

Reading notes for the Ethics

For seminar on oneness taught by Helen De Cruz (fall 2023)

(teaching notes mainly aimed at clarifying, highlighting some parts of the text)

Introduction to the Ethics

Spinoza (1632-1677): Chronology of his life and broader context

The Dutch Republic and Sephardic Jewish population (relative religious tolerance, relative prosperity, rapid economic growth, global influences in food, earthenware [Delft blue = Dutch knock-off of Ming dynasty pottery], philosophy, the East India Company--Google, Tesla etc are nothing compared to its outsize wealth and political and economic influence, for good and also for ill)

Family context: S was the middle son in a relatively well-off family of merchants. Father was Michael despinoza, an importer of dried fruit.

Spinoza (birth name Baruch or Bento, both mean blessed) attended Yeshiva school in Amsterdam (only for boys), to learn Torah, Hebrew grammar, some math/accounting to be able to trade.

After the death of Michael, two brothers (Bento and Gabriel) took over the business, but due to a loss at sea (piracy by UK), they were close to bankruptcy and could not pay their debts or the taxes levied by the Jewish community. Bento finally declared himself an orphan so the debts could be forgiven (this was clever from business perspective but did not endear him to community, it's been speculated this was part of the reason he was expelled later)

Contact with Dutch Baptist-minded collegianten (a group of Christian philosophers and thinkers, many Anabaptists and Arminians, who starting around 1620 started to meet regularly in Rijnsburg) such as Lodewijk Meyer, Jarig Jelles, Simon de Vries... All influenced by philosophy by Descartes, discussing this on regular basis (Cartesians)

1656 (the sixth of Av, 5416, by the Jewish calendar): Spinoza was expelled from his community in the most severe terms. Text (originally in Portuguese)

Herem text: The Senhores of the ma'amad [the congregation's lay governing board] having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises to turn him from his evil ways. However, having failed to make him mend his wicked ways, and, on the contrary, daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies which he practiced and taught and about his monstrous deeds, and having for this numerous trustworthy witnesses who have deposed and borne witness to this effect in the presence of the said Espinoza, they became convinced of the truth of this matter. After all of this has been investigated in the presence of the honorable hakhamim ["wise men," or rabbis], they have decided, with the [rabbis'] consent, that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel. By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of the entire holy congregation, and in front of these holy scrolls with the 613 precepts which are written therein; cursing him with the excommunication with which Joshua banned Jericho and with the curse which Elisha cursed the boys and with all the castigations which are written in the Book of the Law.

Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law. But you that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.
(end of text)

Then a period (roughly 1556-1660) where it's difficult to find out what happened. Spinoza (unable to continue his life as a merchant) left the Sephardic community, probably lived with **Franciscus van den Enden** for a while in Amsterdam on De Singel.

Van den Enden was a Latin tutor and freethinker who had a Latin school and theater company, which was (to the shock of the Calvinist Kerkeraad) mixed gender both in teaching and pupils, and eventually forced to shut down (Van Den Enden is a fascinating philosopher in his own right).

Spinoza learned Latin there, participating in plays, probably teaching van den Enden Hebrew (something many early modern non-Jews were eager to learn) & some mutual political philosophical influence.

Languages: Portuguese (spoken at home), Spanish and Hebrew (school), Latin, Dutch, French (cf his collection of books). No English. But almost everything is in Latin, except for some letters with Dutch authors such as Blijenbergh, and one letter in Spanish

During this time, late 1650s, he learned a trade. He tried painting/drawing (a sketchbook of his is described but does not survive) and lens grinding (a bit like coding now, or prior to ChatGPT—you could do with relatively little equipment in your own home, it's quiet, patient, and precise work which seemed to suit him). This also brought him into contact with the cutting edge of the scientific revolution (note his many remarks on division of labor and mutual aid for art and science in Political Treatise and in Theologico-Political Treatise.).

Spinoza's lenses were very much valued by people like Christian Huygens for their telescopes; he also made lenses for microscopes

Spinoza resurfaced in 1661 in Rijnsberg (Southern Netherlands, still a small town not far from Leiden) our letters come from this Rijnsberg period. He at this point always uses the Latinized "Benedictus" (also means "blessed") when signing off. He later moved to Voorburg, also a small town in the Southern Netherlands, and then finally to Den Haag in 1770 where he would spend his final years.

ca 1660, Short Treatise (*Korte verhandeling*), work only survives in Dutch, not included in Opera Posthuma

1663 Only publication under his name in his lifetime, a commentary on Descartes' Principles (not my fav work by Spinoza, a bit of a snoozefest).

Though Spinoza was a quiet, withdrawn sort of person he still attracted a circle of admirers of his philosophy, interested in his work, he would meet regularly with the Collegianten in the 1660s. They would write letters to him which he responds to.

Looking over letters in the Curley volumes, note how he rarely starts any correspondence, and there are few letters. Only 88 in total (from/to). Compare: Descartes had over 800, and Leibniz had thousands, according to Jonathan Israel's new biography. There were probably far more letters but to the intense regret of future historians, his friends who edited his works burned all the letters that weren't philosophically interesting.

The early modern letter: supposed to be semi-public (first part = personal, middle part = could be shared, read aloud etc., final part = closing).

1670: inexplicably (maybe due to the deteriorating political climate) he publishes (anonymously) the *Political-theological Treatise*, a unique hybrid work of political philosophy and biblical criticism. Basically says: The Bible should not be read through light of reason (Maimonides) or natural light (Reformed epistemology) but in its own terms, as a historical book. Huge outrage follows (cf Nadler's *A book forged in hell*).

(political context: Orangists vs Republicans, or Willem van Nassau vs Johan de Witt. The Orangists wanted more centralized power. The Republicans wanted more diversion to regional powers. De Witt was Grand Pensionary of Holland. Unfortunately, neglect of the army led to Rampjaar (year of disaster) in 1672, France and England attacked the Republic in the Franco-Dutch War. De Witt was tortured and lost his position, but it wasn't enough—he was lynched by an angry mob and literally eaten alive (!!)) Spinoza, very much on the side of De Witt, had to be restrained by his landlady so he would not go out and try to do something about it.)

1673 Declines chair position at University of Heidelberg (the clause that his lectures and written work should not upset established religion was probably too much).

1675 Stops publication of *Ethics* in Dutch, because “stupid Cartesians” and certain theologians were denouncing his views and painting him as an atheist. (Note: we see indirectly in later letters immense frustration and disappointment of S. that he would never see the *Ethics* published during his lifetime, esp given his deteriorating health. He did leave clear instructions on publication; the entire contents of his desk in an unmarked crate should be on a canal boat to Riewertz, the printer).

Spinoza died in Den Haag at the age of 44, quite suddenly (some pulmonary disease, probably tuberculosis, which was ailing him already a while), at the time he lived with a family on the upper floor of a (not too large) house, grinding lenses and writing (he would sometimes be there days at a time).

He left behind very few possessions and his sister Rebecca relinquished her claim on the inheritance as she was worried they might not cover the debt. (But later she had second thoughts, that's how we have his complete book inventory)

Among the possessions was, of note: a substantive collection of books > 100 items (complete list was inventoried so we know), a few small paintings, a few sparse sets of clothes, crockery etc., a signet ring (which had Spinoza's seal, the rose, initials “BdS”

and the motto “Caute”, be cautious!), a game of chess (the only thing indicating something of a hobby), and a bed.

1677: publication of *Opera Posthuma/Nagelate Schriften* by his friends by illegal printer, a friend and sympathizer Jan Riewertz, simultaneously in Dutch and Latin for maximal impact (reach etc) with a false location of publication.

(I put a recently discovered Latin manuscript of the *Ethics* from the Vatican on Canvas, not an autograph unfortunately, but earlier than the OP/NS so independent copy, likely by Pieter van Gent, was brought there by Steno, Latinists among you can have a ball).

OP = the Latin

NS = the Dutch translation (Note almost everything was originally in Latin except for some letters)

Carl Gerbhardt – collection of Spinoza works in 1925. This also includes the later discovered *Short Treatise on Man and His Wellbeing*, a kind of bridge between his earlier views and the mature metaphysics in the *Ethics*.

Reception of Spinoza's work (some examples)

- Atheist and naturalist interpretation (oldest and still today, cf Nadler)
- Pantheist interpretation (esp in 19th century German idealists such as Hegel, following Salomon Maimon's interpretation of Spinoza, culminating in Novalis calling him that “God-intoxicated man”)
- Spinoza as the kickstart of the radical Enlightenment (Jonathan Israel)
- Nietzschean interpretation (Deleuze, Spinoza is a philosopher who wants to offer us joy, freedom, politically from oppression and from our own misguided passions)
- Spinoza the PSR metaphysician (Della Rocca)
- Non-conventional religious interpretation (Carlisle)

Conclusion: you can build your own Spinoza and get away with it (if doing due diligence, or cherry picking really beautifully like Deleuze)

Abbreviations for Spinoza's major works

NS *Nagelate Schriften* – Dutch edition of Spinoza's desk + letters compiled/edited by friends 1677

OP *Opera Posthuma* – Latin edition of Spinoza's desk + letters compiled/edited by friends 1677
containing

E *Ethics*

PT *Political Treatise* – an unfinished book on monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy and how to make them stable

Ep Epistolae, letters

DEI *De emendatione intellectus*, on the emendation of the Intellect, an early work on how to reason

Hebrew grammar (translation is planned as part III of the Princeton volume, I have not read this one)

Then also of note are

- TTP *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* or Theologico-Political Treatise, 1670
- KV Korte Verhandelng *Short Treatise on God, man and his wellbeing* – never published within his lifetime it probably circulated. Dutch (but likely not originally), has a lot of ideas we also find in the *Ethics*. Maybe late 1650s.
- PPC *Principia philosophiae cartesianae*, 1663 - only thing Spinoza published under his name, opinionated commentary on Descartes's *Principles* in geometric order.

Some fun and interesting sources

- The complete and searchable Spinoza's *Ethics* in Latin and 17th-century Dutch

<https://ethics.spinoza.ca/>

- the complete inventory of Spinoza's books upon his death:

<https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/de-boeken-van-spinoza>

- the complete correspondence, also with a few autographs

<https://spinozaweb.org/letters>

- Colerus' biography (originally in Dutch, 1705, one of two early biographies. The other is Lucas translated in English

<https://kvond.wordpress.com/2008/06/15/the-life-of-spinoza-colerus-1705-part-i/>

Part I: On God

The LORD our God, the LORD is one. – Deuteronomy 6:4

(How to interpret this verse? This is a question that preoccupies a lot of Jewish philosophy, and though S. did not self-ID as Jewish anymore when he wrote the *Ethics*, still important to see it also in that intellectual context)

To understand this part I, we should look at important intellectual inspiration, Descartes on substance, attribute, and mode

Substance = something that exists independently (or *could* exist independently).

For Descartes everything exists by virtue of God (divine will—cf his God is not the God of classical theism but can do more, e.g., will different math facts etc)

So only God can be properly speaking a substance (free, self-existing) but Descartes allows for a certain escape clause that Spinoza does not allow (cf also Leibniz, *Monadologie* 1713).

Escape clause: Yes tables, minds etc depend on God for their existence, but they do not depend on other things for their existence once they're in existence. A carpenter may *cause* a table to come into existence, but that's okay once it exists it's still independent from other created things (note how S. denies this with saying about how our bodies depend on many other physical things for their existence, especially in part IV).

Cf Descartes's *Principles* “there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. In the case of all other substances, we perceive that they can exist only with the help of God's concurrence.”

Substance: two kinds -- mind/body (matter)

Each substance has *one* attribute

- Mind attribute of thought
- Body/matter attribute of extension

Mode = a specific way of being extended or of thinking, e.g., table is a specific extension of bodies

However, for D, “objects such as your mind, your body, and the table are not modes of any substance, rather they are substances in their own right” (Della Rocca 2008, 61). (Note: to my knowledge some people, maybe Cottingham see the *res extensa* as just one thing?)

Importantly, cf 1st meditation: That you can *think* about extension does not imply it exists. Thought can be independent from extension (thinking of table does not imply tables exist, could be in the Matrix, brain in vat, evil demon)

Spinoza on substance

How many things are there? **Ultimately just one**: God, or substance, or nature (sive = equivalence relation)

cf 1P11 -- Deus sive substantia constans infinitis attributis quorum unumquodque æternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit, necessario existit.

One substance only and no escape clause like in Descartes to sneak in finite things, and this substance is God.

For Descartes, each substance can only have one attribute.

For Spinoza, the one substance has an “infinity of attributes” including thought and extension. Humans only know thought and extension, so what could the other attributes possibly be?

Modes:

What are modes? Curley thinks they're different from Descartes, Della Rocca thinks they're similar.

Modes = states of substance (so, not like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle but a state, cf 1p15s.) Because God is **indivisible**.

Particular bodies = modes of extension

Particular minds = modes of thought

Problem (!!!) if modes are characterized by their attributes, and there's only one kind of attribute per substance, what makes your mind different from my mind?

Your body is not a *part* of God but is in a sense a full expression of God.

Thought and bodies ultimately come down to same substance but S still distinguishes between them giving rise to puzzling views on the relationship between mind and body we will see further on (parallelism, not a word Spinoza uses but one frequently used to think about his philosophy of mind)

There are also infinitely many modes.

Necessitarianism: modes depend so intimately on God, the one substance, they could *not* have been otherwise (overall project in the *Ethics*: you should realize this! You have no free will, there's no contingency. Realizing you're a mode of God and things are the way they necessarily are gives you a mental acquiescence/repose of the soul/blessedness).

PSR: For Della Rocca a cornerstone of Spinoza's philosophy.

If everything flows with necessity from God's nature, and human will etc is also part of this (hence no free will for Spinoza as we'll see) then everything obeys the same natural principles and laws. Then also (as we will see) you can gain an understanding of these things.

Causation: a bit like logical entailment, not at all the Humean later definition (notice the many mathematical analogies throughout the *Ethics*)

The beautiful argument for monism in Part I of the *Ethics* (read more explanation in Della Rocca, ch 2)

- 1p5 no two substances can share an attribute
- 1p7 it pertains to the nature of a substance to exist
- so, God exists
- since God exists & has all the attributes, then by 1p5 no other substance can exist
- Only one substance (God) exists

Distinction between *natura naturans* (God as free cause) and *natura naturata* (the things that follow from the necessity of God's nature, that is to say, from any of God's attributes) (1p29). So our minds, as modes of God, are *natura naturata* and not *naturans* (side note: this complicates any argument that Spinoza is a pantheist)

E1Appx does several things: It is a natural history of religion (I think, personally more sophisticated than has been given credit, prefigures Hume in important respects, holds up remarkably well in light of cognitive science), and it argues against teleology in nature

Argument in the Appendix in a nutshell:

- people are ignorant of causes
- people seek their own advantage and they know they do this
- therefore, people do have final causation in their actions "men act always on account of an end"

- seeing in the natural world things that also help them achieve their own advantage/ends they infer (spuriously) that there are “eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food”
- add to this inference of a ruler (anthropomorphic God) who “made all things for their use”
- problem: counterexamples “Among so many conveniences in nature they had to find many inconveniences: storms, earthquakes, diseases, etc” – solution: God is punishing us! (ad hoc reasoning)

In Spinoza's view, God has no ends/purposes (this would be an imperfection, as it would imply God lacks something) and this is unwarranted anthropomorphism. This will come back in IV.

Part II. Of the nature and origin of the mind

Big picture of the Ethics, recall the TOC:

- I. Of God
- II. Of the nature and origin of the mind
- III. Of the origin and nature of the affects
- IV. Of human bondage, or of the powers of the affects
- V. Of the power of the Intellect, or human freedom

Remember, Part I – An argument for substance monism + some definitions and some initial implications of substance monism (see previous handout)

God = the infinite, eternal substance that acts from the necessity of its nature

God has infinite attributes (we know among these thought and extension) and infinite modes (p16)

PSR: if there is some state of affairs in nature there must be a cause (1P8Schol2, IV)

Necessitarianism: things only *seem* contingent to us (“in nature there is nothing contingent”, 1P29) everything happens deterministically and with necessity. There is no free will.

This even holds for God, who acts from laws of his nature alone and is compelled by no-one (P17). This is for Spinoza *freedom*. Freedom is not libertarian free will but is lack of being compelled and acted upon.

Part II deals with the human mind and presents a philosophical anthropology and analysis of human cognition

We already have the seeds for the central claims Spinoza is moving toward, namely his central concern of freeing us from bad passions, from recognizing things could not be otherwise. Realizing this (substance monism + necessitarianism) you will be able reach the state of blessedness (*beatitudo*)

We get there by the argument for substance monism and introduction of necessitarianism, lack of free will, no anthropomorphism (so no point praying etc), no teleology (so things do not happen for a reason, they just are)...

Note however that for Spinoza the insight will have to ultimately be the third kind of cognition (intuition), so the previous are helps/scaffolding to get you there.

But it's hard for us to get there because of entrenched ways of thinking, which is why we have parts II, III and IV.

We must get an adequate idea of God which is possible. Note: what adequate means is really unclear, definition 2D4 is unhelpful

2D4

Per ideam adæquatam intelligo ideam quæ quatenus in se sine relatione ad objectum consideratur, omnes veræ ideæ proprietates sive denominationes intrinsecas habet. (OP)

By evenmatig denkbeeld versta ik dat denkbeeld, 't welk, voor zo veel het in zich, zonder betrekking tot het voorwerp, aangemerkt word, alle d' eigenschappen van een waar denkbeeld, of d' innerlijke benamingen heeft. (NS)

So adequate ideas are true and complete. But other than that? For Jonathan Bennett (cf McAllister 2014), it means the causes of adequate ideas are wholly internal to your mind, and inadequate ones are not wholly internal to your mind.

However, for McAllister, an inadequate idea is “defining feature of inadequate ideas is that they conceive indirectly of their objects as existing at a time and place—i.e. they conceive of their objects as existing things affecting one’s body” The formal essence of a truth is an *eternal* truth.

What is this eternal truth? That things follow from a chain of causes from God.

God has both attributes of thought and attributes of extension. God's power should not be thought of as anthropomorphic as of some tyrant/king (2P3Schol) but "God's power is nothing except God's active essence" so God cannot decide this or that

What's the essence of a human? – "the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes" (2P10Schol). Your essence cannot be a substance, bc we already concluded there's only one substance, and it's not you (compare Leibniz's monadologie)

The **human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God** (2P11, scholium). This is really important for Spinoza's picture of immortality/persistence after death which we'll see in V (he admits this sounds odd, see P11schol)

We consist of a mind and a body (2P13Schol) but not in a Cartesian way.

For as we will see the mind does not (in Spinoza's view) move the body, but they move in parallel (famous parallelism doctrine which is important in II and III especially, and will be spelled more fully in part III). Ultimately, the mind and body are different modes of the same thing.

What does it mean that the body is the object of the mind? Not that we have full knowledge of the body (we often don't realize something's wrong). Solution: the human mind only knows "through the affections by which the body is affected" (2P19) this sounds a bit like phenomenology

The body is the essential, prior intentional object of the mind

See P22 and P23 (The mind does not know itself except insofar as it perceives the idea of the affections of the body). More interesting phenomenological points in P26. (I wonder about e.g., Ibn Sina's flying man and what Spinoza would think of this and similar thought experiments).

Three kinds of cognition are introduced. We see this foreshadowed several times but especially in 2P40Schol2:

1. Imagination, perception, memory
2. Reason
3. Intuition/Scientia intuitiva

Adequate ideas are true and are in God's mind. Inadequate ideas are false or confused. Only (1) gives rise to inadequate ideas, for example contingency is an inadequate idea that results from associative cognition

Reason thus will give us the correct view (that things happen with necessity)

Near the end of part II we see arguments that we should be stoic and calm ("For all things follow from God's eternal decree with the same necessity as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles")

Parts B, C and D of P49Schol connect to Spinoza's political philosophy on how you should be helpful to others not because of "unmanly compassion" (sigh...) but because it's in your own interest to do so (a form of ethical egoism).

Reference

McAllister, B. A. (2014). Adequate and inadequate ideas in Spinoza. *History of philosophy quarterly*, 119-136.

Part III: On the nature and origin of the affects

This is a sophisticated 17th-century theory on emotions which holds up remarkably well (and has even inspired contemporary psychologists such as Damasio, Panksepp). It is a model of simplicity that aims to reduce all the various complex human emotions in what we now call core emotions. This project would get a reinstatement in our time with Paul Ekman, following Charles Darwin (basic idea: emotions = evolved, there are just a few basic ones).

The idea to reduce emotions to just a few long predates Darwin. Descartes, *Passions of the soul* (1649) presents six emotions: wonder, love, hatred, sadness, joy, and desire. His response to Princess Elizabeth on how mind and body interact (passions = purely physical in Descartes's view, interact w rational soul via pineal gland). Spinoza reduces these to three: Desire, Joy, Sadness, and for him they belong to the soul.

Note: 17th century is a golden age for theorizing on emotions. Several sources: rediscovery of classical rhetorics guides (Longinus, *On the Sublime*), rhetorical music (don't call it baroque, that was not a term ppl used then) meant to stir/calm the passions

(cf. Mersenne's *Treatise on Universal Harmony*, 1636), theater (Shakespeare: emotions can lead you astray/commit grave errors cf Othello, Romeo & Juliet), government (statecraft involves mood management, you can't do it through force alone, cf. Hobbes, Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing-world* 1666)

Here we get the clearest expression of Spinoza's naturalism (note: I read Spinoza as a naturalist, as does Della Rocca, but not everyone does. Douglas, for instance, doesn't):

"Nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, i.e., 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. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz, through the universal laws and rules of nature" (3pref).

There are no defects in nature, because there is no purpose in nature "nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for nature is always the same" (3pref)

The origin of the passions and our liability to it, are inadequate ideas (P1Cor). So the first kind of cognition (imagination etc). The more we are subject to passions, the more we are passive, the less we are subject to it, the more we have adequate ideas, and the more we are active (this will become very important in IV)

3P2Schol: Spinoza's parallelism (not a term he uses): human body = acted upon by physical causes, the body cannot determine the mind (contra Descartes who does allow for interaction), but mind and body work in parallel bc "Mind and Body are one and the same thing" - considered under attribute of Thought or Extension. S's monism solves the interaction problem

The mind cannot determine the body of sleepwalkers, lower animals (who can do amazing bodily things)

3P6 formulation of Spinoza's concept of Conatus, fundamental self-preserving drive in things "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" -- this striving is the essence of each thing. It will try to do this forever (3p8) and not just for a while. (Note: Think of counterexamples: fire, candle, suicide...and how Spinoza might deal with them. Topic of suicide is treated in part IV)

3p9Schol puts desire centrally: Desire is what makes us evaluate things as good or bad. Recall: no greater purpose in nature (IAppx) so "it is clear that we neither strive, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it"

Sections that follow: basic idea--we want things. Joy: mind passing to greater perfection, Sadness: lesser perfection. Subjectivist idea of passions--they always relate to us, self-preservation, and power (greater perfection/more active power/self-preservation = Joy; lesser perfection, less self-preservation, less power, more passive = Sadness) 211pSchol

Then come a whole bunch of different emotions, e.g., Love and Hate (for Descartes basic) are not basic emotions because they are really just joy and sadness attached to certain perceptions/imaginings of objects. Complex social emotions such as ambition and pity are also explained in this way. E.g., pity and benevolence (IIIp27CorIIISchol) talks about pity = sadness in imitation of the affects (now we'd call this empathy), when we desire to confer benefit to a person we pity = benevolence. So benevolence = sadness + imitation + desire

Another quick E.g., Ambition 3p29: We imagine people to love or hate something, and strive to do that thing "solely to please men", i.e., doing things we solely think they love.

Lots of other cool stuff in this section. Spinoza mixes and matches our imagination (first kind of cognition) with desire, joy and sadness to get things like nostalgia, pride, envy, jealousy (the passage on sexual jealousy is really funny cf 3p35Schol), there is interesting stuff on how children engage in sympathetic emotion contagion "they laugh or cry simply because they see others laugh or cry" (3p32Schol). Sophisticated stuff on how our emotions often react to others, even as adults: when someone hates you, you'll hate them back solely for that reason. When someone likes you, you feel gratitude in return.

P39: What are good and evil? Good every kind of joy, evil any kind of sadness. These are subjective notions and do not exist objectively in nature (cf 3P9Schol). Here you see a first intimation of bigger later theme: because our first cognition can lead to inadequate ideas, passions frequently lead us not to a rational course of action.

P51: Question arises if necessitarianism is true then why do we seem differently emotionally affected by external stimuli (quick e.g., not Spinoza's: Jane loves dogs and feels joy when she sees them, Joe hates dogs, fears them and so a kind of sadness whenever he sees them)

Past experiences with dogs differ, this leads to (deterministic) different affects.

P52 talks about associative reasoning (cf later Pavlov's dogs) when you see an object you'll recollect the others you saw it with

Emotions are so important because as we saw in II humans only know themselves only by the affections of their body and their ideas (kind of empiricist idea, cf IIP53 but also 2P19)

End of part III presents a catalog/recap of the emotions. Spinoza says there are as many emotions as there are objects (3p56Schol), but ultimately it just boils down to the three basic ones and how these relate to our imagination/perception.

Part IV: On human bondage, or the powers of the affects

Note: the Latin here is "servitute" (slavery) -- we're slaves to our passions.

4Preface: Argument that we make a bad analogy between human-made things for specific ends and nature. When we see a house we know the maker's intentions (compare Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion*, 1779).

Perfect = finished, completed (Latin: tautological, perfect = completed + perfect). So we can judge an unfinished house as not perfect. This is fine. What is *not* fine is extending this to natural things.

Nature has *no purposes* (cf 1Apx) "Nature does nothing on account of an end. That eternal and infinite being we call God or (*sive*) nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists."

The phrase **God or nature** (deus sive natura) famously appears *twice* here but nowhere else. In the NS (surprise, not...). Likely censoring on the part of Spinoza's editors (because Dutch would be wider spread, for a bigger audience, and this idea is truly scandalous. It didn't help, the *Ethics* quickly got banned in the Dutch Republic anyway). Given how polished the *Ethics* is, this is not unintentional. God = everything there is = nature. God is free (not acted upon by other things, as God is the sole substance, cf part I) but God does not have libertarian free will. God just acts from the necessity of his nature. This is why things happen the way they do but *not* because God wills it.

So, perfection and imperfection "are only modes of thinking" - good and bad are our subjective judgments, there's no corresponding good or evil. Still, Spinoza admits that good and evil remain useful terms but always relative to us as agents. This leads to...

What could we rationally desire? "I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model".

Spinoza introduces the **model agent**, an ethical exemplar it is rational to become like. You can do things that make you *more* like the modal agent, or less than the model agent. This is an idealized persona (*not* a real person as in Zagzebski's work on ethical exemplars, cf Jesus, Confucius)

We get some interesting definitions here namely that

- Good and evil are subjective categories (only "good for you/bad for you" (4D1, 2)
- Virtue and power are the same thing (4D8)

In 4P2, P3 we read that our bodies are acted upon by many external forces, which surpass our inherent drive for self-preservation (which was seen in 3P6). One consequence of all this external push on us is that we're subject to the passions (4P4 corr)

So, our passions basically are desires that arise from our judgments what we deem useful (i.e. good) for us, which gives us joy, and what we deem not useful/harmful to us, which gives us sadness (p15).

But we can be wrong about this due to associative thinking. Take the example of money, which (in capitalist 17th c Dutch Republic) is so important to get anything you need that we "can hardly imagine any species of Joy without the accompanying idea of money as its cause" (4AppendixXXVIII). However, it is possible and better (as Spinoza did himself) to "live contentedly with little" (you will recall he declined both a professorship + an inheritance of a friend).

It's difficult for us to discern what *truly* benefits or harms us (what Spinoza calls in P15-16 a "true knowledge of good and evil") because of desires of the moment which can overwhelm our long-term interests (4p16, 17).

In IV (especially p18) Spinoza outlines his surprising case for ethical egoism. "Since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can."

Spinoza is aware this is counterintuitive, that many ethical systems seem to presuppose you need to sacrifice yourself. But in his system it makes sense. Virtue = power, increasing your power = doing the good, being virtuous (p20). Or, P22Cor "The striving to preserve oneself is the only foundation of virtue". It means seeking your true advantage. What is this? Knowledge of God. The monistic truth (knowing God and knowing we are a mode of God) is our highest good and "the greatest virtue of the mind is to understand or to know, God" (4p28)

This ethical egoism ties into his political philosophy. We should live in society where we mutually benefit each other and engage in non zero sum pursuits (art, science are frequently mentioned in TTP and PT) that you can only do in a society, and the way to organize this is the State (p35-37, TTP gives a full case for this). This is also why we need states, overall we derive more net benefits for ourselves being part of a society

Our bodies depend on many other bodies for sustenance (also mentally) so the wise man will "refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another" (p46Schol). So, enjoyment of things in moderation is fine.

Further propositions deal with the pitfalls of emotions. The problem of hopium (p47), pitfalls of pity (p50), pride and self-esteem especially the lust for prestige (p58). Prestige-seeking is a good case study of how passions hold us in bondage. Basically it is wanting what others want, wanting the esteem of the multitude. Problem: you can lose their esteem and this makes you anxious. You do all these things to uphold your reputation and thus become less free. It makes you a zero sum thinker, giving rise to a "monstrous lust of each to crush the other in any way possible" (p58Schol). So, this "love of esteem, or self-esteem, then, is really empty, because it is nothing."

In sum, when you're the slave of your passions you are driven to such things as money, excessive hedonism, and prestige.

By contrast, when you are not you are like the model agent, or *free man* (p66). The free man doesn't fear death, doesn't even think about it (p67). He's led by reason (p68). He

forms only adequate ideas and since evil is just a lack (namely lack of things that are useful to us) he doesn't even have a concept of evil (p67). [side note: not thinking of death is important even without the case for immortality of [part of] the soul Spinoza presents in Part V. Even if you die and that's it, don't think of death!"]

In p68 we see Spinoza's intriguing take on the Fall. Though he calls it a story and not a historical account, he thinks it metaphorically talks about a *loss* namely when humans ate from Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they became like the lower animals and began to "imitate their affects", to lose their freedom (because in bondage to their passions, as described above).

In the Appendix (part IV) we see a foreshadowing of part V, namely that "blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God."

Part V: Of the power of the Intellect, or human freedom

This is the most enigmatic, alluring part of the Ethics. Commenters have struggled with it, some thinking that Spinoza seems to have fallen off the rationalist wagon to suddenly go all mystical. But recent commenters/authors including Kristin Primus, Alex Douglas, Steven Nadler see this part as the completion and culmination of the overall project of the Ethics.

What is the overall project? To help us gain an intuitive knowledge of God, and thus to obtain acquiescence of the soul, to have intellectual joy, to gain immortality (!) This is, to put it mildly, quite ambitious so let's see how it goes.

The Preface to V talks about how reason can help us to reduce (not entirely eliminate but reduce) the power the affects have over us (see also IV). In this respect, Spinoza opposes his own opinion explicitly to that of Descartes in *Passions of the Soul* (1649) who claimed absolute dominion over the passions was possible. Also a focus of Spinoza's derision is Descartes's idea that the body and mind are two substances and that the pineal gland is how they interact.

A bit of concern trolling of Descartes near the end of the Preface, "I cannot wonder enough that a Philosopher of his caliber--one who had firmly decided to deduce nothing

except from principles known through themselves...--that such a Philosopher should assume a hypothesis more occult than any occult quality".

Okay, Descartes is obscure but Spinoza's early propositions make some startling claims, such as

5p3 "An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it." -- this is because passions arise out of confused, inadequate ideas and as soon as we replace these with adequate ideas, passions loosen their grip on us.

Once we accept that line of reasoning, it is not surprising that a greater understanding of how the world works, where everything is necessary and happens through complex causal chains (P6), will help the mind gain a better control over the affects.

5p10 recapitulates the ethical egoism we saw in IV but makes it a bit more explicit/sharper, stuff on anger management and on the good of living in society. There is a lot of influence here of stoicism (bear your poverty calmly etc). Your true advantage lies in living harmoniously with others in "mutual friendship and common society"

P11 and following further develop a philosophy of mind whereby you try to relate more and more images to the idea of God. Our blessedness lies in knowing God, so it's good to try to train your mind to connect to God, and so (P16) "This love toward God must engage the mind the most."

From this it becomes also clear that God, only having adequate ideas and not being able to pass to a greater or lesser perfection (which is how passions work for us as we saw in the previous section), cannot be moved by any passions such as anger or even joy and sadness (p17). In a sense (it seems to me) we imitate God if we too have our passions lessened by getting more adequate ideas. We cannot hate God. You might object (see p18Schol) that we also see the cause of all our sadness in God, but the moment we realize that God is responsible (by 5p3) it ceases to be a passion.

There is a strange phenomenological mixture of a very austere stoicism where blessedness, acquiescence of the soul, is couched on the one hand in extinguishing your passions and on the other hand mystical language such as "This love toward God is the highest good we can want from the dictate of reason" (p19Dem).

Toward the end of the Scholium to p21, Spinoza announces "with this I have completed everything which concerns this present life," indicating we will now look at the religious notions of salvation/afterlife through his unconventional lens.

Now on the face of it the prospects for life after death are very grim for Spinoza because recall that in part II we learned that the body is the object of the mind. Or the mind and the body are the same but considered under different attributes. Then it seems that if your body dies, becomes a corpse etc, your mind would likewise go away. This is the reading of Nadler and many others. No afterlife for Spinoza! But the problem is that Part V doesn't quite fit this interpretation.

P21 does express that "The mind can neither imagine anything, nor recollect past things, except while the body endures". *However* there is in God an idea of our particular body conceived "under a species of eternity" (p22). The idea of your body is eternally in God's mind. This opens an escape clause, made explicit in p23, that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something remains of it which is eternal." (Stephen Harrop has a paper in progress on this topic, if you ask he may share).

Indeed, in the Scholium to p24 we read this: Schol.: There is, as we have said, this idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the Mind, and which is necessarily eternal. And though it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the Body—since there cannot be any traces of this in the body, and eternity can neither be defined by time nor have any relation to time—still, we feel and know by experience that we are eternal. For the Mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the **eyes of the mind**, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves. Therefore, though we do not recollect that we existed before the body, we nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal, and that this existence it has cannot be defined by time or explained through duration.

So, it is with our third kind of cognition, our *scientia intuitiva*, that we can understand that our mind somehow endures. The next sections go on about how once we begin to understand truths with the third kind of knowledge, we want to go on and learn more and more through this.

Here is where the *Ethics* becomes self-referential. In p28 we read that this desire to understand things through the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind, but it can arise from the second kind. And you will note that the *Ethics* does have a format of argumentation that engages the second kind, going from definitions and axioms to propositions. But, you ultimately need to bridge (I think) some sort of gap and

intuitively understand this picture and its consequences to get the joy and acquiescence of the soul that Spinoza promises.

P36 seems to contain a blatant contradiction with 5p17, because suddenly Spinoza does talk about God's love for humanity. But we can work the contradiction away if we look in detail what it says. The monistic truth we are trying to grasp with our third kind of cognition, which I've called oneness throughout this seminar is that you and everything else is a finite mode of God. Once you grasp this, you will see that "the mind's intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself".

In the Scholium, we see how Spinoza equates salvation, blessedness, freedom and glory, as follows "nostra salus seu beatitudo seu libertas consistit nempe in constanti et æterno erga Deum amore sive in amore" and "Atque hic amor seu beatitudo in sacris codicibus gloria appellatur nec immerito."

You will note that in p41 Spinoza says you only learned your mind was eternal (or at least the chiefest part of it, cf p39) in part V. What if we thought our minds would just perish with our bodies? Reason would then still dictate we live in this stoic, rationalist, ethically egoist manner outlined in part IV. Here, Spinoza makes reference to what the multitude (common people) believe: they seem to think that you would be virtuous only because it has an ultimate reward, namely in Heaven, or there is the fear of eternal punishment in hell. But this is the wrong way to think about this (cf the food analogy which occurs at the end of the Scholium).

Because, if you bear in mind all that came before, you know that already now, in this life, virtue is power and benefiting yourself, and your highest good is knowledge of God. So, you can obtain blessedness already in this life by obtaining intuitive knowledge of God.

P42 brings it all together "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue but virtue itself." In virtue (which is power, which is joy, which is knowing God through third cognition) lies blessedness.

Closing lines "If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."

So the overall project of the *Ethics* is a road where it will be at the endpoint easy to be virtuous but the road is difficult. It is excellent (perfectionist ethics), difficult and rare. It is

not a road for everyone and certainly not for the multitude at large (we see in other works how Spinoza thinks the multitude is fickle, passion driven etc and so state building/politics needs to be really pragmatic and work with what it has).

My personal take on what it means to be difficult, excellent, and rare: I feel this is in the vicinity of the early modern virtue of sprezzatura, doing things with effortless grace, such as playing music with virtuosity (I have a piece coming up in *The Philosopher* on this topic). While it is difficult to attain once attained you can in fact rest still (acquiescence of the soul) and stop moving (in that piece I make a comparison between sprezzatura and wuwei). Note also that the second kind of cognition is hard work (reason) but the third (intuition) is restfulness. So you can stop doing effort in e.g., restraining your lusts because your lusts/desires for honor, wealth, and hedonistic goods will automatically be tempered when you reach this acquiescence of the soul (mental quietude).