philosopher's reconceptualization of Platonic dualism. Spinoza's singular substance provides an alternative to the dualism of Descartes, the belief that mind and body are two irreconcilable and mutually exclusive substances. For Spinoza, there is only one substance, indissolubly both mind and body, under two of its infinite attributes. These are not two different things, nor are they one single thing that is the reduction of diverse forces. For Spinoza, an ethics and a politics follow directly from and are immanent in metaphysics; the better one understands the universe in its complexity, in the connections that link each thing to every other, the more adequate is one's ethical relation in and to it. An ethics does not spring directly from our understanding of the world. Rather, it comes from our affective bonds to and connections with other things in the world, relations that enable us to enhance or diminish forms of life. Providing a reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* from the perspective of its ontological commitments may help open up ways in which his ethics and politics, and our own, may be developed in fuller depth.

I examine some texts of Friedrich Nietzsche in chapter 3—Like the Stoics and Spinoza, he styles his work as a critique of and an alternative to dominant philosophical traditions: primarily, for my purposes here, the writings of Hegel and other philosophers, such as Descartes, who have tended to privilege ideality over materiality. In Nietzsche's writings there is not only a privileging of the energetic forces of the body, there is also a primary focus on the question of orientation, on the direction of the future, on the trajectory of forces and their future effects. Drawing as he does on the Greeks and especially the pre-Socratics, Nietzsche aims to restore to philosophy its ethical and political force as a knowledge of and continuity with the one real world and the creation of an ethics — he calls it a morality as well as a transvaluation appropriate not to everyone, decidedly non- or even anti-universalist (indeed an elitist activity) open only to those strong enough to create their own ethics, an ethics of affirmation, as their principle of self-regulation, an ethics capable of

affirming itself eternally. Nietzsche's concept of amor fati, the love of fate, intensifies to its maximum the Stoic concept of being worthy of one's fate, a fate dictated or propelled not only by external causal forces—an impersonal fate—but of one's own cultivated nature. Nietzsche elaborates yet deviates both Stoic and Spinozan ontologies through his own perverse readings, for he reads them, as he does all philosophy, not in terms of the logical consistency or plausibility of their arguments but in terms of their values and limits for life, especially for an affirmative life. One cannot affirm life without also affirming the material world and its forces and without seeking to explore and press to the maximum the conditions under which life and its materialities are intensified. This is the task of Nietzschean philosophy: to bring into being new values that affirm all the forms of life to come, their complexities and their struggles, their forms of self-overcoming, their creativity.

If the Stoics, Spinoza, and Nietzsche form not only part of the history of philosophy but also a strain of counterphilosophy, a philosophy that functions in contradistinction to the dominant forms of reason represented in dualism (not to mention rationalism) that marks Platonism, Cartesianism, and Hegelianism, if their influence on the history of Western thought is less understood than these dominant traditions, nevertheless, their writings have sustained many powerful readings and renewals that could draw out what is missing from or problematic with the traditions to which they offered such compelling but relatively neglected alternatives. They are among the very figures brought together, however indirectly, in the writings of Gilles Deleuze (both alone and in collaboration with Felix Guattari). Through Deleuze's careful and thoroughly innovative readings of the Stoics, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, a number of contemporary theorists have been drawn again to these underappreciated yet immensely intriguing, difficult, and original philosophers.

Deleuze's work serves as both a literal and metaphoric center for this book. It was his readings that drew me first to the writers and positions explored here, and enabled me to use them to address a question that Deleuze did not, at least not directly—the relations between ideality and materiality. It is Deleuze's, and Deleuze and Guattari's, work that I address in chapter 4 (although his and their influence is clear in all

the chapters) where once again I look at the question of ideality or the incorporeal through an examination of one of Deleuze and Guattari's most elusive concepts, indeed a concept that marks their own distinctive philosophy of the concept-the plane of immanence. The plane of immanence is what a philosophical concept must attain and address in order to become part of the history of thought; a concept must find for itself a nonlocatable place, an intensive position, among all the other concepts it addresses and disputes, which is also the condition under which it can itself be addressed and disputed, added to and complicated, and misunderstood or redirected by other concepts. The plane of immanence cannot be material, though it is not purely ideal either: rather, it can be conceived as the entirety of materiality, with the entirety of ideality that make this materiality conceivable, that is, capable of forming concepts. It cannot be understood as material in opposition to ideality. Rather, it is immanent in the world itself. It is not a Platonic order but an order of relations and interactions that occur between historically created concepts without the mediation of their "inventors" and freed from the forms of argument that are developed to support them. Concepts are able to address and transform each other, not magically, but through the encounters they undergo, the history in which they develop from one set of components to another. Although Deleuze is almost universally considered a materialist, his fascination with concepts, ideas, and the incorporeal complicates such an understanding.<sup>4</sup> Like many of the philosophers his work directly addresses, Deleuze can neither be classified as a materialist nor as an idealist. His work is oriented in both directions without any assumption of a break between them. An argument could be made, although I will not present it directly here, that Deleuze has addressed this question of the relations between the material and the ideal over and over in his writings without articulating it as such.

Deleuze remains at the heart of this project not only because of his profound and idiosyncratic readings of key figures-the Stoics, Spinoza, and Nietzsche-but also because in his writings he directs us to other philosophers who occupy an invaluable place in the genealogy of the incorporeal, near contemporaries of Deleuze, whose work he has used or referred to in a number of his writings. In chapter 5 I discuss some

central concepts in the writings of Gilbert Simondon, whose influence on Deleuze and Guattari is the object of considerable current research. Simondon's writings, as with all the other philosophers addressed here, will not be examined in their breadth and detail, for although he published only two books, they are immensely broad in their interests, which range from the inventions of technics to the principles involved in the generation of art; rather, I look only at his concept of the processes of individuation that direct all kinds of relations, material (as is appropriate for purely material objects and processes), living (all forms of life are generated by processes of individuation), psychic, social, collective, and technical. I focus on the relations between the preindividual, individuations, and the transindividual. Simondon, as with the others I discuss in this book, not only develops a unique ontology that problematizes dualism; he is also interested in the technical, ethical, and aesthetic implications of this ontology, a conception of the world as a totality that is the result of a multiplicity of processes of individuation whose operations and activities are the same at all levels. Simondon's work is at once cosmological, biological, aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical. He is also a part of the lineage of thinking about the incorporeal, the immanence of ideality in materiality and of materiality in ideality that I aim to explore here. Like the plane of immanence in Deleuze's work or the will to power in Nietzsche's writings, Simondon invents a concept — the preindividual — that is simultaneously material and ideal, the condition for material bodies and self-standing concepts and the inherence of each in the other.

Chapter 6 focuses on a fragment of the prolific and wide-ranging writings of Raymond Ruyer, a philosopher of biology (especially embryology), physics, information theory, axiology, and cosmology, another of the figures whose writings are addressed, briefly but significantly, in Deleuze's writings. Ruyer is perhaps the least known of the philosophers I discuss here, but his work seems indispensable for thinking about the direction and force of materiality, whether in its inanimate or animate forms, in the processes that link, say, quantum fields, through various levels of organization and scale, to the operations of living beings and a living world. Ruyer's concept of consciousness as immediate self-proximity

or self-survey provides us with a way of rendering far more complex the relations between the ideal and the material. If even the most elementary particles have consciousness in his broad antianthropomorphic sense, then consciousness is not a mysterious leap from a nonconscious material antecedent, but the growing forms of autoaffection that mark the coexistence and integration of materiality and ideality. Like Simondon, with whom he was familiar, Ruyer is also interested in the ways in which ontology involves an ethics and a politics, how the forms of interaction of materiality and ideality generate the possibility for the emergence of the arts and sciences, particular human ways of addressing the real, enhancing it, and directing some of its objects and processes to goals and ideals.

This lineage provides at least the briefest outlines of a philosophical alternative to a prevailing tendency to dualism in Western philosophy or to its contemporary successor, reductive materialism, a position that still dominates much of what is called theory today. While Cartesian forms of dualism have been relentlessly criticized and alternatives actively explored (in, for example, the tradition of phenomenology), nevertheless Descartes very clearly articulated some of the qualities or characteristics of thought—its nonspatial, nonlocalizable nature, for example—that even the most sophisticated and contemporary expressions of materialism (materialisms in their genetic, cognitive, or neurological forms) are unable to explain: what is thought, what is a concept, what is thinking? Thinking may be explicable in terms of the brain, neuronal networks, or cognitive connections, but none of these has the incorporeal quality of thought. Thought cannot be nothing but neuronal firings, brain processes, or cognitive relations: these are conditions, accompaniments, perhaps, but are not the same as thought (just as genes may condition and accompany all living forms without any specific aspect of life being reducible to a genomic base). In seeking a non-reductive materialism attentive to the conceptual or ideal dimensions of materiality as a whole, and of material things in their particularity, we cannot simply explain away thought, concepts, meanings, ideality, or the incorporeal, as, for example, emergent qualities from some increasing order of material complexity. Instead, to make a more robust and explanatorily

rich philosophy, ideality needs to be taken seriously and understood in its own terms, not as the other or binary opposite of body but through its own capacities, qualities, and activities and through its ability to direct, orient, and internally inhabit materiality.

I propose here neither a new form of dualism nor a new reductive version of monism in advocating for a materialism that understands its reliance on ideality or an idealism that is committed to the material organization and conditions for ideality. I seek neither two substances whose connection must be adequately, but can only be mysteriously, explained (all dualisms fall prey to the problem expressed by Plato and Descartes. discerning the mysterious conduit by which mind and body interact) nor a single substance that is capable of both material and immaterial effects, but a way to conceptualize something between these alternatives. In exploring the reality of the incorporeal, I do not want to privilege ideality over materiality, but to think them together, as fundamentally connected and incapable of each being what it is without the other to direct and support it. Ideality frames, directs, and makes meaning from materiality; materiality carries ideality and is never free of the incorporeal forms that constitute and orient it as material. It is this connection that I aim to explore, using the genealogy I have indicated—a way to conceptualize materiality without reducing its ideal dimension, a way to think thought, through and in its material arrangements.

With ideality comes the possibility of collective social life, a kind of magical or religious thinking that seeks the orders of connection that regulate the universe itself and the elaboration of increasingly more complex prostheses or technologies that extend and transform materiality exponentially. Without ideality, a plan, a map, a model, an ideal, a direction, or a theme, materiality could not materialize itself. Only through the capacity of thought to extend itself beyond and through its corporeal limits is it directly implicated in the corporeal forces that constitute bodies as form, force, direction, orientation, or, more simply said, as the future which beckons it. This ideality, religious in its earliest conceptualizations, is also the condition for language, concepts, ideas that constitute discourse; the possibilities of philosophy (which debates the proper use of reason and the creation of concepts adequate to it); the

emergence of sensations and perceptions whose organization and transformations constitute art; the functioning of testable conjectures; and the development of formulas and mathematical models that elaborate such conjectures constituting the natural sciences. Ideality provides the cohesion of form, the orientation or direction toward which material things tend, the capacity for the self-expansion of material things and relations into new orders.

With the rise of so-called new materialism, it is perhaps necessary to simultaneously call into being a new idealism, no longer Platonic, Cartesian, or Hegelian in its structure, that refuses to separate materiality from or subordinate it to ideality, resisting any reduction of the qualities and attributes of each to the operations of the other. In what follows I explore the entwinement of ideality and materiality, how each is the implicit condition for the other. As mutually implicated, ideality opens materiality up not just as the collectivity or totality of things but as a cohesive, meaningful world, a universe with a horizon of future possibilities. The philosophers I address here provide concepts and frameworks through which we may understand matter as always more than itself, as containing possibilities for being otherwise. I will explore the direction of materiality, its orientation to the future, and the ethical force of this orientation. This has numerous philosophical implications, among them that there is no definitive break between animals and humans or between animals, plants, and inanimate objects. Mind is not an attribute of a consciousness much like our own but characterizes all primary forms, all forms of the (Nietzschean) will to power, (Simondonian) individuation, or (Ruyerian) primary consciousness. While this order of ideality, sometimes described as pan-psychism, is often viewed in religious terms, through the connective and creative relations to a creator God conceived as the external force of coherence and direction of the world, it may be regarded instead as the material constitution of an ordered world in which the connections between things, between objects and events, come to or always already have meaning or many meanings, values, orientations, potentialities through their own modes of order and organization, without the need to invoke an independent God who exists separately from this world. Perhaps this can begin a

*new new* materialism in which ideality has a respected place and where these forces of orientation can now be recognized as a condition for and immanent in materiality. Such an understanding of the world as material-ideal, as incorporeal openness, may provide a way to conceptualize ethics and politics as well as arts and technologies as more than human (but less than otherworldly), as ways of living in a vast world without mastering or properly understanding it, as creative inventions for the elaboration and increasing complexification of life in the world of coexistence with all other forms of life and with a nonliving nature.