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The Nature of Freedom
- on the ethical potential of the knowledge of the non-human origins of human being

Martin Haugberg-Lund

”There are areas of me / that are not human / pine woods, magma / that which I have been /fluorescent grammar / in a subterranean summer.”
- Theis Ørntoft, *Poems 2014*

1. Introduction

Many ways there are to articulate the objective conditions of human subjectivity. If poetry is regarded as one way, philosophy ought to be regarded as another. Whereas young Danish poet Theis Ørntoft (1984-) in his *Poems 2014* invokes a host of metaphors in order to stage and address the fluctuating and at most semi-stable foundations of human being, American philosopher Graham Harman (1968-) in his *The Quadruple Object* expounds the structural components of a metaphysics that uncovers the ontological relativity of the objectively secured stability of human subjectivity. The implications of Harman's so-called 'object-oriented ontology' for the ethically significant construal of the relation between nature and freedom will be spelled out towards the end of my article.

In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings of the intellectual intentions behind the present paper, it is important that the three main ways of interpreting the expression 'the nature of freedom' is clarified from the start. First, the expression designates what might also be referred to as the 'essence' of freedom, and in that case the expression announces that the article will primarily deal with the truth pertaining to freedom. Second, the expression names the crucial relation that have always held and always will hold sway between nature and freedom, insofar as there belongs a specific way

Martin Hauberg-Lund
DPU – Danmarks institut for Pædagogik og Uddannelse, Emdrup, Danmark
E-mail: mahl@edu.au.dk

in which 'nature' must be and be understood if such a thing as 'freedom' is to be the case. Third, the expression might be understood as announcing that nature is itself an expression of freedom. Now, whether nature's freedom is understood in terms of self-activity ('Selbst-tätigkeit') or in other ways, the idea is that a certain mode of freedom belongs to the ways of nature. In the present article, it is primarily the second interpretation that I will pursue, but by doing so I will inevitably touch upon the two others. The guiding questions of my article are therefore the following: 'what kind of nature must be the case if freedom is real?', 'what must we understand by 'nature' if we insist that human beings are capable of freedom?' and/or 'how can we conceptually unify the immanence of nature and the transcendence of freedom?'

The challenging task of unifying nature and freedom guided much of the philosophical work carried out within the parameters of what we now refer to as the 50 'golden years' of European thought from 1781 (publication of the first edition of Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) to 1831 (Hegel's death by cholera), i.e. 'German idealism'. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) significantly influenced the development of post-Kantian philosophy insofar as he revitalised the otherwise totally absent interest in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). In his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785, 1789 and 1819) Jacobi presented what I consider to be an ultimate philosophical dilemma: the choice between 1) the faith of religion in a personal God, and 2) the rational-materialistic determinism of philosophy. Jacobi coined the expression 'nihilism' to make reference to the dilemma's latter option. By introducing this significant dilemma unto the stage of thinking, Jacobi stroke some of the central chords in what was to become the ambitious philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). Jacobi's philosophical 'either-or' – i.e. the choice between Christian dogmatism and Spinozistic rationalism – thus set the stage for European thinking after Kant. The great

challenge to be overcome nonetheless remained Kant's 'transcendental object' – i.e. 'das Ding an sich' – that logically had to be stipulated, if Kant's critical program for philosophy were to make sense. The question concerning what might be called 'the autonomy of reality', i.e. the existence of objects independent of human experience, played a key role in Hegel's development of his so-called 'presuppositionless philosophy'.

Jacobi's dilemma was not only an inspiring challenge to philosophy in the first half of the 19th century. Still today the dilemma indirectly animates the ways in which contemporary philosophers try to work out the human condition as well as the state of objective reality. The recent works of the 'object-oriented' philosopher Graham Harman will be introduced in order to show how it is today still possible and even beneficial to philosophise with 'objects' as one's theoretical point of departure. Harman presents us with ontological gestures that point towards ways to deal with the categories of 'substance' and 'objects in themselves' that radically break with Hegel's 'absolute idealism' that does not allow for objective knowledge unblemished by the stains of the subjective moment involved in all knowing. What we encounter in 'object oriented ontology' is something quite new, quite exciting and quite radical that really puts us on, ontologically speaking, new grounds. I will argue that Harman even casts the relation between ethics and philosophy in a new light and in doing so implicitly proves himself to be an heir to Spinoza's rationalist metaphysics.

My article is structured in a way that allows for Spinoza, Hegel and Harman to respond to Jacobi's dilemma in ways consistent with their respective philosophical positions. My task has therefore been to do justice to the philosophies of Spinoza, Hegel and Harman in my articulation of the logical outcomes of their respective attitudes to the dilemma posed by Jacobi. (Obviously, Spinoza did not have a chance of responding to Jacobi's dilemma

himself due to the simple fact that the dilemma was first presented some 200+ years after the death of Spinoza. Therefore, my presentation of Spinoza's 'response' is an anachronistic conceptual construction based on the logical integrity of Spinoza's metaphysics as presented in his post-humous magnum opus *Ethics* from 1677.) But let me now begin by introducing and accounting for what I propose to call 'Jacobi's dilemma'.

2. Jacobi's Dilemma

On a fundamental level 'German idealism' is characterised by the philosophical attempt to systematically conceptualize the possibility of 'freedom' and 'autonomy' in order to clear the path for their actual realization. Some of the crucial events that paved the way for this ambition to come about was, among other things, the emergence of scientific thinking in the late middle ages, the 'reformation' inaugurated by Martin Luther in the 1510s and 'the French revolution' that swept through the streets of Paris in the 1780s. As Stephen Houlgate puts it in relation to Hegel's philosophy:

> Hegel's philosophy presupposes as its historical precondition not only the extraordinary developments in German intellectual life since 1770 but also the general modern interest in freedom, self-determination, and critical self-scrutiny, which Hegel traces back to the Reformation and to Cartesian thought (indeed to the emergence of scientific enquiry and civic freedom in cities in the late Middle Ages), and which he believes suffuses modern political, economic, aesthetic, religious, and philosophical life. […] Presuppositionless philosophy is therefore a historical necessity – not in the sense that it could not fail to arise but in the sense that it alone is the philosophical fulfillment of the modern historical demand for freedom. (Houlgate 2006, p. 69)

Hegel himself characterized the spirit that animated the thinking of the philosophers of German idealism in the following way:

> Der germanische Geist ist der Geist der neuen Welt, deren Zweck die Realisierung der absoluten Wahrheit als der unendlichen Selbstbestimmung der Freiheit ist, *der* Freiheit, die ihre absolute Form selbst zum Inhalte hat. (Hegel 1986e, p. 413)

The will to freedom permeates the German spirit of post-Kantian philosophy which culminates in Hegel's encyclopedic philosophy. (Cf. Houlgate 2006, s. 68) As a kind of spiritual *primus motor* for the philosophical projects that were to define the content of German idealism – and perhaps in particular Hegel's philosophy – Jacobi presented the dilemma that, according to him, had become inevitable to confront due to Spinoza's rationalistic metaphysics as presented in *Ethics* in 1677. All in all, Jacobi's dilemma can be said to be defined by the question concerning, on the one hand, human freedom and, on the other, human bondage – a contested dispute that has occupied philosophers ever since the ancient inauguration of philosophical thinking, and which had been radically entertained by Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam in the 1520s.

I will now unfold Jacobi's dilemma and begin by presenting his demonstration of how things, metaphysically speaking, must be, if man is considered as essentially unfree.

"Der Mensch hat keine Freiheit"

In his demonstration of man's radical lack of freedom, Jacobi follows the logic of one of the two aspects that Spinoza thought of as characteristic of God or Nature. Therefore, in order to account for Jacobi's demonstration of human being's radical lack of freedom, we must begin by accounting for some of the central tenets of Spinoza's metaphysics. In a stylistically typical passage from the first part of *Ethics*, Spinoza introduces the notion of 'singular things' in relation to the relation between cause and effect:

> *A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect.* [...] *Every singular thing,* or *any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by*

> *another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.* (Spinoza 1996, p. 19 (IP26-8))

The causal reciprocity of every singular thing is the defining characteristic of Spinoza's conception of 'finitude'. To grasp things in terms of 'determination', i.e. 'being determined', entails grasping things in their purely mechanical aspect, and in so doing, focusing on things in terms of their having been created, and thus, ultimately, on that which Spinoza calls 'Natura naturata'. This category is defined by Spinoza in the following way:

> [B]y *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* from any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. (Spinoza 1996, p. 21 (IP29Schol.))

Freedom is – for Jacobi as well as for Spinoza – impossible when things are only viewed from the perspective of 'Natura naturata'. From this perspective singular things appear as self-identical, hence steady and immobile, and they do so due to the fact that their causality has been retrospectively rationalized by human cognition. Thus, a link is forged between the perspective of 'Natura naturata' – i.e. grasping the causality of created things – and rational human cognition. Therefore, Jacobi invokes the notion of 'personality' to characterise the moment of self-identity that characterises all cognitive rationalisation of created things. (Cf. Jacobi 2000, p. 167-8 (§IX-X) – see also ibid., s. 238 (Beilage IV).)

Now, Jacobi goes on to distinguish between 'rational' and 'irrational' desire. (Cf. Ibid., p. 168 (§XIV)) Whereas 'rational' desire is equivalent to what he calls 'natural drive' (i.e. the inflation of personality (cf. ibid., p. 166-167 (§IV) – or that which Spinoza calls 'conatus' or 'appetite' (cf. Spinoza 1996, p. 75-76 (IIIP6-9)), 'irrational' desire is equivalent to actions that is not carried

out in accordance with the practical principles that every rational being is capable of formulating as the axioms or maxims of its personality. (Cf. Jacobi 2006, p. 168 (§XIII)) The rational being becomes irrational as soon as its will and desire do not correspond and, further, that desire – and not will – is the driving force behind the actions of the being in question. When the actions of a rational being qualify it as irrational, it's essence is defined in terms of what might be called 'radical heteronomy' in the sense that the being in question is utterly determined by external causes. (The simple reason why 'action through desire' is properly classified as an instance of external causation is, that it is really the object of desire that is in control of what is done, and not the desiring being itself.) Therefore, Jacobi rightfully describes the mode of actions of an irrational being as ”lauter Mechanismus und keine Freiheit” (Ibid., p. 171 (§XXIII)).

Freedom and reason are linked, and insofar as the rational being cannot ensure that it is only moved by volition and not also by desire, it flounders, fails and, to its own surprise, finds itself defined by irrationality. (Cf. ibid., p. 168 (§XV)) The rational being cannot by itself qualify itself as 'radically autonomous', that is, it cannot act freely on its own, because every practical axiom or maxim – understood as expressions of the rational identity of its personality – are themselves based on the contingent factors of desire and experience. (Cf. ibid., p. 170 (§XXI)) That which appears to be autonomously phrased axioms or maxims for rational actions, turns out to be nothing but a subtle and masked expression of that against which it ought to have been a remedy: desire itself! This is what Jacobi takes to be the principle of practical axioms or maxims, their *a priori*, from which it follows that human beings *qua* rational must be understood to be striving for ”seine Person zu erhalten, und was ihre Identität verletzen will, sich zu unterwerfen.” (Ibid., p. 170 (§XXII)) That which have been consciously fashioned by rational human beings is, in

truth, nothing but the cunning of desire in relation to its own satisfaction. Or, to put it dramatically: behind the backs of human beings, desire works its ways! The conception of human beings that holds that human beings are unfree despite their awareness of their own desires and appetites, is presented by Spinoza in the third part of *Ethics* where he initiates the dialectical movement from 'determination' to 'auto-determination'. Spinoza gives voice to what derivatively serves as the point of departure for intellectually secured freedom, in the following way:

> "[I]t is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it." (Spinoza 1996, p. 76 (IIIP9Schol.) – see also ibid., p. (IVP30-31).)

The understanding of freedom (auto-determination) as enabled to come about through the process of intellectual insight into necessity (determination) plays, as we shall later see, a crucial role in Spinoza's own metaphysics of freedom. This conception, however, is not shared by Jacobi insofar as he understands the intellectual insight into necessity as essentially unable to bring about freedom. According to Jacobi, rational insight into necessity only amounts to an ever expanding mapping of the particular ways in which the world – including human being – is mechanically conditioned and determined through external causation (e.g. the moving forces of the objects of desire).

Let us now take a look at Jacobi's metaphysical demonstration of the way in which human being can be said to be free.

"Der Mensch hat Freiheit"

Jacobi's demonstration of human freedom is fundamentally premised by the notion that it is as undeniable that the existence of every singular thing is supported by the existence of other singular things, as it is undeniable that we

cannot imagine a wholly dependent thing. (Cf. Jacobi 2000, p. 17 (§XXIV)) Because we cannot even conceive of a wholly dependent thing there must be an aspect of 'pure self-activity' to every singular thing, whether it be mechanically or otherwise mediated. Again, Jacobi borrows some of the conceptual logic of Spinoza's *Ethics*. In the vocabulary of Spinoza himself this pure self-activity is given the name of 'Natura naturans'. Together with the notion of 'Natura naturata', 'Natura naturans' constitutes the dual aspect of Spinoza's ontological immanence. In the first book of *Ethics* Spinoza himself determines 'Natura naturans' in the following way:

> [B]y *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, *or* such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, that is, God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause. (Spinoza 1996, p. (IP29Schol.))

Now, this "reine Selbst-tätigkeit", as Jacobi calls it, cannot itself be known by man, because every clear and distinct idea – that is, all knowledge – rests on the speculative 'mediation' of the causal reciprocity of singular things. (Jacobi 2000, p. 172 (§XXVI-XXVII)) While we cannot rationally come to know the very 'possibility' of self-activity by means of mediation, the 'reality' of self-activity is proven by every act that immediately determines itself and therefore exists as conscious content. According to Jacobi, 'freedom' is the word that denominates the reality of self-activity. (Cf. ibid., p.173 (§XXVIII-XXX)) As far as we know, writes Jacobi, it is only 'human beings' that are sufficiently aware of self-activity in order to be driven to master and perform acts of freedom. (Cf. ibid., (§XXXI)) (Thus, it becomes clear that in it's minimal determination Jacobi's conception of freedom bares some similarity with Hegel's later development of his conception of freedom. As it turned out, for Hegel, freedom is *consciousness* of freedom. (Cf. Houlgate 2005, p. 27))

Further, freedom is determined as the will's independence of desire,

which is in its own turn determined as the elevation of pure self-activity to reason. (Cf. Jacobi 2000, p. 173 (§XXXII-XXXIII)) Jacobi traces the source of the consciousness of freedom – and the actual acts of freedom that flow from it – back to the Stoics' conception of 'honour', whose sole object consists in "die Vollkommenheit der menschlichen Natur *an sich*, *Selbsttätigkeit*, *Freiheit*." (Ibid., p. 174) Honour urges human being to freedom by installing a responsiveness towards itself, whereby human being becomes a freely acting thing in accordance with itself. In opposition to such a freely self-determining human being, there are those who are merely determined by contingent desires and random whims. (Cf. ibid., p. 173-174 (§XXXV)) As Jacobi himself puts it:

> So lange aber noch ein Funken dieses Gefühl [i.e. the feeling of honour] im Menschen wohnt, so lange ist ein unwidersprechliches Zeugnis der Freiheit, ein unbezwinglicher Glaube an die innerliche Allmacht des Willens in ihm. (Ibid., p. 174)

Even though it is obviously possible for human being to oppose the reality of freedom by means of stubborn linguistic refutation, we cannot, according to Jacobi, not hearken to and in our actions comply with the profound and abyssal call of freedom when it comes to our administration of our own reputation as well as our judgment of the worth of other people. Whenever we encounter and experience a human being that squanders its chances, chooses the wrong means to its ends and all in all acts in contrast to its own ideals, dreams, wishes and wants, we judge it as an unreasonable and downright foolish human being. (Cf. ibid., p. 175 (§XXXVII)) Jacobi writes further that the feeling of honour is so deeply rooted in human being that we are only capable of really condemning another human being when it shows clear signs of having lost its feeling of honour and, thus, its self-respect. As he himself succinctly puts it:

> Verleugnet [der Mensch] aber auf irgend eine entschiedene Weise das Gefühl der Ehre; zeigt er, dass er *innere* Schande tragen, oder Selbstverachtung nicht mehr *fühlen* kann; dann werfen wir ihn ohne Gnade weg, er ist Kot unter unseren Füssen. (Ibid., p. 175)

After loosely criticizing Spinoza for having committed a purely abstract demonstration of the incapacity of a rational human being to lie – even in the situation where lying could potentially save the life of the human being in question – Jacobi goes on to assert that there must belong another essential aspect to human being than there merely syllogistic one, i.e. the aspect that has to do with deductive reasoning and logical inferences. This other essential aspect, Jacobi names "den Odem Gottes in dem Gebilde von Erde." (Ibid., p. 176) Thus, for Jacobi, in all its earthly manifestation human being is thus, literally speaking, 'inspired' by God. Jacobi needs God in order to secure human freedom, because, for him, the belief in intelligent, rational self-determination logically entails the belief in a highest intelligence or reason, a rational author, legislator or 'Urheber' of nature, and the name that Jacobi chooses for this divine source and instigator of human rationality turns out to be nothing but the always available notion of 'God'. (Cf. ibid., p. 177 (§XLII)) The underlying reason for Jacobi's crucial inference is not hard to sound out: human being is an exceptional being due to its dual nature. On the one hand, human being belongs to the earthly existence of nature, but on the other, it belongs to the heavenly realm of God. At one and the same time, human being is 'natural' and 'divine'. What this means in practice is that human being possesses the ability to rationally act in such as way as to bring nature to serve the purposes of human being itself – instead of the purposes of nature. That a naturally occurring being possesses the special ability to commence otherwise unreal chains of causality, i.e. the ability to take part in the ongoing rearrangement of the objective state of affairs, thus functioning as an earthly

lawgiver of nature, Jacobi interprets as an indisputable sign of the existence of a rational, personal God. That we, human beings, have been created in the image of God, is proven by every act of freedom insofar as a free act is an infinitesimal repetition of God's primal creation of the world. Jacobi's conception of human freedom is therefore seen to be based on the logic of the genesis creation narrative of Christianity.

Human faith in such a (Christian) God is not brought about automatically. Instead, it must be cultivated and instigated as religion, and this it will only be insofar as that which Jacobi calls 'pure love' is developed in the hearts of human beings. (Cf. ibid. (§XLIII)) With a fleeting reference to Socrates, Jacobi states that the object of pure love is the immanent 'telos' (i.e. end) of human being. Now, this takes us back to his treatment of human being's feeling of honour, that equally had the perfection or progressive development of human being as its object. Pure love can be translated as 'striving for autonomy', i.e. auto-determination, i.e. rational self-activity. Now, as already mentioned, for Jacobi, human being has a dual essence in the sense that human being carries in its core both the seed of necessity (i.e. determination) and the seed of freedom (i.e. auto-determination). Therefore, in addition to its membership of the heavenly realm of God, which enables human beings' defining acts of freedom, human being is subjected to the laws of nature and the contingency that pertains to the phenomenal realm of earthly existence. According to Jacobi, this bestows a 'double direction' upon the essence of human being: ”Die Richtung auf das Endliche ist der sinnliche Trieb oder das Prinzip der Begierde; die Richtung auf das Ewige ist das intellektuelle Trieb, das Prinzip reiner Liebe.” (Ibid., p. 178)

Thus, we are presented with the ancient and age-old narrative of human being's double nature: human being as a puzzling union of sensation and reasoning, finite egotistical desire and infinite cosmic love. Now, as

already suggested, Jacobi does not want to give rational grounds for the reality of the divine aspect of human being, but is, instead, satisfied by making reference to actually free acts of human being as sufficient indication of the reality of freedom, self-activity and auto-determination. He does, however, present us with the illogical nonsensicality of wanting to account for the conditions of the unconditioned. (Cf. ibid. (§L))

For Jacobi, due to its defining feeling of honour, human being is characterised by the wish to know a kind of joy that is not just a sort of superficial tickle: "einer Freude, die nicht blosser Kitzel sei." (Ibid., p. 178) The actions of human being that truly initiates new chains of causality, i.e. the actions that participate in the lawgiving of nature, is given the name of 'divine actions' by Jacobi, and the joy that accompanies such actions as the joy that God feels by his own existence. (Cf. ibid., p. 178-179 (§LI)) Whereas human being acquires the 'soul of the animal' by directing its actions towards the purely phenomenal, earthly and contingent aspect of reality, it acquires nothing less than 'immortality' by directing its actions towards the eternal and enduring. (Cf. ibid., p. 179 (§LII)) All in all, Jacobi's demonstration of the reality of human freedom amounts, therefore, to nothing more than a vain repetition of the Christian conception of human being draped in the logical rigour of philosophical sounding phrases. For Jacobi, nature – understood as the earthly realm of necessity – and freedom – understood as the heavenly realm of God – ought to be thought of as essentially dichotomous. They cannot be reconciled, but must instead be thought of as the two poles of a dualistic spectrum characteristic of the existence of singular things including human being. Insofar as Jacobi takes his demonstration of human being's radical lack of freedom to be exhaustive and fully representative of Spinoza's metaphysics, he will be shown to be wrongheaded in his exegetically unrefined one-sidedness. As we will now move on to see, Spinoza offers a metaphysics

of freedom that qualifies both of the above mentioned aspects of reality and human being as crucial to the reality of freedom.

3. Spinoza's Response

Interestingly, despite Jacobi's overall assessment of Spinoza's philosophy as ultimately inadequate and unsatisfactory due to its deterministic and fatalistic metaphysical content that he takes to flow from Spinoza's rationalistic mode of thinking and presentation, Jacobi's own demonstration of human freedom and the religious premises that support it, bares much similarity with Spinoza's thinking through and presentation of the possibility of human freedom. The ontological structure that follows from the consistent conceptual development of human freedom – i.e. that the human joy that accompanies free actions coincides with God's joy by his own existence – is rediscovered almost word for word in the fifth and last book of *Ethics*: "The mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself […]." (Spinoza 1996, p. 176 (VP36))

What made Jacobi feel justified in his determination of Spinoza's philosophy as deterministic, fatalistic and thus, ultimately, nihilistic, now seems to be nothing but a radical misunderstanding of Spinoza's philosophy. Many a place in *Ethics* Spinoza makes it clear that the condition of possibility of freedom is nothing but knowledge of created nature (i.e. 'Natura naturata') in terms of determined and thus necessary things that externally affect, condition and thus determine human being to act in certain passionate ways. (Cf. e.g. ibid., p. 165 (VP6) and 169 (VP15)) For Spinoza, then, there cannot be said to be any dichotomous relation between freedom and necessity. On the contrary, the road to freedom is paved with the acknowledgement of one's own determination. Or, to put it in the words of Spinoza himself: "*Insofar as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects,* or *is*

less acted on by them." (Ibid., p. 165 (VP6)) (Due to his radical conception of the logical interdependence between freedom and necessity, Spinoza can be said to have cleared the way for some of the central thoughts of German idealism. It is even possible to find linguistically similar ways of phrasing the relation between freedom and necessity in Hegel's works. That the acknowledgement of necessity and determination is the condition of possibility of freedom and auto-determination is even presented in an almost slogan-like manner in the third volume of his *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*: "[V]on seiner Schranke wissen heisst daher, von seiner Unbeschränktheit wissen." (Hegel 1986c, p. 36) Or, as he puts it in the chapter on 'spirit' ('Geist') in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*: "Nur als empörtes Selbstbewusstsein aber weiss es [i.e. the self] seine eigene Zerrissenheit, und in diesem Wissen derselben hat es sich unmittelbar darüber erhoben." (Hegel 1986d, p. 390))

The same ontological structure that expresses the logical culmination of Spinoza's immanent metaphysics of freedom, emerges, as we have seen, in Jacobi's demonstration of human freedom. Freedom is determined by him as well, as human being's ability to act as lawgiver of nature, which can only take place insofar as the objective state of affairs are rationally thought through as regards to their total causality. The power to rearrange the objective state of affairs so that they are brought to serve other (e.g. human) purposes, is bestowed upon human being by the rational capability of knowledge of causality.

Now, in order to stay true to his philosophical intention, that is, in order to attain conceptual consistency, Spinoza must let his philosophical *magnum opus* begin with the seemingly paralysing mechanistic discourse that dominates the first book of *Ethics*. Jacobi's blatant misunderstanding of Spinoza's philosophy might have been caused by his simply not making it to the second, third, fourth and fifth books of *Ethics*, but instead contented

himself with simply dealing with the content and style of the first of the five books, which, when read on its own, can indeed mislead the reader to conclude that Spinoza had nothing but wheels and gears in mind when he wrote his now classic text. Another reason might have been Jacobi's general tendency towards conservatism and theism. (Cf. Baum 2002) However, and independently of what the cause for Jacobi's misinterpretation of Spinoza's great book actually was, a much more organic and dynamic conception of reality emerges as soon as we begin to listen to the subtler themes of the grandiose symphony entitled *Ethics*.

Instead of confronting the logical implications of his demonstration of human freedom and stipulating an impersonal, immanent ontological concept like the one historically introduced, deductively justified and given the name of 'God or Nature' ('deus sive natura') by Spinoza (cf. Spinoza 1996, p. 114 (IVPreface)), Jacobi flees into the irrational dogmas of Christianity, and thus renders himself a victim to that which Spinoza calls 'education', and which Jacobi himself did not manage to rationally free himself from and thus existentially overcome. As Spinoza puts it:

> [W]e ought also to note here that it is no wonder sadness follows absolutely all those acts which from custom are called *wrong*, and joy, those which are called *right*. For from what has been said above we easily understand that this depends chiefly on *education*. Parents – by blaming the former acts, and often scolding their children on account of them, and on the other hand, by recommending and praising the latter acts – have brought it about that emotions of sadness were joined to the one kind of act, and those of joy to the other. Experience itself also confirms this. For not everyone has the same custom and religion. On the contrary, what among some is holy, among others is unholy; and what among some is honorable, among others is dishonorable. Hence, according as each one has been educated, so he either repents of a deed or exults at being esteemed for it. (Ibid., p. 108 (DEFINITIONS OF THE AFFECTS XXVIIExp.), my emphasis.)

I will now go on to explicate Spinoza's doctrine of freedom in order to 1) further account for the philosophically unsatisfactory aspects of Jacobi's

demonstration of human freedom as well as 2) further develop Spinoza's own conception of the relation between objects and freedom.

To begin with, it is crucial that Spinoza's conception of 'affect' be made clear. At the beginning of the third book of *Ethics* Spinoza defines 'affect' in the following way:

> By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. *Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion.* (Ibid., p. 70 (IIID3))

Or, as Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss has put it in his fine and 'down to earth' history of philosophy:

> In the third book [of *Ethics*] we are introduced to the villain: the road to the clarity of knowledge and happiness is not only hindered by ignorance, [...] but human being is all too susceptible to external impressions that set the mind in such oscillations that the equilibrium is lost whereby it is made to perform – and made to insist on performing – actions that lead to unhappiness. The passions prevent human being from unfolding itself in a free and versatile way. (Næss 1963, p. 179-180)

According to Spinoza, 'joy', 'desire' and 'sadness' are the three fundamental affects that are capable of determining a human being. (Cf. Spinoza 1996, p. 77 (IIIP11Schol.)) Whereas joy enables free actions, sadness shackles human being and determines it by means of external causation to do things that do not necessarily agree with the nature of the human being in question. Human being is directed by foreign, obscure and unknown forces as long as it is not determined by joyful affections due to rational self-determination. For Spinoza, freedom is to be understood as a boon to human being, as something to be treasured and held dear. Whereas it befalls some to act freely by means of joyful affections, others are deprived of the privilege of autonomy. In other words: human being is primarily and from the outset

dominated by contingency, and thus, consequently, necessity. Human being is not, according to Spinoza, free to *choose* freedom at will, but is, one might say, sentenced to *be* free under certain benign circumstances. As he himself puts it in relation to his determination of the causal relation between the intellect and the body:

> [W]hen men say that this or that action of the body arises from the mind, which has dominion over the body, they do not know what they are saying, and they do nothing but confess, in fine-sounding words, that they are ignorant of the true cause of that action, and that they do not wonder at it. […] Those, therefore, who believe that they either speak or are silent, or do anything from a free decision of the mind, dream with open eyes. (Ibid., p. 72-74 (IIIP2Schol.))

To develop this notion of what might be called 'the heteronomy of autonomy' – i.e. the contingent and objective source of the conditions of possibility of freedom – we might note in passing that, for Spinoza, adequate ideas or true knowledge cannot restrain or hinder the influence of an affect simply by being adequate or true. (Cf. ibid., p. 123 (IVP14)) Only insofar as ideas or knowledge have an affective force in relation to the human being whose intellect gave rise to the ideas or knowledge in question can they restrain or hinder an affective determination. Thus, human being must already have been brought to be affectively receptive to the adequacy or truthfulness of ideas in order for the rational workings of the intellect to be able to have a power over the actions of human being at all. And insofar as this have been brought about by the means of 'education' – understood in the broad sense, as characterised above – and experience, human being possesses the power of autonomy thanks to its rational capabilities of affecting itself by means of the willed formation of ideas.

Now, while it is not possible to determine a finite and definitive set of possible effects of any singular thing, it is possible to characterise the likely

affective outcome of the encounter with certain extreme things. Domestic violence, systematic bullying and physical abuse will tend to have an affective impact in the general direction of sadness. Mental states such as demotivation, low self-esteem, psychological trauma and paralysation are all likely to follow in the wake of such things. On the other hand, mental states such as zest and vigour are likely to be brought about by things such as healthy food, energetic friendships, parental love, a good night's sleep and creative stimulation. On a daily basis we make reference to things by using the same wording, but the things in question whose names we all agree upon, will necessarily take on a host of different effects depending on who is affected by them and under what circumstances the affection takes place. Thus, to give an example, the Danish author Søren Aabye Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) classic piece of philosophical literature *Either-or* from 1843 might in some instances bring about joyful affections, but in other instances sad ones. At a certain point in the unfolding of the existential narrative, Kierkegaard's persona *Assessor Wilhelm* writes the following: "Already prior to one's choosing, the personality is interested in the choice, and if one puts off the choice, the personality or the obscure forces within it unconsciously chooses." (Kierkegaard 1962, p. 155) Due to its obvious reference to the inevitability of choice Kierkegaard's seminal text is capable of affecting the reader towards self-confrontation and possibly even aesthetically seduce him/her to make an effort and attempt to take responsibility of his/her existence. This kind of literary aesthetic seduction will, possibly, lead to joyful affection and thus, ultimately, free actions. Those, on the other hand, that are not seduced by the Kierkegaardian deceptions will have a radically different experience when affected by his famous work. They might experience the read as an absurd desert journey with no significant meaning attached to it, and they will, therefore, suffer the affections of sadness.

There are no safe routes to joy, no existential regularities regarding which singular things lead to which affective states, and therefore human being is sentenced to exploration and discovery as regards what works under which conditions, and, for Spinoza, the vessel of such exploration and discovery is 'reason'. But because of the fact that the affectivity of reason is itself governed by the mess of reality, i.e. contingency, there are no guarantees for human being to ever develop this divine aspect of its existence. Despite the fact that our social institutions, e.g. the primary school system, is meant to facilitate a certain amount of existential formation, the introduction to the whims and woes of living as well as a partial obliteration of the significance of the respective pupil's socio-economic background as regards the life chances of every single pupil, it remains nonetheless true what French philosopher and Spinoza-scholar Gilles Deleuze once proclaimed: "In the state of nature I live at the mercy of encounters." (Deleuze 2005, p. 260) Now, that which is capable of encountering something else, is always to be regarded as a singular thing. The question, therefore, becomes: what, for Spinoza, are 'singular things'? Or, to put it in another way: how to reconcile IP15 and VP24 of *Ethics*?

On the one hand, God or Nature is said not to be corporeal (cf. Spinoza 1996, p. 10 (IP15Schol.), but on the other hand, Spinoza claims, the more we understand singular things, the more we understand God or Nature. (Cf. ibid., p. 173 (VP24)) How can this be? In order to answer this question, we must consult the opening definitions of the second book of *Ethics* where 'singular things' are defined:

> By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing. (Ibid., p. 32 (IID7)

– this is also true of what Spinoza calls 'bodies'. (Cf. ibid., p. 42 (IIL3A2Definition)) What Spinoza has in mind is that singular things exist on a range of different levels where the relations between parts and wholes are dynamic and ever changing depending on the total causality that dominates the reciprocity of things that defines the objective state of affairs. Imagine a mill. A mill consists of a host of different singular things, and when combined in a specific way those singular things join together in the make up of such a thing as a 'mill'. Traditionally, the main effect produced by a mill has been 'the grinding of grain' or 'the making of flour', but in rare occasions it has been 'the destruction of sprockets and v-belts' due to the excessive tension brought about by the input of unusually hard grains of, for instance, wheat. Thus, what I have referred to as 'total causality' is prone to change when singular things otherwise absent are introduced into the workings of relatively stable assemblages of things. (I will return to the example of the mill in the section on Harman's response to Jacobi's dilemma.)

Insofar as the knowledge of singular things leads to the formation of an adequate idea of God or Nature, ought not also God or Nature to be ascribed the status of a finite, singular thing? Spinoza often defines God or Nature as the cause of all things (see, for instance, ibid., p. 18 (IP24Cor.)), and God or Nature cannot, therefore, itself be ascribed the status of a thing, i.e. an effect, amongst other things, i.e. effects. (Ibid., p. 16 (IP18) and p. 18 (IP24)) In one place, Spinoza characterises the existence of singular things as determined by what he calls ”the order of the whole of corporeal Nature.” (Ibid., p. 7 (IP11Dem.)) Thus, as far as singular things are concerned, Spinoza operates with a radical ontological heteronomy, which entails that singular things only cause other singular things to arise, change or perish thanks to the causation of other singular things. The causal power of singular things is nothing but the surface effect of prior events of causation. Or, to quote a

passage stylistically typical of Spinoza:

> Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and os on, to infinity. (Ibid., p. 19 (IP28))

It therefore makes sense to use the metaphor of 'the great chain of being' in relation to the implicit chronology of existence that is implied by, what might be called, Spinoza's proposed 'ontological successiveness'. The consequence of this doctrine of ontological successiveness is that the only way to consistently conceive of freedom in relation to human being is by way of reference to the mode of necessity that dominates the existence of singular things insofar as they are conceived under the aspect of created nature (i.e. 'Natura naturata'). On a theoretical level, human being is set free by employing reason to know the ways in which singular things are causally linked. That is, by forming adequate ideas about the singular things that are affectively significant in relation to the state and condition of human being. The degree of adequacy of any given idea depends on the level of detail and the amount of nuances that the idea in question expresses. The higher the level of detail and the larger the amount of nuances expressed by an idea, the freer human being becomes depending on the degree of rational receptiveness displayed by the mind who authored the idea. On a practical level, freedom – thus acquired – is realised to the extent to which the human being whose mind has been affected by the relatively adequate idea of certain singular and affectively significant things, is capable of channelling the power of the rationally produced insights into the objective state of affairs into actions rearranging the order of things, thus initiating new chains of causality that changes the

overall affectivity of the total causality in which the human being in question takes part. Spinoza's conception of freedom is therefore to be understood in terms of human being's capacity to be affected in accordance with its own nature. (Cf. ibid., p. 166 (VP10)) Because the power to determine oneself (i.e. freedom) flows from the knowledge of one's current determination (i.e. necessity), it makes good sense to talk about seemingly paradoxical notions such as 'the necessity of freedom' and 'the heteronomy of autonomy'.

Now, in order to illustrate these rather abstract points concerning Spinoza's conception of the relation between singular things, reason and freedom, let us take a look at some of the examples he himself gives in the fifth and final book of *Ethics*. To begin with, it follows logically from what has already been made apparent that such a thing as 'hope' – or, at least, the need for it – vanishes as soon as human being has begun to determine itself by means of reason. When one knows that this or that is not good for one's overall condition or state of being, then one does no longer need hope in order to get along. One simply rejoices in the causal power of the knowledge one has brought about by means of the capacity of reason to produce adequate ideas of singular things taking part of the total causality of which one is oneself merely a part among parts. Translated into the language of general wisdom, Spinoza puts it in the following way:

> [T]he more we strive to live according to the guidance of reason, the more we strive to depend less on hope, to free ourselves from fear, to conquer fortune as much as we can, and to direct our actions by the certain counsel of reason. […] He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and happen according to the eternal laws and rules of Nature, will surely find nothing worthy of hate, mockery, or disdain, nor anyone whom he will pity. Instead he will strive, as fas as human virtue allows, to act well, as they say, and rejoice. (Ibid., p. 141-142 (IVP47-50))

In order to illustrate this rather abstract expression of the ethical implications of Spinoza's philosophy, let us take a look at another passage from the fourth

part of *Ethics* that, at least to some extent, foreshadows the desire to translate abstract, conceptual philosophising into surprisingly specific advice, that would later manifest itself in the late Nietzsche's rambling *Ecce Homo* from 1888:

> It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theatre, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things at once. (Ibid., p. 140-141 (IVP45Schol.))

It is important to underline that Spinoza's well-meant moments of existential counselling ought to be understood as general advice that, all things being equal, does make good sense to adapt for most human beings. The fact that some people simply 'hate' going to the theatre, because they suffer an affection of sadness from the theatrical experience, should not be interpreted as an indication of their not directing their actions by 'the certain counsel of reason' due to the fact that Spinoza, the rational philosophy *par excellence*, once recommended his readers to engage in theatrical shows. On the contrary, such an avoidance of the theatre might just as well be an expression of exactly rational self-determination if the failure to be joyfully affected by theatrical impressions has been rationally thought through and thus demonstrated to be an inherent trait of one's overall psychological dispositions. If one or one's doctor/psychiatrist is thus capable of rationally diagnosing oneself/one with a rare case of 'theatrophobia', then one's systematic avoidance of theatres cannot rightfully be said to be an expression of one's unfree and irrational state of being. (In the fifth book of *Ethics* Spinoza meticulously deducts a host of other specific ethical implications of rational self-determination, but I

will not go into detail with his treatment of such things as 'humility', 'self-esteem', 'fear', 'desire', 'pity', 'repentance' and 'hate' due to the overall scope and focus of my paper. It suffices that I have now duly laid out Spinoza's conception of the relation between singular things, reason and freedom.)

Now, in conclusion, the main problem of Jacobi's overall assessment of Spinoza's philosophy stems from the fact that he (i.e. Jacobi) was not able to merge the concepts of 'freedom' and 'necessity' into a higher and philosophically more refined understanding of human being as well as the intricate relation between freedom and the capacity for rational mediation of the objective state of affairs. Because he could not fathom that knowledge of necessity constitutes the basis of freedom, Jacobi was left with an apparent either-or situation where he, ultimately, chose the cop out of a religious leap of faith instead of soberly taking upon himself the speculatively strenuous effort of philosophy. As we shall see, it was not until the emergence of the philosophy of the mature Hegel that German philosophy was in a position to merge the two phenomena of 'freedom' and 'necessity' in a dialectically satisfying manner. (Jacobi's deficient conception of the relation between freedom and necessity is apparent in, for instance, §XXVI of his *Über die Freiheit des Menschen*. There Jacobi writes that every singular thing "in so fern ihr Sein und Wirken *vermittelt* ist, in so fern muss es schlechterdings auf Gesetze des Mechanismus beruhen." (Jacobi 2000, p. 172)) As we have seen in the case of Spinoza, rational mediation of singular things does not lead to mechanical necessity, but is instead the road to freedom. As we shall see, Jacobi's conception of the mechanical nature of mediation is the diametrical opposite of not just Spinoza's understanding of mediation, but also of Hegel's.

Finally, for Spinoza 'God or nature' must be conceived as essentially free, insofar as we take 'God or nature' to refer to all of the attributes and

modes of the one true substance, which, according to Spinoza, is the only thing that can be understood in and through itself without having to make reference to other concepts. (Cf. Spinoza 1996, p. 1 (ID1)) Through the use of reason human being is capable of existing 'substantially' insofar as rational self-determination enables human being to transcend the specific determinations of the total causality of the mesh of singular things into which it has always already been weaved. The logic of Spinoza's metaphysics of freedom entails the following attitude towards the tripartite meaning of the title of my article: 1) freedom is singular things' (e.g. human being's) rational overcoming of determination *qua* external causation of other singular things, 2) under the reign of freedom nature is to be conceived as the total causality of singular things, and 3) nature understood as 'God or nature' is that which is ultimately free insofar as it is the very incarnation of substance with all of its attributes, modes and affections.

Let us now move on to take a look at Hegel's conception of the relation between nature and freedom, and give voice to the philosophical attitude towards Jacobi's dilemma that follows from his systematic thinking.

4. Hegel's Response

In his introduction to the second volume of the comprehensive *Enzyklopädie*, Hegel expresses his overall conception of 'nature': "Was ist die Natur? Sie bleibt ein Problem." (Hegel 1986b, p. 12) For Hegel, nature remains 'problematic' because, for him, 'nature' designates the natural world *insofar as* it has been named and thus made to appear before the eyes of cultured human being. Everything natural rests, so to speak, in the eye of the beholder. 'In itself', though, nature cannot 'be said' to be anything at all, due to the fact that insofar as we experience, think or talk about what nature might be 'in itself', human concepts have already been engaged in the exposition of the objective

state of affairs, thus turning it into a subjective negation of nature's immediate being. Every subjective negation expresses an interest, a goal or a purpose, and for this reason, the category of 'end' ('Zweck') dialectically emerges in Hegel's logical determination of the concept of 'object' in his *Wissenschaft der Logik*. As an implication of the event of knowledge human being *qua* subject conceptually appropriates the available and ontologically malleable realm of reality that exists beyond the scope of concepts, and which is thus turned into 'objectivity' in the shape of what Hegel calls "die äusserliche Allgemeinheit." (Hegel 1986a, p. 355) Nature, for Hegel, in all its external generality is therefore not be considered as anything else than what might be called 'petrified intelligence', to borrow the wording of Alison Stone. (Cf. Stone 2005) The source of generality is 'reason', understood as the faculty of ontological significance, i.e. conceptual conditioning of the objective state of affairs. Now, 'understanding' is the name of the human capacity for employing the generalities of reason in the realm of objectivity. (Cf. Hegel 1986a., p. 169) Whereas understanding is limited by "das abstrakte *Entweder-Oder*" (ibid., p. 172) that Hegel takes to be a characteristic trait of youngsters and philosophically uneducated people, reason is free to work out the speculative unity of apparently opposite generalities by means of presuppositionless dialectics, thereby grasping the reciprocity and cohesion of the categories of understanding, hence of objectivity itself. (Cf. ibid., p. 168)

Now, before I move on to further clarify the relation between objectivity, reason and freedom within the parameters of Hegel's philosophy, it is crucial that the concept of 'dialectics' is itself determined. As Hegel himself reminds us: "Das Dialektische gehörig aufzufassen und zu erkennen ist von der höchsten Wichtigkeit." (Ibid., p. 173) To begin with, 'dialectics' entails an 'immanent' starting point of philosophical knowing. This means that no predetermined concepts or notions are needed in order for the

process of philosophy to get going. Nothing but sheer immediacy makes up, so to speak, the starting point of Hegel's ontology. (Cf. ibid., p. 182-183) Thanks to the three 'sides' of logic, which manifest themselves in the dialectical unfolding of the ontologically significant categories of human being, i.e. 1) the abstract side, 2) the dialectical side, and 3) the speculative side, pure thinking in terms of reason's engagement with the abstract thought determinations of understanding is capable of thinking through the intricate web of concepts that make up the structural conditions of possibility of phenomena and, therefore, of objectivity itself.

It is important, therefore, not to conflate Kant's and Hegel's respective positions as regards the metaphysical make up of reality. Whereas Kant thought of the transcendental conditioning of objective reality by means of the synthetic capabilities of the faculty of reason on the one hand, and amorphous things in themselves on the other, in terms of what Harman calls "the Kantian duopoly of human and world" (Harman 2011, p. 46), Hegel thought of the relation between human conception and the objective state of affairs in terms of an immanent coincidence where there simply are no objects prior to their inscription in the web of concepts – what Hegel calls 'the notion' ('der Begriff'). (Cf. Hegel 1986d, p. 76-77) Thus, Hegel – in contrast to Kant – does not stipulate the existence of some autonomous, noumenal realm of reality devoid of the constitutive influence of human being. For him, things can only be 'for us' due to the simple reason that insofar as we entertain the notion of 'things in themselves' the things thus talked or thought about as beings 'in themselves' have already been made to appear as 'things for us'. Therefore, 'things in themselves' ought really to be referred to as 'things in themselves *for us*', whereby the conceptual determination of things in themselves *as* things 'in themselves' negates itself by being presuppositionlessly thought through by the use of reason. (Cf.

Hegel 1986a, p. 116 and 254-255)

Now, in order to clarify Hegel's conception of the intimate connection between objects, reason and freedom, it is important to introduce Hegel's conception of human being as 'spirit' ('Geist'). Human being's capacity for freedom stems from the fact that human being is 'spirit', i.e. self-determining through knowledge of self. As Hegel puts it in the third volume of his *Enzyklopädie*: "Dass der Geist dazu kommt, zu wissen, was er ist, dies macht seine Realisation aus. Der Geist ist wesentlich nur das, was er von sich selber weiss." (Hegel 1986c, p. 33) The knowledge of self ('Sichwissen') that characterises spirit is mediated through a host of categories that collectively make up the total notion of reality. These defining categories of human being *qua* spirit are normally 'unconsciously' active (cf. Hegel 1986f, p. 24), wherefore it is a matter of philosophical work to lay out the ontologically significant modes of knowing that characterise human being in its immediacy. On multiple occasions Hegel makes it crystal clear that the business of philosophy has to do with the enlightening task of sounding out the conceptual determinations of things, because for him the very essence of objectivity is thoughts, or to use his own way of putting it, 'thought determinations'. (Cf. Hegel 1986a, p. 81) It therefore follows that "die Aufgabe der Philosophie [besteht überhaupt darin] die Dinge auf Gedanken, und zwar auf bestimmte Gedanken zurückzuführen." (Ibid., p. 220) Hegel's belief in the radical correlation between the logical content of thinking and the being of things in themselves is unequivocally expressed in the first volume of his *Enzyklopädie*: "[D]ie wahre Objektivität des Denkens [ist] diese, dass die Gedanken nicht bloss unsere Gedanken, sondern zugleich das *Ansich* der Dinge und des Gegenständlichen überhaupt sind." (Ibid., p. 116) The programmatic implications of this conception of the relation between thought and being is further developed by Hegel. From his understanding of

human being's relation to the objective state of affairs it follows that human being is itself driven by a striving to subject reality to the idealising faculties of understanding and reason. Therefore, Hegel concludes, human being is determined by the defining drive "die Welt zu erkennen, sie sich anzueignen und zu unterwerfen, und zu dem Ende muss die Realität der Welt gleichsam *zerquetscht*, d. h. idealisiert werden." (Ibid., 118 – my emphasis.)

To say that the world must be 'crushed' ('zerquetscht'), in order for it to be known and appropriated at all, reveals an implicit tendency in Hegel's intellectual orientation. The philosophical significance of human being's random yet fateful encounters with the multiplicity of singular things that, according to Spinoza, govern reality in general and human being in particular, is substantially downplayed by Hegel in order for the ontological primacy of human being's conceptual conditioning of objective reality to emerge. The notion of human being as driven by the will to subject the world to its idealising generalities in order for the world to become ever more attuned to human being is itself reflected, by Hegel, into the ontological hierarchy of reality: "Der Begriff ist vielmehr das wahrhaft Erste, und die Dinge sind das, was sie sind, durch die Tätigkeit des ihnen innewohnenden und in ihnen sich offenbarenden Begriffs." (Ibid., p. 313) It thus becomes clear that Hegel does not ascribe an ontological autonomy to what, as we saw, is called 'singular things' in Spinoza's terminology. Things are only the things they are thanks to the way in which human being comprehends them, wherefore they can only be assigned an ontologically speaking derivative status. Things are only relative to us, so to speak. The difference between Spinoza's and Hegel's respective conceptions of the relation between nature and human being can therefore be phrased in the following way: whereas, for Spinoza, human being takes place at the mercy of natural encounters, for Hegel natural encounters take place at the mercy of human being.

From this it follows that Hegel determines the purpose of philosophy to be the systematic unfolding of the specific ways in which human being crushes and appropriates the world by means of the invocation of ontologically significant categories. Because 'language' is the means by which understanding gets to know and thus constitutes its respective objects (cf. Hegel 1986f, p. 20), Hegel's philosophical point of departure is the vocabulary of everyday consciousness – or, as he himself puts it, the "unmittelbares Vorurteil eines jeden." (Hegel 1986a, p. 79) 'Reason' thinks in terms of the conditions of that which is, i.e. thinks through the concepts that understanding merely invokes in its grasping of objects of experience, and therefore it now follows that what understanding takes to be real things, reason interprets as mere appearances. Hegel therefore points out the difference between philosophical thinking and everyday, common consciousness in the following way: "[D]ie Philosophie [unterscheidet] sich vom gemeinen Bewusstsein dadurch, dass sie dasjenige, was diesem als ein Seiendes und Selbständiges gilt, als blosse Erscheinung betrachtet." (Ibid., p. 262) Reason, therefore, can be said to operate on the level of the conditions of knowing, which is to say on the level of the logical categories that permeate and animate understanding's use of language. For Spinoza, reason primarily operates on the level of being, bodies and/or singular things in relation to the achievement of affective self-determination, and the contrast to Hegel's programmatic characterisation of philosophy is therefore not hard to see.

Nonetheless, 'freedom' is also in the case of Hegel intimately linked to the pursuit of philosophy, because knowledge of the conceptual conditions of objectivity (i.e. the categorial content of the notion) leads to knowledge of the limitations ('die Schranke') of human being, which in turn is equivalent to transgressing those exact limitations by means of truthful appropriation of

their inevitability. Not until human being confronts its ontological make up is human being set free to act in accordance with the actual spiritual essence of itself, and therefore to determine itself *as* itself. For Hegel, it is only this recursive self-transparency as regards human being's invocation of ontologically significant categories that enables freedom to emerge in the realm of human being. (Cf. Hegel 1986f, p. 27 and Houlgate 2005, p. 14-16) It is therefore important to note, in conclusion, that the source of freedom, for Hegel, is the speculative knowledge of the conceptual constitution of things, and not of the things themselves, and in this regard, his philosophical position stands in stark contrast to that of Spinoza's.

The logic of Hegel's ontology, and the derivative conception of freedom, entails the following attitude towards the tripartite meaning of the title of my article: 1) freedom is human being's rational self-determination as spirit through the dialectical sublation of the ontologically significant and initially abstract categories of language, 2) human freedom *qua* self-determination as spirit implies that nature is to be seen as nothing but externalized generality and therefore ontologically heteronomous, and 3) nature understood as externalized generality is not itself capable of acts of freedom, but is only made to appear under the conceptual conditions of human knowing.

Let us now leave behind two of the all time greats of Western thinking, and take a look at what today's philosophical avant-garde has to offer in relation to the metaphysical conception of the relation between object, thinking and freedom. The time has come to introduce the metaphysical position of Graham Harman.

5. Harman's Response

In the wake of French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux's (1967-) critique of

'correlationism', i.e. the Kantian paradigm of philosophical thinking that restricts thinking from dealing with things in themselves (cf. Meillassoux 2009, p. 5), several of the philosophers within the 'speculative realism'-movement have attempted to work out positive metaphysical positions of their own. Whereas Meillassoux's critique served the merely negative purpose of clearing the path for new projects of ontology to emerge, philosophers like Graham Harman, Timothy Morton and Tristan Garcia have put forth positive ontologies that explore the truth and reality of what Meillassoux termed 'the great outdoors', i.e. the world as it is independently of the presence of a knowing subject. (Cf. ibid., p. 7) In what follows I will expound the position of Harman focusing on his conception of objects, thinking and, derivatively, freedom under the headline of 'object-oriented ontology' (henceforth 'OOO'), and I will do so using Harman's *The Quadruple Object* from 2011 as my primary source.

Philosophers, according to Harman, are "specialists in *simplicity*." (Harman 2011, p. 78) By this characterisation he intends to point to the attempt of philosophy "to look for basic overarching structures." (Ibid.) Structures that, so to speak, are "found everywhere and at all times" (ibid., p. 96), and which Harman calls 'tensions'. (Cf. ibid., p. 98-99 and 108-109) He distinguishes tensions from mere 'links' or 'relations', of which he thinks there are only ten in number. (Cf. ibid., p. 78) As regards tensions there are four in number, hence Harman's revival of Heidegger's infamous notion of 'the fourfold', which he (Harman) takes to be a much underestimated and sadly neglected philosophical concept. (Cf. ibid., p. 82-85)

Another trait that Harman takes to be characteristic of philosophy is the fact that it always springs from a relatively small set of fundamental ideas that implicitly govern the systematic laying out of the philosophy in question. In an interview from 2009 Harman puts it in the following way: "In my view,

to understand a philosophy means to grasp a handful of basic intuitions from which the entire philosophy unfolds." (Ennis (Red.) 2010, p. 6)

Now, the basic idea that animates the philosophy of Harman is the following: no object ever exhausts the being of another object. For this reason, I find it reasonable to assert that what I call 'non-exhaustion' is the key metaphysical concept of Harman's OOO. But in order to justify this claim, I must first go through the concepts that he himself invokes in order to metaphysically determine what an object really is. For explanatory reasons I will use two of Harman's own figures as the point of departure for my account of his philosophical stance. The figures are taken from *The Quadruple Object*, which is the clearest presentation of Harman's philosophy to date, even if it is only laid out in rudimentary fashion. Concepts such as 'caricature' and 'allure', which already played a central role in some of his earlier works, will be accounted for as we move along.

FIGURE 8: The Four Tensions

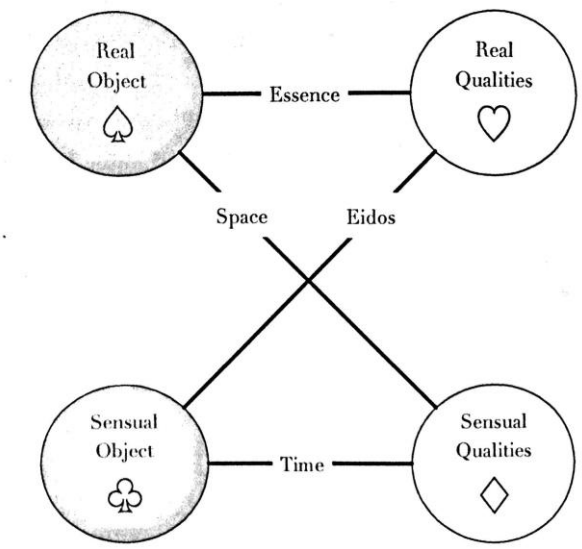

FIGURE 8: The Four Tensions (Harman 2011, p. 114)

FIGURE 7: Broken Links

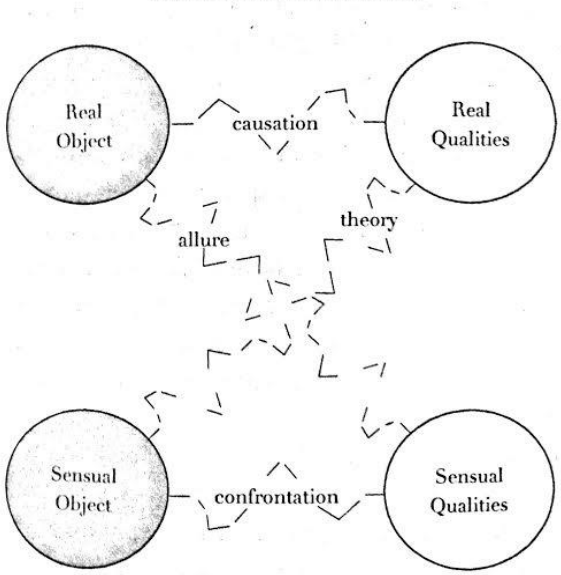

FIGURE 7: Broken Links (Ibid., p. 107)

The above figures present us with the four poles of what Harman calls 'the new fourfold', which is to say his appropriation of Heidegger's notorious 'fourfold' ('Geviert') of his late philosophy from 1949 onwards. (Cf. Harman 2011, p. 82-83) Harman takes the concept of the fourfold to be of philosophical necessity "once we acknowledge both the results of Heidegger's potent tool-analysis and Husserl's breakthrough into the duel between a unified sensual object and its multitude of profiles." (Ibid., p. 95) Whereas Heidegger's tool-analysis entails "two basic modes of being" (ibid., p. 39), Husserl's 'breakthrough' entails "two crucial tensions in the cosmos" (ibid., p. 32). Whereas the two basic modes of being of Heidegger are 'tool' and 'broken tool', the 'two crucial tensions' of Husserl are the tensions between 1) sensual objects and their sensual qualities, and 2) sensual objects and their real qualities. Harman openly states that what he intends to do in his presentation

and qualification of his own metaphysics of objects is to draw consequences and sound out tacit implications of what he takes to be Heidegger's and Husserl's core contributions to philosophy, and thus to expound the results of their philosophical investigations in ways that indeed would have seemed strange to both of them, for, as he puts it, in the philosophies of Heidegger and Husserl is found "the basic elements of an object-oriented metaphysics." (Ibid., p. 49)

In stark contrast to what Harman accounts for as the two dominating strategies of philosophy, namely 'undermining' and 'overmining' – which reduces the object downwards and upwards respectively, leaving the object in a state of radical heteronomy (cf. ibid., p. 8-13) – he defends the notion of the ontological autonomy of objects. Objects, according to Harman, are what they are irrespective of the relations into which they enter – be it object-object relations or object-subject relations. As he himself puts it:

> The only way to do justice to objects is to consider that their reality is free of all relation, deeper than all reciprocity. The object is a dark crystal veiled in a private vacuum: irreducible to its own pieces, and equally irreducible to its outward relations with other things. (Ibid., p. 47)

The state of 'non-exhaustion' that characterise all things *qua* objects points, for Harman, in the direction of the philosophically traditional category of 'substance', when 'substance' is taken to signify "the reality of a thing, irreducible to any of its relations or qualities". (Harman 2010, p. 114 – see also Harman 2005, p. 78) Despite the fact that objects are infinitely withdrawn in "a shadowy subterranean realm" (Harman 2011, p. 37) or "a perpetually veiled underworld" (ibid., p. 39), Harman succeeds in philosophically justifying "four distinct poles in the universe" (ibid., p. 49), thus sounding out a fundamental structure of the otherwise amorphous substance of objects. These are 1) 'real objects', 2) 'sensual objects', 3) 'real qualities', and 4) 'sensual

qualities', where "the sensual is what exists only in relation to the perceiver, and [...] the real is whatever withdraws from that relation." (Ibid., p. 110) This brings about four pairings that combine an object pole and a quality pole: "real object/real quality, sensual object/sensual quality, real object/sensual quality, and sensual object/real quality." (Ibid., p. 49) Let us now take a look at the four basic tensions of 1) 'time', 2) 'space', 3) 'essence', and 4) 'eidos', and the way in which they are related to the four objectively constitutive breaks of linkage between the four poles of reality: 1) 'causation', 2) 'theory', 3) 'allure', and 4) 'confrontation'.

'Time' is defined by Harman as the tension between sensual objects and their sensual qualities in the sense that objects of experience do seem to have a certain amount of durability despite the fact that they constantly undergo change as regards their particular phenomenal make up. 'Space', on the other hand, has to do with the tension between veiled real objects and their sensual qualities, in the sense that any object-object- or object-subject-relation is an expression of both relation and what Harman calls 'non-relation'. Non-relation points to the fact that, following Harman's own example, when we stand in the city centre of any given metropolis we do not fully exhaust the reality of the metropolis in question. We relate and thus perceive certain aspects of the total reality of the city-object in question, yet we never relate to and fully perceive the whole city. Thus, when we relate we both relate and non-relate. 'Eidos', for Harman, signifies the tension between sensual objects and their real yet unconcealed qualities. The 'eidetic features' of an object cannot be known through sense perception, but can instead be encountered through the use of what Husserl called 'categorial intuition', i.e. by the means of the intellect. Last but not least, Harman introduces us to the notion of 'essence', which he invokes as the name of the tension between real objects and their obscure real qualities. Thus essence signifies the qualitative being of

objects independent of object-object- or object-subject-relations. Whereas the tension of space follows from Heidegger's tool-analysis, the tension of eidos follows from Husserl's phenomenological discovery of real objects within experience. (Cf. ibid., p. 100-102)

Following the ontological status of Heidegger's fourfold, Harman characterises the status of the relations of his new fourfold as tensions or structural moments rather than physical forces: "The interaction of time, space, essence, and eidos is not the play of four disembodied forces, but of four tensions affecting every object that in some way is." (Ibid., p. 102) Now, whereas tensions and structural moments can be interesting in their own right, Harman goes on to consider how change in the objective state of affairs is possible and actually takes place, and in order to do so, he considers the ways in which the different tensions of objects emerge and dissolves – that is, how 'fusion' and 'fission' occur. When changes occur in the sensual qualities of a sensual object due to, for instance, physical displacement of the bodily position of the perceiving subject, the object in question "is briefly exposed as a unified kernel dangling its qualities like marionettes." (Ibid., p. 103) Harman calls this experience of intimate encounter with the extra-sensuous being of an object of experience 'confrontation'. We confront the being of objects when we spend time with them, thus experiencing that their shifting phenomenal guises does not destroy or annihilate their being. When considering the tension of space we confront the relation between real objects and sensual qualities, hence the relation between objects in the depth and qualities emerging as surface effects. The 'fusion', to follow Harman's lingo, of real object and sensual quality is given the name of 'allure', due to the fact that the spatial state of relation and non-relation points to the alluring status of sensual qualities in relation to a real object only alluded to. For Harman, qualities of sensuous experience function as the bait of objects, so to speak,

'confrontation' being the possible outcome.

'Theory' is the name that Harman employs in order to designate the fission that occurs between sensual objects and their real qualities. The analytical endeavours of, say, academics or political commentators might serve as an illustrious example of what Harman understands by 'theory'. When analysing an object of experience – the collected works of Shakespeare or Barack Obama's most recent State of the Union Address –, what happens is that the sensual object is suspended or bracketed in order for the analytically engaged researcher to split it "from the real qualities it needs in order to be what it is." (Ibid., p. 104) Last but not least, Harman invokes the name of 'causation' to refer to the fusion of a real object and its real qualities. According to Harman, "the object itself does not have its own essential features." (Ibid., p. 105) Instead, the real object itself simply functions, to use Harman's own metaphor, as an invisible sun bending its qualities to its will. (Cf. ibid., p. 103) Real objects, therefore, might be considered as ontological black holes not strong enough to fully engulf the qualities of reality, yet strong enough to keep the qualities of the world in a constant state of movement, flux and becoming not far from the event horizon of objectivity. (Cf. ibid., p. 102-105) The exotic qualities of Harman's basic outline of OOO is not hard to see. Metaphysics, as presented from the point of view of OOO, might therefore seem, as he himself puts it, like "a Caribbean region where proper relations between objects were corrupted by rum, parrots, and volcanoes." (Ibid., p. 105)

Now that we have seen the structural kernel of Harman's ontology, let us now take a look at some of the overall implications of this structural composition. In his thought-provoking contribution to the burgeoning list of speculative realist publications *Alien Phenomenology* from 2012 with the telling subtitle *What it's like to be a thing*, American philosopher Ian Bogost

summarises OOO's 'strange' conception of mereology, i.e. the study of parts and the wholes they form, in the following way: ”Things are independent from their constituent parts while remaining dependent on them.” (Bogost 2012, p. 23) A clear and distinct echo of Spinoza's conception of singular things is heard in Bogost's brief summary. For Spinoza, as well as for Bogost and Harman, an aggregate, accumulation or constellation of objects or singular things that together function as the cause of an effect must itself be considered as an object or singular thing. Bogost illustrates this rather abstract mereological insight by way of a container ship:

> The container ship is a unit as much as the cargo holds, the shipping containers, the hydraulic rams, the ballast water, the twist locks, the lashing rods, the crew, their sweaters, and the yarn out of which those garments are knit. The ship erects a boundary in which everything it contains withdraws within it, while those individual units that compose it do so similarly, simultaneously, and at the same fundamental level of existence. (Ibid., p. 22)

What the example illustrates is the status of objects in the Harman's OOO, namely that 'it is objects all the way down', to paraphrase the much celebrated mytheme of the world being carried on the back of a turtle, which is itself carried on the back of a turtle, and so on to infinity. (Cf. Harman 2011, p. 113) Harman himself offers another example to illustrate the objective nesting of reality, and we now return to the example of the windmill. According to Harman, a windmill typically involves at least the following objects: “ladders, pumps, rotating blades, and wire-mesh crow's nests.” (Harman 2005, p. 93) Considered as a whole the windmill functions by reducing its constituent parts to that which Harman gives name of 'useful caricatures'. (Ibid., p. 94) In this way, and by means of the necessary reduction of objects that goes into the making of such a thing as a windmill, the windmill does not do justice to the objects that go into the construction of a

windmill. Instead of letting the objects concerned be the objects that they are, the windmill considered as an autonomous object only allows for its objective constituents to realise certain and possibly relatively few aspects of their being. As such the example of the windmill illustrates the 'fractal' aspect of Harman's OOO: "[W]e have a universe made up of objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects." (Harman 2005, p. 85)

It is important to note that the metaphysical principle of 'non-exhaustion' does not only hold for object-object-tensions, but holds in equal degree in the case of object-subject-tensions. As Harman puts it: "[T]o perceive means to encounter sensual objects on the interior of a larger object, and that a real entity is located on such an interior thanks to a relation that makes it a *component* of that more encompassing object." (Harman 2011, p. 122) To perceive is therefore to enter into a tensional relation with an object thereby composing a 'larger' object. Harman points out that both in the case of object-object-tensions and object-subject-tensions "*the sum of parts is always greater than the whole.*" (Harman 2005, p. 94) This follows from the windmill-illustration of OOO's commitment to the metaphysical principle of non-exhaustion. Every object is in reality a 'larger' object composed of other objects, which, in their own right, are 'larger' objects relative to their respective caricatured components, and so on to infinity. 'Larger', that is, than the objects that any given object relates to as its constituents, but not in respect to the absolute 'largeness' of the component objects of any given object considered in themselves. In the last instance this inevitably leads to a metaphor that Harman invokes on several occasions: "If we imagine the universe as an ocean, it would be an ocean without a floor, but with a turbulent surface of objects and nothing but empty sky above." (Harman 2011, p. 113)

Now, six years later from the date of publication of *Guerilla Metaphysics*, Harman draws the metaphysical consequence of this weird view of objects,

which might be called, 'fractal objectivity'. With reference to Kant's 'ban' "on ruling either for or against an infinite regress of pieces" (Ibid., p. 112), Harman nonetheless sides with the former option, stating that whereas it makes good sense to talk about an infinite regress of objects, it makes bad sense to talk about an infinite progress: "The cosmos has no bottom, but does have a surface. There may be an infinite regress, but no infinite progress: no final, encompassing object that could be called a universe." (Ibid., p. 122) This also points to the philosophical notion of 'asymmetry' that Harman introduces in order to properly describe the tensional relations between objects. No two objects ever meet on the same level, so to speak. They will only encounter one another in the shape of more or less useful caricatures based on the local logic of the specific tension in question. (Cf. ibid., p. 117)

Given Harman's initial definition of 'an object' as "anything that has a unified reality that is autonomous from its wider context and also from its own pieces" (ibid., p. 116), my opening claim that the notion of ontological non-exhaustion is the key metaphysical concept of OOO now ought to be justified. It is not a coincidence that Harman on multiple occasions refutes the traditional privilege of the human mind in relation to exhausting objectivity by means of conceptual understanding. In 2005 Harman programmatically stated the following:

> No privilege is to be granted to objects over against mere aggregates, as though atoms were real and baseball leagues only derivative, or individual soldiers real and armies only derivative. What must be avoided is any initial dogma at all as to whether there are ultimate building blocks of the cosmos from which everything else is constructed. The important thing is that any objects, at any level of the world, has a reality that can be endlessly explored and viewed from numberless perspectives without ever being *exhausted* by the sum of these perspectives. (Harman 2005, p. 76, my emphasis.)

Six years later he had distilled the implications of this view of objects into the

almost slogan like claim that "object-oriented ontology holds that the human-world relation has no privilege at all." (Harman 2011, p. 119 – se also ibid., p. 6 and 67) The difference in philosophical outlook between Hegel and Harman ought therefore not to be hard to see, insofar as Hegel's philosophical idealism is all about thinking the world in relation to its relation to human being *qua* knowing.

Now, before we reach the end of my treatment of Harman's OOO, it is essential that I say something about the derivative conception of freedom that follows from Harman's metaphysical investigations. As he himself makes clear in the very last sentence of *The Quadruple Object*, the logic of objects presented in his current philosophical *magnum opus* gives us "a powerful map of the cosmos from which further conclusions can easily be drawn." (Harman 2011, p. 143) What might such conclusions be in relation to the conception of 'freedom'?

Insofar as human perception, knowledge and action all take place within the confines of Harman's 'larger objects', and 'freedom' in its minimal definition is understood as 'acting without undesirable determination of external causation', human freedom must, from an OOO point of view, be related to mapping, challenging and/or even breaking the already established links between the four poles of reality, i.e. real objects, real qualities, sensual objects, and sensual qualities, in order for new and more expedient tensions to be brought about. 'More expedient', that is, in relation to the values, interests and ends of human being. Harman's fourfold cosmic map can, in this way, be used as a compass for navigation in the shadowy realm of the great outdoors. Object-oriented imperatives of freedom might be phrased along the lines of the following suggestions: '*confront* the multitude of sensual qualities of any given object in order for the sensual object itself to be identified', '*theorise* the objective state of affairs in order for the real qualities of merely sensual

objects to see the light of day', 'pay attention to the *allure* of real objects by means of their flashy sensual qualities' and 'engage in the process of reengineering *fusion* of the *causality* between real objects and real qualities based on the practices of theory and the phenomenon of allure'. Thus, it is not just the objects of the world that take on a fourfold shape, but also human freedom itself. Four ways are indirectly proposed by Harman's OOO for freedom to take place – four ways to navigate the frothy waves of the ocean of objects.

By linking freedom with the experiential and intellectual mastering of the objective state of affairs, Harman is shown to be an heir of Spinoza. As we saw in my treatment of Spinoza's conception of freedom, the externally caused affective determination of human being is that which must be intellectually overcome in order for rational self-determination to emerge in the life of human being. Similarly, we have now seen how it follows from Harman's OOO that human freedom must be thought in relation to the fourfold ontological determination of objects, and human being's experiential and intellectual mapping of its objective entanglement in the objective state of affairs. By using 'Harman's compass' as a map of fourfold instructions, human being is set free to navigate the tumultuous surface of the waters of objects in similar fashion to the emancipatory subject of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

The logic of Harman's OOO and it's derivative implications for the conception of human freedom entail the following attitude towards the tripartite meaning of the title of my article: 1) freedom is brought about through the active manipulation of the objective state of affairs in accordance with the navigatory potential of Harman's new and empowering fourfold, 2) through the free acts of human being nature is revealed to be a rich, diverse and objective state of affairs exhibiting an infinite series of dynamic variations of quadruple objectivity, and 3) nature is itself shown to be free whenever

free acts are performed by, for instance, human being insofar as human being does not transcend the ontological plane of objects, but is born, lives, dies and dissolves totally immersed in the torrential streams of objects.

Reflecting on the implications of his novel discoveries Charles Darwin famously stated that "[t]here is grandeur in this view of life." (Darwin 1859, p. 490) The same can be said of the work of any brave philosopher who has dared to draw the astonishing conclusions of his/her initial thoughts, and it certainly is a fitting characterisation in the case of Harman's OOO. Therefore, it is now justified to state in conclusion: there is grandeur in this view of objects!

6. Conclusion

Having traversed the realms of three different philosophers, the time has now come to review what answers might have emerged to my initial questions that served as the guideline for my attempt to determine the nature of freedom in its tripartite sense. We have seen how Spinoza, Hegel and Harman all share a common veneration for linking philosophical thinking with the human capacity for freedom. Human being is enabled to navigate reality in different ways depending on whether it is Spinoza's, Hegel's or Harman's philosophical outlook that inspires human being. Overcoming affective bondage is enabled by Spinoza's *Ethics*, overcoming conceptual self-deception is enabled by Hegel's *Logic*, and overcoming restrictive objectivity is enabled by Harman's *OOO*. Thus, neither of the three thinkers, defining the conceptual coordinates of my article, can be said to rule out the emancipatory project of philosophy of any of the two others. Instead, we ought to see the philosophically distinct programs of thinking proposed by Spinoza, Hegel and Harman respectively as reciprocally supplementary, due to the fact that they deal with three quite different conceptions of both nature and freedom, and thus they cannot be

said to exclude the conceptual results of each other. It simply is not the same 'nature' and 'freedom' they entertain in their respective philosophies. But the fact that their conceptions of nature are all seen to be correlated with their conceptions of freedom, and vice versa, brings together the three philosophers in respect to their programmatic definition of the end of philosophy, i.e. to free human being.

Whereas Slavoj Žižek in 2011 proclaimed that the 21st century would belong to Hegel, I now declare that the true heirs of Spinoza's metaphysics and the dominant philosophical trend of the 21st century will turn out to be Harman and his still growing gang of object-oriented ontologists. (Cf. Crockett, Davis and Žižek (Ed.) 2011, p. ix-xi) What we need is a fusion of, on the one hand, Spinoza's taste for the ontological autonomy of objects in relation to the affective determination of human being, and, on the other, Hegel's taste for the ontological significance of human knowing and, therefore, for the ontological autonomy of 'the notion' ('der Begriff') in order to due away with both one-sided realism and unworldly idealism. Such a fusion is, I conclude, what we find in tentative form in OOO – even though Bogost, Harman and the rest their crew have not yet fully worked out the implications of their metaphysical expeditions in the exotic realm of the great outdoors.

At the end of *The Quadruple* Object Harman makes the following remark concerning OOO's attitude towards knowledge production within other domains than philosophy:

> Our goal is not just to say that the humanities are irreducible to physics, but that geology and chemistry are irreducible to physics as well. Each domain has its realities, which are not reducible to where they came from. Object-oriented philosophy does not reduce, and hence offers no finger-wagging lectures to the humanities on behalf of science. Nor does it offer such lectures to science on behalf of postmodernist

> theories of a science constituted by the discursive practice of power. (Harman 2011, p. 143)

Because of Harman's emphasis on what he calls the "relative democratization of the various forms of knowledge" (Ibid., p. 142) it does not makes sense to use Žižek's diagnosis of a contemporary metaphysical tendency towards a nostalgic return to what he calls 'the primacy of concrete reality' (see Crockett, Davis and Žižek (Ed.) 2011, p. x) as an adequate analysis of the speculative realist sub-genre of OOO. Instead, what we find in OOO is a pioneering mode of thinking that points in the direction of great theoretical syntheses of different domains of natural science and humanistic research still to emerge in the shape of fruitful collaborations directed towards an increasingly nuanced uncovering of reality's objective state of affairs. In this sense, OOO shares Hegel's veneration for 'concrete' thinking, due to its sympathy for the combination of perspectives in relation to unearthing the objects of the world, though it clearly follows from my account of Hegel and Harman that their respective realisations of the ideal of concrete thinking radically differ in practice.

Philosophy ethically shapes human being in accordance with the degree in which the opinions of the human being in question show themselves to diverge from reality, i.e. the objective state of affairs. Therefore, the distance between opinion and truth signals the amount and intensity of philosophy's ethical potential in any given case. Depending on the specific program of emancipatory thinking 'nature' will take on different guises – e.g. ontologically primordial substance (Spinoza), externalised generality (Hegel), and a roaring ocean of ontologically autonomous objects (Harman). But in all cases the attainment of freedom is associated with the knowledge of the non-human origins of human being.

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