



**Ethics and Freedom
within Spinoza's system of
necessary determinism**

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Thanks

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Abbreviations

When quoting Spinoza, I use Shirley's translation (2002) ed. M.L. Morgan, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

E	<i>Ethics</i> (EIp11 = part 1, proposition 11; EIIp48s = part 2, proposition 48 scholium; EIIIdef.3 = part 3, definition 3; EIVax. = part 4, axiom; EIIp13cor = part 2, proposition 13, corollary.)
TTP	<i>Theological-Political Treatise</i>
PT	<i>Political Treatise</i>
Ep.	Letter, followed by the number.

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Introduction

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1672) was a rationalist philosopher which in his main work, the *Ethics*, used a *geometrical method* to show that we can arrive at truths about the world following postulated definitions, axioms and propositions. Spinoza held that from his propositions, substance monism and parallelism of mind and body would follow as something logical necessary, and that the implications of that in turn had importance for ethics and practical philosophy. Spinoza rejected any notion of an anthropomorphic God, and identified God with Nature: *Deus sive Natura*. In nature, causes and effects are necessary, and this is an important cornerstone in Spinoza's universe; since everything according to Spinoza is part of, or follows from, a necessary causal chain, everything is in a way necessary.

Necessarianism is stronger than determinism (even in its strictest form), because a strict determinist would allow that the causal chains constituting the world *could have been different* as a whole, even though each member of the chain could not have been different, given its antecedent causes.

Whether Spinoza is seen as a necessitarian or a determinist will bring about important implications for how we interpret and understand his ethical project as a whole. There are reasons to believe that Spinoza is to be seen as a necessitarian. Understanding Spinoza's modal metaphysics, i.e. his basic ideas and metaphysical framework regarding necessity and possibility, is crucial to later on be able to say something about what this means for his ethical project, morality, agency and prospects of living well.

Given the rigid framework of ontological necessity and the unquestionable rejection of free will we are presented with in the *Ethics* from first part and onwards, several questions are raised. The text more than just implies that we are not agents in the traditional sense; given that everything is necessary and nothing is contingent (EIp29), our common understanding of being free agents are put to the test. Even if we accept the premise of necessity, does it have to mean the end for concepts like voluntary actions, responsibility, intentionality and autonomy, concepts that often define how we understand free agency?

Spinoza ties the subject of determinism up to mental causality and defends the position of parallelism. His idea is that the physical is determined, the mental is determined, and thus he postulates a sort of one-to-one correlation between mental and physical items. Everything physical has a correlating "mental

idea". The mental sphere that is determined parallels the determined physical sphere.

This master's thesis will also deal with questions regarding Spinoza's views on determinism and mental causality. Mental causality regards the idea that the mental acts causally upon the physical world and whether it can be cause for human agency. How we understand "the mental" (and also "the physical") in this context is important. Whether it is seen as a set of properties, events or a vocabulary, it's associated with intentionality, feelings and qualia, but is also closely related to how we think of morality. It is many people's clear intuition that the moment the notion of mentality is threatened, free will, responsibility, and thus morality is immediately in a position under pressure. In many ways it may seem like the old question of free will versus determinism. I will argue that, following Spinoza, we should and can allow room for responsibility and morality – concepts often related to freedom – even in our defending determinism. True Freedom is in fact one of Spinoza's main goals. This means I will discuss the compatibilism in Spinoza's thoughts, and show how he defines true freedom as something compatible with determinism and necessity.

I'll argue that despite Spinoza's *strict determined* world view, *human agency* (which is often seen as standing in discrepancy to Spinoza's necessitarianism) is different from what it would have been when postulating radical *freedom of the will*, but still not at all so restricted (or eliminated) in Spinoza's thought as one may think. We can rather postulate a sort of *self-determinism*, and I will consider and conclude that a natural consequence of this rejection of free will is not any amoral mayhem, or cancellation of responsibility for one's actions. Rather it contributes to the formation of a (moral) self-identity where one understands that our minds with its thoughts and ideas are causally necessary, and can be acted upon like any other cause and effect. Several reflections is thus involved in this. As I will show, we need to be aware of questions like 'What is my nature?', 'What does my nature strive for', and this can, in turn, answer questions of goals in life (or if there are any, given Spinoza's rejection of teleology), of the related meaning in life, and of what we ought to do. Spinoza was influenced by the scholastics and it has an undeniable Aristotelian association to it. *Arête* is the virtue of functioning in the best possible manner in tune with one's nature; and, likewise, to live at best as human being can be seen directly connected to the goal of the *Ethics*. God's essence is to be cause of itself, and it is in its nature to be its own nature completely. The human essence is in a way to strive for the same thing. What are the goal and the meaning when we strive towards *being most fully our nature*? Are there any *oughts*, or is it just *is*?

Chapter One – Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics

What are Spinoza's ontological views on necessity and possibility, and why should we concern ourselves with the intricate details of the matter? For a better and more accurate understanding of the interpretative landscape, and to be able to display a hopefully fruitful and coherent thesis, it is of vital importance not only to deliver a brief overview, but to study in depth this sometimes rather entangled jungle of definitions, propositions and axioms which constitute the make-up of *The Ethics*. Figuratively built, rock upon rock, like a pyramid, the modal metaphysics can be seen as the foundation necessary to reach the top of the ethical endpoint with the goals of human joy, freedom and bliss. Spinoza wrote in a letter to Henry Oldenburg (Ep.75) how his modality was 'the principal basis of all the contents of the treatise'. It is thus a natural place to start the investigating, to explore the connections to several other aspects of his philosophy and, naturally to reveal problematic features.

I first want to draw a few preliminary sketches of what I will focus on in this chapter. Before I can, as promised, explore the connections between Spinoza's modal metaphysics and his ethical project, a thorough analysis of what lies in the concept of "modal metaphysics" is needed. This is the topic of §1. And likewise I will carefully investigate Spinoza's views on necessity and possibility and some important conclusions he deduced from it in §2. The next section, §3, is dedicated to the interpretative disagreements in Spinozistic scholarship about exactly what Spinoza's modal commitments really are. Lastly, I will conclude and summarize in §4, hopefully with a valid argument for my standpoint and therefore setting the stage for the next chapter with my conclusion.

§1. *What is "Modal Metaphysics"?*

Every day we employ modal notions such as *possible*, *impossible*, *necessary* and *contingent* on the world. Modal metaphysics is the theories about the ontological status of these concepts and how to apply them meaningfully and truthfully. What exists ontologically, and what sorts of implications follow if we, for example, accept possible worlds? Or, is this the only possible world? What is the relation between a thing; its essential and its accidental properties, if we even are capable of making such distinctions?

I will not pretend to give clear answers to these complex questions within the limits of this thesis, but I

wish to illuminate them. To put it all in context, I will give my account with special attention towards two philosophers regarded as closely related to Spinoza, namely Descartes and Leibniz. The interpretation of Descartes and Leibniz on modality has difficulties of its own that I do not wish to get too deeply involved in here. For present purposes it will suffice to present a plausible reading of a few highlights in their texts on the related topic.

Descartes on Modality

Spinoza's precursor Descartes' ideas on modal metaphysics are not very elaborate. With his mind-body dualism and advocacy of the free will, his doctrine that the world is created by God's free will differs clearly from Spinoza's and offers several questions. We'll see that their respective ontological understanding of God plays a role in how they see modality.

Despite the fact that it is hard to grasp what Descartes' modal commitments really are, due to some unclarity and inconsistency in his writings on the subject, the well-known philosophical method Descartes applies in *Meditations on First Philosophy* addresses modal metaphysical notions. In the meditations he entertains a number of metaphysical claims and possibilities, but later suggests that even though some of them seem necessary and evident to us, we might still be mistaken about their truth-value. This applies also to our own existence. One of Descartes' famous suggestions is the one that it might be possible that a malevolent demon constantly deceives us. Descartes concludes that it is an eternal and necessary truth that God is no evil deceiver. How does he reach this conclusion?

It depends on his ontological understanding of God. The argument is that God has all sorts of perfections and no imperfections. But deceiving is an imperfection. Descartes writes at the end of the third meditation, *Of God, and that there is a God*:

[...] God... Having all those *perfections*, which I cannot *comprehend*... and who is not *subject* to any *Defects*. By which 'tis evident that *God* is no *Deceiver*; for 'tis manifest by the *Light of Nature*, that all *fraud* and *deceit* depends on some *defect*.¹

Descartes holds that when doing metaphysics we ought to speak only of the things we clearly and distinctly perceive. He argues that God necessarily exists because he has a clear idea of a being most perfect, i.e., of God, and therefore, he says, it evidently follows that there is a God.² This form of

argumentation can obviously be subjected to criticism, as Kant's objection in *Critique of Pure Reason* shows. Kant questions the intelligibility of the concept of a necessary, infinitely perfect being by considering examples of necessary propositions. A triangle necessarily has three angles, *if* it exists. *If* X exists, it necessarily exists with three angles. It does not mean that X necessarily exists. A contradiction will only emerge when the predicate "existence" is necessarily contained in the concept. But "existence" is not a predicate according to Kant.

But Descartes did not have Kant's objection at hand, and his point is that God is a being, which exists necessarily. For Descartes there is possible existence (possibilities that are not necessary actualized) and necessary existence (possibilities that must be actualized). The will and decree of God constitutes and actualizes the eternal and necessary truths. This is a point in which he differentiates from Spinoza and I will return to Spinoza's objection in §2, but in short, Descartes' problem is annihilated in Spinoza's system. God is in Spinoza's view not "slave to logic", he *is* logic.

In the meantime, let's turn to the author of the *Fifth Objections*, Pierre Gassendi, and his demur: The view that God can, *upon will*, do anything is problematic because then nothing is really immutable. This includes the eternal and necessary truths. They were created by God by His free will but for something to be eternally necessary it cannot be the case that it could be otherwise, even if God so chose. The divine omnipotence Descartes insists upon commits him to accept the possibility that the eternal and necessary truths not are so eternal and necessary after all.

We stand here before a problematic incoherency:

- (p1) Eternal and necessary truths exist.
- (p2) God is free to create and change things at His own will.
- (p3) God could have created the eternal and necessary truths otherwise if he would.

If we are to understand "eternal and necessary" as we commonly do today, it is obvious that something has to give. It is puzzling how eternal truths can be necessary if they were produced by a free act of God. Descartes chose to keep God's divine omnipotence and to ease up on the necessity of eternal truths. The interpretation suggests that the eternal truths are contingent because they could have been false given God's willing it so. This means that not even mathematical truths are necessary or

unchangeable in themselves. Descartes writes: "It will be said that if God has established these truths He could change them as a king changes his laws. To this the answer is: Yes He can, if His will can change."³

Lilli Alanen comments that:

We understand these truths as eternal and unchangeable because we understand God as immutable and eternal. But they are not immutable because of any intrinsic necessity. Because they are freely established by God, they could be other than they are. To say that the laws determining all the motions in the universe are independent of God's will, *would indeed be to subject God "to the Styx and the Fates," committing Descartes to a necessitarianism of the kind Spinoza eventually advocated*, and which he was obviously very keen to avoid.⁴

I find the last sentence in this quote a bit imprecise and unfair to Spinoza. True, Descartes did not want to restrict God's divine freedom, and Spinoza applies a different concept of divine necessity here, but to say that Spinoza thereby took the direction of subjecting God to the Styx and the fates is a misunderstanding. In short, Spinoza agrees with this denial, but he could not accept the anthropomorphic Cartesian alternative. For a further discussion on this, see Curley's postscript in *Spinoza's Metaphysics*.⁵ It seems however, to be a common misunderstanding, and not a trivial one, because it is one Spinoza seemed particularly keen to set straight (see §2 below). However, it was not unreasonable of Descartes to hesitate embracing necessitarianism. The comparison to a king who can change his laws might not be the best one, and gives associations to human whims and inconsistencies. I'm sure this was not Descartes' intent, and subsequently he also adds *if his will can change*, suggesting God's consistency and immutability, not being susceptible to change. But still, as Alanen points out, this is not an *intrinsic necessary* aspect. Not of the world and not of God. God's will is thought by Descartes to be perfect and therefore needs not change, but *if* He would, He *could*.

Leibniz on Modality

Leibniz's Modal Metaphysics can be seen as a reaction to the necessitarianism of Spinoza (and Hobbes). Leibniz operated with the concept of *individual substance*, and each individual substance has a *complete individual concept* (CIC). This contains all true predicates of the individual substance, from past, present and future. When we consider the CIC as constituting each individual substance's essence, it follows from this that no two substances can be qualitatively identical and differ numerically. This is quite a leap from Spinoza's one-substance-thesis, but Leibniz was no less of an explanatory rationalist

than Spinoza was.⁶ Leibniz called it *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*, and asks several questions:

The first question we are entitled to ask will be *why is there something rather than nothing?*...Moreover, even if we assume that things have to exist, we must be able to give a reason *why they have to exist as they are* and not otherwise⁷

Like Descartes, Leibniz finds his answer in God. As extramundane or transcendent, He is the ultimate reason for things. Our world is the actual one because God chose to actualize it, and the reason is that the actual world is the best possible world. Mocked by Voltaire in the 1759 satire *Candide*, the tenet of the philosopher and tutor Pangloss that "all happens for the best in the best of all possible worlds" is a reference to the Leibnizian view. Pangloss maintained his optimistic belief that this world is the best of all possible worlds even after having encountered great sufferings. So how does Leibniz defend that this world is necessary, and necessarily the best of all possible worlds?

According to Leibniz a world is made up by a set of composite, finite things, individual substances and certain laws of nature. This composition of things is something God can choose to actualize into existence. (Leibniz endorsed the *a priori*-argument for God's existence like Descartes and Spinoza. That there is a God and that He is absolute perfection are unconditionally necessary for Leibniz, and for him self-explanatory⁸. I will not get involved with ontological proofs or scrutinize this particular problem here, but I will return to the subject in the next paragraph on Spinoza. With respect to this brief exposition of Leibniz's argumentation I suggest we for now accept the postulate.) However, the fact that Leibniz sees God as extramundane and His existence and nature as necessary excludes them from the contingent facts in the worlds. God can choose freely which world and particular composition of things He wishes to realize. Leibniz pursues possible things and contingency because it shows the freedom of God. He rejects that God simply creates; God can see all possible outcomes in all possible worlds and actualizes in creation the best out of all the possibilities out of his goodness. However, not even God can bring into existence something contradictory. If the laws of gravity in world W* dictate that while one stands in the middle of Avenue des Champs-Élysées and drops a one pound brick it falls down, in the same world W* it cannot be the case that under the same circumstances the brick would fly upwards, or that there were no Avenue des Champs-Élysées or France. The latter would be properties of another possible world, say W**. Like in Descartes, we see that Leibniz holds that God could create a different world ("change His laws") if He *would*.

This brief review of how Descartes and Leibniz thought about modality show that they both stressed the transcendent God's omnipotence, perfection, goodness and divine will. God becomes thus the most important explanatory factor regarding how the world has come to be, and why it became as it is. God exists with the utmost necessity, but His creations, natural laws and finite being does not. Spinoza also states the necessary existence of God, or Nature, but the extension of what follows will differ.

Descartes viewed possible and existing things as something understood and created by God. All that is understood by God is necessary existence. Also possible non-existing things subjected to our imaginations are still 'existing' in the mental sphere, i.e. in the soul, if not the physical. Whereas Leibniz, as we have seen, made a distinction between God's understanding and will. God understands all the possible worlds, but will only create the actual one with all its appropriate components.

§2. *Do Spinoza's modal views commit him to necessitarianism?*

Necessitarianism requires an exceptionless commitment to the absolute necessity of all things. Being sensitive to the whole of Spinoza's metaphysical system we need to be sensitive towards how he allocates necessity and possibility. Spinoza is rigorously deterministic throughout his texts. The being of all things is determined by the necessity of the divine nature to exist and act in certain ways (EIp29) and things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than they have been (EIp33). As with Descartes and Leibniz, the assumption of God is ever-present. However, we shall see that Spinoza's derivative is far from the former two. Spinoza's *Ethics* is notoriously challenging in how it constantly throws the reader back and forth. But the first book, *De Deo*, "Concerning God" is where he expounded the intricacy of his principal ideas, which the rest of the parts in the *Ethics* build upon. It is hence the most natural place to start our analysis.

In this section I will give an account for how Spinoza explains and defends the necessity of the *one* substance, how he identifies this one substance with God/or Nature and how all things flow from this with necessity. I will defend the view that Spinoza can be seen as a *moderate necessitarian*, as opposed to the *strict necessitarian* interpretation. Out of this it will be clear how Spinoza's God differs from the claim about being subjected to "the Styx and the Fates" like Descartes feared, as well as from acting with

deliberate consideration and pick what He chooses among several possibilities like Leibniz held.

During the explication of Spinoza's argumentation, the significant and inseparable relation between substance monism, necessity, self-determinism and ethics will emerge.

The cornerstones in Spinoza's ontological proof of God are in mainlines drawn from the propositions of EIp1 to EIp15. Before the propositions he offers six principal definitions, on (1) that which is self-caused, (2) finite things, (3) substance, (4) attributes, (5) modes, and (6) God.

A substance is defined as

..that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.

His definition of God is stated as follows:

By God I mean an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence. *Explication:* I say 'absolutely infinite', not 'infinite in its kind'. For if a thing is only infinite in its kind, one may deny that it has infinite attributes. But if a thing is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation belongs to its essence

Further, his definition of attribute is 'that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence'. The attributes are the essential expression of the substance, constituting how we perceive its nature. When Spinoza says that God is a substance containing infinite attributes, I identify infinite with "all possible". Of all possible attributes, we are familiar with two: thought and extension.

Spinoza's argumentation for God as the infinite, self-caused, necessary existing one substance is based on the assumptions that there must be (I) one substance with all possible attributes, and that (II) no two substances can share the same nature or attribute:

(EIp5) In the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.

He then goes forth claiming that there is one substance, God, with infinite attributes in EIp11:

God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.

He thus concludes in EIp14, that

There can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God.

If another substance existed it would have to have some or another attribute or essence, but Spinoza has strictly stated that two substances cannot share attributes, and God already holds all possible attributes. More than one substance is considered by Spinoza to be absurd. This line of argument should be examined closer, because it is in no way unproblematic.

The argumentation for Spinoza's monism

It is important for Spinoza's ethical project to establish his substance monism. This is also especially important for his parallelism-doctrine, as I will show below in the next chapter. However, getting there requires thorough understanding of the argumentation. Unfortunately, Spinoza's propositions and arguments are frequently far from being as clear and straightforward as he might have intended. For example, why is it that two substances cannot share attributes? Leibniz suggested that two substances might share some attributes and have some distinct. One substance, A, could have the attributes x and y, whilst substance B could have the attributes y and z.⁹ And why could not A and B be numerically distinct even though they have the same attribute? Probably, at the point of EIp5 in his argument for monism, Spinoza is considering a Cartesian framework, i.e. he is considering substances with only one attribute. If the attributes were considered identical, then it would be an application of what Leibniz later called the *identity of indiscernibles*, i.e. if the attributes constituting the substances are identical, there could be no basis for distinguishing the substances. This might hold for EIp5, but Spinoza appeals to the same logic in EIp14, where it applies to God, the *one* substance of *infinite* attributes. To save the argument, we must first shed light on the no shared attribute-thesis, and then show that the interpretation cannot be limited to substances with one attribute.

As already mentioned above, Spinoza's understanding of attribute is *that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence*. The question of the identity-conditions of the attributes, i.e. what

it might mean to claim that two attributes belonging to two distinct substances are identical is important for sufficient understanding. Having in mind that for Spinoza attributes express the essence, or nature, of substance allows him to claim that each attribute *is* substance considered from a certain point of view or taken under a certain description, which, in turn, explains why he sometimes identifies substance and attribute.¹⁰ However, this contradicts the objection that two substances might both have attribute x and still not express the same nature and essence. Say that x is *thought*, for example. Should not both A and B be able to possess x without it being claimed they are identical? Granted, it is unlikely that A and B's thoughts are identical, and thus we can say they differ with respect to their different thoughts (affections or states). This, however, allows a plurality of substances with the same attribute. We could argue against that by saying that, if the affections are put to the side and substance is considered in itself, one cannot be conceived from another. But why should we put the affections or states aside? This is puzzling. Allison follows Russell in his interpretation¹¹, which says that, *on the assumption currently under consideration, the substances must be indistinguishable prior to the assignment of predicates (affections)*. I understand this as follows: if we assume, like Spinoza does, that substance A's attribute x , (with affection we can read it as x^*) and substance B's attribute x , (or x^{**}) are indistinguishable prior to the assignments of predicates (affections), the only way to mark them as distinct substances is to assume that they are numerically distinct to begin with. Clearly, $x^* = x^{**}$ is not true, whereas $x = x$ is. We can allow setting the affections aside because predicates are not a sufficient basis for distinction, and a substance *is prior in nature to its states* (EIp1). Thought can be affected in many ways, but it is still an attribute belonging to, and expressing substance; and if we were to claim several substances with the attribute of thought, they would be identical and thus one.

The problems of EIp5 could be discussed in detail. But I will not dig deeper into this particular problem for now, having showed in the most important lines how Spinoza denies the possibility of several substances sharing attributes¹².

Spinoza further needs to exclude the possibility of several substances with *different* attributes. This is important for him, not only in the rejection of Cartesian mind-body-dualism, where extended and thinking substance share nothing except their dependence on God, but it is thereby also an important step in his criticism of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic conception of God and created substance. A walkthrough of the propositions leading to the conclusion in EIp11, of God's necessary existence, (and thus finally clarify EIp14), will reveal why there must be one substance with every possible attribute, and

not several substances with different attributes. Here is how it goes: EIp2 tells us that two substances with different attributes have nothing in common with one another, and hence, if things have nothing in common, the one cannot be the cause of the other (EIp3). Spinoza denies as a consequence that one substance can create or produce another in EIp6. By EIp7, it is stated that a substance's essence necessarily involves existence. Reasonably enough, Bennett remarks

It is widely agreed now that the existence of a concrete object – something other than an inhabitant of the third realm – never follows from a definition or from a description of a concept. In particular, you cannot infer the existence of something on the premise that existence belongs to its essence or its definition.¹³

This shows the problem of most ontological arguments, but as Bennett goes on to say, there are things to be learned from Spinoza's in particular. Spinoza ontologically defines God as a substance, and takes this as a sufficient explanation for God's necessary existence because substance is in turn defined as that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed. His reason for holding substance as necessary existent comes from the view that any genuine substance must be causally self-contained, not owing its existence to anything else. But how did that whole affair happen? We can understand how something might sustain or keep itself in existence, but how can something *just be* initially, or push itself into existence in the first place? The answer lies in his explanatory rationalism. For a causal rationalist, the question "Could x cause its own existence?" is the question "Could x logically necessitate its own existence?" And a logically self-necessitating thing would presumably be one whose nature or essence had to be instantiated.¹⁴ That is how Spinoza argues, the material for the answer lies in substance's own nature. Given this, we need not look further beyond the thing itself, or dig deeper in the "why" question-bag. A substance cannot be caused by anything else, but must be caused by something, so it must be caused by itself. Again, we may oppose this idea, but given Spinoza's explanatory rationalism, he needed necessarily existing objects and a self-caused substance, with a necessary instantiated nature, was an opportunity good as anything.

To summarize, then, Spinoza's argument for substance monism is suspicious, but the main lines is that when a necessary existing substance with an infinity of attributes possesses *all* the attributes that there are, there is simply none left for any other conceivable substance. Combining this with the proposition that two or more substances cannot share an attribute, the argument for one substance, with all possible

attributes, the *ends realissimum*, is complete.

As known, Spinoza equates this one substance to God, or rather Nature. *Deus sive Natura*, for him it is one and the same thing. This led to both accusations by most of his contemporaries of demonic atheism forged in hell (despite of Spinoza's protests to the label of atheism, see for example Ep. 43) as well as the later praise from, among others, the more romantic inclined Novalis who said of Spinoza the exact opposite, that he was intoxicated with God - *Spinoza geradezu ein Gott-trunkener Mensch ist*.

With Spinoza's argumentation for monism sorted out, this allows me to shed a little more light on how this said monism is connected with the determinism, or necessitarianism, and the ethical project. Does this monism commit Spinoza to the strictest form of necessitarianism? I promised earlier that I would defend the *moderate necessitarianism*-view, as the one defended by Curley and Walski.¹⁵ A more elaborate interpretative discussion of this will proceed in the next section, §3, regarding the interpretative landscape, but I will now give an idea based upon the foregoing analysis.

The substance/God/Nature (or the whole universe) exists with absolute necessity. It is brought into existence by its own necessary and self-causing nature conceived and sustained through itself and all possible attributes belonging to it. All things in the world are composites of this, different modes and affections of this totality. Spinoza studies everything in the world accordingly. Whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary. Does this mean that we all are helplessly subjected to unchangeable fates determined on metaphysical level far beyond our reach? Not quite. But explanatory rationalism demands that for every event we must be able to track down the event's causal chain. Nothing ever just happen out of the blue; however obscure the reasons or causes are to us, they are there, and they are not random. Like the laws of physics, we may not understand them fully, but the laws do not differ from time to time. Conditions may differ and provide different results in seemingly identical circumstances, but upon closer examination, this is often due to us not knowing all the variables. This is already an indication of what is to come in the *Ethics*, in the latter parts that concerns a good human life, after the explicit metaphysical issues I have dealt with in this chapter are accounted for. Spinoza proposes that human freedom, happiness and salvation lie in freeing oneself from the bondage of more or less random emotions, ignorance and superstition. It is a brute fact of life that forces external to us comes our way. We do not like to admit it, but in many cases we do not have total control over our existence. Various forces of nature, illness or good health, death, fame, fortune or the loss of it – albeit

sometimes – we cannot always control what comes our way, only make adjustments. Despair and resignation is bondage, says Spinoza. We despair because we are conscious of our wantings but ignorant of causes (EI Appendix). In admittance of this loss of control follows understanding and accept of the necessary causes. Spinoza is of the belief that this is in this understanding that freedom lies.

Finite and infinite modes

There is yet another thing to take into consideration to understand fully the question of necessity as more than just a purely metaphysical issue, which is the theory of modes. Modes are by EId5 affections of the substance, and since it is only substance that can be and be conceived through itself, modes depend on the substance to be conceived and intelligible. Modes are thus conceived through and exist in the substance. As affections or modifications of substance, modes can be seen as modifications of the *attributes* of substance. Different things may follow from this in different ways. Spinoza categorizes modes into infinite and finite modes. Each mode is a modification of each attribute of substance. Hence, for every mode of the attribute of thought there is a mode of the attribute of extension. Spinoza writes in IIP7S:

[...] thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways.

Infinite modes are features of the universe following from the substance – or its attributes – in a direct manner, or directly from another infinite mode, which follows directly from the attribute. These are universal and eternal aspects of the universe, and do not come in and go out of existence. The infinite modes of extension apply to all finite modes of extension. Infinite modes of extension are exemplified as motion and rest, the elements governing bodies in the laws of physics. The infinite modes of thought also apply to the finite modes of thought, and are described by Spinoza as the infinite intellect of God. We can see this as the totality of logical and psychological laws. Finite modes are all particular things. In EIp25c Spinoza writes that particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.

The finite modes Spinoza talks about in *The Ethics* are easily identified with what he in *The Emendation of the Intellect* calls "mutable particular things". This means we can say that e.g. humans are finite modes and the laws of physics are infinite modes. However, there's obviously a difference between being

a human and being gravity. The infinite modes sustain, whilst the finite modes come and go. Where the infinite modes follow directly from Gods attributes, the finite modes follow from something finite, (dependant on and being in the totality of the infinite but not deriving directly from it) which in turn follows from something finite and so on. Spinoza explains this in his EIp28 proof:

Whatever is determined to exist and to act has been so determined by God (Pr. 26 and Cor. Pr. 24). But that which is finite and has a determinate existence cannot have been produced by the absolute nature of one of God's attributes, for whatever follows from the absolute nature of one of God's attributes is infinite and eternal (Pr. 21). It must therefore have followed from God or one of his attributes insofar as that is considered as affected by some mode; for nothing exists but substance and its modes (Ax. 1 and Defs. 3 and 5), and modes (Cor. Pr. 25) are nothing but affections of God's attributes. But neither could a finite and determined thing have followed from God or one of his attributes insofar as that is affected by a modification, which is eternal and infinite (Pr. 22). Therefore, it must have followed, or been determined to exist and to act, by God or one of his attributes insofar as it was modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence.

Strict versus moderate necessitarianism

In some sense, Spinoza is clearly a necessitarian. The interesting question here is, to what degree. And, will knowledge and acceptance of causes change the turn of one's willings? The answer for the latter question is relevant here but I will save for chapter three and four. Here I first want to examine what differentiates moderate necessitarianism from the strict one.

In EIp33s1 Spinoza acknowledges two ways of necessity. The one is by reason of essence; the other is by reason of cause. The Scholium is worth quoting in its entirety:

Since I have here shown more clearly than the midday sun that in things there is absolutely nothing by virtue of which they can be said to be "contingent", I now wish to explain briefly what we should understand by "contingent"; but I must first deal with "necessary" and "impossible". A thing is termed "necessary" either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence necessarily follows either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. Again, it is for these same reasons that a thing is termed "impossible" – that is, either because its essence or definition involves a contradiction or because there is no external cause determined to bring it into existence. But a thing is termed "contingent" for no other reason than the deficiency of our knowledge. For if we do not know whether the essence of a thing involves a contradiction, or if, knowing full well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, we still cannot make any certain judgements as to its existence because the chain of causes is hidden from us, then that thing cannot appear to us either as necessary or as impossible. So we term it either "contingent" or "possible".

For simplicity's sake, we can say that infinite modes fall into the first category, and finite modes fall into the latter. This can be compared to Leibniz's division between truths of reason and truths of fact. Truths of reason are necessary and true in virtue of the principle of contradiction: their denial involves a contradiction, explicit or implicit. Examples are mathematical and logical truths. Truths of fact are true in virtue of the principle of sufficient reason. This means that nothing happens without a reason why it should be so or so rather than otherwise. Examples would be existential propositions (except God's, as we have seen is that considered as a truth of reason) and singular propositions. Truths of fact are for Leibniz contingent as they depend on God's free decision to create this world.¹⁶

Curley writes

Leibniz will allow that truths of fact are necessary in one possible sense of the term. Though they may fail to be true and are therefore not absolutely necessary, nevertheless they are hypothetically necessary. Given God's decision to create this world rather than some other possible world, things could not have been otherwise. But God could not have so decided. His decision had a cause in his knowledge that this world would be the best of all possible worlds, and it could have been predicted with certainty, but it was not absolutely necessary. And therefore, neither is the world which follows from it.¹⁷

As we have seen, Spinoza had the different approach that everything that follows from God, i.e., the world and everything that exists, follows with necessity. However, this does not necessarily mean that everything that is and happens is inevitable. I concur with Curley's interpretation that all truths are necessary, but not all truths are necessary in the same sense. We can put it this way: it is a necessary truth, that some truths, events, actions, existences, or what have you, with necessity have some degree of "leeway"¹⁸. Having e.g. 'reasons are causes' in mind, our reasons are brought about due to a variety of experiences, external and internal pushes and pulls, beliefs and understandings; i.e. causal factors. The interesting question here is whether these reasons are absolutely necessary, or relatively necessary.

If we give several propositions of the kind "x exists", where x denotes e.g. "this table I'm sitting by", "God (*deus sive natura*)", "Mick Jagger", "Ruprecht-Karls Universität" &c, we can by EIp24 "*The essence of things produced by God does not involve existence*" argue that Spinoza would say that only one such true proposition is *absolutely* necessary and that is that "God exists". However, this does not prevent other existential claims from being true or necessary in some sense. I believe this means that for

some propositions or things it is not necessary in the *strictest* sense that they exist, or that they exist in the particular way they do. But when they first exist the way they do, then the causal chain, antecedent causes and circumstances leading up to them in their particular way explains why they necessarily are as they are, not that it is inevitable or that they could never exist in some other way, or not exist at all. This attention towards the difference between absolute necessity and relative necessity I find important, especially with the later discussion on determining oneself in mind. Considering this, the "every truth is necessary" appears more moderate.

§3: *The interpretative landscape.*

Before I move on to give the final summary and conclusions of this chapter, I wish to give a brief outline of some of the interpretative disagreements in Spinozistic scholarship on this area. Some of Spinoza's premises and arguments have induced a seemingly endless controversy on precisely what should be the outcome. I have already pointed towards a more flexible interpretation of Spinoza's necessity, which will shortly be repeated, in my conclusions in summarized form in §4. However, the diversity of readings should not be ignored since they contribute to an important plurality of perspectives. Naturally I cannot comment on them all, and so I will here continue the debate regarding Spinozistic necessity and possible relative necessity from the view of Spinoza interpreters Edwin Curley and Jonathan Bennett.

Curley's argumentation on why every truth is a necessary truth, absolute or relative

Curley wishes to show that Spinoza's universal denial of contingency is compatible with the admission that some truths are contingent¹⁹, and holds the claim that Spinoza's determinism has the form:

(1) Every truth is either absolutely or relatively necessary,
rather than

(2) Every truth is absolutely necessary.

Curley defends this by proposing four assumptions he is confident Spinoza would make to justify (1).

The assumptions are:

1: The proposition that God exists is absolutely necessary.

2: All other singular truths, though absolutely contingent, have a scientific explanation, in the sense that they follow from a statement of certain antecedent conditions and nomological propositions. Hence they are relatively necessary.

3: All accidental general truths, though absolutely contingent, have a scientific explanation in the same sense, and hence are also relatively necessary.

4: All nomological general truths are absolutely necessary.²⁰

The question is whether Spinoza would make these claims and how he would support them. The first claim hardly need further introduction. It is the ontological claim of EIp11, and has been thoroughly considered above. The second claim is according to Curley tolerably certain from EIp28 and from Spinoza's treating of miracles in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In the Treatise, Spinoza reviews miracles as violating nature's regular laws and believing in them as mere human folly, nonsensical superstition based on inadequate knowledge of God/Nature and causes. EIp28 sounds:

Every individual thing, i.e., anything whatever which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and this cause again cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so ad infinitum.

How Curley deduces his second claim from this is not immediately clear. It is complex and requires a whole chapter long argument.²¹ That singular truths have scientific explanations and follow from given conditions is uncontroversial, and hence it is easy to imagine that if we manipulated one part of a certain causal chain the outcome would change. But it remains still somewhat opaque how he can defend that all singular truths are absolutely contingent. It could, however, be due to the singular truth's nature. As I showed above, the finite modes are modifications of God, but they do, as we see in EIp28 above, not follow directly from God, because finite things according to Spinoza cannot be produced immediately by an infinite cause. They are produced by other causes that are individual and finite. To see how this can be we can follow Curley's line-by-line commentary on EIp28:

Any proposition in *A* (except those which are axioms of scientific theory) must follow from other propositions in *A*.

But a singular proposition cannot be deduced solely from the axioms of the scientific theory of *A*, for these are general propositions, and from general propositions alone only general propositions can be

deduced.

A singular proposition must then follow from propositions which are not axioms of the scientific theory of *A*, that is, from some theorem of the scientific theory of *A*, or from some singular proposition, for these are all the propositions that are in *A*.

But a singular proposition cannot be deduced (solely) from theorems of the scientific theory of *A*, for these too are general propositions.

The singular propositions of *A* must then follow from other singular propositions of *A* (taken together with some general propositions, for it is no more possible to deduce a singular conclusion from singular premises alone, than it is to deduce one from general premises alone).²²

To sum up the second claim; it is partly based on the confidence that science can explain all questions, and partly on the identification of God with nature. That means in effect that anything singular not scientifically explainable would involve a "miracle", that is, a contradiction. Therefore singular truths are necessary, but relative in the sense that they cannot be solely deduced from absolute and general propositions. The laws of the infinite modes apply to them, but their causal chain is also finite, and hence contingent.

The third claim, that all accidental general truths are relatively necessary, is even harder to defend. Curley states that he finds the documentation in Eip8s2. Here Spinoza wishes to prove that it can only be one substance of the same nature, and in the course of his argumentation he suggests an example where exactly twenty men exist. For the sake of discussion, not more nor fewer. Spinoza concludes that wherever a thing is of a kind, which can have several individuals in it, it must have an external cause. Since it pertains to the nature of substance to exist, there can only be one substance of the same kind. The reason for Curley to use this particular passage is that he finds the proposition "exactly twenty men" to be an example of an accidental generalization, and he points out that Spinoza assimilates this proposition to singular propositions (as discussed above) and that the generalization of exactly twenty men are necessary in the same way as singular propositions are. In the same way as with singular propositions, there is always a logical and necessary cause why exactly twenty men exist when they do, but the number twenty is not innate to the essence of men, and hence it is relatively necessary.

Curley's fourth claim is that all nomological truths are absolutely necessary. The nomological truths are known to us as general physical and logical laws. Spinoza's own notion of laws is generally defined as

that according to which each individual thing – either all in general or those of the same kind – act in one fixed and determinate manner, this manner depending either on Nature's necessity or on human will.²³ When further distinguishing between the two kinds of laws, Spinoza makes clear the difference between descriptive and prescriptive laws. The human prescriptive laws – 'Thou shalt not kill' – are empirically breakable, but Spinoza regards on the contrary the laws of nature as possessing the same kind of necessity as, he supposed, the proposition of God's or Nature's existence possess. They follow necessarily from definitions and are thereby absolutely necessary. Given the identification of the essence of God with the fundamental nomological facts this is, as Curley points out, nothing but expected. The objection that rises from this is that laws of nature must be established empirically, by examining nature through and through, not by drawing conclusions and consequences a priori from definitions. From this it can be concluded that scientific laws cannot be absolutely necessary. This assumption implicitly says that what is established empirically cannot also be established a priori. Curley believes that Spinoza very well could have rejected this latter assumption, and even though we cannot say for certain that Spinoza was right in assuming that the laws of nature are absolutely necessary, it was intelligible in his contemporary situation, and it is not a far off conclusion in our own contemporary view either.

Bennett's discussion on Spinoza's commitment to necessity

Bennett discusses thoroughly both the option of the commitment to allowing contingent truths and the commitment to ruling out contingent truths²⁴. As Bennett notes, in certain ways Spinoza commits himself to both, i.e. that there are no contingent truths and that this is the only possible world, and yet at the same time he commits himself to the opposite. The texts on the subject are difficult and inconclusive, but as previously said, there's good reason to attending to them, with respect to better understanding of later parts of the *Ethics* and this paper.

First Bennett attends to the allowance of contingent truths. He also turns to what Spinoza said about miracles in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, underlining that Spinoza equals miracles and random events, respectively as something that falls under the antecedent of a law but not its consequent and something not falling under antecedent or consequent of any law. Bennett refers to Ax3, *from a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect; on the other hand, if there be no determinate cause, it is impossible that an effect should follow*. Here Spinoza says what he frequently repeated, that the laws cannot be broken, and that nothing ever just happens without antecedent causes. Bennett points to an important aspect Spinoza apparently never thought of, that the first half of the axiom rules out

basic causal laws which are probabilistic. However, I do not consider that as a serious fault by Spinoza, and I will briefly return to the coverage of probabilistic causes in the summary of this chapter. After stating what sort of things that hold an undisputedly necessary position – the logic, the geometry and the physics – the world’s infinite and eternal features, instantiated everywhere and always, Bennett turns his attention to the features the world has locally or temporarily, i.e. the particular things from EIp28. Spinoza used the word 'things', but the topic in matter includes all local or temporal (or both) states, events and situations at any metaphysical level according to Bennett. He thus proceeds to say what already has been explained, that every particular item must be caused by other particulars and not by the infinite and eternal items. He explains:

If a particular clap of thunder were necessitated *by* the laws of physics, there would be thunder everywhere and always. What we can say, according to Spinoza, is that every clap of thunder is caused by an antecedent particular, this causation proceeding *through* the laws of physics.²⁵

This picture of the causation of particulars makes it unproblematic for Spinoza to say that everything is caused by God or Nature, due to the two kinds of causal input: one is an infinite chain of finite items which is causally prior to particular events, and the other is a finite chain of infinite items, i.e. the sequence of ever more general physical laws ending in the attribute of extension²⁶. Each of these belongs to God or Nature, the former is a series of finite modes and the latter is the unfolding of one of God’s or Nature’s attributes in its infinite modes. This also supports EIp18, which says that God is the imminent, not the transitive, cause of all things. When a particular comes into being, causal influence is exerted on it from an antecedent particular, but its causation from God or Nature is indwelling, as embodying the laws or as ultimate subject for both particulars.

So we have the class of necessary propositions and the class of particular propositions. As we have seen, the latter kind cannot follow from the first kind. Bennett asks: does this entail that every particular proposition is contingent? Bennett is less bold than Curley in his conclusion, and says that it does so according to most systems of entailment logic, in which it is a theorem that a necessary proposition is entailed by every proposition. Other than this theorem, for which he finds no reason for believing that Spinoza was aware of, he simply states that he cannot find anything else in EIP28 that entails that particular propositions are contingent, and that the strongest pressure on Spinoza to allow that at least some propositions are contingent comes from the difficulty of doing good philosophy while staying faithful to the thesis that this is the only possible world. By the same token, many of Spinoza's

philosophical moves are invalid if there is no contingency:

For example, his uses of the concept of a thing's *essence*, meaning those of its properties which it could not possibly lack, are flattened into either falsehood or vacuous truth if there are no contingent truths; because then every property of every thing is essential to it. [...] See also 3p6d, which purports to show that nothing can, unaided, cause its own destruction; if all a thing's properties are essential to it, then this argument ought to conclude that nothing can, unaided, cause any change in itself²⁷.

The way I understand this, it would make the striving towards self-improvement and self-determinism considerably more difficult, and the pillars for Spinoza's ethical project would break under the weight of necessary essential properties. So there are good reasons for affirming that there are contingent truths, but at the same time Spinoza has fundamental assumptions which commit him to there being no contingent truth. Where does he, according to Bennett come out? E1p33 says that *things could not be produced by God in any other way or in any other order than they have been produced*. This has been interpreted by scholars like Bennett to say that there are no contingent truths²⁸. However, Bennett changed his mind after careful reading of the proposition, and concludes that it shows that what being asserted is just causal rationalism. The causal laws, which govern the universe in the sense that they determine the 'way' and the 'order' in which things are produce, could not possibly have been different. When the 'way' and the 'order' in which 'things are produced' merely refer to causal laws that govern the sequels of particulars, Spinoza is asserting the necessity of causal laws, not of all truths. It is very important to discriminate between the two causal inputs. The two chains mentioned above, the infinite chain of finite items and the finite chain of infinite items, point towards Spinoza's notions of necessary by reason of cause and necessary by reason of essence. Bennett remarks that by applying this distinction, the distinction between what necessity a thing has and where a thing gets it necessity from, Spinoza is adopting a concept of acquired necessity. The question "Where does P get its necessity from?" can be answered by saying that the necessity arises from acquired necessity and is there by reason of previous cause/s, developed through environmental forces. On the other hand, the question "What necessity does P have?" is a much more difficult one, at least on a meta-level, though we have tried to answer for God's/Nature's inherent necessity hitherto in the paper. Bennett compares this with acquired authority:

Your inherent excellence makes people conform to your wishes, whereas they conform to mine because authority was conferred on me by a political appointment. I may have as much authority as you, but the source is different²⁹.

And he then further explains that this provides a way for Spinoza to hold that (i) this is the only possible world, while still acknowledging that (ii) particular propositions are not necessary *in the way* that truths of logic and mathematics are, thus doing justice (i) to the demands of explanatory rationalism and (ii) to the prima facie evidence that there are contingent truths – and to EIp28. However, there's yet another problem with this. According to Bennett, Spinoza needs acquired necessity to be absolute; a proposition that has it must be true at all possible worlds because otherwise it would fail to meet the demands of explanatory rationalism. Therefore Bennett proposes the equation

P has acquired necessity = some Q that is absolutely necessary entails P.

This definition makes acquired necessity identical with necessity: any P satisfying it is as inherently necessary as any other. Bennett sums up by speculating that Spinoza flirted with the notion of acquired necessity and failed to grasp that it would not meet his needs.

§4: *The necessary monism and what it means*

p1: There must be a substance with every possible attribute.

p2: There cannot be two substances with an attribute in common.

p3: There cannot be more than one substance.

p4: This substance is equal to God, or Nature.

The three first postulates are Bennett's summary of EIp14, I add the fourth. Here we have in short what Spinoza is aiming to explain in the first book of the *Ethics*, and it is these notions that keeps running through the work in its entirety and determines later propositions. This substance monism proposes that the entire universe is not to be divided into several substances, and that there is no gap between the mental and the extended realm. It is all the same substance and when we experience the difference between something mental and something extended, it is the instantiated attributes, i.e., the same kind of 'stuff', now seen under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension. Further, the attributes have modes, infinite modes are sustaining and valid at all times and experienced through laws of nature, physical laws, logic and psychology. Finite modes are dependent on these, but have their own causal chain where infinite, or at least to us an unknown number, of causes do their work and produce

things, events &c in a necessary way and order. As we have seen there are different forms of necessity and although there are still disagreements I will hold that many aspects of this world have not absolute, but acquired necessity or relative necessity – but we can in a way say that also this form of necessity is absolute in its contingency.

It is important to keep clear what we really talk about in the discussion of necessity versus contingency. Intuitively, it is easy to confuse strict necessity with fatalism, and contingency with the other extreme of some sort of 'random' free will or events. Neither of these are attractive options practically or philosophically, and I do not think many people consciously holds them in their most extreme form, even though one finds several forms of more or less self-conscious theorizing about explanation outside of philosophy and science. Spinoza's aim to establish the centrality of cause and explanation in a philosophical work regarding *ethics*, shows that his goal was not only a purely universal ontological or scientific one, but also local and ethical, concerning singular individuals' freedom and contentment. Because we *do* deeply feel the need to understand what's going on, an interest in causes and explanations pervades our lives. Woodward writes aptly:

We wonder why our cars won't start, why corn grows better in one field than another, why a friend seemed particularly happy or gloomy yesterday. Scientists wonder why elementary particles have the mass they do, why the universe is, at a sufficiently large scale, (nearly) flat with a uniform mass distribution, why there are so many non-coding regions in the human genome, and why the dinosaurs became extinct³⁰.

Seeing that so many effects have direct impact on our lives it is important to understand their reasons and causes. Sure, for understanding in its own right, but also to make things happen, or for maximizing beneficial results. Roughly, the difference between description and causal explanation lies here: descriptive knowledge may be the basis for prediction, classification and systemization. Maybe we cannot change what is being described, but it allows for better understanding and fewer surprises and less bedazzlement. In causal explanations we identify factors or conditions allowing us to potentially manipulate them and cause change in the outcome, and thus it is of highly practical interest for humans.

So then, what explains a causal relation in itself? Is a causal chain leading up to some particular finite event necessary by reason of its *essence* or necessary by reason of its *cause*, so to speak? Spinoza's embracement of the principle of sufficient reason and of explanatory rationalism demands coherent and

logical explanations of everything, and every explicable thing is necessary the way it appears, from its particular previous conditions and previous antecedent causes. *This* is absolutely necessary. But *how* a given particular turns out is not set in stone in the borderline fatalistic necessary manner. We can descriptively predict, but if the chances are given we can also intervene and change the course to change a particular outcome, or we can leave it be. I do not think Spinoza would have any violent objections to this form of 'contingency'. The form of contingency he did oppose, however, was the one previously mentioned from EIp33s1, where he defines contingency as something we give the term 'contingent' because we know not better, we do not know the thing in question's nature or essence, or the causes which would have explained it fully are hidden from us. Hence Spinoza's criticism of "miracles" and aversion against whatever termed 'totally random'. This is not the least to say that there does not exist an extensive arsenal of hypothetically necessary items and propositions that may or may not come into being, just that for these to be actualized, they must have the necessary preceding conditions and causes. If these previous conditions were met, the arisen effect is necessary. If you mix together the ingredients to make a Molotov cocktail, you don't get surprised because you produced a Molotov cocktail and not a rainbow. That is a matter of necessary chemistry. The effect is necessary by reason of its cause, and one particular finite thing may or may not exist because that particular item is not essential to the whole, or to the substance.

In conclusion, I again repeat that I think it is appropriate to appeal to the thesis that Spinoza can be seen as a moderate necessitarian, consistently affirming both necessitarianism and its denial, or rather, affirming that his necessity was, accordingly, both absolute and relative. Spinoza's use of following-from necessity is a causal use of the modal transfer principle, as we have seen, if *y* follows from *x*, and *x* is necessary, then *y* must be necessary. This causal relation is also a conceptual relation ("*the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things*" EIIp7). Further, Spinoza writes in EIp35: *Whatever we conceive to be within God's power necessarily exists. We can conceive several outcomes, and this at least suggests that the way things are conceived or considered are modally significant. Modality is not wholly an extensional affair, it is also a chain of concepts or ideas reaching to the concept of God or Nature. Considering one particular finite mode in relation to the entire collection of modes, considered as a whole, the particular exists necessarily. But considered in itself, related to its own finite chain, the particular is contingent.*

I have already suggested how modality and monism is connected to ethics in Spinoza's thought. In the third and fourth chapter I will link this to Spinoza's notions of being active, determining oneself as to

achieve freedom from bondage, viewing the world under what he called *the aspect of eternity*, showing that his metaphysical conclusions have consequences for his ethical theory. But before that, it is time to see how Spinoza deals with the human mind. That will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter Two: The Mind-Body Problem.

Titling this chapter *The Mind-body Problem* might be a little exaggerated, but not misleading. The Mind-Body problem concerns the questions of how two such arguably different phenomena, properties or concepts as the *mental* and the *physical* are related to one another. In the history of philosophy a vast number of theories and possible solutions to the mind-body problem have been offered; some of them intersect, others have caused a vendetta between respective philosophers. I will not shed much new light on that general discussion. When I nevertheless call this chapter *The Mind-Body problem*, it is due to Spinoza's efforts to advance towards adequate knowledge on the subject matter. When Spinoza in the *Ethics* moves from the first book *Concerning God* to the second book *Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind*, he is taking a step back from the overall metaphysical framework he introduced – a framework which also included important cornerstones in his understanding of the physical/extended world's "make up" – and a step towards the human mind; what it is, and what its relation to matter is. We have already seen that Spinoza finds Descartes' solution untenable. There cannot be two substances, one that is thought and one that is extension. This solution makes the nature of communication between mind and body incomprehensible. Spinoza is thus carrying his metaphysical one substance doctrine of the entire universe over into the realm of human beings, bodies and minds. With this move he is trying to develop further his one substance doctrine of God or Nature, and the unity of the two attributes of thought and extension as something constituting our very nature. In humans this is body and mind, and this matter is important in our context because the linking of the one substance doctrine with parallelism of body and mind has important implications for Spinoza's ethics, and is thus important for my next chapters on, of course, Spinoza's ethics.

The last chapter established some of Spinoza's most fundamental principles.

- (1) There exists only one single substance, and this substance is identical to God or Nature.
- (2) God or Nature exists with absolute necessity.
- (3) This one substance comprises all possible attributes, of which we know *thought* and *extension*.
- (4) Everything that follows from God or Nature, i.e. infinite and finite modes follows also with necessity (but with respectively absolute and relative such).

Spinoza's task becomes thus to show how his underlying principles also apply to human minds and individuals. A problem (among others, but this is the one I will focus on for now) appears with (1) One

substance doctrine, and (3) concept dualism. In trying to reconcile these he proposes that *the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things* (EIIp7). But with this proposition, i.e. parallelism, he does not completely succeed in his efforts to show that the two *are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that* (EIIp7s).

Understanding the parallelism thesis may be key to further understanding of e.g. emotion, understanding, intent, willings and action. Hence this chapter, albeit its shortcomings on a supremely interesting topic, due to the limitations of this thesis, is here intended more as a bridge between the first chapter, with its focus on the metaphysical framework, and chapters three and four with their focus on ethics, willings, freedom, and human joy. This places mental causation in the spotlight, because it asks the question of how mental properties can or cannot be causally relevant to bodily behavior.

My main aim is to clarify what we mean when we talk about *Spinoza's Parallelism thesis*, i.e. what it is and what it implies. I will present three takes on parallelism, using the three Spinoza interpreters Bennett, Curley, and Della Rocca, and give a brief account of their respective interpretations. I do not intend to do a qualitative analysis, except to briefly touch upon whether, or to what degree Spinoza succeeds in his efforts on showing that thought and extension are really one and the same thing.

§5: *Parallelism*

The first important proposition explicit regarding parallelism is EIIp7: *The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things*. In the following proof, Spinoza writes that this is evident from EIIax.4; *for the idea of what is caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect*. This is rather cryptic, and I do not find it as evident as Spinoza did, nor do many others seem to. I will therefore present three interpretations below; that of Bennett, a subtle and speculative interpretation which claims that body and mind are *not* fully identical, but merely share a part, which Bennett calls "trans-attribute". Further, the thesis of Curley, which holds that Spinoza's parallelism simply means that the extended material world is a set of facts, and that the thinking or mental world is a set of propositions that express those facts. Lastly, the interpretation of Della Rocca, which hold the view that minds and bodies are fully identical in Spinoza, i.e. numerically identical, and that the referential opacity in Spinoza allows this identity without violating the demand that different attributes cannot interact.

However, a full understanding of Della Rocca's interpretation demands a detailed in-depth understanding of his argument for a new interpretation of attributes, and the necessary and sufficient conditions for representation in Spinoza that he works out. I will therefore limit myself to his criticism of Bennett's interpretation, and a few of his alternative solutions with focus on mind-body, or numeric-mode-identity – to get the general idea of it. Hopefully this overview will offer a picture on how the one substance doctrine is compatible with the idea of parallelism, and how parallelism can be understood as an important brick in the wall of Spinoza's ethics.

Bennett: Mental-Physical parallelism

Bennett holds that the mind and the body share a part, which he calls "trans-attribute mode", but he does not think the mind and the body are fully identical beyond that. This is his background for advancing a *mode-identity* interpretation, where minds and bodies are not fully identical, but all contain a trans-attribute feature, which can be combined with the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension, creating a mind and a body at the same time. Keeping in touch with the proposition of Spinoza that they are one and the same thing he calls this mode-identity because my mind and my body is a (trans-attribute) mode combined with the attribute of extension, and at the same time with the attribute of thought. Bennett's argumentation for this interpretation is the following.

Bennett writes that what Spinoza offers us is not mere parallelism, a *matching* of facts about the body with facts about the mind. Bennett means that Spinoza offer an explanation of why the matching holds. According to Bennett then, Spinoza's parallelism thesis is asymmetrical, with the body having primacy³¹. He finds his evidence for this in EIIp13s:

To determine what is the difference between the human mind and others, and how it surpasses them, we have to know the nature of the human body. In proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing or undergoing many things at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly.

Bennett finds accordingly that Spinoza allows some descriptions of mental items to depend on how the corresponding physical items are described, but he denies that this means deserting concept dualism. What he proposes is a thesis where the mental realm runs parallel to the physical realm:

I shall offer respectable reasons, which Spinoza could have had and I think did have, for accepting this drastically strong thesis that a mental realm runs parallel in the finest detail to the physical realm. But it will be seen that these reasons, which depend heavily on empirical fact and on certain broad assumptions about science, could not easily have been shaped up into the sort of demonstration Spinoza liked to give in the *Ethics*. I conjecture that that is why he instead offered the weak, cryptic argument that we find in the text³².

The said weak and cryptic argument is EIIp7. EIIp7 refers us to EIAx4, which says *the knowledge [cognition] of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge [cognition] of the cause*. The Latin word is *cognitio*, and, as in my translation, it is often translated as *knowledge*. Bennett uses *cognition*, because he means that there is abundant evidence that Spinoza means it broader than just knowledge; *Although 'cognition' can be a term in psychology, Spinoza is also willing to use it to mean 'concept', taking the latter to belong to logic*.³³ Thus, if EIAx4 is read in a logical way, it says that if x causes y then there is a conceptual link between them, this being a part of causal rationalism. This is how Spinoza construes the axiom in his other uses of it. However, Bennett continues, this cannot be the case here – in EIIp7d the axiom must be taking 'cognition' to stand for something mental: *If x causes y then a mental item related in a certain way to y must involve a mental item related in the same way to x. Otherwise the axiom cannot even seem to imply a parallelism between the physical and the mental*.³⁴

The alternative is to read both the axiom and the parallelism doctrine as logical. This is what Curley does. Bennett grants Curley a neat account of the parallelism, but will not accept that the *Ethics* is silent about mentality. Curley implies that Spinoza is willing to give the title 'Paul's mind' to the set of propositions which truly describes Paul's body³⁵ and Bennett declines to believe that Spinoza would use 'mind' in that eccentric fashion.³⁶ However, I will explicate Curley's view further below in the dedicated section.

Bennett's defense of a strong doctrine of psycho-physical parallelism is partly based on EIIp3, which together with its proof reads the following:

In God there is necessarily the idea both of his essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence.

Proof: For God can (Pr. 1, II) think infinite things in infinite ways, or (what is the same thing, by Pr. 16, I) can form the idea of his own essence and of everything that necessarily follows from it. But all that is in God's power necessarily exists (Pr. 35, I). Therefore, such an idea necessarily exists, and only in God.

So EIIp3 asserts according to Bennett the existence of a mental item corresponding to every physical item, whilst EIIp7 adds the further claim that this correspondence maps causal chains onto causal chains. These chains run parallel because Spinoza doesn't allow causal interaction between the attributes.

Conventional wisdom says that human beings cognitively assess a situation, which creates an emotion, which then again directs a response expressed by the body. We see someone who looks like an old friend at the airport, he waves and smiles, we become happy and hug the old friend; we see a snake, are frightened and run; we are insulted by someone, get angry and leave in indignation. It seems natural to assume that when all this is going on there are two causal chains that interact. A visual impact or someone's impact on my eardrums causes a belief to be acquired or brings back a previous experience or association, and that causes a bodily movement, like a hug, a sprint or walking away in resentment.

However, since Spinoza cannot allow this causal flow between thought and extension, Bennett writes, this gives him a reason for conjecturing that there is a psycho-physical parallelism in the universe. He further exemplifies:

I stab you, you feel pain, you cry out. Spinoza cannot allow the causal chain from stabbing to feeling to crying, but he must grant some deep, reliable connection is involved. His parallelism thesis lets him explain the data without admitting interaction, because it says that there are two causal chains:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Stab} &\rightarrow \text{O(Feeling)} \rightarrow \text{Cry} \\ \text{I(Stab)} &\rightarrow \text{Feeling} \rightarrow \text{I(Cry)}^{37} \end{aligned}$$

Bennett uses 'I(x)' to name the idea of x, and 'O(x)' to name the object of x. What he proposes is a critique of regular belief, where we often conclude that there is a causal flow both ways, where stabs cause pain, which cause cries. The belief is plausible, though, through regular patterns in our experience, and objection to parallelism is legitimate. Bennett is aware of the obstacles of parallelism, and asks, why not accept interactionism instead? All we have to do is to reject dualism or causal rationalism. However, his intention in the present work I am referring to is not to debate dualism and its merits, but to adopt it as a premise for the serious consideration of Spinoza. He continues to say that if we suspend dualism, the present topic is annihilated. The same does not hold for causal rationalism, and he therefore finds that mental-physical interaction is not downright impossible.³⁸ The answer 'yes' to two questions

determines now whether we shall find new strength in support of parallelism of causal chains: (1) Are there still reasons for thinking that mental-physical interaction does not happen? And (2) if so, would their force have been felt by Spinoza?

A flow from mental to physical would bring uncomfortable difficulties to physical science because then some questions could only be answered when we know how, if at all, that a physical system relates to a mind. There are also good reasons to believe that Spinoza must have been aware of the promises of the recently invented microscope, to object on scientific grounds that the mental intrudes on the physical.

It is more difficult to reject that the physical can act on the mental. However, denying causal flow from mental to physical but allow it the other way means that we commit ourselves to 'danglers'. Those are laws according to which causal influence runs along a certain channel and then stops, rather than producing effects that in their turn have a causal bearing on the rest of the world. From Spinoza's view that would be intolerable, and Bennett concludes that Spinoza could not make a case against physical to mental causal influence except by objecting to all causal flow between attributes.³⁹

However, if someone holds that physical systems have mental effects, it is natural to assume that they would say that some do (e.g. animal kingdom) and some do not (e.g. inanimate nature), Spinoza is under pressure to accept a form of panpsychism. The sort of panpsychism Spinoza embraces is not merely one, which says that no sharp mental/non-mental line divide the physical realm, rather the line encloses it.⁴⁰ This is not to say that physical things has a mind proper so-called. According to Bennett, all Spinoza needs to claim is that the phenomena we recognize as mental are complexes of, and are thus causally continuous with, phenomena associated with very simple physical things.

So, Spinoza thinks (i) that there is a mapping between the physical mental realms, and (ii) that there is no causal relation between them. He rejects on principle causal flow between attributes, but the panpsychism version of parallelism is hard to defend. If there is no causal flow between the two attributes, then what keeps them in step? Bennett proposes a 'mode-identity' thesis. We know from EIIp7s that Spinoza viewed thinking substance and extended substance as one and the same thing, seen under different attributes. This means that between a physical particular and its mental correlate there is not only a correlation but an identity – that is, $x=I(x)$ – and that is why parallelism holds. Bennett explains:

The clue to that is his thesis that these particulars are modes, ways that reality is, properties of the universe. If my mind is a mode and my body is a mode, and my mind is my body, it follows that my mind is the same mode as my body. I submit that that is Spinoza's doctrine: his thesis about the identity of physical and mental particulars is really about the identity of properties. He cannot be saying that physical P1 = mental M1; that is impossible because they belong to different attributes. His thesis is rather if P1 is systematically linked with M1, then P1 is extension-and-F for some differentia F such that M1 is thought-and-F.⁴¹

To sum up:

A: Spinoza must assert that the extended substance is the thinking substance, and

B: that each extended mode is a thinking mode and conversely, and

C: the thesis of mental-physical parallelism is asserted through A and B⁴²

Now Bennett has to reconcile Spinoza's dualism with his mode-identity interpretation. He does so by stressing that the *concept* dualism is not threatened, *what we have to do is drop the idea that there is a concept corresponding to every property*.⁴³ Bennett writes that Spinoza insists that causal or logical connections depend on what is intellectually graspable. And the trans-attribute differentiae cannot be intellectually grasped or conceived, i.e., there are no concepts of them, and so, since we do not get *property* dualism, the conflict vanishes.

So, Bennett does think that there is some trans-attribute feature, what he calls "Differentiae F", and this can be added to extension (extension and F) and to thought (thinking and F). This way Bennett can make sense of the attributes as something that are really distinct from each other, whilst at the same time they assert the claim of identity made by Spinoza in EIIp7s. Bennett admits that this is not what Spinoza explicitly says, but holds that it is a plausible interpretation which solves several of Spinoza's difficult problems. The unabstractable differentiae suggests that Bennett holds that at the very ground of Spinoza's ontology there exists some sort of a "fundamental feature", but conceptually we can't grasp it without either thought or extension, but in return, when we grasp whatever feature of the universe, it can be grasped both physical and mental. But what is this trans-attribute differentiae F that Bennett is attributing to Spinoza? Bennett himself asks:

Why should we believe that the facts about my body and my mind are explained by there being an F which is instantiated in (Extended and F) and also in (Thinking and F), if we cannot abstract it from the former combination and track it across the latter one?⁴⁴

Bennett made a subtle account of a very difficult subject, but he has been bending the text and attributed views to Spinoza that he did not express, and which we cannot for sure know he held. So when he answers his own question from above, it is by putting words in Spinoza's mouth:

In the face of this, Spinoza could reasonably say: 'you are right that I could not adduce a single instance of the phenomenon I am talking about. To single out an instance would be to abstract, so it wouldn't be an instance. But I do have a general reason for thinking that there are these unabstractable trans-attribute differentiae. If there are, the parallelism is deeply and beautifully explained; if there are not, it is a strange universal, brute fact'.⁴⁵

This is a speculative move from Bennett, but we shall let him get away with that for now, and take a look on how Curley interprets Spinoza's parallelism. After that, in the section on Della Rocca, I will attend to his criticism of Bennett's account.

Curley: Logical parallelism

Curley takes, as mentioned, as different route from Bennett. First of all, Curley substitutes the term *idea* with *proposition*.⁴⁶ He holds that ideas for Spinoza involve activity of mind (EIIp49s). Spinoza's ideas are of the kind that follow from and entail one another, and they can be true or false in the sense of agreeing with their object. This makes Curley suggest:

that we can do reasonable justice to Spinoza's concept of the relation between thought and extension if we think of the relation between thought and extension as an identity of true proposition and fact. It is misleading to say, even though Spinoza himself says it, that a true idea agrees with the object (read "a true proposition agrees with the fact"), because the mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing expressed in two different ways. The fact and the true proposition are the same thing, expressed or viewed in two different ways.⁴⁷

This means that to talk about something extended, a fact, having causal relations with other facts is seeing a mode under the attribute of extension. To talk about it as a proposition or idea, with logical/causal relations to other propositions is seeing the same (mode) thing or fact under the attribute of thought. The propositions which make up a complete and accurate description of the world are identical with the facts that they describe, and the causal relations between facts have their counterpart in the logical relations between propositions (cf. EIIp7). Curley suggests therefore a logical reading,

where the thinking mode under the attribute of thought, which is the counterpart or identical to an extended mode or a concrete fact under the attribute of extension, is a proposition bearing logical relations to other propositions. Wherever you have a two facts standing in causal relation, you have also two propositions standing in a logical relation, and the world of extension and of thought are not two, but one.⁴⁸

Curley gives the somewhat roughly analogy of how Aristotle relates form to matter. A concrete object is a unity, which can be thought of as separable into two elements: that is the form, or universal element, capable of characterizing many objects; and the matter, or particular element, which makes the object *this* particular object. Further Curley assumes that a concrete situation is also analyzable into two elements, an abstract pattern, which can characterize many situations; and a particularizing element, which makes it *this* particular situation. However, there is a difficulty to this analogy. The relation of form to matter is a many-one relation, and a plurality of forms may characterize one and the same object. The same might be said of propositions to fact, or to actions. This is something Donald Davidson nicely describes in *Actions, Reasons and Causes*:

I flip the switch, turn on the light, and illuminate the room. Unbeknownst to me I also alert a prowler to the fact that I am home. Here I need not have done four things, but only one, of which four descriptions have been given.⁴⁹

What is difficult about this is that Spinoza requires the relation between modes to be a one-one relation. So what are the identity conditions for facts? Curley admits the question is a very obscure one. Curley needs a correspondence theory of truth to interpret Spinoza, a view that supposes that there are just as many facts as there are distinct true propositions.⁵⁰

Suppose the fact that my watch is made of gold is a mode of the attribute of extension. Then the true proposition that my watch is made of gold is a mode of the attribute of thought. The true proposition is the idea in thought of the mode of extension, it is its form, or, if you like, its mind. I think Spinoza would be willing enough to say this. When he says that the human mind is the idea of the human body (EIIp13), he is not crediting the human body with anything that any other mode of extension does not have.⁵¹

This is what Bennett criticizes, as I mention above. According to Bennett, this correlation between facts and true propositions gets Spinoza's parallelism doctrine out of any conceivable trouble, but the price is to make the doctrine empty and lacking any metaphysical significance, and besides, the use of 'mind'

becomes very eccentric.⁵² Della Rocca finds Curley's reading problematic as well. He says that ideas can't be abstract propositions or mere logical entities because for Spinoza ideas are often equated with perceptions and cases of knowledge, and "perception" and "knowledge" certainly seem to be psychological terms.⁵³ Curley speaks of *ideas of ideas* as a necessary condition for knowledge and consciousness to rise, and in identifying the possession of an idea of an idea with consciousness, he describes it as a special kind of proposition about a proposition, namely what is sometimes called propositional attitude,⁵⁴ i.e., a relation between a person and a proposition, such as belief, desire, intention, &c. Given what we know of how Curley interprets ideas, going from that to propositional attitudes seems to me somewhat strange, but at least he opens up for psychology.

In explaining for this, Curley has to account of how external things affect us and how we can have ideas of them. He refers to (EIIp17s):

[...] this gives a clear understanding of the difference between the idea, e.g., of Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter's mind, and on the other hand the idea of Peter which is in another man, say Paul. The former directly explicates the essence of Peter's body and does not involve existence except as long as Peter exists. The latter indicates the constitution of Paul's body rather than the nature of Peter; and so, while that constitution of Paul's body continues to be, Paul's mind will regard Peter as present to him although Peter may not be in existence.

Curley asks: *How is it that the idea of Peter which is in Paul is appropriately described as an idea of Peter when what it agrees with is a modification of Paul's body?* This is not merely a mental image, because Spinoza explicitly rules this out a number of places.⁵⁵ So Paul's idea of Peter is not a mental image, but rather a conception of thought (EIIp48s). But how then, is it an idea of Peter?

Our question has an answer, if not a satisfactory one. EIIp16-17 gives us justification for saying that an idea that "indicates" the constitution of Paul's body is an idea of Peter: the idea in Paul's mind has as an object a modification of Paul's body that "involves" the nature of Peter.⁵⁶

What it is for a modification of Paul's body to involve Peter's nature is according to EIIp17, its demonstration and corollary, is that when a human body is affected in a way which involves the nature of some external body, the human mind will regard this external body as existing until the mind undergoes a new affection or modification which excludes the said presence of the body. But the mind is also able to regard as present external bodies by which the human body has been once affected, even if they do not

longer exist. Further, these ideas of external objects are confused, according to EIIp28 and its definition:

The ideas of the affections of the human body, insofar as they are related only to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused.

The ideas of the affections of the human body involve the nature both of external bodies and of the human body itself (Pr. 16, II), and must involve the nature not only of the human body but also of its parts. For affections are modes in which parts of the human body (Post. 3), and consequently the body as a whole, are affected. But (Prs. 24 and 25, II) an adequate knowledge of external bodies, as also of the component parts of the human body, is not in God insofar as he is considered as affected by the human mind, but insofar as he is considered as affected by other ideas. Therefore, these ideas of affections, insofar they are related only to the human mind, are like conclusions without premises; that is, as is self evident, confused ideas.

This means that among all the propositions in A , there are some which describe Paul, but at least some of these propositions describing Paul is not solely deducible from Paul alone, and deducing the latter will require some propositions describing facts about bodies external to Paul's.

Suppose one such proposition, say p , requires as a premise for its deduction from the laws of nature the proposition of q , where q describes some fact about Peter's body. In such a case we shall say that p involves q , which describes Peter's nature and therefore p "asserts" (*ponit*) the existence of the nature of Peter's body. That is, p would be an idea which primarily indicates the constitution of Paul's body, but it is also an idea of Peter.⁵⁷

Curley adds that if this is a correct account of how Spinoza thought that we have knowledge of the external world, then we can begin to see why he regarded that knowledge as necessarily inadequate. I will say a bit more about inadequate and adequate ideas below in §7. For now, since Curley annihilates several of the problems related with parallelism due to his logical reading of the doctrine, I will only say a few concluding words before I move on to Della Rocca's account.

My intuitive main like *and* dislike with Curley is his logical reading. The way he matches and identifies the extended reality with its proper meaning or proposition is tempting, and cancels out several annoying problems in Spinoza. Maybe that also is part of the problem. I will repeat what Bennett notes; this leaves Spinoza's doctrine tame, empty and in lack of metaphysical significance. It just seems *too* easy. Maybe Curley's interpretation is right, and other interpretations complicate it beyond recognition. But the way I see it, a problem with Curley's logical reading is that it is in a way "anthropomorphizing" the reality in order to make it fit into a limited human logical motivation, and it leaves me wondering whether it is a parallelism between a real sphere of extension and a real sphere of thought, or merely a parallelism

between a sphere of extension and a sphere of construed language "made to fit our needs".

Della Rocca: Numeric identity

As I mentioned earlier, I cannot within the limits of this paper attend to the whole complexity of Della Rocca's skilful interpretation, and a good account would demand more pages than I have to my disposal. However, I will illuminate some of his views on Spinoza's theory of the mind-body problem through his criticism of Bennett. In that way I can also shed some light on the contrast between two interpretations, and by doing so, on the general discussion.

Where Bennett holds that the mode-identity depends on a certain unabstractable feature to connect and partly identify the modes, Della Rocca defends a full, numeric identity. He states that *mental particulars, such as the mind, are identical with physical particulars, such as the body*.⁵⁸ He also interprets EIIp7s as stating a *numeric* identity, i.e., he emphasizes the "*one and the same thing*" in the famous scholium, and likewise in EIIIp2s, where Spinoza says:

The mind and the body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension.

And EIIp21s:

[...] we showed that the idea of the body and the body itself – that is (Pr. 13, II), mind and body – are one and the same individual thing, conceived now under the attribute of thought and now under the attribute of extension.

Of the above passages Della Rocca draws that is it difficult not to interpret them as committing Spinoza to a numerical identity between the mind and the body. *After all, to be one and the same thing is, it seems, to be numerically identical*.⁵⁹ Bennett rejects the numerical identity interpretation, presumably because of the contradiction it implies in allowance of causal interaction between the mental and the physical, and thus violating Spinoza's explicit proposition EIIIp2: *The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion and rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else)*.

Della Rocca denies that the claim that a mode of extension and a mode of thought are numerically

identical is incompatible with Spinoza's causal or explanatory separation between thought and extension. Rather he argues, in the defense of his numerical identity interpretation, he claims that it is partly *because* of the explanatory barrier (and not in spite of it) that Spinoza holds the numerical identity view. In defending this interpretation Della Rocca relies on what he calls Spinoza's views on referential opacity of certain contexts. This referential opacity is something he draws upon when he rejects Bennett's subtle but wholly unsuccessful interpretation of Spinoza's view on the mind-body problem.⁶⁰

Referential transparency and referential opacity

When contexts are referentially transparent, any way of referring to the same object within the context will generate a sentence that has the same truth-value, and the co-referring terms (thought and extension) are exchangeable without changing the truth-value. In referential opaque contexts, exchanging the terms can change the truth-value of the sentence that completes the context. Della Rocca bases his example and analysis here on Quine.⁶¹ A referentially *transparent* context would be the following:

Let's say that there is an evil spy at work in John's neighborhood, and, further, that this spy is John's brother. In such a situation, the following claims are all true:

- (1) The spy is a spy.
- (2) The spy is John's brother.
- (3) John's brother is a spy.

Notice that (3) follows from (1) and (2). That is, if (1) and (2) is true, then it must also be the case that (3) is true. We can see that for any term "a" that refers to this person, the sentence "is a spy" is true. This shows that the context "... is a spy" is referentially *transparent*: The truth value of the sentence resulting from completing the context with a term that refers to a particular object does not depend on what particular term is used to refer to that object. In general, a context of the form "... is the G" (or "... is a G") is referentially transparent if and only if an inference of the following is valid:

- (4) a is the G
 - (5) a = b
- Therefore, (6) b is the G.⁶²

On the other hand, a context is referentially *opaque* if the truth-value of the sentence completing the

context does depend on which particular term is used to refer to that object:

Although John knows there is a spy at work in the neighbourhood, he is completely unaware that his brother is the dastardly individual. In this situation it would, of course, be true to say that:

(7) John believes that the spy is a spy.

It would also be true to say that:

(8) The spy is John's brother.

However, in light of John's ignorance, it is *not* the case that:

(9) John believes that John's brother is a spy.

Claim (9) does not follow from the truth (7) and (8). This shows that whether or not a sentence of the form "John believes that ... is a spy" is true depends on the particular term used to pick out the individual in question. Thus the context "John believes that ... is a spy" is referentially opaque if and only if an inference of the form of (4) through (6) is invalid. ⁶³

Let's now turn back to Della Rocca's rejection of Bennett's interpretation to see why this is especially important. Della Rocca maintains that Bennett's first mistake is his reluctance to say that the mind is numerically identical with the body for Spinoza. This reluctance stems, as previously stated, from Bennett's thinking that if the mind and the body were numerically identical, then the mind, like the body, would be conceived through extension.

(10) Mode of extension A causes mode of extension B.

(11) Mode of extension A = Mode of thought 1.

Therefore, (12) Mode of thought 1 causes mode of extension B. ⁶⁴

And as we already have seen, Bennett stresses Spinoza's view that no mode of thought can be conceived through extension. However, Della Rocca says that this reason for rejecting the numerical identity interpretation depends on Bennett's implicit view that the context "... is conceived through extension" is referentially transparent.⁶⁵ But as Della Rocca argues, Spinoza would hold that this context is not transparent, but referentially opaque. He defends this idea by saying that Spinoza considers God to be the *immanent* cause of each finite mode (EIp18) whereas a finite mode would be the *transitive* cause of another finite mode. Spinoza says that whether it is true that God is the cause of a finite mode depends on how God is considered. EIIP6 explains:

The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.

With this Della Rocca suggests that for Spinoza (a) The thinking substance causes mode of thought 1, is true, whereas (b) The extended substance causes mode of thought 1, is false:

The fact that Spinoza sees (a) as true and (b) as false, despite the identity of the thinking substance and the extended substance, shows that for Spinoza contexts involving immanent causation are referentially opaque [...]. Thus Spinoza thinks the truth-value of certain immanent causal claims is sensitive to the way in which the immanent cause is described.⁶⁶

Della Rocca believes that "what the intellect perceives ... as" in the definition of attribute (E1def.4) points towards opacity. Bennett uses instead this definition to support his thesis that the attributes do not really constitute substance although they are perceived of doing so, thus opening up for the trans-attribute notion. Two important implications if Della Rocca is right in saying that "... is thinking" and "... is extended" are opaque, is that it helps us understand Spinoza's puzzling emphasis on expression and conception when he claims that the mind and the body are one and the same thing *expressed* in two ways or *conceived* in two ways. This is possibly why Spinoza says that my body is a particular thing *expressed* in a certain way rather than simply saying that my body is that thing. Because of the opacity of attribute contexts, whether or not it is true to say that a given thing is extended and has the property of being a body depends on the terms or concepts used to express that thing. Della Rocca believes that Spinoza is signalling this dependence of the property of being a body on the manner of expressing a thing in his claim that my body is that thing expressed in a certain way. And the same goes for my mind, and this explains why Spinoza does not say it is a certain thing, but a thing *expressed in a certain way*.⁶⁷

§6: *Substance Monism and Mental Causation*

For Spinoza there is only one substance with all possible attributes. While the identity of thinking modes and extended modes are clearly suggested in Spinoza's system, it is extremely difficult to extract a formal argument for this claim's truth (as we have seen from the respective interpreters above). Unlike, for example, Descartes, where mind and body could be conceived separately due to them being two separate substances, this is not the case for Spinoza and he argues that both mind and body belong to the same substance but are different expressions or ways to conceive different attributes of this one substance. That is, the two attributes can be conceived independently, the one without the other, but it is

not the case that there are two substances or "different things" existing separately.

Before I account for Spinoza's theory of knowledge I wish to briefly attend to my last point: Does Spinoza succeed in his efforts to show that thought and extension are one and the same thing?

Spinoza avoided the problems of Descartes' failed interactionism and Leibniz' pre-established harmony. But as we have seen, his own parallelism is in no way unproblematic. Some of the responsibility of the disagreements can be put on Spinoza's obscure style of writing and argumentation in the *Ethics*. But the problems philosophers have had, and still have, of determining exactly what to make out of his argumentation for mind and body being *one and the same* thing, *seen* under different attributes, makes it tempting to say that Spinoza despite his efforts did not quite effortlessly manage to *show* that they in fact *are* one and the same thing, or *how*. However, if we for sake of Spinoza's system accept the premise of substance monism and unity, the attributes can show the variety in the universe without jeopardizing this unity. If the unity of thought and extension in humans, i.e., body and mind are likewise accepted, we get a better gist of how we, according to Spinoza's picture, belong in this universe as necessary modes of God or Nature, not a kingdom within a kingdom, but a part of the whole. Then we can see how this premise weaves into the big picture, from the modal metaphysics, to the nature of the human mind, and, as we shall see, his practical philosophy.

Another important aspect in this big picture before I attend to the practical and ethical part, is Spinoza's theory of knowledge. This I will briefly account for below in §7, before I move on to chapter 3, *Ethics and Freedom*.

§7: *Knowledge*

The fact that the order and connection of our thoughts are causally just as necessary as any physical causal chain leads us to Spinoza's theory of knowledge. We saw Curley touch upon them lightly above, and there is no doubt that there is a difference between confused ideas and adequate ideas. This is important for Spinoza not only of pure epistemological reasons, because in knowledge we ought to strive for true and adequate knowledge, but because of *ethical* reasons. Adequate ideas lead to understanding and freedom, whereas confused ideas leads to bondage and suffering. Spinoza explains in

EIIp38-45.⁶⁸

The first and lowest kind of knowledge is imprecise and fragmentary, and Spinoza calls it *opinion* or *imagination*; haphazard encounters in the external world, superficial sensory data, imagination and hearsay, this is "random experience" and we use different images to form ideas out of scarce building material, so to speak. We saw it above in EIIp28; ideas of external object are ideas of modifications of our body, which cannot be understood solely through other modifications of our body, but only through the modifications of other bodies. Confusing indeed, to say the least. Mixed with prejudice and a number of preconceived opinions, the ideas borne out of this are more often than not highly inadequate. Also, seeing many things of the same kind, we start forming what Spinoza calls *universals*, but I think *generalizations* fits to the description just as well (e.g., "cat", "dog", "man", "Jew", "Muslim", "rock star"). Although this sometimes might be helpful, the universal is often vague and general, and does not capture the uniqueness of every individual. Hence, universals often obscure what they claim to explain, and different people will often have different ideas of universals, a source to many conflicts. In a conflict between two inadequate generalizations, even if we "win" the argument, we have proven nothing; only (often through rhetoric) that one fragment of imagination is superior to another.

The *knowledge of second kind* or *reason* is something Spinoza draws from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things. *Common notions* may sound a lot like universals, but they are properties common to things, that they necessary share which is the case since everything is part of the same universe. The common notions do not depend on universals, but transgress the boundaries we draw with universals and ask what the different individuals have in common. Since the common notions concern actual properties of things we also move from inadequate knowledge or opinion to adequate knowledge. In the case of generalizations, the universals stand between us and true knowledge. In the case of common notions we are much more likely to consider the object in question in relation to [common notion or property x, y and z] and hence we are more likely to reach true conclusions.

The third kind of knowledge is what Spinoza refers to as *intuition*. This is a knowledge, which according to Spinoza *proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things* (EIIp40s). We can see this as the parts and the whole of nature. We are not only in reason seeing the common notions in things, we fully see their

necessity and interconnection, their belonging and their individual essence *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, under the light of eternity, "God's eye", or, the really big picture of things. Spinoza explains this in EVp29s:

We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them as related to a fixed time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. Now the things that are conceived as true or real in this second way, we conceive under a form of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.

Chapter Three: Ethics and Freedom

Spinoza titled his main work *Ethika – Ethics* – and his goal was to give a geometrical demonstration of an ethical doctrine that followed from all the previous propositions as necessary as any other law of nature. This is no prescriptive ethics, it is a more descriptive one, but as we will see, Spinoza also offers "oughts". However, for Spinoza the primary ethical problem we need to solve is that we are in bondage. Here it is appropriate to wonder, has not Spinoza himself asserted human bondage by proposing a metaphysical framework based on the necessity of all things? How is freedom compatible with Spinoza's philosophical system? This shows clearly Spinoza's compatibilist views: he asserts strict determinism, and at the same time he asserts human freedom. But this freedom will emerge only when we understand the necessary causes of things – you are free when you understand determinism and the eternal laws. A part of being in bondage is caused by the illusion that we ourselves can be our own legislator, and that we pick freely between alternatives. Throughout his writings Spinoza makes no distinction between the various phenomena he is explaining, whether it is laws of nature or psychology. He treats and discusses both in the same way. The consequence is that he considers the human mind and emotions as if they were *lines, planes or bodies* (EIII preface). Emotions follow from causes with the same necessity as everything else does, and can thus be understood inadequately or adequately. When they are understood adequately we regain some intellectual control over them.

A few words on some different conceptions of freedom can be enlightening here. Freedom has occupied thinkers through the history of philosophy and is still a much debated topic. Freedom is something that has been considered not only in philosophy, but also in areas of political theory, legislation, articulation of human rights. &c. Positive and negative freedom are important concepts in these areas. Positive freedom is characterized as '*the freedom to*' or '*the right to*'. This may include propositions like the freedom to life, liberty and safety, freedom to speak, freedom to be recognized without discrimination before the law, freedom to necessary medical care, freedom to own property, freedom to thought, conscience and religion. Similarly, negative freedom is '*freedom from*', like freedom from torture, slavery and inhuman treatment, freedom from prosecution based on race, religion, sexual orientation, &c, freedom from arbitrary arrest, and so on.

Sometimes the positive and negative freedom can be incompatible. E.g. can one person's negative freedom *from* being in arrest or detention harm other people's positive freedom *to* public safety. Spinoza

establishes the positive *freedom to philosophize* in the *Theological-Political Treatise*⁶⁹. In the same place Spinoza confirms nature's *sovereign right to do all that she can do; that is, Nature's right is co-extensive with her power*. I have already said that for Spinoza, rights, or freedom, and power is one and the same thing. Inadequate understanding of this particular conception of freedom can easily lead to misunderstandings: in a world where freedom is power, how can there be unforfeitable rights for everybody? I will return to this question in §9.

Freedom is further connected with normativity. Norms are propositions with practical and action-oriented import, and they imply *ought*-type statements or assertions. However, every *ought* imply *can*. We do not say "that brick ought to apologize", "that infant ought to stop crying and clean up after himself", or "that tiger ought to eat carrots instead of wild boars". But when we say that grown, functioning humans are *free*, that implies that we conceive as possible the act of choosing to do a certain action or refrain from it, and when we say that the *will* is free, it means the same thing, that a person *can*, wilfully and consciously, *choose* to do either this or that action. This is not right, according to Spinoza. Our wills are not immune to the wholly determined nature they are modes in. However, we will see that this is nevertheless compatible with freedom and responsibility.

Negative freedom is largely freedom from external and internal restraints. But we are constantly being acted upon and affected by external causes, and we are overwhelmed by our own appetites and emotions, and act from this. In this causal climate, being unaffected is not an option for Spinoza (e.g. Ep. 21: *our freedom lies not in.. indifference, but in the mode of affirmation and denial, so that the less indifference there is... the more we are free.*). Hence, we should ideally get to know the causal mechanism of external and internal affections intimately, in that way we replace passivity of mind with activity of mind (reason). Spinoza does firmly believe that we with activity of mind can replace passive affects with active affects and be "our own causes" i.e. determine ourselves. Adequate understanding is key here, we need to understand necessary causes and effects, both external and internal. As I wrote above in §2, according to Spinoza we imagine we have free will because we are aware of our wantings and desires, but not of the causes of these. When we fail to accomplish something desired, we often despair and become unhappy, blame others or our own weakness of will. Spinoza wants to break the traditional link between freedom and will, and rather connect our wantings to the modal necessity explained in chapter one. Deleuze writes:

Necessity being the only modality of all that is, the only cause that can be called free is one "that exists through the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined by itself alone to act." Thus God, who is constituted by infinity of attributes, is the cause of all things in the same sense that he is cause of himself. God is free because everything follows necessarily from his essence, without his conceiving possibilities or contingencies. What defines freedom is an "interior" and a "self" determined by necessity. One is never free through one's will and through that, on which it patterns itself, but through one's essence and through that which follows from it.⁷⁰

Here we see the close connection of the ontological propositions of necessity and freedom. Spinoza's ethics is not a moral science, but a practical philosophy of how to live well through understanding and reconciliation with a determined ontology.

Spinoza attends to the nature and origin of the emotions in part III, and human bondage, or the strength of the emotions in part IV. In this chapter I will explain what ethics is for Spinoza, and how it is related to the topics of previous chapters of this paper. I will do this in light of how Spinoza sees the human emotions in §8. In §9 I will pick up the concept of *conatus* and show how it relates to freedom and self-subsistence. The conclusions will tell us something about Spinoza's notion of will. In §10 questions about virtue arise, and I will show that although Spinoza does not fit into the traditional conception of vices and virtues given in prescriptive ethics, and despite his rejection of free will, his concept of virtue is an important contribution to ethical discourse and still highly relevant today. This explication of Spinoza's views on ethics, striving and virtue will be a helpful step towards the final chapter, where I aim to show the practical implications of Spinoza's ethics.

§8: *What is Spinozistic Ethics?*

Curley writes in his postscript to *Spinoza's Metaphysics* that his account for Spinoza tends to suggest that he was primarily a metaphysician with an interest in philosophy of science, whose views happened to have consequences for ethics, whereas Spinoza's writings and the title of his major works suggest rather that his concern with ethics was primary and his interest in metaphysics secondary. *To ignore the moral convictions that underlay the metaphysics is to leave out of account what mattered most to Spinoza.*⁷¹ The metaphysics and the ethics are two aspects of one and the same thing for Spinoza. To understand the whole universe, as far as we can, and acquire adequate knowledge is crucial to understand the parts, or the modes of it, and thereby ourselves and our own understanding and

emotions. Understanding our passions and affects will, according to Spinoza, necessarily help us turn into adequate causes, where we can be able to free ourselves from bondage and act according to our nature. I wrote above in §2 about "leeway", in which all truths are necessary, but not necessarily in the same sense. For Spinoza perfection or reality (which is the same thing for Spinoza, by EII def 6) is a matter of *degrees*, it can be seen several places in his writings.⁷² We should briefly note how Spinoza, as an early modernist, used the term *reality*:

Spinoza's conception of reality or of real things contains a number of basic, more or less Aristotelian intuitions that, combined with typical Spinozistic insights, are transformed into a revolutionary worldview. These intuitions are: first, that nothing can be real unless it is a "so and so" – that is, unless it has a certain particular nature or essence; second, that the degree of reality depends on the "richness" of the nature of the thing; third, that a real thing is prototypically a substance or something that "is in itself" and that is the basis of "affections" that are "in another" (Spinoza call these "modes"); and, fourth, that a thing cannot be real ("werk-elijk" in Dutch) unless it is working, unless it is a power actively producing "effects".⁷³

In other words, Spinoza uses reality as a kind of "property" that a thing can have. Properties can be more or less "present", i.e. working or functioning. A *perfect* thing, which Spinoza equates with *most* reality, is thus a thing lacking nothing in essence; it achieves its purpose, fulfils its functions.

The point here is, that this indicates that Spinoza holds open the possibility of change, that something belongs to our essence and we can move from less reality to more, we can increase in perfection; change to become freer and happier, and that we as external causes have the power to be adequate causes in the world. I will now attend to Spinoza's theory of emotions before saying more about this, and about how increasing degrees of understanding and rationality is vital to ethics in spinozistic context.

Emotions

By *Emotion* [*affectus*] Spinoza understands *the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections*. He adds that if we can be adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion he understands activity, otherwise passivity (EIIIdef.3). When we are not able to control and restrain the emotions, Spinoza says we are in bondage:

For a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies

that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse (EIV preface).

Spinoza says there are three primary kinds of affect – *Leticia*, i.e. pleasure or joy, *tristitia*, i.e. displeasure, pain or sadness. The third is *cupiditas*, i.e. desire or appetite. All the other emotions Spinoza lists are subspecies. The first two jointly comprise the emotional affects, the ones that essentially include a component of feeling. The third one, desire, I will treat separately in §10 *conatus*.

A word on the translation: I have in different texts seen *laetitia* and *tristitia* translated as all the terms I use above, and although we can easily understand that what Spinoza aims to do is to contrast pleasant and unpleasant states of mind (and body), I agree with Bennett that 'joy' and 'sorrow' are too specific, and that the German translation of *lust* and *unjust*⁷⁴ are more covering. I will therefore, following Bennett, use *pleasure* and *unpleasure*⁷⁵ henceforward.

The pleasant and unpleasant states of mind are what change us to a greater or lesser perfection or reality according to Spinoza. More reality or perfection means more power to act and that leads us to a greater degree of vitality and self-sufficiency. Pleasure and unpleasure are passages from lesser to greater/greater to lesser perfection. Spinoza explains:

2. Pleasure is man's transition from a state of less perfection to a state of less perfection.
3. Pain [unpleasure] is man's transition from a state of greater perfection to lesser perfection.

Explication: I say "transition" for pleasure is not perfection itself. If a man were to be born with the perfection to which he passes, he would be in possession of it without the emotion of pleasure. This is clearer in the case of pain [unpleasure], the contrary emotion. For nobody can deny that pain consists in the transition to a state of less perfection, not in the less perfection itself, since man cannot feel pain insofar as he participates in any degree of perfection (EIII *Definitions of the Emotions*).

Spinoza traces all emotions back to the primary three of pleasure, unpleasure and desire. Love and hate are respectively defined as pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause and unpleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause. Among other emotions Spinoza defines as being accompanied by the idea of an external thing are contempt, aversion, devotion, derision, hope and fear, confidence and despair, pity, envy and compassion. Among the emotions Spinoza lists which are accompanied by an internal thing as cause follows self-contentment, humility, repentance, pride, self-abasement, honour and shame. The emotions Spinoza links to desire are among others longing, gratitude

and benevolence, anger, revenge and cruelty, timidity, politeness and ambition.

Spinoza makes as we have seen (EIIIdef.3) a distinction between *passive* and *active* emotions. Active emotions are to be preferred because they involve activity of mind, reason. The preceding definitions are helpful:

- (1) I call that an adequate cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause. I call that an inadequate or partial cause whose effect cannot be understood through the said cause alone.
- (2) I say that we are active when something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause; that is, (by preceding Def.), when from our nature there follows in us or externally to us something which can be clearly and distinctly understood through our nature alone. On the other hand, I say that we are passive when something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause.

The distinction is, I think, similar to the one Spinoza makes between *perception* and *conception* in EIIdef3exp: *I say "conception" rather than "perception" because the term perception seems to indicate that the mind is passive to its object whereas conception seems to express an activity of the mind.* It is as if Spinoza wants to say that a passive perception – or a passive emotion – is something that "hits" you, you are not the cause of it, whereas a conception - or an active emotion – involves a contemplative aspect, reason is involved and you are the cause of it. Humans are true to their own nature when they are being reasonable; we are after all a rational animal. Cognition, causation and action are tightly connected in Spinoza's system. And his ethics is all about pursuing our nature of being able to act, instead of just being acted upon. Included in this is a becoming of who we are. When we are in bondage under passive emotions, we do not completely understand, and in the same way as inadequate ideas breed other inadequate ideas, a chain reaction of passive emotions occur. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering. A man can hate his enemies, but his hate doesn't hurt them, rather it makes the hating man's days into a hellish turmoil. That is, he is in bondage.

What would Spinoza have the man do, then? Perhaps his anger is justified, perhaps he is entitled to at least some indignation or contempt. This leads us to active emotions. Although he says in EVp2 that if we remove an emotion from the idea of its external cause, then love and hatred toward the external cause, and also vacillations, that arise from these emotions will be destroyed, I do not think this means that Spinoza is aiming to annihilate every trace of human emotional life. What he says it that we should turn the passive emotions into active ones. According to EVp3, a passive emotion ceases to be a passive

emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it. *In the scholium to EVp4 Spinoza says that since from all things an effect follows (EIp36), and that all that follows from an idea that is adequate in us is understood by us clearly and distinctly (EIIp40), he infers that everyone has the capacity to clearly and distinctly understanding himself and his emotions. If not absolutely, at least in part, and consequently he is less passive in respect of them.*

So we should pay particular attention to getting to know each emotion, as far as possible, clearly and distinctly, so that the mind may thus be determined from the emotion to think those things that it clearly and distinctly perceives, and in which it finds full contentment. Thus the emotion may be detached from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts (EVp4Sch).

This step on "the path of wisdom" that Spinoza points out is an active project of a lifetime. To meditate over the nature of our emotions and their interlinking with causes and other thoughts rather than succumb to or repress them is a key element in Spinoza's ethics. It also indicates one of the reasons why Spinoza has been linked to Buddha⁷⁶, and how Spinoza's ethics may be seen as an inspiration to what animated psychoanalysis, that knowledge of causes of emotional states can be therapeutical⁷⁷.

We have to acquire a new way of seeing things, but no matter how powerful we are, it is always possible to be overpowered (EIVax1). When we are the adequate cause of something, when we act, it means that at the moment we are not overpowered by some other effect. I can act before I cross the street by consciously looking to my right and to my left. If a bus hits me I will still be overpowered, but my act will reduce the chance for it. To look carefully before I cross the street is one of my acquired habits. Of course that particular habit may be due to my striving to preserve my life, which is a part of my nature, but in the same way we can acquire the habit of attempting to strive towards knowledge, or avoid wrongdoing, not out of fear of punishment (passive emotions), but as an active, integrated part of our nature: *I refrain, or try to refrain, from such behaviour because it is directly opposed to my particular nature, and would cause me to stray from the love and knowledge of God* (Ep. 21). This nature is not fatalistically set in stone, we have to start at some point, and we can make the love to knowledge and reason to an integrated part of our nature. Naess writes:

Thus, even though human beings start low on their road to freedom, as slaves of passive emotions, they have necessary causal and cognitive endowment to crawl upwards. There are no emotions (according to 5P4Cor) from which we *cannot* form an adequate idea. And they can all develop into active emotions.⁷⁸

Discussion of problematic features in Spinoza's ethical model

However, Spinoza's therapeutic methods to the blissful state of Zen are not wholly unproblematic. He acknowledges himself that it is not easy ("All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare" in his closing sentence in the *Ethics*), but for our purpose it is important to discuss the argumentation of his proposals. Intuitively it is easy to be swept away with Spinoza's notion that when we get more complete understanding of something, overwhelming feelings lose their power over us. We recognize it from our experience, at least in not too complicated instances. Adkins illustrates with an anecdote. He is driving courteously and mindfully in his little compact car, when a speeding SUV driver cuts him off. He slams on the brakes to avoid a collision, but the driver in the SUV never deviates or slows down. Adkins is livid and with good reason. The other driver endangered him, and showed a total lack of decent traffic behaviour. However, while our man is gazing wrathfully at the rear end of the SUV, it takes a turn by the street to the hospital parking lot and pulls up in front of the emergency room doors. The driver gets out, runs to the other side of the SUV to open the door, and helps out a very pregnant woman. The anger so very present just a moment ago ceased, and he observes in himself: *the lack of anger at this point seems remarkable*.⁷⁹

This sort of experiences we can recognize, but at the same time, can't it just be happenstance? What if Adkins did not see the driver pull in to the hospital? What if the SUV driver really is a thoughtless and incompetent driver even without a labouring woman as a passenger? Would the anger be justified then? We do know that in some instances, at least, our anger dissipates when we get more information about causes and understand a given situation better. But we have to look a bit closer on Spinoza to see if this model can (1) be generally applicable. Also, it is worth asking (2) how the mental property reason can dictate, or be causally relevant, not only in respect to our emotions but also to bodily behaviour, a property of extension.

I will briefly attend to the latter problem first. Spinoza aims fire at Descartes and the stoics in the preface to EV, complaining over their account of the intellect's power over the emotions. But he himself says that the reason can dictate the emotions, so what is the difference? Spinoza's main objection is that of the free will of the mind in control. That implies that if you fail you are to blame for a moral defect or lack of *willpower*. Since Spinoza equates the will and the intellect (see §9), if you fail, he attributes that to error or inadequate knowledge. Descartes' notion of the mind acting on the animal spirits which in

turn influence the emotions⁸⁰, is also something Spinoza cannot accept being a form of interaction between the mental and the physical. However, Spinoza's criticism is not that Descartes and the stoics exaggerate the mind's power over the emotions. Rather, his main charge, Bennett suggest, is that:

they are wrong about what it is for anything to have a power. Rather than holding that the mind can control its owner's emotions *by virtue of* its own structure and the laws it obeys, *while* it is healthy and energetic, *to the extent that* it is well disciplined, and so on, they hold that the mind has its controlling powers without conditions. Has it 'absolutely', has it, period.⁸¹

That kind of absolute power that comes from nowhere is something Spinoza has to reject because he needs an explanation for everything, and for him, the mind and willpowers depend on how they fit into the causal scheme of everything. A powerful mind is caused to be powerful, and he writes in EV preface that *much practice and application are required to restrain and moderate the affects*. That there is a way and means to get leverage on the affects does not, according to Bennett, betray the parallelism thesis. *Affects are introduced as psychophysical episodes or dispositions, and Spinoza is free to say that therapy under one attribute has its automatic counterpart under the other.*⁸²

The first proposition of part V is virtually a repetition of EIIp7; Spinoza says that the affections of the body are arranged and connected in the same way as thoughts and ideas of things are arranged and connected in the mind. He uses this to proof Evp10, which says that *as long as we are not assailed by emotions that are contrary to our nature, we have the power to arrange and associate affections of the body according to the order of the intellect*. This shows the mind-body union, and I take to mean that if Spinoza's medicine is right, and we with the help of reason reflect adequately on distracting and obsessive thoughts and get good mental health, the body's health will naturally follow, and we are less prone to stress-induced high blood pressure, heart disease, neck and back pains, ulcers, &c.

The fact is that we know really very little about psychology and the brain. Not everyone would agree with this, but if we say that a mental thought-shift causes (or is parallel accompanied by) some firing of some neuron in the brain, we can see that we both mentally and physically goes through a change. However, we are not scientifically able to go in and cause that particular firing in the brain yet, or at least safely. Spinoza focuses on the change caused by mental thought-shifts and beliefs, and these must be applied and practiced to be integrated. It is in this process he means that we turn passive emotions to active ones, but his argumentation is not flawless.

Regarding (1), the general applicability of Spinoza's model of turning passive emotions into active ones, we have to look at Spinoza's argumentation. I follow Bennett in saying that Spinoza's method is to *separate* emotions from thoughts, to *turn* passions into actions and to *reflect* on determinism. I will discuss these in the same order.

The method of separation

If we hate someone, it is unpleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause. Then, we by EVp2, have to separate the emotion from the idea of an external cause, and join it to other thoughts. This is problematic. All that follows is that if I e.g. disconnect my unpleasure from the idea that you caused it, then good for you, I no longer hate you, but this only means that my unpleasure no longer qualifies as *hate*: the *unpleasure* might nevertheless still eat me up. If this argumentation should be valid it would have to be the *thought of an external cause per se* that caused the unpleasure.

Also, if I my bad feelings towards you are caused by my *belief* that you did something horrid, the bad feelings would be abolished by removing that belief. But, as Bennett points out:

many harmful emotions would indeed disappear if we were to rid ourselves of the beliefs on which they rest! Unfortunately, sure-fire techniques are usually hard to apply. This one is inapplicable because, as Spinoza knows, belief is not under the command of the will.⁸³

Through practice one can practice putting unpleasurable thoughts away, ignore them or do something pleasurable instead. However, this sound a lot like repression to me, and sweeping uncomfortable thoughts under the rug is not a permanently good solution. Spinoza encourages us to *meet* hate, and meditate frequently over the common wrongs of men, and meet them with love and nobility in the appendix of EIV.

As a therapeutic tool I think all Spinoza want to say was that horrible things happen to us all the time, but when it first have happened, bearing a grudge towards the malefactor will not add anything good to it. Not bearing a grudge or hate or disappear in red anger is beneficial for each and every ones peace of mind, and is not the same as letting evildoers "off the hook". Spinoza writes in EIVp63s. that *the judge who condemns a man to death not through hatred or anger but solely through love of public welfare is guided by reason*. Death penalty aside, in a just court only reason shall prevail, not emotional

distractions.

The method of turning

Turning passions into actions is something Spinoza holds we can do when we form an adequate idea of the passion. As I wrote above, EVp3, reads *a passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it*. Adequate ideas are as we know caused from within, and that makes it an action, not a passion. Its bodily counterpart will also be an action. And, as we also saw above, according to Spinoza by EVp4 *there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception*. Bennett criticizes Spinoza's move here as nonsense, for no one could possibly acquire an adequate idea of an event after it has occurred.⁸⁴ By simply understanding the causes of why x occurred, I cannot make it an action of mine. That is, after an event has occurred, it cannot be caused from within, from me. The problem is that Spinoza's claim is too strong. By turning passion into action, the way he describes it, he is implicitly saying that we can *change the cause of an event*. It doesn't seem right, or extremely peculiar at least.

But what if Spinoza means that in an *ongoing* processes, causes could be altered along the way. Bennett suggests this, but concludes that he cannot imagine what it would be like to *alter the causes of an ongoing emotional process*⁸⁵. The problem is also there if Spinoza meant that as a *defence-mechanism* for future troublesome situations, we should know the different emotions beforehand, as indicated by EV4s, because if we do know each emotion, as far as possible, clearly and distinctly, our mind will be determined away from the passion and towards what it clearly and distinctively perceives. That is, when our emotions are as active as we can make them, we are less likely to be acted upon. When external causes threaten us, then, we are already active by virtue of knowing how the situation may affect our emotions. This explanation is thin, but this "turning-technique" of Spinoza's is hard to defend. Bennett grants Spinoza the view that:

I conjecture that what he had in mind in offering p3,4 was not nonsense, but rather the view that sufferings can sometime be somewhat lessened by an understanding of their causes. That is all right as a bit of worldly wisdom, but p3d is irrelevant to it. Suppose that some episode x occurs in my body, and was caused by an external event y. If I inquire into the causes of x, and am successful, I shall acquire ideas of y. But those ideas will not include I(y) – the idea directly of y, its 2p7 counterpart – but only ideas indirectly of it. So the cause of I(x), namely I(y), will continue to be outside my mind; so I(x) will remain inadequate and x will remain a passion.⁸⁶

I agree with Bennett that this is a problem for Spinoza. Even if we *understand* that something (y) caused

a certain state (x) in us, no matter how we look at it, the former cause (y) cannot change into an action *of ours*. Unfortunately, it seems like that is what Spinoza is saying, because understanding something *adequately* is the same as causing it from within. I can never get the complete, adequate idea of something caused externally.

How then, can we be causes of our own states? I have a suggestion, based on Naess' hypothesis of cognitive-causal parallelism. Also, even though we should keep in mind that Spinoza's seventeenth century use of the Latin *causa* is not like every modern use of 'cause'⁸⁷, I am using the notion of pre-emptive causation, as explained below. Keeping Bennett's *x* as an episode or state in my body, and *y* as the cause, my suggestion would then be, that if and only if *x* can be conceived through *y*, is *y* the cause of *x*, and if and only if *y* is the cause of *x*, can *x* be conceived through *y*.⁸⁸ Simply put: Iff my hate can be conceived through something you did, then the thing you did is the cause of my hate, and iff the thing you did is the cause of my hate, then my hate can be conceived through the thing you did. Now assume that you did something horrible to me, but I am set on not letting you ruin my peaceful state of mind, and I know that by EIII definition of the emotions 7, hatred is unpleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause, but this is passive and confused, by EVp3. If you want to inflict pain on me, I cannot certainly prevent it, but say that I through meditation had studied the emotion of hatred and found it is mostly useless and unpleasant, and I am determined to keep calm and avoid unpleasure. If I succeed in this, instead of feeling *x*, hatred, I feel, say, *z*, self-contentment, *pleasure arising from a man's contemplation of himself and power of activity* (EIII def. Of emotions, 26). Then instead of you with your action, *y*, causing my present state of mind, I am causing it myself. I "cancel out" *y* as the cause and "inserts" a particular instance of understanding my emotion of hatred, *r1*. Then we have: iff *z* can be conceived through *r1*, is *r1* the cause of *z*, and iff *r1* is cause of *z*, can *z* be conceived through *r1*.

This is an instance, or act of pre-emptive causation, where two sufficient causes occur, where one is the cause and the other is merely a pre-empted potential cause:

Billy and Suzy throw rocks at a bottle. Suzy throws first so that her rock arrives first and shatters the glass. Without Suzy's throw, Billy's throw would have shattered the bottle. However, Suzy's throw is the actual cause of the shattered bottle, while Billy's throw is merely a pre-empted potential cause. This is a case of late pre-emption because the alternative process (Billy's throw) is cut short after the main process (Suzy's throw) has actually brought about the effect.⁸⁹

This fits with what Spinoza says in EIVax that there is no individual thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. When r1 caused state of mind z, and prevented y from causing state of mind x, r1 was more powerful than y. If my particular act of reflection r1 had not occurred, y would have caused x. I would have been overpowered by hatred, and this force of passion would prevented my actions from being my own, they would in a way be yours, since my hatred could only be conceived through the external cause inflicted on me by you. Active thinking was in this case more powerful than my passion, and it prevailed. I find Bennett's advice to settle with a humbler conclusion – *namely, the observation that knowledge of causes sometimes has healing power*⁹⁰ to be a insufficient advice in this case, where we can do concideably better in our efforts both to understand Spinoza's method and our own resources.

The method of reflecting of determinism

Spinoza's proposition EV6 is *Insofar as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent it has greater power over emotions, i.e. it is less passive in respect of them* tells us that to that degree we understand that everything that happens is part of a necessary whole, we will not fall victim to unnecessary emotional turmoil and passive speculation of the kind "why, oh why", "if I only had..." &c. In the appendix to EI, Spinoza is criticising the notion of final causes (which I will discuss in §9) by saying that the people that argue for final causes - if a man dies because a stone hits him in the head - they will say that the stone fell in order to kill the man. In Spinoza's criticism here, we also see how understanding necessary cause-effect can explain the event. The stone fell because the wind was blowing, the wind was blowing because a current of air was moving from a high-pressure area to a low-pressure area, and this was because of the weather the preceding days. The man was walking that way because a friend invited him. Questions like '*why* was the man invited at that particular time', and '*why* was the wind so strong', have natural cause-effect answers. Of course it was unfortunate that the man was "at the wrong place to the wrong time", but Spinoza's idea is that when we see how it all can be explained, our passions will not be so strong. The pointless answer "it was his destiny" makes us despair and angry, whereas it is more difficult to be angry at the weather.

But again, there is no *guarantee* that seeing how our unpleasant states arise from necessity will diminish our unpleasant feelings towards it. This is a good point:

If we are lavishly indulgent towards the sequence 3p48-49-5p5 we may credit it with showing that my belief that

Peter was caused to act as he did will lessen the intensity of my emotion towards him, but we cannot extract the further conclusion that I shall then be in a less intense and upsetting emotional state altogether.⁹¹

Spinoza thinks that our greatest affects are toward things we imagine as free (EIIIp49; Evp5). As discussed above, when we say something acts *freely*, we assume they could also act *otherwise*. If somebody we love abandons us, it is harder to come to terms with being left by *choice* than by *necessity*. The idea is that the understanding of some events includes the reconciling knowledge of the necessity of the infinite chain of finite causes. Bennett claims that Spinoza's argumentation concerns *redistribution* of emotions over a wider range of objects. He mentions a possibility, which he himself does not endorse, but there is a gap in Spinoza's argument and this can be driven through:

When I think of Peter deterministically, much of my hate is redirected towards his ancestors and schoolteachers; I have as great a total amount of hate as before, and now it is harder to control because it is wide ranging and unfocussed.⁹²

I agree with Bennett that this is not how hate works. However, it is important to consider because it indicates the possibility of a reason for believing in the benefits of e.g. rehabilitation in prisons, a better safety net in different social services, better follow-up of weaker school pupils. In an infinite chain of finite causes, we understand how single individuals turn out based on infinitely many variables. Some are given by nature; like their genetic make-up, height, shoe size, eye colour, lactose intolerance or Leiden factor V. Other qualities are acquired throughout life. Some unconsciously, like body language and posture, humour, eating habits and certain values. These unconsciously acquired qualities can however be consciously manipulated. We also acquire some properties consciously, like learning to play an instrument. All these genetic and practical areas determine the course in people's lives. If evil-doing were solely the result of bad character and an urge to use one's free will to do devilry, intervention in finite causes would be of little matter. It would be of no use to give education in prisons or protect children from abuse. But considering the practical aspect of Spinoza's philosophy, I think this is relevant to take into the equation, because we do know empirically that a conscious change of acquired tendencies can be positive.

If Peter performs an abominable crime, we instinctively have an intuition that he should be held morally responsible. This intuition is rooted in our belief in free will. "Peter chose to do the crime". If we learned

that Peter had a brain tumour explaining his violent behaviour, or learned that he had been repeatedly raped as a child, we start thinking differently and more in terms of prior causes. But yet again, this is not to say that the determinist thoughts quell all unpleasant affects in us.

Bennett makes an interesting consideration about how reflecting on determinism can lessen unpleasant emotions, which he borrows from Strawson. Given something occurs which is welcome or unwelcome, one may respond with one of two attitudes:

(a) I may adopt the 'objective attitude' of one who wants to understand what happened – to know what the mechanisms were – so as to raise or lower the chances of its happening again. (b) I may adopt a 'reactive attitude' such as gratitude or resentment. [...] For most of us, there seems to be an incompatibility between the two: while I am in a prudently inquiring frame of mind about your benefit or harm to me, I cannot also feel true gratitude or resentment in respect of it. [...] What we have here, I suggest, are not logical conflicts between propositions, but an incompatibility between two frames of mind – the reactive frame which begets thoughts of moral accountability etc., and the objective one which generates questions about whether and how the action was caused. If this is right, then the mere truth of determinism is no challenge to our continued use of praise and blame. Whether we should retain praise and blame is a practical question – more like 'Should we continue with chamber music?' than like 'Should we retain quantum theory?' Like Strawson, I want to retain at least some reactive attitudes because I think that the prospect of being without them is horrid. To welcome this part of our natures, rather than trying to suppress it, is to choose to retain a degree of impulsive uncalculated response to one another; it is to refuse always to act and feel in the light of a considered view of the facts.⁹³

It is simply very difficult to combine the two frames of mind. Spinoza wants us in the objective frame of mind, and that can certainly be a good place to be in many situations. But neither Strawson nor Bennett wants to give up the reactive frame completely. According to Strawson, praise and blame are rooted in feelings of moral approval or indignation, which in turn are vicarious analogues of gratitude and resentment.⁹⁴ Evolutionary speaking we have reason to believe that kindness and co-operation have played an important role in human development. We possess an innate sensitivity to the emotional status of other members of our species. These reactive attitudes are not something we can just discard. And indeed we should not, according to some moral philosophers. Sentimentalist Slote argues that *empathy is the cement of the moral universe*.⁹⁵ This is an interesting notion, and I will consider it in my section on what it means to live ethically for Spinoza

Living ethically for Spinoza is living according to ones nature

From what we have seen above it becomes clearer that Spinoza's ethics can be said to be a sort of ethology. Our endeavour to act as powerful, self-sufficient causes, determine ourselves from our essence is living ethically for Spinoza. As I said in the introduction, (God's or) Nature's perfection lies in the necessary expression of its essence. Nature follows its nature and cannot do otherwise. The human goal is to strive for the same thing, and to acquire 'a more perfect state' through doing what harmonizes best with our nature and inclinations. We ought to strive to do what composes well with our nature or essence, and that is virtue itself, says Spinoza. He also says in EVp25 that the highest striving of the mind is to understand things by the third kind of knowledge, the knowledge that proceeds from adequate knowledge of certain of God's attributes to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things:

Therefore (Pr. 28, IV), the highest virtue of the mind, that is (Def. 8, IV), its power or nature, or its highest conatus (Pr. 7, III), is to understand things by this third kind of knowledge.

This is highly intellectualistic, and seems exceedingly difficult to reach. Are we to settle with "all or nothing" in the area of living ethically according to Spinoza? I say no. Spinoza does not pretend to hide that the proportion of people achieving that kind of enlightenment is a fraction in relation to the whole of humanity. But living morally decent lives is not reserved for the few, neither did Spinoza think so. I suggest that we can understand Spinoza and the path he is proposing towards wisdom better if we consider it as something *evolving through* the three following steps: From the basic empathy – through normativity – to the mature conception of freedom as Spinoza saw it.

Whether or not Slote is right in saying that empathy is the cement of our moral universe, it is something every single person is born with (for brevity I do not consider extreme psychopaths/people with severe personality disorders), and it influences human action regardless of adequate ideas or not. Even if people *are* driven by passions, and think the earth is flat and the moon is a ten pound German trappistenkäse, *they have empathy*, with the morally corrective nature that follows, and this takes the form of aversion or approval. This is primal, immediate reactions we feel in our inner core upon watching some actions; we feel pleasure and joy upon witnessing compassion, we feel unpleasure and disgust upon watching cruelty. Bennett said the prospect of being without reactive attitudes is horrid, and I agree.

Unfortunately, empathy is also partialistic:

We normally feel more empathic concern for potential or actual harm or pain that we notice in our vicinity than for what we merely know about or have heard of, and when we hear of a contemporaneous threat to human life (say, if coal miners are trapped underground), our empathy is more sharply aroused than if a (n even larger scale) threat arises concerning future loss of life. [...] We tend to feel more empathic concern when threats or sufferings are spatially and temporally nearer.⁹⁶

Even if natural empathy can be corrective, it is also inadequate. Some thousand years ago empathy did not need to go beyond our own tribe and possibly the ones surrounding our own. Today the world looks drastically different. Our actions not only have consequences for ourselves, but also for people in other countries, on other continents, and likely for future generations; people we have never met, and never will meet. That makes it tempting to prescribe some normative ethics offering overarching moral principles to follow even when we stand before decisions in areas that goes far beyond our empathic scope. Normative ethics prescribes a particular way of life that we ought to do good, and ought to refrain from doing bad. Depending on the ethical theory one prefers, numerous reasons will be given as to why. This may be the desire to pursue the greatest good, or whether or not the principle one is acting on entails a contradiction. Spinoza's ethics is descriptive, and as I will show in §10 he rejects moral judgements, because what we call "good" and "evil" or "bad", are according to Spinoza merely our evaluations, and have no truth-value in themselves, i.e. "good" and "evil" are not properties belonging to a given thing or action, for Spinoza what determines if something is good or bad is how it affects us in any given situation. Nevertheless Spinoza does acknowledge the use of some prescriptions:

Spinoza does accord a kind of provisional value to "virtues" such as repentance or humility for those not living under the guidance of reason. Thus they are dictated by reason for those who are not themselves capable of full rationality.⁹⁷

So despite Spinoza's rejection of traditional prescriptive virtues, like humility and repentance (EIVp53, 54), as insufficient and not good in themselves, he does not dismiss them completely. They can sometimes be necessary, he says:

As men seldom live according to the dictates of reason, these two emotions, humility and repentance, and also hope and fear, bring more advantage than harm; and thus, if sin we must, it's better to sin in their direction. For if men of weak spirit should all equally be subjected to pride, and should be ashamed of nothing and afraid of nothing, by what bonds could they be held together and bound? The mob is fearsome, if it does not fear

(EIVp54s).

And in the same scholium Spinoza goes on to say that the people subject to these emotions are far more readily induced than others to live by the guidance of reason in the end, and become free men and enjoy the life of the blessed. But *true virtue*, according to Spinoza, is self-contentment that arise from the activity of reason, and that self-contentment that arise from this reason is the highest there can be:

Now man's true power of activity, or his virtue, is reason itself (pr.3,III), which man regards clearly and distinctly (prs. 40&43,II). Therefore self-contentment arises from reason. Again, in contemplating himself a man perceives clearly and distinctly, that is, adequately, only what follows from his power of activity (Def.2,III), that is, (pr.3III) what follows from his power of understanding. So the greatest self-contentment there can be arises from this contemplation.

Scholium: In fact self-contentment is the highest good we can hope for (EIVp52).

All people strive, but when we strive according to reason, we strive only to understand (EIVp26), and the mind's highest virtue is to know God (EIVp28). This highest goal we ought to strive for, what sort of ethical implications does Spinoza think it will have? Only things that follow from our nature, he says, and these things are necessarily in agreement with the nature of, and thus beneficial to all men: *Insofar a thing is in agreement with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good* (EIVp31), and *the more a thing is in agreement with our nature, the more advantageous it is to us*. If I live healthy my reward is health. If I eat poison, the punishment is illness. Spinoza describes the conditions under which we can live well and wisely. *This living well or poorly, however, is not an external judgement given at the end of life, it is the causally necessary effect of one's actions.*⁹⁸ Further, the things that agree with our nature, which we can enjoy as we live virtuous, is something that is common to all, Spinoza says (EIVp36), and when we live according to true virtue, it is "contagious": we will desire it for rest of mankind (EIVp37).

The aspect of happiness is important for Spinoza. When we are virtuous in his sense, we move from the provisional virtue of doing the right thing because we *ought to*, or because it is commanded to us by an external force, to doing the right thing because when we live according to reason and our nature *compels us*, there is a change in motivation - from doing something good indirectly, out of e.g. fear - to doing something good because we cannot do otherwise; there is a necessary desire to do good because not doing it would be in opposition to our nature:

This corollary can be illustrated by the example of the sick man and the healthy man. The sick man eats what he dislikes through fear of death. The healthy man takes pleasure in his food and thus enjoys a better life than if he were to fear death and directly seek to avoid it (EIVp63s).

We can see that Spinoza is interested not mainly in how we *ought* to live but how we *might*⁹⁹ live. We interact with each other and the planet in a myriad of different ways, and we might inflict harm on ourselves, others and the environment, live in fear and bondage, be envious and destructive, *or* we might live free from emotional bondage, striving to understand what is to our common advantage, and see that we have nothing to gain in preventing others from achieving the same thing. The shift from *ought* to *might* shows the descriptive nature of Spinoza rather than a prescriptive one, but we can ask the same question here as we did above about ought: does not every *might* imply *can* in the same way as ought does? Yes it does, but Spinoza is not trying to fit human behaviour into a square box of fatalistic inactivity. Spinoza is exploring the limits of what we might and can do to flourish, not what we ought to do according to a set of rules. Even though both ought and might imply can, they have different connotations and we need to be sensitive towards these. I will briefly return to how might is compatible with necessitarianism in §10.

Striving towards knowledge pertains to the mind's true nature. Striving toward fulfilling one's nature is gaining power. Power leads to physical and mental vigour. This makes us able to be adequate causes and actors. When we are adequate causes we can determine ourselves. When we determine ourselves we are free. When we break free from bondage we gain self-subsistence. When we are self-subsistent we act according to our nature, we become ourselves. This is all aspects of the same thing, and Spinoza called it virtue. But as we have seen, virtue, ethics and freedom is living according to one's nature, and this is self-subsistence. There is no beginning and end in Spinoza's ethics, we just have to break in somewhere and see that the whole and the parts are all related to each other. When Spinoza chose to write the *Ethics* in a strict geometrical manner, his intention was probably far less "fleeting" than this suggestion. However, I think it applies, and it is one of the aspects that makes the *Ethics* so interesting to work with.

§9: Goals and striving – Conatus

The Latin word *Conatus* means effort, endeavour, inclination, impulse or striving. It denotes the effort or striving of natural impulses, our appetite for staying into existence. Spinoza uses the term to describe how all things have an innate tendency to persist in their own being. It is closely related to how living ethical for Spinoza is, as I have shown, self-subsistence. Striving towards activity of mind and body is the path of the virtuous. In this section I will show how Spinoza denies teleology, but emphasises striving. I will also show how Spinoza in his rejection of free will, puts *conatus* in as a substitute, and to what degree we can determine our strivings and be self-determined.

First, I want to note the terms Spinoza use when he talks about striving. The overarching concept is *appetite* [*appetitus*]. When he talks about the striving of the mind, or psychological manifestations of striving, our wanting – the will – he uses *voluntas*. When he refers to the bodily impulses he use *conatus*.

EIIIp9 is an illustrative proposition:

The mind, both insofar as it has clear and distinct ideas and insofar as it has confused ideas, endeavours to persist in its own being over an indefinite period of time, and it is conscious of this conatus.

Scholium: When this conatus is related to the mind alone, it is called will [*voluntas*]; when it is related to mind and body together, it is called appetite [*appetitus*], which is therefore nothing else but man's essence, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that tend to his preservation, and which man is thus determined to perform. [...] "Desire [*cupiditas*] is appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof." It is clear from the above considerations that we do not endeavour, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavour will, seek after and desire it.

With striving Spinoza explain human beings as an integrated part of nature. Everything that exists strives to preserve its existence. In the process Spinoza replaces the notion of free will and "independent" intentions with necessary striving by *conatus*, towards what we *consequentially* judge to be good. This shows how Spinoza rejects a teleological explanation, the notion that we are goal oriented and strives towards something because we initially judge it to be good. This is first and foremost an attack on *divine purpose*, the idea that God acts with a goal in mind: e.g. rewarding the good and punishing the wicked, or creating the world in a specific manner as to satisfy human needs. This is, as we have seen,

impossibility within Spinoza's system, and it necessarily follows that it is impossibility for humans as well as for God. The eternal necessity of nature Spinoza seeks to establish is his strict cause-and-effect determinism. Allowing teleology or final causes would contribute to turn this picture upside down, indicating that effects are not the results of causes, but that causes *are* effects, like Spinoza exemplifies in the appendix to EI, *if a stone falls from the roof on somebody's head and kills him, by this method of arguing they will prove that the stone fell in order to kill the man*. That is; that the stone fell to kill the man instead of the man being killed because he was hit by a stone in the head. Spinoza links the belief in divine freedom with men's belief that they are free, and this belief he links to teleology. If final causes are rivals of efficient ones, teleology involves radical freedom and threatens to falsify determinism.

Turning nature upside down is for Spinoza to explain one event in terms of subsequent ones. But, as Bennett remarks, often there is only one event where the thought of the 'final cause' functions as 'efficient cause':

In saying 'He raised his hand so as to deflect the stone' we are saying that Raise happened because he thought it would cause the stone's being deflected. What is there in that for Spinoza to object to? ¹⁰⁰

It makes perfectly good sense, and Spinoza himself explain actions by reference to the agent's thoughts about the future. I will not dig deeper into the inconsistencies here, but rather focus on how Spinoza substitutes teleology and final causes with his non-teleological concept of striving or appetite.

According to Spinoza the decisions of the mind are nothing but appetites: *...mental decision on one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand... are one and the same thing* (EIIIp2s). We have seen that appetite for Spinoza is the very essence of man, the things he does to promote his preservation. This urge for survival is ever-present and can be driven by both clear and confused ideas. This condition of striving is already set, and is the only one we are moving from. Bennett quotes Roth:

Human beings ..., like everything else and in spite of the fact of self-consciousness, work out *from* conditions which are already set, not *towards* ideals, which are to be realised. In the words of the decisive 4d7: 'By the end for the sake of which we do anything I understand appetite.' What is appetite? Blind impulse. We follow ends and ideals, but these ends and ideals are projected from behind us.¹⁰¹

With regard to 'blind impulse' it is important to note that Spinoza says that we are often conscious of our appetites, but not where they are coming from, their causes (and that is why we think the wanting is a free act of will). Our *will* is by this just the mind's strivings, not disconnected from the intellect, but the very same thing: *Will and intellect are one and the same thing* (EIIp49cor). We believe ourselves free, because we are not aware of the necessary force of our appetites and antecedent causes. I asked in §2 if *knowledge and acceptance of causes can change the turn of one's willing*. With the background we now have, I feel able to conjecture that yes, this is possible. Spinoza's determinism is necessary, but not fatalistic or pre-established. Our strivings are necessary, but we can to some degree determine in what direction we strive. When we are being active in respect to our emotions and elevate to freedom, in Spinoza's sense, we start striving towards *other things* than we do when we are in bondage. Without mindless anger, envy, hate, despair, hope, fear &c, clouding our *sub species aeternitatis*, Spinoza holds that we strive towards things that will make us self-subsistent or self-contained, as explained above. When we act according to reason, the good things that we strive towards for ourselves, we will also want for other people. So the power of virtue is not a freedom that limits other people's freedom, it is supposed to enhance it. To be self-subsistent is more than mere self-preservation, it includes a higher form of striving that Spinoza associates with virtue: the striving for perfection, for whole-ness, completeness: it implies to strive for higher levels of being in oneself.¹⁰² The highest level is for Spinoza to live under the guidance of reason (EIVp35). If we are ignorant, our mind will strive for random wantings and people will often conflict with each other. When our mind is filled with adequate ideas, our striving will differ from that of the ignorant; hence, the willings turn out to be different. Seeing that this is a process, we can say that our priorities change over time, if we are so fortunate as to get wiser.

§10: *What about Virtue?*

It is probably pretty clear now, but I repeat: True virtue is nothing other than to live by the guidance of reason, according to Spinoza (EIVp37s); and blessedness is not a reward of virtue, but virtue itself, by EVp42. This can be objected to, and it was also (maybe especially) difficult to accept for Spinoza's contemporaries. What is being virtuous? What ought we do? I have already mentioned that for Spinoza the question is not so much how we ought to live as how we might live. But it is obvious that Spinoza advocates one path, the path of wisdom/virtue, and not the one of ignorance. Spinoza describes the different ways of life, and it is as if he is saying that we might choose the path of ignorance, or we might

chose the path of wisdom, but we ought to chose the path of wisdom.

I have already discussed the ethical field a bit, and as we know it consists of a wide spectre of theories, including utilitarian ethics, deontology and virtue ethics as well as meta-ethical theories such as moral realism. Many of the models of moral theory are based upon some sort of imperative of what we ought to do. Normative ethics concerns how we ought to act, morally speaking and examines the rightness and wrongness of actions. Meta-ethics attempts among other things to explore what "good" and "bad" stands for. Spinoza claims that nothing is certainly good or evil except what is really conducive to understanding or what can hinder understanding (EIVp27).

The problem is obviously there. Pursuing an ethics that induce us to *follow our nature* seems to spell catastrophe. Kant observed rightly the *unsocial sociability*¹⁰³ of men, which denotes our tendency to come together in society, coupled with our tendency to resist and break society up. History shows that we have killed each other for centuries, and we keep killing each other with increasing efficiency. How can Spinoza's descriptive ethics help us?

Spinoza postulates 'good and 'bad' as something that is respectively in agreement (EIVp31) or contrary to our nature (EIV30), but nothing in themselves:

As for the terms "good" and "bad", they likewise indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions, which we form from comparing things with one another (EIV preface).

No action is good or bad in itself; it is only a matter of how it affects us and how we evaluate something. Some properties can be considered good in a spider, and bad in a human, according to the respective natures. And the "goodness" or "badness" of these properties are measured in more reality or less reality. The thing a spider does to realize its nature, the spider's virtue, is not the same as a human's virtue. When the spider kills and eats its mate, it is good, when a human does the same it is bad, because it does not pertain to human nature or essence. And as we have seen, virtue, perfection or reality is the fulfilment of a things nature or essence. In the big picture, an act can be good in one situation and bad in another, and neither in a third situation. Spinoza has little to spare for the "common man's" value judgements, of universal "goods" and "bads", but nevertheless Spinoza assumes a liberal belief in human nature that involves – given that all were to follow their true nature as rational beings – a view that *the*

good which each man who pursues virtue aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind (EIVp37). This means that according to Spinoza, the reason why people act so horrible towards each other time and time again is ignorance, they are not virtuous in the sense that they act according to their nature, which is constituted by reason. As I said above, we might live according to reason, and the dictates of reason. This sounds somewhat prescriptive, but in EIVp18s where Spinoza announces his plan to *show what reason prescribes us*, he does not follow up¹⁰⁴, and we are left with descriptions. But it does not matter, because we have enough material to answer the question of whether there are any oughts, or if we have to confine ourselves to *is*.

I think the only imperative *ought* in spinozistic philosophy is that we *ought* to follow our true nature. As I showed above at the end of §8, this is a circular mass of concepts. We *ought* to be virtuous, we *ought* to be powerful, we *ought* to free ourselves from the bondage of passive emotions, we *ought* to live fully regardless of duration, we *ought* to be self-subsistent. We *ought* to love God, we *ought* to honour the necessary laws of nature, we *ought* to strive for salvation... We could keep going, but I think that for Spinoza this would really just be different ways of telling us one thing, that we ought to be *free*.

Every ought imply can, and we are back at how we might live. We might live according to reason, or we might live in ignorance. Reason gives us sustainable pleasure, and ignorance gives us pain, or at best unsustainable pleasure. As I said in the beginning of this chapter, the primary ethical problem for Spinoza is that we are in bondage. But we might live otherwise, we can, and we ought to, for the sake of everybody's freedom and peacefulness. Regarding necessitarianism and the different connotations of *ought* and *might*, I will say something about why there is more informative to talk about how we might live as opposed to how we ought to live. I think that in speaking of what we might or might not do, we are closer and more sensitive towards the descriptive notion of necessity and cause-effect. How we might live can be seen as purely descriptive. We might live in one way or another because we *can* (and what we can or are able to are dependent on a chain of prior causes and conditions), but it is no inherent moral claim; whereas *ought* or *should* are used in more general to refer to obligation or duty independent of prior causes. The best alternative is, I think, to first consider what we possibly *can*, i.e. what we *might* do, and *if* we can do something, to *then* speak of whether or not we *ought* to do it. I therefore generally find *might* as more compatible with necessitarianism, but as we have seen, after finding out how we might live, there are some things within these limits we ought to do.

In this chapter I have discussed Spinoza's concept of ethics and freedom and argued that we indeed have the opportunity to be actors, even in a determined universe. The next and final chapter will mainly be a summary of the mainlines of what have been discussed this far, and I will conclude by showing that even though much of Spinoza's philosophy is abstract and difficult to grasp at first, his ethics culminate in an inspiring practical philosophy.

Chapter Four: Practical Philosophy

By now it is clear that within Spinoza's system we are always brought back to his core ideas. The identification of God with nature and nature's necessity leads way to the necessary determined nature of all things, including the human mind. Since the human mind is a part of all necessary things, it is likewise causally determined. When we understand the connections and necessity of all things we understand that there is no radical free will, immune to causal necessity. When we understand that there is no radical free will, we see that our appetites are what drive us. When we see the necessity of this, we get adequate knowledge and power to determine our striving in the direction of understanding. This power is what true virtue is, according to Spinoza. When we are virtuous we act according to reason. When we act according to reason we act according to our nature. When we act fully with reason we have knowledge of God. God is nature. Nature is necessary.

I started this thesis with modal metaphysics and substance monism, and went via the parallelism thesis, to show the ethical endpoint. But I could just as well have started with the ethics and shown how Spinoza pulls the abstract metaphysics and parallelism out from his practical philosophy. This is the nature of Spinoza's system, which makes it both particularly intriguing and difficult at the same time. It is a myriad of threads that need to be sorted. As I said in last chapter, even though it is not completely in harmony with Spinoza's geometrical method, there is no beginning and end, we just have to start somewhere and dig in, untie the sometimes messy, knot carefully, move back and forth, and see how it all belongs together. How interpreters have solved the various problems arising from unclarities in Spinoza's philosophy has resulted in different interpretations, as we have seen. But we know one thing, that seeing the things under the light of eternity, the big picture, is important for Spinoza. Not focussing on particular 'right' or 'wrong' acts, or a myriad of do's and dont's, the resulting attitude becomes more holistic; a way of living, relevant for all areas of life and affairs. When everything is necessarily connected, we cannot see our actions merely as isolated cases, we have to see them as part of the big picture. In this last chapter I will show that Spinoza's philosophy is not merely abstract propositions, but something that can be applied in practical areas as well. I will only offer some final pointers, but hopefully they will still succeed in showing the depth of Spinoza's philosophy.

§11: *Freedom and Necessity in the state*

We have seen that freedom consists in building up power to act, and bondage consists in diminishing it. The order of causes is composition and decomposition. Some causes empower, and some tear apart. Ultimately this affects all of nature, and for humans, as a mode of nature, our relation to the causes affects us. The relation Spinoza wants us to have, is the one of understanding all necessity and act accordingly, because as we have seen, that means, for Spinoza, that the emotions that follow will not be passions. In Spinoza's political writings he transfers this principle to society. How we relate to one another in society can make us stronger or weaker. In the *Political Treatise* Spinoza says that men seek from their nature to join forces, because then they have consequently more power, or right, than either one alone; and the greater the number of the union are, the more right they will together possess (PTII, 13). However, as he continues to say in PTII, 14, if men are assailed by anger, envy or any emotion deriving from hatred, they are drawn apart and are contrary to one another. But this decomposition of cooperation is destructive and renders them with less rights or power. Since reason dictates power, disembodiment of society is contrary to reason. Reason can do much to control and moderate the passions. When we are free from irrational passions, we are supposed by Spinoza to act according to all men's interest. It is surely better to have a reasonable minister of war than one led by ignorance and passions, but Spinoza says that it does not really matter what the motives that induce men to administer a state's affairs properly are, as long as they in fact are administered properly. *Freedom of spirit or strength of mind is the virtue of a private citizen: the virtue of a state is its security* (PTI, 6). However, there is reason to believe that a minister's virtue of reason induces proper administration and preservation of common interests more than ignorance does.

Spinoza denounces three ways of standing in relation to nature's necessity: the slave, the tyrant and the priest. The slave is victim to sad passions, the tyrant exploits this man and thrives, gaining power on behalf of the slave, and the priest who is saddened by the human condition in general.¹⁰⁵ If the state is governed by ignorant tyrants, they gain power on behalf of the enslaved masses, and will do everything to keep them suppressed in fear and superstition.¹⁰⁶ Spinoza is uncompromising in his postulation of the mutual disadvantages of tyranny:

Granted, then, that the supreme mystery of despotism, its prop and stay, is to keep men in a state of deception, and with the specious title of religion to cloak the fear by which they must be held in check, so that they will fight

for their servitude as if for salvation, and count it no shame, but the highest of honour, to spend their blood and their lives for the glorification of one man. Yet no more disastrous policy can be devised or attempted in a free commonwealth. To invest with prejudice or in any way coerce the citizen's free judgement is altogether incompatible with the freedom of the people (TTP preface).

In the same place Spinoza goes on to say that his main task with the *Theological-Political Treatise* is to demonstrate that freedom can be granted without endangering piety and the peace of the commonwealth, and also that the peace of the commonwealth and piety depends on this freedom. We can see how. Masses suppressed by fear can never reach the blessedness and freedom Spinoza is talking about. At best they can be obedient. But if they are suppressed long enough, at some point or another they will start to revolt, and this will cause unstable conditions in the state, leading to loss of security.

Obedience to the law may sometimes be necessary, but that is not Spinoza's main issue. The problem is that law, whether moral or social does not alone provide us with knowledge. As in the worst case scenario of the tyrant, the formation of knowledge is prevented. The free commonwealth Spinoza is describing as most perfect is one where the citizens are free and the state facilitates for knowledge and makes it possible for all. If all men were free in Spinoza's sense, it would be a consensus among people that it is of every ones interest to keep stability and peace, in society, both locally and globally. Knowledge and understanding is essential for Spinoza because it is the immanent power to discriminate between modes of existence, the way of wisdom agrees with our nature and leads to peace, pleasure and life, the way of ignorance leads to strife, decomposition, unpleasure and death:

There is then, a philosophy of "life" in Spinoza; it consists precisely in denouncing all that separates us from life, all these transcendent values that are turned against life, these values that are tied up to the conditions and illusions of consciousness. Life is poisoned by the categories of Good and Evil, of blame and merit, of sin and redemption. What poisons life is hatred, including the hatred that is turned back against oneself in the form of guilt.¹⁰⁷

When human beings are interacting with other things, the different interactions can enhance, destroy or make no difference to their nature. In the same way, but greater in scale and complexity, this is applicable to a state. Like the virtue of humans is to seek out the things that enhance them, the virtue of the state is to seek out the things that enhance it. And as quoted above, for Spinoza this virtue is security. Spinoza was a social contract theorist, but he differed from Hobbes (whom Spinoza had read)

in the motivation of why we form a society: the reason why we seek together in society for Hobbes was fear. Fear of a life in the state of nature that according to him was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". Out of fear for my life I give up all my natural rights to an absolute sovereign. Fear is as we know an emotion of unpleasure and bondage according to Spinoza, fear is the same as losing power, and a state should be based on the understanding that together we gain power. It is only when we understand our nature and parts that we can seek out exactly that which agrees with it, and not do what fear drives us to. But even if a society is built upon understanding, it can still be overpowered:

...although the constitutions set forth above may have the support of reason and the common sentiment of men, there are times when they can nevertheless be overthrown, for there is no emotion that is not sometimes overpowered by a stronger contrary emotion. We often see the fear of death, for instance, overpowered by greed for another's property. [...] So however well a commonwealth is organized and however good its constitution, yet when the state is in the grip of some crisis and everyone, as commonly happens, is seized with a kind of panic, they all pursue a course prompted only by their immediate fears with no regard for the future of the laws; all turn to the man who is renowned for his victories, they set him free from the laws, they extend his command – a very bad precedent – and entrust the entire commonwealth to his good faith (PTX,10).¹⁰⁸

Spinoza's objection to this is that in a properly organized commonwealth of the sort he describes as ideal, *such panic does not occur without good reason; and so this panic and the resulting confusion cannot be assigned to any cause that could have been avoided by human foresight* (PTX, 10), and he as argued for division of power (PTVIII, 25), so that one man or a small elite cannot gain too much power and take advantage of it in a state of crisis. Spinoza is therefore confident that peace and conservation of law and order remain safe from disintegration from internal causes. But as with everything else, it can be overpowered by external causes, like a more powerful state, seeking to expand.

§12: *Environmental implications*

For obvious reasons Spinoza is not tending to environmental subjects like global warming, deforestation, factory farms, endangered species or other problems with the ecological balance. These are modern issues that despite his insights, Spinoza could not have had many, if any, opinions of. It seems like modern science sometimes moves more rapidly than our understanding of the consequences. However, Spinoza does as we know speak of the ethical problems of viewing humans as a "kingdom within a

kingdom". In the most extreme case of the view of a kingdom within a kingdom, the result is treating human action as something separately from, and independent of nature. To grasp this better we have to take a quick look at Spinoza's causal necessity and theory of knowledge again. As have been said, the notion that there is only one substance existing with absolute necessity, and infinitely many modes, existing with relative necessity, suggests that it is impossible for Spinoza to define a mode without relation to its environment.

The environment a given individual inhabit is consisting of other modes. Different finite modes exist with causal necessity, but as we have seen, existence is not belonging to their essence; only substance has existence as essence. Every finite mode, humans, animals, artefacts, &c, is nothing but:

a temporary coagulation of materials drawn from the environment in a particular ratio. This ratio, which determines what is poisonous and what is healthful, what is predator and what is prey, cannot be determined outside of the very specificity of the environment.¹⁰⁹

It is like the way Spinoza sees value judgements like "good" and "evil"; the terms do not have any real value if we see them as disconnected to what they describe. The same way, what is good or bad, or healthful or poisonous are determined by the nature of a given individual. Living in Sahara is bad for a polar bear. Living in fear in a war zone is bad for a human. Both cases inhibit the individual from living according to its true nature. This is causally necessary; the polar bear is not evolved to maximize its potential in Sahara and will die. And as we have seen, living in fear and danger is not beneficial for humans either, and the poor circumstances will causally render the human powerless, as opposed to what would happen if it got the opportunity to live in a more beneficial environment.

Assumed that everything necessarily has some effect, one cannot expect to intervene in anything without it having consequences for the environment or us. Sometimes we intervene to acquire some desired effect; sometimes we are unaware of or close our eyes for the results. Sometimes they are neither good nor bad for our nature, sometimes they are disastrous. Seeing the whole and the parts as necessary linked together is an important aspect of Spinoza's third kind of knowledge. When we are able to see individual things as built up from different parts in a more or less complex way, constituting a particular nature, *and* at the same time see the different singular things as part in its local environment, an environment constituted by numerous different individual things that affects and are being affected in this

milieu, *and* see how this local environment is a part of, affects and are affected in a bigger global environment, and so on, we understand things as necessary under the light of eternity.

§13: *Psychotherapy*

I have already given an account for the emotions and their role in Spinoza's ethics, but want to say a few more words on the happiness aspect. Spinoza aims to show that virtue is its own reward:

Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself. We do not enjoy blessedness because we keep our lusts in check. On the contrary, it is because we enjoy blessedness that we are able to keep our lusts in check (EVp42).

What is in my power to do increases by living virtuous. Since my mind and my will, or strivings, are the same, this is not our purely by *choice*, but it is a consequence of the infinite effects I am subject to. As I have shown, we can to some degree strive in the direction of reason and understanding. This is closely related to a deep understanding of what is useful to our nature and environment:

The foundational question of Stoic psychotherapy is 'what is in my power to do?' The Stoics determine that the passions, i.e. irrational judgements, alone are in our power to manipulate, and consequently, they conclude that therapy involves their manipulation. Spinoza indicates that he is motivated by a similar question and insight. He says that 'it is necessary to know the power of our nature and its lack of power so we can determine what reason can and cannot do in controlling the emotions' (EIVp17). Therapy begins with discerning what is in my power to do, which presupposes no small knowledge. Accordingly, Spinoza begins his *Ethics* by presenting metaphysics, a physics and anthropology, emulating the unity of the Stoic system: I can adequately discern and evaluate my capabilities only by knowing nature as a whole. Once I apprehend that all things in nature are determined, I will recognize that the therapy of the passions is in my power.¹¹⁰

Of course, as I remarked in §8, Spinoza differs from the Stoics in respect of how our power to manipulate and determine ourselves take form. The direction our willings take are made up by a long line of antecedent causes and effects determined by various factors of genetic make-up, environment, different encounters and more. We do not *decide* to change our ways or beliefs from a free will disconnected from these factors, but our minds are made up by, and are identical to the totality of our knowledge and experiences. We will always strive after pleasure and avoid unpleasure. This applies whether we have adequate knowledge of things or not. The only difference is that if we have adequate

knowledge we will strive towards more "sustainable" pleasures. It can be very pleasurable to eat candy for breakfast every day and avoid eating fish and vegetables. But in the long run this is poisonous and leads to disease. Most parents tell their children this, to more or less avail, but true knowledge of the case are not arrived at by being obedient while secretly hating healthy food and craving candy; it is when you instinctively crave what is improving your body and mind's health and vitality it is an action of yours, and not a passion. If we are lacking knowledge we will spend much time and effort to strive after perishable goods. It is a theme through the *Ethics*, and was also Spinoza's concern in his earliest piece of writing, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, here from its opening lines:

After experience had taught me the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and I realised that all things which were the source and object of my anxiety held nothing of good or evil in themselves save insofar as the mind was influenced by them, I resolved at length to enquire whether there existed a true good, one which was capable of communicating itself and could alone affect the mind to the exclusion of all else, whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford me a continuous and supreme joy to eternity.

Therapy is often about articulating confused ideas, exploring them, and understanding how they arrived to one's mind in the first place. Understanding that we did not do this or that because we chose to, but because the series of determined effects led us to, can be enlightening and liberating. You have not single-handedly built your mind. And in moments when we try to do so, for example in therapy or by trying to follow Spinoza's advice, the only tools at our disposal are the ones that we have inherited causally from moments past. If we do not see this we are going to repeat past mistakes. Spinoza is trying to show us that every time we understand the connection and causes of something we gain a new tool. And as we know, for Spinoza the mind (and its tools) and the will is the same thing. We are what we are, but we can get more familiar with why we are as we are, and this may change our striving in the future. This is no free will, this is purely striving. Einstein, who was a great admirer of Spinoza¹¹¹, following Schopenhauer, puts it nicely:

Honestly, I cannot understand what people mean when they talk about the freedom of the human will. I have a feeling, for instance, that I will something or other, but what relation this has to freedom I cannot understand at all. I feel that I will to light my pipe and I do it; but how can I connect this up with the idea of freedom? What is behind the act of willing to light the pipe? Another act of willing? Schopenhauer once said: Der Mensch kann was er will; er kann aber nicht wollen was er will.¹¹²

Our *reasons* for doing things are merely what we will. Davidson says that when we answer the question 'Why did you do it?' with 'For no reason', this means not that there is no reason, but that there is no *further* reason, besides *wanting* to do it.¹¹³ Understanding as far as we can *why* we want and will as we do, does not have to make us fatalistic. On the contrary, if Spinoza is right it will increase our freedom. Our neuroses, hopes and fears will seem less personal and insufferable. We understand that input effects output, becoming sensitive to the background causes of one's thoughts and feelings can allow for greater control over one's life:

It is one thing to bicker with your wife because you are in a bad mood; it is another to realize that your mood and behaviour have been caused by low blood sugar. This understanding reveals you to be a biochemical puppet, of course, but it also allows you to grab hold of one of your strings: A bite of food may be all that your personality requires. Getting behind our conscious thoughts and feelings can allow us to steer a more intelligent course through our lives.¹¹⁴

This is a simple, down to earth account of what we can hope for in getting knowledge about causes. I have not discussed, and will not further pretend to address the later propositions of EV, concerning intuitive knowledge and eternity of the mind and intellectual knowledge of God.¹¹⁵ I have not, by far, said all I wanted to say or addressed all that needs to be discussed. But within my limits I feel it is necessary to stop here. In the last section I will simply recapitulate a bit with a few fairly predicable words.

§14: *True Freedom*

The practical implications of Spinoza's philosophy are that it tells us how we *might* live. We *can* determine ourselves to live according to reason and follow wisdom rather than ignorance. This is conditional and causal rather than imperative. *If* we live according to wisdom the result will be pleasure. *If* we live according to ignorance the result will be unpleasure. The only ought we get from this is that we ought to follow the path of wisdom, to be ourselves. Spinoza's radical freedom does not lie in free will, but in how understanding causes and effects gives us more power over our emotions than we would have had in ignorance. The latter has also shown to be scientifically supported, even if we do not accept Spinoza's metaphysical framework or parallelism doctrine.¹¹⁶

Of course, many of Spinoza's arguments do not hold. Interpreters have tried and tried again to make sense of them, occasionally bending the original texts liberally. In many instances, the problem is not only to figure out if Spinoza's conclusions follow from his premises, but what he is saying in the first place. But that is less important than one might think, because it is still a worthwhile philosophical project:

Throughout the *Ethics*... we have been tracking and criticising Spinoza as he has tackled profoundly important questions, some of them discovered by him, and even when he has been immersed in errors, we have been able to see why.¹¹⁷

Spinoza takes his metaphysical claims and applies them to human ways of living, arguing for e.g. people's need for each other in metaphysical form, deducing it from general principles concerning the necessary relation between all finite modes. The starting point is that no individual finite mode whose nature is different from our own can help or hinder us in any way, i.e., they cannot enter into causal relation with us. Thus they are not good or bad for us, because they cannot affect us positively or negatively. On the other hand, things with which we do have something in common can either agree or disagree with our nature. Hence they can either increase or diminish our power to act. Something is harmful to the extent that its nature disagrees with, or is contrary to, our own nature (EIVp30): *Presumably, this applies to things whose efforts to preserve their own being conflicts with our efforts to preserve our own being.*¹¹⁸ And vice versa, something is good when it is good for us, when the other things effort to preserve their being is compatible or in harmony with ours. Those things are always good, according to Spinoza (EIVp31). This goes as we have seen further than poisonous and nutritious foods; it applies to social and environmental relationships as well. Since we are always striving to preserve our being, different things can either help or hinder us in realizing our potential power. Spinoza means he has clearly demonstrated that humans necessarily follow their desires, and they desire to feel pleasure. When they consider reason as the highest pleasure, they live in harmony with each other they are mutual useful to realize each other's power. When they follow the passions they are contrary to each other, and will be in conflict. We obviously have to recognize that there are limits to this ethical model of Spinoza's. I have already discussed a few of them in §8. His therapeutical methods offers not fireproof solutions, even though he often seems pretty sure of his techniques (but concludes with saying that true freedom is as difficult as it is rare) as something eternally, necessary ontologically true. Be that what it

may, we in *can* in any case see them as guidelines, sort of like Habermas' discourse ethics. We cannot escape desire, but we can, as far as we know, desire rationally.

Wolfson is right to assume that Spinoza's axiomatic style of presentation does not in fact provide the clarity Spinoza intended. The definitions are typically obscure, the axioms frequently not evident, and the demonstrations all too often unconvincing. And yet it is hard to escape the feeling that there is something there worth taking pains to try to understand, something very important, if true, and something quite possibly true.¹¹⁹

I think like Wolfson that Spinoza has a great deal of important insights to offer us, and as I have argued, his moderate necessitarianism shows us that there is still room for ways we might live, that we in fact can steer ourselves in one direction rather than another, and that when we truly understand something it becomes a necessary part of what we want to do. In that way we can make free humans of ourselves, and this is compatible with a necessary determined world.

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- 1 Descartes' third meditation, in Gaukroger (2006) *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* p. 222
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Letter to Mersenne, April 15th 1630.
- 4 Lilli Alanen, (1991). Descartes, Conceivability, and Logical Modality. In Tamara Horowitz (ed.), *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy*. Rowman and Littlefield. Italic is mine.
- 5 Curley (1969) p. 159
- 6 Bennett use 'explanatory rationalism' to denote the case that Spinoza assumed that whatever is the case can be explained – that if P there is a reason for P. It is the refusal to admit brute facts, ones that just *are* so, for no reason. See Bennett (1984) p. 29
- 7 Leibniz quoted in Bennett (2001, vol 1) p. 177
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Allison (1987) p. 52
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Ibid. p. 53
- 12 Bennett (1984) p. 66-70
- 13 Ibid. p. 70-71
- 14 Ibid. P 73
- 15 *Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered* in Gennaro and Huenemann (1999)
- 16 Ibid. p. 86-87
- 17 Ibid. p. 87
- 18 I use "leeway", but *grades of perfection* sounds more right. Spinoza is talking of man's capability of increasing degrees of perfection in e.g. EIV59 and EIV73. Spinoza uses expressions like "Freer" (liberius) and "more free" (magis liber). See also Naess (1975) p. 55-56
- 19 The following argumentation is drawn from Curley (1969) Chapter three, *Necessity*.
- 20 Curley (1969). p. 93
- 21 Ibid. Chapter two, *The Causality of God*
- 22 Ibid. p. 64-65
- 23 Spinoza: *Theological-Political Treatise* in Morgan (2002) p. 426
- 24 Bennett (1984) Chapter five, *Necessity*
- 25 Ibid. p. 113
- 26 Ibid. p. 113. Bennet borrows this from Curley (1969) p. 68
- 27 Bennett (1984) p. 114
- 28 Ibid. p. 119, footnote 10
- 29 Ibid. p. 124
- 30 Woodward (2003) p. 3
- 31 Bennett (1984) p. 126
- 32 Ibid. p. 127
- 33 Ibid. Same page.
- 34 Ibid. p. 128
- 35 Ibid. p. 129/Curley (1969) chapter 4
- 36 Bennett (1984) p. 129
- 37 Ibid. p. 132
- 38 Ibid. p. 133
- 39 Ibid. p. 134
- 40 For a full discussion on Spinoza's panpsychism, see Bennett (1984) pp. 135-139
- 41 Bennett (1984) p. 141
- 42 Ibid. p. 142-145
- 43 Ibid. p. 145
- 44 Ibid. p. 151
- 45 Ibid. p. 151
- 46 Curley (1969) p. 122
- 47 Ibid. p. 123
- 48 Ibid. p. 124
- 49 Davidson (2001) p. 4. Curley suppose that what applies to actions applies *mutatis mutandis*, to facts. See Curley (1969) p. 125 and footnote 4, p. 171
- 50 Curley (1969) p. 125
- 51 Ibid. p. 126
- 52 Bennett (1984) p. 128-129
- 53 Della Rocca (1996) p. 8
- 54 Curley (1969) p. 129

55 Ibid. p. 130
56 Ibid. same page
57 Ibid. p. 131
58 Della Rocca (1996) p. 17
59 Ibid. p. 118
60 Ibid. p. 118-119
61 Ibid., see note 11 p. 195
62 Ibid. p. 121-122
63 Ibid. p. 122
64 Ibid. p. 122. This is Della Rocca's account of the inference of Delahunty, but it is also applicable to Bennett since Bennett insists that causal claims are equivalent to conceptual claims.
65 Ibid. p. 164
66 Ibid. p. 123
67 Ibid. p. 128. Della Rocca discusses it further and draws the lines throughout his book, but I think I have demonstrated the point reasonably.
68 Among other places.
69 Spinoza (2002) p. 526
70 Deleuze (1988) p. 70
71 Curley (1969) p. 155
72 See note 18
73 De Dijn (1996) p. 196
74 Jacob Stern's translation of Spinoza *Die Ethik* (2007)
75 Bennett (1984) p. 253-254. Another reason why 'Joy' does not sound right to me is also that *Gaudium* (Def. 16 in EIII Definition of the Emotions) translates to *Joy* (Shirley (2002)). This form of joy is more of a self-satisfaction/complacency when gotten away with something, and it shows how the word can be misleading.
76 E.g. Melamed (1933). Zen buddhism has also features similar to those of Spinoza's ethics; that enlightenment should be attained through meditation, self-contemplation and intuition, rather than faith and devotion.
77 "Ich habe mein langes Leben hindurch der Person wie der Denkleistung des grossen Philosophen Spinoza eine ausserordentliche, etwas scheue Hochachtung entgegengebracht" in (ed.) Hessing (1933)
78 Naess (1975) p. 47
79 Adkins (2009) p. 5-6
80 From Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*
81 Bennett (1984) p. 330
82 Ibid. p. 331
83 Ibid. p. 334
84 Ibid. p. 336
85 Ibid. p. 336
86 Ibid. p. 336
87 Naess (1975) p. 36
88 A slightly adjusted form of Naess (1975) p. 35
89 Hall (2004) quoted in Menzies, Peter, "Counterfactual Theories of Causation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/causation-counterfactual/>.
90 Bennett (1984) p. 337
91 Ibid. p. 339
92 Ibid. p. 339
93 Ibid. p. 340-341
94 Ibid p. 340
95 Slote (2010) p. 13
96 Ibid. p. 14
97 Allison (1987) p. 239-240
98 Adkins (2009) p. 10
99 Ibid. p. 11
100 Ibid. p. 217
101 Ibid. p. 223
102 Naess (1975) p. 96
103 Kant (2010) p. 44
104 See Bennett (1985) p. 308-310
105 Deleuze (1988) p. 25
106 *Theological.Political Treatise*, preface
107 Deleuze (1988) p. 26

- ¹⁰⁸ Spinoza is probably thinking of the panic of 1672, during which William III was appointed stadtholder despite the Perpetual Edict of 1667. Footnote 15 *Political Treatise* chapter X, section 10 in Spinoza (2002)
- ¹⁰⁹ Adkins (2009) p. 87
- ¹¹⁰ DeBrabander (2007) p. 27
- ¹¹¹ "Spinoza ist der Erste gewesen, der den Gedanken der deterministischen Gebundenheit allen Geschehens wirklich konsequent auf das menschliche Denken, Fühlen und Handeln angewendet hat. Nach meiner Ansicht hat sich sein Standpunkt unter den um Klarheit und Folgerichtigkeit Kämpfenden nur darum nicht allgemein durchsetzen können, weil hierzu nicht nur Konsequenz des Denkens, sondern auch eine ungewöhnliche Lauterkeit, Seelengröße und -Bescheidenheit gehört." Einstein in (ed.) Hessing (1933) p. 221
- ¹¹² Quoted in Harris (2012) p. 75
- ¹¹³ Davidson (2001) p. 6
- ¹¹⁴ Harris (2012) p. 47
- ¹¹⁵ These propositions of the *Ethics* are enigmatic and mysterious. Bennett (1984) p. 374, is merciless, calling it rubbish and babble.
- ¹¹⁶ Harris (2012) lists several published scientific studies that support this in his notes. See also Damasio (2003) for a contemporary neuro-psychological take on Spinoza.
- ¹¹⁷ Bennett (1984) p. 374
- ¹¹⁸ Allison (1987) p. 150
- ¹¹⁹ Curley(1988) p. xi