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Corresponding Author	Family Name	**Stetter**
	Particle	
	Given Name	**Jack**
	Suffix	
	Division/Department	Department of Philosophy
	Organization/University	Loyola University New Orleans
	City	New Orleans
	State	LA
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Spinoza

Jack Stetter
Department of Philosophy, Loyola University
New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, USA

Related Topics

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Introduction

Baruch or Benedictus Spinoza (1632–1677) is one of the most admired Early Modern philosophers. This may be because he is so extraordinarily *bold*, *multifaceted*, and *rigorous*. *Bold*: Spinoza's heterodoxic views are as numerous as they are controversial. Among other things, Spinoza denies divine purposefulness, free will, the immortality of the soul, and miracles. Spinoza is critical of monarchical government and considers democracy to be the ideal regime. These views are largely out-of-step with seventeenth-century consensus views. *Multifaceted*: Spinoza's contributions to philosophy cut across metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, epistemology, the philosophy of action, the theory of emotions, value theory and moral philosophy, political philosophy, and the philosophy of religion. In an age known for its ambition, Spinoza's philosophical reach is especially wide-ranging. *Rigorous*: Spinoza's philosophical sensibility is decidedly informed by his approbation of the Euclidean geometrical method as a model of deductive reasoning. Spinoza's distinctive flair for careful and systematized argument exhibits his hostility to unexamined assumptions and allegedly commonsensical intuitions. Nonetheless, if we are to speak of one overarching philosophical goal that Spinoza pursues across his many works, that must be the project to conceive humankind's freedom from servitude and sadness.

Biography

Spinoza's life is known to us through a variety of sources. Most notably, those include his personal correspondence with many leading Dutch intellectuals of his day; the works of his earliest biographers, Jean Colerus and George Lucas; and the important preface to the *Opera posthuma,* written by Jarig Jelles and translated into Latin by Ludwig Meyer (Freudenthal 2006). One may also very profitably look to his library, sold upon his death but reconstructed posthumously based on the inventory of sale, for insight into what Spinoza was himself reading (Vulliaud 2012).

Spinoza was born in Amsterdam November 24,1632. He was the second son of Miguel de Éspinoza; his mother, Ana Débora, dies before he is 6 years old. The family is descended from

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Portuguese Jews, that is, members of the Sephardic community that had found asylum from the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions in the newly independent United Provinces. This is the backdrop for Spinoza's childhood: a community comprised of *marranos* and "New Christians," Jews who had for almost two centuries practiced Judaism in secret under the threat of death. The *marrano* experience left an indelible mark on the Jews of Amsterdam, eager to prove their orthodox bona fides once in the remarkably tolerant Low Countries, and consequently prone to chastising heretical tendencies, such as those of philosophers Uriel da Costa or Juan de Prado. As Spinoza's signet read would later read *caute*, "prudence," one cannot but be led to think that it also left a mark on Spinoza's cautious yet subversive approach to the leading philosophical problems of his day (Albiac 2013; Méchoulan 1990; Milner 2013; Yovel 1989).

Spinoza's upbringing consisted of traditional Jewish education in Hebrew and the Torah in the Sephardic community's school, the *Talmud Torah*. Following the death of his father and older brother, by 1654 Spinoza is running the family business with his younger brother, Gabriel. The family business (the dried fruit and spice trade) was also tied to the family's Iberian roots and reflects on the burgeoning mercantile and capitalist Dutch society. It is during the 1650s that Spinoza frequents Franciscus van den Enden and his Latin school, around which congregated liberal Christians and other Dutch thinkers. Van den Endenintroduces Spinoza to Cartesian philosophy, along with the Latin-language humanist culture of seventeenth-century Europe, including Euclid.Spinoza's mature works are rich in references to the Classical tradition; he will cite Lucretius, Ovid, Terence, Titus-Livy, along with many others. Despite his reputation of being a dry writer, Spinoza's Latin does have its own charms and achieves a certain austere beauty, as noted by poetically minded commentators and reflected in his later translators (Meschonnic 2017; Spinoza 1993). Spinoza's personal library also includes many Spanish Baroque literary figures, such as Góngora, Cervantes, and Quevedo, whom, we may reasonably gather, he appreciated both for their exquisite prose written in his native tongue as well as their disabused, dramatized studies of human nature. Spinoza's familiarity with the Medieval Jewish philosophical tradition (Maimonides, Gersonides, Crescas) will also continue to nourish his mature reflections, most explicitly when he turns to the critique of Scripture. At work, Spinoza has the Bible in one hand, Euclid in the other.

Spinoza's life is forever changed on July 27, 1656, when Amsterdam's Jewish community subjects Spinoza to a harsh act of communal and religious chastisement, the infamous *herem*. This writ of expulsion made Spinoza a persona non grata among Jews. The text of the *herem* refers without further specification to Spinoza's "evil opinions and acts" (*másopinioins e obras*), his "abominable heresies" (*horrendasheregias*) and "monstrous deeds" (*ynormesobras*). There is room for speculation as to the exact nature of these "heresies" and "monstrous deeds" (Nadler 2002). Some suspect that Spinoza even wrote a defense or apologia in Spanish, now lost (Curley 2015). Spinoza's rupture from the community is never repaired.

Sometime before 1661 Spinoza began but did not finish two works: The *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the so-called *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*. He lives not far from Leiden, in Rijnsburg, where he corresponds with "Collegiants" (a community of liberal Dutch Christians) and a broad network of sympathetically minded thinkers including better known figures such as Henry Oldenburg, then Secretary of the Royal Society, and Christiaan Huygens (Meinsma 1984). Spinoza makes his living as a lens-grinder. Later, while living in Voorburg, in 1665 Spinoza publishes the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*. He is already at work on the *Ethics* but interrupts its composition to begin work on the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

The *Theological-Political Treatise* appeared in 1670 and provoked immediate condemnation by religious and academic circles. Dutch secular authorities complied, and the work was banned; foreign authorities followed suit. In 1672 came the *Rampjaar*, the invasion of the United Provinces

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by the French. The ensuing collapse of the De Witt government propelled the Orangist camp and orthodox Calvinists to power. The De Witt brothers themselves were murdered by a lynch mob; Spinoza, uncharacteristically outraged and wanting to confront the mob, was held back from certain death by his landlord. Spinoza traveled to the French garrison in Utrecht to meet the Prince of Condé, though they failed to meet. He did, however, spend time with a lieutenant-colonel, Jean-Baptiste Stouppe, eager to meet a Dutch intellectual celebrity (Nadler 2018).

During his final years, spent mostly in the Hague, Spinoza completes the *Ethics,* receives Leibniz (whom he does not trust), declines a professorship in Heidelberg, composes a Hebrew grammar, and begins work on a second political treatise, the *Political Treatise*, also unfinished at the time of his untimely death February 21,1677, from a mortal ailment of the lungs contracted while polishing lenses. After their meeting, Leibniz describes Spinoza as living a tranquil and private life; physically, Spinoza is "olive-skinned" and has "quelque chose d'Espagnoldans son visage" (Freudenthal 2006, 332). Spinoza's personal possessions for sale upon death include a colored-cape and silver shoe buckles (Meinsma 1984, 350); Colerus tells him that his landlords, the Van der Spyck family, prepare him a hearty "bouillon de vieux coq" as his last meal. He was no sickly miser, nor was he an intellectual enemy of the body. His passing in the Hague does not go unnoticed by a wide network of interested onlookers, eager to know what philosophical gems he had kept from sight. Confidants Ludwig Meyer, Jarig Jelles, G. H., Schuller, J. H. Glazemaker, and Jan Rieuwertsband together to present much of his unfinished or unpublished work to posterity, including the *Ethics*. They publish the *Opera posthuma* in 1677, and soon after its Dutch translation, the *Nagelateschriften* (Akkermann and Steenbakkers 2005). With Jelles' preface to the *Opera posthuma*, the legend of Spinoza as a saintly thinker whose ethical doctrine, to live according to reason, is fully conform to Christ's own teachings, makes its definitive entry onto the European philosophical scene (Spinoza 2008; Jelles 2017).

Overview of the *Ethics*

There are three individuals, as it were, about which Spinoza's mature philosophy effectively gives meaningful and penetrating accounts: the human individual; the Bible; and the state. To each roughly corresponds a work; thus the human individual occupies the centerpiece of Spinoza's *magnum opus*, *Ethica: Ordinegeometricodemonstrata*. The *Ethics* also provides us with the fullest exposition of his philosophy. Most discussions of his philosophy begin or end in accounting for the *Ethics*, so it is fitting to overview that here.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza adopts the geometrical method, this admirable and terrible "Dreadnought" (Bergson 1938) of intellectual machinery. Like many of his Early Modern contemporaries, Spinoza takes the deductive and demonstrative model of reasoning involved in mathematics, and especially in geometry, to conform to the highest epistemic ideal. All pursuit of knowledge should aspire to the same level of rigor that geometry has attained. What is more, mathematics like geometry have proven salutary in freeing us from the deep-seated prejudice where we vainly try to explain natural things in terms of their purported purposes or ends. As Spinoza notes in the Appendix to Ethics Part 1: "... [the true knowledge of things] would have remained forever hidden from humankind, if mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, had not shown another standard of truth" (E1app). The marriage of content and form goes further still. Just as with a geometrical proof, where properties are inferred from essences, so in Nature do we find a necessary and strictly determined unfolding of consequences from grounds (E1p16d). Unlike in geometry, however, where the surface of the text carries the full charge of the meaning of the proof, Spinoza's scholia frequently contain important polemical digressions, that is, in the famous words of Gilles Deleuze, a buried language of fire (Deleuze 1981).

Spinoza's states that his goal is to "lead us by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness" (E2pr).

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To accomplish this requires discussions of: "God" (Part 1, *de Deo*); "the nature and origin of the mind" (Part 2, *de Mente*); "the origin and nature of the affects" (Part 3, *de Affectibus*); "human bondage, or the power of the affects" (Part 4, *de Servitute*); and "the power of the intellect, or human freedom" (Part 5, *de Libertate*).The chief philosophical difficulty that Spinoza must address is to show how we can move beyond our innate states of passivity to states of perfection and activity. This is to say that, for Spinoza, there *is* a perfect condition for humankind, a state of deep, genuine flourishing of human nature, where we are active and joyful rather than overwhelmed by sad passions. Spinoza's vision of the perfection and flourishing of humans in intellectual prowess and emotional poise has inspired countless poets, scientists, artists, novelists, playwrights, and other non-academic thinkers (Stetter forthcoming).

I will present the order of arguments in the *Ethics* sequentially, though it should be said from the outset that there may be more productive ways of *interpreting* Spinoza's philosophical system as a whole. Alexandre Matheron, for instance, makes a compelling case for reading the political works in conjunction with the *Ethics* (Matheron 1969). The political works elaborate the necessary consequences of the theory of interhuman passions contained in Part 3 of the *Ethics*. Thus, insofar as we are conditioned by such interhuman passions, Spinoza's project in the *Ethics* requires a detour through political and social theory, where the interhuman passions become the subject of sustained analysis and where their mastery necessitates the development of rational political institutions.

References to the *Ethics*, given in parentheses, use the increasingly standard system. Hence, E1p1 means *Ethics* Part 1, Proposition 1; 2a1 means Part 2, Axiom 2; E3p2d means *Ethics* Part 3, Proposition 2, demonstration; 4pr means Part 4 Preface; E5p10s means *Ethics* Part 5, Proposition 10, Scholium; etc. English translations follow Edwin Curley's invaluable edition of Spinoza's collected works (Spinoza 1985, 2016), though they are subject to occasional modification. The recent publication of Spinoza 2020, with a re-established Latin text by Piet Steenbakkers and a new French translation by Pierre-François Moreau, means researchers also have a new, state-of-the-art edition of the *Ethica* at their disposal that supersedes the previously preferable Gebhardt edition (Spinoza 1925).

In Part 1, *de Deo*, Spinoza lays the foundations of his mature philosophical views by arguing that God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*), that which is most real and basic, is necessary, eternal, and infinite, and by exploring the implications that follow from this ground-level commitment. Thus, God is *not* a transcendent creator with humanlike features; rather, God is the fundamental, eternal, infinite substance from which all else follows with a strict geometrical necessity. Finite things, like human beings, are determined by God to act and exist and their power expresses God's own power. This twofold character of the nature of things is characterized as the distinction between *Natura naturans*, "Nature naturing" (that is, the infinitely productive substance itself) and *Natura naturata*, "Nature natured" (that is, the infinitely many consequences of substance). For Spinoza, our explanatory power is so great as to grasp the very root of reality; reality is, in the phrase of Matheron, integrally intelligible (Matheron 1969). More recent discussions of the intelligible nature of reality for Spinoza have emphasized Spinoza's robust adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (Della Rocca 2008).

De Deo consists of two subsections. E1p1–p15 establishes that there is only one substance, God, and that "whatever is, is in God" (E1p15). Spinoza's substance monism puts before the reader a problem in interpretation, viz., the problem of the attributes. Each attribute is conceptually independent (E1p10), and there are infinitely many attributes that belong to God (E1p11). Many readers ask how several attributes so conceived can be held to constitute one substance. Should not each attribute be held to constitute a substance on its own, if each is conceptually independent? Call this the unity objection. A classic response provided by H. A. Wolfson is that attributes are mind-dependent realities and that their plurality is not grounded in substance itself (Wolfson 1934). This would relieve the pressure

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raised by the unity objection; substantial unity remains unimpinged by attribute diversity, as attribute diversity results from *the intellect's* conceiving each attribute independently of every other attribute. However, this comes at the cost of making substance unintelligible. Attributes are the means by which the mind comprehends substance's essence (E1d4). If they are mind-dependent realities, mere subjective apprehensions of substance's essence, then the substance they qualify remains beyond the intellect's grasp. For this reason, this subjectivist interpretation is considered largely unattractive at present, but detractors have yet to settle the dispute (Gueroult 1968). In E1p16–p36 Spinoza moves to discussing God's production of infinitely many modes, or "that which is in another through which it is also conceived" (E1d6). Those modes are expressions of the attributes: a body expresses Extension, an idea expresses Thought; as Extension and Thought belong to God's infinitely productive essence, God produces infinitely many bodies and ideas, or whatever bodies or ideas can be conceived by a divine intellect. Yet Spinoza's conception of modes as "in" God is the subject of another hot-button debate. One of Spinoza's early critics, Pierre Bayle, considers that this position yields the abhorrent conclusion that contrary properties can be predicated of God: all modes inhere in God, or God is the ultimate subject of predication of all modes, but modes themselves have contrary properties, thus contrary properties can be predicated of God (Bayle 1740). There is little agreement whether Bayle is right to interpret Spinoza's substance-mode relation as one of inherence and predication (Curley 2019; Della Rocca 2008; Lin 2018; Melamed 2013; Schmaltz 2019). In the concluding appendix to Part 1, Spinoza criticizes the prejudice that sees God's action as goal oriented. God, Spinoza argues, cannot have an end for which it exists; rather, God acts from the necessity of its nature alone, and all else that exists follows from the divine nature with a strict necessity (E1p33). Spinoza's argument that belief in divine purposefulness and the efficacy of prayer arises from mere ignorance bears witness to his deep-seated anti-anthropomorphism. Spinoza's God consists in infinite attributes from which infinitely many modes follow. It does not resemble the Providential agent that Spinoza thinks is spontaneously conceived because of humankind's innate ignorance of the causes of things (E1app) and which plays the role of God according to the *vulgus*, a God who is kinglike, who exercises arbitrary and violent power over Nature through miracles. Suggestively, seventeenth-century readers, like François Lamy, frequently thought Spinoza's stance on God or Nature is really just a form of atheism disguised (Stetter 2019).

Part 2, *de Mente*, begins with a discussion of the metaphysical relation between the attributes of Thought and Extension. As every attribute is conceptually independent, no attribute can cause inter-attribute effects. However, as each attribute constitutes the essence of substance, all attributes unfold according to the same sequence of causes and effects. The underlying identity of causal states and processes across attributes is characterized by Leibniz as the doctrine of "parallelism" (Leibniz 1999, 25). The nomenclature stuck. Spinoza's suggestion that "the order and connection" of ideas and things is identical across attributes does evoke a kind of mirroring "in parallel" and one-to-one pairing of modes of Thought to the modes of other attributes (E2p7). For Spinoza, there is a causally isomorphic counterpart in the body for any idea in the mind, just as there must be a causally isomorphic counterpart in the mind for any bodily state, although the mind and body cannot causally interact (E3p2). The attribute of Thought is, to speak with Deleuze, a "plane of immanence": ideas can only be conceived through other ideas; *idem* for the attribute of Extension. "Parallelism" helps explain why Spinoza talks about ideas in terms of their being adequate or inadequate conceptions. The mind forms an idea adequately when the idea contains within itself all of the conditions for its being true, or when God conceives it in conceiving the essence of the human mind (E2p11c). But the idea *is* the object. The way that it logically depends on God or follows from the basic laws of Thought "parallels" or mirrors the way that its object physically depends on God and follows from the basic laws of Extension. Parallelism carries over to all things;

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thus, we can speak of rocks, trees, and the like having minds, though minds which, being ideas of less complex bodies, are less complex themselves, and less "excellent", than human minds (E2p13s). Following the account of attribute parallelism, Spinoza propounds a short physical interlude and an account of the human body and its complex corpuscular structure. The body is composite, and so is the mind which is the idea of it. The body has soft, hard, and fluid parts, and by virtue of its complexity, can retain the *vestigia* or "traces" of external bodies even once they are no longer present. The body's identity, claims Spinoza, consists in a certain and precise *ratio* or pattern of motion and rest among its bodily parts; the mind is the idea of that *ratio* or pattern. The small physics is followed by Spinoza's theory of knowledge.

Spinoza sorts our conceiving activity into three kinds, but *all* of these involve the mind conceiving bodily affections. The "first kind of knowledge" is called *imaginatio*. In perceiving bodily affections that represent external objects as present we are said to imagine (E2p17s). The theory of the imagination explains memory as conceiving of objects following the way they have left traces on the body, and not according to the order they present to the intellect (E2p18s). Because ideas of bodily affections always involve both the nature of the body itself along with nature of the external body doing the affecting (E2p16), the imagination is prone to confusing features of the external body with features of the body proper; and insofar as we contemplate the body, external bodies, and the mind through such corporeal images, we have inadequate knowledge of the body, external bodies, and the mind. The first kind of knowledge, then, is the source of all falsity (E2p41). In conceiving of things in this way, the mind only knows according "common order of Nature" (E2p30d) or from random experience (E2p40s2). This knowledge thus resembles opinion and hearsay, as it consists in the truncated perceptions we have of our own bodily states and of other bodies insofar as they causally interact with the body and arouse such states.

Nonetheless, bodies share properties in common. At the very least, as they are all modes of Extension, all bodies share the property of being at motion or at rest. Indeed, for any external body to affect the body proper, the bodies must share some properties in common (E1p3), namely, that property which allows them to causally interact, such as the property of Extended things to be at motion or at rest. Hence, the mind also has access to a "second kind of knowledge" through its very ideas of its bodily affections. The mind's forming of ideas of properties bodies have in common is called *ratio,* and the mind's forming of such "common notions" constitutes "necessarily true" knowledge (E2p41). There is surely an epistemic break, to recall Louis Althusser's dictum, between imagination and reason, but the mind must learn to be rational. It learns to attend to the universal or specific properties that other bodies have in common with the body. Such knowledge of common properties constitutes adequate knowledge, and is involved in all minds. The mind contains an irreducible amount of activity, as Spinoza emphasizes later in the *Ethics*, which is reflected in part in the fact that it will strive to know more things according to reason, and will strive to deduce what further consequences follow from the knowledge it attains of the common properties of things. Spinoza contrasts this rational activity of the mind, whereby it attends to more or less specific common properties of things, with the *faux-semblants* of common notions, "universals" such as "man" and "transcendentals" such as "being". In the case of the latter, the mind does *not* distinctly conceive the way many things, in affecting the body, show themselves to agree in nature (E2p40s1).

Though the mind's formation of ideas of common properties of things yields clear and distinct knowledge, as the mind's contemplations are now determined from within the mind itself, insofar as it shares in some properties with other things, and not from without it (E2p29s), the mind does not yet conceive how the singular essences of things themselves necessarily follow from the ultimate ground and principle of things, God or Nature. However, as Spinoza makes clear as early as the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the mind aspires to conceive singular essences themselves. The mind does this by means of

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genetically deducing the idea of the thing from its cause, thereby mirroring its conception of the thing the productive unfolding of Nature and the place of the thing in Nature. Yet there is no reason to think that that inference from the deepest and most fundamental cause to the essence of the object cannot happen in stages, as the mind moves from conceiving God's attributes to conceiving some general consequences of some attribute, to more specific consequences, such as those involved in the very conception of the essence of the object in question. Take the case of the knowledge that all things must be conceived in God (E1p15). This knowledge is a knowledge of how something follows from God; as such, it taps into the deep cause of things, but only provides a very generic view on what follows from that cause. Now, the mind will know that any given body, for example, must be conceived in God, even if it is does not yet know how that conceiving happens specifically with regards to some singular body's essence. The question, then, is how does some specific *ratio* or pattern of motion and rest follow from Extension itself? We can meet that explanatory demand, Spinoza maintains; we can conceive things according to the marvelous "third kind of knowledge" or *scientia intuitiva*, that is, when we deduce the idea of a singular thing's essence from an attribute's formal essence (E2p42s). In filling in the steps in the process that leads from God to singular things, the mind gains insight into the specific essence of a singular thing, and why it is as it is and could not have been otherwise. The mind conceives the essence in one single intuition, that is, it deduces the essence of the finite mode in question from the attribute through which it is conceived at the speed of the blink of an eye.

Finally, in conclusion to *de Mente*, Spinoza argues that ideas possess inherently affirmatory natures and are not mere mute "pictures" (E2p48s). The mind does not contemplate its ideas *only then* to assent or reject them, *pace* Descartes. Rather, "the will and the intellect are one and the same" (E2p49c). As Spinoza explains in E2p49s, conceived abstractly, all ideas involve affirmation, they all have assent-generating natures. Yet insofar as each idea has a specific essence or nature, the affirmation involved in one idea differs as much from another idea as their respective essences differ. Those essences, in other words, are powerful.

With Part 3, *de Affectibus*, Spinoza turns to the domain of metaphysical psychology and the theory of the affects. No term is more connoted here than *conatus* or "striving." The conatus doctrine is in many respects the backbone of Spinoza's philosophy (Matheron 1969). The striving to persevere in being is said to characterize what anything does by its own power (E3p6). A thing's nature consists in an affirming of that nature and whatever effects follows from that nature and a thing naturally resists destruction by foreign incompatible natures. Actions consist in what can be adequately or completely conceived as following from a given nature, whereas passion consists in whatever inadequately or partially follows from a nature (E3d1 and E3d2). By virtue of the conatus doctrine, we strive to act, but because we are modes, we necessarily have both adequate and inadequate ideas, just as we will act and be acted on. Further, for Spinoza, affective states are involved in any instance of knowledge, because the mind in affirming some idea also affirms a state of the body which is the object of its thinking. My attempts are knowing, in other words, are never affect-neutral, since knowledge necessarily involves ideas of bodily affections and the manner in which the latter express variations in the degree of power of the subject (that is, the body proper) in which they inhere. But before Spinoza tells us how to evaluate our natures and our successes or failures in striving to persevere in our being, he provides an extraordinarily rich vocabulary of affects, thus giving us a language for describing psycho-physical states in a mechanistic and geometric framework. The intention could not be clearer: "To consider the actions of men and their appetites as if it were a question of lines, surfaces, or bodies" (E3pr). Laid out in the center of *Ethics*, then, is Spinoza's geometrical rendering of human psychology.

In this undertaking, Spinoza is notably indebted to Descartes' *Passions de l'âme*, which Spinoza read in Desmartes' Latin translation. However, even when borrowing Descartes' terms, Spinoza reworks the Cartesian theory of

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passions from top to bottom. Spinoza ridicules the Cartesian theory that the pineal gland is the seat of the union of the mind and body (E5pr) and he rejects the Cartesian dualist framework for conceiving the passions of the mind as the actions of the body (E3p2s). Further, Spinoza reduces the number of primitive affects to three: *laetitia* ("joy"), *tristitia* ("sadness"), and *cupiditas* ("desire"). For Spinoza, by virtue of parallelism, affects are ideas that are identical with states of the body. Conceived under Extension as bodily affections, they consist in the body's passing to states of greater or lesser perfection. Conceived under Thought as ideas, they consist in the mind's passing to states of greater or lesser perfection. Desire is the conscious effort of the mind to persevere in its being and constitutes our essence (E3gendefaff) and accompanies the affects. We necessarily desire, and call good, whatever agrees with the striving to affirm our nature and are averse to, and call evil, that which restrains it (E3p9s). For instance, love is the idea of the body passing to a greater state of perfection, or joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause. We will necessarily desire to have that cause or object under our possession, since we desire states of joy and passing to greater perfection. The spontaneous and natural unfolding of human striving gives rise to interhuman passions, most notably the *affectuumimitatio*, or affective mimetism (E3p27), which in turn yields affects like *ambitio* ("ambition"), a central affect in Spinoza's political thinking (Moreau 2005). As will become apparent in the rational evaluation of affects, to the degree that affects arise from external causes, they neither constitute genuine actions nor genuine satisfactions of our natures. The affects caused by external objects, or "passions" in the strict sense, involve an element of belief, namely, the belief that certain external objects can cause joys or sadness. By involving belief, such affects are open to cognitive therapy, as beliefs can be challenged by the intellect; what is more, they can be harnessed to ideal ends, and though the joys they procure are fickle and enjoyed in moderation, they are necessary ingredients to a life of true flourishing. As Moreau shows (Spinoza 2020), Spinoza's theory of the affects is peopled by a fascinating and rich world of Latin theatre character-types. The buffoon, the flatterer, the courtesan, etc. illustrate both Spinoza's sensitivity to this worldly sufferings as well as the flexibility of his seventeenth-century cultural tropes and stock imagery.

It is only with Part 4, *de Servitute*, that Spinoza provides his ethical theory, where the central intuition is that reason can clarify what is ethical and guide us accordingly. Reason tells us what the model of human nature looks like (E4pr) and instructs us on how to achieve true and deep human flourishing in developing the power of the understanding. It is tricky to say, however, whether Spinoza's account can accommodate talk of moral permissibility, obligations, blameworthiness, and other characteristic intuitions of moral thought. Consider the following. Spinoza adopts an ostensibly normative ethical principle, ethical egoism. Thus, the basic rational precept, what we ought to do under the guidance of reason, is seek what is useful (E4p18s). His practical prescriptions, the *dictamen rationis* (e.g., "the *homo liber* always acts honestly, not deceptively" (E4p72)), are applications of this ethical egoist principle. They show how reason does what is most useful, namely, it corrects the imagination's errors, counters the passions, and accommodates the striving to be active and joyous. Reason is thus charged with a therapeutic role as it can "remedy" the affects (E5pr). On reason's instruction, we also strive to form mutually beneficial friendships with our fellow human beings (E4app12); it is because we are rational that we agree in nature (E4p35). Indeed, our greatest good, the knowledge of God, is particularly good because no one person can monopolize it (E4p36). (The reader eager to master the *recta vivendi ratio* can turn directly to the *vade mecum* provided as an Appendix to Part 4.) On Spinoza's understanding, we should strive to form communities of mutually beneficial natures, where our autonomy is founded on the relations we entertain with our fellows. Death is of least concern to the wise (E4p67), who strive to bring it about that their body is affected by life's many pleasures, fine clothing, verdant plants, good drink, and fresh fruits, all in moderation (E4p45s). These constitute *goods* in the technical sense (E4p39), as they bring about the

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preservation of the proportion of motion and rest that constitutes the human body. Because they agree with the body's constitution, and can thereby make known what properties the body has in common with external bodies, they also underpin the development of the mind's rational activity. Only the superstitious think that humans flourish in poverty and despair.

So far, so good. Nonetheless, there is a sense in which, as seen above in E4p72, Spinoza's view may not be that reason prescribes ends or that the *dictamen rationis* are normative propositions, but rather that, in all rigor, under the guidance of reason we are determined to such and such actions. The normative collapses into the descriptive. It is not that I ought not to lie, but that if I am rational, I do not lie. Elsewhere Spinoza seems to question the worth of normative propositions altogether, as they misapprehend specific natures. For instance, in correspondence with the Calvinist Willem van Blijenbergh, Spinoza disparages the belief that someone depraved, such as Nero, can really be held morally blameworthy, since in relation to such a nature, crimes like matricide constitute virtue (Ep. 23). Such considerations have led some notable commentators to maintain that Spinoza's ethics provides scant space for a conception of morality and moral agency (Deleuze 1981). Notwithstanding the fact that Spinoza is indeed attuned to the shortcomings of traditional morality, Spinoza decidedly underscores that only through following the guidance of reason will human beings achieve their greatest perfection. We spontaneously strive to augment our power, Spinoza thinks, and to become active individuals. This striving can only be genuinely fulfilled if we rely on reason to diminish the power of passions, thus freeing ourselves from our innate state of bondage.

Like Part 1, Part 5, *de Libertate*, consists in two subsections. E5p1–p20s covers the remedies for the affects that pertain to the mind's relation to the body insofar as it is conceived in duration (E5p20s). Since we cannot control the objects to which we attach ourselves, we must control our evaluations themselves by means of intellectual self-discipline, and this involves considering all things as necessary. The mind, Spinoza argues, can transforma passion into an action means of understanding the passion, and understanding a thing, for Spinoza, involves seeing the thing as necessary, as determined to necessarily follow from its necessary causes. Spinoza therefore will recapitulate the remedies for the affects, or the power of the mind, as consisting in: (1) Knowledge of the affects; (2) In the fact that the mind can separate affects from the thought of an external cause; (3) In time, because affections related to things we understand have a greater duration than those related to things we conceive confusedly; (4) In the multiplicity of causes by which affections related to common properties or to God are fostered; and (5) In the fact that the mind can order its affects and connect them to one another according to the order of the intellect (E5p20s). Yet all of these remedies have to do with the mind insofar as it is the idea of a body in duration; the joy they can bring us is not quite the supreme joy that is found in conceiving essences *sub specie aeternitatis*.E5p21–p42s will then introduce Spinoza's discussion of the eternity of the mind and the *amor Dei intellectualis* or "intellectual love of God." On Spinoza's account, the mind necessarily possesses an eternal part, constituted by the understanding itself. To grasp this fact is to experience a condition of intellectual love of God. The views espoused in the second half of Part 5 have long puzzled, and enchanted, Spinoza's readers. How, it may be asked, can a part of the mind remain after the destruction of the body (E5p23), if the mind just *is* the idea of the body? Further, how is it that we can in this present life do something with the body to increase the part of the mind which is eternal (E5p39s)? One thing appears clear: Spinoza is *not* offering a doctrine of personal immortality. The part of the mind that remains is the understanding of the eternal essence of the body. Pace Jacobi et al., for whom Spinoza's "nihilism" consists in outright his denial of individuality and his negation of life, Spinoza's true nihilism consists rather in his denial of the doctrine of personal immorality, that is, his is a form of active nihilism, the undermining of the core beliefs of the Abrahamic tradition. The eternal understanding, the *aliquidremanet* in E5p24, does not overlap with

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most of what characterizes our individual existences as we experience them in duration, such as the memories we form over the course of duration. The eternal aspect of the mind is conceived here and now; it is not some otherworldly gift, but belongs to the way that God itself conceives the mind eternally. Spinoza attaches supreme importance to this aspect of his thinking, since it is in understanding the eternal part of the mind and seeing all things *sub specie aeternitatis* that we attain, on his view, genuine wisdom, true peace of mind, and freedom. Alas, Spinoza concludes, only so very few of us come to realize this goal (E5p42s).

Conclusion: Spinoza as a Political Thinker

Though Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (the *TTP*) and his *Political Treatise* (the *TP*) have received far less attention than they deserve, no discussion of Spinoza is complete without an account of his political philosophy. In fact, Spinoza's political thinking is *integral* to understanding his metaphysics, his epistemology, and his ethical theory. The *Ethics* left the question in suspense: *How* can a passionate individual, left to their own devices, raise themselves to states of activity? Rather than thinking of individuals as pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps, Spinoza conceives of individuals as spontaneously forming interhuman relations and communities of mutual empowerment. It is through social and political cooperation that the groundwork for individual liberation is laid. Spinoza's political works also evidence an unmistakably controversial and polemical strand to his approach to his thinking. The *TTP* in particular can only be fully understood in light of historical controversies contemporaneous to its writing and which spurred its inception (James 2012). Spinoza saw that the Dutch United Provinces of his day were threatened by growing Calvinist and monarchical currents, to which he responded by showing why the true purpose of the state is freedom. I will use the paragraphs provided by Curley for references from the *TTP* and *TP* below.

As its subtitle indicates, the *TTP*'s central contention is that "the freedom to philosophize" cannot harm sovereign powers or states. Justifying this claim involves showing that Scripture does not purport to establish any theoretical or speculative truths and that "the freedom to philosophize" does not run counter to Scripture's commandments. However, the project of interpreting Scripture has been conferred to religious authorities who cover Scripture with the mud of fearful superstition, whereby they secure their own interest of maintaining power. Indeed, in states of fear, we are credulous and weak-willed, and it requires little to take advantage of us. Spinoza's critique of superstitious mobs and manipulative clergy, coupled with his vocal championing of freedom in the Low Countries, gives the *TTP* a kind of vivacity and punch that was kept below the surface in the *Ethics* and only visible in the scholia. The critique builds on a heretical Epicurean tradition alive and well in the seventeenth-century (Strauss 1965), and helps usher in a new age of powerful challenges to religious orthodoxy in the eighteenth-century (Israel 2001; Vernière 1954).

To restore the meaning of Scripture, Spinoza develops a method of interpreting Scripture, namely, "that our whole knowledge of it and of spiritual matters must be sought from Scripture alone, and not from those things we know by the natural light" (TTP pr., §25; TTP ch. vii). The overall organization of the TTP is clear. The Preface lays out the basic difficulties that face anyone who would intend to separate true religion from mere superstition. Such a task is required if the acrimonious religious conflicts built around a superstitious use of Scripture are to be put to an end. The first six chapters undermine the superstitious reading, and logically culminate in a critique of miracle, as the concept of miracle is involved in the other key superstitions Spinoza has in mind, such as the belief that God acts Providentially, by means of miracles, or the belief that Prophecy is a special, supernatural form of knowledge of God's ways. In Chapters 7 through 11, Spinoza gives the precise exposition of what it means to read Scripture according to Scripture alone, freed from superstition. Finally, from chapter 12 until the conclusion, Spinoza engages in the constructive

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task of showing what the relation between faith and philosophy truly is, along with the final task of showing what political lessons can be drawn from Scripture.

On Spinoza's view, Scripture intends uniquely to encourage obedience to God, which the prophets saw as consisting in the practicing of the cult of justice and loving-kindness. Yet prophets do not possess theoretical knowledge and are endowed only with moral certainty, not mathematical certainty. Their goal was to reach a wide audience. However, prophets were not philosophers, which is to say they were themselves superstitious; moreover, they adopted their message to accommodate superstitious views, such as those of God as all-powerful because capable of extraordinary feats, hence the belief in miracles (TTP ch. vi). The belief in miracles, Spinoza notes, is efficacious in terms of its ability to compel the vulgar mind to obey God. Yet miracles are impossible; God's action follows with strict necessity from God's essence, and God cannot change decrees ad hoc. Importantly, Spinoza thinks that insofar as Scripture's purpose is purely practical, it doesn't matter what kind of theoretical trappings the prophets and Scripture's authors used to compel obedience to God. Similarly, the ceremonies that have attached themselves to traditional religion are fundamentally mere superstition. In fact, the Jewish Law only served to promote this-worldly prosperity in the way that it compelled the Ancient Hebrews to unite politically (TTP ch. iii).

In TTP ch. vii, Spinoza elaborates a Baconian method of natural history to defend his reading of Scripture; Scripture must be examined in its minutiae. An immense store of culture and awareness of history is necessary if we are to ascertain how and under what circumstances Scripture was written and for what ends, as well as a very strong familiarity with the Hebrew language, which Spinoza would later continue to work on in formulating a Compendium to its grammar (Spinoza 2006). Above all, Spinoza invites us to avoid the error of Maimonides, whose approach to interpreting Scripture, "useless, harmful, and absurd" (TTP ch. vii, §87), consists in forcing onto Scripture a philosophically defensible meaning, that is, an Aristotelian one, without regard to the literal, and often philosophically incoherent, positions adopted in Scripture, a trifling effort at interpretation only rivalled by later "kabbalists" and "Pharisees" (TTP ch. ix). Only with regard to the content and meaning of the moral doctrine has Scripture reached us uncorrupted (TTP ch. xv, §35–36).

Necessarily, Scriptural teaching is simple and accessible to anyone regardless of intellectual ability, as the very purpose of Scripture is to speak *ad captum vulgus* of things which lead to salvation (TTP ch. xiii). The foundations of universal faith, the so-called catholic *credo minimum*, are the doctrines necessary to make us just and loving and kind (TTP ch. xiv, §25–28). These articles of faith that are apt to induce obedience espouse a kind of anthropomorphism that sits in tension with Spinoza's critique of this prejudice in the *Ethics* (Garber 2019; Matheron 1971). Despite this tension, neither is philosophy the handmaid of theology nor is theology the handmaid of philosophy. Rather, Scripture and reason complement one another in their ultimate aims. Reasons provides salvation tithe philosopher, whereas Scripture saves the rest of us, as anyone can obey its moral command (TTP ch. xv).

Having separated philosophy and theology, Spinoza proceeds to bind politics and theology to the benefit of the former. States which are otherwise powerful collapse because of an unresolved theological element in their mix. Spinoza takes his cues from the history of the ancient Hebrew Republic founded by Moses (TTP ch. xvii–xviii). Priestly classes, desirous of power, undermine the common good by monopolizing the administration of the rites and ceremonies that are held to constitute religious affairs. This undermines the common good because the common people attach special value to these rites and ceremonies and are willing to engage in dissident political behavior or civil war in view of securing the benefits they allegedly accrue. Spinoza has not yet fully worked out what kind of regimes are most powerful and why, a point to which he returns in the *TP*. However, because sovereign political powers are charged primarily with administering this worldly interhuman affairs, it follows that the true message of

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Scripture is in principle capable of being fulfilled, if not superseded, by sovereign political powers that can effectively see to it that multitudes behave justly and with loving-kindness. Sovereign political powers therefore see no detriment in tolerating the "freedom to philosophize," but they do suffer internal division and rebellion in attempting to stamp it out (TTP ch. xx).

The *TP* revisits several core commitments in Spinoza's political thinking. For one, Spinoza develops the view that natural right just *is* power (TTP ch. xvi; TP ch. ii, §4). Whether we are driven by passions or reason, what we have the power to do we have the right to do (TP ch. ii, §5). As Spinoza writes in correspondence with his close friend Jelles (Ep. 50), *pace*Hobbes (whose *De Cive* Spinoza had in his library), the transition from a state of nature to a civil order does *not* mean a surrender of our natural right. Because our greatest power consists in reason, and because reason cannot take root without social support, it is a priori empowering to form political and social units, or states. In fact, only where there are common rules of law is natural right even conceivable, as outside collective associations we do not possess the power necessary to secure our basic livelihood (TP ch. ii, §15). Because in a state of nature we do not have anything but an imaginary natural right, Spinoza thinks we are therefore led to form what seem to betacit social contracts as a means of creating a framework for the enforcement of natural rights. Nonetheless, the process of social formation happens through the spontaneous interplay of largely antagonistic interhuman affects (Moreau 2005). Hence, at no point is there a genuine social *contract* where rational agents deliberate and come to agree on the preferability of society. Some stress the alleged difference between the *TP*, with its emphasis on political naturalism, and the *TTP,* where an explicit contractualist view would appear more pronounced, though as has been shown, this difference does not cut very deep (Matheron 1990). The right that defines the multitude's common power, and, hence, general welfare, is called the *imperium*, which is to say "state" or "commonwealth" (TP ch. ii, §17)). Now, states also strive to persevere in themselves and look to increase their power. Here, as elsewhere, the most successful striver will be the most rational, which for a state consists in enjoying concord and tranquility (TP ch. iii, §10). Spinoza's primary worry, then, is to secure the conditions for long-lasting peaceful alliances of natural right, where individual agents consent to the law, do no harm to the general welfare, and thus see their deep natures flourish and achieve true freedom as they live cooperatively under the guidance of reason. Spinoza's valorization of regimes that last the longest has been aptly named a "paradoxical conservatism" (Zourabichvili 2002).

The bulk of the *TP* is spent spelling out the specifics of ideal or model constitutions for a "free multitude" (TP 5/6).The aim is to maximize the amount of rationality involved in a regime by means of the kind of constitutional reforms Spinoza puts forward. Spinoza reveals himself very preoccupied with the arithmetic involved in careful institution design. *Strictosensu*, monarchies are fictions, as every monarch will necessarily rely on advisors and a council to make decisions (TP 6/5). The critique of monarchy as the lowest and least powerful of political regimes resonates with Spinoza's critique of the superstitious belief that God is somehow kinglike (E2p5s, TTP ch. vi). It bears noting further that Spinoza's own Low Countries were invaded and politically devastated by the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV in 1672, the event which likely precipitated the writing of the TP. Aristocracies can be divided into two sorts: centralized and decentralized. The kinds of aristocracies Spinoza has in mind are those given by the Italian Republics of Genova and Venice, as his examples make clear. A well-designed, decentralized aristocracy can last forever (TP ch. x, §9). Finally, there are democracies. Democracies are especially laudable as they achieve the maximum union of minds and are peace-producing machines (Ramond 2005).This is to say that the power of the democratic state consists in the power of all the multitude that composes it (TP ch. xi). This is of course striking, as many, if not all, of Spinoza's contemporaries held that democracies were the *weakest*, not the strongest, of regimes, and most prone to dissensions and civil wars. Spinoza's early death

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1111 deprives us of a more detailed account of what this
1112 "absolute regime" should look like *in concreto*.
1113 Nonetheless, in conceiving the greatest and most
1114 powerful regime as democracy, Spinoza shows
1115 himself committed to the view that only through
1116 maximizing collective agency and political
1117 empowerment can states be spaces of full
1118 flourishing. This is not to say that Spinoza merely
1119 tacks this on to his thinking at the last minute. The
1120 deduction of the ideal regime unfolds the premises
1121 built into Spinoza's deepest philosophical commit-
1122 ments. The theory of politics Spinoza espouses
1123 should lead us to conclude that *all along* Spinoza's
1124 ontology was an ontology of relations, his episte-
1125 mology was a social epistemology, and his ethics
1126 was an interhuman ethics. Only in political associ-
1127 ations do we make use of reason such that the
1128 passions no longer dominate us one and all.

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1131 ► G. W. Leibniz
1132 ► Principle of Sufficient Reason
1133 ► René Descartes
1134 ► Spinoza and the Sciences
1135 ► Spinoza in Social Science
1136 ► Spinoza's Metaphysics
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