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## SPINOZA, *ETHICS*, PART I

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For Part I of the *Ethics*: READ: All the definitions, axioms, and propositions. But pay special attention to Propositions 5-8; 11; 14-18; 25; 28-29; 32-34; 36. Study the following as well: proof of P7; proofs 2 and 3, and the scholium, of P11; proof of P15; corollary 1, 2, and 3 of P16; corollary 2 of P 17; corollary of P25; proof and scholium of P29; proof and corollary 1 and 2 of P32. (We will discuss the Appendix to Part I when we discuss Part IV.)

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[Among the works I've consulted here: Beth Lord, *Spinoza's Ethics*; Brent Adkins, *True Freedom*; Stephen Nadler's "Spinoza" entry at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. I've also benefitted from discussion with Jeff Bell and Joshua Heller.]

The *Ethics* is a fantastic book, one of the true masterpieces in European philosophy. It's got a little bit of everything: metaphysics, psychology, politics, theology, *and* ethics. Or maybe better, all that supporting ethics. That is, one strong way to read it is that everything is in there to enable you to be free – not free in the sense of having no causal antecedents to your actions, but free in the sense of understanding your emotional habits as natural and necessary. And in this understanding you can weaken bad habits and build newer stronger ones.

Now Spinoza and the *Ethics* have been controversial since the beginning; before he even wrote the book, he was exiled from the Jewish community of Amsterdam. And even after his death, and for a long time, "Spinozist" was a dangerous label to have affixed to you.

### 1 ATHEISM / PANTHEISM: "GOD, OR NATURE"

Let's start off: Spinoza was called an atheist, since he denied God was separate and superior ("transcendent") to the world. And he was called a "pantheist" because in denying transcendence he equated God and nature, so that God was everywhere; or, better, everything is in God (pan = everywhere and theos = God); as a cause, God was not transcendent, but "immanent" (P18).

Okay, God is equivalent to nature, and that means the power of natural events: hurricanes, that's a big example, but everything, down to our cell metabolism and brain waves and up to the birth and death of galaxies, everything that happens is just God, or nature, changing itself. Okay, now that's going to be controversial.

Remember our rough and ready clue: many people read "ruler" for "God"; not just that God was Ruler of the Universe, but that "God" was kind of a code word for "ruler," that theology was a hidden way of talking about politics. So there's an analogy, God:World :: ruler:polity.

So if God is above nature, that's cool, that's monarchy, the King is above the kingdom. However, if God isn't above nature, but just *is* nature, that means the ruler isn't above the polity, but just *is* the polity. And that's the formula for a radical, participatory, democracy, something that we're still not ready for.

Remember that the US Founding Fathers designed a mixed system with division of powers among monarchical (President), aristocratic (Senate), and democratic (House of Representatives) elements. But, notice that the democratic element is not directly participatory, but representative.

## 2 THREE WAYS IN WHICH GOD IS NATURE

God is the world in three related senses: He is A) the eternal truth of the world's essential existence (absolutely infinite substance); B) the laws of nature that follow from it (infinite modes); and B) the durational process of the world as it unfolds via a web of finite causes (finite modes).

A) Okay, "essential existence" is a mouthful. God, His essence, must include existence (Definition 1; P7; P11). Technically speaking, this is not an argument from the concept of God. It's an argument from God's reality as underlying our existence.

i) God has infinite attributes; that means every way that existence works (extension and thought are two of these infinite attributes) is a way God works. Now to exist is a power or virtue or perfection (Ip11, 3<sup>rd</sup> proof), and God is all-powerful, perfect, etc. So the essence of God includes the power of existing.

ii) Another way to get to God's essence involving existence is via the fact of our finite power (Ip11, 3<sup>rd</sup> proof and scholium). As finite, we are not self-caused. We are dependent on God / Nature. If we understand ourselves as dependent on a web of finite causes, then there has to be something independent on which we rely, something that doesn't rely on anything else: and it's the "webness" of that web that is not reliant on anything outside itself. That independent, self-reliant or self-causing "webness" is God / nature. He's not caused by anything; in causing Himself, infinitely or absolutely, he causes everything finite, not "transitively," but "immanently" (Ip18).

Now I've introduced implicitly a nuance with regard to our causal dependence on God; it's time to make that explicit. (The following two points [B and C, on infinite and finite modes] are from the article on Spinoza by Stephen Nadler at the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.)

B) Infinite modes (or general laws of nature)

"Some features of the universe follow necessarily from God ... in a direct and unmediated manner. These are the universal and eternal aspects of the world...; Spinoza calls them "infinite modes". They include the most general laws of the universe, together governing all things in all ways.

i) From the attribute of extension there follow the principles governing all extended objects (the truths of geometry) and laws governing the motion and rest of bodies (the laws of physics);

ii) From the attribute of thought, there follow laws of thought (understood by commentators to be either the laws of logic or the laws of psychology)."

C) Finite modes (particular and individual things).

"Finite modes are causally more remote from God. They are nothing but "affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way" (Ip25c). More precisely, they are finite modes" (Nadler).

My take on this: Finite modes are causally enwebbed – we are the effect of other causes and we cause effects in other things; infinite modes are the general laws of the web, the "ground rules" by which any finite mode is caused by a nexus of finite causes.

So anything in the web is enwebbed; but the web just is.

Now, the state of the web at any one time is an "expression" of God / nature; it's a way that God / nature is; it's a "modification" of God / nature. (Def 5; P16).

Here is a famous distinction: *natura naturans* or "naturing nature" is the self-causing, absolute, infinite, eternal "process" of nature; it is the webness or even webbing of the web (if we can understand "webbing" not as durational but as eternal, essential); *natura naturata* or "natured nature" is the ever-changing results of nature naturing itself.

### 3 ANOTHER WAY TO THINK ABOUT GOD IS VIA THE FACT OF OUR EXISTENCE AS A FINITE THING:

As an existent thing, no one of us can deny existence (that should resonate with Descartes' point of certainty: since doubting is a form of thinking, then thinking is happening whenever there is doubting going on); we can't get behind our existing to doubt it or deny it: even doubting it or denying it presupposes our existence; all we can do is "affirm" our existing, by continuing to exist.

(Later, Spinoza will talk about *conatus* or the "endeavor" of finite things to continue to exist in their characteristic matter. A physical example is metabolism: we eat things and work on them so that they support the characteristic chemical pathways that support our life. A psychological example is our habits, especially the way once those habits take hold of interpreting things in terms of our habitual ways of thinking: we endeavor to maintain our characteristic rational and emotional personality.)

And the ground of that finite existing is infinite nature, so our attempt to deny infinite nature is bound to fail, as the very existence of that attempt is an expression of nature, a finite way in which infinitely existing nature operates.

Now we can't say that because we exist now and we strive to continue to exist, we will always exist in the future: we have a finite or limited duration.

(We can say it is an eternal truth that we will always have existed in the way we existed – eternity is not a long duration, but is outside duration. So essential truths – a triangle's three angles add up to 180 degrees, and so is the fact of our existence in the way we existed – are eternal truths).

So, each one of us is a finite existing thing. That means we owe our existing to a web of other finite causes. We are "enwebbed"; we are a node in a web of other finite causes and effects.

(Spinoza holds to the PSR: Principle of Sufficient Reason: nothing happens without a cause and an effect – Ip11, 2<sup>nd</sup> proof; Ip28, Ip29, Ip36).

But to exist is a power (Ip11, 3<sup>rd</sup> proof), and we who are caught in a web of cause and effect, we who are caused to exist (by our parents, who had parents, who ate food, which was caused to exist by rain, and soil, and agriculture...), we exist in that web; the web itself is not caused by anything outside itself, it is self-causing reality.

(Self-causing is another way of saying God / nature is infinite. Just as eternity is not a long duration, infinity is not being really big or even bigger than anything else. Eternity means being without relation to time; and infinity means being without relation to anything else.)

#### 4 AN IMAGE FOR SUBSTANCE AND MODES: THE OCEAN AND THE FOAM

This image can help think the relation of dependence and expression that binds together *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (that is, the dependence of modes on substance and the expression of substance in its modes): all natural things – us, and whatever we cause and whatever causes us, and whatever natural events happen to us – are just foam on the ocean. The foam is *natura naturata* and the ocean is *natura naturans*. Relative to the foam, the ocean is eternal and all-powerful; it just is, and even though we, as bits of foam, are formed by the motion of parts of the ocean (little waves bumping into each other), the state of the foam – its exact composition – is just a way for the ocean to be right now.

In fact, it's the only way the ocean could be at this time! It's absolutely necessary for the foam to be exactly the way it is right now; the laws of motion of the waves are such that this foam configuration couldn't ever not be just the way it is (Ip29: "nothing in Nature is contingent..." and Ip33: "Things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case.")

#### 5 NO FREE WILL!

A very important point: if all things happen necessarily, then not you, or even God, has free will! (Ip32c1). If you think He does, you've just anthropomorphized Him: you've used yourself as a model for God. But even worse, you've done so from a mistaken view of yourself. Your will is a natural thing; it is enwebbed. What seems to you to be an act of free will is a psychological event that follows, necessarily, from the eternal laws of psychology, and from the preceding web of psychological acts.

So, thinking you have free will, and projecting this onto God, is a terrible superstition that sets you up for exploitation by priests and tyrants and condemns you to a life of miserable "bondage" to "sad affects." The rest of the *Ethics* will explain how that works and how you can free yourself from that bondage.

## SPINOZA, *ETHICS*, PART II

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For Part II of the *Ethics*: READ: All the definitions, axioms, and propositions. But pay special attention to P1-3, P7, P13, the discussion after P13, P16 and its corollaries, P17 and corollary, P18 and its scholium, P29 and scholium, P38-39 and their corollaries, P40 and scholium 2, P48 and scholium, P49 and scholium.

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As in my notes on Part I, I've benefitted greatly from reading Beth Lord's book on Spinoza's *Ethics*, and from comments from Bryce Huebner. The confusions and unclear parts of the following are of course my fault!

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Part II does two things: 1) it shifts perspective from infinite substance to the modes; 2) it ups the ante on amazing concepts: parallelism, panpsychism, individuation via characteristic relation of rest and motion, emergent bodies, three kinds of knowledge, and the denial of free will.

RECAP / TRANSITION: In Part I Spinoza says God is an "absolutely infinite being," a "substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite substance" (ID6). Furthermore, in the Explication, "if a thing is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and does not involve any negation belongs to its essence."

Now "infinite substance" sounds traditional enough – sounds like Descartes at least at first. (The difference is that Spinoza will reject the idea of finite substances which Descartes accepts. Remember Descartes's own definition of substance as independent being, which he then has to fudge when it comes to finite substances.) But "absolutely" and "infinite attributes" and "does not involve any negation" are something new.

For Descartes, there were two finite substances, each with its own attribute: body, with the attribute of extension, and soul, with the attribute of thought. And God was "infinite substance."

But for Spinoza, there's only one substance, God, and He has infinite attributes, and none of them involve negation. Another way to put that is that God is "positive difference": the difference between extension and thought is internal to God's substance, and that difference is not negation, but a purely positive expression of God. God isn't weakened or drained by the difference of His attributes. So it's not that extension is not thought or vice versa: both are positive in themselves, with no need to define themselves by what they are not; both are fully positive ways that God is.

PARALLELISM: thought and extension are two of the infinite attributes of God.

"Infinite attribute" here doesn't mean "really big number"; rather it means thought through itself and not through anything else. So you think thought as thought and you think extension as extension, and any other attribute is thinking of substance in a particular way. Remember that attribute = "that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence."

That means modes are ways substance is, as modifications of substance as expressed in an attribute: a particular physical thing is a mode of substance in the attribute of extension: it's a way that God / nature is physically; a particular thought is a mode of substance in the attribute of thought; it's a way that God / nature is thinkingly.

P7: Here's the mind-blowing idea: a thought and a body are the same event, the same activity by God / nature, the same way God / nature unfolds or expresses his essence in different attributes, two of which human beings have access to: extension and thought. Bodies are ways God / nature modifies itself in extension and minds are ways God / nature modifies itself in thought, and these are exactly parallel: they are the same event in different attributes.

*Here's an image:* an explosion will emit light particles and it will compress air into waves (sound). It's the same event, the same explosion, expressed in two different ways. That's what a body and a mind are: the same thing in different ways.

They don't interact however: Parallelism is a monism, even if humans have access to two attributes: extension and thought are different, but they are different expressions of God / nature / substance.

That means Spinoza is not an "idealist": matter is not a image or mirage of a fundamentally mental universe, it's a fully real way that God expresses Himself.

Nor is Spinoza a "materialist": human thoughts are not caused by brain activity.

Nor is Spinoza an "interactionist": he avoids Descartes's pineal gland problem, because there is no causal overlap across attributes.

There is a twist though: we could say that the attribute of thought is that through which both extension and thought are conceived.

Now although God conceives all the attributes perfectly in the infinite intellect, there's no causation across attributes, but only within an attribute.

That means the order of causation in extension is the expression of God / nature's power of creating new things / new patterns of matter-energy. This isn't that hard to follow for us: the laws of nature (the laws of motion and rest) determine physical events. It may be hard for us to follow the causal web, but it's not that hard for many contemporary folks to assume that the laws of nature determine events – that there are no miracles.

Now listen closely, because this final point about parallelism is one of the most amazing and difficult thoughts ever laid out by a philosopher: the order of causation in finite thought is God's mind expressing itself. A finite thought (my thought that this table is in the room) is the end point of an expressive process of God's ideas working themselves out in a causal web.

PANPSYCHISM: P13S: every body has a mind (an activity of thought or "idea") whose object is that body. Of course, the mind of a rock is pretty simple: all it has as its object is its pattern of "rest and motion" (see below).

INDIVIDUATION VIA CHARACTERISTIC RATIO OF REST AND MOTION. This is an attribute of extension. Scholarly debate here is extensive (see the SEP article: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-physics/>), but think of it this way: all matter and energy is interchangeable. Every atom is just vibration at a certain frequency. Matter is just energy caught in clumpy vibration patterns that make it repeat its structure.

EMERGENT BODIES: "repeat its structure" that is, a body hangs together through a range of encounters that it can master (it eats or breathes or drinks or bounces off of or uses as a platform for jumping ....) – if it can't master the encounter it fails to repeat its structure: it falls apart, or is eaten or poisoned or pulverised.

Sometimes however, a body will "resonate" (literally or figuratively) with another vibration pattern and melds together with it to form an emergent body. For instance, 2 hydrogen atoms (vibration patterns) can resonate together with one oxygen atom (another vibration pattern) and form a molecule of water, H<sub>2</sub>O, with its own characteristic vibration pattern.

The HUMAN BODY is an emergent body: think of all the cells working together (there's now fascinating stuff about interaction of human organism and its resident bacteria). So the human body, as very complex, is capable of interacting with all sorts of other bodies: it must interact with food, water, and other humans (proper development needs loving bodily touch, rhythmic interaction, linguistic exposure – getting into conversations, not just listening...).

HUMAN MIND: Now this means that the more complex the body (the more it can interact with other complex beings – especially human beings) the more complex its "idea" is. And the idea of the body is the mind (P13). That is, the active grasp of the



current state of the body is the mind. Now remember, "body" also includes "brain." So our neural firing patterns are a mode of extension that is paralleled by mode of thought. The same really complex event is expressed in both extension (brain waves) and thought (ideas).

Now, here's another turn, a really important one. For Spinoza, groups of people form emergent bodies too. We'll deal with this in Part IV, where we'll see that politics is the ordering of society guiding the formation of emergent bodies of people. For now, we can just consider SCIENCE as a form of organizing human bodies / ideas into really complex emergent bodies with cumulative knowledge.

SENSATION is your body being affected by the encounter with another body (light waves hit eye which cause nerve impulses which modify brain waves). We only experience things as they affect our body, so the nature of our body plays a big role here.

Our mind then has the idea of the thing as it affects our body. Our mind grasps, conceives, the way our body is affected by its encounters. P16C2.

Our mind knows other bodies because it has ideas of (actively grasps) the way our body is affected.

Our mind knows itself because it has ideas of those ideas (it actively grasps the active grasp of our body changing as it is affected in an encounter). P22-23

IMAGINATION: P18: This is S's theory of how memory influences experience. The affect of an encounter leaves a trace. Remember it's not a trace of the thing; it's a trace of the way our body was affected by its encounter with the thing. (That "trace" is called an "image" at IIP17S.) So when we think of something – say, ice cream – we are actively grasping the way our body was affected all the times we've eaten ice cream, AND we anticipate, based on that experience, how our body will be affected in the future. BUT, here's the thing: our body is affected by ice cream *and* by whatever else is going on around us at the time that affect us: the presence of other people; the sights, sounds, smells of the room; and so on.

(Now, you can learn to be more affected: more attuned to nuances; you can learn to detect patterns from what previously seemed to be chaotic motion: you can learn to see a zone defense in basketball or you can learn to see racism or sexism or exploitation and lots of social patterns, just as you had previously learned to see "free contracts," "free choice" and so on when you absorbed American culture.)

PLUS we don't have to be conscious of something for it to affect our body and become part of the trace left in us and so create the conditions for future encounters: so it's this time we eat ice cream (and all its surrounding events that affect us) mingled with our memories (recalled body affective traces) and our

recalled recent anticipations (tasting the ice cream is in the context of the desire we had for the ice cream just before we ate it).

**ADEQUATE AND INADEQUATE IDEAS:** For Spinoza, imagination is always an "inadequate idea." That is, our active grasp of encounters in imagination is always going to include such a cloud of entangled affective traces that we are never going to be able to clearly and distinctly understand the causal web producing the encounter and its affects. How could you possibly disentangle everything that has gone into your taste of ice cream right now? (Only God could keep all that straight!)

An adequate idea, on the other hand, is one that actively grasps a thing in its causal web as that is an expression of God. For instance, we have an adequate idea of God when we actively grasp Him as self-causing and necessarily existing absolute infinite substance whose expression is accessed by us in the attributes of thought and extension as we encounter finite things as modes of substance. That is, all of the *Ethics* is a way for us to improve our idea of God (ideas can be a mix of adequate and inadequate ideas; that is, our activity of thought can have a small area of clarity of understanding in a larger cloud of unclarity of guesswork). As an example of a finite mode, we might have an adequate idea of a soap bubble once we understand the physics of surface tension.

**THE THREE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE.** P40S2: Okay, we've just been through knowledge by experience (imagination; in Spinoza's terms, this is always "inadequate" because it's always mixed up with things of which we don't have a clear sense of their causal web). There's also rational knowledge (the second kind) and intuitive knowledge (the third kind). Rational knowledge is built up through experience-derived "common notions," allowing us to figure out the laws of nature and how they determine a body or mind via a causal web. Intuitive knowledge is knowledge of how an event had to happen based on God's unfolding essence.

**COMMON NOTIONS:** P38: our bodies are modes of God / nature in the attribute of extension, just as our minds are modes in the attribute of thought. So even though many encounters produce images that confuse our body with that of other bodies, there is still the idea of extension (and the idea that each body has its own characteristic pattern of rest and motion) that is common to both bodies in an encounter and that is thought in that encounter.

What does that really mean? It means that all of our encounters with things are raw material for rational, scientific, knowledge: from systematizing our experiences we can isolate what they all have in common: extension and the interaction of different patterns of rest and motion.

**DENIAL OF FREE WILL:** P48-49. Everything happens by necessity, even the connection of thoughts, which are causally chained / enwebbed. You might wish for a bowl of ice cream, but that wish is causally determined. This makes sense if you recall Spinoza's insistence that God has no free will either.

From SEP: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-physics/>

Descartes held that final causal or teleological thinking is useless in physics, not because physical nature is not in fact teleological, but because our finite understanding cannot hope to understand the divine will, hence cannot grasp the purposes with which physical nature is imbued.

For Spinoza, in contrast, the problem is not epistemological but metaphysical. The divine cause of the world has no will, and does not create things with a plan in mind (1p32c, p33d, s2); hence nature is simply not a teleological system at all.

### SPINOZA, *ETHICS*, PART III

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For Part II of the *Ethics*: READ: The Preface, and all the definitions, postulates, axioms, and propositions. But pay special attention to P6-9 and scholium, P11 and scholium, P12-13, P16, P20-24, P30 and scholium, P35 and scholium, P43-44, P51 and scholium, P53-55, P58-59, and the "General Definition of Emotions."

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As in my notes on other Parts of the *Ethics*, I've benefitted greatly from reading Beth Lord's book on Spinoza's *Ethics*, and from comments from colleagues. The confusions and unclear parts of the following are of course my fault!

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OKAY, LET'S RECAP.

FROM *ETHICS* 1 we learned that God = single, self-caused, necessarily existing substance = nature. So God / nature is immanent to the world – He is the world – not transcendent. All finite modes – everything individuated in the world (this table, that pen, you, me) – are an expression of God / nature, a modification or mode or way that God / nature is. There are two attributes to which we have access – that compose our being – extension and thought: our body is a finite mode, and so is our mind.

Each state of our body and each parallel state of our mind is causally enwebbed: there are laws of physics and psychology that in principle explain our physical and mental states.

But as we will see in Part 2, it takes a socially organized investigation of nature (science) to enable us to disentangle those causal webs and have

"adequate ideas." But large parts of the time we just have imagination or guesswork associations of things *that we imagine are causes*.

As finite, we are like the foam on the ocean. Now the ocean just is; it doesn't have a plan or free will. So if even God / nature doesn't have free will, even less do we have it. Things could not have been otherwise; there is no contingency in nature, just necessity.

This means there are no gaps in the causal web; there are no miracles. Recognizing that we don't have free will because nature is a causal web, such that psychological states are causally enwebbed just as physical states are, is one of the key moves in enabling us to be free. That's what the *Ethics* is: a way to teach us how to be free.

FROM *ETHICS 2* we learned about parallelism: thought and extension are two attributes of God / nature's constant production of itself. The duality of attributes of the single substance is like the light and sound of an explosion: the explosion is a single event that is expressed in two parallel tracks. The light doesn't cause the sound or vice versa; they are both the same thing in different "dimensions" / "attributes."

Although there's no interaction across attributes, there is constant interaction within attributes: each finite mode continually interacts with other finite modes. In the mode of extension, we see that bodies are individuated – they are themselves in their individuality – by a characteristic ratio of motion and rest. So encounters will sometimes produce a sort of fight – will you eat the bear or will the bear eat you? Will you be able to integrate the ratio of motion and rest of the encountered object to your ratio?

Bodies can be complexes of smaller individuals with a "superior" ratio of motion and rest. Think of the human body and its cells, organs, and systems. In part 4 we'll learn about human communities as composite bodies. These communities don't have to be a series of winner-take-all or zero-sum fights – we can make institutions such that the most human encounters will be 1 plus 1 equals 3!

The mind is the active conceptual grasp of the state of the body – well, if you want to be fancy about it, the processes and patterns of processes of the body. This is general, so Spinoza is a panpsychist. Now the more complex the body – this also means the brain waves, firing patterns, neural networks, etc of humans – the more complex the mind that grasps that state, its processes and patterns.

When we encounter another body, our body is changed, and so our mind is the grasp of that other body's encounter with our body.

But as we're enwebbed in very complex causal webs, we find ourselves in the *first form* of knowledge or *imagination*, which is composed of *inadequate ideas*. That is, we are grasping the state of our body as it is changing under the influence of other

bodies. Here we *imagine* what the cause of our changing body is by pinning that change to an outside object. But this imaginative thinking of causes is very often just guesswork; it's not the result of scientific study that disentangles the causal web. When we do that, we understand much of the change is due to the nature of our own body – ice cream has no taste in itself, the taste of ice cream is an event, an encounter between it and the current state of our body (when you're sick, ice cream is gross.)

The *second form* of knowledge is *rational knowledge of adequate ideas*. That means that we can work our way up from common notions – that which is in common in our encounters – to figure out the laws of nature. What does that mean? It means the socially organized investigation of physical encounters ("science") proceeds by figuring out patterns of change of bodies: when these extended bodies bump into each other, what happens? Let's keep track of those changes, compare them with other changes, and see what patterns emerge. Same thing with scientific psychology: let's track patterns of mental events as they follow each other.

OKAY, NOW WE'RE READY TO GO TO PART 3.

1. Humans are completely natural; we are not a "kingdom w/in the kingdom" – we don't have our own set of rules. Most contemporary folks are happy to accept that about our physiology (sodium and potassium cross our muscle membranes pretty much they way the cross muscle membranes in cats and dogs), but many people will still think our psychology is special! This opens the way for some people to despise the human condition – so weak and frail are our spirits that our emotions run wild; what pathetic messes human beings are! But Spinoza says that our emotions are fully expressions of nature's power, so they can be analyzed and understood, rather than condemned and mocked. And understood just like the way we understand bodies. E3Preface: "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, and bodies."
2. This *radical naturalism* about emotions makes sense as emotions or "affects" are
  - a. The changes in our bodies by which our power of acting is increased or decreased
  - b. Together with the idea or active conceptual grasp of those changes
3. The background here is activity vs passivity
  - a. Activity happens when we are the adequate cause of an event. "Adequate cause" here means that we (can see that we) cause an event through our nature or power.
  - b. Passivity means that something happens in us of which we are only the partial cause.
4. So a passive emotion occurs when things happen to us that change our bodies as we undergo encounters in the causal web and an active emotion occurs when we do something from our own nature, from our own power of acting.

5. Okay, now we are going to talk about the basic trio of affects: DESIRE, JOY, AND SADNESS. To understand desire, we have to understand "CONATUS."
  - a. Conatus is the endeavor to continue in existence that each thing has. Now this may look like mere self-preservation, but it is an expression of God / nature's power to be *and to act*, and that last bit is our key: each thing expresses God / nature's acting, so it endeavors to act from its own finite nature.
  - b. The conatus of a finite thing is its essence (IIP7). Essence here is not a set of properties by which a thing is classified in a genus / species scheme. Rather it's the exercise of a set of powers that are constantly tested in encounters and hence are constantly growing or shrinking.
  - c. So a rock doesn't just sit there; it is an active exercise of its power as an expression of the power of God / nature (the molecular structure of the rock keeps it together – the energy of which it is composed is caught in that repeating pattern that is the characteristic ratio of motion and rest that individuates that rock).
  - d. Now the rock has a limited range of affects – there's only so much it can do, though it can withstand a certain range of encounters.
  - e. Let's up the ante and think about a cat. It has a much bigger set of affects, to which it adds whenever it learns a new move. Think of kittens wrestling: each time they construct a tricky ambush for the other kittens they are exercising and even expanding their powers.
  - f. Now think of human beings and everything that our body can do and undergo (remember always that "body" here includes "brain" – so we're talking about all the brain waves / firing patterns that you're capable of, so that learning new things is an exercise and increase of our powers) – what a huge exercise of power that is; what an amazing thing it is to go through life growing our powers!
    - i. We will see in Part 4 that the best kind of "power" here doesn't mean "ability to command."
    - ii. Rather it means "ability to cooperate and construct a situation of mutual increase of powers."
  - g. A few precisions: conatus related to mind is "will" and related to mind and body together is "appetite"
  - h. And when we are conscious of appetite we have DESIRE
    - i. One of Spinoza's most controversial points occurs here at Ethics3p9s: we don't desire things we judge to be good; we judge things to be good that we desire.
    - ii. That is, those things *that we imagine* that increase our power are the things we call "good." We can be wrong in our judgments!
  - i. Next: going through life as a finite mode means we have sometimes have encounters that increase the powers of our body (remember, that means our brains too!) – from food to love to intellectual discovery – and that encounter will also increase the power of thought of our mind.
  - j. So the emotion (the idea) of that positive change is JOY. (Note that our translation says "pleasure" at P11Scholium.) Remember, the object of the

- idea that is the human mind is the human body, so we feel the joy of a positive encounter that increases our bodily and mental powers.
- i. For the cat, joy is the joy of jumping and wrestling and playing.
  - ii. For the human, we can have that joy AND the joy of intellectual adventure.
  - k. And, the emotion arising from an encounter that decreases our bodily and mental power is SADNESS (our translation says "pain.")
6. Now, Spinoza says he will derive all the other emotions from this basic trio of desire, joy, and sadness. For instance, "love" is joy plus the idea of an external cause: we love *that which we imagine* causes us to increase our power (IIP13S and P15C). And "hatred" is sadness plus the idea of an external cause. We can be mistaken in our loves and hates!
7. At E3p58 and 59, Spinoza talks about active emotions.
- a. The key to Parts 4 and 5, the key to human flourishing, is active joy; we'll see in detail what that is later, but for now we can say that it is an increase in power that comes from our self-consciousness of understanding adequate ideas.
  - b. All sadness is passive; there's no such thing as active sadness; when you understand that, you've taken a big step in understanding Spinoza.

#### SPINOZA, *ETHICS*, PART IV

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For Part IV of the *Ethics*: READ: All the definitions, axioms, and propositions. But pay special attention to Definitions 1-2 and 8, P2-7, P8, P14 and proof, P18 and scholium, P19-20 and scholium, P24, P35 and corollaries and scholium, P36 and scholium, P37 and scholium, P40-41, P46 and scholium, P63, P67 and proof, P73, and Appendix 1-12.

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I've benefitted greatly from reading Beth Lord's book on Spinoza's *Ethics*, and from comments from a number of colleagues. The confusions and unclear parts of the following are of course my fault!

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P2-7: we are always in a causal web, and many encounters can overpower us, so that we experience passive affects – our body is changed and we have passive emotions (remember you can have passive joy too). Those emotions can become fixed in us (we can fall into bad emotional patterns), though stronger emotions can come along that shock us into another pattern.

P8: wait a second, what do you mean "bad" emotional patterns? Judgments as to what is good and bad for us are often based on inadequate ideas, in which images of external causes dominate our thoughts.

But go back to Def 1-2: yes, you can be mistaken in your imaginary guesswork at to what external thing is causing an emotion in you. But we can also come to make a true judgment as to what is good by understanding the adequate cause of an emotion as it comes from our own nature. That is, anticipating Part V, we can learn how to disentangle the causal web and isolate the way our nature produces an emotion out of an encounter. *Understanding our own emotional reaction patterns allows us to truly judge what will increase our power of action in any one situation – why am I getting irritable? Do I need to study some more or maybe put on some different music, stand up and walk around – what exactly is this emotion telling me about myself?*

Def 8: when we act from our own nature, that is, by understanding our own emotional reaction patterns, we increase our *power*, which is the same thing as increasing our *virtue*.

Don't be afraid: Spinoza doesn't mean by "power" the ability to boss other people around because you have all the guns. He's not a "might makes right" philosopher as that phrase is usually understood. We're going to see that "power" means "constructing a social order that fosters mutual increases in understanding" – basically, a democracy in which scientific understanding is supported and used as the basis for public policy.

P14 gives us a nice insight: you can't reason people out of bad emotional patterns; it's not the truth of what you say (or that they say to themselves) that works. You can only change those emotional patterns by allowing people the thrill of increasing their power of thought by understanding their emotional patterns. In other words, it's the thrill of the "Eureka" that works, not the "conceptual content" of the understanding.

P18 scholium presents a sketch of what reason demands as to the ordering of humans as social beings. We should all love ourselves and seek our advantage, that is, seek to reinforce our conatus; this self-interested seeking is our virtue. **HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT AN EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF DOCTRINE!** Truly understanding yourself means understanding yourself as social. This passage is among the greatest ever written in philosophy:

Nothing is more advantageous to man than man. Men, I repeat, can wish for nothing more excellent for preserving their own being than that they should all be in such harmony in all respects that their minds and bodies should compose, as it were, one mind and one body, and that all together should endeavor as best they can to preserve their own being, and that all together they should aim at the common advantage of all. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason, that is, men who aim at their advantage under the guidance of reason, seek nothing for themselves that they would not desire for the rest of mankind; and so are just, faithful, and honorable.



P24: to be virtuous is to live under the guidance of reason. THIS DOES NOT MEAN NOT ENJOYING YOURSELF! It means knowing yourself, your body's physiology and parallel psychology, and acting on the basis of that knowing.

P35: understanding yourself as best living and thriving and exercising your power by living rationally, you see that all humans are like that. That's what we have in common, our reason. So, three points:

Corollary 1: "There is no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to man than a man who lives by the guidance of reason."

Corollary 2: "It is when each is most devoted to seeking his own advantage that men are of most advantage to one another."

Corollary 3: Even among only partially rational people, and even just considering mere survival, "the social organization of man shows a balance of much more profit than loss."

P36: Living together in a rationally organized society – one that also supports and encourages rationality – we find that the highest good of virtuous people is *common to everyone*. There is no zero-sum game here: seeking your own advantage is seeking to live in a rationally organized society with other rational people.

P37: So what you desire for yourself – life with other rational people – you desire for everyone. And you desire this all the more when you understand that the nature of humans is to be expressions of God / nature, which is, after all, the joy of activity.

P38-39: Now rational life is NOT ascetic hurting of the body. Instead, what helps the body expand its powers helps the mind, due to parallelism. Now what expands the power of the body? Well, food, obviously, but also education and experience – remember that the brain is a mode in the attribute of extension: when Spinoza says "body" we can read "brain" as part of the body. So taking a dance class or a yoga class or learning how to run faster or learning a new language, learning physics, studying philosophy – all those things are to be praised and enjoyed as good, and their contraries to be condemned as bad.

P40: whatever helps positive, empowering, rational social organization is good. Because you don't have to re-invent the wheel! You can learn quickly what other people took a long time to discover.

P63: acting out of fear, so as to avoid punishment, is not rational action. Rational action is that which comes out of understanding yourself; acting from fear is acting on the basis of external forces.

P67: a great line: "A free man thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation of life, not of death." Virtue, power, activity is life, a life spent building a rational community as the best expression of God / nature, which is activity and joy.

P73: People are better off in a state, with laws, than they are in solitude. This takes us back to E4p37s2. If everyone were rational, you wouldn't need a state. But we're not all rational; we are subject to passive emotions due to overpowering encounters. So we need to live in a society that sets and enforces laws; and this has to be done with threats of punishment (see E4p14: it's the force of the affect, not the truth of the content, that works in changing affects).

### SPINOZA, *ETHICS*, PART V

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For Part V of the *Ethics*: READ: All the propositions. But pay special attention to the first paragraph of the Preface, P2-4 and scholium, P6 and scholium, P10 and scholium, P14-15, P25 and proof, P28, P32 and corollary, P38, P42 and scholium.

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Part V of the *Ethics* has provoked controversy for centuries (well, so has all the *Ethics*, to tell the truth). We are going to skip lightly over some of the most controversial and difficult passages (those having to do with the eternity of the human mind). Instead we'll look at what Spinoza says about freedom and the power of the human mind to control and check the emotions (note that Spinoza denies we can have an absolute command of the emotions).

P3-4: WE CAN CONVERT PASSIVE EMOTIONS TO ACTIVE EMOTIONS BY GAINING ADEQUATE IDEAS OF THEM. That is, if we can untangle the causal web of any one passive emotion – which is the idea or active conceptual grasp of a changing body under the influence of an encounter – we can disentangle what comes from our nature from what comes from the encountered thing. We do that through the study of physiology / psychology: P4: "there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception." That is, through socially organized investigation (science) we can come to understand our body and its physical / emotional reaction patterns.

We often incorrectly think that an emotion is just a passive impression on us so that an external event is THE cause ("he's making me sad"). But the external event is really just a prompt or stimulus, and the true cause of the emotion is the reaction of your essence or conatus or striving to maintain a

characteristic pattern. So understanding your nature's role in the arising of the emotion is an increase in active power or "joy."

P6: And when we understand how the emotion resulting from an encounter comes from our nature, and that this emotion was necessary due to our nature's encounter with the nature of the thing, then we have increased our mind's power.

"Our nature" = the causal history that has produced the current state of our body; our reaction patterns are dependent upon that state. The more we understand this nature from analyzing our reactions in a wide range of situations, the more our mind is powerful and able to control the emotions. "Okay, now I know why I feel this way this situation; it's just like (or sufficiently analogous to) the way I feel in these other situations, and it thereby expresses my own conatus as the endeavor to maintain my characteristic ratio of motion and rest."

*Understanding a reaction pattern is not a reaction; it's an action!*

See also P10s: if we concentrate on the fact that "men, like everything else, act from the necessity of their nature, then the wrong or the hatred that is wont to arise from it, will occupy just a small part of our imagination and will easily be overcome."

"Necessity of their nature" means the causal history that has produced their emotional reactions. So what we're saying here is that freedom for Spinoza is not freedom *from* causation (we will see what Kant has to say about this); it is coming to understand how our actions come from our causal history as that is an expression of God / nature. This understanding is like a doubling affirmation of God / nature: we are an expression of God / nature as it unrolls in its causal web, even as that unrolling is expressed as our understanding.

P14-15: we can learn how to relate events and patterns of events to natural laws or God / nature as it unrolls. So as you come to understand and control your emotions you are coming to understand and to love God / nature. You are coming to affirm your status as an expression of God / nature. Not that "God made you this way" – God doesn't have a plan; God / nature is the unrolling of the world, not something outside the world pulling strings and planning events.

P25: our highest expression of power / virtue (our "conatus") is intuition, the third form of knowledge.

Recall that the first form of knowledge is inadequate ideas from imagination (caught in a causal web of random encounters, we just guess what the cause of the change of our body is and form an image tagging an external object as cause).

The second form of knowledge is reason / science, that is, socially organized systematic investigation of patterns of encounters forming "common notions" as arising from there to an understanding of God / nature: how these patterns conform to laws of nature. (Induction.)

The third form of knowledge is intuition: moving from an understanding of God / nature to an understanding of the essence of things: why does this thing have its characteristic ratio of motion and rest? Because it is a specific way of expressing God / nature. (Deduction.)

P28: intuition arises from reason / science, not from imagination.

P32: when we have these flashes of intuition, we feel the most powerful joy we can, the intellectual love of God / nature. Why is this the most powerful joy?

The feeling of the increase of the mind's power is joy. So when we understand we exercise our power of thinking, and we are active. So understanding why you felt sad in an encounter can be converted into the joy of exercising our power of thinking. In other words, the rush of the "Eureka" whereby you understand how that person was provoking your sadness converts that sadness into joy. That doesn't mean you have to keep seeking out that person; in fact it means you understand why you should avoid them.

It also means that it's better to build a social world in which encounters produce active joy, but, when you do encounter sadness – as you must when you undergo encounters that lower your powers – you can at least convert that sadness to joy by understanding your contribution to the sadness-producing encounter.

Now Spinoza is claiming that the joy of intuition is greater than that of science.

P36: the joy of the third kind of knowledge is more powerful than that of the second because in the third kind we understand that our nature is an expression of God / nature, so that we are God / nature loving itself through us. Remember God / nature is the power of acting; we most powerfully act when we exercise that power of thought that is our essence. Joy is the feeling of powerful action; when we intuit, we most powerfully exercise our essence / virtue / power; the intellectual love of God / nature then is the most powerful joy we can attain.

Love = joy plus the idea of the cause. In the first kind of knowledge we are making a guess based on an image. But as we progress to the second kind of knowledge, we track the patterns of nature through our social organization, that is, we use "science" to understand basic patterns of human nature. But in the third kind of knowledge or "intuition" we grasp ourselves not just as a basic pattern common to humans but as a singular finite mode: you grasp

your essence, the way you are a historically formed singularly unique nexus in the causal web, as an eternal truth.

P42: living in this state of intellectual love of God / nature is "blessedness." As much as we can attain it, we are free from passive emotions, as we quickly convert any passive emotion into an active joy by understanding its genesis as necessary, that is, by understanding our own body, we can understand its patterns of reaction. In great understatement, the *Ethics* concludes by saying that attaining and staying in this state of blessedness is difficult and rare.