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HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



BENEDICT DE SPINOZA
Ethics
Proved in Geometrical Order

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HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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Ethics
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EDITED BY
MATTHEW J. KISNER
University of South Carolina

TRANSLATED BY
MICHAEL SILVERTHORNE
AND
MATTHEW J. KISNER



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Abbreviations

Spinoza makes frequent references to the various parts of the *Ethics*. For the sake of conciseness, we employ the following abbreviations in the translation of the text and throughout this volume.

a	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
def	definition
DOE	Definition of the Emotions
ex	explanation
L	lemma
p	proposition
post	postulate
pref	preface
s	scholium

The part of the *Ethics* is indicated by an arabic number at the beginning of the citation. So 4p37s1 refers to the first scholium of proposition 37 of Part Four.

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Introduction

In July of 1675 Spinoza travelled from his home in The Hague to Amsterdam to oversee the publication of his *Ethics*. He must have been bursting with excitement. The *Ethics* was the culmination of nearly fifteen years of philosophical reflection. It was also an astonishing intellectual achievement, as close as anyone had ever come to attaining the holy grail of early modern philosophy: an integrated and comprehensive system of thought, covering the gamut of philosophical topics, including God, physics, psychology, knowledge and ethics. Furthermore, the *Ethics* audaciously purports to prove this system on the basis of geometrical demonstration, the sort of rigorous proof famously employed by Euclid, which attains the highest degree of certainty.

Spinoza's excitement was also mixed with trepidation, for he knew that the *Ethics* would be controversial, to say the least. The first reason for controversy was the *Ethics*'s evident debt to René Descartes (1596–1650), the renowned natural philosopher and mathematician, who had become a polarizing figure in Dutch universities. In opposition to much of the Aristotelian philosophy that traditionally dominated universities, Descartes defended a mechanistic science, which was a cornerstone of what is known as the Scientific Revolution. Mechanistic science aims to explain natural systems as one would explain machines, in terms of the arrangement and movement of matter in space. In the Netherlands, where Aristotelianism had a more precarious foothold, various kinds of Cartesian philosophy spread rapidly among the faculty, particularly in Utrecht and Leiden. Cartesianism was met with hostility by conservative theologians such as Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and

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Jacobus Revius (1586–1685), primarily because it threatened a strain of Protestant theology that draws on Aristotelian metaphysics. In an effort to keep the peace in the universities, the provincial councils of the States of Holland and West-Friesland declared that professors of philosophy must take an oath to cease propounding Cartesianism, although it would eventually come to dominate Dutch universities. While Spinoza was highly critical of Descartes, much of the *Ethics* proceeds from Cartesian starting points. Spinoza was also associated with Descartes because he had published a commentary on Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, the only work to have been published under Spinoza's name during his lifetime.

But the *Ethics* was far more subversive than Descartes or the Dutch Cartesians. Among its many incendiary claims, the *Ethics* defended the idea that God is identical to nature. This view explodes the traditional distinction between the study of God and of creation, that is, between theology and natural philosophy. It also opposes fundamental claims of Christian theology, particularly the notion that God created the natural world *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, identifying God and nature commits Spinoza to a profound sort of naturalism: if all things are part of nature and there exist no supernatural entities or powers, then all things must be explainable in the same way in which we explain the natural world. This approach justifies using natural philosophy, including the new mechanistic science of Descartes and others, to understand not just physics, but also the human mind, psychology and emotions. This naturalistic approach to human behavior echoes Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). For these views, Hobbes was widely condemned and his writings were frequently banned. But Spinoza's view on the identity of God and nature are closer to those of Adriaan Koerbagh (1633–1669), a friend of Spinoza and a close intellectual associate. For publishing his views, Koerbagh was sentenced to ten years of hard labor in an Amsterdam prison, where he died under the harsh conditions. Given these stakes, Spinoza's decision to publish the *Ethics* could not have been an easy one.

But Spinoza was no stranger to controversy, no matter how much he may have disliked it. He was born Baruch de Espinoza on November 24, 1632 to Hanna and Michael de Espinoza. His father was a Sephardic Jewish merchant, and his family belonged to a community of Portuguese Jews who had moved to Amsterdam in order to practice their faith and

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escape religious persecution, including forced conversion to Catholicism. In 1619 the Amsterdam city council granted Jews the right to practice their religion openly, but also required that the Jewish community strictly observe Jewish law, lest they become involved in religious disputes among Calvinists and dissenters. Partly for this reason, leaders of the Jewish community were concerned to police the theological views of their members, often by dispensing *herem*, writs of excommunication, to those who strayed from Jewish orthodoxy. Policing the boundaries of orthodoxy in this community was no simple task because many of its members were descended from Marranos, the Portuguese Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity. Their beliefs and practices had been influenced by Christianity, particularly in their efforts to continue practicing Judaism covertly during their forced conversions.

In his youth Spinoza attended the local Talmud Torah school in Amsterdam, where he studied the Hebrew language, the Bible and the Talmud. However, sometime after his father died and Spinoza, along with his brother Gabriel, took over the family business, it became evident that Spinoza's thinking had drifted from prescribed Jewish thought. Around this time, he is presumed to have begun studying Latin at the school of Franciscus van den Enden (1602–1674), a somewhat radical freethinker and political activist. Van den Enden's ultimate political projects included contributing, along with Pieter Plöckhoy, to the founding of a utopian settlement in the New Netherlands (present-day Delaware) and conspiring against the French King, Louis XIV, to establish a republic in Normandy; the conspiracy eventually resulted in his being hanged before the Bastille. Spinoza's studies at the school likely acquainted him with van den Enden's political views and possibly even Cartesianism. Through his studies and his new associates among the merchant class, Spinoza also became acquainted with the collegiants, a somewhat motley group of Protestant dissenters from various sects, including Anabaptists and Socinians, who eschewed institutional religion, confessionalism and clerical authority. Their biweekly 'colleges,' which resembled Quaker meetings, combined worship and study without the guidance of preachers or leaders.

Spinoza's expanding social horizons were likely both a cause and effect of changes in his philosophical, theological and religious beliefs, though his precise views at the time are unclear. Members of the Jewish community were evidently unhappy with the course Spinoza was

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pursuing, for on July 27, 1656, Spinoza was excommunicated. While a *herem* would often be used as a tool to bring straying congregants back into the fold, Spinoza's *herem* did not contain provisions for repentance and forgiveness. The language of the *herem* was particularly punitive: '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'.¹ The *herem* forbade any member of the Jewish community to communicate with Spinoza in any way, or to admit him into their homes, or even to allow him to approach within four cubits of them.

The consequences of the *herem* were momentous. For Spinoza it meant the end of his relationship with his family, and of his career in his family's business. In Spinoza's childhood, a similar *herem* had been issued against another member of the congregation, Uriel da Costa. He had been censured for his heterodox views, some of which may have been shared by Spinoza at the time of his *herem*, such as the denial of an immortal soul. According to da Costa's autobiography, he was allowed to rejoin the community, though the terms for repentance required a public whipping in the synagogue, after which the members of the congregation exited by stepping upon his prostrate body.² Da Costa ended his own life a few days after enduring this humiliation. The event demonstrates the enormous cost of free thinking in Spinoza's world.

It is extremely revealing of Spinoza's character that, having likely witnessed this cost firsthand, he accepted it willingly and without regret. Rather than contest the *herem*, which he apparently expected and perhaps even invited, he displayed the courage of his convictions by embarking upon a new life independent of the Jewish community, a life devoted to the pursuit of philosophical truth. He adopted a new vocation, grinding lenses for scientific instruments, which afforded him the freedom to pursue philosophy and put him into contact with some of the greatest scientists of his day, such as Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695). He immersed himself in a circle of intellectual associates

¹ This passage, which was read before the ark of the synagogue on the Houtgracht, is taken from the Jewish Archives of the Municipal Archives of the City of Amsterdam. The translation is from Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman, 'Why Was Spinoza Excommunicated?' *Studia Rosenthaliana* 12 (1978): 98–9.

² There is some question about the reliability of the autobiography, which may have been tampered with by da Costa's critics.

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and like-minded friends, primarily collegiants, who admired and supported his philosophical endeavors. Spinoza even took a new name, replacing Baruch with the Latinized Benedict. He was evidently pleased with his newfound freedom. Many years later, in 1673, Spinoza was offered a chair in Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, a flattering and prestigious offer, which he declined. Among his concerns, he worried that the position would confine his ‘freedom to philosophize.’³

Given Spinoza’s intellectual courage and profound commitment to free thinking, it is somewhat surprising that he reversed his decision to publish the *Ethics* within a few days of his arrival in Amsterdam to oversee the printing. The reasons have everything to do with his *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP), which he had published anonymously five years earlier, though Spinoza’s identity as the author was an open secret. The TTP defended freedom of thought and speech, and criticized what Spinoza regarded as the greatest threat to freedom: religious superstition. While Spinoza had harbored naïve hopes that the TTP would be conciliatory and perhaps even warm the public to the philosophical system of the *Ethics*, the TTP was widely condemned and established Spinoza’s reputation as a threat to piety and religion. As a result, leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church and the secular authorities were on the lookout for Spinoza. From The Hague, Theodore Rijckius wrote,

there is a rumor among us that the author of the *Theological-Political Treatise* is about to issue a book on God and the mind, one even more dangerous than the first. It will be up to you and those who, with you, are occupied with governing the Republic, to make sure that this book is not published. For it is incredible how much that man, who has striven to overthrow the principles of our most holy faith, has already harmed the Republic.⁴

Once Spinoza caught wind of this opposition, he prudently withdrew the *Ethics*.⁵

The *Ethics* did not appear in print until after Spinoza’s death. Spinoza was still a young man of forty-four when he died unexpectedly on

³ From letter 48 in Spinoza’s correspondence.

⁴ From Freudenthal, J. *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza’s in Quellenschriften, Urkunden und Nichtamtlichen Nachrichten* (Leipzig: Verlag Von Veit, 1899), 200.

⁵ See letter 68.

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February 21, 1677, likely from a respiratory condition dating from his childhood and exacerbated by inhaling glass dust from his lens grinding. Spinoza's friends gathered up the contents of his writing desk, which included the *Ethics*, and prepared them for publication. His posthumous works appeared in Latin and Dutch by the end of the year. The fact that no edition of the *Ethics* appeared during Spinoza's lifetime accounts for many of the uncertainties about the definitive text, which are mentioned in the Note on the text and translation.

The aim and method of the *Ethics*

It is peculiar that the *Ethics* lacks an introduction to explain its aims and methods. Rather, it unceremoniously dives into a series of technical definitions, which can leave readers stumped. Fortunately Spinoza provided something like an introduction in his earlier, unpublished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE), where he described in refreshingly personal terms what motivated his philosophical investigations:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as my mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity. (TdIE 1)⁶

These important autobiographical remarks provide insight into Spinoza's reasons for breaking with the Jewish community and devoting his life to philosophy. They also tell us the aims of his philosophical project: to attain the 'highest happiness' (*summa felicitas*) (TdIE 2) and the 'highest good' (TdIE 3), and to determine the 'conduct and plan of life' that will lead him to do so (TdIE 3). This project of planning one's life to secure the highest good and happiness is familiar from the history of

⁶ The TdIE is cited by paragraph number. Translations follow Edwin Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) with minor modifications.

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philosophy, particularly from the ethics of antiquity, an important part of the classical tradition that Spinoza had likely studied at van den Enden's school. The TdIE asserts that the highest good and the source of the greatest happiness is the perfection of one's nature that comes from acquiring 'cognition of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature' (TdIE 13). This claim echoes not only the ancients, but also the work of another Sephardic Jewish outcast, Moses Maimonides (1135/1138–1204), an important interlocutor of Spinoza's philosophy. Spinoza's autobiographical remarks indicate that the *Ethics* is the fruit of this philosophical investigation, that is, the knowledge that constitutes our highest good.

This way of thinking about the *Ethics* explains the connection between two of its central aims. The first aim, which is the starting point of the *Ethics* and has traditionally received the most attention by philosophers, is to explain the fundamental nature of reality. The second aim, which justifies the work's title, is to provide an ethical theory that explains virtue, perfection, freedom and our highest good. These projects are tightly interwoven, for the metaphysical project provides us with knowledge of nature and the mind's union with nature, while the ethical project shows us how this knowledge leads us to ethical ends, including attaining the highest good, the source of our highest happiness. This way of understanding the *Ethics* is evident in its structure: after showing in Part One that God is equivalent to nature, Spinoza then turns his attention in Part Two to the human mind and its place in nature. Part Three uses this metaphysical investigation to provide a theory of the emotions. Parts Four and Five then draw on this theory to show how this metaphysical knowledge – of the mind's place in nature – provides us with our highest good, and highest happiness. These last parts also explain how to live in order to attain these goals, or in other words, ethics.

While the primary aims of the *Ethics* are accessible, its method is less so. In the geometrical method, every conclusion is spelled out in a numbered proposition. In order to ensure the certainty of the conclusions, each proposition is accompanied by a proof, which deduces the proposition from the preceding propositions, as well as from a collection of axioms or necessary truths, and definitions of the fundamental terms. With the exception of Part Five, each part of the *Ethics* offers its own set of axioms and definitions, which are essential to understanding its

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particular subject matter. In this way, the geometrical method can be understood as tracing the logical consequences of a few basic definitions and principles.

What, then, is the basis for the definitions, on which the whole edifice of proofs depends? While the geometrical method does not call for proofs of the basic definitions, Spinoza provides some insight into the nature and significance of definitions in the TdIE, which again proves a helpful companion for reading the *Ethics*: ‘to be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing’ (TdIE 95). Definitions pick out essences, what gives things their distinctive character and qualities, what makes them the things that they are. Furthermore, definitions pick out ‘the inmost essence,’ which means that they identify the basis for deducing all of a thing’s essential features and, more generally, its properties (*proprietas*), the features of a thing that are necessary to it but do not belong to its essence.⁷ When a definition ‘is considered alone, without any other things conjoined, all the thing’s properties can be deduced from it’ (TdIE 96). Given this understanding of definitions, Spinoza’s geometrical method can be understood as mapping out the chains of reasoning by which all of the complex properties of things can be deduced from their most basic qualities.

Spinoza’s method is importantly different from Euclid’s. Whereas Euclid applies his method to abstract, ideal figures, such as perfect circles, triangles and planes, which may exist only in our understanding, Spinoza applied his method to metaphysics, the study of the reality and natures of things, including things that exist in nature: minds, bodies, human beings. Spinoza’s application of the method supposes that our basic conceptions of things accurately reflect their actual natures and, furthermore, that the logical consequences of our conceptions map onto the actual order of things in nature. In other words, Spinoza’s method supposes that reality possesses a rational order, such that we can understand the natures of things by analyzing the logical relations among our concepts.

This notion, a cornerstone of what is loosely described as Spinoza’s rationalism, is enshrined in one of the most important axioms of the *Ethics*: ‘cognition of an effect depends upon the cognition of its cause and

⁷ This is how ‘property’ was defined by Suárez in *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 3.I.I.

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involves it' (1a4). This axiom asserts foremost that properly conceiving of a thing requires conceiving of its causes. In other words, if *x* causes *y*, then the conception of *y* requires conceiving of *x*. According to this claim, the proper conception of any single thing requires conceiving of God, since God is the cause of all things. Spinoza also takes the axiom to imply the even stronger claim, that we can infer the causal dependence of one thing on another from the logical dependence of our concepts on one another. This is the dependence where one concept logically entails another in such a way that conceiving of the consequent requires conceiving of the antecedent. For instance, the Pythagorean theorem logically follows from the nature of a triangle so that one cannot even conceive the theorem without also conceiving of a triangle. For Spinoza, if conceiving *x* requires conceiving *y* in this way, then *y* must cause *x*. This second claim justifies reading off the order of nature from the logical relationship among our concepts. Taken together, these two claims assert that the relations of causal dependence among things mirrors the relations of conceptual dependence in our understanding of them; in other words, the relations are coextensive. This mirroring justifies Spinoza's method of deducing the nature of reality from a logical analysis of our concepts.

Spinoza's basic metaphysical terms: Substance, attribute, mode

Understanding this rationalistic commitment helps to make sense of Spinoza's basic metaphysical vocabulary, which is set forth in the first part of the *Ethics*. Spinoza belongs to a tradition that regards substances as the most basic and fundamental things. In this tradition a substance is supposed to possess a particular sort of independence, the sort which properties or qualities generally lack. Properties and qualities depend on a thing or subject in which they exist or inhere, as the whiteness exists in the snow, or a rip exists in a piece of paper. Aristotle put the point this way: a substance (*ousia*) is 'that of which the other things are predicated, while it is not itself predicated of anything else.'⁸ For Aristotle, the substance is the subject of predication (the thing that is said to be white or ripped), but is not predicated of other subjects. In other words, it is

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII (Z), 1028b36. Translation by W. D. Ross from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. II, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1624.

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not the sort of thing that inheres in some other thing in the way that predicated things, such as the quality of being white, inhere in subjects, such as snow. This conception of a substance as an independent thing was articulated, albeit with important differences, by Descartes, who understood a substance more straightforwardly as ‘a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.’⁹

Spinoza agrees that a substance is marked by the sort of independence that properties and qualities lack. His definition asserts that a substance is ‘in itself’ (1def3), in other words, it inheres or exists in itself only, not in other things, as properties and qualities do. Spinoza also claims that substance is conceptually independent, ‘conceived through itself, i.e. no concept of any other thing is needed for forming a concept of it’ (1def3). Because of Spinoza’s rationalistic notion that conceptual and causal relationships are coextensive, it follows that substance is also causally independent. According to this definition, a substance depends on nothing else for its existence. This echoes Descartes’s definition.

Spinoza’s rationalistic way of thinking about causation and conception informs his account of the main qualities of substance: attributes and modes. Descartes employed the notion of attribute in order to secure a mechanistic science, in opposition to the Aristotelian philosophy common in universities of the time. To this end, Descartes conceived of extension as the defining features of physical things, so that all of their qualities and properties are explainable in terms of the particular way they are extended and occupy space: their shapes, sizes and motions. Consequently Descartes described extension as the essence of all bodies, thereby downplaying the role that essences traditionally play in scholastic philosophy in distinguishing things from one another. Partly for this reason, Descartes introduced the notion of attribute to denote this special kind of essence: ‘one principal property which constitutes its [a thing’s] nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred.’¹⁰ All of a thing’s other properties are ‘referred’ to the attribute in the sense that they can be explained and conceived in terms of the attribute. According to this view, all properties of bodies must be

⁹ From René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, section 52. Translations of the *Principles* are from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁰ *Principles*, Part I, section 53.

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explained in terms of the particular shape and motion of some matter. Descartes refers to these other properties as ‘modes,’ the particular ways that things possess an attribute (in the case of bodies, particular ways of being extended): ‘by mode, we understand exactly the same as what is elsewhere meant by an attribute or quality. But we employ the term mode when we are thinking of a substance as being affected or modified.’¹¹

Spinoza takes up Descartes’s notion that an attribute is the essence of a substance: ‘by attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence’ (1def4). Since, as we have seen, Spinoza understands essences as the conceptual basis for conceiving all of a thing’s properties, he also agrees with Descartes that an attribute is the basis for conceiving and explaining all of a thing’s properties and qualities. For Spinoza, who regards conceptual relations as coextensive with causal relations, this claim implies that an attribute is also the cause of all a thing’s properties and qualities.

Spinoza also follows Descartes in conceiving the other properties and qualities of things as modes. Spinoza defines modes foremost as ‘affections’ or qualities of substance, that is, what is ‘in’ or inheres in a substance (1def5). Like Descartes, Spinoza identifies a close conceptual or explanatory connection between modes and attributes. According to Spinoza’s definition, modes are conceived through a substance (1def5). Since Spinoza holds that all of the properties of a thing must be caused by and conceived through its essence and that the essence of a substance is its attribute, this definition entails that modes can only be conceived through attributes. Furthermore, since Spinoza understands causal and conceptual relations as coextensive, it also entails that modes of an attribute must be caused by the attribute (see 1p16, proof).

Nature as the one substance

These definitions set the stage for Spinoza’s bold metaphysical claims in Part One. The most fundamental of these is that there is only one substance, which is God. This claim is set up by Spinoza’s definition of a substance as what depends on no other thing for its existence, since

¹¹ *Principles*, Part I, section 56.

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it is usually held that all things depend on God for their existence. Spinoza's proof for this claim (1p1–1p15) depends on his definition of God as 'absolutely infinite being,' more specifically, a substance possessing infinite attributes or essences (1def6). Given Spinoza's view that all of a thing's properties are derivable from its essence, it is unsurprising to find that Spinoza's definition of God as possessing all the attributes entails in short order that all things must be conceived through God. This entails that they cannot be independent substances because substances, by definition, are conceived only through themselves.¹²

According to this view, God is both identical to the natural world and the cause of the natural world. Consequently, God can be conceived in two ways: firstly, as the active principle in nature that ultimately causes all things and, second, as the effects or products of that activity. Drawing on ancient philosophy, Spinoza refers to the former conception as *natura naturans* (literally, nature naturing) and the latter as *natura naturata* (nature natured) (1p29s). According to the former conception, nature is the cause of itself and is conceived through itself. We understand nature in this way when we conceive of nature as attributes. This is because attributes, as the essence of substance, logically imply and, consequently, cause all of nature's properties, including everything in the natural world. According to the latter conception, nature is understood as an effect and, thus, as caused by and conceived through something else. We understand nature in this way when we conceive of nature as modes, since modes inhere in something else, through which they must be conceived.

Given this metaphysical picture, particular finite things (such as trees or people) must be modes, and not substances, contra Descartes and Aristotle. This is because finite things must be conceived through God, more specifically, through an attribute of God, since all things should be understood through their essences. While Spinoza identifies these particular things with God, he does not understand them as *parts* of God. Spinoza holds that parts precede the whole, both in the nature of things and in our understanding (1p12proof, letter 35). Consequently,

¹² I am describing here some conceptual pressures that lead Spinoza to substance monism. This is not quite how the argument actually goes. Spinoza's argument rather asserts that two substances cannot share the same attribute (1p5). Given that God has all attributes, this implies that there cannot exist any other substance (1p14).

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claiming that particular things are parts of God would imply that they precede God, whereas Spinoza thinks that all things follow from God. Rather, Spinoza understands the relationship between particular things and God as the relation that holds between modes and substance: the inherence relation, the relation of being ‘in’ God. On this basis, it is sometimes said that Spinoza upholds not pantheism, the view that all things are God, but rather *panentheism*, the view that all things are *in* God.

This view of the relationship between particular things and God has an important metaphysical consequence. As I showed at the end of the previous section, Spinoza holds that God’s attributes logically imply the modes of the attributes. Since Spinoza also holds that conceptual and causal relations are coextensive, it follows that God’s essence causes the modes, and with the same necessity that one proposition logically entails another (1p16). This amounts to causal determinism, the view that all things are fixed or causally determined to happen as they do by some prior cause, namely God’s essence.¹³ Furthermore, Spinoza also holds that God’s nature is fixed, so that it could not ‘be other than it now is’ (1p33, proof). This implies necessitarianism, a strong version of causal determinism, which holds that all things are necessary. In Spinoza’s words, ‘things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than they have been produced’ (1p33).

Traditionally this strong sort of causal determinism has been regarded as inconsistent with the possibility of freedom. Consequently, it has also been regarded as inconsistent with morality, since freedom is often understood as a condition for being morally responsible, and for being subject to praise and blame. Spinoza, however, believes that freedom is possible in a causally determined world. The view that freedom is compatible with causal determinism is now called ‘compatibilism.’ He defines freedom as being the cause – even the necessary cause – of

¹³ A qualification is in order here. Spinoza does not say that God’s nature or attributes give rise to modes directly. He claims that God’s attributes, considered absolutely, entail only modes that are infinite, eternal and necessarily existing, like the attributes themselves (1p21). These infinite modes are universal features of all modes belonging to an attribute; for instance, the property of being in motion or at rest belongs to all the modes of extension. In contrast, finite modes are not caused directly by God’s attributes, since they must be caused by other finite modes (1p28). Nevertheless, God is the cause of all things (1p18), which implies that even these finite modes are caused indirectly by God’s essence. Presumably God’s essence implies the infinite causal sequence of finite modes.

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oneself, both of one's actions and existence (1def7). As such, a thing can be both causally determined and free, so long as it is causally determined by itself, rather than by external things. On this view, God is free, since his existence and properties are determined internally by his essence. Particular things, such as humans, also attain some degree of freedom to the extent that they determine their own states and actions. Attaining this sort of freedom is one of Spinoza's main ethical goals.

Of course, this conception of freedom is controversial because it opposes the common view that freedom requires acting spontaneously, that is, without being determined by prior causes. Partly for this reason, Spinoza rejects the existence of an internal power that determines us to act without being determined by any other causes, what is sometimes called free will (2p49s) or free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) (3p2s). Spinoza's conception of freedom also rules out the common view that God's actions are free in the sense that they depend only on his will (1p33s2). This claim is connected to the most radical aspect of Spinoza's conception of God: the denial that God is a deliberating agent, who makes choices as human agents do. Spinoza criticizes this personal conception of God as arising from people's prejudices, which ultimately 'depend upon a single one: that human beings commonly suppose that, like themselves, all natural things act for a purpose' (1app). According to Spinoza, God has no plans for us or for nature; nature and God simply are, without any purposive design. Spinoza's God is the power that determines all things, more like the big bang than the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This implies that God's actions cannot be described in moral terms, as just or fair, and we should not suppose that God envisions some ideal way of life for humans or provides moral commands for us. These conclusions should be taken not as denying morality or ethics – the text is ultimately directed at ethical aims – but rather as committing Spinoza to a secular ethics, grounded entirely independently of a divine will.

Minds and bodies

Spinoza's notion that particular things follow from God's essence raises some difficult questions. We have seen that God has many – indeed, an infinite number – of essences or attributes, though, according to Spinoza, we only have knowledge of two attributes, the same attributes

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recognized by Descartes: thought and extension. How are we to understand the relationship between these essences? How can a thing have two (or more) essences? And what is the relationship among the various modes of each attribute? The answers to these questions are best understood in the context of Spinoza's 'parallelism.' Spinoza establishes this view primarily in 2p7 and 2p7s, but it takes some philosophical and interpretive work to draw out the main claims. The view holds that the modes of the various attributes are parallel to one another in the sense that each mode of an attribute has corresponding modes in each of the other attributes. A mode of the attribute of thought (an idea) corresponds to some particular extended mode (a body), as well as to a particular mode for each of the other infinite attributes.

Parallelism endorses three specific claims about these parallel modes. First, the modes of the attribute of thought (ideas) represent the corresponding modes of the attribute of extension (bodies). For instance, the ideas in my mind represent the corresponding modes in my body. This implies that there are ideas for every bodily thing, so that even tables and chairs have some sort of primitive mind in the sense that they are perceiving things. Second, the causal and conceptual relationships between the modes of any attribute are mirrored by the causal and conceptual relationships between their corresponding modes in each of the other attributes. According to this view, if a body causes an effect to my body – suppose that a ball bumps up against my foot – then the idea that corresponds to the external body (the idea of the ball) must also cause an effect in the idea that corresponds to my body (the idea of my foot). Third, the parallel modes are identical (2p7s). So, the modes of my mind and of my body are the same thing, which is 'expressed' in different ways through the attribute of thought and extension respectively. This suggests that the modes themselves are what is invariant across the different versions of them expressed under each attribute: their causal relations and, thus, their causal powers. According to this view, thought and extension both qualify as the essence of substance because all the modes of substance (all particular things) can be explained by and are caused by both attributes.

Spinoza's commitment to parallelism makes an important break from – and, in Spinoza's view, a decided improvement over – Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes famously held that there are two distinct kinds of substances: bodily substances, which possess the attribute of extension,

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and mental substances, which possess the attribute of thought. This substance dualism famously raises philosophical problems: if mental and bodily substances have entirely different properties, then how can they interact with one another? How can a thought bring about an effect in a body, such as putting it into motion, and how can a body cause an effect in a thought, when thought is not extended and does not occupy space? Furthermore, how can human beings be truly unified, when we are composed of two such different substances?

To some extent Spinoza sidesteps these problems because he denies that minds and bodies are different substances, but he must still explain the apparent interaction of minds and bodies, and how they can be unified in human beings, given that minds and bodies are completely different. Spinoza's parallelism addresses these difficulties, first, by explaining how minds and bodies are unified: minds and their corresponding bodies are identical (2p21, proof). This view is appealing to those who want to avoid dualism, though one might worry about how to make sense of the strange identity that holds between two essentially different things. Secondly, parallelism eliminates the need for mind–body interaction, which Spinoza actually rules out as impossible (3p2). According to parallelism, what appears to be an interaction between mind and body is actually two parallel but causally separated causal sequences, one among bodily modes and the other among the corresponding mental modes.

Endeavor

While the foregoing metaphysical claims are interesting and valuable in their own right, we must not forget that their aim is ultimately ethical. To move his discussion in this direction, Spinoza traces the consequences of these metaphysical theories for understanding human beings. We have seen that Spinoza understands particular things, which include human beings, as finite modes of the one substance. But this leaves open the question of how to understand the natures or essences of particular things.

Because Spinoza understands particular things as modes of God, his answer depends on his conception of God. Spinoza accepts a version of the common theological view that God's essence implies his existence (1p11). In light of Spinoza's view that causal and conceptual relations are

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coextensive, this implies that God is self-caused. From this Spinoza concludes that God's essence is power; in other words, the ability to bring about effects, specifically, God's actions and existence (1p34). It follows that particular things, which are modes of God's essence or attributes, are expressions of God's power, containing some aspect of God's power (3p6, proof). On this basis, Spinoza argues that particular things possess a special power by which they also act and exist, which he calls an endeavor. Endeavor is a thing's power to persist in existence and to resist opposing forces. For instance, endeavor is the power by which a stone continues to exist from one moment to the next and to resist the forces of erosion. Spinoza argues that endeavor is the actual essence of each thing (3p7), what makes it the particular thing that it is.

Spinoza also holds that this endeavor is directed at augmenting or growing the thing's 'power of action,' the degree of strength of its endeavor (e.g. 3p12, 3p28). So, endeavor is the power by which living things act and behave for their own benefit. Since this is the essence of the thing, it follows that a thing's essential power is necessarily directed to beneficial effects, that is, effects that preserve it and improve its power. This view is sometimes described as the 'conatus doctrine.' According to this view, it is necessarily beneficial to be active in the sense of causing effects from one's own essential power. The doctrine also implies, conversely, that any harmful effect – an effect that threatens a thing's existence or decreases its power – must be exogenous, of external origin (see 3p4, 3p5). However, it does not follow that exogenous effects must be harmful. Although harmful effects are necessarily exogenous, exogenous effects can be either harmful or beneficial, depending on the effect.

Spinoza's claims about endeavor must also be understood in light of parallelism. Since all particular things are modes, which are expressed differently through each attribute, the endeavor of particular things is also expressed differently through each attribute. Under the attribute of extension, particular things – specifically complex or compound bodies – express their power by maintaining bodily integrity. Spinoza follows Descartes in conceiving of bodies mechanistically as defined by their extended properties. Consequently, maintaining bodily integrity amounts to a thing maintaining a particular configuration among its parts over time, a fixed ratio or proportion of motion and rest (2a2''def). Particular bodily things also express their power by interacting with other bodies in beneficial ways. Meanwhile, under the attribute of

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thought, particular ideas and minds express their power by representing the power of their corresponding bodies (3p11).

The emotions

Spinoza employs the notion of endeavor to explain emotions in Part Three. He defines emotions generally as changes in our power of action (3def3). Emotions fall into three categories: joy, sorrow and desire. More specifically, he defines joy and sorrow as transitions to possessing a greater and lesser power of action, respectively (3DOE2, 3DOE3). For instance, sorrow is the transition to a lesser power of action brought on by, say, catching a cold, or by being hurt by another person. Joy is the transition to greater power when one recovers from a cold or is aided by friends. Desire, meanwhile, is a kind of appetite (specifically, conscious appetite), which amounts to particular expressions of our endeavor (3p9s). For instance, my endeavor for what is beneficial to me leads me to endeavor for breakfast in the morning, which is my appetite and desire for breakfast. It is not entirely clear how desires qualify as changes in our power of acting. Spinoza may hold that all particular expressions of our endeavor also involve some transition to greater or lesser power.

It is important to note that, while desires are expressions of our endeavor, they are not necessarily pure expressions of our endeavor. Desires are usually comprised of both our endeavor and the powers of external things. For instance, my desire to eat cereal for breakfast is comprised partly of my endeavor to persevere in existence and partly of the power of advertisers and other people's expectations of appropriate breakfast food. This point has important consequences: if desires were necessarily pure expressions of our endeavor, then, according to the conatus doctrine, they would necessarily direct us to act in beneficial ways. While Spinoza is committed to the view that active desires – desires arising entirely from our essential power – are necessarily beneficial, he recognizes that desires can direct us in harmful ways, when they include the power of external things that direct us contrary to our own endeavor.

Because of Spinoza's parallelism, all of these emotions comprise both mental and bodily states. According to his definition, emotions are both 'affections of the body by which the body's power of action is augmented or diminished, assisted or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of

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these affections' (3def3). So, joy and sorrow are changes in our bodies – in their physical constitution and their relationships to other bodies – in virtue of which our bodies have a greater or lesser power of action, while they are also changes in our minds, in which our ideas have a greater or lesser power of action in virtue of representing the changes in the endeavor of our bodies. Similarly desires express our endeavor at the bodily level, as movements that tend to preserve and augment our power, and at the mental level, as the ideas representing these movements (3p9s).

According to this definition, emotions should be understood at the mental level as ideas. For instance, my desire to eat cereal for breakfast is an idea, perhaps an idea of breakfast cereal, which contains the power that moves me to eat cereal. The notion that emotions are ideas has important consequences. One might think of emotions, particularly desires, as purely conative mental states – in other words, purely appetitive or motivational states – rather than cognitive or apprehensive mental states, that is, states that represent things or possess some sort of mental content, in virtue of which they can be evaluated as true or false. In contrast, Spinoza understands desires as both conative – since they are bodily movements and motivating mental states – and cognitive – since desires are also ideas, which represent things and can be judged as true or false.

In fact, Spinoza holds that this dual nature is present in all of our ideas. Spinoza denies that there is any such thing as a will (2p49, proof), that is, a single faculty responsible for all voluntary or chosen action. Rather, he attributes our particular volitions to the power of our ideas (2p49). As modes of God, whose essence is power, all ideas possess some power, specifically, the power to affirm their content. Spinoza regards this power as responsible for the activity that philosophers usually attribute to the will, that is, responsible for judgments and actions. Spinoza understands our judgments and actions as resulting from the interplay between different, sometimes opposing ideas with varying degrees of strength (see, for example, 3p31, 3p37, 3p38), which present their contents as true, thereby inclining us to judge and act accordingly. According to this way of thinking, all ideas are simultaneously cognitive and conative, apprehensive and motivating.

This theory of the emotions has important consequences for understanding the relationship between the emotions and knowledge. Spinoza's theory of knowledge revolves around cognition (*cognitio*). Cognitions are

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the mental states (namely, ideas) through which we are aware of things – in Spinoza’s language, ‘sense’ (*sentire*) things – and understand them. Unlike knowledge – at least as the term has often been understood – cognitions need not be true or justified, though Spinoza evaluates cognitions on the basis of their truth and justification. Characteristically, Spinoza evaluates the justification of cognitions in terms of their certainty, which he understands, like Descartes, as connected to their degree of clarity and distinctness (for example, 2p8s2), and their degree of confusion and mutilation; in other words, the degree to which they provide fragmented and partial understandings of things (for example, 2p29c).

Spinoza sorts our cognitions into three kinds: imagination, reason and intuition (2p40s2). Imagination consists of ideas that are derived from the senses or that resemble ideas from the senses (see also 2p17s). Reason and intuition consist of what Spinoza calls adequate ideas. While Spinoza’s explanation of adequate ideas is circuitous, they are best understood as ideas that are caused and conceptually entailed by other ideas in some mind. Consequently, the mind is active in conceiving and acting from adequate ideas, for in doing so it conceives and acts entirely from its own ideas and, consequently, from its own powers (3p3). According to this theory, all of God’s ideas are adequate because they are all caused and entailed by ideas contained within God’s mind (2p36, proof). Ideas can be inadequate only in the minds of finite, particular things (2p36, proof) when the ideas are caused and entailed partly by things external to the mind, as in sensory ideas or perceptions. Reason consists of adequate ideas arising from what Spinoza calls common notions: ideas of general, shared properties of things, which are contained in all minds (2p38c). Meanwhile intuition consists of adequate ideas that conceive the essences of particular things as following from God’s essence. Spinoza claims that reason and intuition, since they consist of adequate ideas, are necessarily true (2p41) and certain, although he suggests that intuition attains the highest degree of certainty, for he describes it alone as *scientia intuitiva* (intuitive knowledge), the Latin term usually reserved for the most certain knowledge (2p40s2; see also 5p36cs). According to this theory of cognition, imagination is the only source of falsity and confusion, which entails that cognitions based on experience are generally less certain and the only source of error (2p41).

Because Spinoza understands the emotions, at the mental level, as ideas, the foregoing classification of our cognitions also distinguishes

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three kinds of emotions. Spinoza defines the passions as passive emotions, that is, emotions that are at least partly caused by something external (3def3). Since the passions, as emotions, consist of ideas, the passions are also ideas that are at least partly caused externally, which Spinoza understands as inadequate ideas, that is, the first kind of knowledge (3p1c, 3p3, 5p2os). For instance, the desire for breakfast cereal, understood under the attribute of thought as an idea, would qualify as a cognition of imagination because it is partly caused externally, by people's attitudes and beliefs about breakfast food. Similarly all forms of sadness, as decreases in our power, must have some external cause (3p59) and, consequently, must consist of ideas that belong to the first kind of cognition. Spinoza also allows for active emotions, namely desires and joys that come about entirely from our own power. These consist of adequate ideas and, thus, of ideas belonging to the second or third kind of cognition (3p58, 5p2os). It follows that these emotions, for Spinoza, qualify as true and justified cognitions, reason and *scientia*. In this way, Spinoza rejects the notion that emotions are opposed to knowledge and reason. Indeed, since Spinoza understands adequate ideas as possessing the power that inclines our judgment and action, all adequate ideas arguably qualify as desires, which implies that reason itself is inherently emotional.

Spinoza's ethical goals

Spinoza's theory of endeavor is the basis not only for his theory of the emotions but also for his ethical theory, since his main ethical concepts revolve around the notion of endeavor. Spinoza defines virtue as equivalent to power: 'By virtue and power I mean the same thing' (4def8). 'Power' here refers to our power of action, which entails that being virtuous, for Spinoza, is equivalent to bringing about effects from one's essential power, which he sometimes describes as acting in accordance with one's nature or with the laws of human nature (for example, 4p24, proof). This is another claim that resonates with ancient ethics, particularly that of the Stoics. Endeavor is also important to Spinoza's notion of perfection. In general, perfection amounts to realizing or excelling in one's nature. Since Spinoza understands our nature as endeavor, augmenting the power of one's endeavor by augmenting one's power of action amounts to excelling in our nature and, consequently, contributes

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to our perfection. On this basis, Spinoza equates augmenting and diminishing our power of action with augmenting and diminishing our perfection (for example, 3DOE3ex). Finally, endeavor is also important to freedom because endeavor involves being determined by oneself, specifically one's essential power. Spinoza connects human freedom to our endeavor most explicitly in his *Political Treatise*, which he was writing at the time of his death: a human being is called free 'only to the extent that he has the ability to exist and to operate according to the laws of human nature' (Chapter 2, paragraph 7).

According to these definitions, it promotes our virtue, perfection and freedom to augment our power of action. While we endeavor in a variety of ways, Spinoza's ethics places special emphasis on the endeavor involved in cognition of the second and especially third kind (reason and intuition), for these involve conceiving adequate ideas and, consequently, the self-determination involved in conceiving ideas from our own ideas and power. It follows that we attain Spinoza's ethical goals through understanding, which is precisely what the *Ethics* provides.

Since the second and third kinds of cognition are emotional states, there is also an emotional aspect to virtue, perfection and freedom. This aspect is central to Part Four, where Spinoza considers what is good and bad in the emotions. In taking up this task, Spinoza is explaining not only the emotional tendencies of virtuous people, but also their tendencies to action, for our emotions, specifically our desires, motivate action. In this respect, Spinoza's explanation of what is good and bad in the emotions also explains the practical dispositions of virtuous people; in other words, the virtuous character, which Spinoza describes as fortitude (*fortitudo*) (3p59s). Because attaining Spinoza's ethical goals involves increasing one's power of action, the virtuous are characterized by joy, rather than sorrow. Spinoza emphasizes rational self-contentment, the joy that comes from increasing one's power through reasoning and acting in accordance with reason (4p52). In contrast, Spinoza denies the ethical value of sorrow, including pity (4p50), humility (4p53), repentance (4p54) and shame (4p58s). Spinoza also steers clear of retributive ethics that focus on blame and indignation (4p51s), since these too are forms of sorrow.

In the course of considering the ethical value of the emotions, Spinoza introduces an important character into his ethical theory: the free person, an individual who is led only by reason (4p66s). The free person

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may be understood as a hypothetical character, a sort of thought experiment, because Spinoza holds that human beings cannot be determined entirely by reason. For we use reason when we act entirely from our own ideas and powers, whereas humans are inevitably determined to some extent by external powers (4p1–4p6). Nevertheless, considering the emotions of a purely self-determining and rational being provides important practical guidance because it helps us to see the actions and emotions that follow from reason and adequate ideas. Spinoza claims that the free person avoids sorrow and ideas that bring sorrow; he thereby avoids fear (4p69) and ‘thinks about death less than anything’ (4p67). The free person also sheds light on rational desires and motives. For a free person is faithful (4p72), grateful (4p71), defers to the laws of the state (4p73), and prudently avoids both dangers (4p69) and entanglements with potentially harmful ignorant and irrational people (4p70).

Most importantly, Spinoza’s ethics aspires to attain the highest good. Contrary to a view common among earlier Christian philosophers, Spinoza does not believe that all existing things are intrinsically good and evil a privation of existence. This common view is often justified on the grounds that all existing things come about from the morally good choice of a benevolent God, whereas Spinoza denies that God can be described in ethical terms. Consequently, Spinoza holds that the qualities of good and bad exist only in our thoughts; they ‘indicate nothing positive in things, considered, that is, in themselves. They are simply ways of thinking’ (4pref). Nevertheless, Spinoza claims that we can have true cognition of good and bad, which he understands primarily as what helps and hinders our endeavor (4p8proof). Spinoza deduces that our highest good is the understanding of God (4p28). This is because, as we have seen, what most augments a thing’s power – and, thus, what is best for it – is understanding and ‘the highest thing that the mind can understand is God’ (4p28, proof).

According to Spinoza, this highest good also encompasses the state of perfection that is realized through understanding God, what Spinoza describes as blessedness (*beatitudo*) (4app4; 5p42; 5p27, proof). Spinoza also claims that this state involves the highest happiness (*summa felicitas*) (4app4), for the transition to our greatest possible power is necessarily accompanied by the highest possible joy (5p27, proof). Spinoza particularly emphasizes the joy and satisfaction that comes from the intuitive understanding of God, which most augments our power (5p27). Spinoza

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describes this emotion as the love of God (5p32, proof), for it meets the definition of love: a joy accompanied by an idea of an external cause, God (3DOE6). In this way, the *Ethics* delivers on the project sketched in the TdIE: it explains how knowledge of ourselves and of our place in nature provides us with the highest good, which is the source of true happiness.

Spinoza's ethics takes a final goal, which has long puzzled readers and commentators. His philosophy seems to leave little room for an afterlife. For Spinoza, there exists nothing outside of the natural world and, thus, no heaven or hell populated by the souls of the departed. The parallelism doctrine implies that everything possesses both mental and bodily aspects, which seems to rule out the possibility of an immaterial soul that survives the body's death. Yet Spinoza believes that humans are capable of some kind of eternal survival in the sense that there is an eternal part of the mind (5p23). Spinoza holds that the eternal part of the mind becomes greater the better we understand things, specifically the more we understand things 'from the vantage of eternity' (*sub specie aeternitatis*). This is equivalent to understanding things through adequate ideas of their essences, rather than through the imagination, which represents things as existing in space and time and, thus, for a limited duration (5p39). Since we achieve Spinoza's other ethical goals (happiness, virtue and so forth) through the best understanding, living ethically also makes the eternal part of the mind greater, thereby providing some kind of salvation. Spinoza's view on the eternity of mind is a central place where he is entering into dialogue with medieval Jewish philosophy, most likely the work of Gersonides (1288–1344).

Leading a good life

How, then, should we live in order to attain these ethical goals? Spinoza's practical recommendations include cognitive techniques for changing our thought processes to help us to obtain more adequate ideas, which provides us with virtue and Spinoza's other ethical goals (see 5p20s). These therapeutic techniques primarily target the passions. Spinoza does not seek to eliminate the passions altogether. Aside from the fact that he recognizes that externally caused ideas and passions can affect us in beneficial ways, Spinoza regards efforts to gain complete self-mastery and self-determination as hopeless. He begins his discussion of these techniques by criticizing what he regards as Descartes's view, that

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it is possible for any soul to ‘acquire absolute control over its passions’ (5pref). Rather, Spinoza seeks to eliminate or replace harmful passions, which diminish our power of action. And where such passions cannot be eliminated, he seeks to govern them by decreasing their psychological power and influence. The five main techniques include ways of not only making inadequate ideas more adequate, but also ways of changing the associations among our ideas to increase the power and influence of our rational and adequate ideas. These can be understood as a kind of cognitive therapy, whereby one eliminates and constrains false and harmful thoughts and beliefs, much like cognitive therapy employed by psychotherapy today.

While Part Five, which outlines ‘the path that leads to freedom,’ concentrates on psychological techniques for changing our thoughts, Spinoza has more to offer in the way of practical recommendations in Part Four. He holds that conceiving adequate ideas has a practical dimension, since reason prescribes practical rules or dictates (4p18s). Since adequate ideas follow from our own power and endeavor, acting in accordance with these dictates amounts to acting from our power and endeavor. Consequently, the dictates of reason describe how people act when they are virtuous, free and perfect. They also provide practical guidance to those who wish to lead a life of virtue, freedom and perfection. Since the practical dictates follow from ideas of reason, understanding the dictates involves understanding the rational ideas from which the dictates follow. Consequently, understanding the dictates involves possessing the ideas that prescribe the dictates and, thus, involves taking them as dictates for oneself, governing one’s own actions. In doing so, one is determined by adequate ideas and, consequently, is self-determining.

The dictates of reason include foremost the command to seek one’s own advantage, which is equivalent to acting in ways that promote one’s power, ‘that everyone love himself, pursue what is useful for himself – what is useful for him in truth – and seek all that in truth leads a human being to greater perfection’ (4p18s). This dictate is consistent with the generally egoistic bent to Spinoza’s ethics: his definition of virtue identifies it with the self-interested aim of augmenting one’s power. However, Spinoza’s ethics is not narrowly egoistic, that is, indifferent to the welfare of others. This is evident from the dictates of reason commanding us to act for the good of others: from the guidance of reason, humans

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‘want nothing for themselves, that they do not desire for all other human beings’ (4p18s). The basis for this command is that human beings, as collections of finite modes, are necessarily dependent on other things, especially other humans, for both their survival and flourishing. Consequently, the interests of human beings are connected in such a way that acting for the benefit of others is constitutive of promoting one’s interests.

The reception of the *Ethics*

Spinoza’s philosophy has been enormously influential among philosophers, thinkers and artists of all sorts since its publication. Its influence has also been diverse, as his philosophy has been interpreted and employed in different ways, giving rise to various forms of Spinozism. I can here mention only a few central highlights. As Spinoza suspected, the publication of the *Ethics* was quickly followed by a flood of condemnation. In 1678, within a year of its publication, the *Ethics* – and all of Spinoza’s work – was banned by the States of Holland and the States General. In fact, they threatened authors, publishers and printers with long prison terms for even reworking and restating Spinoza’s ideas. The Leiden Reformed Consistory declared that the *Ethics* ‘perhaps since the beginning of the world until the present day surpasses all others in godlessness,’ and ‘endeavors to do away with all religion and set godlessness on the throne.’¹⁴ The next year the Roman Catholic Office of the Holy Inquisition officially condemned the *Ethics*, along with Spinoza’s letters, the TTP and the *Political Treatise*.

Nevertheless, the book was widely read and highly influential in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a fact that was often overlooked until recently. Part of the reason is that Spinoza’s influence was often covert. In public, Spinoza was usually rejected and condemned, though his critics devoted great effort to refuting his philosophy, which ensured the wide dissemination of his ideas. For instance, Pierre Bayle’s (1647–1706) celebrated *Dictionnaire historique et critique* – one of the most popular works of the eighteenth century and an important source for

¹⁴ From Jonathan Israel, ‘The Banning of Spinoza’s Works in the Dutch Republic (1670–78),’ in Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (eds.) *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 11–12.

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Introduction

David Hume – devoted a long critical entry to Spinoza. But in private many of these same critics were often attracted to Spinoza's ideas and developed their own views partly through engaging with him. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who criticized Spinoza's TTP as 'an intolerably impudent book,' was also profoundly preoccupied with Spinoza's thought, which shaped and infused Leibniz's own philosophy.¹⁵ He sought out a correspondence with Spinoza and even visited him in The Hague, engaging in what must have been a productive philosophical exchange.

Spinoza also received a more openly positive reception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by deists, such as John Toland (1670–1722), who sought to dispense with divine revelation in theology, looking instead to reason and observation of the natural world. Spinoza was later openly celebrated in German philosophy in the eighteenth century, beginning with Lessing (1729–1781), a philosopher, dramatist and art critic, who proclaimed himself a disciple of Spinoza. Spinoza achieved greater recognition through the philosophy of Hegel, who declared Spinozism, 'in essence, the beginning of all philosophizing.'¹⁶ Through these and other channels, Spinoza's philosophy was an inspiration and sounding board for generations of thinkers who defended reason as the utmost authority in matters of truth and science, who sought a more secular ethics and society, and who defended toleration and freedom of thought. In this way, Spinoza's philosophy exercised great influence over the important intellectual and social changes that are loosely referred to as the Enlightenment. In the *Ethics* this philosophy finds its most perfect expression.

¹⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. Karl Immanuel Gerhardt (Weidmann, 1875), vol. I, 64.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, iii: *Werke*, Jubilee Edition, ed. Glockner (Stuttgart, 1927–37), xix, 376.

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Chronology

- 1492 Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella decree that all Jews should be driven out of their kingdom and territories.
- 1496 The Jews are expelled from Portugal; remaining Jews are forced to convert.
- 1536 Calvin publishes the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
- 1566 Beginning of the Eighty Years War for Dutch independence from the Spanish.
- 1579 The Union of Utrecht establishes the United Provinces.
- 1587/1588 Spinoza's father, Michael, is born in Vidigueira, Portugal.
- c. 1588–1596 Michael and his family are forced to leave Portugal and settle in Nantes.
- 1596 René Descartes is born on March 31.
- 1603 Arminius and Gomar debate tolerance and freedom of the will at Leiden.
- 1618 The Thirty Years War begins.
- 1619 The States of Holland officially grant Jews the right to settle and build synagogues.
- c. 1596–1621 Michael settles in Amsterdam.
- 1632 Spinoza is born in Amsterdam on November 24.
- 1640 Uriel da Costa commits suicide in Amsterdam.
- 1641 Descartes publishes the *Meditations*.
- 1642 The English Civil War begins.
- 1642 Thomas Hobbes publishes *On the Citizen* in Paris.
- 1644 Descartes publishes the *Principles of Philosophy*.

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1648	Treaty of Westphalia ends the Thirty Years War and the Eighty Years War between the Spanish and the Dutch.
1649	King Charles I of England is executed by beheading on January 30.
1649	Descartes publishes the <i>Passions of the Soul</i> .
1650	Descartes dies on February 11.
1650	William II, Stadholder of the United Provinces, dies on November 6. With his son, William III, not yet born, the position of stadholder is left vacant.
1651	Hobbes publishes <i>Leviathan</i> .
1654	Spinoza's father dies and Spinoza briefly becomes head of the struggling family business.
1656	A <i>herem</i> is issued against Spinoza on July 27.
1656	States of Holland and Frisia issue a decree prohibiting the teaching of Cartesianism on October 6.
1656	Spinoza writes a now lost <i>Apology</i> in Spanish against the rabbis.
c. 1656	Spinoza probably begins studying at Franciscus van den Enden's school.
c. 1655–1657	Spinoza probably attends classes at the University of Leiden.
c. 1657–1660	Spinoza begins work on the <i>Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect</i> .
1660	The end of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth in England and the restoration of the monarchy with Charles II.
c. 1660	Spinoza probably begins work on the <i>Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being</i> , a precursor to the <i>Ethics</i> .
1663	Spinoza moves from Rijnsburg (near Leiden) to Voorburg (near The Hague).
1663	Spinoza publishes his commentary on Descartes's <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> , together with his own <i>Metaphysical Thoughts</i> , the only work he published under his own name during his lifetime.
1664	The Second Anglo-Dutch War begins.
1665	Van den Enden anonymously publishes <i>Free Political Institutions</i> in Amsterdam.

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1666	The States of Holland declare William III ‘Child of the State’ (ward of the Republican Dutch government), to reduce the chance of his future stadholderate.
1666	Spinoza’s friend, Lodewijk Meyer, anonymously publishes <i>Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture</i> in Amsterdam.
1667	The Second Anglo-Dutch War ends.
1668	The trial and imprisonment of Adriaan Koerbagh in Amsterdam.
1669	Adriaan Koerbagh dies in prison on October 15.
1669/1670	Spinoza moves from Voorburg to the center of The Hague.
1669–1671	Spinoza’s <i>Theological-Political Treatise</i> is published anonymously in Amsterdam.
1670	Charles II signs the secret Treaty of Dover, conspiring with Louis XIV of France to form an alliance against the United Provinces.
1672	England and France declare war against the United Provinces, beginning the Third Anglo-Dutch War.
1672	A mob loyal to the House of Orange murders Cornelius de Witt and his brother Johan de Witt, Holland’s Grand Pensionary, who effectively controlled the Dutch Republic during the absence of the stadholder. William III, the eventual King of England, Ireland and Scotland, assumes the office of stadholder.
1673	Spinoza is offered and declines a professorship at the University of Heidelberg.
1674	The States of Holland and States General formally ban the TTP, together with Meyer’s <i>Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture</i> and Hobbes’ <i>Leviathan</i> .
1674	The Third Anglo-Dutch War ends when the States General approves the Treaty of Westminster on March 5.
1674	Van den Enden is hanged before the Bastille on November 27 for conspiring against French monarch Louis XIV, to establish a republic in Normandy.
1675	Spinoza travels to Amsterdam to oversee printing of the <i>Ethics</i> and then backs out.

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1676	Leibniz pays a few visits to Spinoza in November.
1677	Spinoza dies in The Hague on February 21.
1677	Spinoza’s friends publish the Dutch translation of the <i>Ethics</i> , and his <i>Posthumous Works</i> , including the Latin version of the <i>Ethics</i> , seventy-four letters to and from Spinoza and three unfinished treatises: the <i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i> , the <i>Political Treatise</i> and a Hebrew grammar.
1678	The <i>Posthumous Works</i> are sold in the first weeks of January. The States General and the Supreme Court of Holland, Zeeland and West-Friesland ban Spinoza’s <i>Posthumous Works</i> on June 25.
1679	The Roman Catholic Office of the Holy Inquisition officially condemns the <i>Ethics</i> , Spinoza’s letters, the <i>Theological-Political Treatise</i> and the <i>Political Treatise</i> .

Further reading

The most authoritative biography of Spinoza is Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, 1999). For a more popular treatment of Spinoza's life, see Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York, 2006). For more serious scholarly inquiry, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza* (Stuttgart, 2006) contains the earliest biographies by Colerus and Lucas, interviews and surviving historical documents pertaining to Spinoza's life.

On the significance of Spinoza's philosophy to the Enlightenment, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), and the sequel *Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford, 2006). On the historical context for Spinoza's colleague associates, see Andrew Cooper Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1991). On Spinoza's relation to Dutch Cartesians and Dutch academic philosophy, see Alexander X. Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism: Philosophy and Theology* (Oxford, 2015). To understand the *Ethics* in the context of medieval Jewish philosophy, see the essays in *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridge, 2014). To understand the *Ethics* in the context of medieval, scholastic philosophy (as well as Jewish philosophy), see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, 2 vols. (New York, 1961).

For an overview that helps to make the *Ethics* accessible, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2006). For an introduction that explains the *Ethics* as revolving around the principle of sufficient reason, see Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (London, 2008).

Further reading

On Spinoza's geometrical method and its significance for understanding his philosophical ambitions, see Aaron V. Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method* (Cambridge, 2007). On Spinoza's rationalism, particularly the relationship between causation and conception, see Yitzhak Melamed, 'Spinoza on Inherence, Causation and Conception,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012), pp. 365–86.

For general work on metaphysical issues in the *Ethics*, see the essays in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, Olli Koistinen and John Biro (eds.) (Oxford, 2002). On Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism, see Don Garrett, 'Spinoza's Necessitarianism,' in *God and Nature in Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden, 1991), pp. 191–218. For Spinoza's view on the relationship between the attributes, including parallelism, see Yitzhak Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (Oxford, 2015). On Spinoza's theory of conatus, see Valtteri Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power* (Cambridge, 2011).

For Spinoza's theory of knowledge, see Margaret Wilson, 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge,' in the *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, Don Garrett (ed.) (Cambridge, 1996). For an overview of Spinoza's psychology, see Eugene Marshall, *The Spiritual Automaton: Spinoza's Science of the Mind* (Oxford, 2013). For work connecting Spinoza's theory of the emotions to contemporary neuroscience, see Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York, 2003).

On Spinoza's ethical theory, see Matthew J. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* (Cambridge, 2011); Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford, 2010). On this point also see the essays in *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory*, Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa (eds.) (Oxford, 2014). On Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind in a historical context, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford, 2001).

For Spinoza's intellectual legacy, see Pierre-François Moreau, 'Spinoza's Reception and Influence,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (1995), pp. 408–34. For Spinoza's influence in England, see Rosalie L. Colie, 'Spinoza in England, 1665–1730,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 (1963), pp. 183–219. For Spinoza's reception in Germany, see *Spinoza and German Idealism*, Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (eds.) (Cambridge, 2015). For a closer look at

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Further reading

historical and textual issues surrounding the *Ethics*, its reception and Spinoza's philosophy generally, including a historically detailed glossary of Spinoza's main terms, see *The Continuum Companion to Spinoza*, Wiep van Bunge, Henri Krop, Piet Steenbakkers, Jeroen van de Ven (eds.) (London, 2011).

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Note on the text and translation

Our translation is based on the new critical edition of Spinoza's *Ethics* prepared by Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkers.¹⁷ Ideally the authoritative source for any critical edition would be the so-called autograph, Spinoza's own manuscript, which he prepared for publication and brought to the Amsterdam bookseller and publisher Jan Rieuwerts in 1675. Unfortunately, this text is lost. Previous critical editions have been based on two witnesses to the autograph: the Latin text printed in Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*, and a companion Dutch translation (*De Nagelate Schriften van B.d.S.*). These texts were published together in 1677 and edited by Spinoza's friends, who were charged with preparing his work for publication. The previous critical edition by Carl Gebhardt (*Spinoza Opera*, Heidelberg, 1925) regarded these two works as equally authoritative on the mistaken assumption that the Dutch translation was based on an early authoritative version of the Latin text. The new critical edition, in contrast, looks to the Latin *Opera Posthuma* text as the more authoritative version, though it does take the Dutch translation into consideration. The new critical edition also takes account of a recently discovered third witness to the autograph: a manuscript of the entire Latin text, which was discovered in 2010 in the Vatican Library, without a title or author's name. This handcopied manuscript had been commissioned by Spinoza's correspondent, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus. Visiting Rome in 1677, von Tschirnhaus lent it to Nicolaus Stensen, an acquaintance of Spinoza and a convert to

¹⁷ Forthcoming from Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, with facing French translation, as part of the series, *Spinoza Œuvres*.

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Catholicism, who brought the manuscript to the Inquisition as evidence for banning Spinoza's works.

Translating Spinoza's *Ethics* poses unique challenges, not the least of which is settling on consistent translations for key philosophical terms. While consistent translation is always desirable in philosophical texts, it is particularly so in the *Ethics*. In Spinoza's geometric method, the success of proofs depends upon terms being used without equivocation, and in accordance with their definitions. Furthermore, Spinoza employs a distinctive vocabulary to articulate his philosophical system. Many of these fundamental terms are not defined, and determining their precise meaning is difficult: there is precious little context in his spare geometrical style and, while the terms are often drawn from other philosophical sources and traditions, Spinoza frequently endows them with distinctive meanings; indeed, much of the philosophical action occurs in the way that Spinoza departs from and subverts the meanings of familiar terms. Consequently, the meaning of these key terms can often only be determined by attending to the way that Spinoza uses them. In order to help the reader to determine these meanings, then, we strive to translate key terms consistently, though a completely consistent translation of terms is not always possible or even desirable.

A few particular terms deserve mention. Spinoza uses two main terms for power: *potentia* and *potestas*. Whether these terms have different meanings has been a contested question. While it does not appear that Spinoza distinguishes these terms in a rigorous or entirely consistent way, he does tend to use the term *potentia* to refer to the powers that are identified with a thing's intrinsic endeavor, while he tends to use *potestas* more broadly to refer to what a thing can do, regardless of whether it possesses such a power in virtue of its endeavor or external things and circumstances. However one comes down on the issue, we favor, wherever possible, consistently using a different word for each of these terms so that the reader may judge for herself. In nearly all cases, we translate *potentia* as 'power' and *potestas* as 'ability' or 'abilities.' Related to these terms, Spinoza tends to use the term *aptus* to describe the powers that a thing has in virtue of the way that it is bodily constituted as a result of its causal history; we generally translate *aptus* as 'capable' or occasionally as 'adapted.'

While Spinoza usually uses the Latin term *animus* to refer to the mind, it has different connotations than either 'mind' or the Latin term *mens*. More like the English 'heart,' *animus* is associated with strength,

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vigor and feeling. Spinoza makes use of these connotations by employing *animus* as the primary term for the mind when discussing the emotions, their strength, and character traits associated with emotions. He also trades on these connotations in the term *animositas*, a character trait connected to strength. To capture these associations, we generally translate *animus* as ‘spirit’ and *animositas* as ‘spiritedness.’ Spinoza also sometimes uses the term *animus* when discussing Descartes’s conception of *animus*. In Descartes’s work, this term is usually translated as ‘soul’ partly because *animus* has religious connotations that Descartes largely accepts; for instance, for him, the *animus* is immortal and has an afterlife. In these cases, we translate *animus* as ‘soul’ to make clear that Spinoza is referring to this Cartesian conception of the mind.

We translate Spinoza’s famous phrase, *sub specie aeternitatis* as ‘from the vantage of eternity.’ One might take the term *specie* here to mean kind, as in the Aristotelian notion of species, but this seems unlikely because Spinoza does not distinguish different kinds of eternity. Rather, we take the term *specie* in this phrase to mean appearance; more specifically, an appearance from a certain perspective. We found ‘from the vantage of eternity’ preferable to the more literal ‘under the aspect of eternity,’ because the English ‘aspect’ often refers simply to a feature or quality of a thing, which is not a meaning of the Latin term *species*. We also avoided ‘under the appearance of eternity’ because this suggests that this perspective may be different from reality, whereas Spinoza thinks that this perspective reveals the truth of things.

To avoid importing sexist language into the text, we translate the Latin term *homo* not as ‘man,’ but rather as ‘human being’ or, where the context is more familiar, ‘person.’

We follow Edwin Curley’s helpful convention of using italics to indicate when ‘or’ is a translation of the Latin terms *sive* or *seu*. These terms – unlike other Latin terms for ‘or’ (*vel* and *aut*) – often (though not always) communicate an equivalence or an alternative expression for the same thing.

For ease of reference we provide marginal citations to Spinoza’s *Opera Posthuma*, which generally match Gebhardt’s page numbers. We generally follow the critical edition with regard to the use of italics and capitalization. The new critical edition, faithful to Spinoza’s text, uses paragraph breaks sparingly. We have provided frequent paragraph breaks to promote readability and ease of reference.

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