

Introduction

One of the questions that bears down on you quite quickly as your thesis or other piece of research develops, is your relationship with those you will encounter in the field. ‘The field’ can, of course, include a wide range of actors with whom you may have a relationship – not all of whom by any means will necessarily be human (although until quite recently it was widely assumed that they were the only actors who could have an active say) – and a whole series of different methods of inquiry which demand different kinds of stances to human actors and other others. Similarly, the field can include numerous, very different kinds of situation in which these relationships need to be negotiated in very different ways. But one thing stays constant: that is the need to produce encounters from which some measure of enlightenment is possible for you, but which is not at the expense of those others whom you count as respondents (and which may even be to their advantage). In other words, we need to think about the *ethics* of encounters – the effort to formulate right and wrong modes of behaviour – remembering that responsibility does not end with leaving the field but lasts beyond (and sometimes well beyond) the end of the thesis or other piece of research you may be conducting. This chapter is intended to show up some of the ethical dilemmas that can arise in the field and how to think them through *and* think through them. Note the use of the word ‘dilemmas’: you should not expect there to be any easy answers. Generally speaking, there will be no one right answer and what may often be quite agonizing situations will not be resolved but rather will rumble on uneasily and ambiguously through the rest of your life: did I do the right thing? You will never have the satisfaction of knowing that you did the right thing because no easy definition of ‘right’ exists.

Because of these dilemmas, much fieldwork can actually be quite painful. There is not only that sense of dislocation of values which you take for granted – which comes and goes – but also the difficulty of negotiating with people when you don’t know all the small and unspoken ethical ground ‘rules’ that make up everyday life, rules which you have arduously to construct.

Though fieldwork is often portrayed as a classical colonial encounter in which the fieldworker lords it over her/his respondents, the fact of the matter is that it doesn't usually feel much like that at all. More often it is a curious mixture of humiliations and intimidations mixed with moments of insight and even enjoyment as you begin to imagine the world you have chosen to try to inhabit. Note the use of the word 'feel': fieldwork is often a profoundly emotional business, a constant stew of emotions, ranging from doubt and acute homesickness to laughter and a kind of comradeship, which are a fundamental part of how you think the situations you are in. Note also the use of the word 'imagine': fieldwork is also about the act of imagination, about thinking the powers and limits of the bodies around you.

But fieldwork comes loaded up with its own mythology. In the early 1980s, when I was a part of a field-oriented School in Australia which focused on one of the key anthropological heartlands, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, fieldwork was a veritable rite of passage which required the fieldworker to undergo the validation of great hardship in order to bring back authentic knowledge: I well remember the chillingly routine discussions about which awful disease (invariably hepatitis) the fieldworker had barely survived. Encounters with 'natives' were a part of this codifying regime, but those encounters were rarely written about for themselves: 'natives' were informants who told the fieldworker about local practices and 'cosmologies' and then, generally speaking, kept out of the way as the western shaman worked out what was really going on. Of course this is, to some extent, a caricature – but not as much of a caricature as you might think.

But things were already changing. A series of books were appearing which were attempting to recast fieldwork as a much less certain (and much less macho) exercise. There was good reason for this. In particular, fieldwork had, almost simultaneously, moved out of the classical field territories like Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands and into the cities and back into the West, and had also, in an age of widespread decolonization, become much more conscious of its colonial origins. The result was that the field could no longer be equated with the past, the classical distancing move that Doreen Massey notes in her chapter. It is no surprise that in this context Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977), a now classic autobiographical account of a period of doctoral fieldwork, had become a key work. It was located in the Maghreb in a barely post-colonial Morocco among people who were a cosmopolitan mix of native Moroccans and French ex-colonials and it was a work that concentrated on encounter and the dilemmas that encounter threw up.

I am going to start this chapter by considering Rabinow's account of encountering the 'field' in a little more detail because Rabinow was so acutely conscious of the dilemmas of encounter that are faced there. His book is often considered to have started off the great inward turn that preoccupied many anthropologists in the 1980s, much of which consisted

of concerns about whether it was possible to have encounters with others which were not inevitably, in some sense, colonial in form and content and had some genuine ethical weight.

But then, in the second part of the chapter, I want to move on to consider how we might use philosophy to begin to think through some of the dilemmas of encounter. Of course, a lot of philosophy revolves around precisely these dilemmas, so we hardly have to start from a blank slate. In fact, so much philosophy is concerned with these issues that it is possible to get involved with them to a degree that many might see as a fault: whole theses on the dilemmas of the field have been written which are, in effect, long philosophical disquisitions. Indeed, for a time in the 1980s, it often seemed as though a subject like anthropology, which prides itself on being field-minded, had turned itself over to debates about little else.

I will therefore be approaching the subject of the field through the work of a philosopher who may, at first sight, seem rather an odd choice, namely Benedictus de Spinoza (1632–77). Spinoza held a series of views which are, to put it but mildly, out of tune with our times. He was wedded to a strict notion of reason, based on logical inference. He believed that the ordering of the universe was causally logical and deterministic. He held up as a model of good philosophy the kind of work carried out by Euclid, in which the world was able to be reduced to a series of simple mathematical axioms by considering ‘human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies’ (*Ethics*, Spinoza, 1996/1677, Part III, Pref.). He therefore believed that ‘humankind’s blessedness lay solely in the applied conclusions of mathematical deduction in every possible arena of perception, including that sphere of mental activity we call the moral . . .’ (Gullan-Whur, 1998, p.189). As a result, his view of **ethics** – the effort to formulate principles of right and wrong behaviour – seems very strange to us now. Like a number of contemporaries, he wanted to render ethics scientific, by basing it on an entirely naturalistic and deterministic understanding of human passions and behaviour. But he went farther in aiming to marry ethics to science in one further respect as well, in that:

He sought to construe natural scientific understanding itself (also describable for him as ‘knowledge of God’) as the highest virtue. . . . His ethical vision is one in which scientific understanding allows us to participate in a peaceful and co-operative moral community with other co-inquirers, sharing and taking joy in one another’s achievements without being disturbed by one another’s weaknesses. (Garrett, 1996, p.307)

So why has a seventeenth-century philosopher like Spinoza enjoyed such a remarkable intellectual comeback in recent years, a comeback sufficient to be able to paint him as a very modern philosopher indeed? Not least, I think, because he provides a way in to problems of *ethics* which short-circuits so many of the problems that we routinely come up against

in trying to sort out what can be counted as right and wrong in any situation. And he did this by imagining a new space in which these problems take place, which transforms their content and allows us to think about them in new ways. A brief account of Spinoza's work will therefore take up the second part of this chapter. In it, I want to show, in particular, how Spinoza, by re-imagining spaces of encounter, has provided a resource for re-thinking how we are ethically and thus what a 'good' encounter might consist of: I will illustrate this by briefly coming back to an episode from Rabinow's fieldwork in Morocco.

But, in the third part of the chapter, I want to move on from Spinoza's work to consider how ethical dilemmas are often conceived now. Back in the 1960s, when Rabinow was doing his fieldwork, ethical judgement was usually still construed as a matter of individual choice, but that is no longer the case. Since that time a new kind of 'audit culture' has grown up, based around the production of 'correct' templates for practising encounter, in the shape of the rise of the dictates of the ethics committee (and the considerable resistance to some aspects of this new institution put up precisely by anthropologists like Paul Rabinow). I want to ask whether this new kind of culture of ethical judgement, which you are very likely to come up against, really promotes good encounters or whether it actually, in its desperation to avoid mistakes, closes down some of the main means by which we learn about others and other cultures, and therefore violates the Spinozan principles I will set out in the second part of the chapter.

Doing fieldwork

Paul Rabinow's book, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977), described a series of situations which are common to fieldwork – not least the pretty obvious fact that people around you don't want to notice you as you believe that you should be noticed. That sense of disenfranchisement from a culture sits rather oddly with the other obvious fact that you have to negotiate a relationship with that culture which will allow you to obtain the material that will allow you to do your research.

Most particularly, Rabinow, in a long anthropological tradition of recounting his encounters with just a few individuals (Metcalf, 2002), stressed that fieldwork knowledge was **co-produced** from a process of interaction in which both the fieldworker and the informant participated, a process of interaction which might well change both participants' thinking by building fragile and temporary *commonplaces* predicated on building temporary ethical understandings. However, equally, Rabinow was not starry-eyed about these encounters. He did not believe in the kind of reversal of roles that was typical of anthropologists who had become worried that just about every breath they took expressed colonial values, so that the informant was always right. He was willing to assert his own

ethical stance in certain circumstances. For example, on one occasion Rabinow was returning from a wedding early in the morning with one of his key informants, the acerbic and direct Ali, and another acquaintance, Soussi. Rabinow was feeling ill and more than a little exasperated at Ali's lack of thought for his situation, and the persona of an all-accepting anthropologist was in these circumstances starting to break down. Rabinow began, however passively, to respond and 'push back', resulting in Ali insisting on getting out of the car and walking the rest of the way home. This spat could well have threatened some of the fieldwork, but not only Ali's, but also Rabinow's, ethical codes were being violated:

At the wedding, Ali was beginning to test me, much in the way that Moroccans test each other to ascertain strengths and weaknesses. He was pushing and probing. I tried to avoid responding in the counter-assertive style of another Moroccan, vainly offering instead the persona of an anthropologist, all-accepting. He continued to interpret my behavior in his own terms: he saw me as weak, giving in to each of his testing thrusts. So the cycle continued: he would probe me more deeply, show his dominance and exhibit my submission and lack of character. Even on the way back to Sefrou he was testing me, and in what was a backhanded compliment, trying to humiliate me. But Ali was uneasy with his victories, and shifted to defining the situation in terms of a guest–host relationship. My silence in the car clearly signalled the limits of my submission. His response was a strong one: Was I happy? Was he a good host?

The role of the host combines two of the most important of Moroccan values. As throughout the Arabic world, the host is judged by his generosity. The truly good host is one whose bounty, the largesse he shows his guests, is truly never-ending. One of the highest compliments one can pay to a man is to say that he is *karim*, generous. The epitome of the host is the man who can entertain many people and distribute his bounty generously. This links him ultimately to Allah, who is the source of bounty.

If the generosity is accepted by the guest, then a very clear relationship of domination is established. The guest, while being fed and taken care of, is by that very token acknowledging the power of the host. Merely entering into such a position represents an acceptance of submission. In this fiercely egalitarian society, the necessity of exchange or reciprocity so as to restore the balance is keenly felt. Moroccans will go to great lengths, and endure rather severe personal privation, to reciprocate hospitality. By so doing, they re-establish their claim to independence.

Later in the day, I went down to Soussi's store in search of Ali to try and make amends. At first he refused even to shake hands, and was suitably haughty. But with the aid of Soussi's mediation and innumerable and profuse apologies on my part, he began to come round. By the time I left them later that afternoon it was clear that we had re-established our relationship. Actually, it had been broadened by the confrontation. I had in fact acknowledged him. I had, in his own terms, pulled the rug out from under him – first by cutting off communication and then by

challenging his gambit in the car. There was a fortuitous convergence between my breaking point and Moroccan cultural style. Perhaps in another situation my behavior might have proved irreparable. Brinkmanship, however, is a fact of everyday life in Morocco. And finesse in its use is a necessity. By finally standing up to Ali I had communicated to him. (Rabinow, 1977, pp.47–9)

Subsequently, Rabinow's work has been criticized by a number of writers precisely for this ethical assertiveness, most notably by feminist writers who have argued that, as a man, Rabinow occupied a privileged subject-position which allowed him to produce a discourse about the construction of ethical commonplaces that had never been open to them. Certainly, Rabinow's gender and standing as a North American anthropologist had an important influence on his ability to interact relatively forcefully in Moroccan society and assert his own ethical standpoint, since each of these characteristics come with particular power relations engrained in them. Moreover, considerable work by writers like Carol Gilligan (1990) has claimed that western men and women approach the question of practical ethics quite differently: whereas men tend to be oriented to an ethic based on an autonomous sense of self and an associated morality of justice, women tend to be oriented to a connected sense of self and an associated morality of caring. (However, Gilligan's work is not itself immune to criticism; not only has it been accused, like Irigaray's work in Chapter 3, of a certain essentialism, but it has also been criticized precisely for its insensitivity to cultural difference (see, for example, Killen and Hart, 1995).)

So how does the work of a philosopher such as Spinoza chime with forays into the field like Rabinow's? I want to argue that not only does Spinoza give us some very useful resources to think a little more complicatedly about the practice of fieldwork, but that through his emphasis on the construction of common advantages of good encountering through the exercise of feeling and imagination, he provides an ethical stance that is much more in tune with what the experience of fieldwork is (or at least should be) like.

Doing Spinoza

Benedictus de Spinoza has been claimed as a notorious atheist – and as a 'God-intoxicated man'. He has been adopted by Marxists as a precursor of historical materialism and by Hegelians as a precursor of absolute idealism. He is often considered to have been one of the great figures of continental European rationalism (along with Descartes and Leibniz) and yet he has also been judged to be a thoroughgoing irrationalist. Some have argued that he is the founder of modern ecophilosophy (Naess, 1975, 1977), and others that he is some kind of political revolutionary. In the

light of these and many other widely differing interpretations (Moreau, 1996), it doesn't seem an awful sin to say that Spinoza was also a kind of geographer. For his thought consists of a series of propositions that seem inexorably bound up in spatial figures which are more than incidental in that they are used to transform how we should think about thought and consciousness. In particular, for Spinoza, the world is in constant movement, involved in a constant process of self-construction. It is always *becoming* because matter is internally disposed to create its own motion. So Spinoza believed that every corporeal thing was nothing other than a proportion of motion and rest, so that everything is always to a greater or lesser degree active.

In his posthumously published *Ethics*, Spinoza set out to challenge the model put forward by Descartes of the body as animated by the will of an immaterial mind or soul, a position which reflected Descartes' allegiance to the idea that the world consisted of two different substances: extension (the physical field of objects positioned in a geometric space which has become familiar to us as a Cartesian space) and thought (the property which distinguishes conscious beings as 'thinking things' from objects). In contrast, Spinoza was a monist, that is he believed there was only one substance in the universe, 'God or Nature' (he actually used this phrase) in all its forms. Human beings and all other objects could only be modes of this one unfolding substance; they could not be split off from it as something else. Each mode was spatially extended in its own way and thought in its own way and unfolded in a determinate manner. In Spinoza's way of thinking, '*every* mode of extension is identical with a corresponding mode of thought, so that everything is thinking as well as extended' (Garrett, 1996, p.4). So, in a sense, in Spinoza's world everything is part of a thinking and a doing simultaneously: they are aspects of the same thing expressed in two registers. Individual human minds and bodies, for example, ultimately derive from a fundamental unity of composition. In a famous passage from the *Ethics*, Spinoza puts this proposition baldly:

The mind and body is one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension. Whence it comes about that the order of the concatenation of things is one, or, nature is conceived now under this, now under that attribute, and consequently that the order of actions and passions of our body is simultaneous in nature with the order of actions and passions of our mind. (Spinoza, 1996/1677, Part III, Proposition 2, note)

In turn, this must mean that knowing proceeds in parallel with the body's physical encounters. Spinoza is no irrationalist, however. What he is attempting here is to understand thoughtfulness in a new way, extending its sphere of activity into nature. Human activity is no longer, as he put it, a kingdom within a kingdom. Rather, it is one part of a much greater

dominion. Spinoza's metaphysics was accompanied by an original notion of what we might nowadays call human psychology.

emergence

Straightaway, we have to note that Spinoza does not work from a model of the human individual and then simply power that model up. Rather, human psychology is manifold, a complex body which is an alliance of many simple bodies and which therefore exhibits what nowadays would be called **emergence** – the capacity to demonstrate powers at higher levels of organization which do not exist at others. This manifold psychology is continually being modified by the myriad encounters taking place between individual bodies and other finite things. The exact nature of the kinds of modification that take place will depend upon the relations that are possible between individuals who are also simultaneously elements of complex bodies. Importantly, Spinoza describes the outcome of these encounters by using the term 'emotion' or '**affect**' (*affectus*) which is both

affect

body and thought: 'By EMOTION (*affectus*) I understand the modifications of the body by which the power of action of the body is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the idea of these modifications' (Spinoza, 1996/1677, Part III, definition 3). So affect, as a property of the encounter, takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act, which can be positive and increase that ability (and thus 'joyful') or negative and diminish that ability (and thus 'sorrowful'). In this way, Spinoza detaches 'the emotions' from the realm of responses and situations and indexes them instead to action and encounters. They therefore become firmly a part of nature, of the same order as storms or floods: 'as properties which belong to [nature of mind] in the same way as heat, cold, storm, thunder and the like belong to the nature of the atmosphere' (Spinoza, 1996/1677, Pref. C492). But affect will present differently to body and mind in each encounter. In the attribute of body, affect structures encounters so that bodies are disposed for action in a particular way. In the attribute of mind, affect structures encounters as a series of modifications arising from the relations between ideas which may be more or less adequate and more or less empowering (see Brown and Stenner, 2001).

manifold beings

This emphasis on relations is important. Though Spinoza makes repeated references to 'individuals', it is clear from his conception of bodies and minds and affects as manifolds that for him the prior category is what he calls the 'alliance' or 'relationship'. So affects, for example, occur in an encounter between **manifold beings**, and the outcome of each encounter depends upon what forms of composition these beings are able to enter into. Therefore, as Brown and Stenner put it:

The method begins from a point that exceeds individualism . . . , concerning itself instead with the 'necessary connections' by which relations are constituted. Spinoza challenges us to begin not by recourse to biology or culture, or indeed any of the great dualist formations, but with the particularity proper to an encounter . . . (Brown and Stenner, 2001, p.97)

This way of proceeding from relations and encounters has many echoes in contemporary social science. It shows up in work which is concerned to find common complexes of relation, such as that informed by contemporary philosophers like Gilles Deleuze (who was a Spinozan through and through, see Deleuze, 1988a/1970, 2001/1981). It shows up in work that is challenging the nature–culture divide as found, for example, in the writings of Bruno Latour which, just like Spinoza, questions a discrete human substance. It shows up in work which is challenging what counts as thinking, both in arguments that the characteristic of ‘thinking’ should be extended to many more objects and in the emphasis on affect as a part of thinking. It shows up in the much greater emphasis being given to expression, as found in work on, for example, performance and performativity. And it shows up more generally in the way in which social science is now saturated by metaphors of movement. In other words, at this time it is possible to say that Spinoza has become a common philosophical ancestor for many different social science projects which are attempting to produce architectures which deal in constant reorganization, redistribution and revaluation and in which space and time are no longer fixed categories of intelligibility.

But what, you might well be asking at this point, has all this got to do with ethics? I think it is fair to say that Spinoza’s thought gives us some tools to think about what makes for right action in the face of ethical dilemmas, tools which are at a tangent from those that are usually to hand but which, when brought together, supply us with what Gatens and Lloyd (1999) so nicely call a ‘vulnerable optimism’, which can offer a freedom to construct and explore common ground. And I want to end this account by pointing to just one more element of Spinoza’s thought that up until now I have kept in reserve, and that is his notion of **imagination** as a positive mental capacity.

For Spinoza, imagination is essential to the flourishing of human beings. Indeed, it is a touchstone of leading a responsible life. Imagination may be considered as a set of constitutive ‘fictions’ which are, on the one hand, an individual way of knowing arising out of different bodies and their idiosyncratic associational paths and, on the other, the ‘imagery which becomes lodged in social practices and institutional structures in ways which make it an anonymous feature of mental life’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, p.39). Imagination is, then, a continual reworking of the materials of common perception which ‘reflects both the powers of the body, over which the mind has no causal influence, and the powers of the mind to understand it and gain freedom through that understanding’ (1999, p.36). And the exercise of the imagination can, of course, have real consequences: though they are subject to the same material necessities, the lives of those who use their imagination well are very different from those who do not. In turn, Spinoza takes an important part of the exercise of the imagination to be working on the circulation and concatenation of affects – understanding and transforming them through ‘fictions’ and by this

exercise allowing affects themselves to communicate, as well as ideas. The stress on the importance of the imagination also makes it easier to see that Spinoza's notion of ethical *responsibility* shifts away from simple declarations of praise or blame (which rely on notions of individual sites of freedom with independent causal force). In its place, we are encouraged to understand and work with processes of the formation of individuality (so-called 'trans-individual' understanding), in which we take on the responsibility to become something different by expanding our and others' subjectivity.

How might Spinoza's *Ethics* help us here in thinking through fieldwork dilemmas? Most particularly, by pointing to the importance of the *imagination* in producing good encounters. As you will remember, Spinoza sets great store by the goal of improving the intellect by improving the imagination. In fieldwork, it often happens that the best exchanges come from encounters in which the participants have to exercise their imagination, thereby producing something hybrid that very likely did not exist before; new hybrid 'interface cultures' can blossom, however briefly, bringing insight to *both* parties.

Or at least that is the goal. In reality, what this can mean is a fairly brutal calculation by the parties to a fieldwork encounter of what they can get from it (including the possibility that the researcher is deluding themselves in believing that those being researched have any interest whatsoever in the research or believe that it is anything other than a mild nuisance which they feel it would be polite to humour). But this is too cynical and I want to return to Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* to show that this does not have to be the case. For, in his period of fieldwork, a genuine friendship grew up with one of the villagers, Driss ben Mohammed, who continually refused to work as an informant. But Rabinow and he were able to find a space of respect:

Casually, without plan or schedule, just walking around the fields, ripe with grain or muddy from the irrigation water in the truck gardens, we had a meandering series of conversations. Ben Mohammed's initial refusal of informant status set up the possibility of another type of communication. But clearly our communication would not have been possible without the more regularized and disciplined relationships I had with others. Partly in reaction to the professional situation, we had slipped into a more unguarded and relaxed course over the months. (Rabinow, 1977, p.143)

space of
thoughtfulness

In other words, over a period of time Ben Mohammed and Rabinow were able to perform a **space of thoughtfulness** and imagination, however temporary and fleeting, different from that of either of their two cultures.

This is exactly what is now being tried across the social sciences and humanities – in compressed form and often involving more actors – through the use of various performative techniques. What is being looked

for is not a new theory, or a new social epistemology, or a new rhetoric, but rather a theory/method of practical-critical activity which, by its very nature, is shared (e.g. Deleuze, 1988a/1970; Guattari, 1995; Newman and Holzman, 1997). The emphasis is put on *expression* because it is assumed that the process of sharing requires the construction of new things: there is no world of already defined things there for the mirroring, but rather the energy of the forces of bodies – bodies as understood in the Spinozan sense – heading off for unknown and risky destinations. As Massumi puts it, when describing the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, two of the chief modern philosophical inheritors of this Spinozan approach:

They insist on the term ‘ethics’, as opposed to morality, because the problem in their eyes is not in any primary fashion that of personal responsibility. It is a basically pragmatic question of how one *performatively* contributes to the stretch of expression in the world – or conversely prolongs its capture. This is fundamentally a *creative* problem. (Massumi, 2002, p.xxii, emphasis in original)

The kinds of method that can stretch expression contain something old (sheer good writing would be one) and something new. Much of the new is only just being born but it includes methods drawn from performance and from various kinds of three-way psychotherapy (in which the researcher and the researched are moderated by a third party who both acts as a witness and an adjudicator). But it is not being born in the most propitious of circumstances for, at the same time (and perhaps not coincidentally), research methods like fieldwork are being made subject to a new tapestry of ethical regulation which, if strictly adhered to, would close down many jointly expressive possibilities because it assumes that there is only one way of proceeding.

Manufacturing ethics

audit culture Across academia new forms of **audit culture** are growing up (Power, 1998; Strathern, 2000). These forms of culture are means of systematizing the academic labour process so that it is measurable and predictable, and therefore open to greater control. This goal is achieved through an attendant army of new kinds of audit professional, a number of whom are ‘dealers in virtue’ who are there to audit academic ethics. Once these cultures take hold, they tend to grow as the new cadres of activist audit professionals spread out in search of further fields in which to apply their skills of scrutiny. Not least among the elements of the academic labour process that is open to this professionalization of scrutiny is ethics. For, increasingly, virtue is being audited. Some writers would go farther. They argue that there is now a global market in ethics,

of which developments in academia are but a small offshoot, produced by growing competition to accumulate symbolic capital. So Dezalay and Garth (1996, 1998), for example, speak of a new global project of ‘elitist democracy’ which intends to produce a ‘market in humanitarianism’ by stressing correct ethical stances, which an elite of professionals will then enforce. In other words, ethics has become a highly articulated transnational form. Dezalay and Garth take the example of international commercial arbitration as the prototype of a global system of private justice which allows ethics entrepreneurs to flourish, under the guise of a lofty disinterestedness. This is a new circuit of accumulation of ethical capital which will instigate an era of ‘philanthropic hegemony’. Human flourishing becomes big business.

**Research Ethics
Committee**

Whether things are really quite as bleak as Dezalay and Garth – and other writers like Hardt and Negri (2001) – argue when they write of an enforced humanitarian universalism circulating in a newly global civil society – and the ‘surplus of normativity’ that accompanies it – there seems little doubt about the manifestation that they would choose to concentrate on as the best example of this tendency in academia, that is the **Research Ethics Committee**. The ethical judgements of such committees have their roots in the so-called Nuremberg code on ethical research on human beings that was drawn up at the Nuremberg trials following the Second World War as a counter to the numerous atrocities committed by Nazi doctors in the name of science. But their main impetus sprang from various scandals in US biomedical research in the 1960s and 1970s. It did not take a battery of professionals to identify that unethical practices were rife in this paternalistic culture (such as the discovery in 1972 that doctors in Tuskegee, Alabama, had withheld treatment for syphilis from roughly 400 black men since the 1930s in order to document their symptoms) and, as a result, after a National Commission on Medical Ethics was established by the US Congress in 1973, a whole new area of bio-ethics appeared (Rothman, 1991). Ethical linkages were made easily in a rights-based culture that had already been sensitized to these kinds of issues by the civil rights movement. They were fuelled by massive increases in the national bill for healthcare arising out of the increasing application of high technology (Rothman, 1997) and they were topped off by the interest of lawyers in extending litigation to new and profitable areas. As a result, practices of biomedical research that had formerly been tacit became subject to analysis, scrutiny and regulation. A whole new industry of bio-ethics was born, at whose centre was the increasingly ubiquitous ethics committee (or as it is usually known now in the USA, the Institutional Review Board or IRB) which was meant to screen all medical research for its ethical consequences for ‘human subjects’. This new ethical/audit knowledge is enshrined in the *Protecting Human Subjects* handbook (Office for Human Research Protection, 1993), a regularly updated secular bible which is meant to be used to screen all biomedical research for possible risk, evidence of consent, efficacy of selection of subjects and

privacy and confidentiality. In turn, the handbook also sets out how to set up an Institutional Review Board which not only acts as a gatekeeper but also monitors and observes in its own right (see also Amdur and Bankert, 2002).

Similar events have happened in many other countries around the world, though often at a somewhat slower pace. In the United Kingdom, for example, most biomedical, scientific and social scientific learned societies have had codes of ethics for a good number of years, covering issues such as informed consent, deception, privacy and respect for local cultural values. But it is only now that some British universities are setting up ethics committees, in part at the prompting of the Wellcome Trust, the chief biomedical funding body which is insisting on the presence and enforcement of a code of ethics as a condition of funding.

I do not want to argue that ethics committees are *de facto* a bad thing in the biomedical sciences. Given the proven past levels of sometimes quite appalling patient abuse, that would indeed be a difficult case to make. But the problems begin when this bio-ethical apparatus is transferred wholesale into the realm of the social sciences (and so on to activities such as ethnography and other qualitative methodologies which the social sciences are increasingly prone to use) and the humanities, as has increasingly occurred in the USA and now looks set fair to do in Europe. For, in these spheres of knowledge, what counts as ethical practice may sometimes be very different. There have, indeed, been impassioned debates in the USA on precisely this issue. The growing bureaucracy of some 4,000 ethics committees operating in US universities, hospitals and private research facilities has imposed a rule-based biomedical approach generally based on the *Protecting Human Subjects* handbook. The concern is that this actually violates certain ethical precepts that only become clear when doing social science research.

As might be expected, there is a range of positions in the debate. To begin with, there are, of course, certain situations where most social scientists would have little difficulty in condemning a research practice: for example, in anthropology a controversy erupted not long ago concerning an anthropologist who, in studying indigenous populations in Central America, was alleged to have staged violent feuds. In another case an economist introduced money into a currency-less society just to see how people would react (Kancelbaum, 2002). But while situations such as these are clear-cut, there are plenty of others that are not.

One position is to argue that there is no real problem: 'Louise Lamphere, the president of the American Anthropological Association . . ., says that it is second nature – and should be – for graduate students in her department to submit research protocols to the campus IRB each time they start a project' (Shea, 2000, p.30). But others would argue that this is too simple a stance and that there are many ethical instances which are much more blurred than this. For example, what does informed consent mean if you are researching crowds of protesters? Asking a crowd of protesters for

their informed consent is not exactly a practicable option! Another example, researching contraceptive methods, highlights cultural and gender differences in what constitutes ethical ground and further complicates what counts as risk (see Kancelbaum, 2002).

A further position would be to argue that ethics committees' rules and regulations, originally designed to be applied in closed situations such as hospitals and laboratories, are very often simply not practicable in the field. Would many of the classic ethnographic works of twentieth-century social science ever have made it to the printers if they had been subject to eagle-eyed IRB regimes? What seems certain, at the very least, is that research protocols need to be adjusted if certain kinds of urban ethnographic work are ever to be carried out again. And there is a real possibility that, as one Berkeley academic put it, bodies like the IRB will 'turn everyone into low-level cheaters' (Shea, 2000, pp.31–2).

But it is important to note that some social scientists do try very hard to interact with those whom they are researching in ways that show that informed consent can be an ethical position and not just a matter of ticking the boxes and getting the signatures. Mitchell Duneier's prize-winning book *Sidewalk* (1999), a study of working-class reading habits in Greenwich Village, New York, is a case in point:

[Duneier] dutifully got IRB permission. . . . But when his project broadened to include panhandlers and homeless book vendors, [he] improvised. The booksellers knew he was a scholar, but he did not carry a backpack full of consent forms. Still, he took steps to protect them. In his notebooks and diaries, Duneier concealed the identities of his subjects. He stored tapes of conversations in an out-of-state location, where they were beyond reach of the police. After he had written a draft of his manuscript, he rented a hotel room in New York and read long passages of the book to everyone he planned to mention – sometimes for eight or nine hours at a sitting. 'I did get informed consent – in my case it was really informed', he says. 'I showed them the manuscript. I said 'Here's what I am doing with the words and photographs'. He then asked his subjects if they would be willing to sign forms that explained IRB rules and outlined the risks and benefits of appearing in the book . . .

Duneier emphasizes his concern with research ethics. 'I think the procedures I adopted are reasonable and fulfil the spirit of informed consent in a more meaningful way than the routine signing of advance consent forms,' he says. . . . But he still wonders whether he could ever have gotten IRB approval in advance for a study of this kind. (Shea, 2000, p.31)

The example of *Sidewalk* shows not only the considerable ethical sensitivity of Duneier's encounters with others (and, very importantly, disadvantaged and relatively powerless others), but also something else – the creative quality of invention which Spinoza so wanted to promote. But the example also shows just how very difficult it is and will be to slide this

quality past the apparatus of ethics committees. For, above all, such committees attempt to render the ethical outcomes of research encounters predictable. At least on certain dimensions, what comes out of an encounter must be known in advance. And the apparatus is therefore likely to smother what is often so valuable about these encounters: the sense of being there and interacting as something more than just researcher and researched in ways which must be relatively unpredictable in order to have any value. Take the case of an activity like ethnography. Part of the value of the exercise comes from the risky relationship with 'data' that Sarah Whatmore outlines in her chapter, with not knowing what exactly will turn up and therefore not knowing exactly what ethical stance to take. Indeed, in certain cases that value may lie – precisely as Paul Rabinow found in the Maghreb – in having one's own ethical certainties shaken up.

So what can be done? One task is to work on the rules of research ethics committees so that they become more amenable to social science research. The need for informed consent is usually interpreted by ethics committees as requiring a form signed by the subject (rather like a patient undergoing an operation), even though the ethical guidelines of a number of social science organizations offer alternatives and even though most social scientists would agree that it is the quality rather than the format of consent that is at issue (Coomber, 2002). Another task is to find creative ways of getting around some of these guidelines. But it is much easier for senior scholars, like Paul Rabinow, to do this than for graduate students (Shea, 2000, p.32). A third is to turn to the rapidly growing body of work, arising out of or inspired by **performance**, which tries to make more out of research encounters and thereby co-construct knowledge by asking questions that might never have been thought of by either party (Thrift, 2000, 2003; see also Chapter 9). What this work attempts is to provide ways of coming together which can form new ethical spaces, a theme taken up in Chapter 9. This is not some grandiose reformulation of the whole basis of western moral thinking. Rather, it is an attempt, often for a very short span of time, to produce a different sense of how things might be, using the resources to hand. In western thinking, for people to achieve ethical solicitude, they have to have a coherent – for which read bounded – culture resting on cartographic parameters of considerable antiquity within which encounters can be resolved (Campbell and Shapiro, 1999). But it is possible to think very differently – as I have tried to show in the case of Spinoza – and to allow various aspects of difference to remain dynamic rather than become definitively coded. The numerous aspects and sensory registers of performance can allow us to 'embrace contingency and enigma, assuming that problems are historically contingent, that subjectivities are unstable and never wholly coherent, and that spaces need to be continually negotiated rather than physically or symbolically secured' (Campbell and Shapiro, 1999, p.xviii).

Whether they do, of course, is up to *us*, for thinking alone, as Spinoza realized, is an impossible act.

Conclusion

The problem I tried to outline in the previous section of this chapter is the double ethical compromise that developments like ethics committees promote: on one side, they produce a normative regime that takes responsibility away from the researcher and, on the other side, they promote an arrogation of responsibility. The researcher only has to think through the multiple dilemmas that continually infest his/her practices – and which can become a source of a mutual enlightenment – in a partial and restricted way. No wonder that these committees produce a certain unease; there is no easy answer but we live in a world in which the formulae provided by audit all too often make the answer seem as if it is just that.

In this chapter, I have tried to think about ethics by heading in another Spinozan direction. What this means, above all, is cultivating the faculty of **good judgement** in the course of encounters. But can good judgement be cultivated? I think it can – and not only because this is what the processes of social ordering do all the time. Indeed, it is precisely what some contemporary work is trying hard to do, using a variety of affective techniques. In particular, this work attempts to set up good encounters by training bodies and minds to react in open and constructive ways, taking a stance of what has already been termed a vulnerable optimism towards the world (see, for example, Varela, 1999; Irigaray, 2002). Notice straightaway the Spinozan emphasis on bodies as well as minds. Contemporary work aims to engrain in the body's non-conscious being resources for good encountering (through the use of body techniques learnt from sources as diverse as yoga and dance) in order to extend the range of thoughtfulness beyond cognition and into intuition. But it also works to train conscious thought as well, through the usual academic technologies certainly, but also through other technologies drawn from performance, such as acting out encounters in various ways which are meant to both embarrass and enlighten (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000). Taken together, these trainings can begin to develop both spaces and dispositions in the field (such as knowing when to wait for a response, knowing when and when not to foreclose a situation, knowing when to be playful and when to be serious, and so on) in ways that can open out the ethical possibilities of an encounter and allow both the researcher and the researched to trust their judgement and so be carried along by it. Subjectivity expands when we take on such responsibility. To come back again to Spinoza's geometrical imagination, we must write of restless bodies endlessly making new modes of thoughtfulness.

Further reading

If you wish to explore more of Spinoza's thinking, then a short and helpful guide is provided by Genevieve Lloyd in her *Routledge Philosophy Guide to Spinoza and the 'Ethics'* (Routledge, 1996). In the first chapter of *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (The University of California Press, 1977) Paul Rabinow reflects on how and why he came to do fieldwork and how his own sense of ethical behaviour was subsequently moulded. In 'A geography of unknown lands' (2003) Nigel Thrift provides an account of an ethical project which, in part at least, relies on a Spinozan approach. His dissatisfactions with moral and political certainty led him towards a new kind of ethical performance which can remake the world but not in its own image. This paper can be found in Duncan and Johnson (eds) *Companion to Cultural Geography* (Blackwell, forthcoming 2003).