

Spinoza and Relational
Autonomy

Being with Others

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Bodies Politic and Civic Agreement

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1. Prelude on Civility

Spinoza's views on natural sociality and civility are complex. On the one hand, he allows in the *Political Treatise* (TP) that humans may be regarded as social animals (TP2.17), only to assert later in the same work that 'men aren't born civil; they become civil' (TP5.2). His position seems to be that while we are naturally, necessarily driven to unite with others, we do not coordinate spontaneously – we must be directed and motivated to act in a coordinated fashion. We are made civil by the imposition of law. As I have argued elsewhere, law-making is also a complex matter for Spinoza.¹ On the one hand, there is a sovereign body that issues the laws, functioning as 'the mind of the state whereby all citizens must be guided' (TP4.1 (G iii: 291)). On the other hand, sovereign authority extends just as far as it is capable of securing reliable compliance, and its issuances constitute genuine laws only insofar as the prescribed behaviours are actually instantiated.² Law-making is, thus, a two-way street, depending on a sovereign guide and a complying multitude.

So, while civility is in some sense constructed or imposed, it is also natural, both in the sense that it is, to some degree, a predictable by-product of human activity, and in the sense that it is explicable entirely in terms of the activity of human beings. We see this in the TTP, where Spinoza treats civil law as a species of descriptive law in general, or that according to which things 'act in one and the same fixed and determinate way' (TTP4.1 (G iii: 57)). A civil law is a *ratio vivendi*, or a pattern of living, that one 'prescribes to himself or to others for some end' (*finem*) (TTP4.5 (G iii: 58)). The emphasis on patterned activity is repeated in the TP, where he claims that the chief characteristic of the civil order is that in it individuals share one and the same *ratio vivendi* (TP3.3).

Spinoza's conception of the state as entailing the maintenance of a certain pattern of activity – and, indeed, his insistence on the language of ratio – is very telling in light of the account of individuality in the *Ethics*. Here, in the so-called physical digression between E2p13 and E2p14, Spinoza claims that a collection of bodies constitute a single individual to the extent that they maintain a fixed ratio of motion and rest (*ratio motus et quietis*). This ratio of motion and rest is

the 'nature' or 'form' of the individual (see E2p13[4–17]), considered under the attribute of extension. Diachronic identity consists in the maintenance of a ratio between component parts, which is realised to varying degrees throughout the universe: from clusters of bonded atoms to ant colonies to solar systems. The scalar account of individuals implies that while social bodies like the commonwealth may be more loosely coordinated than biological bodies, there is no principled ontological distinction between these two classes of composites. And the more tightly members of a social body are bound by a common law or ratio – that is, the more absolute it is³ – the more fully it is an individual.

Not everyone is convinced, though, that for Spinoza the state can be even a loose or weak individual. Several American commentators – including Steven Barbone, Douglas Den Uyl and Lee Rice – whom I will refer to as Restrictive Individualists, are keen to limit the scope of what counts as a Spinozistic individual. They worry that conceiving of the state as a higher-order individual would undermine the integrity of the human individual. Barbone, for instance, takes it to be a chief virtue of his reading that on its basis 'political institutions take second place in importance to the individuals joined in them' (Barbone 2002: 107). And Rice argues that by restricting what counts as an individual, Spinoza 'evades the twin difficulties of totalitarianism and the metaphysical reification of social aggregates' (Rice 1990: 282).⁴ In this paper, I argue that the Restrictive Individualists are wrong both about the ontology of the state and about what state individualism entails. Spinoza not only allows that states can be individuals, he thinks that the more fully they function as individuals, the better they are. And this is perfectly compatible with the normative priority of the human individual.

This, however, raises another problem: if Spinoza is indeed committed to the normative priority of the human individual, why does he insist that civil subjects should always comply with civil law? In the second part of the chapter, I turn to answer this concern, suggesting that the key lies in the account of agreement (*convenientia*) that he advances in his *Political Treatise*, where *convenire* denotes a literal coming together (*con-venire*), or cooperation, and which directly entails being a part of a larger whole or individual. This analysis of agreement reinforces the case for state individualism, while shedding light on Spinoza's commitment to the convergence of individual and state interests.

2. Restrictive Individualism

Spinoza indisputably allows for nested individuals: '[i]f two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one' (E4p18s). This can be scaled all the way up to the 'whole of nature' or the infinite individual (E2p13[7, G ii: 102]). Still, a number of scholars think there are conditions for being a higher-order individual that the state fails to meet. One condition is that the laws that govern the activity of higher-order individuals must be more basic than those that govern the activity of lower-order individuals. Rice claims that in the case of nested individuals the 'activity at lower levels is *deductible* [from] . . . laws at higher levels'.⁵ And Barbone makes

essentially the same point: 'individuals are obliged by the power (*potentia*) of true higher order individuals that contain them'.⁶ For evidence that this was, in fact, Spinoza's view, both Barbone and Rice look to Spinoza's letter to Oldenburg from 20 November 1665 (Ep32) – the so-called 'worm in the blood' letter – which suggests that the activity of a micro-organism (the lower-order individual) is constrained by the laws of a micro-organism (the lower-order individual) the vascular activities of the larger organism. Barbone and Rice then argue that if the state were a higher-order individual, it would have to be governed by its own, irreducible (socio-political) laws that in turn explain the functioning of individual humans. We may call this the demand of nomological priority. Since Spinoza's political treatises indicate that socio-political laws are in fact rooted in the more basic laws of human psychology,⁷ states fail to meet this demand, and consequently are not individuals.

According to these theorists, the state also fails to meet the demand that individuals have 'intrinsic' conative power, a power that is not reducible to the conative power of its constitutive parts. This is a requirement for all individuals at whatever level: to be an individual is to have intrinsic or non-derivative power.⁸ Rice puts this point in the following way: 'a genuine spinozistic individual is greater than the sum of its parts (has more *conatus* than the sum of its conative elements)'.⁹ Barbone agrees that conative power cannot be derived, as the *conatus* is 'a force found "inside" each individual'¹⁰ or the 'unifying principle'¹¹ that separates the individual from the rest of nature. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that a thing's *conatus* is what makes it what it is: 'the individual is this effort to preserve itself'.¹² A mere collection – like the San Diego Chargers football team, to use Barbone's example – may produce unified effects, but it lacks intrinsic power, and so it lacks a *conatus*. On this account, the state is at best a mere collection, its power being wholly derivative, as evidenced by the fact that the power of the commonwealth is conceived of as a *potestas* (*ad aliquid* power) that is derived from the *potentia* (*per se* power) of individual subjects. Because the state lacks its own *conatus*, it cannot be an individual.

I must confess that I'm not entirely sure how these two demands are supposed to cohere with respect to lower-order individuals, as the demand of nomological priority implies that lower-order individuals are constrained by the laws of higher-order individuals, while the demand of 'intrinsic power' entails that they act from their own, non-derivative power. I will leave this tension to the side, though, and concentrate on what is common to these two demands: they both entail that the laws and powers that govern the operations of a higher-order individual do not reduce to the laws and powers that govern the operation of its component parts. I think this anti-reductionism stems from a misreading of Spinoza. To see why, let's examine more carefully each of the demands, beginning with the latter.

The demand that there be something 'inside' the thing, as Barbone puts it, that 'gives unity and unicity to an individual'¹³ is, as I see it, deeply unspinozistic. Spinoza's view that the 'form' or 'nature' of an individual consists in its structural coherence (ratio of motion and rest) is presented as an alternative to substantial accounts of individuation. Unlike the latter, Spinoza's account does not depend

on the existence of some further feature beyond structural coherence that would set an individual apart from the rest of nature. What makes an individual an individual is just the coherence itself. As Alexandre Matheron put it in his review of Den Uyl's *Power, State, and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy*

... the author in Chapter IV believes that he is able to conclude that the state is not 'an individual, but rather ... an organized set of relations' (p. 80). But what is an individual, according to the definition given after Proposition 13 of Book II of the *Ethics*, if not precisely 'an organized set of relations'?¹⁴

As structural coherence comes in degrees, so too does individuality.¹⁵ So the Restrictive Individualists' attempt to draw a sharp line between individuals and collections on the basis of the possession or non-possession of 'intrinsic' power is misguided from the start. And the claim that an individual is 'more than the sum of parts' is either trivial true or false. It is trivially true that an individual is more than the sum of its parts, since being an integral whole requires the maintenance of a certain relationship between the parts. But this is not what the Restrictive Individualists are claiming. They demand that there be something more to the power of individual than the power of its parts when arranged in such-and-such a manner. I have no idea what this elusive extra power could be or how it could be made consistent with Spinoza's metaphysics.¹⁶

The putative distinction between intrinsic and derived power finds no foothold in Spinoza's ontology. The difference between a single human pushing a stone and a collective pushing a boulder consists not in a difference in the kinds of power (*per se* and *ad aliud*) exhibited by these two nominal or logical subjects, but in the extent to which the parts of these subjects exhibit structural coherence over time. So, when we are asking whether or not the state has a *conatus*, we shouldn't seek some power beyond the coordinated power of its component parts; it is sufficient that its parts stand in some sort of patterned relationship to one another. And, as I suggested in the introduction, this is precisely what typifies a state – it is marked by a unified *ratio vivendi* – which explains why Spinoza explicitly claims that the state is a 'natural thing', and consequently is governed by the laws of nature (TP4.4).

But what exactly are the laws that govern the operations of the state? This brings us back to the demand of nomological priority. The Restrictive Individualists' suggestion that there can be more or less basic laws of nature jars with Spinoza's views on the operations of nature (*Natura Naturata*), according to which there is just one set of laws that govern *all things at all levels* (E3pref): 'Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, that is, the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same'. Nothing in Ep32 contradicts this claim, as the suggestion of the analogy of the worm in the bloodstream is not that the activity of micro-organisms is determined by laws of macro-organisms, but rather that micro-organisms and

macro-organisms alike are determined by the very same laws, the laws of Nature (or 'of the whole universe', as he puts it in Ep32).¹⁷ So, the fact that there are no distinct, irreducible socio-political laws should not be taken as evidence that states are not individuals.

Animating the Restrictive Individualists' account is the concern that if a state were an individual, the integrity of the human individual would be compromised. The human would be engulfed in the functioning of the state, her striving subordinated to the striving of state.¹⁸ Worries about the relationship between the reification of social bodies and the subordination of the individual are commonplace amongst a certain strand of contemporary liberals. But there is no necessary connection between state individualism and human subordination, and Spinoza shows how state individualism can be reconciled with the ontological and normative priority of the human individual.

Consider the first point: ontological priority. There are reasons for thinking that Spinoza embraces the general principle that parts are prior to wholes;¹⁹ and even if Spinoza does not accept the unrestricted claim about priority of parts, he allows for the composition of novel, higher-order individuals that are posterior to their parts (E4p18s).²⁰ Moreover, contrary to what the Restrictive Individualists claim, larger individuals can in fact be composed out of smaller individuals without the latter losing their independent 'viability'.²¹ We need not worry, then, that state individualism implies the disintegration or even the metaphysical subordination of the human individual.

Of course, the primary concern of Restrictive Individualists is that state individualism compromises the *normative*, and not just the ontological, priority of the human individual. Normative priority is taken to depend on ontological priority in something like the following way:

P1: If the state were an individual, then it would be ontologically prior to the human.

P2: If the state were ontologically prior to the human, then it would be normatively prior to human.

C: If the state were an individual, then it would be normatively prior to the human.

Since P1 is false, we may reject the argument as a whole. But we can also offer independent reasons for resisting the conclusion. Normative priority would seem to amount to something like this: X is normatively prior to Y iff the good of X takes priority over the good of Y. On Spinoza's account, however, good and evil are not features of nature itself; rather they are indexed to a particular perspective, or a particular striving. Normative subordination would imply that from Y's (Y = citizen) perspective, the good of X (X = the state) would take priority over Y's own good, which is at odds with Spinoza's striving-relative conception of the good. Consequently, we need not worry that state individualism poses a threat to normative priority.²² The fears expressed by the Restrictive Individualists that state individualism threatens human individualism are simply unfounded.²³

3. The Case for Compliance

This last point, however, raises a new worry: if Spinoza is indeed committed to the normative priority of the human individual, we would expect him to claim that citizens should comply with the laws of the state only to the extent that these laws serve the individual's interest, recognising that scenarios are bound to arise in which one's individual welfare would be enhanced by legal non-compliance. However, in both of his political treatises, Spinoza seems to advocate unqualified compliance with the law. For instance, in the *Political Treatise*, he claims that 'Each is subject to the control of the Commonwealth, and bound to carry out all its commands . . . though the subject may think the decrees of the Commonwealth unfair, he's nevertheless bound to carry them out' (TP3.5), and that

[all citizens] ought to obey all the commands of the King, or the edicts promulgated by the great Council (regarding this condition, see vi, 18 and 19), even if he thinks the commands quite absurd. If he doesn't obey, it will be right to compel him. (TP6.39)

Similarly, in the TTP he maintains that

Everyone must obey [*parere debere*] [the sovereign] in everything . . . unless we want to be enemies of the state, and act contrary to reason, which urges us to defend the state with all our powers, we're bound [*tenemur*] to carry out absolutely all the commands of the supreme power – even if it commands the greatest absurdities. (TTP16 (G iii: 193–4))

While there is a lot to explicate and disentangle in these passages, this much is clear: Spinoza is committed to some form of the thesis that citizens ought to comply with civic laws, no matter how absurd these laws appear to be. For convenience, I will call this Compliance, which is underwritten by something like the following logic:

P1: Legal non-compliance disempowers the state.

P2: To disempower the state is to disempower the individual citizen.

C: Legal non-compliance disempowers the individual citizen.

One might wonder here whether Spinoza actually embraces an unrestricted version of P1 and, consequently, of the conclusion. In his treatment of treason in the TTP, he allows for forms of non-compliance that 'clearly benefit' the state.²⁴ The curious suggestion here is that the treasonous subject can act without right, even while doing what is good or empowering for the state.²⁵ The possibility of a beneficial rebellion not only calls into question the scope of P1, it raises a host of other concerns about Spinoza's conception of right and its relationship to goodness, since he admits that even if one acts in ways that are clearly beneficial,

one is 'rightly condemned' (TTP16.48–50 (G iii: 197)).²⁶ I don't wish to plunge into these muddy waters here. Instead, I want to focus on the reasoning behind P2, to which Spinoza is clearly committed. Given that the citizen and the state are ontologically independent, why does Spinoza think that the power of the citizen is so bound up with the power of the state that it is irrational for the citizen to do anything that would disempower the state? Why does he think that the interests of the human individual and the interests of the state converge (hereafter: Convergence) in the way that Compliance assumes?

4. The Case for Compliance and Convergence

One way of conceiving of Compliance is as a special case of altruism. In E4p37, Spinoza writes: 'the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men'. This proposition ultimately depends on E4p31,²⁷ which reads: 'insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good'. The demonstration for this requires that one take the *conatus* doctrine (E3p6) as entailing that all things strive 'to aid the preservation of the *nature* of the thing itself', from which it is further inferred that one will strive to aid the preservation of all things that *agree* with this nature: 'insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good for human nature, and hence, for each man' (E4p35dem). It is unclear, however, how the following three claims, which are invoked in these passages, are supposed to fit together.²⁸

- (A) All things strive to persevere in their being (E3p6).
- (B) All things strive to preserve their natures (E4p31dem).
- (C) All things strive to preserve other things that agree with them in their nature (E4p35dem).

In E4p31dem, Spinoza asserts (B) on the basis of the *conatus* doctrine (A); but the *conatus* doctrine makes no reference to the natures of things, claiming only that each thing strives to persevere in its *being* (*in suo esse*). The most straightforward way of licensing this inference is to assert that individuals are identical with their natures. And there is some reason to think that Spinoza in fact identified things with their essences or at least took things and essences to stand in a one-to-one relation (E2def2), though the textual evidence is far from conclusive (for evidence of shared essences, see E1p8s). Unfortunately, though, as Michael Della Rocca (2004) aptly pointed out, the inference from (B) to (C) seems to entail that multiple things *can* share a single nature, which directly conflicts with identification of thing and essence that underwrites the inference from (A) to (B). Della Rocca concludes that this argument suffers from an unresolved and seemingly unresolvable tension:

Thus, in some passages, Spinoza expresses a commitment to the uniqueness of essences and in other places he expresses a commitment to its opposite. The main problem with Spinoza's proof in EIVp35d of the claim that rational

people are advantageous to others is that it expresses both commitments simultaneously. His failure to resolve this tension in his thinking about essences comes to a head in this important demonstration. (Della Rocca 2004: 134)

However, just a few years after the publication of 'Egoism and the Limitation of Affects in Spinoza', Della Rocca appears to have discovered the key to resolving this puzzle. He proposes that Spinoza has a conception of identity that permits him to treat striving to persevere in one's being as directly entailing the striving to aid in the preservation of those who *agree* in nature without equivocating on the possibility of shared natures.²⁹ He proposes that Spinoza is committed to a scalar conception of the identity of indiscernibles, according to which to the extent that things are similar to me, they *are* (numerically!) identical to me. And to that same extent, their virtue or power is literally mine; consequently, I will strive to enhance this power.

Della Rocca appeals to this argument from identity to justify the case for Compliance:

... the rebel has a great deal of similarity not only to the other citizens, but also to the state itself. By virtue of this similarity and to the degree to which the state and its sovereign are rational, the rebel has an obligation to preserve the state and to enhance its power and, in general, to strive for the things the state strives for. In other words, to the extent that the rebel is rational, he strives to enhance the state's power. (Della Rocca 2010: 182)

On this interpretation, doing good for others like me – including my compatriots and, indeed, the state itself – does not merely *instrumentally* redound to my good; rather, to the extent that others agree with me, their good is my good, because they literally are me.

This interpretation confirms the fears of the Restrictive Individualists: if the state is an individual, we lose, to some degree, our distinctness and become one with the state.

Della Rocca's interpretation hinges on his understanding of what it means for one thing to 'agree' with another. He takes agreement to mean similarity,³⁰ which is a function of just two factors: the extent to which things agree in nature (*in abstracto*) and the extent to which they are rational.³¹ This is a purely formal conception of agreement or similarity. As far as things agree in nature and are rational, they 'automatically' benefit one another, irrespective of spatio-temporal relationships.³² Della Rocca acknowledges that this interpretation carries odd and implausible implications (could it really be that a twenty-fifth century [ACE or BCE, it doesn't matter!], highly rational Siberian hermit is more useful than my slightly less rational, but thoughtful and amiable neighbour?),³³ but he is willing to bite this bullet – or, willing to have Spinoza bite this bullet – for the sake of consistency.

While Della Rocca's interpretation is quite ingenious, I think that there are good reasons to resist it. For instance, there is textual evidence that Spinoza

does not think that things are identical to the extent that they agree with one another. We find suggestions that he takes agreement to be a relationship that holds between distinct individuals in several passages in E4, the most decisive expression of which comes in E4p18s: 'There are, therefore, many things outside us [*extra nos*] which are useful to us, and on that account to be sought. Of these, we can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our nature'. Even things that 'agree entirely with our nature' are extrinsic to us. Things don't collapse into one another in virtue of agreeing; they retain their existential distinctness. Indeed, there is reason to think that it is precisely because something is existentially distinct from me that it *can* be *useful* to me, and that powers can compound in the ways that Spinoza indicates (E4p18s).³⁴ This is to say nothing of the conceptual problems that attend a 'scalar' conception of identity.

But the primary reason that I think we should resist Della Rocca's analysis is that it fails to capture the special utility of civic relations. If similar things were 'automatically' beneficial, as Della Rocca's interpretation entails, border differences would be irrelevant. Geographical proximity and civic ties would not give us any additional reason to aid or empower. We would have reason to empower all states and all people equally, modulating only for degrees of formal similarity. If citizens of another country are more rational, and so more like me, than my compatriots, then – other things being equal – I would have more reason to advance their interests than to advance the interests of my compatriots and my nation. However enlightened this position might be, it is assuredly not Spinoza's. One's power is uniquely bound up with the power of one's *own* state, and thus one has a particular interest in its success.

To his credit, Della Rocca acknowledges that 'political agreement' brings distinct utility. He accounts for this by maintaining that, because of civil arrangements, one is made to share more ends or agree more with one's compatriots than with others (Della Rocca 2010: 181). It is not clear how the suggestion that striving for the same things is a form of similarity is to be squared with the assertion that similarity is the function of just two factors: the extent to which things agree in nature and the extent to which they are rational (Della Rocca 2010: 178). More to the point, though, even if beings become more similar by desiring the same things, the utility of civic relations cannot be explained exclusively in formal terms. Members of other states in other eras – or, to get a bit more fanciful, participants in virtual worlds – may be more rational or may otherwise more formally resemble me than many of my compatriots, but I am uniquely benefited by the latter. The agreement that explains civic utility is not a matter of similarity alone.

But despite my criticisms, I think that Della Rocca is right that the concept of agreement is the key to understanding Convergence. In the next section, I will propose an alternative way of understanding agreement, as a functional, rather than merely formal, relationship.

5. Agreement as Cooperation

In the political works, Spinoza uses two terms that are translated into English as 'agreement': *pactum*, signifying a legal agreement or contract,³⁵ and the one I want to focus on, *convenientia*. *Convenientia* derives from the verb *convenire* ('to agree'), which is the very same term that Spinoza uses in the *Ethics* to account for the utility of humans to one another: 'the more a thing agrees [*convenit*] with our nature, the more useful, or better, it is for us' (E4p31c). *Convenire* can mean a number of things, and Spinoza takes full advantage of its many valences, using the term in some contexts to mean 'to correspond with' (E2def4) or 'accord with' (TP3.15, TP6.25, TP7.5), in others to mean 'to strike an agreement with', and in yet others to mean to come together, to assemble or even to conspire (TP6.1, TP9.3, TP7.14, TP10.2). It is the last sense of *convenire* as a literal coming together (*con-venire*) – which Lewis and Short (1975) list as its primary meaning ('To come together, meet, assemble, gather, come in a body') – that I want to focus on.

This sense of *convenire* plays an important role in Spinoza's account of state formation in TP2, where he claims to 'deduce' the foundations of the state from human nature, writing that if

two men come together³⁶ [*convenienti*] and join forces [*vires iungant*] they can do more together, and hence, together have more right over nature, than either does alone. The more connections they've formed in this way, the more right they'll all have together. (TP2.13)³⁷

He repeats this point just two sections later: 'the more they agree as one [*convenient in unum*] in this way, the more right they all have together' (TP2.15). On this understanding, what it means for things to agree is for them to combine powers and to act as one. To agree is literally to *co-operate*, to produce common effects, and to constitute a greater singular thing (E2def7). On this reading, things that agree with one another do not collapse into a single entity, rather they retain their distinctness while participating in a new, more powerful entity.

While this account of agreement [*convenientia*] is most perspicuous in the *Political Treatise*, we find glimpses of it in the *Ethics*. Consider, for instance, E3p5, which states 'Things are of a contrary nature, that is, cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other'. The demonstration for this reads: 'For if they agree with one another [*inter se convenire*], or be in the same subject at once, then there could be something in the same subject which could destroy it, which (by P4) is absurd' (E3p5dem). Leaving aside the reasoning here, the salient point for my analysis is that Spinoza infers that if things agree [*convenire*] with one another, then they are in *the same subject*.³⁸ Two things agree only if they are both in the same (larger) subject.

Now, this passage only demonstrates that things that agree with one another *inhere* in the same subject; it does not establish that they *compose* a larger subject.³⁹ The latter claim, however, is explicitly made in E4p18, where Spinoza writes:

There are, therefore, many things outside us which are useful to us, and on that account to be sought. Of these, we can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our nature. For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined [*iunguntur*] to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree [*conveniant*] in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. (E4p18s)

In order that 'the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body', it is not enough for things simply to agree *in nature*; these things must be joined [*iunguntur*] to one another such that they 'compose an individual twice as powerful as each one'. The agreement that Spinoza is extolling here is *agreement in function*, which – as in the passages from the TP – requires the joining of forces and entails the formation of a *larger* individual. To agree in operation is to forge associations, whereby individuals 'bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people of them' (E4app12). Once again, agreement entails participating in a larger individual.⁴⁰

This account harmonises with features of Diane Steinberg's interpretation of Spinoza and altruism (or non-egoism). Steinberg attempts to reconcile Spinoza's anti-realism about universals with his appeal to a shared human nature by maintaining that 'the human nature of one person is absolutely indistinguishable as such from that of any other'.⁴¹ Specifically, she conceives of 'mankind or humanity' as a complex individual whose laws bind together and, to some degree, govern the activity of particular human individuals. The point that I want to stress here is that, like me, Steinberg conceives of the 'agreement' in virtue of which human individuals are beneficial to one another as entailing participation in some larger entity, construing this shared nature or agreement in expressly organic terms: 'just as hearts would not be hearts if they did not exist as parts of human bodies, human beings would not be human beings if they were not each a part of mankind' (Steinberg 1984: 319).

Before proceeding, I want to dispel an objection raised by Jonathan Bennett that there is an equivocation lurking in the analogy with the human body. Bennett writes

The picture of men as composing a single individual and together seeking the common advantage of all, suggests a single organism each of whose organs preserves itself through its special contribution to the survival of the whole. But that conflicts with the idea that men should be 'entirely of the same nature' ... the harmony which relates my lungs to my heart and both to my blood etc., and the harmony of a school of fish peacefully swimming in the same direction. He wants us to interrelate like the former, but his arguments all point to the latter. (Bennett 1984: 306–7)⁴²

Put somewhat differently, Spinoza seems to slide between agreement in nature – or homology – and agreement in function. As I've indicated, though, I think that in fact Spinoza did intend to distinguish between formal and functional agreement, which is why he is often careful to tag the former as 'agreement in nature' (*natura*). And, while it is true that not all functional unities must be composed of homologous parts, there is nothing incoherent about insisting that certain functional unities – like moral communities or the state – can only be forged out of homologous parts, since only things that agree in nature can be bound by these particular kinds of laws. While we might wish that Spinoza more carefully distinguished between, and expounded on, these conceptions of agreement, we should not take the admission that certain forms of cooperation require similarity as evidence of confusion, as Bennett does.

While I don't intend to defend Diane Steinberg's interpretation wholesale, I do find it instructive insofar as it serves not only as a precedent for this reading of agreement as participation in a larger individual, but also as a model for defending a version of Convergence. She concludes her analysis by indicating how such a view supports Spinoza's non-egoism:

Why then did Spinoza think it absurd that reason should counsel human beings to have in reality no common laws, that is, to submit to common laws only to the degree that it is in one's own self-interest to do so? I believe it was because he thought it impossible that a person should preserve his own being or promote his own welfare without acting in accordance with a set of laws whose aim is to promote the welfare of mankind. (Steinberg 1984: 322–3)

Individual welfare is so bound up with collective welfare that that 'the egoistic/non-egoistic distinction collapses' (Steinberg 1984: 323). This reasoning applies *a fortiori* to the citizen and the state. As noted in my preliminary observations about civility, individual humans are necessarily driven to come together (*con-venire*), since we are fundamentally powerless in isolation. Coming together with others – forging an agreement and forming a super-individual – provides conditions in which we can each flourish. The better we preserve the laws or *rationes vivendi* that hold together this super-individual, the more effectively we cooperate and more completely we empower or benefit one another.

At this point, we can see how this sense of agreement differs from Della Rocca's. First, it consists in a functional rather than a merely formal relationship: to agree with others is not merely to resemble them in some way; it is to operate as one (*in unum*). It is something achieved or accomplished when the dynamic powers of individuals are united.⁴³ Second, rather than entailing that we are literally (numerically) identical with others to the extent that we agree with them, my interpretation entails that things that agree with one another maintain existential distinctness, but compound powers by forging a larger individual. And, finally, it accounts for the special utility of civic relations. We benefit from our state and have a special interest in its health not because formally similar

things 'automatically' benefit one another, but because we are empowered when we operate in concert with others.

6. Conclusion

The interpretation of civic agreement as cooperation reinforces the case against the Restrictive Individualists by presenting further reasons for supposing that the state, which is constituted by human agreement, is an individual. And the account of Convergence intimated on the basis of this interpretation of agreement in no way undermines the ontological distinctness or the normative priority of the human individual, as the reasons for supporting the state are firmly rooted in the interests of the human constituents.

Still, the preceding analysis leaves unanswered *which* higher-order individuals – which cooperative units – we ought to be most concerned with preserving and strengthening. It is conceivable that the benefits of empowering some non-civil – say, transnational or subnational – association could outweigh the benefits of empowering the state. Think of separatist groups for whom empowering their association requires acts of civil non-compliance, perhaps in the form of revolution or secession.

Spinoza does not directly take up this scenario, but nothing in his account (or its logic) precludes the possibility that the form of agreement that is most beneficial to the individual is transnational or subnational. Rather than attempting to offer a full reconstruction of Spinoza's would-be response, I'll simply note that he was indeed concerned with the possibility that people would prioritise other associations – especially religious associations – above the state. And he thought that the fragmentation or balkanisation of interest groups *within* a state is a sign of civic pathology, for which the sovereign deserves the bulk of the blame (see TP5.2–5.3). Where one's welfare would be advanced – or even would *appear* to be advanced – through counter-civil behaviour, the state has failed, as its function is to coordinate the activity of its members, to induce harmony. If the state is to secure its status as the super-individual nonpareil, it must create the conditions in which citizens see themselves as participants in, and beneficiaries of, the operations of the body politic. So, even if 'men aren't born civil' (TP5.2), in a well-functioning republic, individuals will come to appreciate the extent to which their welfare depends on their cooperation with their compatriots.

Notes

1. Steinberg (2018a, 2018b).
2. Steinberg (2018a). In order for an issuance of law ('law') to be a genuine *ratio vivendi*, a certain threshold of compliance must be met (see TP3.8, G iii: 288).
3. Steinberg (2018a).
4. It is not clear to me why the latter, on its own, is an evil. I can only surmise that Rice's point is that reification brings along its 'twin', totalitarianism. But this is implausible, as Rice himself concedes: 'This is not to say that all of the consequences of such

communalism for the nonautonomy of the individual will follow from the adoption of such a model in Spinoza' (Rice 1990: 274).

5. See also: '[A] complex may be said to be "more than the sum of its parts," and thus an individual from an ontological perspective, if and only if the laws governing those parts are a subset of the implication class of the laws governing the complex whole. If this subset relation does not hold, then the complex is a logical individual' (Rice 1990: 277).
6. Barbone (2002: 107).
7. Rice (1990: 278).
8. Rice draws here on Douglas Den Uyl's distinction between *per se* and *ad aliud* power (Den Uyl 1983). One can exercise *ad aliud* power, or power over another, simply in virtue of derived powers, as when a group of people move a boulder.
9. Rice (1990: 282).
10. Barbone (2002: 100). In fairness, Barbone admits that this is 'to speak grossly'.
11. Barbone (2002: 99).
12. Barbone (2002: 99) Taken strictly, this view is incoherent. If an individual, *I*, is nothing but the striving to preserve *I*, the account is either circular or infinitely regressive, since one is left to answer to what the second 'I' refers. The upshot here is that the *conatus* should not be taken as the sole basis for metaphysical individuation, even if striving is the essential activity of all individuals. See Garrett (1994: 97).
13. Barbone (2002: 99).
14. Cited in Rice (1990: 27).
15. Others who have argued for degrees of individuality include Michael Della Rocca (1996, 2008) and Yitzhak Melamed (2013).
16. Moreover, by Barbone's own admission, collectives like the state can produce common effects, and to the extent that they do so, they may be regarded as a single thing (E2def7), even if not as an individual ('we cannot properly identify the Chargers as an individual, but only as a single thing' (Barbone 2002: 100)). While there is some debate concerning exactly how the concepts of individuals (*individua*) and singular things (*res singulare*) relate to one another, this much is clear: the *conatus* doctrine applies to things (*res*) (see E3p4–7). As singular things are a subset of things – namely they are things that are finite and have a determinate existence (E2def7) – collectives that produce common effects must, like all singular things, *strive to persevere in their being*. So, if Barbone admits that the state is a singular thing, he cannot coherently deny that it strives.
17. I don't wish to claim that, for Spinoza, all laws are reducible to and explicable in terms of a few primary laws. But I am suggesting that whatever laws exist – however many, and however broad in scope they happen to be – are either primary laws themselves or are reducible to the primary laws of nature. Thanks to Andrea Sangiacomo for prompting me to clarify this point.
18. Rice (1990: 274).
19. For instance, Yitzhak Melamed has recently maintained that for Spinoza parts are prior in knowledge and nature to their wholes: 'Parts are prior to their whole both in nature and in our knowledge' (Melamed 2013: 47). He cites three bits of textual evidence: (1) E1p12dem, which claims that it would be absurd to think that 'the whole could both be and be conceived without its parts'; (2) Ep35, where, as in E1p12dem, he denies that God is a complex whole, claiming, that God is 'simple and not composed of parts. For in respect of *their nature* and *our knowledge* of them, component parts would have to be prior to that which they compose'; (3) CM, Part II,

- ch. 5 (G i: 258): 'component parts are prior in nature at least to the thing composed' (Melamed 2013: 47, note 145). If this is right, then human individuals, as *parts* of a higher-order whole, would be metaphysically prior to the state. For scepticism about Melamed's reading, see Alison Peterman (2014).
20. Contrast with Den Uyl, who claims that super-individuals would 'also have to be found, at least theoretically, in the state of nature' (Den Uyl 1983: 70).
 21. Barbone (2002: 107).
 22. Indeed, as we shall see, the power of the individual human is in fact augmented by participating in the functioning of a larger individual.
 23. There are two other key claims that Restrictive Individualists make against the possibility of state individualism. One is that Spinoza claims that states are always more vulnerable to internal rebellion than external threats, while singular things can only be destroyed by external causes. The other is that Spinoza adopts hedging phrases when describing the mind/body politic, claiming that the state acts 'as if' (*veluti, quasi*) from a single mind, rather than explicitly embracing state individualism. Without attempting to fully rebut these considerations here, I will simply note that I don't think either of them seriously threatens the claim of state individualism. The fact that states can be destroyed by citizens does not mean that they can be destroyed by internal causes. Rather, to the extent that citizens act seditiously, they act from their partially extrinsic nature. Indeed, Spinoza cites the fact that the state is endangered more by its citizens than by its enemies as evidence that the 'transfer' of one's right to the state is incomplete – human individuals always retain their own power (TTP17.1–5 (G iii: 201–2)). This also helps to explain the hedging phrases (*veluti, quasi*), as Spinoza may simply be calling attention to the fact that the decisions of the state are never realised without the consent of disparate constituent minds – the state is never truly guided by a single mind alone. This comports with TP3.2, where Spinoza invokes the hedging phrase *veluti* to describe how the state is guided (as if by one mind), but proceeds unhesitatingly to refer to the 'body and mind of the whole state' (*totius imperii corpus et mens*) (cf. TP3.5).
 24. TTP16.48–50 (G iii: 197).
 25. So as to leave no doubt, he repeats it a few lines later: 'he's violated the right of the supreme power, has committed treason, and is rightly condemned. As we've said, it doesn't matter how much advantage this would certainly bring to the state' (TTP16.51 (G iii: 198)).
 26. One way to make sense of this would be to distinguish between the intention and the outcomes. The treasonous subject might be condemned for acting without authority, even while producing salutary consequences. One complicating factor here is that it is not clear whether the knowledge that it 'would clearly benefit the whole Republic' is part of the aspect under which the treasonous agent acts, or whether this is just apparent from some omniscient perspective. If one could really be quite certain that non-compliance would be empowering, it is hard to see why this would be a condemnable act, unless one thinks that permitting case-by-case determinations of utility is dangerous (see Steinberg 2014).
 27. E4p37dem appeals to E4p35c1, which is in turn rooted in E4p31c and, ultimately, E4p31.
 28. The following discussion is indebted to Della Rocca (2004). Steinberg (1984) calls attention to similar problems.
 29. Della Rocca (2010).
 30. This is his gloss in multiple works, including Della Rocca (2004, 2010).

31. Della Rocca (2010: 178).
32. Della Rocca (2010: 179; 2008: 197).
33. Della Rocca (2010: 179).
34. It would be, at the very least, linguistically awkward to suggest that 'I am useful to myself.' To be clear, though, existential distinctness is compatible with agreement in nature.
35. This concept is notably absent from the TP.
36. I've altered Curley's translation here, which reads – infelicitously, in my view – 'If two men make an agreement [*convenienti*]'.
37. I take 'join[ing] forces' here to be just an elaboration of what happens in virtue of coming together.
38. Surprisingly, Spinoza uses *vel* or the 'or' of disjunction, rather than *sive* or the 'or' of apposition. Nevertheless, he is clearly claiming that agreement entails participation in a (larger) subject, and the reasoning is far more intelligible if we take this as an appositive 'or'.
39. In conversation, John Grey rightly cautioned me against conflating the inference relationship with the composition relationship. I do think, however, that when it comes to things, as opposed to substance, Spinoza's treatment of these two relations is somewhat entangled. For instance, an idea is, at once, in the mind and a *part* of the mind.
40. In Ep32 (the worm in the blood letter), Spinoza claims: 'concerning whole and parts, I consider things as parts of some whole to the extent that the nature of the one adapts itself to that of the other so that they [A: all] agree with one another as far as possible', which suggests once again that it is in virtue of agreeing with one another that things constitute parts of some (greater) whole. Sangiacomo (2015) emphasises this point. While this supports my reading, it is worth noting that the Latin verb translated here as 'agree' is *consentire*, not *convenire*.
41. Steinberg (1984: 314; cf. p. 309).
42. Thanks to John Grey for drawing my attention to this passage. If I remember rightly, Hasana Sharp raised a similar concern in response to the analogy with the human body when I presented this paper at a conference at the University of Toronto.
43. Etienne Balibar interprets *convenientia* in a way that draws out the notion of cooperation of unified functioning. He refers to *convenientia* as a kind of 'synergy' (Balibar 1997: 24) that is achieved through 'rational communication' (*ibid.*: 30). See also Sharp (2011).

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Power, Freedom and Relational Autonomy

Ericka Tucker

In recent years, the notion of relational autonomy has transformed the old debate about the freedom of the individual in society. A simplification of this debate has two poles: on the one side were libertarian individualists who argued that freedom requires complete independence from society, and on the other were those philosophers who argued that without the social there could be no self to be free in the first place. Rather than the old poles of libertarianism versus social constructivism, relational autonomy theorists sought to find ways to understand how we can be free while being fully situated in social lives (Benhabib 1992; Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000; Barclay 2000; Christman 2004; Westlund 2009; Stoljar 2015). While the freedom of an individual is clearly curtailed in some ways by having to follow the law, for example, it is also clear that the society that supports the individual also makes it possible for the individual to do and to be more, that is, in another sense, to be free. In her article 'Autonomy and the Relational Individual', Aurelia Armstrong argues that Spinoza can best be understood as a theorist of relational autonomy (Armstrong 2009). She argues both that Spinozan freedom is relational and, further, that Spinoza's notion of freedom really is one of autonomy. While I agree with Armstrong that we cannot understand Spinoza's notion of freedom without understanding the social and physical relations by which individual power is constituted, I am less sure that Spinoza's theory of freedom is entirely captured by understanding it in terms of autonomy, unless we understand it as a fully naturalised constitutive conception of autonomy (Oshana 1994). By constitutive autonomy, I refer to Marina Oshana's view that external circumstances – social and political conditions – impinge strongly on individual freedom. For Oshana, the external circumstances that foster or limit individual autonomy are both physical and psychological or ideological – all of which are understood naturalistically. Oshana's account recognises that increasing individual autonomy may involve challenging or changing these external circumstances. That is, social change, for example, may be required for individual autonomy. Oshana's account and Spinoza's conception of relational autonomy would be considered 'constitutive' theories of relational autonomy (Barclay 2000; Christman 2004; Oshana 2006; Stoljar 2015). These accounts are constitutive insofar as they not only 'investigate the effects of external "relational" factors on