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Love and Objective Reality in Spinoza's Account of the Mind's Power over the Affects

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Spinoza's therapy of passions and method of salvation through knowledge and love of God. His optimism about this method is perplexing: it is not even clear how his God, who is unlike any traditional notion of divinity, can be loved. Sorting out Spinoza's view involves distinguishing an ethics of bondage from another of freedom, and two corresponding notions of love of God. The paper argues that the highest kind of love—'pure intellectual love of God'—should not be understood as an affect at all, but instead as unimpeded intellectual activity. This suggestion requires reconsidering Spinoza's account of cognition, particularly his use of the Cartesian notions of objective and formal reality which are not only central to his theory of ideas but constitute the foundations of his salvation project.

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1. Introduction

Despite striking similarities between the philosophy of Spinoza and Ancient Stoicism, Spinoza's strong identification of God with Nature does not involve any kind of divine providence [E1p16].¹ Since everything happens of necessity—nature's laws being everywhere the same—there can be nothing truly bad or evil in nature generally considered. Instead, what we consider good depends on desire. We do not desire a thing because it is good; rather, it is good because we desire it [E3p9s].

Nonetheless, Spinoza retains ideas of perfection and of salvation through knowledge and love of God. This paper focuses on his therapy of the passions and notion of increased perfection attained through his method of salvation. Central is Spinoza's notion of love of God—a God immanent in nature and unlike any traditional notion of divinity—and its role in the salvation project.

Human passions are defined in Part Three of the *Ethics* as confused and inadequate ideas of affections in the body caused by external objects. They obey their own

¹ Citations are from the *Ethics* (E) by part, proposition ('p'), axiom ('a'), scholium ('s'), corollary ('c'); 'd' indicates a definition (when immediately following a part number) or a demonstration (when immediately following a proposition number); 'pref' indicates Preface and 'app' Appendix. 'DefAff' indicates the definitions of the affects, and 'GenDefAff' the general definition of affects, in part three. I use Curley's translations (in C), and sometimes Shirley's (in S), but occasionally alter them.

mechanisms, and Spinoza shows in Part Four how powerless the mind—the idea of the body—is against them. Yet, *contra* Descartes, he defines ‘the power of the Mind’ by understanding (*intelligentia*) alone [E5pref; G II 280], arguing that ‘the more an affect is known to us, the more it is in our power’ [E5p3c], so that a passive affect ceases to be passive ‘as soon we form a clear and distinct idea of it’ [E5p3].

To understand this optimism, one needs look beyond Spinoza’s psychology and account of cognition to their metaphysical assumptions. These include some traditional lines of thought that he borrows from Descartes, including a version of the thesis that the mind or intellect has a power to form true ideas on its own and the ancient philosophical identification of being or reality with perfection [E2d6]. Being comes in degrees, so that some beings or categories of being—‘individuals’—have more reality than others, hence more perfection [E4pref; G II, 207]. Being is interpreted in terms of power to produce effects—‘force’ or ‘activity’—where the more active an individual and the more effects it produces, the more reality or perfection it has. The degree of activity that an individual has is its degree of reality, where unimpeded activity represents the highest degree of reality.² If in Spinoza’s universe there is necessarily no room for changing the order of things, there is, remarkably, room for improvement in the sense of increased perfection.

Section 2 outlines the difference and interrelation of what I call the ‘ethics of bondage’ of *Ethics*, Part Four, and the ‘ethics of freedom’ of Part Five. Section 3 discusses love of God and its role in intellectual emancipation, arguing that two different notions of love of God are at work in Part Five.

Section 4 turns to Spinoza’s account of cognition and its metaphysical assumptions, particularly the notions of objective and formal reality. These are central to his theories of ideas and emancipation from the slavery of the passions, but have not been much discussed in this context.

The suggestion to be defended here is, roughly, that the formal reality of things is reflected in the objective reality of their ideas, and that the power of the highest kind of cognition consists precisely in the greater degree of intellectual activity of a mind whose ideas connect in intuition to the infinite formal reality on which its finite essence depends. As its adequate cognition increases, and it attains intuitive understanding of the essences of things and how they flow from God, the finite human mind comes to see itself as participating in the pure intellectual activity that is the highest perfection itself, and thereby comes to experience the highest possible satisfaction—namely, self-contentment, eternal love of God, or beatitude.

2. Ethics in Bondage and Ethics of Salvation

2.1 Metaphysical Assumptions

In the *Ethics*, God is described as a necessary, infinite being of the highest perfection, that can be considered in two ways, as *Natura naturans*, the free cause of itself—nature *qua* dynamic and causing— and as *Natura naturata*, nature *qua* necessarily caused [1p29s]. In the *Short Treatise* we read that *Natura naturans* is ‘a being that we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself ... that is God’ [I.8; G I, 47]. God is this infinite substance that involves existence, in which intellect, will, and power or essence are all one:

² See E5p20, 4pref [G II, 209], Descartes’s *Principles of Philosophy* [G I, 165].

there is no distinction or priority among God's thinking, willing, and power of acting. *Natura naturata*, what this power produces and thinks (created nature), can be seen as general or particular. The general consists of eternal and infinite modes depending immediately on God, conceived of under the attribute of extension as motion in matter and under the attribute of thought as understanding in the eternal intellect. The particular consists of all finite things that are produced by, or flow from, the general mode. Substance, the cause of itself, is something that a mind perceives through these two attributes, thought and extension, the first expressing God's eternal and infinite essence as thinking, the second God's infinite and eternal essence *qua* extended.

Where then are we, finite thinking, sensing, and striving beings in this picture? Considered through the attribute of extension, human beings are bodies—transient determinate systems of motion and rest. Considered through the attribute of thought, we are ideas of these bodies and their essences in the eternal intellect. Spinoza writes (*Cogitata Metaphysica*, G I, 267) that 'the whole of *Natura naturata* is nothing but a unique entity, from which it follows that man is a part of nature that must cohere with the rest.' *Qua* bodies, we are parts of extended Nature and must cohere with the whole of which we are parts. *Qua* minds, we are ideas of these bodies in God's infinite intellect. Spinoza proudly defends his theory as solving Descartes's mind-body problem: if the human mind is an idea (God's idea) of the human body, it is in a sense identical with the body whose formal reality it reflects or expresses objectively. *Qua* idea of the body, the mind has no independent formal existence apart from the body that constitutes its object but is still distinct from it logically. Its power of acting deployed in understanding manifests, or reflects under the attribute of thought, the same force manifesting itself through the attribute of extension as the causal power of the body. Our minds are these finite determinate modes (or affections) of God-Nature's infinite power or force, understood as thinking and manifested in the eternal intellect, while our bodies are determinate, finite, and transitory expressions of the same infinite power manifested as extended.

In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza offers an early formulation of his *conatus* principle: 'each thing in itself has a tendency to preserve itself in its state, and bring itself to a better one' [I.5; G I: 40].³ These two apparently diverging lines of thought reappear throughout the *Ethics*, and are present in the final version of the principle. 'Each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours (*conatur*) to persist in its own being' [E3p6]. *Conatus* or 'striving' is a determinate, finite expression of God's or Nature's force. Corresponding to the two manifestations of that force, *conatus* also takes two forms: (i) striving to persist in being, which comes to mean striving to uphold the body's given determinate ratio of motion and rest through which its singular essence is defined, and (ii) as a desire (or will) [3p9ds] to increase understanding in any given finite mind, which, according to the degree of clarity and distinction of its ideas, is a limited expression of the infinite power or activity of understanding of the eternal intellect of which it is a part. If we are thus parts of an infinitely extended universe where brute force seems to prevail, we are simultaneously parts of the eternal intellect that does nothing but understand and that eternally enjoys its intellectual activity.⁴

³ Spinoza does not use the term '*conatus*' here.

⁴ Thanks to Peter Myrdal for clarification.

2.2 Adequate Cognition

What, then, is this intellectual activity of which we have our share? Spinoza gives a brief and dense account of two kinds of adequate cognition, reason and understanding or intuition, at *Ethics*, Part Two.⁵ The human mind being the idea of the body, all of its knowledge is obtained through the body. He distinguishes between three kinds of cognition: (i) mere opinion, (ii) belief, or imagination, and (iii) true or adequate knowledge. (i) is inadequate, based on ideas of things not in themselves but how they affect our bodily senses in the encounters of daily life. (ii) is based on evident ‘common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things’ and is called ‘reason’ (*ratio*) [E2p40s2]. These notions are shared (by [E2p38]) and ‘explain those things which are common to all, and which (by [p37]) do not explain the essence of any singular thing’, and therefore ‘must be conceived without any relation to time, but under a certain species of eternity, q.e.d.’ [E2p44c2d]. When connected to an adequate idea ‘of the formal essences of certain attributes of God’, reason is said to lead to the third kind of cognition, intuition (*intuitio*), consisting ‘in adequate knowledge of the essences of things’ and how they depend on the formal essence of God’s attributes [E2p40s2].

While imagination regards things as contingent, in confused and partial ways, as they affect our body, reason and intuition conceive of them truly or adequately, as they are in themselves, under the aspect of eternity [E2p44c]. Whichever kind of adequate cognition one considers, its central element is its active or dynamic nature, ideas being understood not as passively received images or information but as conceptions formed by the mind, through its actual engagement in the activity of understanding their objects, their interconnections and relationship to God.⁶

What, then, distinguishes the third, intuitive kind of cognition is that we move beyond the level of abstraction and universality of demonstrative knowledge based on processing adequate common notions, to a direct intuitive grasp of the actual existence and essence of particulars and how they flow from God’s essence [E2p47d, E5p36s]. Thus, through our intellectual activity of understanding how our essence depends immediately on God, we come to directly experience the existence of this infinite powerful immensity on which all things depend.⁷ In truly cognizing the essence of our mind, and realizing how it is a determination of God’s eternal and infinite mode of thinking [E2p11d], we are said to ‘feel and know by experience that we are eternal’ [E5p23s]. The very act of evidently understanding our singular essence through God’s essence, is what Spinoza here calls sensing or experiencing, through ‘our mind’s eyes’, eternity. It is a kind of purely intellectual experience that can occur here and now, without presupposing survival after the destruction of the body [5p23].⁸ It does, however, presuppose the second kind of knowledge and the desire to understand that it generates [E5p28]. Singular things being ‘nothing but ... modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in certain and determinate ways’ [E1p25c], the more we understand them, ‘the more we understand God’ [E5p24]. The mind’s greatest striving and virtue is understanding things through this third

⁵ See Wilson [1996], Garrett [2010], Carriero [2016, 2019], and Primus [2017].

⁶ See [E2d3, E2p49cd, E2p45d].

⁷ E.g. Soyarslan [2016]; see Carriero’s illuminating discussions [2016, 2019].

⁸ Jaquet [2018] describes the feeling produced by demonstration as involving ‘certainty’ [2018: 375]. Following Carriero [2016], I prefer to construe this as the sense of our active engagement in reasoning.

kind of knowledge [E5p25], which fuels itself since ‘the more able the mind is to understand things through the third kind of cognition, the more it desires to understand things by this kind of cognition’ [E5p26]. It makes one self-sufficient, keeping the mind engaged in its essential activity, protected from the illusions of imagination and the harmful passions that they feed. It produces the highest contentment (*mentis acquiescentia*) and perfection, and, by DefAff2, the highest kind of joy or pleasure (*laetitia*), accompanied by the idea of oneself and one’s virtue [E5p27d].⁹ Hence, it is also a kind of self-knowledge [E5p30].

In knowing the body’s eternal essence as part of God’s essence, the mind knows that it knows so knows itself—its power of understanding—as part of God’s eternal intellect and infinite essence *qua* thinking. In seeing itself *qua* part of God’s eternal intellect, as ‘the adequate, or formal, cause of the third kind of knowledge’, it—the part of it that knows—realizes that it is eternal. The proof of E5p31 invokes E3d1: ‘the cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it is adequate.’ The power of thinking producing the mind’s understanding of the essence of its body *sub species aeternitatis* is the power of God’s eternal intellect acting in the finite mind/body—in the idea of this finite human body. This self-knowledge is the highest perfection that a human mind can reach and is the cause of blessedness (*beatitudo*) [E5p27, E5p42d]. Whether or not we reach it, ‘the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, i.e., the more perfect he is’ [E5p31s].

2.3 Spinoza’s Two Ethical Projects

Spinoza may be thought to have two ethical projects, relating to the two different forms of the *conatus* principle, the first concerning persevering in one’s being, and the second concerned with bringing it to a greater perfection—goals that supposedly merge at the end of the day. Between the two, the subject may seem to change: human embodied beings—men and women—remain in bondage, whereas the human mind—the idea of the human body—through its innate power attains freedom in recognizing itself as part of the eternal divine intellect. Paradoxically, in becoming more and more conscious of itself, of God, and of other things, nothing should matter more to the human mind than intellectual understanding. In Spinoza’s words, ‘everything relating to its memory or imagination should be of scarcely any importance in comparison with its intellect’ [E5p39s].

The ethics of bondage is a rational undertaking, where reason working with memory and imagination moderates and uses the passions for a healthy, interactive, social life—laying the foundations for a community of similarly rational beings living according to virtue and supporting one another. Such a community is a presupposition for fully exercising reason itself—creating the conditions for developing the science and increased understanding of the world that reason desires. The ethics of freedom, by contrast, presupposes that the passions are mastered, and harmful passions eliminated, by being transformed into understanding. For no matter how useful passions are for our practical life and activities, they are still, *qua* passive, dependent on external causes beyond our control and a hindrance to the emancipation of the

⁹ Self-contentment—*acquiescentia in se ipso*—is defined as being joy born from a person’s consideration of herself and her power of action [DefAff25]. Cf. Rutherford [1999] and Soyarslan [2014].

intellect. They hinder the finite human mind or its better part, which is God's idea of the human body, from blending completely with the whole, the infinite and eternal intellect. It is only in seeing itself working as part of and grounded in the eternal intellect that the mind is truly active and free in Spinoza's sense of 'self-causing'. Increase of activity is increase in perfection or reality [E5p40d]. The part of the mind that is active, the intellect, whereby it processes adequate ideas, is its eternal part, 'the part of the mind that remains' [E5p40cs, E5p23, E5p24].

The paradox here is this. To be wholly active and free, the human mind has to 'free' itself from the temporal body whose idea it is, ignoring the affections of the body that constitute its imagination and memory. The existing human body with its inescapable affections is an impediment to the complete freedom of its mind; yet this mind exists and reasons well only to the extent that its object, the body, exists and thrives [E5p39ds]. The more the mind acts, the more perfect it is; the more it is acted upon by the imagination and hence by the body, the more it is hindered and imperfect [E5p40cs]. Is this to say that the mind gains its full freedom—actualizing its true nature as part of an infinite intellect with eternal and uninterrupted activity—only when its durational existence comes to an end, in the 'afterlife'? Some of the language in Part Five may suggest this, but Spinoza seems to hold that intuitive cognition gives us insight into our actual eternity here and now, and that such insight comes with or is a pure *intellectual* enjoyment.¹⁰

The two ethics must be intimately related, though, since the art of living well, following the rules of prudence of Part Four, with a healthy body capable of a great deal of (useful) activity, is a precondition for achieving the goal of Part Five, developing a mind 'that is highly conscious of itself, of God, and of things' [E5p39], a mind active and free. Piety and religion are important tools in the service of the ethics of bondage, fostering virtue—strength of mind. These serve the ethics of freedom as well, as does anything that promotes courage (*fortitudo*) and nobility (*generositas*), the virtues of the 'free man', one free within bondage in so far as she lives according to reason, seeking her own true advantage (the very basis of virtue) according to reason. But we are not meant to climb and to leave the ethics of bondage behind us. At the end of Part 5, Spinoza comments on the relation between the two ethics as follows [E5p41d]:

Now in order to determine what reason prescribes as advantageous we took no account of the mind's eternity, a topic we did not consider until Part V. So although at that point we were unaware that the mind is eternal, we regarded as being of prime importance whatever is related to courage and nobility. And so, even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we should still regard the said precepts of reason as being of prime importance.

Regardless of the mind's eternity, we should follow the precepts of reason: they do not serve any further transcendent end. We are also reminded in the last proposition of the *Ethics* that blessedness (*beatitudo*) is not a reward for virtue, but is virtue itself. It is not, as secular imagination would have it and as popular religion teaches, that we will become blessed—reach the highest good—because we restrain ourselves and keep our drives in check. Instead, it is because we enjoy blessedness that we are able to control our lusts [E5p42]. To enjoy blessedness or freedom is intellectual love of

¹⁰ Jaquet [2018: 371–2] rightly stresses that eternity 'has nothing to do with immortality or with any post-mortem existence'. Cf. Garrett [1996].

God, the eternal *joy*—if one ‘may still be permitted to use this term’ [E5p36s]—in which intellectual understanding or intuitive cognition consists [E5p32]. Such understanding always involves the idea of God as the eternal cause of whatever at the time is the object of our experience and understanding.

3. Love of God

3.1 *The Supreme Good*

Given Spinoza’s account of love, how should one understand the idea of an eternal joy and love of God? Spinoza works with two notions of love of God, relating to the two ethics discussed above, both of which are rational in that they depend on adequate knowledge. Only the second kind, introduced in the last pages of the *Ethics*, qualifies properly as ‘Intellectual love of God’—a love that comes with highest satisfaction or bliss, but which *qua* eternal cannot really be an affect at all.¹¹ It is, rather, pure unimpeded intellectual activity—pure perfection. The kind of pleasure or peace of mind that it produces has more affinities with Aristotle’s *Eudaimonia* than with Descartes’s intellectual love of God. The first kind of love, that Spinoza works with from Part Four until E5p32, echoes Descartes’s intellectual love of God, which, although in itself a purely intellectual emotion, is associated with and strengthened by body-dependent passions of love.¹² The *amor intellectualis Dei* introduced in Part 5 [E5p32] is purely intellectual and self-sufficient.

Consider, first, the object of love. From the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TIE) onwards, Spinoza seeks a permanent and unfailing true good, worthy of being loved for its own sake. He is seeking one that would always be at hand, one ‘which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity’ [§1; G II: 5].

Now, if we take seriously Spinoza’s value-neutral view of desire as developed in the *Ethics*, any object of love should be as good as another, since there is no good independently of desire [E3p9s; E4pref]. There is no standard of goodness other than one’s affect, and so good and bad, perfection and imperfection, are only modes of thinking of how the body is affected by external things.¹³ Yet Spinoza needs to ‘retain these words’ and he relates them to his model of human perfection, the free man described in Part Four, so that humans are said to be ‘more perfect or imperfect in so far as they approach more or less to this model’ [E4pref; G II: 208].

Human perfection is here defined in relation to a model or standard that we set ourselves. But Spinoza also works with a notion of perfection identified with reality [E2d6]. Individuals can be compared, not merely according to how they affect our body, but to a common genus of which the most general is the notion of being that ‘pertains absolutely to all individuals in nature’. Comparing them to one another thus we ‘find that some have more being or reality than others’ and ‘say that some are more perfect than others’ [E4pref; G II: 207]. Perfection is ‘reality, i.e., the essence of each thing in so far as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration’ [E4pref; G II: 209]. Existence *per se* is not the measure. What counts

¹¹ Joy is always transitory to greater perfection, but is not perfection itself ([DefAff3]; also 5p33s, 5p36s, 5p17c).

¹² For Descartes, this love is the supreme happiness postulated by faith in the next life, but already constitutes ‘the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life’ [AT VII 36].

¹³ E.g. ‘[m]usic is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad for one who is deaf’ [E4pref; G II, 208].

is existing *and* producing, each according to its own being, the particular effects that depend only on it. The perfection of an individual varies depending on whether its power of acting (namely, its power of causing some effect) is increased or diminished. Its perfection is thus measured not by duration but by power of activity, which alone depends on the nature or essence of a particular thing [E4pref; G II: 209]. Our human power of acting depends on our essence defined by reason. It follows from the very nature of reason [E4p36] that '[w]hatever we strive for from reason is understanding', and 'the greatest good of those who follow virtue is knowing God' [E4p36d].¹⁴

3.2 The Definition of Love and Two Kinds of Love of God

How, then, does Spinoza define love, and how does it apply to love of God as our highest good? First, affects or passions are ideas of determinate modifications of our basic striving. Your striving depends on your bodily constitution and is under constant pressure from surrounding things, sometimes inhibiting or opposing, sometimes supporting and enhancing, your power. Spinoza describes this in terms of affections diminishing or increasing the body's power of acting together with their ideas [E3d3]. Ideas of things that increase or diminish the body's power of acting increase or diminish the mind's power of thinking. Joy is the affect that 'increases the mind's power of thinking'—that is, 'by which the mind passes to a greater perfection'; sadness, 'a passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection' [E3p11s]. Love is defined as 'joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause' [EDefAff6], which 'explains the essence of love clearly enough'. Descartes's definition of love as the volition to form and remain in union with the thing loved is, for Spinoza, a property of love but not part of its essence, and not a matter of free will or decision [DefAff6, *my italics*]¹⁵:

Rather, *by will I understand a contentment (acquiescentia) in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved, by which the lover's Joy is strengthened or at least encouraged.*

In Spinoza's account of love, the object's presence need not be spatio-temporal; presence in thought and attention suffices. Thinking of or imagining a thing, through the activation of the traces in one's body of the thing thought, is enough, for it can affect you just as much as perception of the object [E2p17]. The joy that the thought of God causes is a special kind of inner contentment, differing from love as a passion, and is always a transition from a lower to a higher perfection.

While love as a passion depends wholly on the imagination and its inadequate and truncated ideas of its external cause, intellectual love is based on adequate and transparent, true ideas. Since God *qua* infinite, eternal, and omnipresent encompasses everything, God can be neither an external cause of nor an object of imagination. This is why love of God, love being a joy caused by an external thing, turns into

¹⁴ That the two ethics are really stages in one continuous project is supported by Spinoza's claims about 'true' virtue [E4p23–p28]. Knowledge of God is both the Mind's greatest good and 'the Mind's greatest advantage', thus its greatest virtue [E4p28d]. And: 'For the excellence of the idea and the actual power of thinking are measured by the excellence of the object' [EGenDefAff; G II, 204]. I thank Andrew Youpa for pointing out this passage, omitted from Curley [C 543].

¹⁵ Descartes characterizes love as 'an emotion of the soul ... inciting it to join itself willingly (*de volunté*) to the object loved' [AT XI, 387].

self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), joy with an internal cause.¹⁶ The intellectual love of God depends on *understanding* God to be eternal—that is, the eternal omnipresent cause of our being. In intellectual love, God is grasped as the immanent cause of everything, including the finite mind itself with all of its inadequate and adequate ideas.

Ferdinand Alquié [1981: 321] despairs of finding in Part Five ‘a coherent conception of the Love of God’.¹⁷ Spinoza, I argue, works with two notions of love of God, but writes as if they were on a continuum, suggesting that the intellectual love of God—described in E5p32 as eternal and as dependent on the third kind of knowledge (intuition)—is a stronger and more effective version of the love of God grounded on the second kind of knowledge (reason). Yet it is hard to see how they could be continuous—namely, how his *amor intellectualis Dei* could have any trace of affectivity involving temporary increases of one’s power or desire to persevere that serve, at best, to support or perfect the body and mind in their durational actuality.

Spinoza is generally more restrictive than Descartes on the proper object of love. He thinks that any ‘ordinary’ love, if not possessive by essence, degenerates into possessive love or harmful desires that only lead to misery (see, for example, [E5p20s]). Any passive joy or increase in the power to persevere seeks by nature to perpetuate itself and to grow [E3p7–p13]. No finite changing thing can satisfy it but is bound to make us, sooner or later, miserable. We, our minds, require an unchanging object of love that none can take away from us, one that gives us permanent peace and freedom of mind instead of enslaving us. Only the eternal being existing and acting from the necessity of its nature could fit that description. But how could an infinite eternal object cause any kind of joy or love in a finite being tied to the finite objects acting on its senses?

3.3 Love of God and Therapy of Passions

Consider the general remedy against passions proposed in Part 5; adequate cognition—notably (where possible), cognition of the passions themselves and their true causes. It is a matter of reordering ideas, and, with them, the affections of the body [E5p1]. This requires an uncommon lucidity about one’s own passions, since one needs to separate any affect itself from the thought of its particular external cause, and to join it to the idea of its true cause, God or Nature, whereby the affect and its effects should be destroyed [E5p2]. How can this take place? It cannot be a matter of a more sophisticated form of therapy of passions with which we would be familiar, although it is sometimes presented in that way.¹⁸

It is a psychological law for Spinoza that the human mind strives to imagine things that increase the body’s power of acting [E3p12; E1p12d], and thus to recollect things that exclude images of those that diminish it [E3p13, DefAff32]. These strivings are constantly opposed by images of other things that impose themselves on the mind. The force of any passion and its persistence depends on the power of external things compared to our own, and we always remain subject to them and to the common order of nature to which we have to adjust ourselves [E4p4c, E4p6].

¹⁶ Our intellectual love of God is part of God’s self-love. Our salvation or blessedness (*beatitudo*) or freedom consists in ‘a constant and eternal love of God, or in God’s love for men’ [E5p35]. See [E5p36c] and Melamed [2020].

¹⁷ Cf. Nadler [2018: 304n7] and Melamed [2020].

¹⁸ On Spinoza’s cognitive therapy, see Alanen [2017, 2020]. See also Lin [2009] and Marshall [2012].

Nothing can surpass an affect other than a stronger affect opposing it since, when any affect troubles the mind, ‘the body is at the same time affected with an affection by which its power of acting is increased or diminished’ [E4p7d].¹⁹ These bodily affections are essential to the passions *qua* confused ideas of affects, not only for their genesis, growth, and persistence but for their control as well. Only by knowing ‘both our nature’s power and its lack of power’ can we ‘determine what reason can do in moderating the affects, and what it cannot do’ [E4p17s].

‘Man’s lack of power’ is exposed in the first half of Part Four. We are shown how easily desires arising from passive affects can overcome a desire arising from true cognition of good and evil. While the latter depends on our own activity (of understanding) or reason alone, the former depend on the power of external causes that exceed our own, which explains the difficulty of following reason [E4p15d–p17]. The mind’s power of thinking varies with transitions in the body’s power that its ideas affirm and reflect; it waxes and wanes with the body’s power to persevere.²⁰ Adequate ideas depend on their truth alone and with the increased desire to understand that they generate, which is stronger, the more adequate ideas that the mind possesses. Increased adequate cognition is a perfection of the mind. But does it also reflect some change of perfection or power in the body by which it could counteract passive affects?²¹

Spinoza’s language may suggest that mastery of passions would be a matter of quasi-mechanical conflict between opposed forces carried out within the individual, but that cannot be his view.²² Alternatively, it can be seen as a matter of how well a mind-body as a whole is adapted to its natural and social environment, and able to preserve and develop its own essential power of action, something that is not a question only of preserving a healthy life but of increased understanding of things, which helps the finite body to adapt to its environment and cope with its challenges. Although such increase of understanding must correlate with some bodily state, it is a purely mental perfection, and must extend to understanding whatever its body can directly or indirectly interact with. *Qua* mental perfection, it requires nothing beyond the intellectual activity in which it consists, which is its own reward.

We should, then, see Spinoza’s therapy of the affects as part of a more general striving toward rational self-control (see James [2014]). Rational self-governance is a matter of using natural means at our disposal for a decent life, caring for the body combined with caring for a community of other rational beings, developing their capacities to reason, and understanding ourselves and the world in which we live—each one according to her power and abilities, and all together for what guarantees, for each individual, the greatest possible freedom to make the best of her particular powers. This is not a question of striving to preserve durational existence. It is instead a

¹⁹ ‘No affect can be restrained by the true cognition of good and evil insofar as it is true, but *only insofar as it is considered as an affect*’ [4p14d, my emphasis].

²⁰ See EDefAff24–25 and EGenDefAff [G II, 204].

²¹ I thank Peter Myrdal for pressing this question.

²² Of the two ways to spell out such a conflict, neither is satisfactory. One invokes Spinoza’s notion of active affects, joy and desire [E3p58–p59], which have no accompanying bodily mode and cause at best more adequate ideas. Another invokes the special kind of joy that Spinoza calls *Hilaritas* (cheerfulness), that Bove [1996: 107–11] identifies with intuitive cognition. Spinoza defines it [E3p11s] as a species of joy relating to mind and body when all of the parts of the body are equally affected (see Carlisle [2017: 229]). I agree that such equilibrium and stability are prerequisites for intuitive cognition and its enjoyment. Yet, as a bodily state, *Hilaritas* must be caused by equal and optimal affections of all the body’s parts, presupposing some kind of harmony between external and internal forces. *Hilaritas* may thus be a state more easily imagined than attained.

matter of preserving one's power in so far as it is rational and can affirm itself in all our actions, within the limits of what a peaceful truth-honouring community of just and mutually respectful members can tolerate (see, for instance, [E4p37s2], [E4p67], and [E4p72s]). Preserving and perfecting one's being (*esse suo*) is essentially a matter of exercising and perfecting reason in practical action as much as in theoretical understanding, which is an end in itself (cf. Youpa [2003]). Thinking nature necessarily cares about truth, intelligibility, and the moral virtues supporting the life of reason and its innate striving to see things such as they are, under the aspect of eternity.

Yet, our finite minds reflect our finite bodies, and their power to think depends on the state and situation of the body as a part of infinite nature. Our ability to adapt external things to our purposes is limited, as is our power to master our passions through reason. Understanding their necessity helps us to bear, with a calm and unmoved mindset, things that surpass our power, provided that we have done whatever we can to avoid them [E4app32]:

If we understand this clearly and distinctly, that part of our nature which is defined by understanding (*intelligentia*), that is, the better part of us, will be fully content with this (*in eo plane acquiescet*) and strive to persevere in that contentment (*acquiescentia*). For in so far as we truly understand there is nothing we could desire except what is necessary, nor could we absolutely be content with anything but the true, and thus in so far as we understand this rightly, the striving of our better part agrees with the order of the whole of nature.

The alignment of our better part, the intellect, with the whole order of nature is what we should strive for through understanding. This is a hard doctrine. What about the rest of our being? And what about those who neither grasp the necessity of the order or powers of nature nor are prepared to accept them with contentment when they work against them?

3.4 Intellectual Love of God

Is this, then, why Spinoza, having outlined his therapy of passions, appeals to what appears to be his last resort—an enduring, purely intellectual, love of God relating to the mind alone [E5p20s]?

[T]his love is the most constant of all the affects, and in so far as it is related to the Body, cannot be destroyed, unless it is destroyed with the body itself. What the nature of this love is insofar as it is related only to the Mind, we shall see later.

Love of God, this suggests, differs, depending on whether we consider it in relation to the mind-body, or to the mind alone. Considered in the first way, if it does not yield absolute power over the affects, it helps through its greater constancy to contain them, permitting the cognition and love of God achieved through the second kind of knowledge to grow and to occupy the greatest part of the mind, affecting it 'extensively' [E5p20s]. In what, exactly, could this affect consist?

Adequate ideas come with a desire for more adequate ideas. The ethics of bondage—with the dictates of reason—prepares the ground, teaching the importance of taking good care of the mind-body, developing good habits, virtue, and adequate ideas with their joyful activity and desire for more such activity. The latter will then produce, automatically, more adequate ideas. Reason helps us first to understand the true general causes of our passions and the predicament that they create. Reason, if we follow the precepts summarized in E5p20s, helps us to distance ourselves from

disturbing affects by relating them to God/Nature as their cause, wherein they turn into Love of God/Nature [E5p15d]:

He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly rejoices [3p53], and this Joy is accompanied by the idea of God [by p14] hence [by DefAff6], he loves God, and ... does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects, q.e.d.

The more that we contemplate God—the idea of God being adequate and perfect—the more active we are [E5p18].²³ The love of God described here, and up to 5p20, is not an extension or perfection of any ordinary affect of love, not even love of God in the familiar sense of a providential father. Any love of this kind would have to count as, or as dependent on, a passive affect. What Spinoza seems to have in mind here is rational thinking coming with its own kind of ‘active’ affect—his counterpart of Descartes’s ‘intellectual love of God’. Although generated by reason and true knowledge alone, it would then, like Descartes’s intellectual love, be effective on the will only as supported by some associated (bodily) passion helping the imagination to weigh against disturbing passions.²⁴

This first kind of love of God grows out of affections of the body dissociated from their objects and related to God as their true cause. It is grounded in rational cognition but, importantly, fuelled by imagination—by the very affects of the mind-body that true cognition is supposed to transform into the active affect of loving God. This is presented in Part Four as ‘the highest good, which we can want from the dictates of reason’ [4p28], one moreover that is ‘common to all men’ [4p36]. The more people we imagine enjoying it, the stronger it becomes. There are, moreover, no affects contrary to it to destroy it. Of all objects of (earthly) love, God, who is immutable and eternal, is the most stable and can never be taken away from us [E2p45]. Therefore, the joy that the thought of it causes can only increase and ‘affect the mind greatly’ [E5p20s].

Thus, when summarizing in E5p20s what clear and distinct rational knowledge can do against the affects, Spinoza refers in the first hand to knowledge of the second kind, knowledge that is available to all, that is not yet perfect intuition, but is the cognitive state from which intuition, the third kind of knowledge, and, with it, an eternal love of God, emerges (see [E2p47s]).

At this point, remarkably, Spinoza notes that ‘with this I have completed everything which concerns this present life’, and adds that ‘in these few words I have covered all the remedies for the affects’ [E5p20s]. Just before this, we read that if ‘clear and distinct knowledge does not absolutely remove’ the passive affects, ‘at least it brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the Mind’ [E5p20s]. The first kind of love of God—the rejoicing produced by the knowledge of the true causes of passions—cannot in the end prevent the passions. What it can do, however, is change the dynamics of the soul, so that these affections come to occupy only the smallest part, making room for more adequate ideas and eventually for the change of perspective that comes with a bliss of its own—the pure intellectual love of God. The therapeutic work is done by reason, in tandem with imagination and the second kind of knowledge. The third kind of knowledge then crowns and fulfils the transformation of a mind that has already learnt how to moderate its passions.

²³ The scholium asserts that ‘in so far as we understand God to be the cause of sadness, we rejoice’ [E5p18s].

²⁴ See Descartes’s letter to Chanut [AT IV 601–611] and Alanen [2019].

Perhaps we could see the two kinds of love of God as belonging to different aspects of our cognitive life, the first emerging in duration, the second pertaining to the mind's eternal essence? The human mind, the idea of any given human body, includes the idea of the body's eternal essence, something that lacks duration and so is not destroyed with the actual temporally existing body [E5p23d]. In adequately cognizing the essence of our body, we 'feel and know by experience that we are eternal' [E5p23s]. It is likely that Spinoza thinks of this second aspect as having always been there in some form. We could then think of the two kinds of adequate cognition, each accompanied by their own kind of love, as completing each other here and now. For why else would the third kind of knowledge be included among the remedies against the passions? Consider the following [E5p20c; G II: 294]:

From this we easily conceive what clear and distinct cognition, and mainly the third kind of cognition (see [2p47s]) whose foundation is the cognition of God itself, can do about the affects (*in affectus potest*), though if in fact it cannot thereby absolutely remove them in so far as they are passions (see [5p3] with [s, 4p4]), at least it brings it about that they constitute the smallest part of the Mind. It then also (*deinde*) begets a love towards a thing immutable and eternal (see [5p15]) that we really possess ...

No vices or misfortunes threaten the love generated by the third kind of cognition, the joy produced by the pure intellectual contemplation of God ([E5p20s]; see also [5p26–7]). What remains of the mind, considered apart from the durational existence of the body, is God's idea of the essence of the singular human body under the species of eternity—an eternal necessary truth flowing from God's own eternal necessary nature. Understanding the striving of this particular mind, a finite mode, and how it is caused by other modes, is an activity and perfection of the eternal intellect itself, one in which, through the best or eternal part of our mind, we have some share. Thus, what Spinoza calls intellectual love of God and the self-contentment that it involves, is really a form of self-understanding and self-love of the eternal essence of the mind, a steady unchanging eternal perfection [E5p31–p33s] equivalent to God's eternal self-love [E5p36]. To the extent that the human mind can enjoy it—that is, participate through direct intuitive cognition in unimpeded divine intellectual activity—it must already have been freed from the passions [E5p34]. To better understand the power of intuition and the increase of perfection that it produces, we need to consider Spinoza's metaphysics of cognition and the role of the notions of formal and objective reality in this extraordinary doctrine of intellectual salvation.

4. Intuitive Cognition and Increase of Perfection

The doctrine of degrees of reality applied to the contents of ideas—ideas considered 'objectively'—are key notions that Spinoza adopts from Descartes but uses in his own way. He also accepts Descartes's causal principle: nothing comes from nothing, including that 'whatever is in the idea considered objectively must be in its cause' formally. In TIE [§35]), he treats the terms 'objective essence', 'certainty', and 'truth' as interchangeable [TIE §36; G II: 15]:

the true Method is not to seek a sign of truth after the acquisition of ideas, but ... the way that truth itself, or the objective essences of things, or the idea (all those signify the same) should be sought in the proper order.

True ideas require no further sign; having a true idea is knowing that one has a true idea [E2p43]. True method is all about rightly ordering one's ideas and distinguishing true ideas from confused or inadequate perceptions [TIE §37]. In combination with the doctrine of degrees of reality of the essences of things, the notion of ideas expressing, through their objective reality, the degree of formal reality of things yields this ideal of method [TIE §38; G II: 16]:

since the relation between two ideas is the same as the relation between the formal essences of those ideas, it follows that the reflexive knowledge of the idea of the most perfect being will be more excellent than the reflexive knowledge of any other ideas ... the most perfect method will be the one that shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of the given idea of the most perfect being.

Since the mind is most perfect when it reflects on the most perfect being [TIE §39], the road to perfecting the mind and salvation goes through reflecting on the idea of God, the supreme and most perfect being—infinite and eternal reality, Nature itself.

Ethics, Part One, enounces the axiom that a true idea must agree with its object [E1a6], and Part Two the definition that '[b]y reality and perfection I understand the same thing' [E2d6]. There can be only one substance in the sense of an independent self-causing being, and it is perceived by human minds through the self-contained infinite attributes of thought and extension. God *qua* thinking thing forms ideas of all of the things that follow from its essence as thinking: 'the formal being of ideas admits God as its cause insofar as he is a thinking thing' [E2p5].²⁵ The same holds for any other attribute: extended things, the objects of ideas, are not caused by ideas or by being known by God prior to being created, but 'are inferred from their attributes in the same way and by the same necessity as that with which we have shown ideas to follow from the attribute of thought' [E2p6]. The upshot is that the 'order and connexion of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' [E2p7].

Objective being reappears in the corollary to the proof of this central proposition. Relying on axiom 1a4—'The knowledge of the effect depends on and involves the knowledge of its cause'—E2p7 shows that, since 'God's power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting', 'whatever follows formally from God's infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection' [E2p7c]. Objective being is inseparable from God's understanding or thinking of things, and so applies only to adequate cognition. Inadequate ideas—namely, human sensory confused and inadequate cognition—thus lack objective being, although, with increased knowledge, they could be rendered clear and distinct, in which case they would have objective being, expressing the true formal reality of the object.²⁶

It is not affects of love and joy, but the greater reality or perfection of its object, that make the third kind of cognition so special. Adequate thinking expresses objectively the formal reality of its object, and the force with which our adequate ideas affirm themselves is that of God's/Nature's infinite power of thinking. In the human mind, this power is manifested in the degree of objective reality of the ideas affirmed, the latter varying with the (degree of) formal reality of their objects—the finite body which is its direct object and the modes of extension that it can infer from that [2p13s]. The greater the

²⁵ The formal reality of the idea is the idea considered *qua* act of thinking. Since any act of thinking always has an object constituting the objective being of the thing thought, act and object are inseparable (see Alanen [2011]).

²⁶ Cf. Carriero [2016: 139–40, 142n10]. When an idea is adequate, it can be more or less ordered, according to the intellect, to which extent we perceive 'things according to their first causes' [E2p18s].

degree of reality affirmed, the greater also the force of affirmation. Thus, the more reality its adequate ideas affirm objectively—the more actual formal reality and causal connections they cover—the greater their power and perfection. Adequate ideas are the eternal essences of things conceived through God's essence [E5p30d]:

Eternity is the very essence of God in so far as this involves necessary existence (by [1D8]). To conceive things under a species of eternity, therefore, is to conceive things ... through God's essence, as real beings, or insofar as through God's essence they involve existence. Hence, in so far as our Mind conceives itself and its body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God.

This is one of two ways of conceiving of things as actual that belong to the power of mind: conceiving of them not in relation to a certain time and place, but as being in God and as following from the necessity of divine nature, hence being conceived through and in God. Conceiving of things under a species of eternity is the very essence or essential activity of the mind [E5p29]. Conceiving of the essences of bodies is cognizing them as actual (existing) things *not* from their present temporal existence but as eternal [E5p31d; *emphasis added*]:

The mind conceives nothing under a species of eternity except in so far as it conceives its body's essence under a species of eternity (by [p29]), i.e., (by [p21] and [p23]), except in so far as it is eternal. So (by [p30]) it has knowledge of God, knowledge which is necessarily adequate (by [2p46]). And therefore, in so far as the Mind is eternal, it is capable of knowing all these things which can follow from this given knowledge of God ... i.e., of knowing things by the third kind of knowledge ... therefore the Mind ... is the *adequate*, or *formal* cause of the third kind of knowledge (by 3d1).

The proof invokes E5p23 about the eternity of the mind—something that the mind is said to experience or feel in actually understanding—suggesting that 'the third kind' of knowledge [E2p40s2] includes the mind's self-knowledge of being its 'formal cause' [E5p31]. The mind in intuitive understanding knows itself as the eternal formal cause of its understanding. This self-knowledge comes with the immediate experience of producing an intuitive understanding through one's own mental activity (a finite token of God's power expressed in the eternal intellect of which it is a part), something that we have more or less dimly. Ascending to the heights of the actual intuition in the third kind of knowledge seems reserved for a few. It comes with the pure intellectual love of God—love not in the sense of an affect that would consist in some increase of bodily power, but in being fully engaged in active understanding, 'endowed with perfection itself' [E5p33s]. Reality and perfection are here one with truly (adequately or formally) self-caused activity. The activity that is God's or Nature's is ours, to the extent that we understand that the part of our mind actively engaged in increasing its understanding is part of the eternal intellect, an immediate mode of God's eternal thinking. Active thinking in a finite human mind does not relate it to some external reality; it is, or expresses, formal reality itself—a mode of God considered under the attribute of thinking. *Qua* actively understanding, our mind transcends the finitude of the body whose adequate idea it is, seeing itself through the perspective of eternal and infinite nature.

What the third kind of cognition adds to the second is this realization that any given act of understanding depends immediately on God's infinite power *qua* thinking.²⁷ In

²⁷ I read 'formal cause' here as 'real or adequate', not as 'distinct from efficient causes'. See also Hübner [2015]. I thank Martin Pickavé for raising this point.

understanding this, the (human) mind comes to see itself as it is—a finite mode among others in God’s eternal intellect expressing the same infinite creative power, *Natura naturans*, the formal cause of *Natura naturata*, comprising both the infinite physical nature and the infinite understanding contemplating it. For a metaphysician and intellectualist like Spinoza, this may seem an exalting prospect, but it can also be seen as a sobering one.²⁸ Spinoza is well aware that his way to salvation will seem extremely difficult and that the salvation he proposes is rarely found [E5p42d].

5. Conclusion

Scholars bent on endorsing contemporary naturalisms and basing their faith in scientific knowledge have found in Spinoza a forerunner and inspiration. Yet if we take his distinction between intellect and imagination seriously (as we should), we must recognize how foreign his ethical outlook is to later naturalists. Situated between pre-modern and modern ways of thinking, Spinoza’s philosophy shares too many elements with ancient and mediaeval philosophy that contemporary naturalisms have lost sight of or eliminated, and updating Spinoza to contemporary intuitions does not help to retrieve these or to do his doctrine full justice. Its deep concern with escaping transience and finding contentment in nothing less than an unfailingly eternal highest good of which nothing can deprive one, is strikingly anti-modern, and has more affinities with Ancient Aristotelean views.^{29,30}

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²⁸ Koistinen [2019] defends the unity of the idea with its object. I would not want to go this far. Caution requires acknowledging Spinoza’s two ways of considering nature, as self-causing and as caused [E1p29s]. We, including the intellect in act, are definitely part of *Natura Naturata*, hence on the latter side of the divide [E1p30–1].

²⁹ I have learnt immensely from the work of and conversations with John Carriero and Olli Koistinen over the years. Versions of this paper were presented at the APA Midwest Meeting (2018) and the Spinoza conference arranged by Karolina Hübner in Toronto (2018), and I have benefited from the questions of the participants in these discussions. I am grateful to John Carriero, Peter Myrdal, Andrew Youpa, Sanem Soyarslan, and Kristin Primus for questions and helpful comments on earlier written versions of the paper. My deepest gratitude to Deborah Brown, Calvin Normore, and Peter Myrdal for invaluable help in improving the manuscript for publication. Lastly, without the unfailing support from Harry Alanen under challenging circumstances, this project could not have been completed.

³⁰ Sadly, this was Lilli Alanen’s (16 October 1941 – 22 October 2021) final philosophy paper. I understand from her children that working on its final version, knowing that it was to appear in the *AJP*, lifted her spirits, allowing her to die as she lived: working while caring for her friends and family. How many of us will achieve such grace, as death manifestly approaches? I am grateful for Lilli’s having contributed so strongly to *AJP*’s increasing presence in scholarship within the history of philosophy. Deb Brown has described this movingly, in comments read at Lilli’s funeral: ‘She always endeavoured to bring out in the texts she explored what we might learn from and use now, what still speaks to the human condition, and helps us to understand ourselves and make better decisions in the here and now. It was in this way that she made the history of philosophy a living history, inspired a generation to do likewise, and changed the field of history of philosophy for the better.’ (– Stephen Hetherington, former *AJP* Editor).

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