SPINOZA ON HUMAN FREEDOM

Spinoza was one of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment, but his often obscure metaphysics makes it difficult to understand the ultimate message of his philosophy. Although he regarded freedom as the fundamental goal of his ethics and politics, his theory of freedom has not received sustained, comprehensive treatment. Spinoza holds that we attain freedom by governing ourselves according to practical principles, which express many of our deepest moral commitments. Matthew J. Kisner focuses on this theory and presents an alternative picture of the ethical project driving Spinoza's philosophical system. His study of the neglected practical philosophy provides an accessible and concrete picture of what it means to live as Spinoza's ethics envisioned.

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Reason, autonomy and the good life

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For Michael

Contents

Abbreviations and translations

Translations of Spinoza's writings most often follow *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), though I often use my own translations, which have benefited from consulting *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, volume I, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985). Translations from the *Theological-Political Treatise* are generally my own, though I have taken account of Shirley, as well as Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel's *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge University Press, 2007). All translations of Kant's practical philosophy are from the Cambridge edition of the *Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Abbreviations used are as follows:

A/B	Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), cited by page number from the first and second (A and B) editions of the text.
CM	Spinoza's *Cogitata Metaphysica*, the appendix to his *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae*, cited by part and chapter.
CPR	Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, cited by volume and page number from the Academy Edition (*Akademie Ausgabe* or Ak) of Kant's collected writings.
CSM/K	*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1984, 1985), volume III, trans. Anthony Kenny (1991), with marginal pagination to *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–74). Cited by volume and page number.

G	Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, cited by volume and page number from Ak.
KV	Spinoza's *Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand*, cited by book and chapter.
L	Hobbes, *Leviathan*, cited by chapter, section and page number in Edwin Curley's critical edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994).
MM	Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, cited by volume and page number from Ak.
TdIE	Spinoza's *Tractatus de Intellectus Emandatione*, cited by paragraph number from *Benedicti de Spinoza Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Hermannus Bruder (Leipzig, 1843–6), volume II.
TP	Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*, cited by chapter and paragraph number from Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*, ed. R. W. Meijer, 1677.
TTP	Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, cited by chapter and paragraph number from Fokke Akkerman's critical edition of the text (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

Spinoza's *Ethics* is cited by part and proposition using the following abbreviations:

a	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
d	demonstration
def	definition
DOE	Definition of the Emotions (end of Part 3)
ex	explanation
p	proposition
s	scholium

Thus, 2p49d = *Ethics*, Part 2, proposition 49, demonstration.

Spinoza's *Correspondence* is cited by letter number from J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land's 1882 edition of Spinoza's collected works.

Acknowledgments

The jacket cover features the *Philosopher and Pupils* by seventeenth-century Dutch painter Willem van der Vliet. I chose this image because it represents the philosopher as social and active, rather than solitary and contemplative, as in more familiar representations of the period, such as Rembrandt's *The Philosopher in Meditation*. The present work is guided by the conviction that Van der Vliet's painting comes far closer to capturing Spinoza's understanding of the life of reason and freedom. Special thanks to the National Trust for Scotland for permission to use the image.

This book was made possible by the University of South Carolina, which has nurtured my career in innumerable ways, from providing me with opportunities to teach the relevant material to time away from teaching altogether. I am grateful to my colleagues in the philosophy department for their support during the years it has taken me to complete this book. I would like to thank the community of Spinoza scholars, who have been so welcoming and have taught me so much. In particular, Andrew Youpa has been a tireless interlocutor and a good friend. Michael LeBuffe has shown extraordinary patience in slogging through my early, often muddled, drafts, and Eugene Marshall has always been generous in taking the time to engage with my hasty e-mails. The entire manuscript was read by two anonymous referees from this press and one from another. Without their conscientious service in providing such thoughtful criticism, this work would be greatly impoverished. Kevin Elliot provided helpful comments on an earlier draft, going above and beyond the usual requirements of a colleague specializing in an unrelated area. I also received helpful comments on earlier portions of this book, often in article form, from Michael Della Rocca, Donald Rutherford, Justin Weinberg, Holly Groover, participants in a graduate seminar at the University of South Carolina, particularly Travis Reider, and a great number of anonymous referees from various journals. My work has also benefited from participants at talks and conferences where I presented portions of this work, including several sessions of the American

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Introduction: Beyond therapy

Among Spinoza's many philosophical aims and ambitions, none was closer to his heart than helping people to achieve freedom. Each of Spinoza's works on metaphysics, from his early commentary on Descartes' *Principles* to his eventual masterpiece, the *Ethics*, culminates in a discussion of freedom, insisting on its possibility and importance.[1] In fact, the central aim of the *Ethics* is to show us "the way leading to freedom" (5pref). Spinoza's other main body of work, his political philosophy, is also motivated by his concern for freedom. Arguing that "the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom" (*TTP* 20, 6), Spinoza recommends how states should be structured and governed for the protection and promotion of freedom. The central thesis of the *Theological-Political Treatise* quotes Tacitus that the best state allows "every man to think as he pleases and say what he thinks" (*TTP* 20).[2] Even Spinoza's notion of salvation is arguably directed at our freedom, for it arises from union with the eternal, divine nature and, thus, offers a kind of liberation from the power of external forces.[3]

It is surprising, then, that Spinoza's view of freedom has received so little scholarly attention. Most work on Spinoza's philosophy only touches on the subject of freedom, reading him instead as concerned primarily with other goals, such as resolving problems in Cartesian metaphysics or addressing the harmful influence of religious authorities.[4] The reason for this is largely that Spinoza specialists, until very recently, have tended not

[1] The *KV* concludes with a section entitled "On True Freedom," while *CM* concludes with a chapter on the human mind, arguing that we have a will and that it is free. Although Spinoza's view on the will changed over time, the same cannot be said for his insistence on the importance of human freedom.

[2] This is the title to chapter 20, quoting from *Histories* 1, 1, 4.

[3] The *KV* claims that divine union makes us "free from change and corruption" (II, 26), though it is less clear that salvation in the mature work involves such a divine union.

[4] For prominent examples of each see Curley (1988) and Nadler (2001). The most notable exception is Bennett, who devotes considerable attention to freedom, only to conclude that Spinoza's view is ultimately incoherent (1984, 324–6).

to focus on his ethics, which provides the context and motivation for his interest in freedom. Rather, work on Spinoza's philosophy has tended to revolve around issues in metaphysics and epistemology – in the anglophone literature – or political philosophy – in the continental literature.[5] Consequently, the little research that has been devoted to Spinoza's view of freedom has been narrow in focus, concentrating on the question of how he can consistently maintain the possibility of freedom, given his causal determinism, without considering the issue that most concerned him: the ethical significance of freedom.[6]

This book aims to provide an interpretation of Spinoza's theory of freedom that focuses on this neglected issue by explaining why, for Spinoza, freedom is valuable and how we should go about attaining it. Taking up this task sheds light on not only his theory of freedom, but also his ethics. In order to explain how, it is helpful to consider a natural way of thinking about Spinoza's ethics, what I will call the "therapy reading," found to some extent in most scholarship on the subject.[7] The reading takes its cue from Spinoza's characterization of our highest good as a psychological state of contentment or tranquillity, one that does not depend on external things and, consequently, is immune to the vicissitudes of fortune. Since achieving the highest good is Spinoza's central ethical goal, this reading suggests that Spinoza primarily aims to help us achieve a psychological state of happiness that involves overcoming obstacles to this state, particularly the passions, painful and disruptive passive affects. According to this way of thinking, Spinoza's ethics secures these aims by arming us with knowledge of the true nature of things, which corrects the errors and confusions at the root of the passions and strengthens our rationality, steeling us against

[5] Here I echo Garrett (1996, 269). One should note that there has been significantly more work on Spinoza's ethics since Garrett's assessment, particularly by LeBuffe, Miller and Youpa, though little of it has focused on freedom.

[6] See Parkinson (1975), Kolakowski (1973) and Kashap (1987), the only book-length treatment of Spinoza's view of freedom. One might object that there has been more work on freedom, since Spinoza essentially equates our freedom with our virtue and there has been a great deal of work on the latter. However, one cannot have a complete picture without also considering how his view of virtue also serves as a theory of freedom. This means examining how his view relates to other theories of freedom and to concepts connected with freedom, such as responsibility.

[7] This reading is invoked in the frequent claim that Spinoza's ethics offers psychological therapy; for instance, see Smith (1997, 135; 2003, 8). Elements of the reading are most pronounced in Hampshire (see particularly 1975, 308; 1977, 64), Neu (1977), Gilead (2000), De Dijn (2004), and more recently LeBuffe, who presents the main goal of Spinoza's ethics as correcting our passions by acquiring knowledge and avoiding error (2010, 11). The reader should take my description of the therapy reading with a grain of salt. Like the frequently invoked "standard view," the therapy reading is an idealized description of general trends in scholarship that fails to do justice to the complexity of most interpretations.

their harmful effects. Consequently, this reading canvasses Spinoza's ethics by explaining, first, his views on the true natures of things, that is, his metaphysics, and, second, his "remedies for the emotions" (5p20s), recommendations for avoiding passive affects and transforming them into active ones. Since Spinoza explains our passive affects as what he calls inadequate ideas, which are the source of error, explaining these remedies also means concentrating on Spinoza's view of how to avoid and correct error. In this way, the therapy reading regards his ethics as primarily providing cognitive psychological therapy: strategies and techniques for changing one's beliefs, thought processes and affective states in order to avoid cognitive error and, thereby achieve greater happiness – though this amounts to a peculiar kind of therapy since it operates through metaphysical investigation rather than reflection on one's personal experiences.

Focusing on the theme of freedom suggests a different way of thinking about Spinoza's ethical aims. For freedom is important to Spinoza, in part, because it is fundamentally connected to our good: freedom amounts to acting from one's own power, what he calls *conatus* or striving, while he understands the good as whatever promotes one's power. It follows that achieving our good necessarily promotes our freedom, so that the aim of attaining our highest good is tantamount to attaining our greatest freedom. In this way, focusing on freedom emphasizes that Spinoza's highest good consists in increasing our power and activity as much as attaining any psychological state. Given this emphasis, it is most natural to read Spinoza's ethics as providing guidance for increasing our power. This reading, unlike the therapy reading, understands the ethics as primarily working toward the practical aim of directing action, rather than the psychological aim of achieving contentment or tranquillity. On this view, Spinoza's ethics investigates the true nature of things not simply because metaphysical knowledge has a transformative effect on our psychology, but also because it identifies what promotes our power so that we may act appropriately. In making this claim, I do not mean to deny that happiness consists partly in attaining a psychological state of contentment or that acting in accordance with Spinoza's ethics requires us to change our thought processes and affective states. I argue, rather, that these therapeutic aims should be understood with respect to the practical aim of directing action. Consequently, my reading differs from the therapy reading primarily in its emphasis.

Nevertheless, this difference in emphasis is important because it directs our attention to aspects of Spinoza's ethics that have been neglected. In particular, the book focuses on Spinoza's practical philosophy, specifically

his account of reason's practical demands, contained in his theory of the natural law, his view of the virtuous character and what we might call civic virtue, the virtuous activities of citizens.[8] Conversely, I devote less attention to issues that have preoccupied the literature on Spinoza's ethics, such as his remedies of the passions, the psychological techniques for avoiding error and for changing one's affects and mental processes.[9] I justify this on the grounds that these techniques have already received thorough investigation, arguably more than they deserve, since the interest in the subject is motivated to some extent by the mistaken notion that Spinoza's ethics offers such remedies in lieu of a practical philosophy.[10] I will also have relatively little to say about Spinoza's theory of salvation from Part v of the *Ethics*. Here again, there has been ample attention devoted to this subject, partly because salvation amounts to achieving the psychological state that accompanies intuitive knowledge of God and such states have been emphasized by the therapy reading.[11] While I do not mean to deny that salvation is an important part of Spinoza's ethics, it is less important to my investigation since it plays little role in his practical philosophy.

In focusing on Spinoza's practical philosophy, this book provides something that has been sorely lacking in the literature, a concrete and detailed picture of the good life, that is, a life of freedom and virtue. Such a picture is critical if we are to take Spinoza's ethics seriously: to understand what it is asking of us and to try it on, so to speak. In the absence of such a picture, the therapy reading suggests that a good life is primarily devoted to intellectual activities, such as scholarly study and contemplation.[12] However,

[8] Spinoza's practical philosophy has received shockingly little attention, aside from some general discussion of his normative ethical principles, such as ethical egoism. Some have suggested that Spinoza does not even have a practical philosophy: "the *Ethics* offers no laws or rules of behavior – their very form would be misleading – and it does not tell us what actions the wise will perform" (Schneewind 1998, 222). Smith claims that Spinoza's ethics "offers no answer to the question 'what ought I to do'" (2003, 27). Similar reasoning leads Broad to conclude that Spinoza's *Ethics* "is not a treatise on ethics in our sense of the word" (1930, 15). LeBuffe is more attentive to Spinoza's practical prescriptions (2007; 2010, Chapter 10), providing an exhaustive inventory of Spinoza's explicit prescriptions in the *Ethics*. However, LeBuffe focuses primarily on prescriptions for correcting errors of the imagination, rather than on what I regard as the main sources of Spinoza's practical philosophy, his accounts of the natural law, civic virtue and the virtuous character.

[9] Chapter 9 does consider Spinoza's psychological techniques for changing our mental processes, though it focuses on how these changes influence our choices and actions.

[10] For a recent discussion of these techniques, see Lin (2009).

[11] There is a section or chapter on salvation in almost all general and introductory works on Spinoza. See also Rutherford (1999).

[12] For instance, Smith argues that Spinoza identifies the highest good "exclusively with the contemplative ideal" (1997, 142). Rutherford argues that Spinoza understands the highest good of a rational being as "a life of pure thought" (2008, 506). Along these lines, Bidney claims that "the body is the source of all passivity and is the cause of human servitude. Properly speaking, virtue pertains only

if we understand a good life as devoted not just to achieving a psychological state by acquiring knowledge, but more broadly to maximizing one's activity, then this assumption seems less plausible. Rather, my approach suggests that freedom involves stamping one's causal footprint on to the world. While Spinoza admittedly holds that our power is best served by leading a rational life (4app5), this does not imply a preference for intellectual activities. For he holds that rational ideas increase our activity not only in the abstract metaphysical sense of increasing our mental power, but also in a practical sense, by directing us to engage actively in the world through forming friendships, treating others with kindness and participating in the life of the state. Moreover, a free life cannot be insulated from practical, worldly considerations, since Spinoza recognizes that developing and exercising our rationality depends upon material conditions, including political conditions, such as a state that promotes the free exchange of ideas. In this way, a free life looks much like recent work has come to understand Spinoza's life, as profoundly engaged in the world – indeed, as aiming for nothing less than the transformation of the very political and social fabric of early modern life.[13]

While focusing on Spinoza's practical philosophy leads me to a number of distinctive conclusions, three deserve special mention here at the outset. First, I argue that Spinoza's ethics is better equipped to account for traditional morality than has been appreciated. It is not uncommon to think of Spinoza as a kind of iconoclastic, almost Nietzschean figure, challenging the most basic assumptions of morality.[14] A variety of reasons are offered to support this conclusion. First, it is argued that Spinoza, in denying the possibility of mind–body causation, also denies the possibility that humans can bring about their own actions, and thus, of moral agency.[15] Second, it is argued that Spinoza's causal determinism rules out the justification for attributing praise and blame and, thus, the grounds for moral evaluation.[16] Third, some argue that morality imposes laws in the sense of normative

to human reason which constitutes the active essence of man; there is no corporeal virtue at all" (1940, 278).

[13] This is according to my reading of Israel (2001).

[14] Of course, this view is praised for bravely reconceiving moral philosophy more than criticized as immoral; see Frankena (1975, 85–7).

[15] See Irwin (2008, 180–4). Irwin also argues that understanding ourselves as the cause of our actions is a confusion that Spinoza's ethics aims to overcome.

[16] Bidney argues that a wise man, because he understands that everything is necessary, does not praise and blame or hold people responsible (1940, 323). Bidney also argues that we value the praise and blame of others because of purely social conventions, not reason (328). Broad argues that for Spinoza "praise and blame must be removed from ethical judgments" because there is no possibility of humans acting otherwise (1930, 44).

commands, whereas Spinoza is only interested in laws as descriptions.[17] Fourth, some argue that morality imposes obligations that may by contrary to our own interests, whereas Spinoza upholds ethical egoism, the view that we are only ethically required to pursue our self-interest.[18] Fifth, Spinoza argues that a truly free man would not form the ideas of good and bad (4p68), which suggests that a basic form of moral evaluation is some sort of illusion.

However, if we focus our attention squarely on Spinoza's practical philosophy, we find that none of these charges is warranted. Chapter 3 shows that the first charge is based on a misreading of Spinoza's parallelism and, against the second, that Spinoza regarded his causal determinism as consistent with notions of praise, blame and responsibility. With respect to the third charge, Chapter 6 shows that reason, according to Spinoza, prescribes natural laws, which are roughly analogous to moral laws, since they are universal, normatively binding commands; he even holds that natural laws are impartial to some degree, since they are formulated from the perspective of reason, which does not take account of our individual perspectives. With respect to the fourth charge, I show in Chapter 7 that Spinoza regards acting for the good of others as valuable in and of itself, regardless of the consequences. It follows that benevolence is valuable even when the consequences of doing so oppose one's own interests, perhaps sufficiently valuable that we should sometimes act with benevolence regardless of harmful consequences to ourselves. Finally, Chapter 5 shows, contrary to the fifth charge, that we can have knowledge of good and bad. Thus, correcting these confusions shows that Spinoza's ethics holds us to normatively binding, impartial, practical laws, directing us to the good of others, much like conventional morality.

My second conclusion is that Spinoza offers a more nuanced and attractive view of human passivity than is often recognized. The therapy reading, emphasizing Spinoza's interest in attaining a psychological state of contentment, suggests that he regards the passions as necessarily opposed to virtue. According to this suggestion, Spinoza follows the ancient Stoics in aiming

[17] Den Uyl argues that Spinoza's laws can be reduced to two types, neither of which is genuinely normative: universally true descriptions, like the laws of physics and conventional political and socials laws, which are only binding in virtue of their political and social enforcement mechanisms (1983, 3–5). On this basis, he concludes that Spinoza offers "no normative moral standards" (88). Relatedly, Rutherford argues that Spinoza's natural laws are not normative or universally binding (2008, 500–2) and Curley argues that the natural law places no practical demands, prohibiting nothing (1991, 97).

[18] Frankena claims that Spinoza cannot offer a moral philosophy because of his normative egoism (1975, 96).

to rid us of passions, striving toward the ethical ideal of *apatheia*.[19] Indeed, it is sometimes supposed that Spinoza's freedom amounts to freedom from the passions.[20] Since Spinoza understands the passions as ideas that arise when we are passively affected by external objects, this reading suggests that his ethics aims to eliminate human passivity as much as possible, a suggestion that is embraced by those who read Spinoza's ethics as aiming to make us perfectly active beings, like God.[21] This reading is problematic, first, because claiming that the passions are necessarily harmful and opposed to virtue appears inconsistent with Spinoza's other commitments. He claims that passive desires can be good (4app3) and that our understanding and power benefit from experience (4p38; 2p13post4), which requires our being passively affected by external objects.[22] He also admits that there are passive joys, which entails that being passively affected by objects can increase our power and, thus, be good.[23] Second, the reading suggests that an ethically ideal human would have no sensations, since they arise from our passivity to external things, a conclusion which has been criticized as patently absurd.[24] Third, the notion that all passivity is harmful has been criticized on ethical grounds as constituting an inhumane intolerance of weakness and vulnerability. Thus, Nussbaum claims that, for Spinoza, "passive dependence checks and inhibits our very being, which is a project of seeking our own flourishing. For Spinoza, in effect, the very humanness of life is a problem to be solved."[25]

While Spinoza is obviously concerned with the ways that passive emotions can harm us and our freedom, he says nothing to indicate that the passions, as a category, are necessarily bad, opposed to our virtue or freedom.[26] He claims only that our virtue consists in our activity, which

[19] It is very common to draw this conclusion in passing, for instance, see Sandler (2005, 73). The view is central to James' reading of Spinoza (see, for instance, 1993, 298–9; 2009, 223–4). While LeBuffe admits that the passions can have some value, he regards it as minimal, amounting to combating competing passions (2010, 19–21). The view is also held in a less explicit way by those who argue that the model of human nature is the free man, since this entails that Spinoza's ethics asks us to become perfectly active, having no passive affects. The most notable dissenters are Goldenbaum (2004) and Moreau (1994), who argues that Spinoza leaves an important role to experience as a necessary supplement to reason.

[20] See Smith (2003, 7), Irwin (2008, 191), Broad (1930, 30) and Bidney (1940, 300).

[21] See Levene (2004, xi), Youpa (2010a, 75).

[22] Spinoza's view on the value of experience is documented in Moreau (1994) and Curley (1973a).

[23] For this reason, Hoffman (1991) and LeBuffe (2009) regard Spinoza's view on the possibility of passive joy as a problem that must be solved. Kisner (2008) responds.

[24] This is Bennett's reason for arguing that Spinoza's theory of freedom is incoherent (1984, 324–6).

[25] Nussbaum (2003, 502).

[26] The closest Spinoza comes to such a claim is in 4pref: "man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself,

is consistent with the view that certain kinds of passivity can be good in the sense that they are conditions for our activity or help to promote our activity. On the contrary, focusing on Spinoza's view of freedom makes clear that he did not regard passivity or the passions as wholly negative. Spinoza defines freedom as being self-caused, which implies that no creature except God can be completely free. Consequently, in order to make sense of Spinoza's ethical claims about freedom, we must read his ethics as concerned with a distinct category of human freedom, the greatest degree of activity and self-determination achievable by us. This category of human freedom necessarily involves a degree of passivity in virtue of our nature as finite things, which necessarily depend on and are passive to external things. On this reading, achieving the ethical aim of freedom requires us to eliminate only the kinds of passivity and passions that harm our power. In fact, this aim requires us actually to increase other kinds of passivity, those which are required for and promote human activity. These include not only sensation, but also food, shelter and the friendship of rational people, since being passively affected by them leads us to imitate their behaviors. Along these lines, Chapter 10 shows that we develop the virtuous character largely through channeling our social tendency to imitate others. Furthermore, Chapter 9 argues that passive or inadequate ideas, on Spinoza's view, play an indispensable, positive role in practical and moral reasoning, allowing us to interpret and apply reason's practical directives and indicating morally salient features of practical situations, such as our own degree of perfection. In this way, my reading shows that Spinoza not only tolerates certain kinds of human passivity, but also embraces them as contributing positively to a life of freedom. Indeed, Spinoza identifies our highest good with the love of God, which amounts to a recognition of how our existence and powers depend on other things, as Chapter 7 argues.

Third, my reading shows that there is greater cross-pollination between Spinoza's ethics and politics than is often recognized. Prima facie one would expect these projects to be closely connected, since Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* and the *Theological-Political Treatise* at roughly the same time. Spinoza's circle and wider audience certainly regarded his radical politics as buttressed by his deeper metaphysical commitments. However, following the

but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse." However, the passage argues that our bondage consists not in merely *having* affects or passions, but rather in being so subject to them that one is unable to control himself. On this view, the passions do not lead us into bondage unless they render us unable to control ourselves. Since reason is essential to our nature, as I will argue, this entails that the passions are only harmful when they direct us contrary to reason.

therapy reading tends to obscure the connection between the two projects, because it regards the ethics as primarily aiming to help rationally disposed people to eradicate false beliefs. Since Spinoza's politics is concerned with managing the masses, people who are generally too irrational to respond to – or, even, to be interested in – such assistance, this reading suggests that the ethics and politics have different aims and audiences, a conclusion which partly explains the unfortunate tendency to focus on only one set of writings, without considering how they illuminate one another.[27] This way of thinking has led some scholars to conclude that these projects are concerned with different and even inconsistent notions of freedom: the ethics aspires for the positive freedom that comes from liberating ourselves from the passions, whereas the politics aims for negative freedom in the sense of less restrictive political conditions. These two notions clearly cannot be equivalent since only the former requires rationality, whereas the latter is possible for even the passionate multitude.[28]

Focusing on freedom, however, illuminates the important connections between Spinoza's ethics and politics. While it is true that the politics is uniquely concerned with managing the inevitably irrational segment of the population, the works are unified by a common concern with helping people to attain freedom. Moreover, the projects are connected by a common conception of freedom, for Spinoza's politics aims to promote not freedom in the negative sense of an absence of government interference, but rather the positive, ethical freedom that comes from becoming more rational and, thus, virtuous citizens. In support of this view, Chapter 11 argues that Spinoza defends democracy on the grounds that citizens' participation in the activity of the state promotes their rationality. While Spinoza recognizes that not all people can become rational, he nevertheless advocates political measures that encourage rationality for all, from the most enlightened to the most brutish. Consequently, part of the task of Spinoza's political philosophy is to provide precisely the same sort of practical guidance as his ethics, indicating how to act in order to become free. It follows that political freedom is a subset of freedom generally; politics

[27] The claim that Spinoza's ethics and politics have fundamentally different aims in this sense is defended by Sacksteder (1975, 122) and Smith (1997, 11). The notion that the two projects are concerned with different populations, who have different capabilities and ambitions, is upheld by Smith (1997, 143; 2003, 6) and Yovel (1989b, 108). Strauss represents the most extreme version of this view, arguing that Spinoza's political writing cannot be read literally, since it is targeted at an audience that Spinoza regards as incapable of understanding his true views (1952, Chapter 5, especially 177–200).

[28] This view is defended by Sorrell (2008, 156–7). Prokhovnik similarly supposes that Spinoza distinguishes personal freedom from political liberty (2004, 203–8).

is just one particular venue in which we can become self-determined and rational.

In addition to helping us understand Spinoza, my reading helps us to better appreciate the relevance of his views for ongoing philosophical discussion. In pursuing this line of argument, this book runs contrary to a recent trend in the history of philosophy – particularly of epistemology, metaphysics and natural philosophy – to shy away from considering how historical figures speak to contemporary concerns.[29] Part of the reason for this trend is the concern that such work imposes anachronistic concepts and categories, thereby distorting historical work. To address this concern, we should recognize at the outset that philosophical questions are framed with respect to a background of historically particular concerns and assumptions, such that the questions addressed by philosophers of the past are rarely the same as ours today. However, this recognition does not threaten the possibility of constructing a dialogue between current and historical philosophy. On the contrary, it makes the possibility of dialogue more appealing, since we stand to learn at least as much from the different ways that philosophical questions have been framed as we do from the way they have been answered. The history of philosophy reveals ways of thinking that, while once taken for granted, often appear surprising and original today. Conversely, history challenges us to see our own historical circumstances through the eyes of another, leading us to rethink views that we have taken for granted. In this way, history provides us with a fresh perspective over our own concerns and problems. The ongoing contributions of Aristotle, Hume and Kant to contemporary ethics provide familiar examples of how productive such dialogue can be.

I should be clear, however, that in aspiring to engage in, or, at least, to pave the way for such a dialogue with Spinoza's views on freedom, I do not aim to defend them in a robust sense. Doing so would require answering the most serious objections to Spinoza's views, showing that they can defend our deepest commitments and evaluating them with respect to other approaches, all given the standards of contemporary philosophy. I am in no position to take up such a task, if for no other reason, because Spinoza's ethical theory is too poorly understood for me to be able to take up this task without becoming mired in exegesis. Rather, I aim to do something that is a necessary preliminary to taking up such a project, to draw our attention to Spinoza's most promising views. Showing that his views are promising means considering their particular strengths in

[29] For a sympathetic explanation of this trend, see Garber (2001, Chapter 1).

withstanding common objections or how they might compare favorably with other approaches, given the concerns of philosophers today. However, I only intend to conclude from such consideration that Spinoza's view is worthy of greater attention or that it cannot be as easily dismissed as one might think, not that it is true or right.

Furthermore, I do not aim to construct a dialogue with Spinoza that considers all of the many ways that his work might speak to philosophy today – and there are many, from political philosophy to environmental ethics. Rather, the book is concerned narrowly with Spinoza's contributions to contemporary discussions of autonomy – our concept that most approximates to Spinoza's freedom – taking a wide view of the work on autonomy from both political philosophy and ethics.[30] There are a number of prima facie reasons why Spinoza's thoughts on this subject would be of particular interest. Our views on autonomy are indebted to the modern period, which witnessed an increased commitment to the value of autonomy.[31] Recent historical work has shown that Spinoza played a central role in shaping and articulating this commitment, which has only become more important today.[32] This point may be overlooked because Spinoza's view is ostensibly a theory of freedom and it has recently become customary to distinguish freedom from other notions of self-determination, such as autonomy. Recognizing the connection between Spinoza's freedom and autonomy shows that he was the only philosopher of the modern period, aside from Kant, to put the notion of autonomy at the center of his philosophy, treating autonomy as the thing of greatest value to humans and the *raison d'être* for the state. Spinoza's treatment of these issues is particularly relevant today because it aims to capture a number of commitments that have become more prominent in the intervening centuries: he was a causal determinist and a thoroughgoing naturalist, holding that practical norms arise from

[30] Spinoza's contributions to this topic have not received much attention. The only sustained treatment of autonomy in the modern period, Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy* (1998), treats Spinoza as one in a long series of minor figures working towards Kant's achievement, the title of the book. While much recent work in political theory is attentive to how Spinoza's philosophy speaks to us today, it does not focus on his view of autonomy.

[31] This is evident from the rise of the now ubiquitous notion that people should have a say in the decisions that affect them. While this change can be felt in nearly every aspect of our culture, it is particularly evident in politics. In the seventeenth century, the notion that common people should participate in governance was considered absurd; even the most ardent defenders of democracy conceded that most people were too lazy or stupid to be trusted with such responsibility. By the eighteenth century, however, it was argued that people should have a say in government, regardless of their qualifications or abilities, simply because its actions affect their lives.

[32] A thorough and compelling case for Spinoza's influence is offered by Israel (2001). Spinoza's intellectual descendants are considered in Yovel (1989b). In contrast, Schneewind offers a less rosy assessment of Spinoza's influence (1998, 225), as does Prokhovnik (2004, 237–46).

human desires; he rejected the notion of a personal God and teleological explanations of the natural world and he held remarkably progressive views on politics, being one of the first modern figures to defend democracy.

What, then, according to my reading, does Spinoza have to teach us about autonomy? Most importantly, Spinoza provides us with a promising and largely unexamined strategy for thinking about autonomy. Throughout modern philosophy, freedom concepts, such as autonomy, have been important to ethics because they are regarded as conditions for moral responsibility. It follows that freedom is constitutive of our ability to act in ways that make us subject to moral evaluation, that is, of our moral agency. Freedom is valuable, on this view, for the same reason as our agency, because it is a condition for our membership in the moral community and, in this respect, the ground for moral obligations. This line of reasoning is most powerfully articulated by Kantian ethics, which regards our agency as the thing of greatest value and the ultimate basis for moral requirements. Spinoza, however, steers clear of this tradition by rejecting the notion that freedom and autonomy are conditions for moral responsibility. Since he understands human freedom as attained by acting in accordance with reason, it is rare and difficult to attain, not something possessed by all competent, responsible agents. Rather, Spinoza understands freedom within the context of his broadly eudaimonistic ethics, according to which freedom is equally important, but for entirely different reasons: because it is a necessary component of our virtue. For Spinoza, both virtue and freedom fundamentally involve one's activity, acting from one's own power. In this way, freedom and autonomy are essentially connected to Spinoza's broader ethical goal of leading a good life, that is, a life planned for attaining happiness.

This alternative strategy for conceiving of autonomy is interesting for two main reasons. First, it articulates approximations of hallmark Kantian claims about the moral significance of autonomy within an entirely different philosophical framework. Kant is influential in contemporary ethics largely because he provides a means of articulating and defending the moral value of autonomy. While he is often upheld as an alternative to utilitarianism on the grounds that he conceives of morality in terms of laws and duties, this commitment by itself is not novel, since the natural law tradition had long conceived of morality along these lines. Rather, Kant's distinctive achievement is identifying our autonomy with the self-legislation involved in directing oneself in accordance with the moral law. My reading shows that Spinoza's ethics comes far closer to capturing this Kantian claim than is usually recognized. This is because Spinoza holds

that we become free and autonomous by following reason's practical prescriptions or natural laws, which look much like conventional moral laws; Chapter 6 argues that Spinoza's natural laws amount to universal and, to some extent, impartial practical principles.[33] The similarity to Kant's view is particularly close because Spinoza's view of the natural law eliminates the religious and theological suppositions with which such theories are usually bound up.[34]

Spinoza also goes some way toward capturing the Kantian claim that autonomy is the foundation for morality (with the qualification that Spinoza is entitled to a weaker conception of morality than Kant). Since Spinoza's ethics is eudaimonistic, he justifies ethical prescriptions on the grounds that they contribute to our good. Our good, in turn, is closely connected to our autonomy, for being autonomous means acting from our own power and the good is simply what promotes our power. Consequently, we can say that Spinoza also justifies ethical prescriptions on the grounds that they promote our autonomy. Furthermore, Spinoza holds that autonomy is the foundation of morality, in a deeper and more Kantian sense, because he holds that we are only able to recognize the natural law by exercising reason, in which our autonomy consists. In other words, we can only become moral, in the sense of following the natural law, by becoming autonomous. Thus, Spinoza's ethics conceives this, an intuitively appealing Kantian claim within the framework of eudaimonism and a secular theory of natural law.

There is a second way that Spinoza's approach to autonomy is interesting to philosophy today. Because he regards autonomy as an ethical goal rather than an intrinsic property of moral agents, Spinoza attends to the social and political conditions for autonomy, and this in two ways. First, he attends to the social and political conditions for developing autonomy. Spinoza understands individual agents as collections of ideas representing their bodies and their causal histories.[35] As such, we acquire our ideas primarily from our experiences with other things, particularly people, since we have a psychological tendency to mirror the ideas of those things that we represent

[33] Relatedly, Chapter 7 argues that Spinoza justifies altruism or benevolence on the basis of intellectual love, which requires a kind of respect for others in the sense of recognizing their value, independently of deliberating about how to act.

[34] This distinguishes Spinoza's theory of natural law from more Kantian contemporary theories of natural law; see Rhonheimer's (2000).

[35] My claim here may be controversial because it entails that all of our ideas are ultimately traceable to ideas of experience, in other words, inadequate ideas. Chapter 1 defends this claim by arguing that we cannot have any strictly adequate ideas. According to this view, when Spinoza claims that we can have adequate ideas he means that we can have ideas that are as adequate as humanly possible.

as being like ourselves. It follows that we acquire many of our ideas – and consequently our beliefs and behaviors – from those around us. On this picture, whether we develop reason and, thereby, become autonomous depends, to a large extent, on having certain sorts of interactions and relationships with others and, consequently, on the broader social and political conditions that structure and determine these interactions.

Second, Spinoza attends to the social and political conditions for not only developing autonomy but also being autonomous. He holds that our autonomy consists in following reason, which places ethical demands on our interactions with others, for instance, that we act for their benefit. One might be tempted to construe this requirement in a purely psychological way as requiring only that we choose our actions by considering others. However, Spinoza's famous parallelism doctrine identifies psychological processes with bodily movements, such that our reasoning about others cannot be distinguished from our bodily interactions with them. Since our rationality requires interacting with others in particular ways, it follows that our autonomy does as well. Consequently, our autonomy depends upon whether the prevailing social and political conditions permit or encourage such interaction. Both of these points are evident in Spinoza's politics, according to which the state is created for the purpose of promoting and protecting people's freedom and, thus, their autonomy, as Chapter 11 argues. To help the state achieve this aim, Spinoza's politics explains precisely how the state should be constituted and conducted to promote the rationality of its citizen's.

By conceiving of autonomy in this way, Spinoza provides a refreshing alternative to contemporary philosophical accounts of autonomy, which have been primarily concerned to determine the psychological processes by which one acts in a way that is genuinely self-determined. While Spinoza's theory of autonomy attends to such psychological processes, it is more attentive to their social and political context. Moreover, Spinoza's theory is also concerned with nonpsychological aspects of our antonomy, such as social and political requirements and threats to our autonomy. In this way, Spinoza's view is more friendly to a view of autonomy, developed by recent feminists, as relational, in other words, partly constituted by our relationships with others.[36] This view is justified partly by the notion that our identities are determined socially, through our relationships with others and the roles that we play in communities. For if our identities are formed socially, then acting in accordance with our identities, in other

[36] For an overview of this approach, see Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000).

words, being genuinely self-directed or autonomous, requires that we play certain social roles, a conclusion upheld not only by feminists but also by communitarians and others. Consequently, understanding autonomy – that is, understanding what it means to be autonomous, as well as identifying and diagnosing threats to our autonomy – requires us to consider the broader social and political context. Spinoza's view of autonomy is interesting, then, because it provides a framework for this more relational approach to autonomy.

Of course, so far I have offered nothing more than a sketch of my main claims. The case for them emerges over the coming chapters. The organization of this book will strike some readers as unusual. Nearly all philosophical studies of Spinoza follow the progress of the *Ethics*, first analyzing the central metaphysical apparatus before considering his psychology, then ethics and, finally, politics. This approach is unhelpful for my purposes, since I aim to focus on Spinoza's practical philosophy, which comes later in the *Ethics* and in other texts. So, while I understand that Spinoza's ethics is fundamentally based in his metaphysics, I want to avoid spending several chapters setting up the metaphysical issues and tracing Spinoza's long progress to the relevant issues. Consequently and instead, the book begins by explaining Spinoza's theory of freedom, what it is and why it matters, drawing on his entire corpus. To this end, Chapter 1 considers Spinoza's basic conception of freedom and defends two main claims, that human freedom, unlike perfect freedom, necessarily involves a degree of passivity and that being free is identical to being rational or, in Spinoza's terms, having adequate ideas. Chapter 2 goes on to consider Spinoza's arguments for conceiving of freedom in this way, while Chapter 3 considers how, for Spinoza, this conception of freedom is related to other concepts, autonomy and responsibility. Chapter 4 explains why freedom is valuable by considering its place in Spinoza's ethics. The chapter argues that Spinoza upholds an eudaimonistic conception of ethics as indicating the value of various goods so that we may plan our lives for attaining our highest good. Freedom is ethically important, on this picture, because it is identical to virtue and, consequently, provides the measure by which we determine the value of goods.

With this account of freedom in place, the rest of the book examines its practical implications, the nature of free action and a free life. Since we become free by acting rationally, the next three chapters take up this examination by considering Spinoza's claims about reason's practical guidance. Since reason, for Spinoza, directs us to action by indicating the value of various goods, understanding reason's practical guidance requires us to

consider his theory of the good, including what he regards as good and how we can use reason to identify the good; this is the subject of the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter considers reason's practical guidance for attaining the good, which is contained in Spinoza's account of the natural law. The seventh chapter focuses on the most important natural law, that we should act with benevolence. The chapter considers the justification for the law and how to square it with Spinoza's ethical egoism.

Once we understand reason's practical guidance, the final chapters consider how this guidance is put into practice in a life of freedom. It is critically important to distinguish this as a separate question, because a free human life cannot be purely rational and, thus, not lived entirely on the basis of reason's guidance. Indeed, Chapter 6 argues that human reason is limited, such that its practical directives are too general to admit univocal interpretation. Consequently, understanding a life in accordance with such directives requires us to consider the necessarily nonrational and passive ways that we navigate practical situations. This important point is obscured by the common assumption that Spinoza offers a picture of the free life in his account of the free man. Since the free man is a perfectly rational being, this assumption suggests that Spinoza understands the free life as one of perfect reason, without attending to the ways that we are nonrational and passive. Consequently, I begin the final part of the book by arguing, against this assumption, that the free man should not be read as Spinoza's model of human nature. Chapter 9 then considers the precise role for passivity in a free life, arguing that passive or inadequate ideas, including the passions, play a positive role in practical reasoning, thereby contributing to our power and freedom. The final two chapters provide a more concrete picture of a free life. The textual basis for this picture is primarily Spinoza's account of the virtuous character, the subject of Chapter 10, which explains what it means for humans, given their necessary passivity, to act rationally. The final chapter considers what Spinoza's politics tells us about a life of freedom. It argues that human freedom involves democratic participation in political life. The chapter concludes that Spinoza's view of autonomy as depending on social and political conditions is friendly to recent relational views of autonomy.

CHAPTER 1

Freedom as rationality

While the notion of freedom plays a central role in Spinoza's philosophy, it is far from obvious how he understands it. A first interpretive difficulty is understanding the unity of Spinoza's claims about freedom. Whereas Part 1 of the *Ethics* defines freedom in metaphysical terms as being the cause of one's own existence and actions, the later text treats freedom as equivalent to the ethical goal of mastering one's emotions. But it is not clear how mastering the emotions involves being free in the sense of self-caused. A second difficulty is understanding the consistency of Spinoza's claims about freedom. Defining freedom as self-caused implies that only God can be free, a conclusion Spinoza openly accepts. On the other hand, since his ethics promises to help us attain freedom, without giving any indication that this is an unrealistic goal, he also seems to hold that we can attain freedom, in some sense. How, then, do we reconcile these apparently incompatible claims about the possibility of human freedom? This chapter explains Spinoza's basic conception of freedom, which means coming to terms with these difficulties.

This investigation leads me to two main conclusions, which are important to the coming chapters. The first is Spinoza's identification of freedom with rationality. While philosophers have long connected freedom and rationality, Spinoza does so on distinctive metaphysical grounds by conceiving of reason as having what he calls adequate ideas, which are caused by our own essential power or *conatus*, in other words, ideas of which we are the sole or adequate cause. It follows that using reason entails being free in the sense of causing one's own ideas. In fact, it follows that rationality and freedom are actually equivalent: since human beings, understood at the mental level, are ultimately made up of ideas, being the cause of one's own ideas just means being the cause of oneself, understood at the mental level. The second conclusion is that the ethical goal of human freedom should not be understood as freedom in the strict sense of Spinoza's definition. Since freedom is defined as self-causation, only God can be free in

this sense. Consequently, we should understand the goal of Spinoza's ethics as approximating the standard set by the definition, that is, becoming as self-determining as possible.

After explaining Spinoza's definition of freedom and its motivation in the first section, the second section addresses the first interpretive difficulty. The section shows how Spinoza's definition is connected to his later claims about freedom by explaining his identification of freedom with rationality. Turning to the second interpretive difficulty, the third section argues that Spinoza's claims are consistent if we carefully distinguish between a few senses of 'freedom.' The section concludes that humans can only attain freedom in a limited sense. The final section addresses a potential problem with my reading. If freedom is equivalent to having adequate ideas, then Spinoza's claims about the possibility of freedom ought to be consistent with his claims about the possibility of having adequate ideas. Yet Spinoza denies the possibility of human freedom while arguing that humans can have adequate ideas. The section concludes that Spinoza only admits the possibility of humans having adequate ideas in a limited sense, corresponding to the limited degree of freedom available to humans.

1.1 FREEDOM AS SELF-DETERMINATION

To understand Spinoza's view of freedom, we should begin with his definition:

> That thing is said to be free [*liber*] which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. (1def7)[1]

The definition may strike some readers as strange, because it claims that free actions arise from necessity, which rules out the common notion that freedom consists in or requires a lack of causal determination. According to Spinoza's view, *whether* our actions are causally determined has no bearing on whether we are free; in other words, our freedom is compatible with causal determinism.[2] Rather, our freedom is a matter of *how* our actions are determined, by internal or external causes, since the definition states that things are free when they are self-determined, more specifically, the sole cause of their own actions. In fact, the definition stipulates that a free thing is the sole cause of not only its own actions, but also its own existence,

[1] Spinoza offered the same definition in letter 58 to Schuller.

[2] While Spinoza is a compatibilist, he does not think that causal determinism is entirely irrelevant to our freedom, since he argues that accepting the necessity of all things contributes to our freedom by promoting our understanding (2p44c2; 3p49d).

existing "solely from the necessity of its own nature." In other words, a free thing is entirely self-caused.

While the next chapter will consider Spinoza's arguments for conceiving of freedom in this way, at this point I should at least say something about his motivation, much of which comes from his metaphysical commitments. Unlike Descartes, who distinguished two kinds of substance, mental substances (which are essentially thinking) and bodily substances (which are essentially extended), Spinoza admits only one substance, God, whose essence is infinite power (1def6; 1p34). Finite things, bodies and minds, do not qualify as substances, for Spinoza, because they are not causally independent, as a substance should be (1def3). Spinoza's substance monism leads him to two commitments that shape his thinking about freedom, the first of which is causal determinism. Spinoza upholds a rationalist conception of causality, according to which causal relationships imply relationships of logical entailment: if *A* causes *B*, then fully understanding *A* provides grounds for deriving or deducing *B*. It follows that *A* also renders *B* necessary in the same way that the premises of a valid argument render their conclusion necessary. Consequently, claiming that all finite things are causally dependent implies that they are also necessarily determined: "all things are determined from the necessity of the divine nature not only to exist but also to act in a definite way" (1p29d). Indeed, even Spinoza's God is necessarily determined by his own essence (1p17s).[3] Given this way of thinking, it is unsurprising that Spinoza regards freedom as compatible with causal determinism; otherwise, no thing, not even God, would be free.

The second commitment is Spinoza's distinctive understanding of finite things. Since all things are causally dependent on God, Spinoza distinguishes finite things not by their causal independence, but rather by the particular way that they express God's essence or power. More specifically, the essence of any finite thing is its particular power, what Spinoza calls its *conatus*, its striving or endeavor to persist in existence and increase its power (3p7). Although Spinoza uses '*potentia*' to refer to our power, he does not understand power as a potential or capacity, something contained but untapped, like the power in a battery. Thinking of power as a capacity suggests that I have the power to do any number of things that I do not do, such as jump off a ten-story building or stay up all night grading papers. Spinoza could not accept such a view because of his commitment to what is

[3] In other words, Spinoza does not regard God as free in a libertarian sense. Thus, Spinoza rejects the Cartesian view that God possesses an "absolute will" or undetermined will (1p17s; 1p32c2).

usually referred to as the "*conatus* doctrine," the view that a thing's activity necessarily promotes its power.[4] According to this view, it is not possible for a thing to check, decrease or limit its own power. Rather, any such restriction on a thing's power must arise from the power of some external thing. It follows that if one's power fails to bring about a particular effect, this is not because the power is stored and unused, like a battery, but rather because one's power is countered in some way by the power of another thing. In other words, every thing at every moment expresses its power as much as possible; we do not have the power to do anything, except what we actually do. In this respect, our power amounts to the same thing as our activity, which explains Spinoza's tendency to equate 'power' with 'power of activity' (*potentia agendi*).

This way of conceiving finite things leads Spinoza to a distinctive conception of the natural world. God's power is expressed in infinite essential properties or attributes, which, in turn, are each expressed in an infinite series of finite modes. All finite things, then, are part of this infinite, determined series. Since each finite thing expresses God's power through its *conatus*, the infinite series of modes can be understood as the interplay between individual powers, striving to act on one another according to their particular natures, while also maintaining their own integrity in the face of competing forces. According to this picture, all finite things have a particular "life cycle": they come into existence as the effect of some other finite power, then struggle to maintain themselves, both aided and hindered by the effects of other finite things, before their power is eventually overwhelmed and they are annihilated. For instance, human beings emerge from the power of their parents, their bodies and passions, even from the power of the earth and other celestial bodies to generate the appropriate conditions for life. We struggle against the forces of gravity, speeding cars and the degrading effects of ultraviolet radiation, until we are inevitably unable to maintain the form necessary for life and our bodies become corpses and then dust. Given this way of thinking, it is natural to conceive of freedom as successfully struggling against opposing external forces, in other words, as acting from one's own power and, thereby, maintaining one's integrity.

To appreciate fully the motivation for Spinoza's definition of freedom, we must also look beyond his metaphysics to the broader history of theorizing about freedom. The notion of freedom as self-determination has its roots in an ancient tradition: the Greek *eleutheria*, like the Romans' *liber*, was

[4] For a more thorough discussion of the *conatus* doctrine, its basis and implications, see Garrett (2002).

foremost a political term, describing the distinction between a citizen and a slave. The political distinction concerned whether one is under his own authority, or the authority of another. Thus, the digest to Roman law defines a free man as *sui iuris*, one who is under his own jurisdiction.[5] However, the term was used metaphorically to refer to a variety of properties held by citizens: the ability to participate in public life, being answerable for one's own actions, self-ownership. At the root of these metaphors is the general notion that freedom amounts to directing or determining oneself. In this sense of the term, the ancients said that a city is not free when it is ruled by a tyrant, who bends the city to his own needs and desires, rather than those of its people.[6] Epictetus also uses this sense of the term when he tells a wealthy man, twice consul that, ironically, he is a slave, since he is beholden to his peers and the demands of his position: "he who has all things in his power, as he desires is free; but he who may be restrained, or compelled, or hindered, or thrown into any condition against his will, is a slave."[7]

This ancient view of freedom was particularly relevant – loaded, even – in the context of the United Provinces during Spinoza's life.[8] This is because the ancient view was a source of inspiration to republican theorists in the Netherlands and throughout Europe.[9] While the Netherlands was technically a republic, ruled by regents, local burgher aristocrats, it also had a centralized executive power in the form of the stadtholder, an office which, although technically appointed, had been passed dynastically through the House of Orange. Many Dutch were quite happy to see the House of Orange function like a king, if not to crown him outright.[10] The Netherlands functioned more like a true republic when William II of the House of Orange died, leaving only his infant son to serve as stadtholder. The republicans used this as an opportunity to secure their

[5] For the history of this concept of freedom, see Bobzien (1998, Chapter 7).

[6] Aquinas similarly claimed that to be governed for the benefit of one's ruler alone was to be treated as a slave, as discussed in Ryan (2003, 52).

[7] In *Of Freedom* (section 14), translation by Carter (1910), 212. The general notion of freedom as self-determination includes both the ability to act authentically and in accordance with one's will, notions that are usually distinguished today. So, while this passage more clearly articulates the latter, more Hobbesian way of thinking about freedom, it is still connected to the more general notion of determining oneself or being under one's own authority.

[8] For a more detailed account of how Spinoza's notion of freedom relates to his political context, see James (2009).

[9] My discussion of this period and the political circumstances relies heavily on Israel (2001). See also Nyden-Bullock (2007, Chapter 1) and Prokhovnik (2004).

[10] Though monarchy was sometimes seen as an instrument of foreign oppression, because of the legacy of Spanish rule.

power, refusing to appoint a new stadtholder, thereby allowing Johan DeWitt, the representative from the most powerful Dutch state, to assume de facto executive power.

DeWitt and his allies claimed to represent "true freedom," a phrase that became identified with the Dutch republican movement. In taking up the banner of freedom, DeWitt followed in the footsteps of English republicans, who tended to justify their views by appealing to the notion of freedom derived from Roman law: being one's own master, having the ability to govern oneself.[11] This definition was taken to imply that monarchies inherently harm freedom, because the monarch, simply in governing the state, interferes in the people's ability to govern themselves.[12] The opposing, conservative view conceived of freedom as liberties dispensed to subjects by the grace of the sovereign.[13] On this definition, it is conceptually incoherent to say that the monarch interferes in the liberty of subjects, since their liberties are just defined as whatever powers he grants them. DeWitt's notion of "true freedom" implicitly invoked the same reasoning used by English republicans: only popular sovereignties are free because they are governed according to the will and interests of the people.

Seen against this historical backdrop, Spinoza's definition of freedom as self-determination appears to stake out something of a pro-republican position in debates over popular sovereignty. It would be naive to suppose that Spinoza was unaware of the political implications of his definition. We must remember that he wrote the *Ethics* at roughly the same time as the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, a work that explicitly defends popular sovereignty and implicitly defends DeWitt's regime, to some extent. In particular, a central aim of the *TTP* is to defend toleration, that is, to show that "in a free commonwealth every man may think as he pleases and say what he thinks" (*TTP* 20). DeWitt, an accomplished *philosophe*, was naturally more sympathetic to the Remonstrants, reformers of Dutch Calvinism, who tended to be more intellectually and culturally liberal. Consequently, his true freedom included "freedom or toleration in and about the service and worship of God," which afforded greater intellectual freedom, particularly to Dutch Cartesians, who had endured some persecution from

[11] Sir Edward Coke and others drew on older Roman-influenced texts to make their points in parliament (Johnson and Cole 1977). The texts include Henry de Bracton's *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae* (1260) and Sir Thomas Littleton's fifteenth-century *Un Lyver de exposicion de parcel de les tenures*.

[12] As explained in Skinner (2003).

[13] For example, see Cowell (1607). While it is problematic to place Hobbes squarely in the conservative camp, his understanding of political freedom is consistent with that of the conservatives, for Hobbes defines the liberty of the subjects as whatever the sovereign permits (*L* 21: 6, 138).

Gomarist anti-Remonstrants.[14] Consequently, Spinoza's definition of freedom as self-determination should also be read as partly motivated by these political convictions, which are more explicitly defended in the *TTP*; the political dimension of freedom will be considered in Chapter 11 below.

1.2 THE FIRST DIFFICULTY: FREEDOM AND MASTERING THE EMOTIONS

With Spinoza's definition in view, we can consider the first interpretive difficulty, reconciling it with his eventual claims about freedom in Parts IV and V of the *Ethics*, which regard freedom as equivalent to mastering one's emotions.[15] For instance, 4pref suggests that freedom is equivalent to escaping the "bondage" of the emotions. He explains that such bondage amounts to being "unable to control and check" the emotions, being so "compelled" by them that he "is not his own master." Along these lines, Spinoza criticizes those who believe that freedom means obeying their lusts (5p41). He tells us that the mind's freedom consists in gaining power over the emotions (5p42s) and that we come to govern our emotions and appetites out of a love of freedom (5p10). In this respect, Spinoza's thinking about freedom in the later *Ethics* more clearly resembles his thinking about freedom in the early *Korte Verhandeling van God* (*KV*), where he claims that true freedom comes from possessing the knowledge that there are no devils, which frees us from passions of fear (II, 26).[16]

How, then, is mastering one's emotions connected to self-causation? It is important to recognize that mastering the emotions, for Spinoza, means gaining specifically *rational* control over them, in other words, governing the emotions in accordance with reason. Summarizing his claims in Part V, Spinoza claims that controlling the emotions provides us with "the freedom of the mind," which is the freedom possessed by "the wise" or rational people (5p42s). He tells us that the true freedom of man is "related to strength of mind [*fortitudo*]" (4p73s), which is "attributable to the mind

[14] This is according to Pieter de la Court's *The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland* (1972), which aims to defend the true freedom platform; the quote is from the title of Book I, chapter 14.

[15] It is common to emphasize this notion of freedom in Spinoza. For instance, Smith claims that freedom consists in understanding the passions (1997, Chapter 5).

[16] I should acknowledge here an important difference between the *KV* and the *Ethics*: the latter no longer argues that we have complete power to follow reason (5pref). Nevertheless, the *Ethics* draws on the same notion of freedom as controlling harmful emotions by improving the intellect. For a helpful overview of the development of Spinoza's metaphysical views between the works, see Nyden-Bullock (2007).

in virtue of its understanding" (4p59s). Most decisively, he claims that "to live by the guidance of reason . . . is to become free men" (4p54s).[17] These claims indicate that the "bondage" described in 4pref is not bondage to the emotions per se, but rather the bondage of being led by irrational emotions.[18] According to this view, mastering the emotions requires rational self-governance; in fact, Spinoza indicates that mastering the emotions contributes to our freedom precisely because it involves rationality. Consequently, we can understand how mastering the emotions contributes to our self-determination by explaining how rationality does so.

I should point out here that there is an intuitive connection between rationality and self-determination, an intuition that has been present throughout the history of philosophy and which stands independently of Spinoza's particular commitments. To draw out the intuition, consider the fact that reason often forces us to conclusions and actions that we do not desire. Indeed, because of this tendency, the Stoics described the action of reason as grabbing us by the hair.[19] If reason can determine our will contrary to our desires, then it might seem to be as much of a threat to our self-determination as external forces that determine our will contrary to our preferences; imagine a nefarious hypnotist, who implants a suggestion, without my knowledge, forcing me to avoid my favorite flavor of ice cream. The intuition, however, counters that reason's power to determine the will does not threaten our self-determination. In support of this intuition, Wolf offers the example of two swimmers, who, on the basis of a reasoned examination, jump into a lake to save a drowning child.[20] Wolf asks us to suppose that one of the swimmers is compelled to act from reason, such that he could not have acted otherwise. Would he be any less free because his reason insisted, demanded, even forced him into the water, despite his fear and reservations? Her intuition is that the swimmer is no less free on this account; rather, we would say that he is particularly rational, conscientious or brave. Since an analogous external compulsion would clearly interfere in the swimmer's freedom – imagine that he was hypnotized to save the child – Wolf concludes that reason's inclinations are essential to us, such that following them is a case of self-determination. This seems right: determination by reason is different from determination

[17] The connection between freedom and the understanding helps us to understand other claims about freedom in Part v, such as the equation of freedom with blessedness (5pref, 5p33s, 5p36cs).

[18] Consequently, the freedom described in the later *Ethics* does not amount to an absence of emotions. I depart here from Irwin, who regards Spinoza's freedom as equivalent to "freedom from emotion" (2008, 190).

[19] As reported by Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, 7.253–60.

[20] See Wolf (1990), 59–61.

by an external force precisely because reason is essential to who we are, more essential even than our desires.

Although one could accept Spinoza's identification of reason with self-determination on such intuitive grounds, he offers a metaphysical justification for this claim by explaining rationality as consisting in literal self-causation, acting from our essential power or *conatus*.[21] To understand this point, we must say something more about Spinoza's theory of reason as having certain knowledge or adequate ideas (2p40c2). He defines an adequate idea as having "all the intrinsic characteristics of a true idea" (2def4). I take it that "intrinsic characteristics" refers to an idea's representational content, independent of its relationship to the object it represents, for instance, whether it corresponds with or is caused by its object.[22] Thus, an adequate idea has the same representational content as a true idea. Spinoza defines a true idea, in turn, as one that "agrees" or "corresponds with" its object (1ax6; 2p32), which amounts to representing its object. Since God's ideas contain all ideas, he represents all things, which entails that all of God's ideas are true (2p32) and adequate (2p36d). It follows that our idea of a thing is adequate when it has the same representational content as God's idea of the thing. In Spinoza's words: "When we say that there is in us an adequate and perfect idea, we are saying only this, that there is an adequate and perfect idea in God insofar as he constitutes the essence of our mind" (2p34d). In other words, our ideas are adequate when God's adequate ideas are contained in our mind (the part of God that "constitutes the essence of our mind").[23]

Now that we understand what adequate ideas are, how do they contribute to our self-determination? To answer this question, we must consider a few requirements for adequate ideas. Since our ideas are part of God's ideas, which are true and adequate, then it follows that our ideas are only false, confused or inadequate because they are incomplete, missing some representational content contained by God's ideas. This conclusion is supported by Spinoza's claim that falsity is a privation possessed by inadequate ideas because they are "fragmentary [*mutilatae*]" (2p35); "when

[21] For another explanation of the connection between reason and freedom, which is consistent with my own, see Giancotti (1990).

[22] Garrett (2003, 53) argues that intrinsic characteristics should be read in tandem with the *TdIE*, where he discusses intrinsic denominations.

[23] While our ideas are part of God's ideas, it does not follow that I conceive my ideas in the same way as God. On the contrary, God's ideas are always conceived adequately, whereas particular minds often conceive them inadequately or confusedly; "no ideas are confused or inadequate except in particular minds" (2p36d). In this respect, the adequacy of an idea is relative to the particular mind that conceives it. On this point, see Bennett (1984, 178) and Della Rocca (1996a, Chapter 3).

something in nature appears to us as ridiculous, absurd or evil, this is due to the fact that our knowledge is only partial, that we are largely ignorant of the order and coherence of the whole of nature" (*TTP* 16, 4). Our ideas are usually inadequate because they are missing a complete representation of their objects' causes. This point is evident in Spinoza's explanation for why we cannot have adequate ideas of any part of the body:

> The idea, or knowledge of each part [of the body] will be in God, insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing, a singular thing which is prior, in the order of Nature to the part itself . . . And so, the knowledge of each part composing the human body is in God insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things, and not insofar as he has only the idea of the human body, that is, the idea which constitutes the nature of the human mind. And so the human mind does not involve adequate knowledge of the parts composing the human body. (2p24d)

Spinoza claims here, basically, that our ideas are inadequate because they represent only the relevant part of the body, whereas God's true ideas also represent the "great many things" "prior in the order of nature" that act on and determine the part of the body, in other words, the causes of their objects. This claim indicates a first requirement for adequate ideas, that they provide complete representations of their objects' causes; call this the causal representation requirement.[24] The basis for the requirement is straightforward: Spinoza understands adequate ideas as providing us with knowledge (2p40s2; 2p41); since knowledge comprehends causes (1ax4), it follows that adequate ideas must represent the causes of their objects.[25] This is a steep requirement because it stipulates that adequate ideas represent not just their objects' causes, but also their causes, their causes' causes, and so on. This is because an idea could not provide knowledge of the causes of the object without also providing knowledge of their causes, which requires providing knowledge of their causes' causes, and so on. In other words, the requirement stipulates that adequate ideas represent all their objects' causal antecedents.

There is a second requirement for adequate ideas, one that has received less attention but is critical to understanding Spinoza's theory of freedom: in order for an idea to be adequate in our minds, we must be its adequate cause; call this the causal adequacy requirement. In order to understand the requirement and its basis, we must consider two other commitments. The first is Spinoza's conception of an adequate cause.

[24] For a more detailed discussion of the requirement, see Della Rocca (1996a, Chapter 4).
[25] See also letter 19.

I call that an adequate cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause. I call that an inadequate or partial cause whose effect cannot be understood through the said cause alone. (3def1)

Since Spinoza holds that understanding a thing requires understanding its causal antecedents, the fact that an effect can be understood ("clearly and distinctly perceived") through some cause implies that the cause is the only causal antecedent of the effect. Consequently, the definition stipulates that an adequate cause is the only or sole causal antecedent of an effect, while an inadequate cause is a partial cause of an effect.

The second commitment is Spinoza's parallelism doctrine. According to 1p16, God's infinite power entails that there exists an infinite chain of causes expressed through an infinite number of attributes or essential properties, though we only know the attributes of thought and extension. The parallelism doctrine concerns the relationships between these attributes, asserting that "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (2p7). In other words, the causal relations that hold among the modes of an attribute, such as extension, are mirrored by the modes of the attribute of thought. Spinoza takes this to imply an identity relationship between the modes of the various attributes: "Consequently, thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing" (2p7s). According to this passage, parallelism also stipulates that ideas represent the bodies to which they are identical. It follows that for every body there exists an idea representing it.

With these commitments in view, we can now consider the argument for the causal adequacy requirement. The argument takes the form of a conditional proof: if we assume that we have an adequate idea of some thing, then it follows that we are also the adequate cause of that idea.

(1) We have an adequate idea representing some body *A* (assume).
(2) Our mind represents (or contains the ideas of) *A*'s causal antecedents (from [1] by the causal representation requirement).
(3) *A*'s causal antecedents are the adequate cause of *A* (the definition of an adequate cause).
(4) Ideas stand in the same causal relationships as the bodies they represent (parallelism).
(5) Our ideas representing *A*'s causal antecedents are the adequate cause of our idea *A* (from [3] and [4]).
(6) If we have an adequate idea of *A*, then we are the adequate cause of that idea (from [1] through [5] by conditional proof).

It may be helpful to put the argument in more natural language: according to the causal representation requirement, having an adequate idea entails having the ideas of its causal antecedents. Given the definition of an adequate cause, the causal antecedents of a thing are its sole and, thus, adequate cause. So, the requirement stipulates that we have ideas of the adequate causes of the things we represent. Parallelism dictates that our ideas stand in the same causal relationships as the bodies they represent, which entails that our ideas of the adequate causes of things are themselves adequate causes of our ideas. Consequently, if we have an adequate idea, then we also contain the idea's causal antecedents. In this respect, we are the causal antecedent and, thus, the adequate cause of our adequate ideas, a conclusion which is implied by the moniker "*adequate* idea."[26]

The requirement basically stipulates that we bring about adequate ideas from our own ideas and, thus, our own powers. In other words, calling an idea "adequate" says something not just about its epistemic adequacy, whether it qualifies as knowledge, but also about our activity in conceiving the idea. Spinoza asserts this requirement when he equates having an adequate idea with being causally active: "insofar as [the human mind] has adequate ideas it is necessarily active, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily passive" (3p1). To appreciate the significance of this point, it is helpful to consider an opposing way of thinking, upheld by Descartes, who distinguishes conceiving ideas – in other words, understanding – from one's causal activity. This is evident from his claim that we have an idea of God, though we cannot be the cause of this idea, since it has infinite objective reality and, thus, can only be caused by God (CSM II, 31). According to this view, we can understand an idea, even clearly and distinctly, although the idea is caused by something external to us and, thus, we are passive with respect to it. For Spinoza, in contrast, understanding and activity go hand in hand, since understanding an idea implies that we contain its causal antecedents and, thus, that it comes about from our own ideas and powers. Thus, when he defines ideas as conceptions of the mind, he qualifies that "I say 'conception' rather than 'perception' because the

[26] As the reader may notice, this argument shows only that the causal adequacy requirement holds for ideas representing bodies. On this basis, one might think that the requirement does not hold for all of our ideas, which also represent other things, such as attributes. In fact, 2p7 stipulates ideas not just for bodies, but for all things. While there certainly exist ideas of things other than bodies, I will argue shortly that all human ideas, according to Spinoza, represent bodies, specifically our own bodies (2p13). According to this view, our ideas represent other things, external bodies, attributes, essences and other ideas by representing the body. It follows that the causal adequacy requirement holds for all human ideas.

term perception seems to indicate that the mind is passive to its object, whereas conception seems to express an activity of the mind" (2def3ex).

With the causal adequacy requirement in view, we can now explain how rationality contributes to our freedom, as it is defined in 1def7. The reasoning goes as follows: the causal adequacy requirement shows that using reason, having adequate ideas, amounts to being an adequate cause of one's ideas. According to Spinoza's parallelism, all things are expressed, at the mental level, as ideas. It follows that humans, understood at the mental level, are made up of ideas. Consequently, being the adequate cause of one's own ideas is equivalent to being the adequate cause of oneself, understood at the mental level. Being an adequate cause of oneself, in turn, is equivalent to being free. In fact, Spinoza's definitions of an adequate cause and freedom stipulate an analytic connection between them: freedom is defined as being the sole cause of oneself and an adequate cause is defined as a sole cause; in other words, being free is equivalent to being an adequate cause of oneself. It follows that freedom, understood at the mental level, is equivalent to having adequate ideas, since this is just the mental expression of being an adequate cause of oneself and, thus, free. In light of this discussion, we can see the connection between freedom in the sense of self-caused and mastering the emotions: we master the emotions by using reason, which is equivalent to being the cause of oneself.

1.3 THE SECOND DIFFICULTY: THREE SENSES OF FREEDOM

We may now turn to the second difficulty, Spinoza's apparently inconsistent claims about the possibility of freedom. On one hand, he promises, in the title of Part v, to reveal "the way leading to freedom" (5pref), which (assuming that he does not intend to lead us on a wild goose chase) suggests that humans can attain freedom.[27] On the other hand, he pointedly denies that humans can attain freedom, claiming that "God is the only free cause" (1p17c2).[28] This is not the only text where Spinoza denies the possibility of human freedom. Since, as I have shown, he defines freedom as equivalent to being an adequate cause of oneself, he also denies the possibility of human freedom when he denies that humans can be adequate causes: "It is impossible for a man not to be part of nature and not to undergo changes other than those which can be understood solely through his own

[27] Chapter 8 explains why we should not read Spinoza's ethics as holding us to unattainable ends.

[28] Parkinson (1975, 24) suggests that this problem cannot be solved. He argues that humans are free in the moral sense that they have reasons for action, not in the causal sense stipulated by 1def7, which entails that Spinoza has two distinct concepts of freedom.

nature and of which he is the adequate cause" (4p4). The passage basically asserts, using rather frustrating grammar, that it is impossible not to be an inadequate cause, which is equivalent to claiming that we are necessarily an inadequate cause.

One might try to rescue Spinoza from the apparent contradiction by pointing out that the definition of freedom stipulates two conditions, that one be the sole cause of her own actions and her own existence. Although we clearly cannot satisfy the second condition, one might think that we can be the sole cause of our own actions, meeting at least the first condition of the definition. This suggests that we can resolve the apparent contradiction while remaining somewhat true to Spinoza's definition of freedom: when he denies the possibility of human freedom, he is asserting that we cannot meet the second condition, and when he affirms the possibility of human freedom, he is asserting that we can meet the first. A first problem with this suggestion is reconciling it with the texts. Spinoza's claim that God is the only free cause basically asserts that God is the only being that can cause anything – that is, bring about some change – entirely from its own power. Similarly 4p4 claims that we cannot be an adequate cause, which would seem to entail that we cannot be an adequate cause of anything.[29] This entails that humans cannot even be the sole cause of their own actions and, thus, that we cannot meet even the first condition of the definition.

But, regardless of how we read these texts, the second and more serious problem is that Spinoza is not entitled to claim that humans can be an adequate cause of their own actions or, indeed, of anything. Understanding this point requires having a clear picture of what precisely an adequate cause is. Remember, an adequate cause is one "whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause." According to this definition, in order for an individual to be an adequate cause of her action, we must be able to clearly and distinctly perceive the action through her alone. Clearly and distinctly perceiving something is equivalent to having knowledge of it, that is, adequate ideas.[30] According to the causal representation requirement, having an adequate idea of a thing requires conceiving its causes, not just proximate causes but all of its causal antecedents. Consequently, we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive an action through the

[29] One might claim that 4p4 only rules out the possibility of humans *always* being an adequate cause, thereby allowing the possibility that we can be an adequate cause of some action or change. While I find the reading counterintuitive, my main reason for rejecting it is that Spinoza's philosophy renders it impossible for humans to be an adequate cause of anything, as I will now show.

[30] 3p9 shows that Spinoza regards clear and distinct ideas as equivalent to adequate ideas, since what he calls a clear and distinct idea in the proposition he calls an adequate idea in the demonstration.

individual alone unless she is its sole causal antecedent. In other words, being an adequate cause of an action requires not only being the sole cause of the change, but also the cause's cause, and its cause and so forth, all the way back to the original cause. It follows that being an adequate cause requires being the cause of oneself; otherwise, the causal antecedents of one's actions will necessarily trace back to some prior external cause. This explains why the definition of freedom requires both being an adequate cause of oneself and one's actions: the two conditions go hand in hand. It follows that humans, since they are not self-caused, cannot be an adequate cause of their actions or of any change.[31]

According to this discussion, Spinoza has deep reasons to deny the possibility of human freedom. The fact that we cannot be adequate causes is guaranteed by our very nature as finite things, which entails that we are necessarily determined by external things, as I argued in the first section. Consequently, claiming that we can attain freedom is tantamount to denying that we are like other finite things. In this respect, admitting the possibility of human freedom denies Spinoza's naturalism, the view that human beings are part of the natural world, to be understood in the same way as the rest of the natural world. This point is evident above in 4p4, which equates supposing that humans can be an adequate cause with supposing that man is "not part of nature." Spinoza famously criticizes this view as treating man as a "kingdom within a kingdom [*imperium in imperio*]" (3pref). While the criticism originates in the *Ethics*, it reappears in the *TP*, where he claims that treating humans as a kingdom within a kingdom consists specifically in supposing that they are not determined by other finite things:[32]

> Most people believe that the ignorant violate the order of nature, rather than conform to it; they think of men in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom [*imperium in imperio*]. They hold that the human mind is not produced by natural causes but is directly created by God and is so independent of other things that it has an absolute power to determine itself and to use reason in a correct way. (2, 6)

According to this passage, asserting the possibility of human freedom – "an absolute power to determine oneself" – commits one of the cardinal sins of Spinoza's philosophy!

[31] This discussion is indebted to helpful conversations with Eugene Marshall.

[32] The *Ethics* more briefly claims that the mistake consists in thinking that man "has absolute power over his actions, and is determined by no other source than himself" (3pref).

This conclusion suggests that it is hopeless to resolve the apparent contradiction by showing that humans can attain the standard set by 1def7. Consequently, I prefer another strategy, one that instead attends to Spinoza's use of 'freedom' and its cognates. For Spinoza only appears contradictory if we suppose that he always uses the term strictly in accordance with his definition, but he may be asserting the possibility of human freedom according to a different sense of the term. In fact, it is clear that he, at least sometimes, uses 'free' in a different sense that applies to humans:

> The more free we consider a man to be, the less we can say that he is able not to use his reason and to choose evil before good; and so God, who exists, understands, and acts with absolute freedom, also exists, understands and acts necessarily, that is, from the necessity of his own nature. For there is no doubt that God acts with the same freedom with which he exists. Therefore, as he exists from the necessity of his own nature, so he also acts from the necessity of his own nature; that is, he acts from absolute freedom. (*TP* 2, 7)[33]

Spinoza here claims that only God has freedom in the 1def7 sense of existing and acting from "his own nature"; following Spinoza's lead, let's call this "absolute freedom." Yet Spinoza still claims that we can consider a man to be free in what must be a second sense of the term. Since Spinoza claims that humans can be considered "more" or "less" free, this second sense of the term is scalar, admitting degrees; let's call this "degree freedom." This second sense of the term is evident elsewhere, when Spinoza claims that a person could live "more freely" (4p73d) and that "it is not in the power of any man always to use his reason and be at *the highest pitch of human freedom*" (*TP* 2, 8; emphasis added). These two kinds of freedom must be different not only because degree freedom is attainable by humans, but also because absolute freedom is not scalar. For having absolute freedom means being an adequate or sole cause of oneself, which, according to Spinoza's definition, does not come in degrees – something is either the sole cause of itself or not. Rather, absolute freedom is categorical, setting an all or nothing standard for freedom.

What, then, is degree freedom? Since Spinoza does not provide an explanation of this second sense of the term, we would expect it to be related to his general definition of freedom. This suggests that the second sense refers to the degree to which a thing approximates the definition, in other words, absolute freedom. While Spinoza defines an adequate cause as all or nothing, one's proximity to this standard does admit degrees. For instance, if I build a sandcastle with a little help from a friend, then I am

[33] Thanks to Michael Della Rocca for directing me to this passage.

closer to being the sole cause of the sandcastle than if I had a lot of help from the friend. It follows that there can also be different degrees to which one approximates being the sole cause of oneself, in other words, degrees of self-determination. For instance, if I choose to buy a new car largely through the influence of persistent salespeople, then we might say that I am less self-determined than if I made the choice as the result of my own preferences and reasoning. Consequently, being more self-determined brings one closer to meeting the standard of absolute freedom, complete self-determination. It is important to distinguish a thing's degree of self-determination from its causal power. To illustrate the difference, imagine that an alcoholic quits drinking with the assistance of a sponsor. While this feat may require a great deal of causal power from the alcoholic, the assistance of the friend counts against the alcoholic's degree of self-determination. In contrast, if the same person quits snacking before bed, without any assistance from friends, then he would be more self-determined, even though the act may require less causal power from him. As the example illustrates, our degree of self-determination is proportional to how much we bring about an effect with respect to other causes.[34]

Does this second sense of 'free' extricate Spinoza from the apparent inconsistency? It does show that Spinoza consistently uses 'free' in a sense that applies to humans. However, the second sense does not explain his use of 'freedom' to describe the goal of his ethics, as in "the way leading to freedom."[35] This is because the second sense of the term applies to all humans and their actions, since we are all at least a partial cause of our own actions – otherwise we wouldn't call them *our* actions.[36] Consequently, the second sense of the term doesn't specify a particular threshold of self-determination to which humans should aim, an ethical goal. How, then, should we read Spinoza's use of 'freedom' in the title to Part v? Given his tendency to use 'free' in ways that deviate from the strict definition, it makes sense to suppose that he is using 'freedom' in a third sense. Nevertheless, since he does not think that there is anything unusual about using 'freedom' to describe the goal of his ethics, one would expect the third sense of the term to be closely connected to the definition. This suggests that the goal of human freedom is simply to come,

[34] Spinoza arguably asserts this distinction in 4p5, when he argues that the power of passive emotions is determined "not by the power whereby we ourselves endeavor to persist in existence, but by the power of external causes compared with our own power."

[35] Spinoza similarly refers to the ethical goal of human freedom when he describes the "true freedom of man" (4p73s), which refers specifically to the virtuous character, the subject of Chapter 10.

[36] This claim is implied by Spinoza's claim that even confused and inadequate ideas express our striving (3p9).

as close as possible, to absolute freedom, to attain the greatest degree of freedom attainable by humans, in Spinoza's words, "the highest pitch of human freedom."[37]

While this interpretation vindicates Spinoza from the apparent inconsistency, one might worry about the reading on other grounds. For it asserts that Spinoza discusses three different kinds of freedom but fails to communicate these distinctions to the reader. One might further worry that the reading excessively complicates interpreting Spinoza: if he uses 'free' in three distinct senses, how do we know, in any particular sentence, which kind of freedom he has in mind? These concerns are alleviated by recognizing the close connection between the three kinds of freedom, which are unified by an underlying conception of self-determination. To illustrate, imagine that our self-determination can be scored on a scale of 1 to 10, where a 10 indicates that one is the sole cause of oneself and 1 through 9 represent increasing degrees of self-determination. The three kinds of freedom are just different ways of describing where things fall on this scale: a thing's score is its degree freedom; a thing scoring a 10 has absolute freedom; the goal of freedom is the greatest degree attainable by humans, say, a 9. In this way, the three kinds of freedom are unified by and derived from the more fundamental conception of freedom as self-determination, which is emphasized by Spinoza's definition. With this picture in mind, the context should be sufficient to determine Spinoza's particular usage of the term.[38] For instance, when he claims that it is not possible for men always to be at the highest pitch of human freedom, he must mean that it is not possible for humans to always score a 9. Furthermore, this picture makes clear how Spinoza's claims about the different kinds of freedom relate to one another. For instance, if Spinoza claims that self-determination is good, it follows that it would be best to have absolute freedom (scoring 10), that it would be proportionally better to increase one's degree of freedom (scoring 4 rather than 5) and that the goal of human freedom, scoring 9, is not as good as scoring 10 but is still proportionally better than scoring 8.

[37] This is a fairly standard way of dealing with the difficulty. See Bennett (1984, 316–17), Hampshire (1975), Nadler (2006, 235–6), Della Rocca (2008b, 188–9). Alternatively, one might suppose that the third kind of freedom is the ability to control the emotions, since this sense of freedom is emphasized in the later *Ethics*, where Spinoza regards freedom as attainable. However, Spinoza is adamant that we cannot gain complete control over the emotions any more than we can become completely self-caused: "experience teaches us with abundant examples that nothing is less within men's power than to hold their tongues or control their appetites" (3p2s; see also *TP* 2, 6). In fact, he criticizes Descartes and the Stoics for imagining that "we have absolute command over the emotions" (5pref).

[38] For this reason, I will generally follow Spinoza's convention of using 'freedom' to refer to self-determination, relying on the context to distinguish the particular kind of self-determination.

1.4 THE POSSIBILITY OF HUMAN ADEQUATE IDEAS

A central conclusion of the previous discussion is that being free, at the mental level, is equivalent to having adequate ideas. If we take this equivalence seriously, then we ought to regard Spinoza's claims about adequate ideas as part of his larger theory of freedom. It follows that his claims about the possibility of attaining adequate ideas ought to be consistent with his claims about the possibility of human freedom. However, this does not initially appear to be the case. Since an adequate idea is one of which we are the adequate cause, then having adequate ideas should be equivalent to having absolute freedom. But whereas Spinoza denies that humans can be free, in the absolute sense, he explicitly claims that we can have adequate ideas (2p38; 2p47). This section aims to show how Spinoza's claims about the possibility of freedom and adequate ideas are consistent and, moreover, connected by an underlying view of the possibility of human self-determination.

Taking up this task means entering into an ongoing debate about whether humans, for Spinoza, can have adequate ideas. While he explicitly claims that we can, some have suggested that he is not entitled to this claim. A central reason cited in support of this suggestion is that human ideas cannot satisfy the causal representation requirement.[39] This is because any adequate idea must represent its object's causal antecedents, which in the case of finite bodies and ideas amounts to an infinite series of modes (1p28). Since our minds are finite, they cannot represent such a series and, consequently, our ideas cannot be adequate. However, there is a problem with this argument, which has been pointed out by defenders of the view that humans can have adequate ideas: not all human ideas represent finite bodies or ideas.[40] In particular, Spinoza allows that we have ideas of the attributes, extension and thought. Since Spinoza holds that attributes are expressed in an infinite sequence of modes, they are not finite things and, consequently, their causal antecedents are not an infinite chain. On the contrary, Spinoza holds that attributes are essential properties of the one substance (1def4; 1p10), which entails that their cause is the same as the cause of the substance itself, infinite power (1def3; 1p7). Consequently, the argument above does not rule out the possibility of finite minds representing the causal antecedents of the attributes.

The foregoing reasoning suggests that humans can have adequate ideas of the attributes. Spinoza appears to endorse this conclusion explicitly,

[39] Della Rocca (1996a, 183, note 29). [40] This argument is defended in Marshall (2008a, 67).

claiming that humans can have adequate ideas of not only the attributes but also God's essence, to which the attributes are equivalent. With respect to the former, he claims that we can have adequate knowledge of properties that are "common to all things" in such a way that the properties are "equally in the part as in the whole"; the obvious candidates here are the attributes of thought and extension (2p38).

> Let *A* be something common to all bodies, and equally in the part of any body as in the whole. I say that *A* can be conceived only adequately. For its idea will necessarily be in God both insofar as he has the idea of the human body and insofar as he has the ideas of affections of the human body, affections which partly involve the natures of both the human body and external bodies. That is, this idea will necessarily be adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the human mind. (2p38d)

His reasoning seems to be that knowledge of general properties does not require understanding particular things exhibiting such properties. Consequently, everything that we need to know about general properties is contained in anything exhibiting those properties such that the knowledge can be derived entirely from our understanding of any particular finite mode.[41] With respect to the latter, he claims that "the human mind has an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God" (2p47). The reasoning here is that such knowledge of God is implicitly contained within each mode as the condition for its existence (2p45d), so that we can derive this knowledge entirely from our ideas of modes (2p47).

Given this powerful textual evidence, one might think that the debate has been decisively settled. However, Spinoza's views on freedom provide further ammunition for concluding that humans cannot have adequate ideas. In particular, the previous section entails the following argument:

(1) Humans cannot be a free cause (1p17c2).
(2) Being a free cause is equivalent to being an adequate cause of one's own action (definitions of freedom and adequate cause).
(3) Being an adequate cause of one's own action, at the mental level, is equivalent to being an adequate cause of one's own ideas, that is, having an adequate idea (the causal adequacy requirement).
(4) Humans cannot be an adequate cause (from [1] and [2]).
(5) Humans cannot have an adequate idea (from [3] and [4]).

This argument cannot be dismissed as easily as the previous. Since (1) and (4) are so explicit in the text, it seems that the most promising line of objection would call into question the series of equivalences in (2) and (3).

[41] A good discussion of this argument is found in Nadler (2006, 174).

However, rejecting these equivalences would mean throwing out Spinoza's best explanation for how reason promotes our freedom, arguably the most fundamental claim of his entire philosophical system; if the adequacy of our ideas is not correlated to our causal adequacy, then it is not clear why Spinoza holds that reason increases our self-determination and freedom.

In case the reader is not persuaded by this argument, there are other ways that Spinoza's theory of freedom rules out the possibility of human adequate ideas. As we have seen, he denies that humans can have absolute freedom on the grounds that it is our nature as finite things to be determined by external things. This conception of human beings as determined finite modes is most pronounced in Spinoza's definition of the human mind: "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body – i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else" (2p13). According to this definition, the human body should be understood as a series of finite bodily modes and the human mind as the corresponding mental modes. In defining humans as finite modes, 2p13 provides the basis for two further arguments against the possibility of humans having adequate ideas. According to the first argument (which does not rely on any premises from the previous argument), this conception of the human mind makes it impossible for human ideas to meet the causal representation requirement: 2p13 entails that all our ideas must represent our bodies in some respect; otherwise the idea would not count as part of our mind. Since our ideas represent the body as "a definite finite mode of extension," the causal antecedents of their objects are infinite chains of modes. Consequently, we cannot represent this entire causal history and our ideas cannot be adequate. It is important to distinguish this argument from the first argument we considered against the possibility of adequate ideas: the first argument supposes that our ideas cannot meet the causal representation requirement because we are finite beings, whereas this argument allows that finite beings can represent infinite things such as attributes or God. This argument charges, rather, that specifically human ideas, since they must represent the finite modes of the body, cannot completely represent the causal antecedents of their objects.

But even if our ideas of finite modes could somehow meet the causal representation requirement, the second argument charges that no human idea can meet the causal adequacy requirement. As we have seen, Spinoza's parallelism implies that the order and connection among ideas must be the same as the order and connection among things (2p7). Since Spinoza understands the mind as the idea representing the body, it follows that the causal power of our mind must be the same as the causal power of our body.

In Spinoza's words, "the order of the active and passive states of our body is simultaneous in nature with the order of active and passive states of the mind" (3p2s). But no state of the human body can ever be the sole cause of any of its future states. This is because all bodily states are brought about, at least partly, through the power of other things. For instance, all our bodily states are brought about by the temperature and pressure of the earth, since this is a condition for the very survival and operation of the body. While Spinoza does not claim explicitly that our body cannot be the sole cause of its own states, this claim is implicit in his conception of the natural world as a causal nexus of mutually dependent, interacting modes. If we cannot be the sole cause of our bodily states, then parallelism entails that our minds cannot be the sole cause of their ideas either.

One might reject these two arguments by dismissing 2p13 as false, first, on the grounds that our ideas obviously represent things other than our own bodies. This reasoning, however, misunderstands 2p13. It claims not that we cannot represent other things, but rather that we can only do so *through* the ideas of our own bodies. Spinoza's commitment to this claim is evident in his view that we represent external bodies indirectly by representing our own body, specifically, how our body is affected by external bodies: "the ideas that we have of external bodies indicate the constitution of our own body more than the nature of external bodies" (2p16c2). On this view, my ideas of the words on this page are ideas representing how my body is affected by the light from the screen hitting my eyes. In keeping with this view, 2p38 and 2p47 are clear that we represent the attributes and God's essence through our ideas of our own bodily modes: the former claims that the mind perceives common notions "insofar as it perceives its own body," while the latter claims that we perceive "the eternal and infinite essence of God" through ideas by means of which the human mind "perceives itself, its own body." According to these passages, we are only able to represent God's essence and attributes by means of ideas that also represent our own bodies. It follows that the causal antecedents for the objects of even these ideas must be an infinite series.

One might alternatively reject 2p13 on the grounds that it is inconsistent with Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind. Spinoza holds that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal" (5p23). If some part of our mind survives the body, the objection reasons, then we must have some idea that does not represent our bodies. The obvious candidate would be our idea of God's essence, since God's essence, being eternal, remains after our body has been destroyed. If our idea of God's essence survives the body, then

it need not represent a finite mode of the body. Consequently, the idea need not have infinite causal antecedents and its causal adequacy need not correspond to a finite bodily mode. It follows that our idea of God's essence could be adequate, as Spinoza claims. While this reasoning is superficially attractive, it ultimately suffers from too many problems. Most obviously, it is inconsistent not only with 2p13, but also with Spinoza's parallelism, which entails that each mode of the human mind has the same causal powers as the corresponding mode of the body. This requirement would be violated if some mode of our mind has the power to preserve itself at some future time – after the death of the body – when the corresponding mode of the body does not.

One might reply that these problems are endemic to Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind and, thus, are unavoidable; in order for the mind to be eternal, some part of it must survive the body, thereby violating 2p13 and parallelism. However, it is possible to read the doctrine in such a way that no human idea survives the body. In fact, the demonstration arguably calls for such a reading:

> In God there is necessarily a conception, or idea, which expresses the essence of the human body and which therefore is necessarily something that pertains to the essence of the human mind. But we assign to the human mind the kind of duration that can be defined by time only insofar as the mind expresses the actual existence of the body, an existence that is explicated through duration and can be defined by time. That is, we do not assign duration to the mind except while the body endures. However, since that which is conceived by a certain eternal necessity through God's essence is nevertheless something, this something which pertains to the essence of the mind, will necessarily be eternal. (5p23d)

The demonstration hinges on the notion that God's mind contains an idea representing the essence of the human body. This idea is eternal in the sense that it is conceived under the species of eternity, that is, as following logically from God's essence, without any reference to time or duration. Our mind is eternal, Spinoza argues, in the sense that it "pertains to," that is, has some sort of special but unspecified relationship to this idea. What, then, is this special relationship? Since the human mind represents the body, it follows that our mind and this idea share a common representational content. In other words, they both represent the body, though in different ways: our ideas represent the body inadequately, whereas God represents it adequately. Since Spinoza understands inadequate ideas as partial, it follows that our mind represents only part of the body – for instance, failing to represent its causal antecedents – whereas God's idea represents it completely. It follows that the special relationship is one of containment:

our mind is part of, or is contained by, God's idea of the essence of the body. According to this reading, the human mind is eternal in the sense that it is part of an adequate idea that exists timelessly in God's mind.[42] Thus, there is no part of our mind, no particular idea that survives the body: as a collection of inadequate ideas, our entire mind perishes with the body. Nevertheless, as part of God's adequate idea, our entire mind exists eternally.[43] This reading is not only consistent with 2p13, but requires it, for our mind is eternal in virtue of the fact that it represents the body and, thus, is part of God's idea of the body.

Even if the reader is not persuaded by this reading of the eternity of the mind, the demonstration to 5p23 points out an even more fundamental problem with the objection. The objection claims that the eternal part of the human mind is our adequate ideas of God's essence and the attributes. This point is critical to the objection, since it uses the eternity of the mind as evidence that our ideas of God's essence and attributes, being eternal, do not represent the body and, consequently, can be adequate, as Spinoza claims. However, 5p23d shows that the mind is eternal in virtue of the fact that it represents the essence of *the human body*, not in virtue of having adequate ideas of God's essence or the attributes. So, even if the eternity of the mind implies that some of our ideas survive the body, there is no reason to suppose that the surviving ideas would be the ideas of God's essence and attributes, as the objection requires.

If we accept the foregoing arguments against the possibility of humans having adequate ideas, then we are faced with a difficult question: how do we explain Spinoza's claims that we can have adequate ideas in 2p38 and 2p47? One might conclude that Spinoza was simply confused, believing that we could have adequate ideas, without recognizing that this claim contradicts his view on the possibility of human freedom. According to this conclusion, Spinoza held a deeply inconsistent conception of human

[42] This reading is consistent with Spinoza's claim that our mind becomes more eternal as our ideas become more adequate (5p39). For in having more adequate ideas, our mind becomes more like God's adequate and eternal idea of our body, increasing the extent to which our mind is eternal.

[43] I should also point out the excellent interpretation by Garrett (2009), with which I disagree. He argues that God's idea represents the formal essence of the body, which is an infinite mode, representing permanent and pervasive features of God. More specifically, the formal essence of body is a property of extension, possessed by all modes, in virtue of which they are capable of assuming their particular properties. This does explain how we have an idea that outlives the body, since, on this reading, the essence of body is expressed in all modes, including those that persist after the death of the body. However, it is not clear to me how an infinite mode can "represent the essence of the human body" (5p23d), in other words, what makes the human body the particular thing it is; rather, it is a property that all bodily modes have identically and, consequently, cannot distinguish them. For a view that is more consistent with mine, see Della Rocca (2008b, Chapter 7).

beings, as necessarily determined by external things, on one hand, and capable of complete self-determination, on the other. We can, however, offer another response, taking a page from the previous discussion of freedom. The arguments against the possibility of humans having adequate ideas are predicated on the notion that an adequate idea is one of which we are a sole cause, since having adequate ideas, in this sense, is equivalent to being absolutely free; call this an absolutely adequate idea. While this conception is entailed by his claims about adequate ideas, it is possible that he sometimes uses 'adequate idea' in a different sense, according to which having adequate ideas does not entail being a sole cause.[44]

In support of this suggestion, it is clear that Spinoza sometimes uses 'adequate idea' – or, at least, what I take to be equivalent, "adequate cognition" – in another sense. He claims that we can have only a "very inadequate [*admodùm inadaequatam*]" cognition of the duration of the body (2p30) and particular things external to us (2p31).[45] Claiming that an idea is very inadequate asserts that it is even less adequate than other inadequate ideas, or, equivalently, that other inadequate ideas are more adequate. Consequently, this claim implies that inadequate ideas must have some degree of adequacy, according to what must be a second sense of the term. This second sense is clearly scalar, which also does not make sense if Spinoza is talking about absolute freedom. Since being an adequate cause is all or nothing, having an absolutely adequate idea should be all or nothing as well. Let's call this second kind of adequacy 'degree adequacy.'[46]

To determine whether this second sense of the term explains Spinoza's claims in 2p38 and 2p47, we need a better understanding of it. Given Spinoza's use of the term above, it appears that the adequacy of an idea is somehow determined by the degree to which it approximates the standard of an absolutely adequate idea. In other words, ideas have a greater or lesser

[44] My suggestion here, that Spinoza only asserts that humans can only have adequate ideas in a limited sense, is also upheld by Giancotti (1990) and Nadler (2006, 165).

[45] Since, as I will argue in Chapter 5, the certainty of knowledge corresponds to the adequacy of our ideas, this way of thinking is also evident in Spinoza's suggestion that our knowledge admits degrees of certainty. For instance, he writes that "men have not as clear a knowledge [*cognitionem*] of God as they do of common notions" (2p47s). The distinction among the three kinds of knowledge similarly shows that he conceives of certainty as admitting degrees.

[46] Since I regard having an adequate idea as equivalent to being the adequate cause of one's idea, understood at the mental level, having an idea that has a degree of adequacy implies that we can be a cause that has some degree of adequacy. Consequently, while my discussion focuses on adequate ideas, I also hold that Spinoza can make sense of and sometimes thinks about causal adequacy itself as scalar. So, when I claim that being an adequate cause is all or nothing, I am referring to Spinoza's definition of an adequate cause, which is categorical. This is consistent with claiming that there is another scalar sense of 'adequate cause.' In fact, using 'adequate idea' as a scalar term implies this second scalar sense of 'adequate cause.'

degree of adequacy according to how close they come to being absolutely adequate. What, then, does it mean for an idea to be near or far from absolutely adequate? To begin with, since an absolutely adequate idea is one of which we are the sole cause, an idea approximates this standard according to our degree of self-determination in conceiving the idea. In other words, the closer we come to being an adequate cause of our ideas, the greater our ideas' degree of adequacy. Read in this way, it is clear that our ideas' degree of adequacy is equivalent to our degree of freedom, understood at the mental level, since both are determined by our degree of self-determination.[47]

Given my previous claims about adequate ideas, there is another explanation for how the degree adequacy of ideas approximates the standard of an absolutely adequate idea: since an absolutely adequate idea represents all of its object's causal antecedents, an idea's degree of adequacy can also be understood as its degree of completeness in representing these antecedents. In other words, the more an idea represents its object's causes, the greater its degree of adequacy. It is important to recognize that these two explanations for how an idea approximates the standard of an absolutely adequate idea are really just two different ways of making the same point: as one's ideas represent their objects' causes, one's mind also contains the ideas that cause its own ideas. Consequently, the more our ideas represent their causes, the more self-determining we become in conceiving the ideas.

Unfortunately, this second sense of the term does not explain Spinoza's claims in 2p38 and 2p47 that we can have adequate ideas. According to the second sense of the term, all of our ideas have some degree of adequacy, since they are all at least partly caused by us: "the mind, both insofar as it has clear and distinct ideas and insofar as it has confused ideas, strives to persist in its being" (3p9).[48] But 2p38 and 2p47 describe our ideas as adequate in order to single them out as attaining some special, epistemic standard. In other words, the second sense of the term is scalar, whereas Spinoza's claims in 2p38 and 2p47 are categorical. Nevertheless, the second sense of the term indicates that there is a precedent for Spinoza using 'adequate' in a different sense than the strict sense implied by his theory and, furthermore,

[47] According to this discussion, the scalar notion of causal adequacy, described in the previous note, concerns the degree to which one is a complete cause of a thing, in other words, proportionally how much one brings about an effect with respect to other causes.

[48] Since we are passive in conceiving inadequate ideas, one might question how they express our power at all. The answer is that passive ideas express our power simply in virtue of the fact that they represent our body (3p11s). Furthermore, he claims that all ideas involve, at least, the power that moves us to affirm them as true (2p49).

in reference to ideas that are inadequate in the strict sense. This suggests that 2p38 and 2p47 assert that human ideas are 'adequate' according to a third sense of the term, one which is categorical and applies to human ideas, even though they are not absolutely adequate. According to this reading, all human ideas are inadequate (in the absolute sense), but have varying degrees of adequacy (in the second sense). If our ideas have a sufficient degree of adequacy, then they are adequate in the third sense. To distinguish this kind of adequate idea from absolutely adequate ideas, I will call this third sense of the term 'human adequate ideas' or more simply 'reason,' since Spinoza is referring to these human adequate ideas when he defines reason as having adequate ideas (2p40c2).

What, then, is the threshold of self-determination that divides human adequate and inadequate ideas? Since none of our ideas are absolutely adequate and they all have some degree of adequacy, it might appear that any categorization of human ideas as adequate or inadequate would be arbitrary. What justifies describing one of our ideas as adequate, when another idea, with only slightly less adequacy, counts as inadequate? To put the question a slightly different way: If someone sets the bar for human adequate ideas slightly lower, would Spinoza have any grounds to object? Spinoza's thinking about freedom provides some direction here. While he holds that humans cannot attain perfect freedom, he does not give up on the goal of freedom. Rather, he exhorts us to increase our degree of freedom, to become as self-determining and free as possible. Taking this as our cue, we can explain the category of adequate ideas as those attaining the greatest degree of adequacy available to humans. This is a nonarbitrary standard, for the distinction between human adequate and inadequate ideas is justified by the capabilities of the human mind. According to this reading, when Spinoza claims that we can have adequate ideas of God's essence and attributes, he is claiming that our ideas of these things are the most adequate ideas possible, presumably because they come closest to meeting the causal representation requirement, as the relevant proofs suggest. In this way, having a human adequate idea is equivalent to attaining the goal of freedom, understood at the mental level, since both consist in being as self-determined as humanly possible.

Some readers may be uncomfortable with the foregoing reading because it supposes, on the basis of little textual evidence, that Spinoza uses 'adequate' and 'adequate ideas' in three different senses. I defend the reading on the grounds that it is necessary to make Spinoza's philosophy consistent, while remaining true to the text. If we do not distinguish the different senses

of adequate ideas, then we would be forced to conclude that Spinoza allows for the possibility of adequate ideas only because he failed to recognize that his conception of human beings as determined finite things had ruled out this possibility. We would also be forced to conclude that Spinoza's claims about adequate ideas are inconsistent with his theory of freedom, which explicitly claims that humans cannot be entirely self-determined. Finally, it would be impossible to reconcile Spinoza's different claims about adequate ideas, since some of them treat adequacy as scalar and others as categorical. My reading, in contrast, not only avoids these problems, but also uses the resources of Spinoza's philosophy to point out a meaningful and nonarbitrary sense of adequate ideas that is attainable by humans. Furthermore, my reading treats Spinoza's claims about freedom and adequate ideas as parts of a broader, unified theory of human self-determination, as they should be, given his commitment to the identity of freedom and adequate ideas. Indeed, as the reader has hopefully noticed, my reading entails a symmetry in his treatment of freedom and adequate ideas: for Spinoza employs three closely related notions of freedom, which, understood at the mental level, are equivalent to the three uses of 'adequate' in reference to ideas. It makes sense that there would be such a symmetry, given that both theories are underlain by a deeper conception of self-determination.[49]

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown that Spinoza understands freedom as being self-caused or self-determined. He argues that this is best achieved through using reason, which he explains as having adequate ideas. This is because Spinoza understands adequate ideas as those of which we are the adequate cause, in other words, which follow from other ideas in our own minds, which implies that having adequate ideas is equivalent to being free, that is, the cause of oneself, understood at the mental level. It follows from Spinoza's metaphysics that human beings can never be truly free, in the strict sense of the term, since humans, as finite things, are necessarily causally dependent on other things. Consequently, when Spinoza uses the term to describe the goal of his ethics, we should suppose that he is using the term more loosely to refer to the greatest degree of self-determination and freedom available

[49] Because Spinoza's notions of adequate ideas are connected by his more fundamental thinking about self-determination, his claims about adequate ideas usually apply to any idea in proportion to its degree of adequacy. For instance, if Spinoza thinks that having adequate ideas is good, then it is best to have an absolutely adequate idea and better to have an inadequate idea that is more adequate than another inadequate idea.

to us. It follows that just as we can never have absolute freedom, we can also never have absolutely adequate ideas. Consequently, Spinoza's claims about human adequate ideas should be read, parallel to his claims about the goal of human freedom, as referring to ideas that are as adequate as is humanly possible. In this way, Spinoza's theory of adequate ideas is part and parcel of his more general theory of freedom and self-determination.

CHAPTER 2

Justifying Spinoza's conception of freedom

The fact that Spinoza offers his conception of freedom in a definition at the beginning of the *Ethics* might give the impression that he simply stipulates this conception without defense or justification. In this case, Spinoza would have little to say to the many readers, then and now, with competing views and intuitions. However, Spinoza does offer arguments to back up his definition, though they tend to be tucked away in letters and scholia rather than featured in the demonstrations of the *Ethics*. This chapter examines these arguments, with somewhat surprising results. Since he is a causal determinist, one might suppose that Spinoza is forced to conceive of freedom as self-determination because it is the only conception available to him, having ruled out a more robust conception of freedom as the ability to do otherwise. According to this suggestion, the ultimate justification for Spinoza's view of freedom is his arguments for causal determinism and, thus, the metaphysics from Part 1 of the *Ethics*. This chapter shows, however, that Spinoza's arguments seldom presuppose the truth of causal determinism; rather, they target the more fundamental incompatibilist intuitions that freedom requires some form of causal independence. Consequently, he does not regard his freedom as second-best and, moreover, he has something to say to those who think it is.

The first two sections consider his arguments against each of two versions of the libertarian conception of freedom as the ability to do otherwise. The third section considers Spinoza's arguments against his other main rival, the Hobbesian view that freedom consists in an absence of constraints to pursue one's volitions.

2.1 SPONTANEITY

Let us begin by considering Spinoza's arguments against the view that freedom consists in spontaneity, acting without being determined by prior causes. Since spontaneous action could have been otherwise, this is a

version of the libertarian view of freedom. Spinoza, of course, agrees that freedom consists in spontaneity, according to a slightly different and more literal meaning of the term, as acting entirely from oneself. Since freedom, for Spinoza, consists in self-determination, absolute freedom means acting entirely from oneself and, in this sense, spontaneously. However, while he allows for such spontaneity in the limited case of absolute freedom, he denies that human freedom involves such spontaneity. Moreover, he denies that any action is spontaneous in the sense of arising independently of prior causes. We have already seen part of the reason for this view, that Spinoza's metaphysics rules out the possibility of complete self-determination for finite things. But he offers two further arguments that stand independently of these metaphysical commitments, the first of which is found in the *KV*:

> We have already shown that a thing which is not explained through itself, or whose *existence* does not pertain to its *essence*, must necessarily have an external cause; and that a cause which is to produce something must produce it necessarily; it must therefore also follow that each separate act of willing this or that, each separate act of affirming or denying this or that of a thing, these, I say, must also result from some external cause: so also the definition which we have given of a cause is that it cannot be free. (II 16)[1]

This reasoning can be broken into three claims:

(1) Since existence does not pertain to the essence of finite things – in other words, since they are not God – then they must have external causes.
(2) Since causality is deterministic, finite things must be determined by external causes.
(3) Each separate act of willing arises from a causal chain external to the agent.

Taken together, these propositions argue against a libertarian view of freedom on the basis of causal determinism, which is asserted in (2). However, (1) and (3), taken by themselves, assert that all volitions must have an external cause; call this the 'Principle of Human Causation' (PHC).[2] It is interesting that Spinoza infers PHC from a premise to the ontological argument that was commonly accepted at the time, that existence pertains only to the essence of God. Spinoza's reasoning depends on the notion that all actions arise from a causal chain that depends upon the existence of the agent. Since existence does not pertain to our essence, we must exist because of some external cause. It follows that every human action must

[1] While Spinoza claims here that causes cannot be free, he still allows in the *KV* that God is a free cause (1, 3).
[2] Following Van Inwagen's Principle of Universal Causation (1983, 3).

come about from a chain of events that ultimately originates external to the agent.[3] This reasoning does not imply any kind of causal determinism, since it holds only that volitions have external causes, not that volitions are fixed or determined by these causes. Nevertheless, PHC is sufficient to rule out the possibility that human actions come about spontaneously.[4]

A second argument against the spontaneity view is found in a letter to Blyenbergh:

> Our freedom lies not in a kind of contingency nor in a kind of indifference, but in the mode of affirmation and denial, so that the less indifference there is in our affirmation or denial, the more we are free. For instance, if God's nature is known to us, the affirmation of God's existence follows from our nature with the same necessity as it results from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles. Yet we are never so free as when we make an affirmation in this way. (letter 21)

Spinoza's reasoning here is arguably traceable to Descartes' comment in the *Fourth Meditation* that we are most free when our will is necessitated to assent by clear and distinct perception.

> I could not but judge that something which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will, and thus the spontaneity and freedom of my belief was all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference. (CSM II, 41)

Both passages deny that freedom consists in indifference. The reasoning for this claim is that we are most free when we act from reasons. Since reason exerts a psychological force inclining our affirmations and actions, it follows that our freedom requires having some inclination. On this view, inclination is actually evidence of one's freedom, provided the inclination arises from reasons, which explains Descartes' claim that "the more I incline in one direction – either because I understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way or because of a divinely produced disposition of my innermost thoughts – the freer is my choice" (CSM II, 40). This view leads both philosophers to conclude that we are most free when we have the best possible reasons, even if this creates an inclination too powerful to resist. This cuts against the spontaneity view because it identifies freedom

[3] This argument also constrains Spinoza's thinking about autonomy, which I will discuss in the next chapter. For Spinoza, people cannot be autonomous in the sense of the ultimate source of their actions, though one could have a weaker kind of autonomy, in which volitions are proximately traceable to some aspect of the agent.

[4] This difference is evident in incompatibilist agent-causation accounts, which deny determinism but accept universal causation. See Clarke (1993).

with an absence of any force exerting causal influence over our decision, in other words, with indifference. If there is no force inclining us one way or the other, Spinoza's argument objects, then we have no reasons for action and we are not free.

It is worth pointing out that this argument bears some resemblance to a contemporary argument against libertarian conceptions of freedom, variously called the 'rollback argument,' 'rationality problem,' or 'the mind argument.'[5] The argument asserts that, if one's volitions are undetermined, then they cannot be caused by morally relevant features of the agent, such as her disposition, character or reasoning. It follows that libertarianism has no grounds for holding the agent morally responsible. Clearly there are differences between the arguments: Spinoza's takes no account of responsibility and only targets spontaneity, not libertarianism, which regards freedom as consistent with inclination. Nevertheless, both arguments question the intelligibility of conceiving of freedom as being undetermined. Indeed, the arguments arguably share a guiding intuition, that indifferent or spontaneous events would be arbitrary: whereas the rollback argument asserts that one cannot hang responsibility on arbitrary events, Spinoza (and Descartes) argue that one cannot hang rationality and, thus, freedom on such events. Spinoza's argument is also different from the rollback argument, since Spinoza's regards freedom as essentially connected to having reasons for belief and action, while the rollback argument does not imply such a commitment. Consequently, Spinoza is more entitled to the argument than Descartes, because Spinoza regards freedom as necessarily connected to reasoning, as I argued in the previous chapter, whereas Descartes upholds a libertarian view of freedom, which provides no grounds for connecting our freedom with having reasons.

2.2 FREE WILL

Spinoza also argues against two closely connected views that he construes as involving a libertarian view of freedom, one asserting free will and the other free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) (letter 58; 3p2s). Before the late thirteenth century most questions about freedom and agency were framed as questions about the possibility of free decision.[6] While there were different ways of understanding the conditions for free decision, it was generally held that

[5] These titles can be found in Fischer and Ravizza (1998), Clarke (1993) and Van Inwagen (1983), respectively.

[6] The question of free will did not become important until the 1270s because of a variety of factors, including the increased importance of reconciling Christianity with Aristotle, whose moral

having free decision requires that our volitions not be determined by any external force. In contrast, later free will views assert that our volitional faculty or will is causally independent from our other faculties, including the intellect. Thus, as its name indicates, the free will view is more explicit that the ability to do otherwise is a power possessed by the faculty of will.

Spinoza argues against free will on the basis of his theory of ideas. He denies that we possess a faculty of willing, to which our actions, desires or character can be causally traced. Rather, he holds that all of our volitional powers arise, at the mental level, from our ideas. "There is in the mind, no volition, that is, affirmation and negation, except that which an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves" (2p49). While this proposition is only concerned with the volition to affirm or deny beliefs, it suggests that the volition to act also comes from our ideas, since our actions are determined to a great extent by the beliefs that we accept as true.[7] Furthermore, the notion that mental volitions arise from the power of our ideas is required by Spinoza's metaphysics, which holds that all finite mental things are modifications of thought, in other words, ideas, just as all extended things are bodies. Consequently, there is no source for volitions, at the mental level, other than the power of our ideas. On this basis, Spinoza claims that treating the various volitions of our ideas under a general category of will represents conceptual confusion. 'Will' is an abstract, general term or mental construct (*ens rationis*) used to describe a class of particular volitions. As such, it cannot be the cause of anything and, thus, we cannot trace the cause of our actions to it: "to conceive the will to be the cause of this or that volition is as impossible as to conceive humanity to be the cause of Peter or Paul" (letter 2; see also 2p49s).

Spinoza's argument against free decision is targeted at a particular interpretation of the view, according to which our actions are free when our desires are moderate and, thus, controllable. On this view, one is free when he is able to control his desire for cake by refusing to take another bite. This view implies that the person is free in the sense that he has the power to order his own thoughts, turning them away from the desire for cake, which inclines one to eat more, by thinking instead of, say, the calories in the cake.[8] In targeting this view, Spinoza is not arguing that we are powerless

psychology could not obviously accommodate the Christian commitments that all vice is causally traceable to wills and that conversion and salvation is available to anyone. For a good discussion of this history, see Kent (1995), especially Chapter 3.

[7] This view is more fully developed and defended in Della Rocca (2003).

[8] Spinoza's construal of the view is consistent with a common way of understanding free decision as an ability in the agent to act in opposition to causal influences, in this case, desires. Spinoza does not appear to recognize that free decision is sometimes interpreted as more friendly to causal determinism.

to control the order of our thoughts, though his remarks may sometimes sound this way. For Spinoza believes that we often do have the ability to determine our thoughts in significant ways, for instance, when we use reason. Consequently, we should read his argument against free decision as showing that we have no absolute power to order our thoughts, in other words, that the order among our thoughts will always be determined partly by forces beyond our control.

Spinoza argues that we do not have the power of free decision on the basis of both experience and reason (3p2s). It is refuted by experience because it "teaches us with abundant examples that nothing is less in man's power than to hold their tongues or control their appetites."[9] In this way, Spinoza regards the phenomenon of incontinence or *akrasia* as evidence against the power of free decision. He elaborates on this point in the *TP*, claiming that experience "teaches us only too well, that it is no more in our power to have a sound mind than a sound body" (*TP* 2, 6). There he specifically takes issue with the Augustinian claim that our passions and behavior lie beyond our control as a result of the fall.[10] Spinoza regards this argument as Augustine's way of reconciling *akrasia* with the existence of human freedom: humans generally are free in the sense that we chose the sin that has rendered us unable to control our impulses and behavior. Spinoza rejects this explanation on the grounds that Adam, had he been free in a libertarian sense, would never have chosen to sin. In this way, Spinoza denies that there was ever a moment when humans had complete self-control.

The argument from experience, however, does not show that we never have the ability to control our desires, since few would accept that humans are always akratic. Consequently, it leaves open the possibility that we sometimes have the power of free decision. This puts greater weight on Spinoza's argument from reason, which is more difficult to discern in the text. He appears to pursue two lines of reasoning. The first, which is more defensible, but less clearly articulated, takes its cue from a conclusion of 3p2s, that mental appetites and desires are identical to corresponding bodily states: "mental decision on the one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand, are simultaneous in nature; or rather, they are one and the same thing." Presumably Spinoza takes this as undermining free decision on the basis of his parallelism doctrine: since our bodily states are determined by previous states, it follows that our mental desires are also

[9] Spinoza makes essentially the same point to Oldenburg (letter 78).

[10] It is worth noting that Spinoza had Augustine's collected works in his personal library (Alter 1965). The view in question is found in *Urbis Dei*, Books XIV and XIX.

determined by previous mental states. If such desires are determined, then we do not have the ability to either adopt or reject desires. It follows that the free decision view cannot be correct. While this argument targets free decision, it applies broadly to any libertarian view of freedom.

The second line of reasoning is less defensible but more clearly articulated: free decision stipulates that we are free in the sense that our minds have the power to summon forth whatever images and memories we like.[11] Spinoza questions whether our intuition that we have such power is reliable. He points out that in dreams we also perceive that we have the power of free decision, though we are mistaken:

> When we dream that we are speaking, we think that we do so from free mental decision; yet we are not speaking, or if we are, it is the result of spontaneous movement of the body. Again, we dream that we are keeping something secret, and that we are doing so by the same mental decision that comes into play in our waking hours when we keep silent about what we know. Finally, we dream that from a mental decision we act as we dare not act when awake. So I would very much like to know whether in the mind there are two sorts of decisions, dreamland decisions and free decisions. (3p2s)

While this is an intriguing argumentative strategy, the argument is subject to an obvious objection: the mind clearly operates differently when asleep, so that the unreliability of dreaming perceptions does not cast doubt on waking ones. Whether the argument succeeds, then, depends on whether it is, as Spinoza suggests, absurd to think that "there are two sorts of decisions, dreamland decisions and free decisions."

2.3 HOBBESIAN FREEDOM

While Spinoza vigorously opposed libertarianism, he was no more friendly to its chief competitor, the Hobbesian account of freedom as "the absence of external impediments, which impediments may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him" (*L* 14: 2, 79). I gloss this definition as the ability to act without constraint according to one's particular volitions. To avoid digression, the discussion will focus on this definition, without worrying about how Hobbes himself may have developed or defended it. A constraint, according to the definition, would be any external force that impedes one's volitions.[12]

[11] Thus, for Spinoza, free decision is a power of our memory and imagination.

[12] This is not the way Spinoza generally understands 'constraint'; according to Spinoza, anything that is causally determined counts as constrained: "a thing is said to be necessary or rather, constrained

So, if I will to purchase a piece of cake in the shop window and there is no external force to prevent me from doing so – I have enough money in my pocket, the shop is open – then I am free. This view is broadly compatibilist because it allows that an action could be determined and still unconstrained and, thus, free. For instance, my buying the cake in this instance would count as free even if my ultimate decision is the outcome of neurological activity that is determined by physical laws. I should mention that this general strategy to associate freedom with an absence of constraints, rather than indeterminism, is not original to Hobbes or peculiar to compatibilists; it is at work, for instance, in the intellectualist claim that, although God's benevolence is necessitated by his nature, his actions are still unconstrained because there is no external power forcing him to act with benevolence.[13]

Spinoza addresses this Hobbesian view in a letter to Schuller (58). While he describes the view as asserting "free will" and attributes it to Descartes, the position Spinoza describes fits the foregoing Hobbesian account: "a free man who is not constrained by any external cause," where "constrained means acting against one's will." In response, Spinoza admits "that in some instances we are in no way constrained and that in this sense we have free will." While Spinoza accepts this view as both coherent and true, he nevertheless defines freedom in such a way that such instances of "free will" do not count as free. For Spinoza, we are free only when we are self-determined, which is not guaranteed by an absence of constraints.[14] Why, then, is the Hobbesian definition insufficient for freedom? A likely reason is that the Hobbesian view only recognizes external obstacles to freedom, such as a prisoner's shackles, whereas Spinoza explicitly recognizes that our freedom can be threatened by internal psychological forces, specifically those that oppose our rationality, since this is equivalent to our freedom.[15] This suggestion is supported by Spinoza's discussion in the *TP* where he distinguishes four ways that one can be subject to the right of others. Since being subject to the right of others amounts to being "under the power of another," these count as threats to our self-determination and freedom.[16]

[*coacta*], if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way" (1def7).

[13] Spinoza draws Oldenburg's attention to this point in letter 75.

[14] I depart here from Broad, who argues that "the only sense in which the word 'free' can intelligibly be used is in opposition to the word 'constrained'" (1930, 23), thereby attributing a Hobbesian view of freedom to Spinoza.

[15] These latter threats to freedom are internal in the sense that they occur within an individual's psychology. However, they are not internal in the sense that they are caused by our own powers: since reason is our essential power, any action of which we are the adequate cause must be in accordance with reason. Consequently, any irrational tendency must be caused primarily by external forces.

[16] This is because Spinoza equates political right with power (4p37s1, *TTP* pref.).

> One man has another in his power if he holds him in bonds, or has deprived him of the arms and means of self-defense or escape, or has terrorized him, or has so attached himself by benefit conferred that the man would rather please his benefactor than himself and live as the other would wish rather than at his own choosing. (*TP* 2, 10)

The passage lists four ways to undermine one's self-determination:
(1) to bind one physically, "hold him in bonds"
(2) to deprive one of "arms and means of self-defense or escape"
(3) to inspire fear in one
(4) to bind one through an internal sense of obligation or indebtedness.
The first two cases concern external constraints on our freedom. An example of (1) would be the prisoner's shackles, whereas an example of (2) would be holding someone at gunpoint. The latter threatens one's freedom by depriving her of a means of defending herself such that acting according to her own judgment risks death. Spinoza's inclusion of (2) already signals a break from Hobbes' definition, which provides little grounds for regarding threats of force as impinging on our freedom.[17] The fact that Spinoza classifies (2) as a bodily constraint (as we will see shortly) shows that he is inclined to construe the notion of bodily impediments broadly, such that it includes not only literal constraints but also facts about the consequences of one's actions. For instance, suppose that a person held at gunpoint is commanded to be silent or face death. On Hobbes' definition, strictly interpreted, this individual would be free because there is nothing that literally prevents her from speaking, for instance, no gag, whereas for Spinoza, the severe consequences of speaking provide just as much of an impediment.

The more substantial break with the Hobbesian view concerns the latter two cases, where Spinoza recognizes that one's freedom can be threatened by internal mental constraints. "He who has another under his power in the first or second of these ways, holds only the other's body, not his mind. But in the third or fourth way he has made the other's body, as well as his mind subject to his own right" (*TP* 2, 10). The third way can be demonstrated by our example of holding a person at gunpoint. This would harm her freedom not only by closing off her options for bodily actions, but also by generating fear. While the fear exists only in the mind of the agent, it is just as much of a threat to her freedom, because fear opposes reason. Spinoza

[17] Hobbes' acceptance of this point is suggested by his claim that "covenants extorted by fear are valid" (*L* 14: 27, 86). For these to be valid, they must reflect the legitimate will of an agent, that is, a free choice.

claims that fear "indicates a lack of knowledge and weakness of the mind," and that "the more we endeavor to live by the guidance of reason, the more we endeavor to free ourselves from fear" (4p47s). The fourth case provides an even more complicated scenario for internal threats to our freedom. Here one is bound by a self-imposed sense of obligation. For example, imagine someone satisfying the requirements of a gang, out of a sense of indebtedness, because it has protected her in the past. To appreciate this case fully, we must suppose that the person has no fear of recrimination by the gang – there is no threat of punishment or fear that the gang will withhold its protection. Spinoza claims that one's sense of obligation alone can pose a threat to her freedom.

This departure from the Hobbesian view signifies a considerable advantage for Spinoza's theory of freedom. Since the Hobbesian view is blind to anything within the agent that might harm her freedom, it has difficulty accounting for various problem cases: for instance, it does not appear that a kleptomaniac or drug addict acts freely, though there are no external powers constraining them from acting on their volitions. Rather, it seems, in such cases, that the volition itself is not free. Since Spinoza's theory, in contrast, recognizes that psychological forces may harm one's freedom, he could argue that the kleptomaniac is not free because her compulsion to steal is a force that opposes her reason. Similarly, addicts are not free because their addiction generates emotions and actions that oppose reason. While Spinoza only considers how our freedom is damaged by other people, his reasoning applies to objects as well. Consequently, he could hold that addicts are bound by drugs, as much as drug dealers, on the grounds that both generate a fear of quitting, one through threats of force, the other through withdrawal symptoms.

Furthermore, Spinoza's theory is able to recognize threats to freedom that have dogged even sophisticated contemporary versions of compatibilism. To illustrate this point, consider the example of a woman raised in a deeply patriarchal society. Suppose that women in this society are not allowed to drive cars, go out in public, hold jobs or have independent friendships outside of the family. To the extent that these prohibitions are enforced with physical constraints, the Hobbesian account recognizes them as impositions on women's freedom. However, suppose that the woman emigrated to a new country where there are no physical constraints, or even rules and sanctions to enforce the prohibitions. It may turn out that the woman continues to avoid these activities because she has been socialized to accept the beliefs of her home culture that women should not engage in these activities. As a result of these beliefs, the woman may not even

desire to engage in such activities. The Hobbesian view would be inclined to regard this woman as free, even though she appears to be every bit as much a prisoner in her new home. Spinoza's view, on the other hand, provides resources for articulating how the woman is not free, because she holds herself to irrational beliefs about her obligations as a woman. While Spinoza was sadly too sexist to follow this reasoning himself, it follows straightforwardly from his account.

CONCLUSIONS

Spinoza steers a middle course between the two most influential seventeenth-century conceptions of freedom. At one pole is the notion of freedom that usually serves as the starting place for incompatibilist theories, the ability to do otherwise. While Spinoza captures the notion that freedom should be understood as independence from external determination, he accepts that free action is determined by internal sources; indeed, his freedom consists in precisely this determination. At the other pole is the conception of freedom that usually serves as the starting place for compatibilists, the Hobbesian notion that freedom consists in the absence of constraints to pursue one's desires. Whereas the libertarian view is metaphysically demanding, the Hobbesian view makes few metaphysical commitments, conceiving of freedom as nothing more than a lack of impediments to pursuing one's volitions. While Spinoza accepts compatibilism, he breaks with the Hobbesian view by recognizing that there can be internal obstacles to our freedom, namely irrational psychological forces. Spinoza also suggests that these things can be brought about without any threat of force, through mere obligation, thereby offering the resources for analyzing complex threats to our freedom, including cases where people's freedom is harmed by their own socialized beliefs. This point will become more significant in Chapter 11 below, where I argue that Spinoza's view is better equipped to consider the social and political causes of our freedom and autonomy.

CHAPTER 3

Autonomy and responsibility

Having considered how Spinoza's conception of freedom stands with respect to other conceptions, we may now turn to the question of how it stands with respect to other related concepts, autonomy and responsibility. With respect to the former, the first section of this chapter argues that Spinoza's theory of freedom encompasses autonomy, which philosophers now distinguish from freedom. The section argues that Spinoza's view of autonomy should be understood as what is now called a substantive theory, holding that autonomy requires a commitment to certain unvarying beliefs. With respect to the latter, the second section aims to pin down Spinoza's cagey remarks on responsibility, which tend to dodge the difficult question of whether his causal determinism undermines the possibility of moral responsibility. The section argues that Spinoza's remarks, while consistent with a number of theories of responsibility, nevertheless deny that freedom can be understood as the condition for moral responsibility.

3.1 SPINOZISTIC AUTONOMY

While autonomy and freedom are closely related – indeed, it is common to treat autonomy as identical to positive freedom – the subject of autonomy, at least since Kant, has become an object of special philosophical investigation, distinct from freedom.[1] Of course, earlier philosophers would have recognized and sometimes used the Greek term for self-rule.[2] And regardless of whether philosophers used that particular term, notions of self-rule and what it amounts to have been discussed throughout the history of philosophy. In this general sense, Spinoza is clearly concerned with notions of autonomy. However, since he did not use the term 'autonomy,' we must

[1] See Christman (1989).
[2] Darwall (2006) briefly discusses the history of theorizing about autonomy.

be careful to articulate what we mean by it before considering how his views bear on the subject.

Of course, 'autonomy' can mean many things. Indeed, some have argued that the various notions of autonomy are too diverse to be encompassed by a single philosophical account.[3] The term sometimes refers to an agent's capacity to direct herself in a manner that reflects her authentic desires and values. In Kantian philosophy, autonomy refers to a property of a well-directed will or, more generally, the capacity to hold ourselves to normative principles. The term also sometimes refers to rights protecting individuals' abilities to direct themselves without coercion and paternalism. While these uses of the term are clearly different, they are nevertheless connected by the common notion that autonomy amounts to being self-directed, self-governed, one's own master. For the present purposes, I will focus on this general notion of autonomy. Consequently, I am concerned with realized autonomy, rather than a capacity for or right to autonomy.[4]

What does Spinoza's theory of freedom have to say about this notion of autonomy? Since self-directedness is more or less synonymous with self-determination, it appears that Spinoza's freedom is the same thing as autonomy.[5] There is, however, one important difference: Spinoza's 'free' is applicable to a broader class of things than 'autonomy.' Since 'free' describes the causal powers of things in general, it can meaningfully refer to anything possessing causal powers – rocks, hair and mud – whereas our notion of autonomy is only applicable to agents. Furthermore, one

[3] Feinberg (1989), 27–53.

[4] It is common to distinguish 'freedom' from 'autonomy' on the grounds that the former refers to acts, whereas the latter refers to the process by which one forms intentions, desires and preferences. For instance, Dworkin (1988, 16) regards autonomy as a global property referring to a person as a whole, not to particular acts. However, at the conceptual level of our discussion, it is intelligible to say that an agent himself, his desires, his process for forming the desires and the resulting actions are all the sorts of things that could be regarded as autonomous.

[5] One might object on the grounds that a minimal requirement of autonomy is being an agent in the sense of causing one's own actions. But Spinoza denies the possibility of mind–body causation, arguing that "when men say that this or that physical action has its origin in the mind, they are using words without meaning" (3p2s). On this basis, one might conclude that Spinoza's ethics aims to liberate us from the illusions of moral agency. Along these lines, Irwin argues that Spinoza rejects fundamental claims about agency, that "we are capable of actions, and that ethics matters because it concerns (among other things) the regulation of actions" (2008, 180). However, this objection reflects a misunderstanding of Spinoza's parallelism. The objection assumes that we are fundamentally minds and our actions are fundamentally bodily events, so that the impossibility of mind–body causation is tantamount to denying our very ability to effect change in the world. But parallelism rules out identifying anything, including minds and actions, as purely bodily or mental. Rather, these things have both mental and bodily expressions. Consequently, we do cause our actions: understood as mental modes, we bring about our actions, understood as mental modes; understood as bodily modes, we bring about our actions, understood as bodily modes.

might think that Spinoza would not countenance a distinct notion of autonomy, applying only to agents, since he upholds the naturalistic view that humans are part of the natural world, to be understood in the same way as natural things; indeed, he was so committed to this view that he endorsed panpsychism, arguing that all things, even rocks, have minds. However, Spinoza's naturalism does not imply that he would fail to recognize the obvious differences between inanimate objects and agents. On the contrary, he criticizes Blyenburgh for jumping to such a conclusion:

> When you say that by making men so dependent on God I reduce them to the level of elements, plants and stones, this is enough to show that you have completely misunderstood my views . . . This dependence on God and necessity of action through God's decree can be best understood when we have regard, not to logs and plants, but to created things of the highest degree of intelligibility and perfection. (letter 21)

While Spinoza holds that humans are part of the natural world and, consequently, causally determined, he nevertheless recognizes that we are special because we are capable of the highest degree of intelligibility and perfection, in other words, rationality. So, even though Spinoza accepts that rocks have minds, in the sense of ideas representing them, he has no trouble accepting that these minds are not capable of the things required of agents, such as deliberation or responding to reasons.[6] Consequently, he should have no trouble recognizing a distinct sort of self-determination that only humans possess. In fact, Spinoza is uniquely concerned with human freedom, which consists in traits that are specific to agents, such as having rational emotions and acting in accordance with reason. Therefore, we need not worry that Spinoza's 'free' has a wider extension than 'autonomy.'[7]

What, then, are Spinoza's views on autonomy? His most important claim is that autonomy consists in having adequate ideas. Since these ideas have a fixed content, Spinoza would not agree with those who understand autonomy as consisting in a content-neutral procedure for reasoning. For instance, one might argue that reason promotes our autonomy because it involves a process of reflecting on and considering one's own desires and preferences; this is often referred to as a 'procedural account' of autonomy.[8] A notable example is hierarchical accounts of autonomy as consisting in second-order endorsement of the desires and preferences that move us

[6] Of course, one might have a notion of autonomy such that the degree of self-directedness Spinoza attributes to rocks is a kind of autonomy. But I consider this to be an unusually loose notion of autonomy.

[7] My formulation of this point is indebted to an anonymous reader from Cambridge University Press.

[8] On this point, see Haworth (1986, Chapter 2).

to act.[9] While Spinoza's view is consistent with describing rationality in procedural terms, for instance, as following certain rules or upholding certain epistemic norms, he holds that people following such procedures will invariably reach the same adequate ideas and the same conclusions. Consequently, Spinoza cannot make sense of the notion that fully rational people can disagree. In this respect, he offers what is called a substantive account of autonomy.[10]

There are good reasons to prefer a substantive account, since it is notoriously difficult to devise a procedure that captures our complex intuitions about autonomy. In particular, it is difficult to devise a procedure that rules out obvious cases of manipulation. For instance, one could be hypnotized to reflect and deliberate in such a way that a particular outcome is inevitable. Thus, although the procedural requirements have been met, it does not seem that the outcome is authentically one's own. Procedural accounts also have some difficulty in justifying why their procedures promote autonomy. Why should reflection or deliberation make our actions a more authentic reflection of ourselves? Imagine that someone makes an impulsive decision to fire a gun to save her family from a killer. The fact that she didn't have time to deliberate and reflect does not necessarily indicate that her action was not her own. On the contrary, a person's initial, knee-jerk reaction is often her most authentic.

In contrast, Spinoza's substantive approach not only avoids these difficulties, but also captures a powerful intuition about the relationship between autonomy and knowledge. To illustrate the intuition, suppose that one has the power to choose one door over another but no idea of what is behind them. It does not seem that the mere ability to choose makes one any more self-directing. Rather, we must also know what is behind the doors so that our decision may reflect our own commitments, priorities and values. This point is frequently illustrated in the medical context, where the autonomy of patients requires that they are informed about their condition, the availability of options and the best medical treatments. This intuition supports Spinoza's view because he holds that our autonomy is connected to having not just particular beliefs, but, more specifically, knowledge. He recognizes this point when he argues that freedom is incompatible with indifference.

[9] For examples, see Frankfurt (1971; 1987), Christman (1991), Dworkin (1988). For discussion of the problems with such accounts, see Young (1986, Chapter 2), Lindley (1986) and Haworth (1986, part 1).

[10] Kant also holds a substantive view of autonomy, for he holds that being autonomous requires one to recognize the universal moral law. For more recent defenders of a substantive view, see Wolf (1990) and Benson.

For this argument, discussed in the previous chapter, shows that freedom requires us to have reasons, which implies that freedom also requires having the knowledge that serves as and justifies reasons.

On the other hand, substantive accounts of autonomy are subject to a common criticism: claiming that one must recognize certain fixed views or conclusions conflicts with the notion that autonomy is the ability to guide oneself in any way she wishes. Spinoza appears particularly vulnerable to this criticism: since adequate ideas have identical content for everyone, he holds that a population of fully autonomous people would act exactly the same way in the same situations. Spinoza's best response here is to point out that this difficulty arises for almost any view that defends the intuitive connection between autonomy and rationality. Assuming that reason directs us to certain fixed, universal conclusions, these views entail that autonomy requires us to recognize certain truths, even if they run contrary to our desires and preferences. So whether Spinoza's view is satisfying depends on whether we regard our rationality or our individual preferences as more fundamental to ourselves. It is important to remember here that reason, for Spinoza, is not an alien power, forcing us to act in accordance with its demands, but rather, our essential nature.

A further possible problem with Spinoza's substantive account is that procedural requirements appear to be necessary in order to rule out problem cases where people act in accordance with reason as the result of apparently nonautonomous processes. For instance, imagine that a teenage daughter wants to leave home in order to join a cult and her parents hire a psychiatrist to hypnotize her into remaining at home. If remaining at home is the more rational decision, it seems that Spinoza would be forced to conclude that hypnotizing the daughter helps her autonomy. However, one might object that the daughter's decision to remain at home, even if it is rational, would not be autonomous, because it is brought about through manipulation by the hypnotist. Since Spinoza identifies autonomy with rational behavior, without stipulating how such behavior is brought about, he appears to admit the apparently paradoxical conclusion that we can be coerced, manipulated, even brainwashed into being autonomous.

It must be admitted that Spinoza's conception of autonomy is friendlier to paternalism than many accounts because he disagrees with the notion that autonomy consists in doing as we like. For Spinoza, irrational preferences cannot be autonomous, even if they have been chosen without any obvious manipulation or coercion. Consequently, he must accept the possibility that it can promote autonomy to prevent one from acting on her preferences, if her preferences are irrational. In this respect, we can

promote the autonomy of others by 'making' them be rational. While this may appear objectionable, it avoids problems with the view that autonomy arises from acting in conformity with one's desires and preferences, which are often clearly not autonomous. Philosophers have long puzzled over how to explain the problems posed by cases of drug addicts, compulsive gamblers and kleptomaniacs. So, although Spinoza's view lets go of the notion that autonomy is connected to acting as we wish, the upshot is that he has an easy fix for such problem cases: acting on these desires does not promote one's autonomy, because the desires themselves are irrational.

We should also recognize two points that ameliorate Spinoza's commitment to paternalism. First, Spinoza has a strict view of acceptable paternalistic measures. He is clear that actions are only rational in virtue of the ideas that move us to the action: "to every action to which we are determined from an affect which is a passion, we can be determined by reason, without that affect" (4p59). Consequently, one's self-determination comes from having adequate ideas, not from being forced to act as though we do. It follows that we can only 'force' one to be autonomous by providing her with the adequate ideas required to recognize the right course of action for herself. In other words, Spinoza's view of rationality entails that we can only promote autonomy by providing individuals with the knowledge that changes their preferences, rather than forcing them to act contrary to their preferences. Consequently, it is misleading to say that, for Spinoza, force and manipulation can promote our autonomy. This point answers the hypnotism objection above: Spinoza would not conclude that hypnotism promotes the daughter's autonomy unless it imparts whatever adequate ideas indicate that cult membership is harmful. If the hypnotism provides adequate ideas, then it looks less like external manipulation and more like education. In this case, it appears that the hypnotism does promote autonomy, since the ultimate decision to stay at home is the daughter's own, arising from the power of her ideas.

Second, Spinoza has a strict view of when paternalism would be acceptable. He argues that paternalism promotes the best interests of its target, which distinguishes it from domination. This is clear from Spinoza's distinction between parenting and mastering.

> Though children are obliged to obey all their parents' commands, they are nonetheless not slaves, since a parent's commands have as their chief aim the good of the children. We thus recognize a vast difference between a slave, a child and a subject, who accordingly may be defined as follows: A slave is someone obliged to obey a master's commands, which look only to the advantage of the master; *a child is one who at the command of a parent does what is advantageous for himself*; and a subject

is one who does by command of the sovereign what is good for the community and, thereby, for himself. (*TTP* 16, 10; emphasis added)

This passage shows that there is a high standard for what counts as paternalism, for a paternalistic command must have the good of the 'child' as its chief aim and, furthermore, it must succeed in this aim, since Spinoza claims that in the case of paternalism the child "does what is advantageous to himself." So, while a parent may believe that forcing his children to work as prostitutes is to their benefit, Spinoza would say that this is not paternalism but rather slavery, since the action is, despite the parent's beliefs, contrary to the children's interests. It follows that paternalism would only be justified in cases where we could objectively know the right course of action and, as we will see, Spinoza is not optimistic about the power of reason to provide details about particular cases. Consequently, even though Spinoza may admit that paternalism can promote autonomy, he admits few instances where it is justified.

3.2 MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Causal determinism has long been regarded as a threat to moral responsibility. The central reason is expressed in the following argument: people should not be held responsible for actions – broadly construed to include decisions – that are not up to them or under their control. In order for an action to be under one's control, the individual must be free. But, if all events are causally determined, then it seems nobody is free and, thus, nobody can be held morally responsible. In this vein, Bishop Bramhall's chief complaint against Hobbes was that his account of liberty cannot make sense of just punishment; how can it be just to punish people for actions that are not freely chosen?[11] Even the ancient Stoics, writing long before the Christian preoccupation with free will, were pressed on similar grounds to reconcile their causal determinism with questions about responsibility.[12]

Given that these concerns were widely discussed, it is surprising that Spinoza, who pointedly defends causal determinism, has so little to say on the subject of responsibility. He only briefly mentions the related notions of praise and blame, writing that "the abstract notions of praise, blame, right, wrong" arise because people "believe that they are free" (1app).[13]

[11] Bramhall (1655), 1.

[12] This is the motivation for Chrysippus' example of the cylinder and cone, which will be discussed shortly.

[13] Della Rocca reads these remarks as implying that Spinoza thinks we are only responsible to the extent that we are free (2008b, 190). Since freedom and virtue are essentially equivalent, as I will

Since Spinoza is here talking about an opposing libertarian conception of freedom, he is referring to a mistaken belief in human freedom. Consequently, one might read these remarks as implying that praise, blame and the underlying notion of responsibility are confusions. However, this conclusion would be premature, for, in the same breath, Spinoza criticizes notions of good and bad, which his ethics ultimately defends and makes use of. Furthermore, when Spinoza briefly returns to the subject, as he promised in 1app, he does not criticize praise and blame as confusions; rather, he simply defines them as the joy and sadness we have toward the actions of others, a thoroughly Spinozistic and coherent definition (1p29s). Thus, his scant remarks on praise and blame tell us very little about his views on responsibility.

Spinoza's readers were not entirely content to let the issue go. In a letter, Oldenburg raises Bramhall's objection:[14]

> They consider that whatever compels or brings necessity to bear, excuses; and they hold that no one will thus be without excuse in the sight of God. If we are driven by fate, and if all things, unrolled by its unrelenting hand, follow a fixed and inevitable course, they do not see what place there is for blame and punishment. What wedge can be applied to this knot, it is very difficult to say. I would be glad to know and to learn from you what help you can give in this matter. (letter 74)

Spinoza responded as follows:

> This inevitable necessity of things does not do away with either divine or human laws. For moral precepts, whether or not they receive from God himself the form of command or law, are nonetheless divine and salutary, and whether the good that follows from virtue and the divine law is bestowed on us by God as judge, or whether it emanates from the necessity of the divine nature, it will not on that account be more or less desirable, just as on the other hand, the evils that follow from wicked deeds and passions are not less to be feared because they necessarily follow from them. And finally, whether we do what we do necessarily or contingently, we are still led by hope and fear. (letter 75)[15]

argue in the next chapter, this reading entails that we are responsible for only virtue, not vice. Since Spinoza never suggests that he upholds such a radical view of responsibility, I am disinclined to this reading.

[14] On responsibility, see also letter 19.

[15] This passage repeats, almost verbatim, his reply to the author of a pamphlet response to the *TTP* four years earlier (letter 43). The only change is that the term 'contingently' has taken the place of 'freely' in the last line; the passage above must have been copied from his previous letter. The earlier version continued: "therefore he is wrong in saying that 'I assert that no room is left for precepts and commandments,' or, as he goes on to say, 'there is no expectation of reward or punishment when all is attributed to fate, or when it is asserted that all things emanate from God by an inevitable necessity.'"

Spinoza makes three claims here, which add up to the more general conclusion that causal determinism does not undermine conventional morality. First, he asserts that moral principles ("precepts") are equally valuable ("salutary") whether or not they are given by divine commands or emanate by necessity from the divine nature. Second, he argues that acts themselves are equally valuable, whether or not they are necessary: "the evils that follow from wicked deeds and passions are not less to be feared because they necessarily follow from them." Finally, he argues that the necessity of actions is irrelevant to the practical perspective, since we continue to be "led by hope and fear," that is, to be led to act in the same way, regardless of whether our actions are determined.

How do these remarks reply to Oldenburg's concerns? It is not clear. Since the gist of his remarks is that determinism does not undermine morality, Spinoza appears to be suggesting that the value of good acts and moral principles provides sufficient grounds for holding a person responsible, whether or not her actions are causally determined. This is a provocative answer for which Spinoza provides little explanation. Is he suggesting that responsibility does not require control? Or does he think that the relevant kind of control is compatible with causal determinism? If so, what kind of control is it and how does it work? Not surprisingly, Oldenburg pressed Spinoza on the matter and he responded as follows:

> "But," you urge, "if men sin from the necessity of their nature, they are therefore excusable." You do not explain what conclusion you wish to draw from this. Is it that God cannot be angry with them, or is it that they are worthy of blessedness, that is, the knowledge and love of God? If you say the former, I entirely agree that God is not angry, and that all things happen in accordance with His will; but I deny that on that account all men ought to be blessed; for men may be excusable but nevertheless be without blessedness and afflicted in many ways. A horse is excusable, for being a horse and not a man; but, nevertheless, he must needs be a horse and not a man. He who goes mad from the bite of a dog is indeed to be excused, yet he is rightly suffocated. Finally, he who cannot control his desires, and keep them in check through fear of the laws, although he is also to be excused for his weakness, nevertheless cannot enjoy tranquillity of mind and the knowledge and love of God, but of necessity he is lost. (letter 78)

Spinoza asserts two claims here that bear on but, unfortunately, do not do much to clarify his response.[16] First, he argues that rewards and punishments can be justified independently of whether the individual is excusable

[16] Admittedly, some of Spinoza's response here is simply beside the point, such as his consideration of whether necessitated actions are excusable in the sense that God cannot be angry with them.

or responsible, pointing out that a mad person would be suffocated whether or not he was responsible for his condition. An analogous contemporary example would be the criminally insane: while their madness may excuse their crimes – prevent us from holding them responsible – we still punish them in the sense of protecting society by putting them away. This seems to take a different response to the objection than his initial response. Whereas he originally argued (on my best reading) that responsibility does not undermine conventional morality, he here suggests that we should assign reward and punishment without concern for responsibility, in other words, without taking account of desert, which would involve a fairly radical revision of much conventional morality.

Second, Spinoza points out that from the perspective of his ethics, the question of reward and punishment is not terribly important. Presumably, this is because, as we will see in the next chapter, Spinoza takes a eudaimonistic approach to ethics, which focuses on helping people to attain fulfillment and happiness, rather than providing grounds for praise and blame. Thus, at the end of the passage he points out that while a morally weak person may be excused, presumably because his behavior is beyond his control, whether he deserves to be blamed is irrelevant to his ethical aim of achieving knowledge of God and tranquillity of mind. This also seems to be the point of the earlier remark, that "men may be excusable but nevertheless be without blessedness and afflicted in many ways."

What, then, can we conclude about Spinoza's views of responsibility from this rather muddled exchange? It does not appear that this aspect of his thinking was as well thought-out as other aspects. Consequently, we should not put too much stress on his more speculative remarks, for instance, that rewards and punishments need not consider desert. Nevertheless, Spinoza's remarks indicate at least one significant commitment, to which he was firmly committed, that whether we are responsible, for Spinoza, is a fundamentally different issue from whether we are free. This is implied not only by Spinoza's general neglect of the subject of responsibility, but also by his initial remarks to Oldenburg that his causal determinism does not call into question our standard ways of thinking about morality: we have just as much reason to follow moral laws, Spinoza suggests, whether or not our actions are determined. This view is diametrically opposed to Oldenburg's view, so prevalent in early modern thought, that freedom is a condition for and, thus, necessarily connected to moral responsibility. Spinoza has

Spinoza denies this not because of his views on moral responsibility and determinism, but rather because he denies that God can be angry, since Spinoza's God is not personal.

deep reasons to deny this view, since, as we have seen, he holds that we are only rarely free and never absolutely free. Consequently, if he regarded freedom as a condition for responsibility, he would be forced to conclude that we are rarely or never responsible. More specifically, he would be forced to conclude that we are only responsible when we are rational. Since Spinoza's remarks indicate that he did not see his determinism as being fundamentally at odds with ordinary attributions of moral responsibility (though his ethics may diminish their importance), he must have held that our responsibility does not require our freedom.

Appreciating this point helps us to see how Spinoza's remarks answer Oldenburg's objection, though in a rather circuitous and profound way, not explicitly articulated. To understand how, it is helpful to consider the basic form of Oldenburg's objection:

(1) We are generally morally responsible.
(2) Being responsible requires that we are free, in some sense.
(3) We are generally free, in this sense (by *modus ponens* from [1] and [2]).
(4) Our freedom, in this sense, requires *P* (some metaphysical condition).
(5) Therefore, *P* must obtain (by *modus ponens* from [3] and [4]).

The general strategy of this argument form is to derive metaphysical conclusions from the fact of our moral responsibility. Oldenburg's argument substitutes 'the falsity of causal determinism' for *P*, thereby concluding that causal determinism cannot be true. Since Spinoza rejects the very notion that freedom is a condition for moral responsibility, he responds to the argument by denying that we can infer anything about freedom from facts about responsibility, in other words, by denying (2). Consequently, Spinoza rejects not just Oldenburg's argument but also the more general argumentative strategy to determine the nature of freedom by analyzing the conditions for moral responsibility. In other words, Spinoza does not regard freedom as whatever must be the case in order for us to be justified in holding people responsible. Indeed, he rejects, at an even more general level, the strategy to infer metaphysical conclusions (about the nature and possibility of human freedom) from our moral intuitions (about responsibility).

Spinoza is arguably on to something here. Let's say that we have, on one hand, a compelling argument for causal determinism and, on the other, a conflicting moral intuition about the nature of responsibility. What reason do we have for preferring the latter? Theorists of freedom throughout the history of philosophy have been inclined to accept our intuitions about responsibility on the basis of Christian background assumptions. The future of our souls in the afterlife is determined by divine judgment

of our actions. Since divine judgment is just, the thinking goes, we must be genuinely responsible for our actions. In this way, our responsibility is stipulated a priori, built into the metaphysical fabric of the world, which justifies concluding the existence of whatever metaphysical conditions are required for our responsibility. For this reason, most Christian debates about freedom accept as a ground rule that one must provide a metaphysical footing for responsibility, thereby treating our intuitions about the fact and nature of responsibility as bedrock. But Spinoza denies the Christian assumption that "God directs everything to a fixed end" (1app). Indeed, since Spinoza's God acts with necessity from his own nature as infinite power (1p33, 1p35), God cannot be understood as personal, acting with a benevolent will and intentions (1p33s2). Spinoza, at one point, even claims to avoid "bringing in the notion of God as judge" (letter 21). Consequently, for Spinoza, there is no reason to think that the universe was created with the purpose of accommodating human responsibility.

Once we consider the matter from a more secular perspective, what reason do we have to think that our moral intuitions about responsibility indicate metaphysical truths? While moral intuitions provide a helpful way of understanding our implicit moral commitments, our values, the consequences we would or would not accept, there is no reason to think that they provide an accurate understanding of causality. On the contrary, the independence of facts from values gives us reason to believe that such metaphysical issues should be addressed independently of our moral commitments.[17] Spinoza certainly did not regard our moral intuitions as providing reliable insight into the nature of reality. On the contrary, he claims that many of our intuitions on this subject are wrong, arguing that people mistakenly perceive themselves as entirely self-determined because they are ignorant of the causes that determine their actions (2p35s; letter 58).[18] This way of thinking is reflected in the method of the *Ethics*, which derives the content of his ethical theory, contained in Parts IV and V, from his metaphysics, contained in Parts I and II. In other words, he derives his ethics from metaphysics, not the other way around. From Spinoza's perspective, the argument form above is like beginning the *Ethics* with

[17] This line of reasoning presupposes that Spinoza accepts a divide between facts and values. I defend this claim in the next two chapters, where I show that Spinoza understands notions of value as reducible to good and bad, which are not properties that objects possess themselves, but are rather projected on to them by human desires. As we will see, things only count as good and bad for Spinoza with respect to the perspective of an individual *conatus*.

[18] In this vein, Hampshire (1977) argues that Spinoza's ethics should be distinguished from Aristotle's, because whereas the latter takes our intuitions as bedrock, Spinoza seeks to overturn them, challenging us with revolutionary new ideas.

the morals and deriving the metaphysics in the final part, putting the cart before the horse.

It is worth noting that Spinoza's reasoning here breaks with many contemporary philosophers of freedom. Philosophers continue to argue that determinism must be false on the basis that it cannot satisfy our intuitions about moral responsibility.[19] Furthermore, by placing consideration of freedom procedurally prior to and independent of responsibility, Spinoza also breaks with the very notion that freedom ought to be conceived as the metaphysical condition for responsibility, as do even some compatibilists.[20] While it is possible that freedom may ultimately serve as a metaphysical condition for responsibility, defining freedom as the metaphysical condition for responsibility, at the outset, smuggles moral intuitions into metaphysics, stipulating an a priori burden that our account of freedom reveal the features of agents necessary for holding them responsible.

To be clear, the foregoing discussion shows only that Spinoza did not regard freedom as a condition for moral responsibility. It would be a mistake to conclude that he is a skeptic about moral responsibility. On the contrary, the project of the *Ethics* relies upon at least a primitive notion of responsibility, since it directs us to a better life, which presupposes that we can be responsible to ourselves, holding ourselves accountable to our own projects, desires and principles. Furthermore, Spinoza's metaphysics provides possible grounds for the notion of responsibility, namely one's activity in bringing about her actions.[21] In this respect, Spinoza can follow the view sketched by the ancient Stoic example of a cylinder and a cone. When tipped over, both objects roll in different ways, according to their shape: the cylinder rolls in a straight line, whereas the cone's path is curved. The example is intended to serve as an analogy for the chain of events leading to an action. There are two events in the example: the tipping represents the effect of external objects on us, setting in motion the

[19] In general, incompatibilists regard our intuitions that we must have choice as evidence against causal determinism. I assume here that they are committed to the fact that we have choice on the basis of moral intuitions as much as self-reporting. See Van Inwagen (1983), 95–6, 190–1; Clarke (1993), 191–203; and Ekstrom (2000). However, incompatibilists do not necessarily agree on the strength of that evidence and today they rarely hold that our intuitions about responsibility prima facie trump arguments for determinism. Van Inwagen's reasoning is that, once arguments for determinism have been refuted, our intuitions about responsibility give us reason to deny determinism.

[20] "We can express the problem of free will in the form of the question 'What must our relation to our wills be?,' or better, perhaps, 'What kind of beings must *we* be if we are ever to be responsible for the results of our wills?'" Wolf (1990, 4; Wolf's emphasis).

[21] This condition should be distinguished from agent control, which specifies that actions or behaviors be caused by the agent in such a way that the agent can be said to control them. See O'Connor (1993), 500.

psychological process leading to action; the distinctive rolling movement of the object along the ground represents our individual psychological processes. The analogy purports to show that, even though the chain of events is initiated by an external force and unfolds in a causally determined way, the outcome of the sequence is nevertheless determined by the objects themselves, their peculiar shapes.[22] In the same way, while our decisions and volitions may be causally determined, they are still determined by us, our particular beliefs, character and thought processes. The Stoics held that this provides sufficient grounds for responsibility. Spinoza too can argue that we are responsible for our actions, even if they are the outcome of a causally determined sequence, because they are determined by our particular powers.[23]

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explained how Spinoza's concept of freedom bears on notions of autonomy and responsibility. With respect to the former, human freedom, for Spinoza, is equivalent to the general notion of autonomy, the property of agents in virtue of which they guide or direct themselves. Since Spinoza holds that humans become autonomous through using reason, which consists in having adequate ideas with fixed content, it follows that Spinoza is committed to a substantive rather than a procedural account of autonomy. Since this fixed content is also certain knowledge, it follows that our autonomy is promoted by having knowledge. While this view is more consistent with paternalism in the sense that it divorces autonomy from pursuing one's volitions and preferences, Spinoza mitigates this commitment because he has a strict view of how paternalism can be enforced and when it is justified.

With respect to responsibility, Spinoza has little to say and what he does say is difficult to parse. Nevertheless, it is clear that he does not regard his causal determinism as undermining ordinary attributions of moral

[22] To be clear, the Stoics did not introduce the example as a way of defending compatibilism, since such concerns were not raised until much later. For a discussion of this point and the example, see Bobzien (1998, Chapter 6).

[23] If Spinoza were to explain responsibility in this way, he would need to specify the sort of activity in the agent that is required for moral responsibility. Mere proximate causation would not be sufficient to ground moral responsibility, since that would not account for accidents. Rather, we should say that an agent is responsible when the causal chain leading to an action moves through the agent in a morally relevant way, for instance, when it is caused by morally relevant features of the agent, such as her judgment, disposition, intention or character. Today this way of thinking about responsibility is often called an actual-sequence account of responsibility.

responsibility. This implies that he cannot regard freedom as a condition for moral responsibility, since this would entail the unusual conclusion that we are only responsible in the few conditions where we are free, namely when we are rational. This point, coupled with Spinoza's general evasiveness on the subject of responsibility, also indicates that he does not regard discussion of responsibility as necessary to understanding freedom. In this respect, Spinoza opposes the common strategy to analyze freedom as the condition for moral responsibility. This is a defensible view, for we have little reason to think that our moral intuitions would map on to the fundamental nature of reality. While Spinoza did not discuss how we might instead determine responsibility, his view is friendly to the Stoic notion that we are responsible for our actions in virtue of our activity in bringing them about.

CHAPTER 4

Freedom and happiness

Now that we understand what freedom is, we can consider why Spinoza regards it as so valuable. To this end, this chapter examines the role freedom plays in his ethical project. Drawing on the ancient Greeks, Spinoza conceives of ethics as helping us to determine the value of our various goods so that we may plan our lives for attaining our highest good. Attaining our highest good, on this view, provides us with *eudaimonia*, an ethically rich conception of happiness that encompasses flourishing and perfection. Unlike the ancients, however, Spinoza holds that freedom plays a central role in our *eudaimonia*. This is because *eudaimonia* comes from virtue, which Spinoza essentially equates with freedom, for he understands freedom as acting from one's own power and defines virtue as equivalent to one's power (4def8). It follows that freedom is important to Spinoza's ethics for the same reason as virtue, because it is constitutive of our highest good and, more fundamentally, because it serves as the measure by which we determine the value of all things. A central conclusion of this reading is that Spinoza departs from the dominant tradition in modern ethics, which regards freedom as important because it is essential to our moral agency or personhood, the basis for special consideration we afford moral agents, such as dignity or respect. Rather, freedom matters, for Spinoza, because it is integral to our flourishing and happiness.

The first section below sets forth Spinoza's eudaimonistic project as it is sketched in the *TdIE*. The second section shows how this project is taken up in Spinoza's later writings. The final section explains the value of freedom and autonomy with respect to this project.

4.1 SPINOZA'S EUDAIMONISTIC OUTLOOK

To understand the aims and methods of Spinoza's ethics, we should begin by taking a close look at the unfinished *TdIE*.[1] Although the editors of the

[1] I generally agree with those who read the *TdIE* as clarifying the project of the *Ethics*. See Moreau (1994, book 1, particularly Chapter 1), De Dijn (1996) and Garrett (2003). For a discussion of the

posthumous collection of Spinoza's writings suggested that this is a later work, it is more likely an early work, since he refers to a work on "the emendation of the intellect" in an undated letter to Oldenburg (6), likely from early 1662. This indicates that the *TdIE* was written much earlier than the *Ethics* and likely earlier even than the *KV*, for the same letter indicates that Spinoza had already set aside the *TdIE* and was continuing to revise the *KV*. This dating is supported by the apparent immaturity of his philosophical views in the *TdIE*. For instance, Spinoza there makes use of the distinction between formal and objective essence (33), a rather scholastic distinction that had been ironed out of his thinking by the *Ethics*. According to this evidence, the *TdIE* is, if not Spinoza's first philosophical work, his earliest surviving work on ethics.

As such, the *TdIE* provides a window on Spinoza's thinking about the nature of ethics, its motivations, questions and methods, issues that are not explicitly dealt with in the *Ethics*. The text shows that Spinoza's entrance into ethics is heavily influenced by ancient philosophy, quite possibly the classical works with which he cut his Latin teeth under van den Enden's tutelage.[2] The work begins:

> After experience had taught me the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and I realized that all the things which were the source and object of my anxiety held nothing of good or evil in themselves save insofar as the mind was influenced by them, I resolved at length to enquire whether there existed a true good, one which was capable of communicating itself and could alone affect the mind to the exclusion of all else, whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford me a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity. (*TdIE* 1)

This introduction is remarkable for its reliance on the first-person voice, which gives the text an almost confessional quality. This suggests that Spinoza's entry point into ethics is personal reflection on his own life, which is supported by the fact that his life was guided by such deliberate planning, namely the decision to devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge, despite the harmful consequences of doing so: a life of limited financial means, the rejection of the Jewish community and possible persecution for his unpopular views. In proceeding in this way, Spinoza takes on not just a style of writing, but also a fundamental way of thinking about the nature of ethical reflection, as arising from the question of how one should plan

method of the *TdIE* and its relationship to general discussions of method in the seventeenth century, see Garrett (2003, 73–86).

[2] Obvious candidates include Seneca's letters and Cicero's *De Finibus*.

her life, precisely the same starting point as much ancient ethics. Thus, the text focuses on the possibility of "embarking on a new way of life" (6). This approach indicates that Spinoza's ethics is first-personal, arising from the perspective of a person considering how to act on the basis of his own concerns, ends and satisfaction. In this respect it departs from the common modern concern with the third-personal question of how *one* should act, which seeks a verdict on the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of acts.

According to this way of thinking, ethics is fundamentally concerned with determining the value of the various goods in one's life, so that she may plan accordingly. In this vein, much of the early *TdIE* is devoted to investigating the respective value of various goods. He considers the value of "riches, honor and sensual pleasure" (3–5) and worries whether, in changing his life, he would be "abandoning a certain good for an uncertain good" (6). Furthermore, the ancients held that understanding the true value of our goods means recognizing that there is a hierarchy among them, for there is a highest good, that which is valuable for its own sake and for the sake of which all other things are valuable.[3] A good life, then, is properly directed to one's highest good, which entails acting for the sake of other goods in a way that reflects their proper place in the hierarchy of goods. This notion of a highest good is captured by Spinoza's "supreme good" in the passage above, which he goes on to call our "highest good" (3–6). He describes this good as "sought exclusively for its own sake," and "good in itself and the ultimate end to which everything is directed" (5). For this reason, he treats the supreme good as providing "a guiding principle" (3, 11) for directing one's life.

Spinoza also follows the ancients in identifying this highest good with our *eudaimonia*. While he does not use this term, since he is not writing in Greek, Spinoza's explanation of the highest good indicates that it possesses the properties usually associated with *eudaimonia*. To begin with, his supreme good is a kind of happiness: he describes the supreme good as his "highest happiness [*felicitas*]" (2) and claims that it provides "a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity" (2). In contrast, he claims that those who misidentify their highest good meet with "a profound depression," which leads to "confusion and enervation" (4). But, Spinoza's highest good is not merely a joyful or pleasurable state, for it also involves the flourishing connoted by '*eudaimonia*.' More specifically, Spinoza equates achieving the

[3] Of course, there is a great deal of variety among these accounts. For instance, for Aristotle there are other practical goods which do not themselves constitute the highest good but which make it possible for us to achieve the highest good, such as a life with sufficient resources for rational reflection and participation in civic life, a claim which the Stoics deny, as we will see shortly.

supreme good with realizing his nature, thereby perfecting himself: "Man is urged to seek the means that will bring him to such a perfection, and all that can be the means of his attaining this objective is called a true good, while the supreme good is to arrive at the enjoyments of such a nature" (*TdIE* 13). This last point requires some qualification, however, for Spinoza denies in the preceding paragraph that there is a basis for attributing these natures to anything other than human desires, which we mistakenly attribute to things themselves. Consequently, he concludes that "nothing when regarded in its own nature can be called perfect or imperfect" (12). According to this view, we strive for our highest good from a mistaken understanding of our nature, because "human weakness fails to comprehend the order in its thoughts" (13). This makes a significant break from the ancients, who understood our highest good as fixed objectively in nature, independent of our desires.[4] Spinoza nevertheless agrees that our highest good amounts to flourishing in the sense of realizing and perfecting our nature, given this different understanding of our natures. While there is a great deal more to be said about the *TdIE*, this discussion is sufficient to provide the necessary background for Spinoza's mature philosophy.

4.2 EUDAIMONISM IN THE MATURE WORK

Spinoza's eudaimonism appears to persist in his mature philosophy, since he continues to make use of eudaimonistic concepts. Indeed, the *Ethics* claims to direct us to our "*summum bonum*," as well as our '*summum felicitas*' and '*beatitudo*,' other common Latin renderings of *eudaimonia* (4p28, 4p36, 4p52, 4app25, *TTP* 4, 4–5).[5] However, one might question whether his early views persist in a serious way. After all, the *TdIE* was never published or even completed, and the *Ethics* makes similar allusions to Judaism and Christianity, only to turn these traditions on their heads. To determine the extent of Spinoza's eudaimonism, we should consider what he has in mind when he undertakes to direct us to our highest good, which requires examining his view of the highest good. He defines 'good' as "that which we certainly know to be useful to us" (4def1) and 'bad' as "that which we certainly know to be an obstacle to our attainment of

[4] This is likely how Spinoza understood the ancients, at any rate.

[5] It is possible that he uses so many terms in recognition of the difficulty of translating '*eudaimonia*' as either *summum bonum* or *beatitudo*. He clearly regards these terms as equivalent: he equates "highest happiness" with "blessedness" in 4app4. He identifies blessedness with knowledge of God (4app4; *TTP* 4, 4), which is also our highest good (4p28). He also describes our highest good as our "highest good and blessedness," the "final end and the aim of all man's actions" (*TTP* 4, 4).

some good" (4def2). While his view of the good will be examined more extensively in the coming chapter, suffice it to say that he understands the good as what is useful for our *conatus*, that is, what increases our power. If our good promotes our power, then our highest good must promote our power to the greatest degree. On this basis, Spinoza identifies our highest good as the knowledge of God (4p28).[6] This is because we most increase our power, understood at the mental level, through understanding. Knowledge of God most increases our understanding, since nothing "can be or be conceived without God" (4p28d). This argument is clearest in the *TTP*, where Spinoza puts it in a slightly different way:

> Since the knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing other than the knowledge of a property of that cause, the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of God's essence, which is the cause of all things. So the whole of our knowledge, that is, our supreme good, not merely depends on the knowledge of God but consists entirely therein. (4, 4)

In other words, since God is equivalent to nature and contains all things, conceiving God is equivalent to conceiving all things, which is the greatest expression of our mental powers. Thus, Spinoza's ethics directs us to our highest good in the sense of providing us with the knowledge of God.

Our question, then, is whether taking up this task indicates a serious commitment to eudaimonism. To begin with, Spinoza's identification of the highest good with knowledge of God preserves the traditional eudaimonistic view that there is a hierarchy of goods, such that everything is valued with respect to this highest good. As Spinoza writes in the *TTP*: "the knowledge and love of God is the ultimate end to which all our actions are to be directed" (4, 5). This view consists in two claims, that our highest good is (a) valued for its own sake and (b) that for the sake of which all other things are valued (*TdIE* 1, 5). While Spinoza does not assert this precise version of the claim in his mature work, it follows from his general commitments. (a) follows from the *conatus* doctrine, which entails that increasing our power is good for us in and of itself; "virtue should be sought for its own sake . . . there is nothing preferable to it or more to our advantage, for the sake of which it should be sought" (4p18s). Since

[6] More specifically, our highest good is the intuitive knowledge of God (5p27), knowledge of the third kind (2p40s2), which will be discussed in the next chapter. 5p27 indicates that the highest good consists in only an intuitive knowledge of God, knowledge of the third kind (2p40sch2). Although other passages indicate that any adequate conception of God constitutes our highest good (4p36d), our highest good is to know God and intuition provides the best knowledge. One should note that Spinoza also identifies our highest good as the love of God and self-esteem, claims which will be examined in Chapter 7 below.

we increase our power by having adequate ideas, it follows that having adequate ideas is also valuable for its own sake, including adequate ideas or knowledge of God. In other words, knowledge of God, our highest good, is valued for its own sake. An argument for (b) follows from Spinoza's view of our striving, understood at the mental level as the striving to conceive, that is, to increase our mental powers by acquiring more ideas and more adequate ideas. It follows that our striving, understood at the mental level, is the striving to understand God and to do so adequately, since God contains all things. Because the good is what promotes our striving, it follows that the only thing of value, understood at the mental level, is what helps us to understand God. In other words, all things, understood at the mental level, are good with respect to the end of knowing God, our highest good.

Spinoza also upholds the ancient notion that our highest good provides a kind of *eudaimonia*. To begin with, Spinoza's highest good provides a kind of happiness. For he holds that our activity necessarily gives rise to joy, which entails that attaining the highest good, since it most increases our power of activity, also provides us with the greatest joy: "he who passes to this highest state of human perfection . . . is affected by the highest joy" (5p27d). Spinoza describes this joy as the "highest happiness [*summa felicitas*]" (4app4), more specifically, a kind of self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*):

> For blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God. Now to perfect the intellect is also nothing other than to understand God and the attributes and actions of God that follow from the necessity of his nature. Therefore, for the man who is guided by reason, the final goal, that is, the highest desire whereby he strives to control all the others, is that by which he is brought to an adequate conception of himself and of all things that can fall within the scope of his understanding. (4app4)

This claim is initially puzzling, since Spinoza defines self-contentment as the joy arising from contemplating one's own power of activity (DOE 25), not God's. However, Spinoza holds that the emotion of joy is an idea corresponding to and, thus, representing increases in our power. It follows that knowing God necessarily involves joy connected to representations of the resulting increase in our own power. The joy, then, is not just the joy that comes from knowing God, but also the joy that comes from recognizing how this knowledge magnifies and increases our power. In this respect, Spinoza's claim that the highest good provides self-contentment underscores that our highest joy and happiness arises from ourselves, our

own increase in power, rather than awe and wonder at God's infinite power. This reading is supported by Spinoza's insistence that we should be motivated to attain the highest good not out of obeisance to God, like the ignorant described in 1app, but rather from the joy that "arises from the contemplation of ourselves" (3p55c1s).

As the passage above suggests, Spinoza's highest good is also like *eudaimonia* in that it involves flourishing, developing and perfecting our nature. Since our power of activity is also our essential nature, increasing our activity increases our perfection: "the more perfection a thing has, the more active and the less passive it is. Conversely, the more active it is, the more perfect it is" (5p40).[7] Consequently, the highest good, since it most increases our activity, also most increases our perfection. On this basis, Spinoza explicitly equates our highest good with our perfection, specifically our intellectual perfection, increasing the activity of the mind to its greatest possible degree: "If we want to seek what is truly in our own interest, we should endeavor above all things to perfect the intellect as much as possible; for our highest good must consist in its perfection" (*TTP* 4, 4).[8] While this passage and others like it claim that our highest good consists in perfecting the intellect, we should not conclude that Spinoza prefers the good of the mind to the good of the body.[9] Spinoza's parallelism dictates that the order and connection among modes must be the same for all attributes. Consequently, increasing our mental power by attaining the highest good must increase our bodily power in precisely the same way. In other words, perfecting the intellect entails perfecting the corresponding bodily states. It follows that the body is most powerful and perfect when the mind has adequate ideas. Spinoza acknowledges this conclusion when he claims that "he whose body is capable of the greatest amount of activity has a mind whose greatest part is eternal" (5p39). Since our minds become more eternal the greater we understand God through reason (5p23; see also 5p30) and we best understand God through reason when we have intuitive knowledge (5p33), 5p39 basically claims that our body has the greatest amount of activity when we have intuitive knowledge of God, in other

[7] This is because Spinoza equates our perfection with our reality (2def6) and we have more reality as our activity increases. It is helpful here to think of our reality as our causal footprint, the degree to which we act on the world.

[8] He similarly claims that our blessedness, which amounts to our highest good, "must consist in the mind being endowed with perfection" (5p33s). See also *TdIE* 13 and 4app4.

[9] This is a common conclusion. For instance, Miller writes that Spinoza is committed to "the superiority of the good of the mind to that of the body" (2005, 159). Bidney argues that there is no corporeal correlate of virtue (1940, 278) and that there is no parallel between moral virtue and physical notions of virtue or power (293). See also Allison (1987, 148–9).

words, the highest good.[10] According to this discussion, the bodily activity involved in knowing God, presumably the activity of our brains, represents greater activity than other things that we usually associate with our bodily power, for instance, robust health, physical strength or the ability to defend oneself.

The foregoing discussion shows that Spinoza's eudaimonistic commitments not only persist, but are strengthened in the *Ethics*, since it provides a more systematic account of our highest good and one that is more thoroughly grounded in his metaphysics. Remember, the *TdIE* held that any notion of our essential nature is a confused projection of our desires, so that there can be no metaphysical footing for the notion of human perfection. By the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza has developed the concept of *conatus*, an essential nature that we can know through reason and perfect. Consequently, the *Ethics* regards the property of perfection as grounded in the true natures of things; indeed, the *Ethics* defines perfection as "reality" (2def6). It follows that Spinoza's understanding of ethics in the *Ethics* is eudaimonistic, and in roughly the way he describes in the *TdIE*. It is important to emphasize that this view of ethics is practical. In other words, it changes not only our affective and psychological states, but also our actions, for it provides knowledge of the value of goods, which determines how we value others, what we regard as worthwhile endeavors, how we budget our time and prioritize our various activities.[11]

4.3 FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY AS VIRTUE

With Spinoza's ethical project in view, we can now consider freedom's place in it. Since Spinoza regards freedom and our highest good as important ethical goals, one would expect them to have some relationship. But it is difficult to determine the precise relationship because Spinoza generally has little to say about freedom in connection with his eudaimonism. We can make progress here by looking to Spinoza's views on virtue, since he is far more explicit about virtue's importance to eudaimonism and he essentially equates our freedom with our virtue. While this equation is not initially obvious from his definition of virtue as power (4def8), we must remember

[10] We should not suppose that survival or preservation of being is our highest good. While Spinoza writes that "nobody endeavors to preserve his being for the sake of some other thing" (4p25), this does not show that self-preservation is our highest good, since the highest good is not only valued for its own sake, but also that for the sake of which all other things are valued.

[11] LeBuffe supports my general claim that Spinoza's ethics directs our actions by helping us to understand our good (2010, especially Chapter 6).

that our power cannot be stored, like the power in a battery; rather, it is always expressed, which entails that our power is the same thing as our activity. One's activity, in turn, consists in acting from one's own power, which is equivalent to our self-determination or freedom. Thus, freedom and virtue are equivalent in that both amount to acting from one's own power, as Spinoza acknowledges in the *TP*: "freedom, in fact, is virtue" (2, 7).

What role, then, does virtue play in Spinoza's eudaimonism? To begin with, virtue is importantly connected to our highest good, as Spinoza indicates when he writes that "the mind's highest good is knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God" (4p28; see also 4p36, 5p27). To understand this claim, it is helpful to consider the relationship between the good and virtue generally: we have seen that our good is what is useful to our power, while virtue is our power itself. In other words, the good is what is useful to increasing our virtue. This entails that attaining the highest good increases our power to the greatest degree, thereby providing us with the highest virtue. 4p28, then, is claiming that attaining the highest good (the knowledge of God) is necessarily accompanied by the 'highest virtue,' the activity of knowing God, which is the greatest expression of our power. It follows that attaining the highest good requires increasing our virtue to its highest degree, so that virtue is a central part of *eudaimonia*. In fact, since joy arises from our activity, virtue is essential to generating the happiness associated with *eudaimonia*. Given the equivalence of virtue and freedom, it follows that our highest good is also essentially connected to our freedom. Spinoza acknowledges this conclusion when he describes our *beatitudo* as "freedom of mind" (5pref). Thus, *eudaimonia* involves freedom, which provides Spinoza's eudaimonism with a distinctively modern twist.

This discussion indicates an even more important point about the role of virtue in Spinoza's eudaimonism, though understanding how requires elaborating on the relationship between the good and virtue. I said that the good is what is useful to increasing our virtue. By this, I mean that good things count as good because they increase our virtue, such that whether and to what extent anything is good is determined by how it increases our virtue. In other words, virtue serves as the measure of the good.[12]

[12] This claim is potentially problematic, for, if things are judged as good because they are a means to our virtue, it would follow that our highest good is only good as a means to our highest virtue, which is inconsistent with the very idea of a highest good, something that is valuable for its own sake. To avoid this difficulty, the claim should be understood in a slightly different way; things only count as good in virtue of how they contribute to our virtue, but not as a means to it. For example, we could agree that cheesecake is the best dessert, but disagree as to whether it is best in virtue

There is a notable precedent for this claim in ancient Stoicism. While most eudaimonists agreed, on a superficial and formal level, that the highest good is happiness, they were divided on their conceptions of happiness. Most notably, Epicureans held that happiness consists in pleasure, while the Stoics held that it consists in virtue.[13] The issue between them is not whether happiness requires virtue or pleasure, for the Epicureans were adamant that it does require virtue.[14] Rather, the issue concerns value, whether happiness is valuable because of its connection to virtue or pleasure. The Stoics argue that happiness and, indeed, all things have value because of how they contribute to virtue. In this respect, virtue is the most primitive measure of value, by which we determine the value of all things.[15]

There is, however, an important difference between Spinoza's and the Stoics' views of virtue. The Stoics reject Aristotle's suggestion that our goods include external things that promote commodious living, whereas Spinoza admits that anything promoting our power contributes to our virtue, including such external things.[16] In other words, Spinoza links the good and virtue by expanding the scope of 'virtue,' to encompass all good things, rather than restricting the scope of 'good,' to only what is virtuous, as the Stoics did. For this reason, Spinoza's notion of virtue, like Aristotle's, lacks any peculiarly moral sense: anything good for us, even obviously amoral activities such as eating and drinking, contributes to our virtue. It follows that Spinoza does not recognize a category of peculiarly moral goods: being just, moral or fair is valuable in the same way as a nice car, a cup of tea or a vacation. Any distinction between these goods must be one of degree, rather than kind.[17]

This discussion helps us to understand the full ethical significance of freedom: like virtue, freedom is important to Spinoza's ethics because it serves as the measure by which we determine the value of goods. This conclusion is suggested by Spinoza's tendency to use the term 'freedom' and its contrast, slavery, as ways of describing the value of things. For instance, he calls the love of God "man's true freedom" (*KV* II, 26) and claims that the union of man and God, "our supreme happiness and bliss" (*KV* II, 26), is "human freedom" (*KV* II, 26). As I noted above, he also

of its richness or sweetness. In defending our respective positions, we would not be arguing that cheesecake is only instrumentally valuable as a means to something rich or sweet.

[13] For the Stoic claim, see John Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 2, 6e, where he reports on views by Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus. For the Epicurean, see Cicero, *De Finibus*, Book I, 29.

[14] See Epicurus, letter to Menoeceus, 127–32.

[15] Cicero, *De Finibus*, Book III, 20–2.

[16] See Cicero, *De Finibus*, Book III, 21, 34, and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, volume VII, 101–3.

[17] This point will be treated more extensively in Chapter 6 below.

calls our *beatitudo* "freedom of mind" (5pref), which not only specifies the nature of the highest good but also indicates its immense value. According to this reading, the right course of action is that which best promotes one's freedom. In this respect, freedom, like virtue, is the ultimate basis for planning one's life. Consequently, the good life, for Spinoza, is not only one of flourishing, pleasure and virtue, as the ancients held, but also one of freedom.

These conclusions about the ethical significance of freedom also have important implications for Spinoza's view of autonomy. While we have already seen that autonomy consists in rationality, Spinoza's commitment to eudaimonism shows that it consists, more specifically, in the activity of guiding oneself according to a rational understanding of the good. In other words, autonomy involves recognizing and acting in accordance with our understanding of the value of things. In this respect, Spinoza's view bears some resemblance to the view, more recently defended by Watson, that autonomy requires acting in accordance with one's values. According to this view, we can determine whether an individual's actions are autonomous by considering whether they are in keeping with her general values and priorities, rather than considering her second-order desires and volitions, as do hierarchical accounts of autonomy.[18] While Spinoza agrees that we become autonomous from acting in accordance with our values, his view is more pointed than Watson's, for Spinoza holds that we become autonomous not only by acting from our authentic values, but also from the right values, in other words, from true knowledge of the good. In this respect, Spinoza's view is closer to a stronger view, upheld by Benson, that autonomy requires understanding the normative standards for action.[19] To illustrate the view, he offers the example of a child who knowingly breaks a rule.[20] While the child is acting in accordance with her values and has sufficient self-control to avoid breaking the rule – the usual conditions for autonomy – Benson claims that we still do not hold the child accountable in the same way that we would a fully autonomous individual, because she lacks the capacity to understand the justification for the rule. In making this claim, Benson insists that autonomy requires us to understand the right reasons for action, the normatively defensible ones. While Spinoza would

[18] Thus, Watson justifies our intuition that a kleptomaniac is not autonomous (assuming that she regrets her behavior), on the basis that she acts contrary to her decided values, which presumably reflect her more authentic self.

[19] Benson (1987, 1991, 1994).

[20] Benson (1987, 476). One should note that Benson (1994) later retracts or, at least, softens the view defended in this example.

not argue for his claim on the basis of our intuitions about responsibility, he nevertheless holds that we are autonomous when we understand the right reasons for action, in Spinoza's language, when we act from adequate ideas. For while Spinoza admits that we can be determined to the same action by adequate or inadequate ideas (4p59), our true freedom consists in acting from adequate ones and, thus, from true understanding.

However, the most interesting conclusion from the previous discussion concerns Spinoza's view on the value rather than the nature of autonomy. I have shown that Spinoza aims to defend the value of autonomy within the framework of an eudaimonistic ethics. This constitutes a significant break from the dominant tradition of thinking about autonomy, according to which it is valuable because it is constitutive of our moral agency, in other words, the capacity that warrants the special consideration afforded to us as agents. This view is most pronounced in Kant's ethics. Kant also uses the notion of freedom as an entry point into ethical reflection. He argues that "if freedom of the will is presupposed, morality together with its principle follows from it by mere analysis of its concept" (*G* 4:447), in other words, that we can derive moral requirements by analyzing freedom. This is because morality, for Kant, consists in the activity of holding ourselves to moral laws, which is the activity of a free will, in other words, an autonomous will, determined by reason itself, independently of external forces. This entails that the moral law is importantly determined by the nature of autonomy, in other words, the particular way that we act spontaneously from ourselves. In particular, acting autonomously means acting from reason, which demands that we act in accordance with laws. Most notably, Kant justifies the requirement to treat others as ends rather than means, on the grounds that only the absolute value of a good and, thus, autonomous will can serve as the basis for the universal laws that reason demands (*G* 4:427–8). In this way, Kant argues that the basis for our moral requirements to others, and what makes them worthy of our respect, is their capacity to govern themselves in accordance with the moral law, their autonomy.

Spinoza's eudaimonistic conception of ethics opposes this way of thinking in a variety of ways. For instance, he sides with the ancients in conceiving of ethics as offering prescriptions for individual self-fulfillment, which rules out a conception of morality as concerned with obligations and requirements that arise independently of our self-interested perspective. While Spinoza's departure from the Kantian tradition will be considered in the coming chapters, I have pointed out that Spinoza offers a very different conceptual framework for explaining the value of autonomy, by treating it

not as an intrinsic feature of agents that grounds our obligations to them, but, rather, an essential component of their happiness and flourishing.[21] However, the fact that Spinoza explains the value of autonomy with respect to one's personal satisfaction, rather than intrinsic personhood, should not be taken as diminishing his commitment to the value of autonomy. On the contrary, his view implies an exceptionally robust commitment, just one that is very different in its form. To understand how, it is helpful to contrast his view to another, which generally struggles to explain autonomy's significance, the utilitarian.

Spinoza's ethics is sometimes confused with utilitarianism because they agree on a superficial level that the fundamental measure of value is the good, which is connected to a kind of happiness.[22] It is important to recognize, however, that he departs from utilitarians in the same way as eudaimonism generally does, because he determines goods and their value with respect to one's own flourishing and, thus, with respect to the desires, values and perspective of individual agents. Utilitarianism, in contrast, assesses the good from an agent-neutral perspective: promoting the happiness or preferences of a particular individual has the same value whether the individual is a stranger in another country or one's own mother. In other words, utilitarianism is impartial, while eudaimonism is not. For my present purposes, the most important difference concerns their conception of the value of autonomy. For utilitarians, the right action produces the greatest utility, which implies that autonomy has instrumental value as a means to achieving greater utility. Utilitarians might try to escape this conclusion by arguing that autonomy is constitutive of good states of affairs, because they regard good states of affairs as intrinsically valuable. However, since they measure the good in terms of happiness, or the satisfaction of desires and preferences, utilitarians will likely be forced to conclude that good states of affairs may sometimes not promote autonomy and vice versa, for there is little reason to suppose a necessary connection between the two. Even acting on one's preferences may not promote autonomy because her preferences may not be autonomous.

Spinoza's eudaimonism, in contrast, provides him with greater resources to articulate the value of autonomy, by treating autonomy as the primitive measure of value and, thus, as intrinsically valuable, independently of any

[21] This also explains why Spinoza cares about realized autonomy rather than the capacity for autonomy, which has been so important to the Kantian tradition.

[22] LeBuffe regards Spinoza as a consequentialist (2010, 170), as does Garrett (1996, 288).

other end.[23] Furthermore, this view inclines Spinoza to a fundamentally different way of understanding the relationship between autonomy and other goods: whereas utilitarians conceive of autonomy as just one good that must be weighed alongside others, Spinoza conceives of autonomy as an essential aspect of all goods. Thus, for Spinoza, all ethical questions fundamentally revolve around our autonomy, in much the same way that they do for Kant. To illustrate this point, consider an example where autonomy appears to conflict with other goods. For instance, suppose that an individual's religious beliefs prohibit medical treatment for a curable condition. According to the utilitarian, we are faced with the difficult task of weighing the value of the individual's autonomy against other goods, such as her health. However, since Spinoza regards autonomy as the measure of the good, he cannot admit the possibility of a conflict between the good and autonomy. To be clear, I am not claiming that Spinoza denies the possibility of competing goods. My view, rather, is that all goods necessarily promote our autonomy, so that any case of competing goods necessarily pits one autonomy-promoting good against the other. The question, on this view, is not how autonomy stacks up against other goods, but rather which option best promotes her autonomy and, thus, her good. So, in the case of the patient refusing medical treatment, Spinoza might claim that her desire is irrational, so that her autonomy is best preserved by protecting her from harm.[24] Regardless of how Spinoza would decide this particular case, the important point is that whatever option best promotes the patient's interests necessarily best promotes her autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

In the *TdIE*, Spinoza treats ethics, like the ancients, as helping us to plan our lives for attaining the highest good by identifying the value of our various goods. In taking this approach, Spinoza also follows the ancients

[23] The notion that autonomy has intrinsic value is supported by well-known examples. For instance, imagine that scientists create a drug that eliminates the desire for anything but the drug. Mass consumption of the drug would mean a far more effective route to satisfying people's desires. Our intuition is that such a world would be highly undesirable, even if it were to satisfy everyone's desires, because it would interfere in people's autonomy. Administering the drug would effectively erase people's own rich and varied desires, replacing them with an artificial desire for the drug, thereby turning them into drug-seeking machines.

[24] This view is consistent with Spinoza's tolerance of paternalism, discussed in the previous chapter. Of course, it does not necessarily follow that we should force her to accept treatment, since he could still recognize that forcing treatment causes harm.

in supposing that there is an order among our goods, such that we value all goods for the sake of a single good, desired for its own sake. Spinoza explains this highest good as a kind of *eudaimonia*, the happiness that arises from our flourishing and perfection. This eudaimonistic approach persists in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza provides a more detailed theory of our highest good as the knowledge of God. The mature work also deepens this commitment to eudaimonism by providing it with a metaphysical basis, for Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine stipulates that the nature of each thing is its power, which entails that attaining our highest good helps us to develop and perfect our nature.

Reading Spinoza's ethics as eudaimonistic brings into relief the ethical significance of virtue. Since Spinoza understands the good as what promotes our power, which is equivalent to our virtue, he holds that all goods, including our highest good, promote our virtue. It follows that our highest good is importantly connected to increasing our virtue. It also follows, on a deeper level, that all things are good in virtue of how they increase our virtue; in other words, virtue is the measure of the good. These views are important to understanding freedom, because Spinoza ultimately identifies our freedom and virtue. Since Spinoza identifies our virtue with our power and freedom amounts to acting from our power, attaining virtue is tantamount to attaining freedom. It follows that freedom occupies the same position in Spinoza's ethics as virtue, serving as a requirement for attaining our highest good and the measure by which we judge the value of any thing.

In making these claims, Spinoza pursues a distinctive route for explaining the value of both freedom and autonomy. Unlike most modern moral philosophers, Spinoza does not regard freedom as valuable because it is a condition for our agency. Rather, he argues that freedom and autonomy are important because they are constitutive of our flourishing. Indeed, Spinoza's eudaimonism entitles him to the distinctive view that freedom and autonomy are the measure of the good, which entails that autonomy is intrinsically valuable and an essential part of all ethical deliberation.

CHAPTER 5

The good

If we are moved by Spinoza's claims about the importance of freedom from the previous chapter, then we are faced with an obvious practical question: how do free people act? Answering this question is critical for understanding not only how we can attain freedom, but also what's in store for us if we do. While the question is simple enough, its answer is not; in fact, it will occupy the rest of this book. The next three chapters, taking their cue from Spinoza's identification of freedom with rationality, make progress towards answering this question by examining Spinoza's view of reason's practical guidance. This chapter begins by examining his view of the good, since reason, for Spinoza, guides action by determining the value of our various goods, so that we may plan our lives accordingly, as we have seen. So far, I have supposed that the good is simply whatever contributes to our power, a supposition that requires greater explanation and defense, for it glosses over the fact that Spinoza identifies our good with a baffling array of things: what satisfies our desires, the emotions of joy and sadness, what helps us to attain the model of human nature, to name only a few. Consequently, explaining Spinoza's view of the good requires explaining how each of these claims are supposed to fit together. To this end, the first two sections of this chapter argue that Spinoza's various claims about the good, when properly understood in the context of his philosophy, are not only consistent but reducible to the claim that the good is what promotes our power.

This chapter also explains how we can know the good, in other words, how we can justify beliefs and ideas about the good. Spinoza's view on this matter is complicated by his metaethical commitments, particularly his irrealist view that things are not good or bad in and of themselves. If this is true, then how can we represent and, thus, know these properties – properties which objects do not actually possess? The third section answers this question by drawing on Spinoza's general theory of knowledge. I argue that ideas of the good represent our desires and how things fit

them. These representations, then, qualify as knowledge when they are sufficiently certain, which is determined by their adequacy. The section concludes by considering a central test for this reading, whether it makes sense of Spinoza's various claims about our knowledge of good and bad, particularly some difficult criticisms from 1appendix. To further defend this reading, the final section argues that a few problematic passages running from 4p62 to 4p68, contrary to first appearances, do not deny that we can have adequate ideas of good and bad.

5.1 THE GOOD AS WHAT PROMOTES OUR POWER

As we have seen, Spinoza defines 'good' as "that which we certainly know to be useful to us" (4def1), which should strike the reader as incomplete, since we usually judge the usefulness of things with respect to some end or goal.[1] With respect to what goal, then, should we judge the good? I have indicated that the answer is our *conatus*, for this entails that the good is whatever is useful for our survival and increasing our power, a conclusion which Spinoza endorses: "We call good or bad that which is advantageous, or an obstacle to the preservation of our being; that is, that which increases or diminishes, helps or checks, our power of activity" (4p8d).[2] This reading makes sense of several of Spinoza's other claims about our good. Since our *conatus* is our nature, claiming that the good is what promotes our *conatus* is equivalent to claiming, first, that the good is what promotes or agrees with our nature – "nothing can be good except insofar as it agrees with our nature" (4p31c) – and second, that the good is what contributes to our perfection (5p40, 3DOE 2, 3, 5p33s). For this reason, I will call these equivalent claims Spinoza's 'perfectionism.'

[1] He defines 'bad' as "that which we certainly know to be an obstacle to our attainment of some good" (4def2). Consequently, most of Spinoza's claims about our good imply parallel claims about our bad, for instance, that the bad decreases our power and perfection. For the sake of simplicity, I will only articulate the claims about the good.

[2] This answer indicates that our *conatus* and, thus, our nature indicates some goal. One might question how such a view can be consistent with Spinoza's well-known rejection of teleological explanations of natural phenomena: "nature does not act with an end in view" (4pref; see also 1app). We must remember that Spinoza objects to thinking of nature as acting with intentions, that is, as wanting some fixed outcome. Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine does not require us to understand strivings as intentional or purposive in any anthropomorphic sense. Acorns strive to become trees, not in the sense that they intend or plan to become trees, but rather in the sense that acorns causally act to bring about changes such that they become trees. Furthermore, while Spinoza objects to the notion that nature generally acts intentionally, he clearly allows that particular things in nature do, namely human beings. The question of whether Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine is consistent with his general criticism of teleology is discussed by Bennett (1984, 240–51), Della Rocca (1996b), Garrett (1999) and Lin (2006b).

There is, however, another end or goal with respect to which we could determine the good: desires. This is arguably the most natural reading of the definition, since Spinoza holds that all our ends arise from our desires: "by the end for the sake of which we do something, I mean appetite" (4def7).[3] On this reading, if one desires to grow roses, then compost would be good, and if one desires to rob banks, then a get-away car would be good. Since the objects of one's desires are most useful for satisfying them, the good would also be the object of our desires, roses and loot in the previous examples. Consequently, this answer indicates that Spinoza upholds a desire-satisfaction theory of the good: the good is whatever satisfies or helps to satisfy our desires. Spinoza appears to endorse this conclusion: "by 'good' I understand . . . whatever satisfies a desire [*desiderio*]" and "by 'bad' I understand that which frustrates a desire [*desiderium*]" (3p39s).[4] This commitment is also evident in Spinoza's conception of the highest good. If the good is what helps to satisfy our desires, it follows that the highest good is what best helps to satisfy our desires. Along these lines, Spinoza describes our highest good (or "final end") as our greatest desire:

> Blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God. Now to perfect the intellect is also nothing other than to understand God and the attributes and actions of God that follow from the necessity of his nature. Therefore, for the man who is guided by reason, the final end [*finis ultimis*], that is, the highest desire [*summa cupiditas*] whereby he strives to control all the others is that by which he is brought to an adequate conception of himself and of all things that fall within the scope of his understanding. (4app4)

This reading raises a difficulty, since these two ways of thinking about our good do not appear consistent: it does not appear that what contributes to our power would necessarily satisfy our desires or vice versa. In fact, Spinoza explicitly denies that satisfying certain desires, such as the desire for excessive drink and bodily pleasure, contributes to one's power (3p56s; 4p60). Conversely, it appears that people often do not desire the things that Spinoza claims increase their power, such as rational behaviors, like acting to the benefit of others (4p37). Consequently, Spinoza's theory appears contradictory, since the objects of excessive sensual desires would simultaneously count as good, according to his desire-satisfaction theory,

[3] While the passage refers to appetite rather than desires, these are roughly equivalent, as I will argue shortly.

[4] I have chosen to translate *desiderio* as desire rather than Shirley's 'longing' because the claim is derived from 3p9s, which uses *cupiditas*, indicating that Spinoza takes these terms to have the same meaning.

and bad, according to his perfectionism, since they decrease our power. Conversely, for someone who does not desire to behave rationally, such behaviors would count as bad, according to his desire-satisfaction theory, and good, according to his perfectionism.

The solution to this difficulty lies in Spinoza's distinctive view of desire, which entails that desires are necessarily connected to increases in our power. To understand this point, we must look more closely at his theory of desire. He first defines '*cupiditas*' as "appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof" (3p9s). We should not put too much emphasis on Spinoza's suggestion that desires involve consciousness of one's appetite. For the sentence before states that desire is "*usually* [*plerumque*] related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite" (3p9s; emphasis added), suggesting that nonconscious appetites can be desires. Furthermore, when Spinoza later summarizes the conclusions of this scholium, he writes that "I also noted that in fact I acknowledge no difference between human appetite and desire. For whether or not man is conscious of his appetite, the appetite remains one and the same" (3DOE 1).[5] Given these remarks, desires are best understood as the same thing as appetite, with the added qualification that desires are usually (perhaps paradigmatically?) appetites of which we are conscious.

To understand desires, then, we should look to Spinoza's remarks on appetites. He defines appetite as follows: "When this *conatus* is related to the mind alone, it is called will [*voluntas*]; when it is related to mind and body together, it is called appetite, which is therefore nothing else but man's essence" (3p9s). This definition supposes that appetite is our *conatus* "related to [*refertur*]" mind and body, in other words, as expressed in identical mental and bodily modes. On this reading, an appetite is a particular expression of our *conatus*, or, more simply, a particular striving. Consequently, appetites include any thought and its corresponding bodily states, by which we aim to persist in existence and increase our power. To illustrate, consider an example of a particular striving, say, one's inclination to eat a plate of food. Spinoza's parallelism holds that this striving is expressed both at the mental level, in the feeling of hunger, imagining the taste of the food, and at the bodily level, in salivation, grumbling belly, the synapses firing in the way that characterizes hunger. According to the definition, appetite is such a combination of identical mental and bodily modes.

[5] He also treats appetites and desires as interchangeable in 5p4cs and 3DOE 32.

Given Spinoza's identification of desires with appetites, it follows that desires too should be understood as particular strivings. This conclusion is supported by Spinoza's claim that the category of desires should be understood broadly to include all strivings: "my object was to define it [desire] as to include all strivings of human nature that we term appetite, will, desire, or urge" (3DOE 1).[6] The notion that desires are expressions of our *conatus* is further emphasized in Spinoza's second definition of 'desire': "Desire is the very essence of man insofar as his essence is conceived as determined to any action from any given affection of itself" (3DOE 1). Since our essence is our *conatus*, the first part of the definition equates 'desire' with our *conatus*. The second part further specifies that our desires are our particular strivings – our *conatus* insofar as it is determined by particular ideas and affections. In keeping with this definition, Spinoza identifies our desires with our essence throughout Part IV, claiming that the appetite to increase our power "is nothing more than man's very essence or nature" (4p19d), and that the "desire to live happily, to do well and so on is the very essence of man" (4p21d).[7]

It follows from this account of desire that satisfying desires is necessarily correlated with increases in our power. This is because Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine implies that anything arising from our *conatus* increases our power (3p6–8). Since desires are merely particular expressions of our *conatus*, it follows that whatever helps to satisfy our desires also promotes our *conatus* and, thus, increases our power. However, we must add an important qualification to this conclusion: the claim that satisfying our desires increases our power only holds with respect to a particular class of desires, those arising entirely from our *conatus*. While all desires are at least partial expressions of our *conatus*, they can also come about partly from the power of external things. For example, one could desire to smoke as a result of the power of peer pressure and advertising. To the extent that desires come about from external things, they need not direct us to increases in our power. Consequently, there is a critical difference between desires brought about by our *conatus* and those brought about by external things, which is captured by Spinoza's distinction between desire "that is related to us insofar as we are active" and desire that is related to us insofar as we are passive (3p58) or more simply desires that are kinds of "active emotions" and "passive emotions" (3DOE 2). Thus, it is true that satisfying desires necessarily increases our

[6] Indeed, this passage indicates that the category of desires is broader than appetites, for desires include 'will' and, thus, strivings understood only at the mental level.

[7] In one place, he even treats '*conatus*' and 'desire' as equivalent: "the *conatus*, or desire [*conatus seu cupiditas*]" (5p28).

power, so long as we are talking about active desires. In Spinoza's words, "our active emotions, that is, those desires that are defined by man's power, that is, by reason, are always good; the other desires can be either good or bad" (4app3).[8]

This discussion resolves the difficulty by showing that what satisfies our desires necessarily increases our power and vice versa, rendering Spinoza's perfectionism and desire-satisfaction theory of the good consistent. There is, however, a problem with this solution: when Spinoza asserts the desire-satisfaction theory of the good in 3p39s, he does not specify that the theory applies only to active desires.[9] One might respond that 3p39s was simply poorly worded, which is not an entirely bad response, as it saddles Spinoza with making a rather minor mistake in exchange for acquitting him of a far greater one. However, we need not accuse Spinoza of any mistake, for there is some evidence that he was using 'desire' to refer only to active desires, since he has the tendency to use the term 'desire' in this way. In 3DOE 1 he writes that "appetite is the very essence of man insofar as his essence is determined to such actions as contribute to his perfection"; in other words, our essence is desire that increases our power, that is, active desire. But, as we have seen, Spinoza summarizes this claim multiple times throughout Part IV by arguing that desire is the essence of man, without qualifying that he means only active desires. In these instances, he must be using 'desire' to refer only to active desires.

We should not infer that this use of 'desire' is mere sloppiness on Spinoza's part, for he has philosophical grounds for supposing that the term technically refers only to active desires.[10] When Spinoza claims that the good is what helps to satisfy desires, he means only one's own desires. After all, satisfying your desires is not necessarily good for me – a stabbing victim would not say that her assailant's weapon was good because

[8] This explains how Spinoza can consistently claim that satisfying some desires, such as those for excessive sensual joy, is not good, because these desires are passive.

[9] In fact, one might object that Spinoza's examples in 3p39s are cases of obviously passive desires, for instance, "a miser judges wealth the best thing, and its lack the worst thing." If these examples were intended to illustrate the definitions of 'good' and 'bad' in 3p39s as what satisfies and frustrates desire, then this would be problematic for my reading, since I hold that the good is only what satisfies active desires and the bad what frustrates them. However, the examples are intended to illustrate a different claim, that "it is according to his emotion that everyone judges or deems what is good, bad," in other words, Spinoza's subjectivism, which I will discuss presently. Furthermore, the example only shows that the miser judges good and bad from his emotion, without mentioning his desires.

[10] Of course, Spinoza usually uses 'desire' in a looser sense to refer to passive desires, as when he claims that "the ambitious man desires nothing so much as public acclaim, and dreads nothing so much as disgrace" (3p39s).

it helped him to satisfy his desire for blood.[11] This is important because passive desires are arguably not one's own desires, since they arise from the power of external things. For instance, if my desire to smoke arises primarily from the influence of advertising and the pressure exerted by my peers, it is arguably imposed on me, in much the same way as desires brought about by brainwashing or hypnotism. Since Spinoza's claims about the good apply only to one's own desires, it follows that they would not apply to passive desires. It follows that in this context 'desires,' strictly speaking – that is, in the most rigorous sense of the term – refers only to active desires. Spinoza appears to acknowledge this technical sense of the term in 4p61d: "desire, *considered absolutely* [*absoluté considerate*] is man's very essence" (emphasis added).[12]

This discussion goes a long way toward addressing the difficulty, but it does not lay it entirely to rest. The worry is that Spinoza's desire-satisfaction theory and perfectionism are inconsistent for two reasons: because people seem to desire things that do not promote their power (for instance, too much dessert) and because they seem not to desire things that do promote their power (say, reading classic literature). I have addressed the first of these, showing that desires for things that do not promote our power are passive and, thus, not desires in the strict sense. But we have yet to address the second. Surely people do not desire all the things that he regards as good for us, such as moderating certain passions or acting to the benefit of others.[13] Spinoza, however, disagrees: 4p21d asserts that our essence is the desire to live and act rightly.[14] Since living and acting rightly amounts to increasing our power (4p24d), this claim essentially asserts that our essence is the desire to increase our power. It follows that we necessarily desire to increase our power and, thus, whatever increases our power.

How, then, would Spinoza explain instances where it appears that we do not desire what he regards as increasing our power, for instance, acting with kindness to others? His best response is to answer that we appear not to desire these things because we do not know that we desire them.

[11] Similarly, when Spinoza claims that desire is man's essence, he means that each man's desire is his own essence. For your desires come about from your striving to increase your power and, consequently, are not part of my essence to increase my power.

[12] A reader has suggested that Spinoza's phrase "desire considered absolutely" refers to one's *conatus* considered as unmodified. I disagree on the grounds that human beings are modes or collections of modes (2p13), particular expressions of God's power, which entails that our *conatus* is always modified.

[13] LeBuffe regards this as a "serious problem" with Spinoza's theory of the good (2010, 155–6).

[14] This is to be distinguished from the claim that people desire what they *perceive* to increase their power. My claim asserts that people necessarily desire whatever actually does increase their power, regardless of their perceptions.

For while we desire whatever is advantageous, we do not necessarily know everything that is advantageous. So, the cruel person does not know that he desires to treat others with kindness because, while he desires to do what is advantageous he does not know that kindness is advantageous. This response is consistent with Spinoza's definition of desires as conscious appetites, since he claims only that we are "usually" conscious of our desires. Furthermore, Spinoza's definition requires only that we are conscious of the striving in question, not the object of the striving. So long as we are conscious of the striving to increase our power, it counts as a desire, regardless of whether we are conscious of the various objects of this desire, that is, those things that help us to increase our power. This response may seem problematic because it entails that we are not conscious of all that we desire. But this is not so strange as it at first appears. For instance, we accept that a discontented person desires some sort of change, though she may not have any awareness of what specific changes would satisfy her. Similarly, we accept that we have open-ended desires for categories of things – say, whatever helps us to live longer – without being aware of all the objects falling within the category.[15] In the same way, we should understand our striving as an open-ended desire for whatever increases our power, even though we may not – indeed, cannot – be aware of all that would do so.

From a certain perspective, the reading I have offered may appear somewhat frustrating: if Spinoza's various claims about the good are ultimately reducible to the claim that the good is what increases our power, then why would he obscure the issue by stating it in so many different ways? Stating his claim in different ways provides Spinoza with greater conceptual resources for articulating various claims about the good.[16] Most notably, describing our good as what helps us to attain desires entitles Spinoza to a collection of closely related views about the good, which were central to the development of his thinking. Foremost among these is subjectivism, the view that the good is determined by our desires: "We do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire (*cupere*) because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it" (3p9s). Unlike Spinoza's desire-satisfaction theory of the good, which is a normative ethical claim about what counts as good (whatever we desire), subjectivism is a metaethical claim about the basis for judging the good (desires).[17] In 3p39s Spinoza essentially infers the former

[15] This reading is also defended in Della Rocca (1996b, 217).
[16] LeBuffe makes a similar point (2010, 168–9).
[17] I should point out that Spinoza is entitled to traditional strengths of subjectivist views. For instance, he is entitled to an attractive account of moral motivation: since Spinoza's subjectivism conceives

from the latter.[18] Immediately after asserting the desire-satisfaction theory, he explains its basis:[19]

For I have demonstrated above that we do not desire a thing because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we call the object of our desire good, and consequently the object of our aversion bad. Therefore it is according to his emotion that everyone judges or deems what is good, bad, better, worse, best or worst.

Spinoza's inference is roughly that, if things must be judged as good on the basis of our desires, then what ultimately counts as good must be those things we desire. Put slightly differently, the good is whatever we desire precisely because our desires provide the basis for determining what is good.[20] For the present discussion, the important point is that whether something counts as good is determined not by the thing itself, but rather by our desires for it.[21]

of the good as necessarily connected to one's desires, there is never a question as to why we would be motivated to attain it. If the good appears to interfere in our happiness, Spinoza holds that this impression must be mistaken, based on a false understanding of our happiness or a failure to recognize how things contribute to our happiness in the long term. Finally, Spinoza's subjectivism avoids thinking of normative properties such as good and bad as properties of objects, which dodges the metaphysical difficulty of explaining what these properties amount to and how we acquire knowledge of them.

[18] One might question whether Spinoza is really committed to subjectivism because he admits the existence of universal goods, such as knowledge of God. If some things are always good, under any circumstances, then it may seem that whether an object is good cannot depend on our subjective states. In this vein, Miller argues that Spinoza cannot be subjectivist because he admits "non-circumstantial goods," things that are good regardless of one's particular circumstances (2005, 169–70). However, Miller supposes that subjective states such as desires are highly variable and contingent: if the good depends on such things, then it could never be universal. As we will see, Spinoza admits universal desires, namely the desire to increase our power. Consequently, he can consistently admit universal goods and uphold subjectivism.

[19] One should distinguish psychological from normative subjectivism. The former holds that judgments of the good depend on desires, whereas the latter only holds that justified judgments do. While the distinction is not relevant to this discussion, my own view is that Spinoza accepts psychological subjectivism with respect to all desires, but normative subjectivism with regard to only active desires; in other words, we always judge the good from desires, but we are only right when we judge from active desires.

[20] Of course, a desire-satisfaction theory of the good does not necessarily follow from subjectivism. For instance, one could uphold a desire-frustration theory: the good is whatever we hate and the bad is what we desire. Nevertheless, a desire-satisfaction view is the more natural consequence of subjectivism.

[21] There is some other indirect evidence that Spinoza upholds subjectivism. He claims that goodness and badness are abstract notions that people form when considering the usefulness of objects to themselves (1app), which implies that they invent these notions on the basis of their own goals and desires and then project them on to objects. Furthermore, the notion that judgments of good and bad are desire-dependent is arguably implied by Spinoza's very definition of 'good' as what is useful. Since things can only be judged as useful with respect to some end, it follows that we must judge the good with respect to our ends, which Spinoza essentially defines as desires. Finally, Spinoza's subjectivism is evident in 4pref, which I will discuss in the next section.

Spinoza's subjectivism, in turn, arises from a more fundamental irrealist conception of the good, according to which things are good or bad not in themselves but rather because of their relationship to our own ends and desires. This commitment was central to Spinoza's ethics since its inception. He claims in the *TdIE* that his ethics arose from the realization that "all the things which were the source and object of my anxiety held nothing of good or bad in themselves save insofar as the mind was influenced by them" (1). Similarly

> it must be borne in mind that good and bad are only relative terms, so that one and the same thing may be said to be good or bad in different respect, just like the terms perfect and imperfect. Nothing, when regarded in its own nature, can be called perfect or imperfect, especially when we realize that all things that come into being do so in accordance with an eternal order and Nature's fixed laws. (*TdIE* 12)

This passage reveals much of the motivation for his subjectivism: since nature itself is a fixed causal order, which has no interest or concern in human needs and desires, the things we call good are good only for us, from the perspective of our desires. While Spinoza did not continue to uphold this claim about perfection, as I argued in the previous chapter, he did continue to uphold it about the good: "The terms 'good' and 'bad' likewise indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form when comparing things with one another" (4pref). Given these commitments, we can see the benefit of cashing out the claim that the good is what increases our power as a claim about our desires. If Spinoza had only claimed that the good is what increases our power, the reader might conclude that things really are objectively good or bad, since they increase or decrease our power as a result of their own properties and powers. But claiming that the good is what satisfies our desires makes clear that while things may have the objective property of increasing or decreasing our power, these properties only count as good or bad in virtue of our desires and strivings, in other words, from the perspective of one's own interests and concerns. Consequently, understanding the value of things requires us to understand our own strivings and desires. In this respect, Spinoza's claims about the good and desire indicate an important commitment about the normativity of the good: while external things interact with us in ways that variously increase or decrease our power, these facts only become good, in other words, acquire normative meaning as a consequence of our striving

and desire to increase our own power.[22] This striving, then, is the necessary basis for determining the value of things and how we should direct our actions.[23]

5.2 THE GOOD AND THE MODEL OF HUMAN NATURE

We have not yet explained a final claim about the good, featured in 4pref, that the good is what helps us to attain the model of human nature. A model (*exemplar*) is a kind of general idea, representing groups of things or types. More specifically, a model is a representation of a thing that best agrees with or embodies a type, a kind of ideal. For instance, a gardener's model of a rose would be his idea of the rose that best exhibits the size, color and structure of a rose. 4pref argues that models play an important role in judging our good: judgments of the good assess whether something is useful to us in attaining models and, relatedly, judgments of perfection assess how closely something approximates to our model. So, the perfect rose is that which most resembles the gardener's model, while the good is what helps him to attain his model, such as compost and good soil. Spinoza argues that we similarly judge our own good and perfection with respect to a "model of human nature." This is a normative as well as a descriptive claim, for Spinoza holds that we should judge our good and perfection with respect to a particular model of human nature.

For my present purposes, the most important claim about models is that they originate in human desires. Spinoza argues that nature itself does not recognize or act toward models; he criticizes those who believe that nature "looks to these ideas and holds them before herself as models" (4pref). His reasoning is that models are fundamentally goal-directed and "nature does not act with an end in view" (4pref; see also 1app).[24] Consequently, he concludes that models must arise from the one part of nature that Spinoza acknowledges is goal-directed: humans – "men always act with an end in view" (1app). More specifically, they must arise from human desires, since Spinoza identifies desires as the source of our goals: all human ends derive

[22] In this way, Spinoza is inclined to explain normativity generally by appealing to desires. For example, the claim that I ought to take my medicine derives its normative force from my desire to get better, as I argue in Chapter 6.

[23] A further advantage to explaining Spinoza's claims about the good as claims about desires is that it helps make sense of the claim that we can know our good, given Spinoza's irrealism about it, as I will show in section 3.

[24] This mistaken view of nature arises from the notion that nature is directed by a personal God, who acts with plans and intentions (1appendix).

from the "advantage that they seek" (1app).[25] So, although the gardener may suppose that his ideal rose has been set by nature, it is actually determined by his own desires and preferences, which he then projects onto the natural world. Spinoza laments that this point is not better understood: people are in the habit of mistakenly concluding that nature has "failed" or "blundered," when it does not live up to their desires (4pref).

Spinoza's reasoning here applies to all models, even the model of human nature with respect to which we should judge our own good and perfection. It follows that this model of human nature is not simply found in nature, but rather created on the basis of our desires. Spinoza explicitly acknowledges this conclusion in a section of the *TdIE*, which is a likely ancestor of his discussion of models.

> But human weakness fails to comprehend the order in its thoughts, and meanwhile man conceives a human nature much stronger than his own, and sees no reason why he cannot acquire such a nature. Thus he is urged to seek the means that will bring him to such a perfection, and all that can be the means of his attaining this objective is called a true good, while the supreme good is to arrive at the enjoyment of such a nature. (*TdIE* 13)

This passage immediately follows Spinoza's previously cited claim that things are judged as good or bad not from their own nature, but rather from our desires. Thus Spinoza is asserting here that this nature we conceive is not found in nature itself, but invented by us and set before ourselves on the basis of our own desires.

Furthermore, the model of human nature must be not only the object of desire, but also of rational desire. In other words, we must desire the model of human nature when we strive from adequate ideas. After all, Spinoza's ethics asks us to accept this model and his ethics is based on reason. Furthermore, Spinoza suggests that we accept the model on the basis of knowledge.[26] "Men are in the habit of calling natural phenomena perfect or imperfect from their own preconceptions rather than from true knowledge" (4pref). Since he holds that we should instead judge perfection based on the model, this remark implies that our model should be based on true knowledge as well. Spinoza also suggests that the model should be based on knowledge when he criticizes wrong ways of judging the good. For instance, he rejects the view that our perfection consists in worshiping

[25] Remember that 4def7 defines ends as desires.

[26] The notion that our good should be judged from reason is also implied by Spinoza's definition of the good as what "we certainly know" to be useful, since he understands knowledge as having adequate ideas, which are the same thing as reason.

God and that our good is what helps us to do so, on the grounds that these judgments are based on "ignorance" and "confusion" (1app). In order for this criticism to have any bite, Spinoza's own judgment of perfection must be based on certain knowledge. Since he judges perfection with respect to the model of human nature, it too must be based on certain knowledge.

This discussion explains how Spinoza's claims in 4pref fit together with his other claims about the good. According to the foregoing, the model of human nature is the object of our rational desires, that is, what we seek when we act from adequate ideas. It follows that we could accurately describe the model of human nature as the object of our active desires. After all, an active desire is essentially a rational striving and Spinoza holds that it is rational to strive for the model of human nature. Consequently, claiming that the good is what helps us to attain the model of human nature is more or less equivalent to claiming that the good is what helps us to satisfy our active desires. In this way, the claim of 4pref simply makes use of different terms and concepts to make the same point that he had already made in 3p39s. It follows that there are several interdeducible ways of reading Spinoza's definition of the good as what is useful: useful for our *conatus*, our active desires and attaining the model of human nature.[27] So, Spinoza had good reason to leave the definition open-ended. This reading helps to explain one of the most puzzling things about Spinoza's claims in 4pref, that they appear so weighty yet receive so little attention later in the text. In particular, 4pref indicates that we require the model of human nature in order to determine what is good, but there is no explicit mention of the model outside of 4pref. This is less puzzling once we recognize that this claim about the model of human nature is already more or less implied by Spinoza's general theory of the good.

5.3 KNOWING THE GOOD

Since Spinoza's ethics directs us to act in accordance with a rational understanding of the good, reason guides our action largely by indicating what is good. In order to understand how we acquire knowledge of the good, we should begin with a brief overview of Spinoza's theory of knowledge.[28] It is important to note at the outset that he does not use a term that corresponds

[27] Since Spinoza's claims about desire in 3p39s use the language of desires to articulate the claim that the good is what increases our power, the claim of 4pref, that the good helps us to attain the model of human nature, is also reducible to the claim that the good increases our power.

[28] For a general overview of Spinoza's theory of knowledge, see Wilson (1996), Della Rocca (1996a) and LeBuffe (2010, 62–98).

perfectly to our 'knowledge.' 'Knowledge' usually refers to something like true, justified belief, whereas Spinoza uses '*cognitio*,' which is sometimes translated simply as "belief" because it does not necessarily imply truth. This is evident when Spinoza describes *cognitio* as adequate (2p29c) or true (4p14), as though being *cognitio* is not sufficient to imply these things. Nevertheless, Spinoza clearly regards *cognitio* as something stronger than mere belief. For while he does not assume that *cognitio* is true, he regards it as more likely to be true than other perceptions, which is different from 'belief.'[29] For instance, when Spinoza claims that the mind has no *cognitio* of the body (2p19), he means not that we have no beliefs about the body, but rather that our beliefs about the body are not sufficiently certain, which entails that calling a perception '*cognitio*' implies some degree of certainty. Consequently, *cognitio* is best understood as a belief that we have some reason to accept as true, in other words, that passes a certain threshold of certainty, though a sufficiently low threshold that its truth is not assured. To simplify matters, I will continue to translate '*cognitio*' as knowledge, though the reader should keep this caveat in mind.

As this discussion suggests, for Spinoza, whether beliefs or perceptions qualify as knowledge depends on their degree of certainty. The certainty of our perceptions, in turn, is determined by the adequacy of our ideas.[30] This is because adequately conceiving an idea entails representing its object's causes, according to the causal representation requirement for adequate ideas. Since Spinoza equates causes with logical reasons, it follows that adequately conceiving an idea entails conceiving its logical grounds or justification.[31] Spinoza asserts the connection between certainty and adequacy when he claims that "he who has a true idea" (which has the same content as an adequate idea) "cannot doubt of the thing perceived" (2p43). The connection between adequacy and certainty is also evident in Spinoza's famous division of knowledge into three kinds (2p40s2). The first kind of knowledge comes from two sources, the senses and "symbols," which includes testimony. Knowledge of the second kind comes from adequate ideas, while knowledge of the third kind comes from an intuitive grasp of adequate ideas. Spinoza holds that the second and third kinds of knowledge are more certain, "necessarily true," while knowledge of the first kind is

[29] This explains why Spinoza is reluctant to describe *cognitio* as false; rather, he directs claims of falsity at our ideas (2p33) or modes of thinking (2p33d).

[30] My entire discussion here uses 'adequate idea' and 'inadequate idea' to refer to human adequate and inadequate ideas, rather than absolutely adequate and inadequate ideas. This difference is explained above, in Chapter 1.

[31] For more discussion on this point, see Steinberg (2009, 155–60).

the source of falsity (2p41). The reason is that knowledge of the first kind, since it comes from experience, arises from external things. Consequently, knowledge of the first kind consists in inadequate ideas, which do not fully represent the causes and, consequently, the logical grounds of their objects.

We should not conclude, however, that knowledge comes only from adequate ideas. Spinoza refers to representations of inadequate ideas as a kind of knowledge, though he does so grudgingly. "I have settled to call such perceptions by the name of knowledge [*cognitionem*]" (2p40s2), even though they are "fragmentary and confused" to some degree. Spinoza indicates his reasoning when he claims that representations of inadequate ideas count as knowledge "from the suggestions of experience," in other words, because experience obviously contributes to our knowledge. Indeed, arguing that only adequate ideas qualify as knowledge would be tantamount to skepticism about all ideas of experience.[32] The notion that inadequate ideas can provide a kind of knowledge is also supported by Spinoza's claim that all our ideas come about partly from our power (3p9), which entails that even inadequate ideas have some degree of adequacy. Since ideas are adequate in virtue of representing the logical grounds of their objects, it follows that even our inadequate ideas must represent the logical grounds of their objects, to some extent. Consequently, our inadequate ideas have some degree of certainty, providing some indication of their truth. According to this reasoning, our degree of certainty should be proportionally related to the degree of adequacy of our ideas; as our ideas become more adequate, we possess more of their causal antecedents, which provide their logical justification, increasing our certainty. Spinoza's decision to include adequate ideas as a kind of knowledge confirms this conclusion by showing that some inadequate ideas possess a sufficient degree of certainty to qualify as knowledge.[33]

With Spinoza's theory of knowledge in view, we can now consider what it means to know good and bad. Supposing that we have ideas that represent our good, these ideas presumably come in varying degrees of adequacy with corresponding degrees of certainty. When these ideas are sufficiently adequate, they are sufficiently certain to count as knowledge. It follows that the most certain knowledge of the good comes from adequate ideas, though

[32] Along these lines, Scruton (1986, 73) argues that inadequate ideas provide us with an illusory perspective over reality, such that the necessity of inadequate ideas prevents us from understanding the nature of reality.

[33] In support of this reading, LeBuffe shows that ideas of the imagination, which are the same thing as inadequate ideas, are not necessarily erroneous, according to Spinoza's thinking about error (2010, 79).

we can also know our good through inadequate ideas of experience.[34] For example, we know that it is bad to be hit by a car, since it disrupts one's body in a way that harms her power, even though we can only know this through experience and, thus, inadequate ideas.

This interpretation is subject to an obvious difficulty: our knowledge consists in representations, but we cannot represent our good, at least, not in any straightforward way, since Spinoza upholds irrealism about the good, denying that these properties really exist. Since he repeatedly insists that we can have "true knowledge of good and bad" (4p14–17), we must be able to know and, thus, represent good and bad. But, how?

An explanation is found in Spinoza's subjectivism, which implies that our ideas represent the properties of good and bad by representing our desires and how things in the world fit them. According to this view, an idea represents that compost is good in the sense of representing that it helps to satisfy one's desire for roses. Knowledge of our good, then, consists of sufficiently certain representations of our desires and what satisfies them. Presumably "true knowledge" of good and bad amounts to human adequate ideas of our striving and how things promote them. This reading is confirmed by Spinoza's claim that "knowledge of good and bad is nothing but the emotions of joy and sadness, insofar as we are conscious of them" (4p8). It takes a bit of unpacking to see how this claim supports my reading. We must keep in mind that Spinoza understands the emotions of joy and sorrow as transitions in our perfection, increases and decreases respectively (3DOE 2, 3). Since our perfection is our degree of power, it follows that joy and sorrow are also increases and decreases in our power. It follows that joy and sorrow, understood at the mental level, are representations of increases and decreases in our power. Understood in this way, claiming that knowledge of good and bad amounts to the emotions of joy and sadness is equivalent to claiming that this knowledge consists in representations of changes in our power, in other words, our striving. Since these representations qualify as true knowledge, they also represent their objects' causes, that is, how things promote or hinder our strivings. Thus, 4p8 asserts that knowledge of good and bad represents our striving and how it is affected. Since our striving, in turn, is equivalent to our active desires, it follows that knowledge of good and bad also represents our active desires and how things help to satisfy them.

[34] Spinoza's claims about our good in the *Ethics* are generally derived from adequate ideas. For example, his claim that our highest good consists in understanding God is derived from adequate ideas of God's essence.

The real test for this reading is whether it can explain Spinoza's various claims about our knowledge of good and bad. As we have seen, the reading explains how Spinoza can admit the possibility of knowledge of good and bad, given his irrealism about them: we know our active desires or striving and how things contribute to them. Furthermore, the reading explains how Spinoza is entitled to evaluate whether various claims about good and bad count as knowledge – for instance, claiming that opposing views of good and bad are false, wrong or confused. According to my reading, he can judge claims about good or bad on the basis of whether they accurately identify the means to satisfying desires. For instance, consider my judgment that a medicine prescribed for my dog is good. On my reading, the judgment arises from an idea representing how the medicine satisfies my desire, most notably, for the survival of my dog. Consequently, he can evaluate the judgment as false if the medicine will not satisfy my desire; suppose that the bottle has been mislabeled and actually contains poison. This way of evaluating the judgment is consistent with moral irrealism: although the judgment is admittedly justified by facts that hold independently of me and my desires, for instance, that the medicine will help to ensure my dog's survival, Spinoza need not uphold the moral realist view that the medicine is good, independently of me and my desires. On this view, the medicine may promote my dog's survival independently of my desires, but this fact only counts as good because I desire my dog's survival.[35]

However, the foregoing cannot explain instances where Spinoza criticizes our desires themselves, for instance, claiming that an excess desire for wealth or bodily pleasure is bad. The difficulty is that, according to subjectivism, things can only be judged as good or bad with respect to one's desires, which appears to leave no grounds for judging desires themselves. A common subjectivist response to this problem is to evaluate desires with respect to one's other desires. For example, suppose that I desire both to eat chocolate and to lose weight. Assuming that these desires are inconsistent, the fact that my desire to lose weight is stronger or deeper provides grounds for criticizing or rejecting my desire to eat cake. Even if my desire to eat cake is stronger, I could still have grounds for rejecting it, if losing weight is

[35] It is important to stress that subjectivism need not justify judgments of good and bad entirely on the basis of desires. For such judgments depend on facts about how the world fits our desires, which hold independently of them. For instance, suppose that one who desires a high-paying job judges that a college education is good. This determination depends both on one's desire for a high-paying job and the fact that a college education increases one's likelihood of securing such a position. Obviously whether a college education improves one's job prospects does not depend on one's desire for a job. For subjectivism, the important point is that this fact only counts as good in virtue of one's desire.

necessary for satisfying other greater desires. In other words, a subjectivist can engage in prudential evaluation of one's desires, criticizing or justifying them according to how they help to satisfy one's desires as a whole. Hobbes, also a subjectivist, offers a historically relevant example of this view.[36] He criticizes some desires, for instance, those that lead to conflict in the state of nature, such as the desire for glory on the grounds that it conflicts with one's more fundamental desire for self-preservation (*L* 13: 6–9, 76).[37]

While Spinoza is entitled to this subjectivist response, it cannot explain all of his claims about the good. In particular, it cannot explain 1app, where he diagnoses "misconceptions" about "good and bad," primarily the notion that the good "is what conduces to the worship of God." The object of Spinoza's criticism is the notion that there is an order in nature corresponding to the way that our bodies are affected by things. For instance, people judge the objects of sensation that make them happy as beautiful and those that make them unhappy as ugly. According to Spinoza, beauty and ugliness are not really found in things themselves, but rather mistakenly attributed to nature on the basis of inaccurate ideas of the imagination. This false belief leads people to conclude that things were created with a purpose, according to the design of a willing and intelligent God. On this basis, they believe that humans too were created with a purpose, namely, to worship God. They see worshiping God as our perfection in the literal Latin sense as our completion, since it allows us to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. On this basis, they judge our good with respect to this purpose: the good is whatever helps us to worship God.

Here is the difficulty: given Spinoza's subjectivism, his opponent's judgment that "worshipping God is good" must be understood as the claim that "worshipping God helps me to satisfy my desires." Consequently, Spinoza's criticism of this view must be directed at the opponent's desires, either taking issue with the opponent's desire or her assessment of the means to attain it. Spinoza cannot be taking issue with the latter: worshiping God must be a means to satisfying her desires because she obviously desires to worship God. His criticism, therefore, must be directed at the desire to worship God itself. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Spinoza's criticism targets the very notion that striving to worship God is a worthy end. However,

[36] According to the common subjectivist reading, which holds that normative claims, for Hobbes, should be understood as causal claims about the means to satisfying desires. See Gauthier (1967), Hampton (1986) and Kavka (1986).

[37] Hobbes is arguably the source of Spinoza's subjectivism; see *De Cive* (Chapter 3, 31), a copy of which was in Spinoza's library.

Spinoza does not criticize the opponent's desire on prudential grounds. He does not claim that the desire to worship God interferes in her satisfying other desires, of which Spinoza takes no account.[38] In fact, Spinoza's reasoning cannot be prudential because he criticizes his opponent's judgment as false in a cognitive sense, arising from "confusion" and "ignorance of things and their nature" (1app).[39] Prudential reasoning could not support this criticism: my desire to lose weight shows that my desire to eat cake is not false, but rather wrong in the sense that I should avoid acting on the desire or rid myself of it. Consequently, if we are to make sense of Spinoza's claims in 1app, we must explain how the falsity of the opponent's beliefs undermines her judgment of the good. But it is hard to see how it does. Suppose that the opponent only desires to worship God because of her false beliefs, for instance, that God created her for this purpose. Since her judgment of the good amounts to a claim about her desires – the desires she has, not that she should have or would have under different conditions – then the truth of these beliefs should not be relevant.

While Spinoza does not address this issue, his theory of desires offers grounds for a plausible explanation. Since desires are the causal powers of our ideas, our desires are bound up with representational content, which is subject to cognitive evaluation. This suggests that Spinoza is entitled to judge desires as literally true or false. In what sense, then, might the desire to worship God be false? Presumably, this desire is bound up with the ideas that Spinoza targets in 1appendix, that God acts with intentions and creates humans for the sake of his glory. Since the desire to worship God is merely the causal power of these ideas, which are false, the desire is, in a sense, false as well. This explanation shows that Spinoza is entitled to engage in more rigorous cognitive evaluation of judgments of our good than one would think, given his subjectivism. Subjectivism suggests that the truth of one's beliefs is only relevant to our judgments of the good when we go about identifying the best means to satisfy our desires. But Spinoza understands desires as connected to cognitive content, which entitles him to evaluate the truth of beliefs to which our desires are connected. Consequently, he can

[38] Here I depart from LeBuffe, who argues that Spinoza in 1appendix rules out the providential account of the good on "pragmatic grounds," which are equivalent to what I call prudential grounds (2010, 160–2).

[39] In this respect, Spinoza's view resembles cognitive expressivism, the view that moral judgments express desires and are subject to determinations of truth and falsity. See Horgan and Timmons (2006). While LeBuffe argues that Spinoza's view is close to ethical projectivism (2010, 154–9), his reasons for this claim apply just as well to cognitive expressivism and there is little reason to think that Spinoza upholds the distinctly projectivist claim that good and bad misleadingly appear to us as belonging to objects, in the same way as color.

also determine our good by evaluating the beliefs from which our desires arise. For instance, he can argue that wealth is bad, even if one desires it, because the desire arises from false beliefs. For instance, the desire may arise from the false belief that money leads to happiness, or that people's worth is determined by their wealth.[40] This is consistent with Spinoza's desire-satisfaction theory of the good: the fact that a belief is false indicates that it is passive and Spinoza only upholds a desire-satisfaction theory of the good with respect to active desires.

5.4 ADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOOD

According to the previous section, "true knowledge" of our good amounts to adequate ideas representing our good. This reading is consistent with other passages where Spinoza allows that we can have adequate ideas of good and bad. For instance, he claims that we "certainly know" that whatever conduces to understanding is good and whatever hinders understanding is bad (4p27). Since certainty is the mark of true ideas (2p43s), which are necessarily adequate (2p34), it follows that we can have adequate knowledge that the good is what conduces to understanding.[41] Furthermore, Spinoza would surely agree that the propositions of the *Ethics* follow from reason and, thus, from our adequate ideas. Since many of these propositions concern our good, it follows that our adequate ideas represent our good, indicating, for instance, that good things agree with us in nature (4p31) or that our highest good is knowledge of God (4p28). If Spinoza is to maintain that these propositions are revealed by reason, he must hold that their content is contained in our adequate ideas.

Nevertheless, one might question my claim that there are adequate ideas of good and bad, since there are a variety of texts where Spinoza appears to deny it. Let's begin with Spinoza's claim that "if the human mind possessed only adequate ideas, it would form no conception of good and bad" (4p64c). This passage asks us to imagine a human being with only

[40] Alternatively, Spinoza could argue that the opponent does not actually desire to worship God, since the desire, arising from inadequate ideas, is passive and, thus, arguably not her own. This explains how Spinoza is entitled to criticize the opponent's desire on the basis of her false beliefs, for showing that her beliefs are false is tantamount to showing that they arise from inadequate ideas, which are externally imposed. However, this explanation puts a great deal of stress on a point that Spinoza does not obviously endorse, that passive desires are not our own. On the contrary, he usually accepts that these desires are our own, except when he is using 'desire' in a strict and technical sense, according to which passive desires are not really desires at all.

[41] Miller (2005) also defends the view that judgments of good and bad are justified on the basis of knowledge.

adequate ideas, what he goes on to call "the free man." Consequently, 4p64c is essentially equivalent to Spinoza's later claim, "if men were born free, they would, so long as they were free, form no conception of good and bad" (4p68). To make sense of these claims, it is helpful to consider what such an individual would look like. Since being affected by external things necessarily generates inadequate ideas, a free man cannot be affected in any way by external things. In other words, such an individual would act entirely from his own powers, doing "no one's will but his own, and only what he knows to be of greatest importance in life, which he therefore desires above all" (4p66cs). Seen in this light, there is good reason to conclude that such an individual would form no idea of good or bad. Since a person with only adequate ideas would not be affected by anything, there would be no thing that would help or hinder such a person's power. Thus, a free man would not have adequate ideas of good and bad because, being causally independent of external things, he would form no ideas of good and bad at all.[42] Read in this way, the passages do not call into question whether normal humans, who are affected by external things, form ideas of how they help or hinder or power, good and bad.

However, even if we can form ideas of good and bad, it might appear that they cannot be adequate, for 4p64 claims that we cannot have adequate knowledge of the bad (4p64). Since Spinoza cites this proposition as the basis for claiming that someone with purely adequate ideas would not form ideas of good or bad (4p64c), it may appear that his reasoning in 4p64 rules out the possibility of our having adequate ideas of the good as well. To address this worry, we should consider the proof.

> Knowledge of bad is sorrow itself insofar as we are conscious of it. Now sorrow is a transition to a state of less perfection, which therefore cannot be understood through man's essence itself and so is a passive emotion, which depends on inadequate ideas. Consequently knowledge of it – that is, knowledge of bad – is inadequate knowledge. (4p64d)

The argument reasons that an idea of the bad represents a decrease in our power, which, according to the *conatus* doctrine, must be brought about by something external. Following parallelism, the idea must also have an

[42] One might object that the free man could form the idea that his own powers are good, since they would increase his power, regardless of whether he is acted on by other things. However, we must remember that power, for Spinoza, is always expressed, unlike a battery. Since a free man would have no constraints on his power – that is, his power would be unopposed – his power would never increase, since there would be nothing for it to overcome. Consequently, not even his own powers could be said to increase his power. In other words, nothing would be good and bad for the free man because his power would not fluctuate.

external cause, which entails that we cannot be the sole cause of the idea. Consequently, the argument concludes, the idea cannot be adequate. The important point for our discussion is that this argument only rules out the possibility of our having absolutely adequate ideas, that is, ideas of which we are the sole cause. This is supported by the fact that Spinoza uses this argument as the basis for claiming that a free man would not have adequate ideas of good and bad. Since the free man is absolutely free, he has only absolutely adequate ideas. However, since human adequate ideas are partially caused by external things, as I argued in Chapter 1, the argument above is consistent with our having human adequate ideas of good and bad.

There is a final passage that suggests we cannot have adequate ideas of good and bad: "True knowledge of good and bad is only abstract or universal and the judgment that we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes so that we may determine what is good or bad for us in the present pertains more to the imagination than to reality" (4p62s). Since the imagination is the source of inadequate ideas, Spinoza's remark that determining what is good or bad pertains more to the imagination than to reality suggests that we cannot have adequate ideas of good and bad.[43] To understand this passage, we must consider an important way that our knowledge of good and bad is limited. Most good and bad things are external things that act on us in ways that change our power of activity. Spinoza holds that our knowledge of external things is importantly limited, as is evident in his explanation for why we cannot have adequate knowledge (human adequate ideas) of bodily modifications:

> Insofar as the external body is an individual thing that is not related to the human body, the idea or knowledge of it is in God insofar as God is considered as affected by the idea of another thing, which is prior in nature to the said external body. Therefore an adequate knowledge of the external body is not in God insofar as he has the idea of an affection of the human body. (2p25d)

The passage argues, in short, that we only know external bodies through modifications of our own bodies. Our ideas of these modifications are necessarily inadequate because our bodily modifications are determined by prior causes, of which we have no ideas.[44] We should not conclude,

[43] On the identification of inadequate ideas with ideas of imagination, see LeBuffe (2010, 48–50).

[44] In other words, ideas of bodily modifications do not meet the causal representation requirement (or, at least, they do not come close enough, since I have argued that none of our ideas can meet this requirement).

however, that we cannot have adequate ideas of external things. Rather, the passage shows only that we cannot have adequate ideas of particular or finite external things, which we know from our bodily modification.[45] We can still have adequate ideas of common notions such as extension, which are properties of external things. It follows that we can have adequate ideas of internal good or bad things and of general external good and bad things, but not of external, particular things. This point explains Spinoza's claims in 4p62: he only asserts that we have imaginary representations of what is "good or bad for us in the present," that is, of the particular things affecting our bodies at any time, while allowing that we can have "true knowledge of good and bad" that is "abstract or universal." Read in this way, the passage actually affirms the possibility of adequate ideas of good and bad.

Before concluding, I should address a final question about the possibility of having adequate ideas of good and bad: how do we square this claim with the fact that Spinoza only admits that we can have adequate ideas about the attributes and God's essence? The best explanation is that representations of our good are contained in our adequate idea of God's essence. It makes sense to suppose that adequately understanding an idea entails adequately understanding various propositions that follow from it or are contained within it. For instance, adequately understanding God's essence entails understanding that he consists of infinite attributes (1p11), that he is indivisible (1p13) and the only possible substance (1p14). Similarly, adequately understanding God's essence entails understanding our own essence as finite modes of God's power, from which Spinoza derives his claims about what promotes our power and, thus, our good. In this way, one could say that adequate representations of our good are contained in our adequate idea of God's essence. Thus, it is possible that the entire content of the *Ethics* is contained in a few adequate ideas, perhaps, even, in only one.[46]

[45] Spinoza's claim that we cannot have adequate ideas of finite things is evident in his claim that we cannot have adequate ideas of perishable things or things of a limited duration, both of which are equivalent to finite things: "all particular things are contingent and perishable" (2p31c); "we can only have a very inadequate knowledge of the duration of particular things external to us" (2p31); "it is not in the nature of reason to regard things as contingent" (2p44).

[46] While I sometimes use the plural "adequate ideas of our good," I do not mean to take any stand on the question of how we should quantify our adequate ideas. In other words, I do not mean to deny the possibility that there is only one adequate idea of our good or, even, that there is technically no adequate idea of our good, only adequate ideas of other things, such as God's nature, that also represent our good.

CONCLUSIONS

While Spinoza makes a bewildering number of claims about our good, they are all ultimately reducible to the claim that our good is what promotes our power. The main obstacle to this claim is Spinoza's desire-satisfaction theory of the good, since it seems that we desire things that do not promote our power and, conversely, that we do not desire things that do. However, since desires are particular expressions of a striving to increase our power, it follows that satisfying our desires necessarily promotes our *conatus* and, thus, our power. Conversely, it follows that increasing our power promotes some particular expression of our *conatus* and, thus, satisfies some desire. Of course, these claims about the connection between our power and desire only hold with respect to desires that follow entirely from our *conatus*, that is, active desires. However, Spinoza has a tendency to use 'desire' to refer only to active desires. He even acknowledges this as a special strict sense of the term, "desires considered absolutely." Furthermore, since our good is connected to satisfying only active desires, it follows that his desire-satisfaction theory of the good is also equivalent to the claim that the good is what helps us to attain the model of human nature, since the model is the object of our rational or active desires. Consequently, whatever helps us to satisfy our active desires also helps us to attain the model of human nature and vice versa.

This chapter has also explained how we know the good, which is important to Spinoza's ethics, since it requires us to identify the good, to distinguish true from merely apparent goods and to determine how various goods contribute to our highest good. Spinoza's view on the matter is best understood with respect to his general theory of knowledge, according to which knowledge (*cognitio*) amounts to representations of ideas that admit a sufficient degree of certainty. The certainty of ideas, in turn, is determined by their adequacy, since this determines the extent to which we grasp their causes and, consequently, their logical basis. While Spinoza does not specify the degree of certainty that is required for an idea to count as knowledge or how we can recognize whether this degree of certainty has been attained, he admits that some inadequate ideas are sufficiently certain to count as knowledge, specifically of the first kind. So, while adequate ideas of our good are the most certain, inadequate ideas of our good can also qualify as knowledge, such that we can determine our good on the basis of experience as well.

However, it is not initially clear what it means for an idea to represent our good, since Spinoza holds that the properties of good and bad do not

exist in things themselves. The answer is found in Spinoza's subjectivist view that these properties are projected on to objects on the basis of our desires. It follows that we represent the good by representing our desires and how they are satisfied. So, representing a glass of water as good means representing that it satisfies one's desire to drink. These representations count as knowledge, then, when they admit a sufficient degree of certainty.

This reading is prima facie in tension with three texts. The first is 1appendix, where Spinoza criticizes some desires on the cognitive grounds that they are confused or false. The best explanation for this claim is that we can evaluate desires on the basis of the representational content to which they are connected. In this way, we can acquire knowledge of our good by considering whether our strivings arise from true or adequate ideas. It follows that we can criticize our desire for, say, excessive drink, on the grounds that it arises from false or confused ideas. In this respect, Spinoza's view provides more robust cognitive grounds for evaluating our good than one would expect from a subjectivist. The second text is 4p64, where Spinoza appears to claim that we cannot have adequate ideas of good and bad. However, a close reading shows that Spinoza denies only that free men would have absolutely adequate ideas of good and bad. A close reading of the third text, 4p62s, shows that it only denies the possibility of having adequate ideas of particular, external things.

CHAPTER 6

The natural law

Having considered Spinoza's view of our good, we can now turn to reason's guidance for obtaining it. One might expect reason's practical guidance to be very specific, since the best course of action likely depends on the particular circumstances; for instance, while it is usually in our best interests to exercise, there are times when it may not be, say, when recovering from an injury. Yet Spinoza holds that reason dictates practical laws, in other words, universal rules for action, which are the subject of this chapter. The first section examines Spinoza's discussion of practical laws, arguing that they are best understood as natural laws. The second section considers why reason would dictate lawlike commands. The section answers that reason, for Spinoza, requires us to adopt a kind of impartial perspective that does not attend to particular properties or one's position in space and time. The final section considers how Spinoza's view of the natural law bears on his view of autonomy. Since rationality consists in following impartial and universal rules for action, it follows that our autonomy does as well, a view that bears an unmistakable resemblance to Kant. The section examines this resemblance, arguing that Spinoza's ethics provides a different philosophical framework for defending claims often identified with Kantian ethics, that we become autonomous by being moral and that autonomy is the basis of morality.

6.1 DICTATES OF REASON AND DIVINE LAWS

Spinoza's most prominent discussion of practical laws in the *Ethics* is found in 4p18s, where he considers the "dictates of reason." While he does not explain precisely how reason provides practical guidance, the dictates of reason are practical principles for promoting our power, which suggests that reason directs us to actions in the sense of indicating that they are good. Spinoza's list of reason's dictates indicates that many of them

are universal prescriptions, applying to all people in all situations.[1] The two primary dictates are "that every man should seek his advantage" and that we should act to the benefit of others – "men who are governed by reason . . . seek nothing for themselves that they would not desire for the rest of mankind" (4p18s); I will refer to these as the 'first' and 'second' laws respectively.[2] Although the second describes what rational people would do, it nevertheless provides a universal law by implying that it would be good for all people to act to the benefit of others, since using reason is in our best interests.[3] In fact, the second law resembles the golden rule, though it is slightly different: Spinoza's dictate commands us to "do for yourself only what you would do for others," rather than "do to others, what you would have them do to you."[4] His claim in 4p37 comes closer: "the good which every man who pursues virtue aims at for himself, he will also desire for the rest of mankind," in other words, "do for everyone what you would want for yourself."[5]

However, not all of Spinoza's dictates of reason are universal in scope. Most importantly, he claims that all the free man's actions arise from dictates of reason (4p72d), but some of these dictates cannot be universal. Since Spinoza describes the free man as completely rational and self-determined, having only adequate ideas (4p68d), what is good for him will not be the same as what is good for us. For instance, consider the claim that the free man would not lie, even to save his life (4p72d). This makes sense for a free man, since he has nothing to lose: having fully adequate ideas, he already possesses the highest good, and since he sees all things under the aspect of eternity, he would see no further value in prolonging his existence, "for no individual can be said to be more perfect on the grounds

[1] The same point is made by Nadler (2006, 227), who compares Spinoza's dictates to Kant's categorical imperative. Curley (1973b) also argues that Spinoza allows for a kind of categorical imperative. His reasoning is that all dictates of reason for Spinoza are hypothetical imperatives and since some of them take necessary claims as their antecedents, then they always hold.

[2] The other dictates mentioned in 4p18s are forms of these two. For instance, the command to desire what brings us to perfection is a form of the command to seek our advantage. The second dictate is also the basis for a dictate not mentioned in 4p18s, that freeing another from misery "is an action that we desire to do as a dictate of reason" (4p50d).

[3] In this way, all of the dictates imply laws, even if they are not framed as universal prescriptions. For instance, his claim that "those who commit suicide have a weak spirit" (4p18s) implies a law prohibiting suicide, because of our striving to increase our power.

[4] For the moment, I will consider only how the second dictate qualifies and functions as a practical law, leaving for the next chapter the question of why it is good for us to act for the good of others.

[5] Interestingly, Hobbes also argued that many laws of nature boil down to something like the golden rule, though his formulation requires only negative commitments, that we refrain from doing to others what we would not have done to ourselves: "do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself" (*L* 15: 35, 99).

that it has continued in existence over a greater period of time" (4pref). But this dictate would not benefit us, since dying would deprive us of the opportunity to increase our power in the future.[6] The fact that the actions of the free man are not listed among the dictates of reason in 4p18s suggests that it lists only the dictates that apply to all humans in virtue of the adequate ideas available to us.

Spinoza has much more to say about practical laws in the *TTP*, though understanding this point requires us to consider his general account of laws there. He first defines laws as "that by which an individual, or all things, or all things of a particular kind, act in one and the same fixed and definite manner, which manner depends either on natural necessity or on a human decision" (*TTP* 4, 1). As suggested by the tail end of the passage, Spinoza distinguishes between naturally necessary laws, such as physical laws, and 'man-made' laws: whereas the former hold regardless of human ideas and preferences, the latter depend on "human decision," that is, on human commands and our ability to recognize them as binding.[7] Consequently, man-made laws are different because they are both violable and also limited in domain, applying only to those things that have the capacity to recognize and follow laws.[8] Because of these differences, Spinoza claims that such a law "is more correctly called a statute [*ius*]" (*TTP* 4, 2). Nevertheless, it is important to Spinoza that we recognize man-made law as a kind of law. Thus, he offers a second definition of law as "a rule for living which a man prescribes to himself or others for some purpose" (*TTP* 4, 2).

Spinoza further divides these rules of living into human and divine laws:

> By human law I mean a prescribed rule of conduct which aims only to protect life and the state.
>
> By Divine law I mean that which is concerned only with the highest good, in other words, the true knowledge and love of God. (*TTP* 4, 3)[9]

The difference between human law and divine law is basically the difference between political laws, which aim for the preservation of the state

[6] Miller also recognizes the difference between our practical deliberation and that of the free man (2003b, 129–33).

[7] For a discussion of the connection between these two kinds of laws in Spinoza, see Miller (2003a).

[8] This point is more explicit in other natural law theories, such as that of Pufendorf, which distinguishes between moral and physical entities (in *The Law of Nature and Nations*, Book 1, Chapter 1, sections 2–6).

[9] Spinoza's taxonomy here is somewhat confusing, since he first divides laws into necessary and human, then divides human laws into human and divine. So, there are, strangely, human-human laws and human-divine laws. I will use 'human law' and 'divine law' to refer to the latter two kinds of "rules of living," that is, practical laws.

and its citizens, and ethical laws, which direct us to the highest good. Consequently, we should not assume, despite their title, that divine laws are religious. According to the definition, human laws are primarily concerned with actions, whereas divine laws are also concerned with one's inner states, whether one has "true knowledge and love of God." Spinoza generally thinks of religion as concerned with action rather than inner states. For instance, he conceives of faith, the province of religion, as whatever one must believe in order to act with piety, whether or not it is true (*TTP* 14, 3). For this reason, Spinoza understands much religious law as human, as is evident in his account of the ceremonial law. He claims that many commands from the Old Testament "contribute nothing to blessedness and virtue, but had reference only to the election of the Hebrews, that is, to their temporal and material prosperity and the peace of their state, and therefore were only practically relevant while that state lasted" (*TTP* 5, 1).

We should note a few important differences between divine law and human law, the first of which concerns their authority. On a superficial level, one might say that human laws derive their authority from an external source, whereas divine laws derive their authority from an internal source, since human laws are only binding when they are commanded by one with the power to enforce them, whereas divine laws have force because they are commanded by reason. However, this way of framing the difference is somewhat misleading, since even human law ultimately derives its authority from internal desires to obtain rewards and to avoid punishments; external enforcement mechanisms are only effective because of people's desires. It is better to say, then, that human law and divine law are distinguished by their enforcement mechanisms: human laws are enforced by means of external rewards and penalties, whereas divine law is binding independently of such things, "not from fear of punishment and penalty, nor from the love of some other thing, from which we desire to receive joy" (*TTP* 4, 5).

The second difference concerns the rationality of the laws. Spinoza generally understands human laws as created for the purpose of controlling behavior as a means to some human end. As such, they may be irrational in a variety of ways. The end or purpose of a law may be irrational, such as satisfying the excessive appetites of a ruler. The means commanded by the law may be irrational in the sense of not being required to bring about the intended end; in this sense, it would be irrational to sacrifice animals to win victory in battle. Finally, the methods of the law may also be irrational in the sense that they do not appeal to reason in order to secure compliance. Indeed, the methods are quite likely irrational; since the laws

must have sway over irrational people, human law usually relies on threats and intimidation to ensure compliance. Divine laws, on the other hand, must be rational. For they indicate what is genuinely useful for leading one to her highest good, which is a rational end. Indeed, since the highest good consists in using reason, it would be contradictory for the laws to command anything contrary to reason.

A third difference, which is most important to the present discussion, is that only divine laws are universal. Human laws depend on external enforcement mechanisms, which entails that they only hold in particular historical and political circumstances. Divine laws, on the other hand, direct us to our highest good, which is common to all people. Consequently, Spinoza derives divine laws by considering what benefits human nature generally, rather than our particular individual natures. It follows that his account of the divine law applies to all people in all circumstances. In Spinoza's words, "[divine law] is universally applicable or common to all men, for we have deduced it from human nature as such" (*TTP* 4, 6; see also *TTP* 5, 1).

At this point, it should be clear that divine laws are the same thing as the dictates of reason from 4p18s: practical laws, given by reason, for promoting our interests. Consequently, we can use his account of the divine law to fill out his explanation of practical laws from the *Ethics*. In particular, the foregoing discussion of divine law helps us to see something not evident in 4p18s that will be important later in this chapter and in the next. Unlike human laws, which are only valuable by virtue of external rewards, following the divine law provides its own reward: "the highest reward of the divine law is the law itself" (*TTP* 4, 6). This is because the law is commanded by reason and it increases our power to act in accordance with reason. To illustrate the significance of this point, imagine a case where helping others leads to some harmful consequence to oneself, for instance, where one has the choice of giving money to a friend in need or spending it on herself. If we suppose that reason dictates a law of benevolence requiring one to give away the money, it follows that there is some value to doing so, solely because it is rational. It follows that obeying the dictates of reason is valuable, independently of the consequences of doing so.[10]

According to the foregoing discussion, Spinoza's practical laws look a great deal like natural laws, as they were conceived by the tradition running

[10] Of course, this is not to say that the value of following the rational law is sufficient to outweigh possible harmful consequences to oneself; despite the value of giving the friend money, it may ultimately be best not to do so. I will return to this point in the final section.

from the Stoics, through Aquinas, Suarez, Grotius and Hobbes. While there is much variety among these accounts, they tend to agree on certain fundamental claims about natural laws, that they are universal, divine commands revealed by reason and binding independently of political enforcement.[11] Admittedly, Spinoza's divine laws are not divine decrees in any literal sense, since his God has no will, though the fact that Spinoza referred to the dictates of reason as divine law in the *TTP* suggests that he was trying to accommodate this aspect of the natural law tradition.[12] Nevertheless, Spinoza's laws possess the other common features: they are revealed by reason, universal and binding independently of any political enforcement, since following the divine laws provides its own reward and breaking them provides its own punishment. Spinoza even suggests that they are, at least sometimes, universally known: "this law is so deeply inscribed in human nature that it should be counted among the eternal truths universally known" (*TTP* 16, 6). Not surprisingly, Spinoza sometimes calls the divine law "natural divine law" (*TTP* 4, 6) or just "natural law" (*TTP* 4, 7).[13] Henceforth, I will assume that the terms 'divine law' and 'natural law' are, for Spinoza, extensionally equivalent and furthermore, that they include the universal dictates of reason discussed in 4p18s.[14]

[11] It is less clear that the Stoics held these views, firstly, because their understanding of God is very different from later Christians. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent they understood the natural law as offering strict rules. According to one reading, the Stoics regarded the natural laws as universal laws from which we deduce our own behavior. See Annas (1993, 84–108), Striker (1987, 218), Mitsis (1993). According to another reading, there is no good evidence for thinking that the original Stoics believed in universal exceptionless laws; rather, they were rough and ready principles. See Inwood (1985, 105–11), Long (1983, 191).

[12] Spinoza's effort to do so is likely indebted to Grotius' treatment of natural law in *De jure belli ac pacis*, a copy of which was in Spinoza's library (Alter, 1965). Like Spinoza, Grotius does not think that natural law requires God's will; they would hold "even if there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him" (*De jure belli ac pacis*, prologue, 11). Grotius' view also emerges from a general account of law, which distinguishes human law from divine law. Furthermore, he distinguishes natural law from volitional divine law, thereby implying what Spinoza explicitly embraced, that natural law is the same thing as a nonvolitional divine law. In this way, Grotius provides a precedent for Spinoza's claim that natural laws, though not commanded by God, are still divine, in some unspecified sense. Spinoza's philosophy, however, is better equipped to explain nonvolitional divine laws, because he believes that everything follows in a necessary, lawlike way from God's nature. For a concise discussion of early modern natural law theories, see Darwall (2006). For a longer treatment see Haakonssen (1996) and Schneewind (1998, chapters 2–8). For discussion of Grotius, see Schneewind (1998, 69–70, 73–5). For work on Spinoza's connection to Grotius, see Rosenthal (2001, 540–3).

[13] I should mention that the main overviews of the natural law tradition, Schneewind (1998), Haakonssen (1996) and Darwall (2006), do not consider Spinoza's account of natural law. Presumably this is because they lump his ethics together with other perfectionist ethics, which generally make less use of natural law, such as Malebranche's.

[14] The claim that Spinoza upholds a natural law theory is upheld by Miller (2003a) and Harris (1984). I will consider Curley's dissenting view (1991) presently.

Given that Spinoza's natural laws are not literal divine commands, one might question how they have any normative force. Spinoza's previous claim that the law provides its own reward suggests that the law has force because it increases our power, in other words, because it is good.[15] I argued in Chapter 5 that claims about the good are only normative in virtue of our striving, which is equivalent to our desires. In light of this conclusion, Spinoza's natural laws are best understood as normative in virtue of our desire to persist in existence and increase our power. The general move to explain the normativity of the natural law as arising from desire has some precedent in Hobbes, according to a common interpretation. While he holds that natural laws are divine commands, Hobbes understands them as rational principles for satisfying our desires, which, according to a common reading, become normatively binding in virtue of our desires.[16] For instance, reason indicates that seeking peace when possible helps to preserve our lives, which we take as implying that we *should* seek peace, since we want to preserve our lives. Spinoza's view is somewhat different because he understands the natural law as indicating not the means to satisfying our desires, but rather the actions that follow from the power of adequate ideas: for instance, that if one acts according to reason, then she will act to the benefit of others.[17] Because of this difference, Spinoza's dictates of reason, unlike Hobbes', identify not just means to ends but also the ends represented by adequate ideas, for instance, to increase our power. Nevertheless, Spinoza's natural laws, like Hobbes', are essentially descriptive claims that serve as normative principles in virtue of our desires.[18] So, the descriptive claim that rational people will act to the benefit of others implies

[15] I side here with the broad outlines of Curley (1973a–b) against Rutherford (2008).

[16] In making this claim I read Spinoza as following Hobbes in moving toward internalism, as described by Darwall (1995, Chapter 3).

[17] This point is defended by Rutherford (2008, 499).

[18] In making this claim, I disagree with Rutherford, who argues that the dictates of reason merely describe the necessary consequences of having adequate ideas. While I agree that the dictates are the necessary consequences of having adequate ideas, these consequences acquire normative force from the practical perspective of an agent who desires to increase her power. Rutherford's objection to my view hinges on the claim that the desire for rationality is not universal: "the normative force of such principles presupposes an individual's desire to realize her true advantage, or what will certainly preserve her being, and Spinoza is clear that many, if not most, people lack this desire in a sufficiently robust form for it to exercise a determining effect on their actions" (502). However, in Chapter 5 I argued that we do, in fact, have a universal desire to increase our power because Spinoza identifies our desires with our *conatus*. (I will presently address Rutherford's further claim that the laws cannot be universally binding because the desire is not strong enough to determine all people's actions.) My reading better explains the fact that Spinoza often writes as though the dictates are normative principles and that they include only practical principles, not theoretical claims that also necessarily follow from adequate ideas, for instance, that there is only one substance.

the normative claim that we should do so, because we desire to promote our power and, thus, to be rational.[19]

One might object that Spinoza's natural laws are fundamentally different because they have a different scope: Hobbes' natural laws are universally binding in virtue of indicating the means for self-preservation, which all people desire, whereas Spinoza's natural laws are only binding for those who are sufficiently rational to identify the actions that follow from adequate ideas.[20] However, their positions are not really so different. Since, for Spinoza, all people strive to increase their power, they also desire to increase their power, as I argued in Chapter 5. It follows that all people desire to follow reason, whether or not they realize it, since doing so most increases their power. Consequently, Spinoza's natural laws are universally binding in the sense that all people possess desires that provide them with reason to accept the dictates as binding. Of course, it does not follow that all people accept the dictates, since people may fail to recognize that using reason increases their power. However, this is no different from Hobbes' position. While Hobbes holds that all people have reason to accept the natural law as binding, since they desire self-preservation, he nevertheless allows that people may fail to recognize that the natural law helps to satisfy their desires. Indeed, claiming that there is conflict in the state of nature requires that at least some people fail to recognize that their interests are best served by obeying natural laws commanding peaceful cooperation.

This discussion helps to clarify the precise way in which Spinoza's natural laws are universally binding. They are not universally binding in the strict sense that all people accept them as authoritative. This is because the natural laws are commands given by one's particular rational powers, which vary by individual: for one who understands the conclusion of 4p28, reason dictates that it is most beneficial to increase one's understanding, but this is not the case among the ignorant, who do not recognize this conclusion. This explains why Spinoza claims that natural laws are not universally binding in the state of nature: in the absence of external enforcement mechanisms, the natural law only has force for those who follow reason: "among men, as long as they are considered as living under the rule of Nature alone, he

[19] The interpretive line I am pressing here opposes Darwall (2006), who puts Spinoza's ethics in the same category as Malebranche's, as orientating ourselves "toward a unified order of value" (230). In other words, on his reading, Spinoza identifies a rational order in nature and sees ethics as fundamentally concerned with matching ourselves to this order – a very Stoic reading. On my reading, however, Spinoza sees the nature of reason itself as generating principles that derive normative force from us rather than an external source. In this respect, my reading moves Spinoza closer to Darwall's reading of Kant and the Cambridge Platonists (230–3).

[20] This is the view of Rutherford (2008, 502–3).

who is not yet acquainted with reason . . . lives under the sole control of appetite with as much sovereign right as he who conducts his life under the rule of reason" (*TTP* 16, 2).[21] Nevertheless, Spinoza's natural laws are universally binding, even in the state of nature, in the weaker sense that all people have reason to accept the natural law as authoritative, since all people desire to increase their power and the natural law indicates actions that do so. In recognition of this point, Spinoza immediately follows up the passage above by qualifying that "there cannot be any doubt as to how much more it is to men's advantage to live in accordance with the laws and sure dictates of our reason, which, as we have said, aim only at the true good of men. Furthermore, there is nobody who does not desire to live in safety, free from fear, as far as is possible" (*TTP* 16, 5). In short, the natural law is universally binding in the sense that following the law benefits all people and satisfies their desires, but is not universally binding in the sense that people may fail to recognize this point.

6.2 THE PERSPECTIVE OF REASON

Since Spinoza held that it is rational to act to one's own advantage, it is not clear why he would conceive of reason as imposing practical laws. Rather, it seems that reason should direct our action only by helping us to calculate what is in our best interests, which varies by situation. On this basis, one might question whether Spinoza really regards following practical laws as important to a virtuous life. After all, many of Spinoza's natural laws boil down to the dictate to "do what is good for you," which is so vague that it scarcely looks like a principle at all. This is not to say that Spinoza does not have the philosophical resources to explain natural laws. But, one might think that he offers universal laws more as lip service to the natural law tradition than because of a genuine commitment to the ethical significance of following laws.

However, this way of thinking cannot be right, because practical laws play a prominent role in Spinoza's account of what it means to be rational

[21] Curley takes this claim as implying that the laws of nature prohibit nothing, since they are binding in the state of nature and in the state of nature nothing is prohibited (1991, 97). On this basis, Curley concludes that Spinoza opposes the natural law tradition, even regards it as "bankrupt" (114). The trouble with this reading is that it contradicts Spinoza's claims that the natural law does prohibit things, for instance, suicide or harming others for no reason. Allison has a similar reading, though his is based on a passage in the *TP* where Spinoza claims that "nature's right and established order [*institutum*] . . . forbids only those things that no one desires . . . does not frown on strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit, or on anything at all urged by appetite" (2, 8). Allison reads this passage as claiming that the natural law forbids nothing because he uses Wernham's misleading translation of "*institutum naturae*" as "natural law" (1987, 182–3).

and virtuous. To begin with, he claims that free men conduct themselves in accordance with rules, such as the rule prescribing honesty. In fact, he suggests that free men recognize some intrinsic value to following rules. He claims that "the free man who lives among ignorant people tries as far as he can to avoid receiving favors from them" (4p70), on the grounds that they may request a favor that is harmful. This reasoning implies that, for the free man, returning the favor would be obligatory, regardless of harmful consequences, presumably on account of some practical principle. Moreover, Spinoza upholds the virtues of justice, faithfulness and honor, all traits which follow from acting consistently, in a rulelike way: being just requires that one apply the same standards to all parties; being faithful and honorable arise from consistently following the same standards of behavior, as opposed to selectively upholding standards only when it is in one's own interests. For instance, insisting that you repay your debts to me, but then refusing to repay mine to you would be both dishonorable and unfaithful. This is likely Spinoza's justification for claiming that these virtues arise from following the dictates of reason (4p18s).

Why, then, would reason dictate laws? According to our previous discussion of the divine laws, they take a universal form, applying to all people, because they are derived from a general idea of human nature. This indicates that reason offers laws because it focuses on general rather than particular things. So, reason offers laws rather than context-specific guidance, because it only considers human nature, rather than my particular nature. This suggestion is supported by Spinoza's claim, explained in the previous chapter, that reason does not represent particular, finite things. While this answer goes some way toward answering the question, it is not sufficient, for it supposes that reason's dictates only take the form of laws because of limitations of human reason. But Spinoza holds that someone with unlimited reason, the free man – who "has only adequate ideas" (4p68d), presumably of even particular things – acts in accordance with laws, such as the command not to lie.

So, why does the free man recognize practical laws? Spinoza's answer is that reason requires actions that can be universalized; in other words, reason only recommends action if it would be acceptable for all people to act in this way.[22]

> If the free man, insofar as he is free, were to act deceitfully, he would be doing so in accordance with the dictates of reason (for it is in this respect only that we term him free) . . . and thus to act deceitfully would be a virtue, and, consequently,

[22] While there has been very little work on this aspect of Spinoza's account, it is considered somewhat in Yakira (2004).

in order to preserve his own being, it would be better for every man to act deceitfully . . . which is absurd. (4p72sch)

One might miss the significance of this passage by reading it as follows:
(1) The free man acts only on dictates of reason.
(2) Acting in accordance with the dictates of reason is virtuous (by definition).
(3) Thus if the free man lied, it would be virtuous to lie (from [1] and [2]).
(4) We know that it is not virtuous to lie.
(5) The free man would not lie (from [3] and [4] by *modus tolens*).
According to this reading, the argument presupposes in (4) what is intended to be its main conclusion, that honesty is virtuous. This would be especially problematic, since it is not clear why an egoist like Spinoza would uphold a prohibition against lying. Moreover, if the argument assumes that it is not virtuous to lie, then it is not clear what the purpose of the passage is; we already knew that the free man is virtuous. A better reading goes as follows:
(1) A perfectly free person acts only on dictates of reason.
(2) Dictates of reason must be applicable to all people, in other words, universalizable.
(3) If lying were a dictate of reason, then "it would be better for every man to act deceitfully" (from [1] and [2]).
(4) It is absurd to think that people would be better off in a world where everyone lied.
(5) Lying must not be a dictate of reason (from [4] and [2]).
(6) The free man does not lie (from [5] and [1]).
On this reading, the free man upholds a rule against lying because a perfectly rational being would only follow universalizable principles. He uses similar reasoning in the scholium.

I reply in the same way, that if reason urges this [men to lie], it does so for all men; and thus reason urges men in general to join forces and to have common laws only with deceitful intention; that is, in effect, to have no laws in common at all, which is absurd.[23]

This conclusion may appear puzzling, since the claim that we should act on universalizable principles is a serious ethical commitment, which is not evident elsewhere in Spinoza's ethics. If the reading is correct, it seems that he should treat universalizability as a test or, at least, a requirement for

[23] While Kant is most famous for using universalizability as a test for moral principles, this is not unique in the history of moral philosophy. Cumberland makes a similar argument in *A Treatise of the Law of Nature*, Chapter 5.

right action, much like Kant's categorical imperative. However, my reading supposes only that the free man should act on the basis of universalizable principles. It does not follow that we should act on universalizable principles. On the contrary, the previous section argued that the dictates of reason for the free man do not apply to ordinary humans. Since Spinoza does not mention the importance of universalizability elsewhere, it appears that ordinary humans need not act on universalizable principles. So, while it is the nature of reason to demand that one act on universalizable principles, normal humans, apparently, are not sufficiently rational that it demands this for us. Nevertheless, Spinoza's claims in 4p72s still have implications for ordinary humans. In particular, they offer an explanation for why reason dictates laws, because it is the nature of reason to demand principles that hold for all people. This indicates that reason dictates laws because it is impartial, formulating practical guidance without giving special priority to particular individuals. This answer has already been suggested by Spinoza's golden rule, which dictates that we treat others as we want to be treated so that we avoid privileging ourselves. The answer is implicit in Spinoza's explanation of the cause of interpersonal conflict. When Peter and Paul fight over a mutual object of love

> the reason for their dislike is none other than that they are assumed to differ in nature. For we are supposing that Peter has an idea of the loved thing as now in his possession, while Paul has an idea of the loved thing lost to him. Hence the latter is affected with sorrow, while the former is affected with joy, and to that extent they are contrary to each other. (4p34s)

Spinoza explains that Peter and Paul are drawn into conflict because one experiences joy at the idea of having a thing and the other sorrow at the idea of not having it. Since people are drawn into conflict by hatred and, thus, irrationality, these ideas must be irrational. Presumably fully rational people would not experience joy and sorrow at possessing or not possessing the thing. In this way, Spinoza indicates that a fully rational person would experience joy at the thing itself, without regard to his particular relation to it, such as whether he owns it.[24] Consequently, he concludes that if Peter and Paul are both rational, then their mutual love of the object only strengthens one another's love, rather than bringing them into conflict.

[24] Spinoza makes a similar point in 5p20s: "Emotional distress and unhappiness have their origin especially in excessive love towards a thing subject to considerable instability, a thing which we can never completely possess. For nobody is disturbed or anxious about any thing unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions, enmities, etc. arise except from love towards things which nobody can truly possess."

According to this explanation, reason reduces conflict because it inclines us to assess situations without giving special priority to our particular relations to things, in other words, impartially. Spinoza asserts precisely this in his early writing, arguing that knowledge of God and, thus, rationality "serves to promote the greatest common good, because through it a judge can never side with one party more than with the other, and when compelled to punish the one, and to reward the other, he will do it with a view to help and to improve the one as much as the other" (*KV* II, 18, 85).

One might be troubled by my suggestion that Spinoza conceives of reason as impartial, since he generally holds that reason directs us to our self-interest. Prima facie these claims appear to be inconsistent or, at least, in tension. To address this concern, we need a better understanding of why and how Spinoza regards reason as impartial, which requires examining his account of time. Spinoza holds that reason understands things as necessary, whereas the imagination confusedly supposes that things are contingent (2p44c2d).[25] This entails that reason understands things "without any relation to time" (2p44c2d). Indeed, Spinoza regards time as "a product of the imagination" (2p44c1s).[26] According to this view, if we understood things perfectly through reason, then we would see all things as existing timelessly. This implies that we only see things as having a finite duration of existence through the influence of the imagination. On this view, my idea that Julius Caesar does not exist now is inadequate and confused. Of course, the idea is not confused because Caesar is actually, despite what we've heard, still alive. Rather, the idea is inadequate merely because it contains a temporal predicate: exists *now*.

2p44c1s offers some insight into the basis for this counterintuitive claim. Spinoza explains that the imagination always represents things as present unless it is countered by an idea that negates the existence of the thing. On this view, I could only deny that Caesar exists now because my natural tendency to conceive of Caesar as present is checked by a more powerful idea that Caesar does not exist. Spinoza explains that we form such ideas through the influence of external bodies acting on our own. So, my idea that Caesar does not exist comes from experiences that provide evidence for this claim – reports of Caesar's death, the fact that I have never met Caesar and so forth. The problem with the idea is that, following Spinoza's causal determinism and substance monism, Caesar's existence follows necessarily

[25] For a deeper discussion of Spinoza's view on time, see Bennett (1984, Chapter 8). It is important to note that Spinoza's view on time is also connected to his doctrine of the eternity of the mind and salvation. On this point, see Rutherford (1999), Allison (1987, Chapter 5), Lloyd (1994, 114–47).

[26] See also letter 12.

from God's nature (1p28). Consequently, the grounds for positing Caesar's existence (or the existence of anything) are the logical grounds provided by God's nature. Since these logical grounds are timeless, my grounds for positing Caesar's existence are just as good as were Brutus' at the crossing of the Rubicon. It follows that any denial of Caesar's existence arises from confusion.

Spinoza seems to hold a symmetrical, though less developed, view about space:

> Corporeal substance, insofar as it is substance, cannot be divided. If I am now asked why we have this natural inclination to divide quantity, I reply that we conceive quantity in two ways, to wit, abstractly, or superficially – in other words, as represented in the imagination – and this is what we more frequently and readily do – we find it to be finite, divisible, and made up of parts. But if we consider it intellectually and conceive it insofar as it is subject – and this is very difficult – then it will be found to be infinite, one, and indivisible, as we have already sufficiently proved. (1p15s)

On this view, it seems that any perception of space as comprised of distinct, finite parts is a confusion of the imagination. Since reason represents all things as parts of a single substance, we only come to understand things as spatially distinct through our ideas from experience, which are inadequate (2p41d). Consequently, Spinoza holds that spatial properties as conceived in the imagination are not susceptible to rational understanding.[27] On this view, my perception that I occupy a distinct space from you is a kind of confusion. The symmetry is imperfect though, because whereas Spinoza regards any temporal property as the result of confusion, he is careful to allow that we may legitimately conceive of space abstractly in the intellect.

This discussion indicates Spinoza's basis for conceiving of reason as impartial. Reason does not recognize spatial or temporal properties, which entails that it does not take account of the interests and concerns that we have as a result of our particular positions in space and time. For instance, reason does not comprehend the time since my last meal, my close proximity to the cake sitting on the grocery store shelf or, consequently, my particular craving for dessert.[28] It follows that reason's recommendations

[27] Spinoza does not seem entirely consistent on this point, for he seems to accept some kind of spatial reasoning as rational. For instance, reason indicates that bodies strive to maintain a proportion of motion-and-rest among their parts (4p39d), a notion which requires us to conceive of space as divided up into distinguishable parts.

[28] This explains why the free man would follow universal rules, even though he has ideas of all particular things; he judges his best interests from a purely rational perspective that does not consider his spatial and temporal perspective.

for action are impartial in the sense that they do not take account of our individual spatial and temporal perspectives and, thus, a great many of our individual concerns.[29] Given this explanation, we can see how Spinoza can consistently hold that reason is impartial and how this directs us to our self-interest. For reason is not impartial in the sense of selfless, recommending that we choose the good of others over our own good. Rather, it is impartial in the sense that it judges our good without considering the spatial and temporal perspectives by means of which we distinguish and privilege the particular concerns of individuals, including ourselves.[30]

While this discussion shows that reason is impartial, it does not necessarily follow that Spinoza's ethics is impartial. To understand this point, we must consider an argument that will be taken up and developed in Chapter 9. In short, reason's guidance cannot be put into practice without assistance from the imagination, because reason does not take account of space and time, which are essential features of practical situations. For instance, while reason guides me to act for the good of others, I cannot determine what specific course of action will benefit others without attending to their position in space and time, which requires representing them in the imagination. Consequently, applying reason's guidance, as Spinoza's ethics demands, requires us to attend to necessarily partial representations of our own interests. This argument entails that there is a significant difference, for Spinoza, between reason and rational deliberation, that is, between our general and impartial adequate ideas and the deliberative processes by which we use these ideas to determine our actions. Similarly, there is a difference between the practical perspective, which determines our actions with the assistance of the imagination, and the rational perspective, which provides general practical guidance but cannot determine specific actions. Thus, the rational perspective is relevant to but also somewhat removed from the practical perspective.[31] Because of this argument, I cannot specify

[29] For instance, while the need to eat is a general property shared by all people, my desire for this piece of cake is particular to me in virtue of my proximity to the cake and the amount of time since my last meal.

[30] It follows that the natural law arises, to some extent, from formal properties of reason, because it takes no account of spatial and temporal properties. This point provides a possible explanation for Spinoza's otherwise cryptic remark: "Somebody may ask: 'What if the highest good of those who pursue virtue were not common to all? Would it not then follow, as above, that men who live by the guidance of reason, that is, men insofar as they agree in nature, would be contrary to one another?' Let him take this reply, that *it arises not by accident but from the very nature of reason that men's highest good is common to all*" (4p36sch; emphasis added). In other words, the highest good cannot be good only for some people, because it is the nature of reason to understand the good without attending to people's particular perspectives in space and time.

[31] This discussion indicates a difference between us and the free man. Since the free man comprehends particular things without the aid of imagination, he determines his actions entirely from the

the extent to which Spinoza's ethics is impartial until Chapter 9, when I consider how we apply and interpret reason's guidance.

However, I can point out two ways in which reason's guidance is impartial, given the previous discussion. First, as I will explain in the next chapter, rationality inclines us to interpret the natural law dictating benevolence without giving special priority to our spatial and temporal perspective. So, the mere fact that someone is close in proximity to me does not provide a rational reason for acting to benefit her, rather than someone halfway across the globe. Second, as I will also argue, reason directs us to act with benevolence on the basis of humans' shared rational nature. This means that the natural law provides no basis for giving special preference to individuals on account of their particular relationships to us, thereby preferring associates, friends and family to strangers or even enemies. However, this does not necessarily mean that rational people will act in this way, since assuming the practical perspective requires representing ourselves in space and time through the imagination, thereby attending to the countless ways we benefit from our intimates and those near to us in space and time.

Second, rationality inclines us to place less value on material possessions, since they are often valuable in virtue of our particular spatial and temporal perspective. This point is implied by Spinoza's explanation for the origin of conflict discussed above. Remember, Paul enters into conflict because of his irrational sorrow at losing some loved object. Thus, Paul's sorrow is based on the irrational desire to have the object under his control, that is, within certain regions of space at certain times. Spinoza's disdain for material possessions is most explicit in *TdIE*, where he considers what most people regard as the highest good, to judge from their actions, including "riches" (3). He argues that riches cannot give us true happiness because they are fleeting: "if it should come about that our hopes are disappointed, there ensues a profound depression" (5). In contrast, Spinoza argues that true happiness arises from focusing our energies on eternal things: "love toward a thing eternal and infinite feeds the mind with joy alone, unmixed with any sadness" (10).

Of course, Spinoza would not reject all possessions as irrational. His account of the conflict between Peter and Paul indicates that they are irrational not because they desire to own the loved object, but rather for supposing that the object is valuable in virtue of owning it. This implies only that it would be irrational to own things that benefit us equally

perspective of reason. In other words, the practical and rational perspective are the same only for the free man.

regardless of whether we own them, for instance, great works of art. But this is not the case for all possessions. On the contrary, Spinoza holds that reason directs us to seek things that promote our power, which must include, in some instances, material resources. After all, one needs to eat in order to be able to engage in virtuous activities. Consequently, it would be rational to own food or shelter, things that benefit us in virtue of a particular spatial and temporal relationship that requires ownership. Nevertheless, Spinoza only regards material possessions as valuable as a means for securing our true good, which is rationality. Consequently, a rational person would live much as Spinoza did, securing the resources required for directing one's life to the highest good, but otherwise not giving any special priority to material possessions.

6.3 morality and autonomy

The foregoing has important implications for Spinoza's view of autonomy: if rationality consists to some extent in following impartial and universalizable rules for action, then so too does our freedom and autonomy. While it would clearly be false to paint Spinoza as a proto-Kantian, this claim has an unmistakable Kantian ring to it, one which deserves further exploration. One might object to this line of investigation, at the outset, on the grounds that Kantian autonomy consists in acting morally, while Spinoza has no notion of morality. Admittedly Spinoza does not subscribe to the notion that there is a distinct category of moral concepts. This way of thinking is predicated on the view that there are moral, that is, non-self-interested reasons for action, which impose practical requirements or duties. In contrast, Spinoza avoids any strong concept of obligation, sticking instead to the softer normative ought of a prudential should. Consequently, he offers no grounds for a principled distinction between actions that are morally required – for instance, saving a human life when presented with the opportunity at no cost to oneself – and merely good, such as eating a delicious meal. Nor does he allow for a principled distinction between impermissible acts, such as murder, and acts that are merely bad, such as skipping a meal.

While Spinoza's ethics does not count as moral in this narrow sense, it does count as moral in the broader sense that includes most ancient ethics. In fact, Spinoza's avoidance of strictly moral concepts is partly a consequence of his eudaimonistic approach to ethics, which prohibits drawing a principled distinction between moral value and benefit. However, treating ethical value as a kind of benefit does not imply that eudaimonistic ethics

cannot recognize the obvious difference between the value of a delicious meal and saving a life.[32] Here Annas' defense of ancient ethics holds just as well for Spinoza:

> On the one hand, virtue is not straightforwardly incommensurable with other things, in the sense of not being on the same scale at all. A penny has the same kind of value (monetary) as Croesus' riches; one step does get you some of the way to India. On the other hand, there is a difference so marked that seriously to compare these items shows a lack of understanding of what they are. Someone who seriously congratulated herself on the progress she had made towards getting to India after taking one step would be showing lack of understanding of what one step is and what the journey to India is . . . Similarly, while we can at the intuitive level talk of virtue, health and so on as considerations all of which have value in an agent's life, seriously to compare the value of money as against that of honesty, say, shows a misconstrual of what money is and what honesty is.[33]

There is a further way that Spinoza's ethics is friendly to moral concepts, one implicit in his view of the natural law.[34] My argument here hinges on the previous claim that it is valuable to follow the natural law simply because it is commanded by reason. This entails that there is a value to acting on or for the sake of principle, independently of the consequences to oneself. This commitment bears some resemblance to the notion of duty, an obligation based on principle. We must tread carefully here, for Spinoza's 'duties' do not stand independent of self-interest. Furthermore, he does not hold that acting on such 'duty' has overriding value; in other words, the value of acting on principle does not necessarily trump harmful consequences to oneself. For there are likely many cases where the value of following the natural law is outweighed by the harmful consequences of doing so. For instance, for most people death is sufficiently harmful that it would be acceptable to violate a law prescribing benevolence in order to save one's life. Nevertheless, Spinoza's view allows that there may be cases where the value of acting in accordance with the natural law is sufficiently beneficial to outweigh harmful consequences to oneself: helping a stranger in need, since it is commanded by reason, may sufficiently improve my

[32] Furthermore, treating virtue as a kind of benefit to oneself does not imply an immoral egoism, since one's good can require acting for the good of others at considerable cost to oneself.

[33] Annas (1993, 122).

[34] My view here departs from, at least, the tenor, if not the substance, of those who take a disparaging attitude toward the possibility of Spinoza explaining modern notions of morality. See Darwall (2006, 235–7), and Schneewind (1998, 220–5). My view also departs from those who argue that, for Spinoza, morality and ideas of good and evil are really confusions, which adequate ideas allow us to overcome. See Schneewind (1998, 222), De Dijn (2004) and Frankena (1975).

power that doing so outweighs the harmful consequences of, say, having less money or time for myself.

Given the qualified sense in which Spinoza offers a moral philosophy, we can consider how his view on the relationship between morality and autonomy stands with respect to Kant's. Despite their enormous philosophical differences, Spinoza's ethics captures two claims that have been central to Kantian ethics. The first is that we are most autonomous when we act morally, that is, leading a virtuous life and directing ourselves in accordance with moral requirements. Of course, this claim means something very different for Spinoza, because he has such a different view of what it means to be moral. A first difference is that Spinoza does not regard universalizability as a test for right action – at least, for ordinary humans – which leads him to place less emphasis on the importance of moral rules. To some extent, this view can be traced to Spinoza's eudaimonism, which leads him to focus on how we should understand the value of our various activities for the purpose of planning our lives, rather than rules for judging specific actions. However, the more fundamental reason is that Spinoza's ethics directs us to our good, which varies depending on the situation. This entails that any universal rule directing us to our good is necessarily very general – "every man should seek his advantage." Consequently, Spinoza's rules are not sufficiently fine-grained to provide specific practical direction. Indeed, it is impossible for reason to even determine our actions without the assistance of imaginative representations.

A second difference is that Spinoza's moral philosophy, unlike Kant's, does not require us to act selflessly. On the contrary, Spinoza holds that practical normative claims are based in self-interest. This difference can be traced, first, to their different views on the perspective of reason. While Spinoza and Kant agree that we become autonomous by assuming the perspective of reason, their conceptions of this perspective are diametrically opposed. For Spinoza, the perspective of reason is, on a fundamental level, one's own self-interested perspective, the perspective that reveals what is best for us.[35] It is revealing that Spinoza's formulation of the golden rule does not ask us to take into account the perspective of others. He avoids the usual claim that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us, which requires us to consider what they should do and, thus, what the world looks like for them. Rather, he claims that we should do for

[35] This distinguishes Spinoza not only from Kant, but also from the Roman Stoics of the imperial era, who identify the perspective of reason with the perspective of the universe. On this point see Annas (1993, 159–79).

others what we want for ourselves, formulating the requirement entirely from one's own perspective. Even when Spinoza considers whether lying is universalizable, he does not take into account how others are affected by lying. He simply appeals to the obvious unacceptability – presumably for oneself – of a society where lying is widely practiced. Kant, in contrast, holds that the perspective of reason transcends our own self-interested motives, concerns and feelings:

> An action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations. (*G* 4:400–1)

Kant has a deep metaphysical reason for this view: we are only autonomous when we act purely from respect for the law because this entails governing ourselves from pure reason, independently of the causal forces that determine the relations among objects in space and time. For Spinoza, in contrast, there is no possibility for humans to escape causal determination. Adopting the perspective of reason makes us free not because it is entirely self-determined, but rather because it best increases our power.

Spinoza's philosophy captures a second important Kantian claim, that autonomy is the basis for morality. Kant asserts this claim at the end of the second section of the *Groundwork*, where he claims to have shown that "autonomy of the will is unavoidably bound up with it [the generally received concept of morality], or rather is its very foundation [*zum Grunde liege*]" (*G* 4:445).[36] For Kant, autonomy is the foundation for morality in the sense that being moral requires us to be autonomous. The reasoning for this claim is roughly that being moral and autonomous both involve the same essential activity of self-legislation. With respect to the latter, Kant understands autonomy not merely as self-determination, but more literally governing oneself according to law, in much the same way that a sovereign power governs a state; thus, he defines autonomy as "the property of the will by which it is a law to itself" (*G* 4:440). For Kant, this is precisely the same activity required by morality, for he argues that duties must originate in agents themselves, specifically in reason, which requires that laws have a universal form. While Kant does not hold that all moral requirements take the form of laws – he admits imperfect duties, which are not strict laws – he holds that all moral requirements must be universal;

[36] This translation and discussion is indebted to Reath (2006, Chapter 5).

even imperfect duties arise from ends that we accept because they can be universalized (*MM* 6:389). It follows that being moral requires us to recognize that certain ends and maxims are universalizable – providing reason for anyone to accept them – and, on this basis, to endorse them as normative principles governing one's own actions. In other words, morality requires self-legislation and, thus, autonomy.

Spinoza also holds that autonomy is the foundation for morality, in the general sense that the justification for any ethical claim is the fact that it promotes one's power and, consequently, her freedom and autonomy. Furthermore, Spinoza accepts that autonomy is foundational in the sense that being moral requires us to be autonomous, since both consist in our rationality. In fact, Spinoza would agree that our rationality and, thus, autonomy is a condition for recognizing lawlike moral demands. In this way, Spinoza upholds Kant's essential line of reasoning that we only recognize and hold ourselves to moral requirements when we function as autonomous individuals. We should not make too much of this last point, however, since Spinoza holds that increasing our power is a matter of degree, with correspondingly scalar value, whereas Kant holds that being moral is an all or nothing affair. Consequently, Spinoza allows that the slightest degree of rationality accompanies a degree of autonomy, even where one is not sufficiently rational to recognize lawlike dictates. Nevertheless he accepts that there is an essential connection between morality and autonomy, such that being autonomous in a robust sense requires us to act in accordance with universal laws.

In order to appreciate the significance of this second point of agreement, it is helpful to compare Spinoza to other natural law theories. Most natural law theories would probably agree that autonomy plays some role in our good, such that following the law promotes our autonomy. Furthermore, there are more Kantian versions of natural law theory, which emphasize that our autonomy consists, at least partly, in the activity of legislating and following the natural law.[37] Spinoza accepts both of these claims: since the natural law is rational, he holds that following the law promotes our autonomy and that the activity of legislating the law is important to our autonomy. However, Spinoza goes further than even the most Kantian defenders of natural law, because he holds that following the law is valuable precisely because it promotes our freedom and autonomy; in other words, autonomy plays a critical role in the justification for morality itself.[38]

[37] See Rhonheimer (2000).

[38] I would be remiss if I did not point out one glaring difference between the way that autonomy serves as a foundation for morality in Spinoza and Kant. For Kant, autonomy is essential to our agency

CONCLUSIONS

Spinoza's account of the dictates of reason from 4p18s indicates that he accepts essentially two practical laws, that we should act in our best interests and Spinoza's version of the golden rule, that we should treat others as we would choose to be treated. His account of divine laws in the *TTP* contributes to this account by showing that the dictates are laws in the sense that they are rules for living that humans set for themselves. Unlike human laws, though, divine laws are necessarily rational and do not depend on political enforcement mechanisms. In this sense, they resemble natural laws as they were commonly understood, except that Spinoza's are not decreed or enforced by a divine will. Consequently, natural laws derive their normative force, rather, from our desires, in a way that resembles a common reading of Hobbes. It follows that natural laws are universally binding in the sense that we all possess the desire to increase our power in virtue of which they are normatively binding. Nevertheless, Spinoza's natural laws are not universally binding in the sense that not all people use reason to recognize them.

Spinoza's commitment to the notion that reason provides laws for action is explained partly by his view on the nature of reason. Reason does not represent particular things, which entails that its prescriptions are derived from human nature generally, thereby applying to all people in all situations. However, this explanation alone cannot be sufficient, since the free man has adequate ideas of particular things and still acts in a rule-like way. Indeed, Spinoza's explanation of the free man's actions indicates that he acts according to principles that are universalizable. It follows that reason demands impartial action, not giving special preference to oneself. This explanation is supported by Spinoza's view that time and space are confusions of the imagination.

Spinoza clearly does not demand this sort of impartiality for us: he does not suggest that we should determine our action by universalizing principles or that we should ignore spatial and temporal representations of our needs. Nevertheless, it suggests that as we become more rational, we will increasingly understand our interests without respect to our particular spatial and temporal perspective. The natural law is a step in this direction

and, thus, our membership in the moral community. Kant holds that this aspect of our agency warrants respect, which, in turn, incurs certain moral obligations. Spinoza, on the other hand, does not treat our autonomy as essential to us as agents, though, as I will argue in the next chapter, he does argue that our shared rational nature and, thus, our capacity for autonomy serves as the basis for claiming that we should act for the good of others.

for it directs us to our good entirely on the basis of reason without attending to this perspective, which also explains why the natural law takes the form of a universal law. This explanation helps us to specify precisely how reason's guidance is impartial: to the extent that we are rational, we will recognize that we benefit from helping others regardless of their proximity to us and we will place less value on material possessions. While it is consistent with reason to own some things – whatever is required for achieving our true good – a rational person would not value material possessions for their own sake, independently of how they promote one's rationality.

An important conclusion of this interpretation is that Spinoza understands the relationship between autonomy and morality in a way that moves him far closer to Kant than one might think. Of course, Spinoza does not have a concept of morality or duty, independent of prudence and self-interest. Nevertheless he has a moral philosophy in the same general sense as the ancients and, furthermore, he allows for a concept that approximates a weak notion of duty, that there is an intrinsic value to acting in accordance with reason and, thus, to acting for the sake of the natural law. This allows that there may be times when we should act for the sake of an impartial principle despite harmful consequences to oneself. Given this qualified understanding of Spinoza's commitment to morality, he upholds two claims that are usually associated with Kantianism. The first is that we are most autonomous when we are moral. While Spinoza does not regard the activity of legislating moral laws to be as important to morality as does Kant, Spinoza nevertheless holds that the more autonomous we become, the more we act on the basis of impartial and universal principles. Spinoza's principles are also impartial in a different sense than Kant's, for Spinoza's principles are ultimately self-interested, though Spinoza's understanding of rational self-interest does not look particularly selfish. The second claim is that autonomy is the basis for morality. For, like Kant, Spinoza holds that we are only able to grasp moral requirements by becoming rational and, thus, autonomous.

CHAPTER 7

Benevolence

The previous chapters showed that Spinoza justifies ethical prescriptions, including the natural law, on the grounds that they are good. Since the good amounts to what promotes one's power, it follows that Spinoza is committed to ethical egoism, the view that the right action best promotes our self-interest. Spinoza openly embraces this view, arguing that advantage determines even the permissibility of acts: "whatever we deem good, that is, advantageous for preserving our being and for enjoying a rational life, it is permissible for us to take for our use and to use it as we please" (4app8). While one might regard this commitment as tantamount to a rejection of conventional morality, ethical egoism can consistently defend the value of benevolence on self-interested grounds. Spinoza clearly meant to take this tack, since he holds that there is a natural law requiring us to act for the good of others. Spinoza's justification for this claim is that our good consists in following reason's guidance, which directs us to the good of others: "he who lives by the guidance of reason endeavors as far as he can to repay with love or nobility another's hatred, anger, contempt towards himself" (4p46). This chapter aims to explain why, according to Spinoza, reason directs us to act with benevolence, in other words, the basis for what I have called the second natural law.[1]

The first section sets forth Spinoza's argument for this claim, which hinges on the notion that humans share a rational nature, in virtue of which acting for the good of others necessarily promotes our own good. The second section aims to clarify the argument by defending it from a few standard objections. The third section considers how this argument bears on Spinoza's egoism. The section argues that benevolence has a kind

[1] I should distinguish my use of 'benevolence' from Spinoza's *benevolentia*, a desire arising from pity (3p27c3s). While Spinoza criticizes the latter – "in a man who lives under the guidance of reason, pity in itself is useless and bad" (4p50d) – he defends the value of benevolence, understood as the maxim to act for the benefit of others. Indeed, his complaint against *benevolentia* is that we should act for the benefit of others on the basis of reason, rather than pity (4p50).

of intrinsic value because acting with benevolence increases the degree to which our nature agrees with those of others, which is good for us, regardless of whether our benevolence motivates others to act with benevolence toward us. The fourth section considers how the argument for benevolence fits into the broader scheme of Spinoza's ethics. I argue that Spinoza's argument ultimately justifies benevolence on the basis of love. It follows that benevolence is connected to our highest good, which consists in not only knowing but also loving God. The final section considers how Spinoza's view stands up to Kantian objections against using love as the ground of benevolence, that love is excessively partial and fails to respect people.

7.1 THE ARGUMENT FOR BENEVOLENCE

Spinoza's egoism entails that benefiting others can only be regarded as good because it promotes our power. The argument that it does, running from 4p30 to 4p37, shows that it benefits us to promote rationality in others. Since the only thing of value to humans is understanding and what is conducive to it (4p26), this is tantamount to showing that it benefits us to benefit others.[2] The argument can be summarized roughly as follows: if something agrees with our nature, it must be good for us. Since rational people agree with our nature more than anything else, they must be very good for us and, consequently, it must be advantageous for us to promote their rationality.

In order to make sense of this argument, we first need to understand what it means to agree in nature. The phrase first appears at 4p31: "Insofar as a thing is in agreement with our nature, it cannot be bad (preceding proposition)." Here the term is used to paraphrase a claim from a preceding proposition: "nothing can be bad for us through that which it has in common with us" (4p30). This indicates that two things agree in nature in the sense that the natures of two things have something in common: *A* agrees in nature with *B* to the extent that the nature of *A* shares properties with the nature of *B*.[3]

There are a few important things to note about agreeing in nature. First, things agree in nature only if they share essential properties. So the bluebird does not agree in nature with the bluejay in virtue of their shared color, since blue is a nonessential, secondary property. Other nonessential

[2] For this reason I will treat promoting rationality as equivalent to benevolence.
[3] I regard 'nature' and 'essence' as equivalent terms in this context.

properties are those brought about primarily through the causal influence of external things, for instance, wearing a hat, having cancer, being in debt. Consequently, for Spinoza, essential properties are those that make us the sort of *beings* that we are, not those that make us the sort of *persons* that we are. While the experience of surviving cancer or being in debt may shape one's personality in ways that are essential to her as a person, these properties are not essential in the relevant sense.

Second, agreement in nature does not imply identity, since things can share some but not all essential properties. This is consistent with Spinoza's understanding of individual essences as their *conatus*. He holds that this striving is expressed, under the attribute of extension, as the striving to achieve a particular proportion of motion-and-rest among the parts of the body.[4] So, my striving, at the bodily level, is my body's tendency to maintain its ideal functioning in opposition to competing forces; it is because of my *conatus* that my wounds heal and that small objects bounce off of my skin rather than rend my flesh. According to this view, essential properties pertain to this particular proportion; in other words, essential properties are the bodily properties I have in virtue of this striving. So, my adult height would be an essential property, assuming that my growth has not been stunted by a lack of nutrition or trauma brought about by external forces. In the case of human beings, many such essential properties will be shared, for instance, the general proportions that hold among the parts of the usual human anatomy: we all have circulatory systems, similarly constituted brains and so forth. Nevertheless, some essential properties will not be shared, for instance, one's fingerprints or the particular way one's neurons fire when happy.

Third, agreement in nature is not fixed, but rather changes depending on the properties one exhibits. This is somewhat surprising, since we do not usually think of natures as the sort of things that change.[5] Spinoza agrees that our general nature as *conatus* does not change – no matter what happens, our essence is always the striving to continue in existence and to increase our power, which, at the bodily level, includes striving to maintain the same proportion of motion-and-rest. Nevertheless, Spinoza allows that the properties brought about by my *conatus* change over time as the result of external forces; for instance, the particular proportion of motion-and-rest

[4] There is a straightforward derivation of this conclusion, which I borrow from LeBuffe (2009, 195): one's essence is her *conatus* (3p7); form and essence are the same thing (4pref; 2p10); one's form is the proportion of motion-and-rest of her body's parts (4p39); therefore, one's essence is the proportion of motion-and-rest of her body's parts.

[5] Garber flags this as a problem with the argument (2004, 188), but I do not see that it is.

of my body could be dramatically altered by a car accident.[6] Agreement in nature is best understood as the degree to which two things exhibit the same essential properties, in other words, the degree to which things with similar natures succeed in their striving. So, someone whose body has been severely damaged in an accident does not exhibit the same properties as other people – at least, not to the same degree – thereby agreeing in nature less with other people.[7]

Now that we understand agreement in nature, why does agreeing in nature entail that things are good for one another? Spinoza's answer takes the form of an argument from elimination: insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it cannot be bad for us or indifferent (neither good nor bad); consequently, it must be good. Remember, when Spinoza claims that "insofar as something agrees with our nature, it can't be bad for us," he means that something, to the extent that it expresses shared essential properties, cannot be bad for us. This claim follows straightforwardly from Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine: since one's *conatus* necessarily increases its power, no property that follows from a thing's *conatus*, that is, no essential property, can harm its power or, equivalently, be bad for it. It follows that, if *A* and *B* share the essential property *q*, then *q* cannot be bad for either of them. Thus, it is not possible for *A*, to the extent that it possesses *q*, to be bad for *B*. By similar reasoning, *q* cannot be indifferent either, since it follows from their *conatus* and must, therefore, promote their power.

While Spinoza presents this as an argument from elimination, it also provides positive grounds for claiming that things agreeing in nature must be good for one another: since essential properties necessarily preserve a thing, when two things share the same essential property it must be good for both of them. It follows that it benefits each of us to promote in others the expression of essential properties we share. Since rationality is an essential property shared by all people – indeed the greatest expression of our *conatus* – Spinoza concludes that it benefits us to promote the rationality of others.[8] This entails that it benefits us to benefit them, because rationality is the most beneficial thing for humans.[9]

[6] Essential properties may also change because of one's development: an infant has different properties than an adult because its causal powers have had less time to bring about their results.

[7] Though we would not say that she agrees more in nature with those suffering from similar injuries, since the properties brought about by the injury are not essential.

[8] It also follows from this that we disagree in nature the more we exhibit nonessential properties, in other words, the more that we are under the influence of external things. This is supported by Spinoza's claims that people disagree in nature the more they are subject to passions (4p34, 4p35).

[9] My reading of this argument departs from the most common reading found in Bennett (1984), Della Rocca (2004) and Garber (2004). Their interpretations lead them to conclude that Spinoza's argument falls prey to the objections that I consider in the next section.

7.2 EVALUATING THE ARGUMENT

Spinoza's argument has been criticized for relying on specious reasoning. In the interests of explaining the concerns, consider the following set of inferences implicit in the argument:

(a) if some person, *A*, acts to preserve herself, then to the extent that she is rational, she will act to preserve her nature;
(b) if *A* acts to preserve her particular nature in this way, then she also acts to preserve the nature of another, *B*, with whom her nature agrees;
(c) if *A* acts to preserve the nature of *B*, *A* acts to preserve *B*.

The first objection charges that Spinoza's reasoning conflates a thing with its nature. For (a) infers from a thing preserving itself to preserving its nature, while (c) infers the converse (from preserving the nature of a thing to preserving its existence). This inference is illicit because, in Garber's words, "what is preserved is being, not nature."[10] While this inference may involve a conflation, it is not one that is problematic. This is because Spinoza is entitled to infer that something preserves its existence from the fact that it preserves its nature and vice versa. Remember that our nature as *conatus* is expressed through the attribute of extension as the proportion of motion-and-rest to which our bodies strive. Since preserving our own existence entails maintaining this proportion of motion-and-rest, it follows that preserving our existence entails preserving our nature, in the aforementioned sense of 'nature.' The converse follows as well: maintaining our nature – this proportion of motion-and-rest – entails preserving our existence.

A second objection charges that Spinoza conflates the nature of two different things. For in (b) Spinoza infers from the fact that one thing, *A*, preserves its own nature, that it must also preserve the nature of another thing, *B*. This inference would not follow, the objection charges, unless sharing a nature amounted to having the same nature. This would be problematic: since all humans agree in nature, it would follow that all humans have the same nature or essence, which would make it impossible to distinguish individuals.[11] This criticism, however, misrepresents the predicate "agree in nature," which asserts not that two things have identical natures, but rather that they have distinct natures with common properties. Thus Spinoza is claiming only that, when two things share some essential

[10] Garber (2004, 189). The same objection is raised by Bennett (1984, 303).
[11] Della Rocca makes this argument (2004, 129). See also Bennett (1984, 300). While Della Rocca argues that Spinoza commits the first conflation as well, he is primarily concerned with the second conflation.

property, *A*'s efforts to benefit herself by promoting this property will necessarily benefit *B*, who also possesses this essential property.

However, my understanding of "agreement in nature" does not entirely lay the concern to rest, for the alleged conflation calls into question how Spinoza is entitled to infer from the fact that something acts to benefit its own nature, that it thereby acts to benefit something sharing its nature, in other words, that if essential property *p* is shared by *A* and *B*, then *A*'s preserving *p* will benefit *B*. This inference does look suspicious, for two reasons: first, there exist properties that are beneficial for every individual, but not mutually beneficial, in other words, which benefit each person at the expense of others. For instance, even if all humans universally have a property such that they benefit from, say, operating the television remote control or being king, it does not follow that my operating the remote or being king will benefit anyone else; on the contrary, my having this property may be very bad for people who share it. The same goes for any desire for scarce resources: given the limited number of fancy sports cars, my desire to secure one will actually make it harder for others to acquire one.[12] Call these 'competing goods.'[13]

It follows that Spinoza's argument does not succeed unless he holds that rationality does not direct us to competing goods. Fortunately, this appears to be Spinoza's view, for he holds that reason directs us only to goods that can be shared by all. This is most explicit in his characterization of the highest good:

> To act from virtue is to act by the guidance of reason and whatever we endeavor to do in accordance with reason is to understand. So, the highest good of those who pursue virtue is to know God; that is a good that is common to all men and can be possessed equally by all men insofar as they are of the same nature. (4p36d; see also 4p37s1)

While this passage primarily concludes that the highest good is not a competing good, his reasoning for this claim is that reason represents our good as understanding (4p26), which is not the sort of thing that is in competition with the good of others.[14] Thus, the argument implies that reason does not direct us to competing goods. One might object that understanding requires material resources, such as college admission or the financial security to devote time to learning, which are competing goods. Since it is rational to seek these things, it follows that reason directs us to

[12] Bennett raises this problem, though he does not think that there is a Spinozistic solution (1984, 301).
[13] The distinction between competing and noncompeting goods is also drawn by Broad (1930, 40–4).
[14] Spinoza also asserts the converse claim, that "the highest good sought by men under the sway of emotion is often such that only one man can possess it" (4p37s1).

competing goods. However, we must remember that reason amounts to adequate ideas, which do not represent particular things, such as money or college. Consequently, while it may be rational in the sense of being in our best interests to seek out competing goods that help us achieve understanding, reason does not actually direct us to such things.

Now to the second reason why Spinoza's inference looks dubious. Spinoza's argument for benevolence shows only that shared essential properties are mutually advantageous, but I have argued that people have both shared and distinctive essential properties. Consequently, the argument leaves open the possibility that benefiting ourselves by acting for the sake of an essential, distinctive property could lead us to act against the good of others. For instance, if I have the distinctive essential property that I love a good fight, then acting to preserve this property could lead me to provoke fights with others, which would not be to their benefit. We can respond for Spinoza in two ways. First, since all humans have a rational nature (we benefit from adequate ideas), we act to preserve our essential properties, even distinctive ones, through reason. Spinoza's account of the origin of conflict, discussed in the previous chapter, indicates that reason does not lead people into division and conflict.

> A man, Peter, for example, can be the cause of Paul's feeling pain because Peter has something similar to a thing that Paul hates, or because Peter has sole possession of a thing that Paul also loves, or for other reasons . . . Thus it will come about that Paul will hate Peter. Consequently, it will easily happen that Peter will hate Paul in return; thus, they will endeavor to injure each other, that is, they will be contrary to each other. But the emotion of pain is always a passive emotion. Therefore men, insofar as they are assailed by passive emotions, can be contrary to one another. (4p34d)

The proposition sets forth two scenarios for conflict, both of which arise from one party hating the other. While the proposition does not provide an exhaustive investigation of the possible sources of conflict, it is reasonable to suppose that all conflict arises from some kind of hate, which, as a kind of pain, arises only when we are acted on by external forces, in other words, when we do not act from adequate ideas or reason.

This response is not entirely satisfactory since it is possible for people to harm one another as a result of not conflict and hatred but rather a rational calculation of one's own best interests. Consequently, the response leaves open the possibility that acting to preserve one's nature may benefit her individual properties at the expense of common properties, so long as the individual properties do not generate hatred or conflict. The second response closes off this possibility: reason necessarily directs us to attend

to common properties, because it is the nature of reason that it can only comprehend common properties of things. For we have seen that we can only have adequate ideas of properties that are common to all things, such that they are as much in the part as in the whole (2p38, 39), such as thought and extension. Since these properties are so general that they are shared by all things, they alone do not constitute the essence of any particular thing (2p37), which entails that reason is blind to essential properties that are not shared by all humans. Consequently, reason could not lead us to prefer or even to attend to such properties, for instance, benefiting from fighting, enjoying the suffering of others, or any other problematic property of the sort.[15]

7.3 EVOLVED EGOISM: THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF VIRTUE

Now that we understand the basis for Spinoza's commitment to benevolence, we can consider its implication for his ethical egoism. While these commitments are consistent, since Spinoza justifies benevolence on the grounds that it promotes self-interest, one might think that benevolence can only have limited value in this egoistic framework.[16] In particular, one might think that benevolence can only have instrumental value, that is, as a means of benefiting oneself. However, this section aims to show that Spinoza's view assigns a kind of intrinsic value to benevolence.[17] I define these terms as follows:

A has *instrumental value* iff *A* is valued because it is a means of attaining something else of value, *B*, such that if *A* did not lead to *B*, *A* would not be valued.

A has *intrinsic value* iff *A* is valued independently of whether it is a means to anything else.

[15] I should also mention a final objection to Spinoza's argument from Bennett: if being rational is a point of agreement between two things, then being irrational is a point of agreement as well. It follows that Spinoza's argument also shows that irrational people are good for one another and thus endorses irrationality as much as rationality (1984, 302–3). The problem with this objection is that, while irrationality may be a general point of agreement between two things, it does not represent a point of agreement in nature. Whenever we are irrational we act from the influence of external things, not from our own nature: "for things that agree only negatively, that is, in what they do not possess, in reality agree nothing" (4p32s). Bennett clouds the issue by supposing that Spinoza's argument relies in some way on the distinction between positive and negative facts.

[16] For an opposing view, one that emphasizes Spinoza's egoism at the expense of his commitment to benevolence, see Yakira (2004, 77).

[17] I disagree here with those who claim that Spinoza, like Hobbes, thinks that the value of promoting rationality is instrumental, such as Allison (1987, Chapter 5, section 2).

A common reading of Hobbes offers a familiar example of the view that benevolence has instrumental value.[18] On this view, the value of things is determined by people's desires, such that satisfying one's desire is the only thing of intrinsic value.[19] Benevolence is valuable, then, to the extent that it helps us to satisfy our desires, for instance, leading to reciprocated goodwill and peaceful cooperation with others.[20] This provides a relatively weak justification for benevolence, since whether we should act for the good of others depends on the facts of the particular situation. Of course, our way of life depends on the cooperation of others, which requires treating people with some degree of benevolence. Consequently, acting with benevolence will usually satisfy one's desires. However, it is inevitable that there are some circumstances where it will not and, consequently, where benevolence is not required. For instance, imagine that someone could commit the perfect murder, without any possibility of being discovered or punished. Supposing that the act satisfies even the most trivial of the potential murderer's desires, without leading to any harmful consequences for him, the Hobbesian view can offer no reason why the murder is wrong.

At first glance, it appears that Spinoza, too, assigns instrumental value to benevolence. To begin with, his account of the state of nature echoes the Hobbesian argument above, treating benevolence as valuable because it helps us to attain greater security and other advantages of cooperation: "men will still discover from experience that they can much more easily meet their needs by mutual help and can ward off ever-threatening perils only by joining forces" (4p35cor1s; see also 4p37s2). The second proof of 4p37 also suggests that benevolence has instrumental value, though for different reasons.

[18] This reading is motivated in large part by Hobbes' account of reason as a power for determining causes, according to which reason directs action by identifying the course of action that best satisfies one's desires. Reason leads us to assist others, then, because it identifies this as the best means to satisfy our own desires. While I think this interpretation of Hobbes is largely correct, I cannot thoroughly defend it here.

[19] This claim is suggested by the fact that Hobbes defines the good as whatever we desire and the bad as whatever we do not desire (*L* 6: 7, 28–9). While Hobbes is renowned for emphasizing the value of survival, it is valued, according to this reading, because it is a necessary condition for the satisfaction of any desire.

[20] The roots of this argument in the modern tradition are natural lawyers, who hold that seeking one's own advantage provides incentives for obeying natural laws. For instance, Grotius argues that it would be contrary to our best interests to disobey laws of nature, which he understands as the basis for sympathy and benevolence (*On the Law of War and Peace*, Prolegomena 7, 18). Pufendorf argues that pursuing our own interests requires the cooperation of others (*On the Duty of Man and Citizen*, Chapter 3, 7). The argument is not limited to natural lawyers, though; for instance, see Helvétius, *On the Mind*, essay 2, Chapter 2.

The good which a man seeks for himself, and loves, he will love with greater constancy if he sees others loving the same thing. Thus he will endeavor that others should love the same thing. And because this good is common to all, and all can enjoy it, he will therefore endeavor (by the same reasoning) that all should enjoy it, and the more so the more he enjoys his good.

The proof argues that rational people are beneficial to us because we tend to imitate their rational affects and, thereby, become more rational ourselves.[21] Thus, rational people are advantageous because they are a means to the end of attaining our own rationality.

While benevolence is valuable as a means to other goods, Spinoza's argument assigns intrinsic value to benevolence.[22] The critical difference between his argument and the Hobbesian argument above is that the latter depends on the empirical claim that benevolence has beneficial consequences, for instance, that it is rewarded with goodwill, which entails that there will inevitably be circumstances where benevolence does not have such consequences. However, since Spinoza's argument is a priori, appealing to metaphysical claims about our essential nature, then it shows that acting with benevolence is necessarily and universally good, regardless of how people react to our benevolence.[23] Consequently, the argument shows that we benefit from benevolence, independently of its consequences, simply because benevolence amounts to agreement in nature. Furthermore, it follows that we benefit from our own rationality in the same way, since our own rationality constitutes greater agreement in nature with other rational people. In fact, merely promoting the rationality of others, regardless of whether we succeed, benefits us, since doing so is rational. Spinoza endorses the claim that benevolence is valuable, independently of the consequences in his remarks on the free man:[24] since the free man is determined to action by himself alone, he would not require or depend upon external things or other people. But Spinoza holds that such a being would still act with benevolence, developing love and friendship for other people (4p71), which indicates that doing so must be rational and, thus, good, in virtue of the acts themselves.[25]

[21] Della Rocca (2004) examines this argument in depth.

[22] My claim that Spinoza assigns a kind of intrinsic value to virtue is suggested by LeBuffe (2010, 164).

[23] It is common to read Spinoza's argument for benevolence as empirical. See Donagan (1988, 164–7) and, I think, Nadler (2006, 239). I should also mention here that I use 'a priori' in the anachronistic Kantian sense of the term as prior to experience. On this point, see Miller (2004, 555).

[24] Della Rocca acknowledges this point (2004, 124).

[25] It is difficult to find an example illustrating how shared rationality benefits people independently of the consequences of rational behavior. One might look to a furthest Mysian example: how does it benefit us to agree in nature with somebody who is so distant that he can never offer us any

Although Spinoza holds that acting with benevolence is valuable, independently of the consequences, he does not hold that it is valuable independently of all other things, since benevolence is valuable because it benefits us, in other words, because it contributes to our good. Consequently, I should qualify that Spinoza assigns a particular kind of intrinsic value to benevolence, constitutive value.

> *A* has *constitutive value* iff *A* is constitutive of something that has intrinsic value.

For Spinoza, benevolence has constitutive value in the sense that it is constitutive of acting for the sake of our own good, which has intrinsic value. Spinoza is clear that self-interested action has intrinsic value, for he argues that our virtue, which is the same as our power, "should be sought for its own sake, and that there is nothing preferable to it or more to our advantage, for the sake of which it should be sought" (4p18s). He also claims that "nobody endeavors to preserve his being for the sake of some other thing" (4p25) and that "no virtue can be conceived as prior to this one, namely, the *conatus* to preserve oneself" (4p22). While the latter two passages mention self-preservation, Spinoza derives both claims from the *conatus* doctrine, which entails that his remarks apply to all actions that promote our *conatus* and, thus, to all virtuous activities.

One might object that Spinoza only assigns instrumental value to benevolence because he holds that it is only valuable as a means to promoting one's own power. In response, we should consider an example illustrating the important difference between instrumental value and constitutive value. Imagine two gardeners, Happy, who gardens because the activity contributes to his happiness, and Crabby, who despises the activity of gardening, but does it anyway, for the sake of the produce. For Crabby, the activity of gardening clearly has instrumental value: if his crops were destroyed by a hailstorm, he would consider his time wasted; if he could find a preferable alternative means of attaining produce, he would gladly pave over the garden. It is true that Happy, like Crabby, values gardening because of its relationship to something else, a happy and meaningful life. Nevertheless, Happy does not regard gardening as having instrumental value, since gardening is not a means to, but rather part of a happy life.[26]

reciprocal benefits such as cooperation? Spinoza could respond that agreement in nature is beneficial simply because it arises from rationality, having adequate ideas, which are good, regardless of how we are affected by others.

[26] Thus, the objection is right only in the sense that benevolence has conditional value: if promoting rationality were not advantageous and virtuous, then it would not have any value. It is not clear,

This difference is critical, for it means that Happy regards gardening as having value regardless of its consequences, that is, as having intrinsic value; he would continue to work even if he knew in advance that his efforts would yield no produce. In the same way, Spinoza holds that benevolence is valuable because it is constitutive of – not a means to – one's own virtue.[27]

This conclusion entails that Spinoza has a more robust commitment to benevolence than the Hobbesian egoist view, since Spinoza holds that benevolence is always beneficial, no matter what the consequences are. This difference is reflected in the different ways in which Hobbes and Spinoza characterize the cooperation of rational people. For Hobbes, rational people can only be trusted to look out for their own interests, such that they will not trust one another unless there are sufficient incentives and mechanisms to guarantee that cooperation is mutually beneficial, as there are in a state. For Hobbes holds that rational people will not cooperate, even with one another, in the state of nature, "where every man is enemy to every man" (*L* 18: 9, 76).[28] In contrast, Spinoza argues that rational people trust and care for one another – they are grateful, love one another and develop bonds of friendship (4p71) – even in the absence of social or political incentives for cooperation, because they recognize that benevolence is always good.[29] Consequently, Hobbes' description of grudging, distrustful cooperation better fits Spinoza's account of the irrational person, who uses every possible means of deception to secure her own benefit without concern for others, and who repays the goodwill of others with ingratitude (4p71s).

7.4 Love as the Ground of Benevolence

According to the foregoing argument, Spinoza's ultimate justification for benevolence is the recognition that acting for the good of others benefits us. Although this justification is egoistic, Spinoza's philosophy allows us to cast it in a slightly different light, as one based in love. While Spinoza does not state this point outright, it follows straightforwardly from his definition of love as "joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause"

though, whether anything turns on this point, since Spinoza regards it as metaphysically necessary that promoting rationality is always advantageous.

[27] Garrett (1996, 297) makes a similar point.

[28] This conclusion is also implied by Hobbes' claim that reason requires us to create a sovereign, to tie men "by fear of punishment to performance of their covenants" (*L* 17: 1, 106), for reason recognizes we should not enter into covenants without sufficient enforcement.

[29] This runs contrary to Smith, who argues that for Spinoza we only have duties to people with whom we have formed contracts. See Smith 1997, the final sections of Chapter 5.

(3DOE 6; see also 3p13cs); for instance, a child's love for her father is the recognition that he is the cause of her joy.[30] According to this definition, the knowledge that we benefit from others is a kind of love, for it consists in an idea representing increases in our power, combined with the idea of their cause: rational beings. Since benevolence is justified by this idea, then benevolence is literally justified by love. It follows that benevolence is justified not just by the selfish calculation of one's own interests, but also by emotional commitments to others, personal concern and attachments.

Of course, this conclusion supposes that Spinoza's notion of love captures our ordinary notions, which is not obviously the case. Indeed, Spinoza's rather austere definition makes it sound as though love is something like an intellectual recognition of causes. However, we must remember that love is a species of joy, consisting partly in warm feelings. Spinoza's claim that love involves an idea of a cause implies that this feeling represents the cause and thus is intentionally directed at it: love consists in joy *for* the beloved. Furthermore, since love is an idea, it also has power, expressed in desires disposing us to act in certain ways to the beloved. Thus, Spinoza claims that it is a common property of love that "the lover wishes to unite himself to the loved object" (3DOE 6). While Spinoza goes on to qualify that this desire is not necessary for all cases of love, he nevertheless recognizes and accounts for the way that love commonly influences our actions.

The notion that love provides the grounds for benevolence indicates that love plays an important role in Spinoza's ethics. Spinoza supports this conclusion when he claims that we attain our highest good by properly cultivating and directing our love:

> There are numerous examples of men who have suffered persecution unto death because of their wealth, and also of men who have exposed themselves to so many dangers to acquire riches that they have finally paid for their folly with their lives. Nor are there less numerous examples of men who, to gain or preserve honor, have suffered a most wretched fate. Finally, there are innumerable examples of men who have hastened their death by reason of excessive sensual pleasure. These evils, moreover, seemed to arise from this, that all happiness or unhappiness depends solely on the quality of the object to which we are bound by love. (*TdIE* 8)

[30] This definition distinguishes Spinoza's love from the ubiquitous understanding of love as essentially a drive or desire, documented in Velleman (1999, 353). While love involves drives in the sense that it consists of ideas that necessarily influence our actions, love is essentially the recognition that we benefit from the beloved, which may but does not necessarily lead us to desire the beloved: "writers who define love as 'the lover's wish to be united with the object of his love' express not the essence of love, but a property of it" (3DOE 6).

This passage shows that the ultimate direction of our lives and, consequently, whether we are able to achieve *eudaimonia*, depends on the objects of our love. This view is echoed in the *Ethics*:

> Emotional distress and unhappiness have their origin in excessive love toward a thing subject to considerable instability, a thing which we can never completely possess. For nobody is disturbed or anxious about any thing unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions, enmities, etc. arise except from love toward things which nobody can truly possess.(5p20s)[31]

It is easy to see why, for Spinoza, happiness depends on the object of our love: since we are fundamentally driven by a striving to increase our power, our actions and, consequently, the ultimate direction of our lives are fundamentally influenced by what we represent as increasing our power. Love matters, then, because it consists in ideas representing the causes of one's joy (and thus what increases one's power), thereby determining whether one's life is properly directed toward the highest good. On this view, our lives become misdirected because we love wrongly, misidentifying what increases our power and, consequently, pursuing aims that do not contribute to our happiness. A good life, on the other hand, loves rightly, properly identifying and directing ourselves to what contributes to our power.

Love is important, for Spinoza, not only because it directs us to our highest good, but also because it is constitutive of it.[32] This is because our highest good is knowledge of God, which requires loving God: our knowledge of God qualifies as a kind of joy because it increases our power, and more specifically, as a kind of love because the joy arises from ideas representing God as its cause, indeed, as the cause of all things. Consequently, "when we come to know God, who has all perfection in himself, we must necessarily love him" (*KV* II, 5). On this basis, the *KV* consistently describes our highest good as love of God: "This knowledge [of God] also brings us so far that we attribute all to God, love him alone because he is the most glorious and the most perfect, and thus offer ourselves up entirely to him; for these really constitute both the true service of God and our own eternal happiness and bliss" (II, 18). Indeed, the *KV* emphasizes loving God more than knowing him. Summarizing this claim in the next paragraph, Spinoza

[31] *KV* argues that our happiness hinges on whether we love material and transient things – "he, therefore, is indeed always wretched who is united to transient things" (II, 5) – or God, who is "eternal and imperishable" (II, 5).

[32] This is a central reason why I reject Broad's view that the love of God and the third kind of knowledge concern a mystical experience that belongs to religion, not ethics (1930, 15–16).

describes our well-being as "the love of God (which we have remarked to be our supreme happiness)" (II, 19). While Spinoza's later work describes our highest good primarily as the knowledge of God, it regards this as equivalent to the love of God. In the *TTP* Spinoza writes that "this, then, is the sum of our highest good and blessedness, to wit, the knowledge and love of God" (4, 4). This claim is echoed in the *Ethics*, where he writes that "this love toward God is the highest good we can seek for under the guidance of reason" (5p20d; see also 5p39d).

This discussion helps us to see how benevolence fits into Spinoza's broader eudaimonistic scheme. Since human beings are part of God, the love of other humans beings is an aspect of our love of God. Consequently, achieving our highest good – loving God – requires loving other humans and, thus, treating them with benevolence. While this point is implicit in the arguments of the *Ethics*, he asserts it outright in the *KV*, claiming that knowing God "inspires us with a real love of our neighbor" (II, 18). One might object that this conclusion is trivial, since loving God entails loving all things. This suggests that loving other humans has no more ethical significance than loving, say, hair or mud. However, the love of human beings has special importance to our highest good because Spinoza connects our highest good with only the *intellectual* love of God, that is, love arising from adequate ideas of God, which specifically represent rational beings as contributing to our power, as I argued in the first section. This is different from the case of hair or mud, since our adequate ideas do not represent any specific finite mode as contributing to our power. Indeed, we do not even know that these particular things are good. For the fact that a finite mode is part of God, who increases our power, does not entail that the mode increases our power, since God also contains finite modes that decrease our power, such as murderers or radiation.

Understanding our highest good as the love of God has important ramifications for Spinoza's ethics. Since love consists in the representation of how our power benefits from and, thus, depends on the power of other things, love is fundamentally connected to our need and dependence, in other words, our passivity.[33] Indeed, since love arises from being affected in ways that benefit us, we cannot love unless we are passive. It follows that our highest good and, thus, the ultimate aim of Spinoza's ethics amounts to understanding our passivity, how our own powers arise from and depend

[33] It follows that love is a relation between us and the things from which we benefit, rather than a property of a single thing. Consequently, Spinoza's notion of love escapes Kolodny's criticisms (2003, 135).

upon God. Spinoza could not be more explicit about this point in the *KV*, where he claims that our knowledge of God reveals

> that we are truly servants, aye, slaves of God, and that it is our greatest perfection to be such necessarily. For, if we were thrown back upon ourselves, and thus not dependent on God, we should be able to accomplish very little, or nothing, and that would justly give us cause to lament our lot; especially so in contrast with what we now see, namely, that we are dependent on that which is the most perfect of all, in such a way that we exist also as a part of the whole, that is, of him; and we contribute, so to say, also our share to the realization of so many skillfully ordered and perfect works, which depend on him. (II, 18)[34]

This passage flies in the face of Stoic readings of Spinoza as aiming for an ideal of complete independence and self-control.

One might object that if love is necessarily connected to passivity, then God could not love, which Spinoza denies, insisting not only that "God loves himself" (5p35), but also that "God loves mankind" (5p36c): "God is absolutely infinite; that is, God's nature enjoys infinite perfection, accompanied by the idea of itself, that is, by the idea of its own cause; and that is what, in 5p32c, we declared to be intellectual love" (5p35d).[35] Spinoza's claims here are puzzling, since the notion of God's love does not make sense for him. While God has adequate ideas of all things, representing God as their cause, it is unclear how these ideas qualify as a kind of joy. This is because God's degree of perfection does not change, and yet Spinoza defines joy as the "transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection" (3DOE 2). As Spinoza himself explains: "God is not affected with any emotion of joy or sadness" (5p17c). Unsurprisingly, the passages above blatantly contradict his claims elsewhere. He argues in the *KV* that "man together with all that is, are in God in such a way, and God consists of all these in such a way, that, therefore, properly speaking, there can be in him no love for something else" (II, 24). And earlier in the *Ethics* he wrote that "strictly speaking, God does not love or hate anyone" (5p17c).

The best explanation is to suppose that God can be regarded as having love only to the extent that he is considered as identical to his modes,

[34] From this discussion one should not draw the erroneous conclusion that our activity consists entirely in recognizing our passivity, since we are most active when we love God, which involves recognizing our passivity. In this vein, Irwin defends the rather fatalistic view that our activity, for Spinoza, means recognizing our own passivity, which means recognizing our lack of agential power and submitting to the necessity of all things (2008, 191–2). This reading overlooks the fact that achieving the highest good places practical demands on our actions, such as following the dictates of reason, developing a virtuous character and participating in the business of the state.

[35] Relatedly, one might object, on the same grounds, that the free man could not love, which Spinoza also denies. This objection will be addressed in Chapter 8.

which undergo joyful increases in power.[36] This suggestion is supported by the evolution of Spinoza's thinking about the relationship between God and finite modes. In his early work, Spinoza was not comfortable ascribing to God properties possessed by his modes. When considering whether God has mercy, wisdom and omniscience, he claims that "since these are only certain modes of the thinking thing, and can by no means be, or be understood without the substances whose modes they are, they can, consequently also not be attributed to him, who is a Being subsisting without the aid of anything and solely through himself" (*KV* I, 7). As we have seen, however, the later work sometimes describes God in terms of his modes, often by employing the qualifier "God insofar as he is affected by" something. For instance, Spinoza claims that God has sensory ideas of how one body is affected by another "insofar as he is affected by another idea of a particular thing" (2p20d), even though God *per se* cannot be affected by other things. In other words, God has sensory ideas in the sense that his mind contains the ideas of particular things, which are affected by other things. It makes sense, then, that the early work would reject – and the later work accept – that God has joy and love "insofar as he is affected," that is, insofar as we understand him in terms of modes, which increase in power.[37] Consequently, it is consistent for Spinoza to claim that "strictly speaking" God cannot love, if we understand him as a substance, while also claiming that he does love, if we understand God, loosely, in terms of his modes. The important point for our discussion is that Spinoza does not hold that God, understood as a completely active being, experiences love. Consequently, his view on God's love is consistent with my reading that love only arises from passivity.

7.5 LOVE, PARTIALITY AND RESPECT

In grounding benevolence in love, Spinoza sides with a view that has been subject to much criticism, particularly from Kantians. Although Kant

[36] Alternatively, one might try to escape the difficulty by supposing that God has a special kind of love that does not involve changes in perfection. This suggestion is supported by the fact that intellectual love of God arises from the third kind of knowledge, which Spinoza claims gives rise "to the highest possible contentment of the mind," without mentioning anything about it increasing one's power. However, this suggestion does not extricate Spinoza from the difficulty, since it is unclear how such intellectual love would qualify as a kind of love, given his definition.

[37] Thus, the *KV* claims that "it cannot be said that God loves mankind, much less that he should love them because they love him" (II, 24), whereas the later work makes precisely this move, even identifying our love with God's: "the love of God toward men and the mind's intellectual love toward God are one and the same" (5p36c).

has a more sophisticated view of the value of the emotions than is often recognized, he nevertheless denied that they play any role in the foundation for morality.[38] This is because he holds that actions have moral value when they are motivated only by duty, not inclination, that is, affective feelings such as love.

> To be beneficent where one can is a duty, and besides there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth, but is on the same footing with other inclinations, for example, the inclination to honor, which, if it fortunately lights upon what is in fact in the common interest and in conformity with duty and hence honorable, deserves praise and encouragement but not esteem. (*G* 4:398)

Why, then, does benevolence motivated only by inclination lack moral worth? Kant answers that moral worth comes from acting on moral principles, which are necessary and universal in the sense that they impose obligations for all agents, without regard to one's particular circumstances. He holds that inclination cannot provide such moral principles for two main reasons. First, necessary and universal moral principles, like their theoretical counterparts, cannot be grounded empirically, that is, in sensible representations of objects.[39] It follows that affects cannot justify moral principles, because the affects are sensible representations. More specifically, Kant explains affects as arising from desire, which is ultimately motivated by a kind of sensible representation, pleasure.

> However dissimilar representations of objects may be – they may be representations of the understanding or even of reason, in contrast to representations of sense – the feeling of pleasure by which alone they properly constitute the determining ground of the will (the agreeableness, the gratification expected from the object, which impels activity to produce it) is nevertheless of one and the same kind not only insofar as it can always be cognized only empirically but also insofar as it affects one and the same vital force that is manifested in the faculty of desire, and in this respect can differ only in degree from any other determining ground. (*CPR* 5:23–4)

[38] Kant acknowledges that love and other affects are valuable to the extent that they motivate us to recognize and act from the moral law, as do feelings of awe and respect for the law, pride in following it and guilt for failing to do so. For a fuller discussion of Kant's views, see Anderson (2008) and the other essays in Betzler's collection.

[39] More directly, Kant states that "an affect always belongs to sensibility" (*MM* 6: 409).

Spinoza would disagree with this reasoning because he understands desires not as contingent psychological phenomena, but rather as particular expressions of our essence, which can be understood through pure reason, as when Spinoza derives the *conatus* doctrine in 3p5–7. It follows that Spinoza is entitled to necessary and universal claims about desire – for instance, that all people desire to increase their power – and emotions generally, for instance, that loving God is the highest good. These claims, in turn, provide the basis for necessary and universal practical prescriptions, for instance, that we should act to increase our power. In fact, this is precisely how Spinoza justifies benevolence, arguing that all humans should act with benevolence because we necessarily benefit from our shared rational nature.

Since we are here concerned primarily with ethical issues, we need not resolve this issue, which ultimately concerns the metaphysical status of desires. More important for our purposes is Kant's second reason for denying that benevolence from inclination has moral worth: because it is partial. While Kant does not assert this claim in precisely these terms, it is implicit in his explanation for why inclinations direct us to act contrary to moral principles.

> The human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so deserving of the highest respect – the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which he sums up under the name happiness. Now reason issues its precepts unremittingly, without thereby promising anything to the inclinations, and so, as it were, with disregard and contempt for those claims, which are so impetuous and besides so apparently equitable (and refuse to be neutralized by any command). (*G* 4:405)

For Kant, it is inevitable that the moral law will direct us in opposition to inclination, for the latter directs us to our happiness, satisfying one's own needs and desires, which reason "disregards" and holds in "contempt." In other words, inclinations are self-interested, whereas morality is not. According to this reasoning, love could not justify a moral notion of benevolence because it is necessarily partial, giving special preference to the objects of one's love, which are determined by one's own needs and happiness, whereas moral duties are indifferent to these partial concerns.[40]

While this objection appeals to widely held moral intuitions, it is not clear that Spinoza runs foul of it. This is because Spinoza's ethics recommends the intellectual love of God, which is necessarily joined to adequate

[40] This is not to say that Kant requires us to eliminate affects or to act always impartially. Nevertheless, he denies that affects can serve as the justification for moral benevolence, since it often requires us to act impartially.

ideas of God. As such, the love arises from representations that are impartial, for, as we have seen in the previous chapter, adequate ideas take no account of particular individuals or their spatial and temporal properties. Consequently, loving others as a means of loving God would require us to love impartially, without giving special preference to particular individuals in virtue of our personal relationships. Spinoza goes some way toward acknowledging that the intellectual love of God is impartial when emphasizing that it is eternal (5p33). He explains that this love is eternal in the sense that it conceives of our relationship without respect to time, "without imagining God to be present" (5p32c). In fact, Spinoza deems this a central advantage of the love of God: because it does not understand things in temporal terms, it is not disturbed by the passing and perishing of material things, unlike the love of money or honor, which is the source of "emotional agitation," such as fear, sorrow and envy (*TdIE* 10). Implicit in this claim is the notion that the love of God values things without respect to one's particular perspective in space and time.

Since Spinoza's love of God is impartial, so too is our rational love of others, which is part of our love of God. In particular, it seems that the rational love of others is impartial in the sense that it loves all individuals equally, since it recognizes that all rational beings contribute to our power without further discriminating between them on the basis of their relationship to us.[41] Thus, Spinoza's love accomplishes what Kant thought love could not: grounding impartial obligations to the good of all people. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Spinoza's love is impartial in a different sense than Kant's moral laws. As explained in the previous chapter, Kant's laws are impartial in the sense that they are formulated without respect to self-interest, whereas Spinoza's benevolence from the love of God is not. Because of this difference, Spinoza and Kant uphold opposing views on how love motivates. Whereas Kant thinks of moral motivation as necessarily distinct from self-interest, Spinoza sees moral motivation precisely as self-interest. It does not follow, however, that Spinoza simply conflates impartial moral action with ordinary self-interested action, for he holds that impartial actions are justified by the intellectual love of God and, thus,

[41] One might press that even the love of God is partial in one sense: love, as a kind of joy, provides a motive for benevolence independently of the content of my ideas: the mere fact that love feels good provides reason to act with benevolence, regardless of whether I recognize that benevolence is recommended by reason. This pleasurable motive is partial because it provides grounds to act in virtue of the way one's particular power is increased by particular things. The problem with this objection, however, is that it aims to disassociate the affective pleasurable motive, which is particular to me, from the rational motive, which is universally available to those with reason. Spinoza blocks this response because he refuses to distinguish the affective aspect of an idea from its content.

adequate ideas, which have a distinct and stronger justification than ideas of experience.

In this way, Spinoza's ethics upholds standards of impartiality without arguing that morality requires us to set aside our own interests and feelings, in other words, without distinguishing the moral and self-interested points of view. Consequently, Spinoza's view avoids some common criticism of this distinction, such as Williams' "one thought too many argument." The argument arises from considering whether a rescue worker, forced to choose between saving two individuals, would be justified in preferring to save the one who is also his wife.

> It depends on how much weight is carried by 'justification': the consideration that it was his wife is certainly, for instance, an explanation which should silence comment. But something more ambitious than this is usually intended, essentially involving the idea that moral principle can legitimate his preference, yielding the conclusion that in situations of this kind it is at least all right (morally permissible) to save one's wife . . . But this construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might have been hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife.[42]

As I read it, Williams is not suggesting that it reflects a defect in one's character to bring moral consideration to bear on certain questions, as though the rescue worker was wrong to even entertain whether he should prefer his wife. Nor is he claiming that one's personal relationships should trump moral concerns in certain matters: as though the rescue worker ought to think, "Morality be damned, it's my wife!" Rather, Williams' point concerns the proper role of partiality in moral deliberation: the man's love for his wife ought to be seen as providing the moral justification for his action, rather than as an extramoral, extraneous concern. Thus, considering additional concerns about permissibility – is this action consistent with my broader ethical principles? – is one thought too many to the extent that in asking such questions we presuppose that one's personal attachment is an insufficient moral reason. This is an objection to Kant and to anyone who regards the moral point of view as separate from the self-interested point of view, since this distinction entails that self-interested reasons will always be extramoral.

This is not an objection to Spinoza, however, because he does not see self-interested reasons as fundamentally different from ethical reasons: the

[42] Williams (1985, 18).

fact that one benefits from and loves his wife counts squarely as an ethical concern. Nevertheless, Spinoza is still able to capture, to some degree, more Kantian ideas about the value of impartiality, since his intellectual love disinclines us to take account of our own perspective in space and time or particular individuals. Thus a fully rational being would not give special preference to his wife. It is important to note, however, that this does not imply, for Spinoza, that it is wrong for us to act partially. While it is best for us to be rational, having impartial adequate ideas, there is limited value in acting as though we are rational, in the absence of such ideas.[43] Thus, for us, finite humans with inadequate ideas, it is likely unthinkable that we would act impartially, saving a stranger over one's intimates. While we would be better people, in the sense of more powerful and happy, if we were impartial, Spinoza does not suggest that failing to achieve one's highest good is wrong, in the sense that it provides reasons for others to accuse one of acting wrongly. Consequently, Spinoza offers grounds for valuing impartial action, without blaming those who fail to live up to such standards.

We should consider another objection to grounding moral obligations in love, also motivated by Kantian commitments. Kant holds that we are morally required to treat rational agents with respect. However, love inclines us only to act for the good of others, which does not necessarily involve respecting them, that is, recognizing the authority of their choices. So, even if Spinoza's love is impartial and universal, it may still be insufficient to explain the basis of our moral requirements.[44] Spinoza appears particularly susceptible to this objection, since his view of autonomy is friendly to paternalism, as I argued above in Chapter 3. Of course, Spinoza would strenuously object to the notion that acting with benevolence from love undermines the rationality of the beloved, because, as we have seen, he identifies one's good with her rationality. However, the objection charges that we respect people's rationality by recognizing the authority of their choices. Since Spinoza's love does not prima facie appear to incline us to respect the choices of others – at least, not if the choices are contrary to reason – then it appears that Spinoza's love would condone or possibly, even, encourage disrespect for their choices.

Spinoza's best response is to argue that the love of God requires us to respect others. A first argument for this claim draws on Spinoza's view about the importance of rationality to our good. As I argued in the discussion

[43] This value will be discussed in Chapter 11.
[44] This argument is defended by Ebels-Duggan (2008).

of paternalism in Chapter 3, promoting people's rationality likely requires allowing them to learn their own lessons, which means making their own choices, even if we know them to be mistaken. In fact, promoting rationality arguably requires helping people to work towards mistaken ends, if it means that doing so will help them to see the error of their ways. Thus loving people arguably implies recognizing the authority of their choices, on the grounds that this is a condition for their developing rationality.

A second argument in support of this response looks to Spinoza's argument for benevolence, which implies that we should treat people with a particular kind of respect, one that is important to Kant. To appreciate this point, it is helpful to consider Kant's understanding of respect. According to Kant, respect means recognizing a certain kind of value, what he calls dignity: "the word *respect* alone provides a becoming expression for the estimate of it [dignity] that a rational being must give" (*G* 4:436). Dignity in turn is something that has an "unconditional, incomparable worth" (*G* 4:436), which distinguishes it from another kind of value, price: "In the kingdom of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be replaced by something else as equivalent; what on the other hand is raised above all price and therefore admits of no *equivalent* has a dignity" (*G* 4:434). Kant's claim here, that the value of dignity is special because it cannot be compared to or substituted for the value of other things, depends on his notion that things with dignity are ends in themselves. Things with a price can be compared or substituted because their value is determined with respect to a common end: for instance, suppose that owning a certain house is valuable to me because it contributes to my happiness. Since I can be made more or less happy in other ways, for instance, by going on vacation, my happiness provides a metric with which I can compare the value of the house to other things. Dignity's value is special, then, because it is not valued as a means to anything else and, consequently, cannot be compared to or substituted for other things of value: "that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*" (*G* 4:435).

What, then, has dignity? Nothing we value out of desire or inclination can have dignity, because inclination always values things with respect to the end of our happiness. "Respect is based upon . . . an estimation of a worth that far outweighs any worth of what is recommended by inclination" (*G* 4:403). Kant argues that there is only one thing that we value in this way: the good or moral will. "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good

without limitation except a good will" (*G* 4:393). It follows that rational agency – the capacity to command laws to oneself, which Kant sometimes refers to as autonomy (*G* 4:436), or simply the practical or moral law (*G* 4:403) – also has dignity, because it is a condition for the possibility of a moral will. Thus, agents (or, more simply, people) have dignity in virtue of which they command our respect:

> Our own will insofar as it would act only under the condition of a possible giving of universal law through its maxims – this will possible for us in idea – is the proper object of respect; and the dignity of humanity consists just in this capacity to give universal law, though with the condition of also being subject to this very lawgiving. (*G* 4:440)

> Morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity. (*G* 4:435)

> *Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature. (*G* 4:436)

This account of respect has a variety of consequences, most notably, that we should treat people "as an end, never merely as a means" (*G* 4:429). For present purposes, however, I would like to focus on another, that respecting people requires us to afford them a special place in practical deliberation. For claiming that people have dignity entails that they have value independently of one's particular situations. So, while there may be situations in which my welfare crucially depends on the actions of others, respecting them means accepting that they have value independently of the particulars of my situation, even when they contribute nothing to my welfare. It follows that respecting people requires that our practical deliberation recognizes their value independently of the process by which we assess our particular situation, including our desires, opportunities, the possible consequences of our actions and so forth. In other words, respecting people means assuming that they have a prior, or preexisting value:

> Rational nature is distinguished from the rest of nature by this, that it sets itself an end. This end would be the matter of every good will. But since, in the idea of a will absolutely good without any limiting condition (attainment of this or that end) abstraction must be made altogether from every end to be *effected* (this would make every will only relatively good), the end must here be thought not as an end to be effected but as and *independently existing* [*selbstständiger*]. (*G* 4:437)[45]

[45] For a discussion of the translation of *selbstständiger*, see Guyer (1995, 372–3).

Kant claims here that our rationality requires us to take as ends every good will, that is, our own good will and those of others. Doing so, Kant argues, entails taking the good will as an "independently existing" end, in the sense of independently of ends "to be effected" or brought about by us. In other words, we take wills as ends in the sense that we assume their value, not that we work to bring them about, as we do in the case of our other, particular ends.[46] This view highlights an important and widely acknowledged aspect of respect, that it recognizes people's value unconditionally, that is, under all conditions, not only when it is personally advantageous. According to this thought, it would be disrespectful to treat you well only because I want something from you or to treat you poorly when you have nothing to offer me.

With Kant's understanding of respect in view, we can see precisely how Spinoza's love of God accords people a kind of respect. The argument for benevolence supposes that people have value universally and necessarily, regardless of one's particular situation; thus, people have "unconditional" value in the sense of value under all conditions. It follows that, as in Kant, people have a preexisting value in the sense that we accept their value independently of our deliberation about our particular situation. For Spinoza, it is good to treat all people well, regardless of whether they are particularly situated to contribute to my good.

Of course, Spinoza's view is importantly different from Kant's. Most obviously, Kant holds that people have value independently of our desires and happiness, whereas Spinoza accepts that they have value in virtue of these things. Consequently, whereas Kant insists that their value must be distinguished from price, Spinoza collapses the two: people are valuable for the same sort of reason as any other good, because they promote one's interests. This means that people are not, for Spinoza, ends in themselves, for their value always stems from their relation to the end of happiness. It also means that the value of people can be compared to and even substituted for the value of other goods. In other words, Spinoza does not think that people have "unconditional value" in the sense of overriding value: while I always have reason to act for the good of another person, it may be justified not to act this way, under conditions where doing so has sufficiently detrimental consequences. In this way, Spinoza allows for a far weaker notion of respect than Kant's. Whether this is a strength or weakness of Spinoza's view depends on one's other commitments. On one hand, a Kantian might argue that Spinoza's love does not sufficiently

[46] In this respect, to use Velleman's language, persons are "ends not aims" (1999, 355).

recognize people's value; on the other hand, some might find Spinoza's view attractive because it does not treat the motivation to act morally as distinct from other motives and, consequently, it allows for a more partial and less demanding morality: while it is good to help all people on Spinoza's view, it is better to help those from whom we benefit most, such as our family and other intimates.

CONCLUSIONS

Spinoza's argument from 4p30 to 4p37 shows that people are good for one another the more they exhibit shared essential properties. The claim that these properties are mutually beneficial to people who share them follows from the *conatus* doctrine: since all essential properties of a thing strive to increase the power of a thing, such properties are good for it. When properties are shared, therefore, they are good for both. Since rationality is chief among our shared essential properties, it follows that people are good for one another the more they are rational. Consequently, it benefits us to encourage rationality in other people. Since rationality is the best thing for people, this involves acting with benevolence.

While some criticism of this argument is predicated on misunderstanding, there are two gaps in the argument. The first is the possibility of a shared essential property that is good for only the person who possesses the property, a competing good. However, Spinoza rules this out by arguing that true goods can be shared by all, without competition. The second is the possibility of a distinctive essential property the preservation of which would conflict with the good of others. But, since reason could not recognize such a trait, Spinoza's argument does not claim that acting for our good – that is, from reason – would lead us to preserve distinctive essential properties.

A central conclusion of the chapter is that Spinoza's argument entails a deeper commitment to the value of benevolence than a common egoist view, often attributed to Hobbes. Spinoza's argument, unlike Hobbes', defends benevolence on a priori, metaphysical grounds, because it involves greater agreement with the rational natures of others, which entails that benevolence is always in our self-interest, not only when doing so inclines others to reciprocate. Indeed Spinoza's argument entails that benevolence is intrinsically valuable, for it is constitutive of virtuous behavior, which he regards as having intrinsic value.

Finally, this chapter has shown how Spinoza's claims about benevolence are connected to his views on love. Benevolence is justified by love in the

sense of an adequate idea that qualifies as love because it both increases our power and represents rational people as the cause. It follows that benevolence is both a means to and constitutive of our highest good, which Spinoza equates with the love of God. While it is not uncommon to justify benevolence on the basis of love, Spinoza's view is distinctive because it appeals to intellectual love, which is impartial because it arises from impartial adequate ideas. Consequently, Spinoza is well situated to avoid the usual objection that love is too partial to justify moral commitments. On the other hand, since Spinoza's love is partial, in the sense of self-interested, he also dodges Williams' objection to a more selfless Kantian notion of impartiality. Spinoza's love offers some grounds for responding to another Kantian objection, that acting for the sake of others from love can be disrespectful, since Spinoza holds that people are necessarily valuable to us, independently of one's advantage in any particular situation.

CHAPTER 8

The free man

Having examined, in the previous three chapters, Spinoza's view on reason's practical guidance, we can now consider how this guidance translates into practice, or, to rephrase in the light of Spinoza's eudaimonism, what a life in accordance with reason's guidance looks like. In taking up this question, the traditional starting place has been Spinoza's account of the free man (4p66s–4p73). This way of thinking is justified on the grounds that the free man is the model of human nature from 4pref and, thus, the goal of a free life. This approach, paradoxically, has been as much of an end point as a starting point: since the free man, according to most of Spinoza's remarks, enjoys a life of perfect freedom, which humans cannot attain, this reading gives the impression that he has little assistance to offer in envisioning a good life for us, ordinary humans.[1] While the remaining chapters will pursue more promising routes to understanding the good life, this chapter aims to show that it is a mistake to look to Spinoza's free man as providing significant guidance on the matter. This is because the free man is best understood as a thought experiment demonstrating reason's guidance and rational emotions, rather than providing a realistic example of human freedom. This is perhaps the most controversial aspect of my view, because it denies the nearly universally accepted reading, that the free man is the model of human nature.[2] Consequently, before advancing my own reading, it is necessary to confront this, the standard view.

[1] While Spinoza does tell us something about how the free man acts, it is not clear what relevance these claims have for us, who cannot be free men. Furthermore, if we know that we cannot attain the goal of Spinoza's philosophy, then it is not clear what, if anything, we should do to bring it about. These questions have been the focus of much work on the free man, including Garber (2004) and Garrett (1990). They argue that the free man is merely a goal to which we aspire, so that we need not behave as the free man does. We need not concern ourselves with these questions, since they only arise for the standard view, which I reject.

[2] This view is explicitly endorsed in Nadler (2006, 219), Allison, (1987, 142–3), Della Rocca (2004), Garber (2004), Garrett (1990), Youpa (2010a) and others. The only exception is Bennett, who argues that the model is a remnant from an earlier draft, though he still holds that Spinoza's freedom amounts to being perfectly active and self-determined (1984, 315–28).

The first section considers the evidence for the standard view. It argues that, while the standard view is justified on the basis of its explanatory power, it does not explain the text as well as it first appears. The second section considers three problems arising from the standard view. The final section offers preferable readings of the model of human nature and the free man. The section concludes that the free man still plays some, albeit diminished role in helping us to understand a life of freedom.

8.1 THE CASE FOR THE STANDARD VIEW

Most readers of the *Ethics* regard it as perfectly obvious that the free man is intended to serve as the model of human nature, and it is not hard to see why. The preface to Part IV indicates that we ought to determine our perfection and good with respect to a model of human nature, which indicates that Spinoza intends – is required, even – to provide such a model. When he makes a series of claims about the free man later in Part IV, then, it is natural to suppose that he is finally providing the model. After all, the model is supposed to offer us a picture of human perfection, and a truly perfect person would be the most free person. Further cementing this impression, many of Spinoza's claims hold up the free man as a kind of model. For instance, when he claims that a free man "thinks of death least of all things, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death" (4p67), there is little doubt that Spinoza regards this trait as exemplary, worthy of emulation and praise. Aside from being intuitively obvious, this reading has the advantage of providing an answer to what an ethically inclined reader would regard as a pressing question at this point in the *Ethics*: what exactly does Spinoza's freedom look like in practice?

While this case is prima facie compelling, it is not an open and shut case. It is important to recognize that the text does not explicitly identify the free man as the model: Spinoza does not mention the free man in the preface nor, conversely, does his discussion of the free man refer to a model.[3] Consequently, the standard view *infers* that the free man is the model. The inference is justified on the grounds of its explanatory power, because it makes the most sense of the text. The explanation above indicates two ways

[3] Indeed, since models are not mentioned anywhere else in the *Ethics*, there is little textual basis for connecting the model to any other specific part of the text. For this reason Bennett has suggested, plausibly, that the discussion may be an ancestor of an earlier draft that had assigned models a greater role in Part IV (1984, section 68.4). Even if this is true, it would be a mistake to dismiss the discussion as mere detritus; regardless of its origins, the discussion of the model found its way into a critical part of the text and remained there for a reason, as argued by Curley (1988, 122–3).

in which it does so. First, it makes programmatic sense of the text by helping us to understand how the various discussions are supposed to fit together. This is because the standard view provides a clear referent for the model of human nature, while also indicating the purpose of Spinoza's claims about the free man. Second, the standard view provides a straightforward picture of a free and virtuous life, putting flesh on what otherwise looks like an excessively general and abstract ethical theory.

On closer examination, however, neither of these claims are as strong as they at first appear. With respect to the first, one should recognize that the standard view does not actually make much programmatic sense of the text, for, while the free man does provide a referent for the model of human nature, the fit is far from perfect. As we have seen in Chapter 5 above, Spinoza expressly introduces the model for the purpose of judging our true good and perfection, but there is nothing to indicate that he understands the free man as playing this role. To begin with, if the free man did play this role, he would be very important to determining the content of Spinoza's ethics, yet the free man does not occupy a prominent place in the text: he is introduced without fanfare in a scholium and treated entirely within the span of ten propositions. More importantly, Spinoza's discussion of the free man has little to say about our good and perfection. In fact, while he makes some claims about what is good or bad for a free man, they do not appear even to apply to us: if we acted like free men, then we would not lie to save our own lives, which would clearly violate Spinoza's ethical egoism, according to even the most enlightened reading. Finally, as I argued in Chapter 5, the model should be what we strive for under the guidance of reason; while we could hold ourselves to any number of models – striving to be the life of the party, the perfect spouse, the model of hard work – Spinoza thinks that his model is the right one because it is justified by certain knowledge. Consequently, the content of the model, the particular properties of the free man, ought to be justified on the basis of certain knowledge, that is, deduced from the previous propositions of the *Ethics*. Yet Spinoza merely stipulates the free man's properties *ex hypothesi*, without appealing to the preceding propositions or offering any justification.

I should also point out that, while the standard view may address some programmatic difficulties, it also raises others, arguably just as serious. My argument here revolves around the division of labor between Parts IV and V of the *Ethics*. According to the prefaces, Part IV explains the mechanisms by which we are led into bondage to bad emotions, while Part V explains "the method, or way, leading to freedom," in other words, how to use reason so as to avoid bondage to harmful emotions (5pref). Simply put, Part IV

describes the problem and Part v the solution.[4] Consequently, it is not clear why the model of human nature would appear in Part iv. If the free man were the model, then he should provide a model of rational action, which should be part of the solution treated in Part v. At the least, if the free man is the model of human freedom, he should tell us something about the nature of our freedom, which belongs in Part v. The difficulty is not just explaining why the free man is placed in Part iv, but also determining how we should understand the purpose of Part v: if we have already determined in Part iv the nature of human freedom and the model for judging good and perfection, then what is left for Part v? While I am not suggesting that these problems are insoluble, they do show that the standard view does not provide a particularly neat and clean explanation for how the text fits together.

Now let's consider the second reason in favor of the standard view, that it provides a picture of a free life. While the standard view admittedly locates a place in the text where Spinoza provides somewhat specific, concrete ethical recommendations, these ethical recommendations do not reduce the obscurity of his view. On the contrary, it is difficult to determine how his claims about the free man add up to a coherent picture of a free and virtuous life. This is because, first, it is unclear how these different claims about the free man fit together into a single picture of a free life. On one hand, Spinoza describes the free man as a perfectly active being whose actions follow entirely from his own nature: he "does no one's will but his own, and does only what he knows to be of greatest importance in life, which he therefore desires above all" (4p66s). Consequently, the free man is perfectly rational: "a free man, that is, he who lives solely according to the dictates of reason" (4p67); "a free man is he who is guided solely by reason" (4p68). These claims imply not just that a free man acts under the guidance of reason, but further that he is perfectly rational, for Spinoza claims that the free man "has only adequate ideas" (4p68d).[5] As I argued in Chapter 5, this point is critical to Spinoza's claim that a free man would form no concept of good and bad (4p68); nothing is good or bad for the free man only because he is perfectly free and, thus, his power does not

[4] There are different ways of understanding the relationship between Parts iv and v, though the standard view suggests that Spinoza describes our freedom and the way to attain it in Part iv. For example, Curley (1988) argues that Part iv explains ideal freedom, whereas Part v explains the sort of freedom attainable by us. While this reading accommodates (and is based largely on) the notion that the free man is the model, this reading is not consistent with the programmatic descriptions Spinoza offers in the prefaces to both sections.

[5] These claims argue against Bennett's reading of the free man as one who is as free as possible for us (1984, 317).

depend on external things. On the other hand, Spinoza sometimes writes about the free man as though he is less than perfectly active: the free man sometimes retreats in combat (4p69d) and avoids receiving favors from the ignorant (4p70), on the supposition that these behaviors help him to avoid harm. This suggests that the free man could be harmed by others and thus is passively affected by external things. In fact, the mere notion that the free man can have interactions with others, either in combat or relating with the ignorant, supposes that the free man can be passively affected by external things, for instance, by having sensations of them. Since a free man has only adequate ideas, how can he have sensations, which Spinoza claims are necessarily inadequate?

Second, it is not clear how to reconcile the ethical recommendations implied by the free man with Spinoza's other claims about a free life. For example, Chapter 10 below argues that a free life aims to cultivate a virtuous character, what Spinoza calls *fortitudo*. This account makes no mention of honesty, which is one of his most prominent claims about the free man. Furthermore, the virtuous character, I argue in Chapter 10, arises partly from cultivating our social tendencies in accordance with reason. More specifically, Spinoza holds that we imitate the affective states we observe in people like ourselves, which leads us to desire the same things, adopt the same beliefs and conform our behaviors to those of others. He argues that we develop *modestia*, a central trait of the virtuous character, when we temper this tendency with reason by giving in to social pressures only where reason approves. It follows that *modestia* involves surrendering oneself to the social pressures of sufficiently rational people. But Spinoza's free man is entirely self-determined and not subject to such social pressures. Consequently, he would have no need to develop the virtuous character traits that allow us to navigate such pressures appropriately. In this way, the free man offers a picture of a virtuous life that stands in tension with Spinoza's own account of virtue.

8.2 THE CASE AGAINST THE STANDARD VIEW

The previous section argued that the advantages of the standard view are less significant than at first appears. We must now weigh these diminished advantages against a few serious disadvantages. They arise from the fact that Spinoza describes the free man – at least, much of the time and in his most explicit descriptions – as a perfectly active being. Since humans are not capable of perfect freedom, it follows that the free man is not an attainable model, which Spinoza arguably acknowledges: "it is evident that the

hypothesis of this proposition [if men were born free and remained free] is false and *inconceivable* [*nec posse concipi*]" (4p68sch; emphasis added).[6] Consequently, reading the free man as the model renders Spinoza inconsistent, and in three ways. First, the reading implies that we should act irrationally in the sense of striving for a goal that reason recognizes as impossible, which contradicts Spinoza's view that we ought to act in accordance with reason. To illustrate, suppose that our degree of freedom can be represented on a scale of 1 to 10. If we have certain knowledge that the most freedom we can hope to attain is a 7, then we have no good reason to shoot for a 10, rather than a 7. Indeed, shooting for a 10 would seem to constitute a practical contradiction, forcing us to act as though we can attain some outcome that we know to be impossible. Consequently, we would only shoot for a 10 from confusion, not reason. It is important to remember here that Spinoza understands our volitions as arising from our ideas. Consequently, shooting for perfect freedom would seem to arise from ideas representing perfect freedom as good for us. But these would seem to be confused ideas, since it is our nature as finite modes to be passively determined by other finite modes, as I argued in Chapter 1.

For precisely this reason, some defenders of the standard view have argued that Spinoza holds up the free man as the model on the basis of imagination rather than reason. According to this view, the free man is a confused idea, employed by Spinoza because it has a psychological influence inclining us to act more rationally.[7] The idea is that, since the imagination has a greater hold over our behavior than reason, Spinoza employs the free man as an imaginative aid for fostering rationality. Admittedly, Spinoza's politics advocates for irrational imaginative aids, such as the belief in a personal God, for the purpose of directing the behavior of inevitably irrational people. However, it is implausible to suppose that Spinoza's ethics, which is founded on the value of reason, would direct us to act in accordance with irrational ideas. Furthermore, offering such an aid would be inconsistent with the method of the *Ethics*, which logically deduces propositions from self-evident definitions, so that its content is derived

[6] Admittedly, it is not entirely clear whether the false and inconceivable hypothesis here is the claim that there could be a free man, or that one could be born free. I am inclined to read the passage as rejecting both claims, since he cites 4p4, which rules out both, for 4p4 claims that it is impossible for one to be entirely self-determined.

[7] See Garrett (1990, 288–9), Santayana (1886), Rousset (2004). Bidney makes a related claim that our idea of perfection is a confusion of the imagination (1940, 270–7). De Dijn (2004) also upholds the standard view, while accepting that the model of the free man opposes reason, though he takes this as evidence that reason leads one into contradictions and inconsistencies. I argue against De Dijn's view in Kisner (2010b, 110–13).

entirely from reason, without relying on the imagination. While there are a few places, in the appendices, scholia and corollaries, where Spinoza uses inadequate ideas of experience, these sections only illustrate, in different terms, claims that he has already demonstrated through reason in the propositions.[8] It is an entirely different thing to introduce an idea of imagination that contradicts reason.

A defender of the standard view might reply that it is rational to strive for an unattainable end on the grounds that doing so can help us to increase our power more effectively. For instance, shooting for a 10 may provide us with greater motivation to work harder, thereby achieving a 7 faster and more effectively. In this case, shooting for a 10 would be rational, since it would more effectively increase our power. However, any such psychological advantage could only come about from believing that one can attain a 10. Consequently, one could only attain the psychological advantage through deliberate self-deception, by convincing oneself that a 10 is possible, despite one's adequate ideas. It is hard to see how denying the contents of one's adequate ideas could ever be considered rational for Spinoza. Furthermore, such deliberate self-deception is very much opposed to the spirit of the *Ethics*, which provides guidance through knowledge and reason.

One might alternatively defend the standard view by arguing that the model is rational in another sense not because it describes what we seek when we act from reason, but rather, because it is based on a rational understanding of what our inevitably irrational nature seeks. In other words, the model of the free man is rational in the sense that it provides adequate knowledge of our nature, which strives for perfect freedom, even though such a thing is unattainable. However, even if we accept that the model is rational only in the sense that it provides knowledge of our nature, it would still be inconsistent for Spinoza to claim that it is our nature to strive for perfect freedom. This is because Spinoza holds that we act from our nature when we are self-determined, which is equivalent to acting on the basis of adequate ideas. Since adequate ideas recognize the free man as an unattainable goal, it cannot be the case that we act from our nature when we strive to become free men. Rather, such a striving can only arise from confusion and the influence of external things.

The standard view renders Spinoza inconsistent in a second way, which concerns his view of passivity. While Spinoza blames most of our failings on our passivity, he also accepts that passivity can sometimes be beneficial,

[8] For instance, consider the example of the sun in 2p35s or the discussion in 1app.

increasing our power and, thus, our virtue and perfection. Consequently, he claims that passive desires can be good: "our active emotions, that is, those desires that are defined by man's power, that is, by reason, are always good; the other desires can be either good or bad" (4app3). He also accepts that there are passive joys. Since he defines joy as the "transition to greater perfection" (3DOE 2), it follows that passivity can bring about transitions to greater perfection. Furthermore, Spinoza acknowledges particular ways that passivity is beneficial: (a) being passively affected provides us with experiences of external things, thereby increasing our understanding (4p38d; 4p18s);[9] (b) being passively affected makes possible our survival, since we require food, shelter and information about the external world (2p13post4; 4app27);[10] (c) we are necessarily passively affected in the commonwealth, where we depend on the activities of others, which increases our power (4p40; 4p35c1; 4app14); (d) we benefit from the friendship of rational people, since we are inclined to imitate their behaviors (4app9; 4app12).[11]

The problem is that these claims about passivity would be inconsistent if the free man were the model. Remember, 4pref stipulates the model as providing the basis for judging our good and perfection. Since the free man is perfectly active, if he were the model, then any passivity on our part would distance us from the model and, therefore, would count as an imperfection. Similarly, anything contributing to our passivity would count as an obstacle to achieving the model and, consequently, would be bad, including the care of others, food, sensory information and so forth. But all of these conclusions disagree with Spinoza's aforementioned views on passivity. Aside from being inconsistent, these conclusions would also be indefensible: nourishment is not an obstacle to our perfection!

Now to the third inconsistency: if the free man were the model, it would follow that Spinoza allows for legitimate normative demands – namely, to become completely free and self-determining – even though it is impossible to meet those demands. In other words, reading the free man as the model denies the principle that ought implies can. The problem is that Spinoza

[9] For Spinoza's view on the value of experience, see Moreau (1994) and Curley (1973a), who argues that Spinoza has a more positive view on the epistemic value of experience. Specifically, Curley argues that Spinoza's division of the three kinds of knowledge criticizes not experience per se, but rather vague or vagrant experience (24–34).

[10] As an example, he claims that we require many different kinds of food in order to nourish all the parts of our body (4app27).

[11] Furthermore, Spinoza holds that there are virtuous ways of responding to human weakness (4app), a Stoic view discussed by James (1993). Our passivity is also required for attaining the highest good, since it consists in recognizing our passivity, as I argued in the previous chapter.

endorses this principle. He claims that the right and order of nature, which permits almost everything, nevertheless forbids "those things that no one can do" (*TP* 2, 8). He also asserts the principle at the very beginning of the *TP*, where he treats it as something of a guiding principle for his politics:

> Philosophers look upon the passions by which we are assailed as vices, into which men fall through their own fault. So it is their custom to deride, bewail, berate them, or, if their purpose is to appear more zealous than others, to execrate them. They believe that they are thus performing a sacred duty, and that they are attaining the summit of wisdom when they have learnt how to shower extravagant praise on a human nature that nowhere exists and to revile that which exists in actuality. The fact is that they conceive men not as they are, but as they would like them to be. As a result, for the most part it is not ethics they have written, but satire; and they have never worked out a political theory that can have practical application, only one that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia or in that golden age of the poets where there would naturally be no need of such. (*TP* 1, 1)

Spinoza here indicates that ethical and political prescriptions should be derived from claims about the way humans really are, not from the way that we would like them to be.[12] Otherwise, he argues, such prescriptions cannot be put into practice, "have practical application." In this case, Spinoza asserts that such prescriptions do not count as either ethical or political, presumably because these disciplines are fundamentally practical in nature. According to this view, normative claims only derive meaning and force from their practicability, which implies that we can only make sense of claims about what one ought to do, if one can, in fact, do those things.[13] It would contradict this reasoning if Spinoza's most fundamental ethical prescriptions were derived from an unattainable model of human nature. For in this case there would be no actions that we could put into practice to attain such a model. Indeed, holding us to the model of human nature would commit precisely the same mistake as the "satirists" above: conceiving men as we would like them to be – capable of perfect

[12] This sentiment is not limited to the *TP*, since 4pref claims that normative judgments should be based on certain knowledge of our actual human nature, as I argued in Chapter 5.

[13] One might question how to square Spinoza's commitment to the principle that ought implies can with his causal determinism, since the latter entails that we can do only what we actually do. This implies that the only legitimate claims about what we ought to do merely describe what we do. As a possible solution, one might construe 'can' as referring not to causal possibility, but rather what someone in a similar situation is capable of doing or, perhaps, the sort of thing that one is capable of doing in similar situations. So, while it may be the case that someone is necessitated to steal a car, so that it is impossible for him to act otherwise, it is still the case that not stealing the car is the sort of thing that he is generally able to do, unlike jumping a hundred feet into the air.

freedom – rather than attending to them as they are: necessarily finite, limited and passive.[14]

One might object that, despite his remarks in the *TP*, Spinoza cannot be committed to the principle that ought implies can, because he upholds so many ought claims that cannot be put into practice. This is because he holds that anything increasing our power is good, even if it is unattainable; for instance, living for a million years would be good because it would provide greater opportunities to increase one's power. If these things are good, the objection reasons, then we ought to strive for them. While the objection is correct that, according to Spinoza's theory of the good, some unattainable things are good, this does not necessarily imply that we should act to attain them. In fact, this is precisely what Spinoza denies in the *TP*. While it would be good for us to live for a thousand years, we should not adopt this as an end, since there is nothing we can do to attain it.[15] Consequently, even if Spinoza held that the free man provides the standards for judging our good and perfection, it would be inconsistent for him to claim that we ought to act to strive to become free men, in other words, to treat the free man as the model.

8.3 A PREFERABLE READING

The previous objections provide sufficient reason to explore a different reading of the free man. Given the initial appeal of the standard view, one might proceed by modifying the standard view to avoid the objections above. Since the objections only apply if the free man is perfectly active, one might look for a solution by focusing on passages where Spinoza allows that the free man is affected by other things, perhaps conceiving of the free man as something like the most free and virtuous person imaginable. Thus, one could argue that only these passages describe the model of human nature; call this the hybrid view. On this view, the propositions treating the free man as perfectly active represent some confusion for Spinoza, of which he was not fully aware, or perhaps another strand of thought that serves some other end.

[14] This point of tension is connected to the previous point that the model must be based on certain knowledge, since the problem with the satirists is that they do not judge humans from knowledge.

[15] For this reason, I disagree with Della Rocca's view that Spinoza equates the good and the right (2008b, 183–5). Calling something good describes its value, which does not necessarily entail that we ought to act in some way, whereas calling an action right (and only actions can be called right) does imply that we should act in that way.

Although the hybrid view avoids my objections above, it is not entirely desirable either. To begin with, the view supposes that Spinoza conflates different conceptions of the model, which makes it hard to take seriously Spinoza's suggestion that the model should be based on certain knowledge. While a defender of the hybrid view might counter that Spinoza never intended for all of his claims about the free man to serve as the model, this claim is somewhat ad hoc: while it must be admitted that there is a distinction between passages that describe the free man as perfectly free or less than perfectly free, one would hope that Spinoza would acknowledge the distinction if it meant that only some of his discussion served as the basis for the model of human nature. Furthermore, since the hybrid view still regards some of Spinoza's description of the free man as the model, it is sufficiently similar to the standard view that it is burdened with many of the same difficult questions: if the free man is the model, then why doesn't Spinoza use the free man as the basis for determining our good and perfection? Why doesn't Spinoza derive his claims about the nature of the free man from the propositions of the *Ethics*? Why does his account of human freedom appear in Part IV rather than Part V, and what is the purpose of Part V?

However, we can take another route, one that avoids even these difficulties, by supposing that the free man is not intended to be the model at all. To be clear, arguing that the free man is not the model of human nature does not entail that the free man does not serve as some sort of model. On the contrary, the free man must serve as an ethical model in some sense, for Spinoza claims that his observations of the free man indicate "man's true freedom." Before considering precisely how the free man serves as a model, though, we should consider two pressing questions for my proposed reading: if the free man is not the model, then what is the model of human nature and what is the purpose of the free man? In response to the former question, Chapter 5 showed that the model represents the object of rational desire, which is the most active and perfect human being possible, rather than a perfectly active being. Where in the text, then, is such a model to be found? On my reading, the task of describing the model is not relegated to any particular section of the text, though we have little reason to expect that it would be, since models are never mentioned outside of 4pref.[16] This suggestion is supported by Spinoza's view on the model,

[16] Though '*exemplar*' does appear in the *TTP*. Spinoza explains that the first dogma of universal faith is that "God, that is, a Supreme Being, exists, supremely just and merciful, the exemplar of true life" (*TTP* 14, 10). However, this passage does not imply that Spinoza's *ethics* would have us take God as

which indicates that its content would be difficult to capture in any brief, self-contained discussion. For if the model represents the perfection of our nature understood on the basis of certain knowledge, then explaining the model would require determining (a) our nature; (b) the characteristic ways that our nature is perfected, in other words, how our power is expressed; and (c) the greatest possible degree of our power. Since this is an enormous task, too involved to be captured in a handful of propositions, it makes sense to suppose that it is taken up throughout the text. This is arguably the case, for (a) is taken up by the first two parts of the *Ethics* and the beginning of Part III, which provide a metaphysical account of the nature of all things, including finite things, such as humans. The task of (b) is taken up primarily by Parts III and IV, which explain how our *conatus* is expressed in human psychology through our ideas and emotions. Finally, the task of (c), determining the greatest degree of our power, requires us to consider the strength of our power vis-à-vis the external forces that oppose and constrain it, the aim of Part V: "I shall treat the power of the mind, or of reason; and I shall mainly show the extent and nature of its dominion over the emotions, for their control and moderation" (5pref). According to this reading, we develop a model of human nature ourselves by coming to understand our nature and capabilities through reading the entire *Ethics*.

What, then, can we say about the content of this model? We can briefly summarize the outlines as follows. With respect to (a), our nature is *conatus*. With respect to (b), we express this power by being an adequate cause, which at the mental level means having adequate ideas or, equivalently, using reason (4p24). In particular, it most increases our power and perfection to have the third kind of knowledge or intuitive knowledge of God (5p25, 5p36cs). This knowledge is realized not just in having a particular mental or affective state, but also in our bodily states and actions. In particular, we are most powerful when we act from adequate ideas, which means acting according to the natural law and, thus, with benevolence, as described in Chapters 6 and 7. With respect to (c), our power is limited such that we can only have adequate ideas of a few general things, such as God's essence and rational dictates. Our power is also necessarily weaker than the power of external things, such that our *conatus* will eventually be

a model for living, since Spinoza does not accept these dogmas as true. This is indicated by the fact that the dogma also asserts that God is personal – specifically, just and merciful – a view which he refutes in 1app. Rather, the dogmas of the universal faith are expedient principles for guiding the behavior of irrational people. Consequently, while Spinoza's universal faith may require us to hold ourselves to this model, it is less clear that an ethics based on certain knowledge would.

overwhelmed and we will die (4p3). While our mind will, in some sense, be eternal (5p23), we most increase our *conatus* by becoming as powerful as possible in our lifetime. According to this model, the most powerful and perfect person has acquired as many adequate ideas as possible and understands them through the third kind of knowledge.

It is important to draw out the significant difference between this view and the standard view: on my view, the model allows for some, indeed, a significant degree of passivity. For the individual represented by the model is passive in those ways that are required by our nature – for instance, he is mortal and depends upon external things for his existence. Because of this difference, my reading avoids the inconsistencies of the standard view. With respect to the first, my reading is consistent with Spinoza's view that it is impossible for us to become perfectly active beings, since the reading does not suppose that we take such a being as a model. With respect to the second, since the most perfect human is, on my view, inevitably passive in certain ways, judging our good and perfection with respect to such an individual does not entail that all passivity is bad and a sign of imperfection. On the contrary, my reading entails that being passive in these ways can make us more like the model, which is not only consistent with Spinoza's claim that passivity can be beneficial, but also more defensible. Third, my reading does not suppose that we strive for a model that we can never attain, which is consistent with Spinoza's view that ought implies can.

Now we can turn to the second question: if the free man is not the model of human nature, then what is its purpose? This question should be answered by considering Spinoza's explanation of his aims in 4pref. He claims that Part IV explains not the nature of human freedom, a task explicitly reserved for Part V, but rather the nature of human bondage, that is, how we can be enslaved by our passions. Since our bondage consists largely in failing to guide ourselves according to reason, the central task of Part IV is to explain how it is that we "are often compelled, though we see the better course, to pursue the worse" (4pref), in other words, *akrasia*. Taking up this task requires Spinoza to explain two points: first, how "we see the better course," in other words, how reason guides our actions. To this end, Spinoza later adds to the list of his goals in Part IV, "to describe what it is that reason prescribes for us" (4p18s). Second, it requires explaining why we "pursue the worse," why reason's direction is sometimes insufficient to determine our action. Since he thinks that we are led into bondage by irrational emotions, this leads him to outline a further task for Part IV: to determine "what is good and bad in emotions," in other words, to determine which emotions lead us contrary to reason.

I submit that the purpose of the free man should be understood in the context of these more general aims of Part IV. This approach suggests that the free man provides an example of a perfectly rational being, which Spinoza then uses to determine reason's guidance and the nature of rational emotions. This explains why Spinoza insists that the free man is perfectly free, since it is only by imagining a completely rational person that we are entitled to draw inferences about reason's guidance. Since there aren't any purely rational people, the free man is best understood as a kind of thought experiment. It is no problem that such a person does not – cannot – exist, because, on this reading, Spinoza is only interested in conditional statements of the form: if there were a perfectly rational person, he would experience such and such an emotion. Seen in this light, the free man is like Hume's example of the perfect reasoner, who never concludes that causality is anything other than constant conjunction.[17] In both cases, the perfect reasoners serve as the basis for deriving claims about the nature of reason, not as models for our behavior.

The best evidence for this reading is Spinoza's investigation of the free man, which focuses on understanding the nature of reason's guidance and rational emotions. With respect to the former, Spinoza claims that the free man does only what he knows to be of greatest importance in life (4p66s), upholds the natural law to seek his own advantage under the guidance of reason (4p67d), avoids dangers as much as overcomes them (4p69), avoids receiving favors from the ignorant (4p70), never deceives (4p72) and lives in a state (4p73). With respect to the latter, Spinoza claims that the free man does not fear or dwell on death (4p67), is courageous in flight from battle (4p69c) and grateful (4p71).

My reading is supported, second, by the text leading up to the introduction of the free man. Immediately before explaining the dictates of reason, Spinoza sets forth all that is left for Part IV: "it now remains for me to demonstrate what it is that reason prescribes for us and which emotions are in harmony with the rules of human reason and which are contrary to them" (4p18s). In keeping with this claim, the remainder of the text focuses, first, on explaining reason's prescriptions by showing, for instance, that reason directs us to seek our advantage (4p20), to understand (4p26), to act with benevolence (4p37). Second, the text examines the value of the emotions by arguing that hatred cannot be good (4p45), honor can be rational (4p58), that fear is not rational (4p63) and so forth. This indicates that Spinoza introduces the free man not to break away from this discussion by explaining the model of human nature, but rather in the

[17] From section 5 of the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

service of this discussion. In support of this suggestion, the propositions immediately before the free man is introduced, 4p65 and 4p66, explain reason's guidance, that it directs us to prefer the greater of two goods and to choose the greater future good over the present lesser good respectively. The scholium introduces the free man as a way of illustrating these directives by considering one who is "under the guidance of reason" (4p66c), "if the mind could have adequate knowledge of what is to come" (4p66d). In this way, the free man is introduced to help us understand reason's guidance by considering an ideal case.

Third, my reading is supported by Spinoza's aforementioned claim that the free man indicates man's true freedom (4p73s). Since Spinoza equates man's true freedom with strength of character (*fortitudo*), which, as I will show in Chapter 10, is the affective tendencies arising from adequate ideas, 4p73s essentially claims that the free man is supposed to indicate rational emotions. This reading is supported by the fact that Spinoza uses the free man to discuss the emotional life, such as the desires and motives of a perfectly rational person.

There is a fourth piece of evidence for my reading, the otherwise inexplicable appearance of the free man's often neglected sibling, the slave (4p66s). The slave is the free man's opposite, one "who is guided only by emotion or belief . . . and performs actions of which he is completely ignorant" (4p66s). Since Spinoza holds that the model of human nature provides the basis for judging our good and perfection, the model should also be the basis for negative judgments of bad and imperfection: bad is what hinders us attaining the model, and we become imperfect as we move away from it. Consequently, if the free man is the model of human nature, then he should provide the basis for judging our bad and imperfection. Why, then, would Spinoza introduce the slave, as a foil to the free man? My reading offers an explanation: the free man alone cannot explain what is bad in emotions, since the free man is perfectly rational and, consequently, only experiences good emotions. The fact that a free man fails to experience an emotion does not necessarily show that it is bad, since there could be rational emotions experienced only by ordinary humans, such as the experience of learning something new or overcoming an obstacle. To show that an emotion is bad, then, Spinoza must consider the example of the slave, someone who is never led by reason and only experiences harmful emotions.

The final evidence for my reading is Spinoza's apparent inconsistency in his conception of the free man, sometimes treating him as completely free, at other times as partially passive to external things. While this is a serious problem if the free man is supposed to provide the model of human

nature, it presents no trouble if the free man is a thought experiment, which does not require Spinoza to offer a unified picture of a free man. On the contrary, using the free man to understand reason's guidance and rational emotions arguably requires Spinoza to consider slightly different versions of the thought experiment. To understand reason's guidance, one must consider a perfectly active being; otherwise one could not conclude that his actions and intentions reflect reason's guidance, rather than some external power. However, we cannot consider a perfectly active being to understand rational emotions, because such a being would not experience any emotion, except perhaps desire. Remember that joy and sadness arise from increases and decreases in our power and the free man's power, not depending on any thing, would not fluctuate. It is revealing that the two main propositions, where Spinoza backs away from treating the free man as perfectly active, are both concerned with the free man's emotions, his courage and gratefulness.

This discussion helps us to see precisely how the free man serves as an ethical model: since the free man is purely rational, his emotions do not arise from confusion, passivity, inadequate ideas. It follows that the free man provides some insight, first, into the nature of reason's guidance, which is evident from the important role that Spinoza's remarks on the free man have played in the previous three chapters. Second, the free man indicates rational emotions and, consequently, tells us something about the affective side of the virtuous character. Thus, the free man is a model in the sense that he provides important information about the nature of rationality, which is the goal of Spinoza's ethics. However, since the free man is perfectly rational, we cannot simply assume that we should act or feel as the free man does, which is implied by treating him as the model of human nature. Rather, we must consider how reason's guidance is applicable to humans, who are necessarily passive and use inadequate ideas to navigate the world, which is the subject of the next three chapters.

CONCLUSIONS

The notion that Spinoza's free man provides us with a picture of a free life is predicated on the standard view that the free man is the model of human nature. Since the standard view is not supported by any direct textual evidence, whether we accept it or not depends upon its ability to make sense of the text. However, the standard view is not particularly strong in this regard, for claiming that the free man is the model entails that Spinoza intends to judge our good and perfection from the free man, which is not reflected in the text. Furthermore, the standard view arguably creates as

much textual confusion as it lays to rest, for it is not clear why Spinoza's account of human freedom would come in Part IV, how to read his claims about human freedom as a unified model or how to square them with his claims about human virtue.

Furthermore, the standard view also renders Spinoza inconsistent. First, upholding the free man as the model of human nature is inconsistent with Spinoza's claim that we ought to act in accordance with reason, since reason recognizes that the free man is unattainable. Second, if the free man were the model, it would follow that our passivity necessarily opposes our perfection and that things contributing to our passivity are bad, even food, sensations and the assistance of others – conclusions which Spinoza denies. Third, treating the free man as the model contradicts the principle that ought implies can, but Spinoza accepts this principle; in fact, he lampoons those who, refusing to accept humans as they are, hold us to impossible standards.

This chapter has offered a reading that escapes these problems. I have shown that the model of human nature represents the greatest possible perfection of our nature, as revealed by reason: the most powerful human possible. Given what would be involved in describing such a model, it is not surprising that there is no simple summary of it. Rather, the task of developing and describing the model should be understood as a project taken up by the entire *Ethics*. On this reading, the free man is not irrelevant to Spinoza's ethics, for it indicates reason's guidance and rational emotions, which figure importantly in his account of reason's dictates and the virtuous character, as I will argue in Chapter 10. Nevertheless, the free man is not at the center of Spinoza's ethics and is even less important to his account of human freedom, which is concerned with necessarily passive and finite beings. Consequently, my reading absolves us of the difficult tasks of explaining how a free man can be a model for ordinary humans, why humans should strive to become free men and, if this is an unattainable goal, what implications the free man should have for our actions. In these ways, my reading renders Spinoza's practical philosophy far less problematic. Furthermore, this reading allows us to dispense with a rather unattractive picture of Spinoza's ethics. According to the standard view, Spinoza is either blind or intolerant of the weakness, passivity and irrationality that are a necessary part of human existence. My reading, in contrast, shows Spinoza to be far more accepting of human vulnerability.

CHAPTER 9

Rational deliberation

What does a life of human freedom look like, if it is not the life of the free man? While a free life follows reason's guidance, it is unclear what it means to live or, even, to act in accordance with reason, for, as I argued in Chapter 6, the perspective of reason is fundamentally different from one's practical perspective, since the former takes no account of particular things and one's position in space and time, which are necessary features of practical situations. In fact, understanding our actions as particular, spatial and temporal events renders them effectively invisible to human reason. To understand, then, how reason's guidance can be put into practice, this chapter considers how, for Spinoza, reason influences the deliberative processes that lead to action or, more simply, rational deliberation. The remaining two chapters will then consider the outcome of such deliberations, the specific actions and activities that characterize the free life. My central claim here is that rational deliberation requires input from inadequate ideas of the imagination, specifically about our particular perspective, including the particular things around us and our own degree of perfection. In this way, the chapter explains precisely how our imagination, and, even, passions contribute positively to a free and rational life.

The first section looks to Spinoza's psychology to explain the psychological processes by which we decide how to act. The second section considers how reason's guidance influences these processes. The third section specifies how inadequate ideas provide a positive contribution to rational deliberation.

9.1 PRACTICAL DELIBERATION

To understand how reason guides our actions, we first need to understand generally how we choose our actions. While Spinoza does not offer any explicit account of practical deliberation, we ought to be able to derive the outlines of such an account from his psychology, since it aims to provide

the resources for explaining the entire range of psychological phenomena, though taking up this task involves a fair bit of speculative reconstruction. Because Spinoza understands all mental processes in terms of ideas, their powers and interactions, practical deliberation must involve the interaction among ideas pertaining to possible actions. So, considering whether to take a second helping of dessert involves ideas representing the various concerns that figure in such deliberation, how much I have already eaten or whether the dessert is a particular favorite. Spinoza's theory of ideas holds that each of these ideas exerts some volitional power, inclining me to accept its content as true and, possibly, inclining me to act in some way. An idea representing the dessert as a source of joy inclines me to accept the second helping, whereas an idea representing the indigestion that might follow inclines me in the opposite direction. On this view, deliberative processes amount to the train of thought that arises from the interaction among these ideas. The process of weighing one's reasons for or against acting, leaning one way and then the other, arises from the struggle between competing ideas. The ultimate volition to act is determined by the idea that emerges victorious.[1]

In order to understand how this train of thought proceeds, we need to know more about how Spinoza understands the interactions among our ideas. Spinoza's psychology provides general principles that describe how ideas follow from one another in our minds. These principles can be sorted into two categories, those pertaining to reason and those to imagination. The former are principles of logical entailment. While Spinoza does not provide a taxonomy of these, his arguments in the *Ethics* clearly make use of them. They consist of general rules of inference, for instance, that something implying a contradiction must be false or that a statement following necessarily from a true statement must also be true, and so forth. Ideas in God's mind are all connected by these principles, following from one another, like the steps of a logical proof. Because of Spinoza's strong rationalism, these are not just logical principles, but also causal principles that determine how one idea gives rise to another. It follows that they are also psychological principles governing the sequence or train of ideas in our minds.[2] According to this view, if the representational content of idea

[1] Since Spinoza understands emotions or affects as kinds of ideas, it follows that these chains are emotionally laden as well. This picture of our psychology as governed by the interaction between competing affects is supported by Nadler (2006, 208).

[2] Spinoza's commitment to the claim that rational principles are also psychological principles is implied by 2p40: "whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas that are adequate in it are also adequate." According to this claim, when my idea *B* follows from my idea *A*, which is adequate in my mind, then

A logically entails the representational content of idea *B*, then conceiving idea *A* inclines us to conceive idea *B*.[3] It does not follow, however, that our ideas necessarily arise in accordance with principles of logical entailment, for these logical principles may be opposed by other forces influencing the order of our ideas.

In particular, logical principles may be opposed by principles of the imagination. Spinoza's understanding of the imagination and its operation is motivated by his rejection of the Cartesian view that ideas of the imagination are images representing bodily impressions (CSM II, 113). Rather, Spinoza urges his "readers to make a careful distinction between an idea – i.e. a conception of the mind – and the images of the things we imagine" (2p49s). Spinoza insists that ideas are essentially active, whereas he understands images as passive: those who confuse ideas and images see "ideas as dumb pictures on a tablet, and misled by this preconception fail to see that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves affirmation and negation" (2p49s). Rather, Spinoza understands images as the modifications of the body by external things: "the affections of the human body whose ideas set forth external bodies as if they were present to us we shall call images" (2p17s); "the essence of images is constituted solely by corporeal motions, far removed from the concept of thought" (2p49s). In other words, images are bodily modes, for Spinoza, not mental perceptions of the body, as they are for Descartes. Consequently, he regards ideas of the imagination not as images, but rather as active conceptions of the mind that are derived from images. The imagination, then, should be understood as the faculty or power for generating not only images, but also ideas from images. This point is important in understanding the principles of imagination, since Spinoza derives these principles from the characteristic way that we generate ideas from images, as will become clear.

I will call the first and most important of these principles 'Association': "If the human body has once been affected by two bodies or more bodies at the same time, when the mind afterwards imagines one of them, it will straightway remember the others too" (2p18). Spinoza considers several instances of the principle, primarily various ways of associating affects. For instance, "if the mind has once been affected by two emotions at the same

B is also adequate in my mind. The justification for this claim is that *B* follows from *A* according to adequacy-preserving principles, that is, logical, deductive principles. Consequently, the claim implies that these principles can also serve as the psychological mechanism by means of which *B* arises from *A*.

[3] I must emphasize that this is only an inclination; we do not necessarily conceive all of the countless propositions that necessarily follow from our ideas.

time, when it is later affected by the one it will also be affected by the other" (3p14). Thus if the happiest event of my life was also the saddest, when I am happy again, it may be tinged with sadness.[4] Spinoza's demonstration of the principle appeals to parallelism, arguing that the experienced associations among bodily affects must be accompanied by corresponding associations among their ideas. To understand the reasoning, suppose that, when I start a friend's car for the first time, it backfires, making a loud and startling noise. My idea of starting the friend's car represents the image or bodily impression of the event, which is caused by both the starting of the car and the backfire, all at once. Consequently, the idea representing the image represents both things, which entails that thinking about starting the car involves thinking about the backfire. Thus, association arises from a kind of ambiguity in our bodily images arising from the fact that they are brought about by multiple causes.[5] This suggestion is corroborated by 2p40s1, which explains that confused ideas arise because they are based on images that fail to distinguish bodily modifications: "when the images in the body are utterly confused, the mind will also imagine all the bodies confusedly without any distinction and will comprehend them, as it were, under one attribute, namely that of entity, thing, etc."

Association should be distinguished from a second principle, 'Similarity': "From the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have something similar to an object that is wont to affect the mind with joy or sorrow, we shall love it or hate it" (3p16). Spinoza purports to derive Similarity from Association, though the reasoning is not prima facie clear, since Association connects things that are spatially and temporally related to one another, not similar. While there is no fully satisfactory explanation of this point, Spinoza's reasoning likely relies again on the ambiguity of images: for example, the image or bodily modification caused by the bee's sting is sufficiently similar to the modification caused by the wasp's sting that ideas formed from the images will not sufficiently distinguish them. For this explanation to make sense, the previous suggestion that imaginative ideas are ambiguous and blurred must entail that they are also overlapping and connected, such that conceiving of one leads me to conceive of the other. If this is Spinoza's reasoning, then Similarity holds any time that two ideas are derived from bodily impressions that are sufficiently similar. Consequently, the principle

[4] The demonstration explains that this is the same mechanism employed both in memory and in language, when associating words with things.

[5] This account is supported by the common view that Spinoza understands confusion as arising from the ambiguity of ideas overlapping ideas. See Della Rocca (1996a, 61–4) and Bennett (1984, 179–82).

is broader in scope than indicated by 3p16, applying to all ideas based on similar bodily impressions, not just affects of joy or sadness.

The final principle is 'Imitation of Affects':[6] "From the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves, towards which we have felt no emotion, to be affected by an emotion, we are thereby affected by a similar emotion" (3p27). This principle provides the psychological basis for empathy, the tendency to feel the sorrows and joys that we observe in others (3p29, 3p31). The justification for this principle goes as follows: representing things as similar to ourselves represents both the thing and ourselves; for instance, representing a doll as like me represents me as well as the doll.[7] Spinoza takes this to imply that representing the similar thing as being in an affective state also represents ourselves as being in that affective state; representing the doll as sad represents me as sad. Representing ourselves as being in an affective state, in turn, is the same as actually being in that state. This is because emotions, understood at the mental level, are just ideas representing changes in our power. So, representing oneself as joyful – as increasing in power – is just what it means to be joyful at the mental level. In summary, representing ourselves as like something in a particular affective state involves representing ourselves as being in that state, which is the same thing as actually being in that state. To use the example, representing a doll as both like myself and sad makes me sad, since it represents my power as decreasing, which is all that sadness is.[8]

It is important to recognize that the principles of imagination, being nonrational, do not connect ideas on any logical basis: my idea of a bee sting cannot be logically derived from my idea of a wasp sting. Similarly there is no logical relationship that justifies the sadness that arises from seeing a doll that looks sad. In this respect, Spinoza upholds the proto-Humean view that there is no rational basis for the associations of ideas in experience. Rather, inferences based on experienced associations arise from

[6] I borrow this title from Della Rocca (1996b, 2004). One should not suppose that this is mere imitation, merely aping the behavior of another. Rather, imitating the sadness of another is identical to experiencing genuine sadness.

[7] Spinoza derives this claim from his view that our images represent both external objects as well as our own bodies (2p16). This claim resembles the Cartesian explanation of sensation: our sensation of the grass as green represents both something about the grass, how it reflects light, and the way my body, particularly my eye, is affected by the object, through the medium of the light (CSM II, 52, 294). On this point, see Della Rocca (1996a, 63).

[8] I should note that the principle only holds when the represented object is sufficiently similar to ourselves that representations of it are applicable to us; representing a number as infinite will not make us infinite. It follows that we can experience sorrow at the imagined sorrow of a doll or, conversely, feel nothing at the sorrow of humans, depending on whether we imagine them to be like ourselves.

habit or accustomed "*consuevit*" associations (2p18s).[9] Similarly, there is no rational justification for many of our emotional responses to others, our tendency to mirror their joys and sorrows. Of course, Spinoza maintains that all of our ideas are logically entailed by and derivable from other ideas. However, as limited beings we do not have access to the adequate ideas of finite modes required to perform such a derivation. What little we know of finite modes comes from our experience, which presents them as jumbled and disordered, obscuring the logical relations among them.[10]

According to this discussion, how one's deliberation unfolds depends a great deal on whether it follows principles of reason or imagination: if our ideas are governed by the former, then our thinking will follow a logical progression, like the steps of a deductive argument; on the other hand, if our ideas are governed by imaginative principles, then our thoughts will proceed according to nonrational associations and empathic responses. Spinoza explicitly distinguishes these two trains of thought when he contrasts ideas arranged "according to the order of the intellect" (5p10) with those which are "uncertain and random" (5p10s). For instance, when considering whether to accept a second helping of dessert, if my deliberation follows rational principles, then it might focus on the logical consequences of doing so. However, if my deliberation follows principles of imagination, then it will consider experienced associations, for instance, the feelings of comfort and security with which food has been associated, or the feelings and attitudes of others at the table.

Whether our deliberation follows one set of principles or the other, in turn, is determined by the adequacy of our ideas. While we can construct many arguments for this claim, the following is sufficient: Spinoza's rationalism holds that all ideas in the mind of God – that is, true ideas – are ordered according to logical relations. Since Spinoza holds that adequate ideas fully represent true ideas – which includes their causal antecedents – it follows that adequate ideas are also ordered in this way. Consequently, when our ideas are adequate, like God's, they give rise to other ideas in our minds according to principles of logical entailment.[11] Conversely, since

[9] There is a different sense in which we might say experience is rational. The associations we make tend to assist in the body's survival, motivating me to escape future bee stings and so forth. Thus they are rational to the extent that Spinoza regards self-interested behavior as rational.

[10] These associations are also responsible for the harmful behaviors described throughout Part III: people fail to achieve what is genuinely good for them because they misunderstand the true natures of things and they are drawn into conflicts and vain endeavors out of irrational love and hate.

[11] This argument applies to both human and absolutely adequate ideas, according to their degree of adequacy. So, absolutely adequate ideas will be governed entirely by principles of logical entailment, whereas human adequate ideas will be primarily governed by such principles, though they will

inadequate ideas arise primarily from experience, they are more likely to be associated according to principles of the imagination. It follows that the direction and outcome of practical deliberation is largely determined by the adequacy of the ideas involved.

One should note that our deliberation is shaped by the adequacy of our ideas in other ways as well. Since adequate ideas are more certain, deliberation involving these ideas is more certain, that is, more likely to lead to true conclusions, whereas inadequate ideas are more prone to misrepresentation and confusion. Furthermore, since we are active in conceiving adequate ideas, the *conatus* doctrine implies that their volitional power inclines us to actions and reasoning that increase our power. Since inadequate ideas come about from external things, we have less certainty that they will direct us to our good. In this way, whether our action ultimately benefits us has a great deal to do with the adequacy of the ideas that figure in deliberation.

9.2 PRACTICAL DELIBERATION AND ADEQUATE IDEAS

Now that we have a rough picture of how we choose our actions, we can consider what it means to do so rationally. A first possible explanation is that rational deliberation consists entirely of adequate ideas and, thus, follows the order of the intellect. The trouble with this suggestion is that practical deliberation must consist at least partly of inadequate ideas. The basis for this claim is the argument, sketched in Chapter 6, that reason's guidance cannot determine any specific action. In short, any practical deliberation that determines a specific action or volition must take account of things that cannot be conceived through adequate ideas, particular finite things and our position in space and time. For instance, in deciding whether to take the second helping of dessert, I will probably consider whether the calories consumed would exceed my daily allowance, whether my host will be offended by my refusal, things that we only represent through inadequate ideas. While I can deliberate without considering these specific concerns, my deliberation must take into account at least some particular features of my situation, for instance, that I am seated in the house of a friend who is holding a plate of cheesecake; otherwise, there is

inevitably be governed, to some degree, by principles of imagination. Since all of our ideas have some degree of adequacy, it follows that principles of logical entailment exert some influence over all our ideas. However, the extent to which these principles determine our thought processes depends on the kind and strength of our ideas: the more adequate our ideas and the stronger they are, the more our thinking will follow logical principles.

nothing to deliberate about. For this reason, it is important to distinguish rational deliberation from the guidance of reason, which consists in purely adequate ideas of how we ought to act. While Spinoza allows for the possibility of general deliberation that does not take account of specific situations – for instance, considering whether people generally should act with kindness toward others – this is importantly different from what I am calling rational deliberation, for this general deliberation cannot lead to specific actions, which entails that it isn't practical, at least, not in the same sense. For instance, suppose that I decide that one generally should act with kindness entirely on the basis of adequate ideas, such as my adequate idea of human nature. In order to put this principle into practice, I must consider particular situations to identify opportunities for kindness and what particular actions, gestures and bodily movements would constitute acting with kindness. Consequently, deliberation at this level cannot prescribe any particular action.

It does not follow that practical deliberation is necessarily irrational. For an idea to be irrational – that is, opposed to reason – its content must be inconsistent with the content of adequate ideas. Certainly some inadequate ideas are inconsistent in this way: for instance, an inadequate idea representing God as acting with intentions contradicts adequate ideas of God's nature. However, my idea that I am sitting at my computer, though inadequate, does not contradict adequate ideas; since reason does not represent such particular things, it has nothing to say on this point one way or the other. Furthermore, some inadequate ideas can reinforce adequate ones. For instance, I might conclude that God does not act with intentions on the basis of inadequate ideas of experience, which represent nature as disordered and unplanned. Spinoza acknowledges this point when he claims that passive emotions, which are a kind of inadequate idea, can lead us to all the same actions as reason (4p59).

If rational deliberation necessarily involves inadequate ideas, how, then, can practical deliberation be rational? Since reason guides action by directing us to what increases our power or our good, rational deliberation is best understood as deliberation guided by adequate ideas of our good, in other words, true knowledge of good and bad. By 'guided by' I mean that the ultimate outcome of one's deliberation is determined by these adequate ideas without opposition from inconsistent inadequate ideas. According to this view, whether or not practical deliberation is rational has less to do with the presence of inadequate ideas than with their agreement with adequate ideas. This reading is supported by Spinoza's claim that reason contributes to deliberation by focusing our attention on what is good. "In

arranging our thoughts and images we should always concentrate on that which is good in every single thing" (5p10s). In this vein, he claims that failed lives, devoted to honor, ambition and riches, arise from the failure to understand and focus on the good:

> For example, if anyone sees that he is devoted overmuch to the pursuit of honor, let him reflect on its proper function, and the purpose for which it ought to be pursued, and the means by which it can be attained, and not on its abuse and hollowness and the fickleness of mankind and the like, on which nobody reflects except from a morbid disposition. It is by thoughts like these that the most ambitious especially torment themselves and when they despair of attaining the honor that they covet, and in vomiting forth their anger they try to make some show of wisdom. (5p10s)

According to this discussion, a basic requirement for rational deliberation is that our adequate ideas of the good overpower contradictory inadequate ideas of the good. To illustrate this point, consider the example of Greedy, who tends to act for the attainment of material things – expensive clothes, cars, jewelry. Since our volitions arise from the power of our ideas, this is because Greedy's ideas represent her good as consisting in the acquisition of material things. Since adequate ideas inform Greedy's deliberation by representing her true good as consisting not in riches, but rather in rational understanding, they conflict with the ideas that motivate Greedy's behavior. So, engaging in rational deliberation requires that her adequate ideas overpower her irrational ideas, thereby dominating her deliberation and inclining her to act for the attainment of greater understanding rather than for material acquisition.

One might question precisely how adequate and inadequate ideas interact in this case: what does it mean for one to oppose or overturn the other? While Spinoza is not clear, a likely answer is that adequate ideas correct the representational content of conflicting inadequate ideas. Spinoza's thinking about sensation provides a helpful example of this. He holds that ideas derived from sensation are prone to confusion, among other reasons, because they represent things according to the way our body is affected (2p16). "For imagination is an idea that represents the present disposition of the human body more than the nature of an external body, not indeed distinctly, but confusedly, whence it comes about that the mind is said to err" (4p1s). To illustrate the point, Spinoza offers the example of our sensory representation of the sun:

> When we gaze at the sun, we see it as some two hundred feet distant from us . . . It is not our ignorance of its true distance that causes us to see the sun to be so near;

it is that the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun only to the extent that the body is affected by it. (2p35s; the example is revisited in 4p1s)

For our discussion, the important point is that these confusions can be corrected by reason; "with knowledge of the distance, the error is removed" (4p1s). To illustrate this point, it is helpful to turn to a different example, where the error is removed by more obviously adequate ideas. Consider my idea of a particular body, say, a desk. While my inadequate idea from experience represents the desk as black, my adequate ideas of bodies indicate that bodily things are essentially extended.[12] On this basis, we conclude that, while the desk appears to be black, this is only because of the way that the desk is extended and, consequently, reflects the light, which affects our sensory organs. In this way, adequate ideas influence my idea of the desk so that I conceive of the desk as only appearing to be black.[13] Similarly, in the practical case, an adequate idea can correct the content of opposing inadequate ideas, for instance, by indicating that material things only appear to be good because we derive joy from the superficial esteem of irrational people, which does not really benefit us.[14]

We should keep in mind that adequate ideas inform deliberation not only by correcting our understanding of the good, but also by directing our thought processes in accordance with rational rather than imaginative principles. When Greedy's adequate ideas of her good dominate, her thoughts focus on the logical implications and, thus, causal consequences of ideas, leading her to consider the consequences of the actions to which her ideas direct her. Since we are naturally inclined to consider our good (3p12), this will incline Greedy to consider how her greedy behavior ultimately affects her power. Spinoza holds that merely imagining the harmful consequences of action gives rise to immediate sorrow (3p18), which entails that reflection will inevitably incline Greedy to redirect her behavior. In this respect, adequate ideas lead her to engage in reflective life planning, guided by consideration of one's good. On the other hand, when Greedy's

[12] In this way, we can use reason to make our inadequate ideas more adequate.

[13] Of course, the desk will still continue to look black, just as the sun will continue to look as though it is only 200 feet away; "although we know the sun's true distance, we shall nevertheless see it as being close to us" (4p1s).

[14] Of course, one's idea of the good, adequate or not, could not completely dominate one's behavior, unless it were extraordinarily powerful. For the idea would have to be strong enough to influence all of one's particular ideas. Given the variety of causal forces at play in Spinoza's psychology, it seems unlikely that all of one's ideas could ever be so influenced by an idea of the good. It is more likely that people have multiple competing conceptions of the good that hold in different domains. At home Greedy may understand her good as requiring that she treat the people around her with dignity and respect, whereas, at work she may operate under a conception of her good in terms of professional success, which requires her not to treat people in this way.

inadequate ideas dominate, her thought processes proceed according to imaginative principles: she focuses on experienced associations, such as the presumably joyful images and feelings that she associates with material acquisition; she tends to imitate the emotional responses of others, for instance, the joy that others derive from material acquisition. Without adequate ideas directing her to consider consequences, there is little to incline Greedy to plan her life, so that her behavior is more the result of knee-jerk responses to the things that she associates with joy. In this way, the example vividly demonstrates how failures of virtue are connected to failures of freedom and autonomy. Of course, this imaginative deliberation could lead her to rational outcomes as well. In an antimaterialistic society, these imaginative processes could lead Greedy to imitate the emotions of others and to associate material gain with shame, steering her away from harmful materialistic behaviors. On the other hand, adequate ideas of the good are guaranteed to lead Greedy to her true good, regardless of her environment.

9.3 RATIONAL DELIBERATION AND THE IMAGINATION

Since rational deliberation always involves inadequate ideas, it is always guided, to some extent, by principles of the imagination. One might conclude from this that inadequate ideas are a kind of necessary evil, an inescapable aspect of practical deliberation that serves only to interfere in rationality. While inadequate ideas can interfere with reason, one should recognize that they also provide essential and positive contributions to practical reason because they are our only source of knowledge about particular things.[15] In this respect, inadequate ideas compensate for a natural weakness of human reason. The weakness is not just that human reason cannot understand particular things, but, more specifically, that it cannot understand particular goods. While reason guides us to actions in the sense of indicating that they are good for us, it determines the good from an adequate idea of human nature generally, which represents only traits that are shared by all people. It follows that adequate ideas only indicate our general good, that is, what is good for all people – for instance, that we

[15] This section provides an alternative to the notion that Spinoza's characterization of humans as necessarily passive is "depressing" (Donagan 1988, 163) or "pathetic" (Nadler 2006, 212). I am more in sympathy with those who read Spinoza as assigning a more positive role to inadequate ideas, particularly to the imagination, such as Garrett (2003, 182–7), Lloyd (1994, 50–2) and Moreau (1994). None of these commentators consider how inadequate ideas, specifically the passions, contribute to practical deliberation and ethical life.

benefit from the rationality of others. But there are also particular goods, since the *conatus* of each person is expressed in the particular bodily proportion of motion-and-rest to which she strives, which is individual: consider one's fingerprints or the neural composition that determines one's particular personality. For instance, because of my particular personality, I may benefit more from owning a dog than others.

It follows that inadequate ideas are important to rational deliberation because they fill these critical gaps in reason's guidance, in two ways. First, inadequate ideas provide information that is necessary for interpreting and applying reason's dictates. For example, consider the main dictate of reason, that we should increase our power, a dictate so general that it scarcely provides any direction for how to act in a given situation. Putting this dictate into practice requires us to make particular judgments, most notably, about how particular actions increase our power, which means considering their possible consequences. Furthermore, we must identify particular instances of the general concepts employed by reason. So, if adequate ideas indicate that it is good to surround ourselves with rational people or to love God, then we must determine which people are rational or whether love of a particular person indicates love of God or mere lust. Since inadequate ideas are the only source of these judgments, they are essential for applying reason's guidance and, thus, choosing how to act in a rational way.

Second, inadequate ideas indicate whether we should follow reason's guidance. The fact that reason's guidance is so general entails not only that it is hard to interpret, but also that it is not necessarily rational to act on it. This claim is not as paradoxical as it seems, for the rational action is the most beneficial, which may, in certain circumstances, not be the action that benefits human nature generally. For example, while it generally benefits human nature to treat others with kindness, there are particular circumstances where doing so also leads to harmful consequences, sufficiently harmful to outweigh any benefit from the kindness. Remember, the second natural law of benevolence indicates not that we should always act with benevolence, but rather that benevolence is always beneficial. Consequently, whether it is best to act with benevolence depends on how the benefit of doing so stacks up against other possible benefits and harms, many of which are particular to us and our situation. Since reason takes no account of such particular things, it is not always rational to follow reason's guidance. This general line of reasoning is supported by Spinoza's suggestion that experience is valuable because it provides us with the practical knowledge that helps us to navigate the world. "The advantage we

get from things external to us" includes the "experience and knowledge we gain from observing them and changing them from one form to another" (4app27).

This conclusion helps to clarify the extent to which rational deliberation ought to be partial, picking up on my discussion from Chapter 6, which left unclear precisely how one should balance the impartial perspective of reason and the partial practical perspective in choosing one's actions. We can now see that rational deliberation must move back and forth between these perspectives, since the rational is necessary to understanding our good and the practical is necessary to choosing our actions. If done properly, rational deliberation should attend to the strengths of each perspective: since the perspective of reason indicates the nature of our good, we should adopt this impartial perspective to measure the value of our activities and other goods, while adopting the more partial practical perspective only in assessing the particular situation at hand to determine how best to pursue one's good and to consider the possibility that one's good may be harmed by particular things, which reason overlooks. It follows that partial concerns have no role to play in determining the nature of the good, the ends and the activities that are valuable for humans. This means that one should not conclude, on the basis of one's particular attachments, that a good life consists in a relationship with some particular person. Rather, the rational perspective recognizes that all people have value, in virtue of their rational capacities, such that a good life must be planned with concern for how one's priorities and activities affect all people. Consequently, a rational person would regard it as unacceptable to devote one's life entirely to the good of a particular set of individuals without regard to others, like a mob boss, whose generosity toward his family is made possible by harming others, or a patriot, who benefits the people of his own country at the expense of foreigners. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to consider one's particular attachments from the practical perspective by considering specifically how to act for one's good. This is because our attachments indicate the particular ways that we benefit from the things around us, for instance, that the rationality of my spouse contributes to my own rationality and, thus, is particularly beneficial to me, more beneficial than the rationality of a stranger or a person half way around the globe. This is not to open the door completely to partial reasoning, since Spinoza's ethics only approves of those attachments that contribute to our rationality and to the extent that doing so is consistent with reason. For Spinoza, it is not acceptable to promote one's spouse's rationality by, say, exploiting others, since this exploitation also harms our rationality because it disregards the value of

others. In this respect, the rational perspective constrains and determines acceptable forms of partiality in practical deliberation. According to this view, I should only act partially for the good of my family to the extent that they genuinely promote my rationality and to the extent that doing so does not require me to act contrary to the dictates of reason, for instance, by harming others. In this way, Spinoza leaves important roles for both partiality and impartiality in moral reasoning.

Understanding the distinctive contribution of adequate and inadequate ideas to rational deliberation shows the importance of a particular kind of inadequate idea, passive affects or passions.[16] As we have seen, passive affects are inadequate ideas corresponding to changes in our power, which entails that they serve as a barometer of our perfection, one which we may use to determine what things and activities are good. In fact, Spinoza claims that the emotions, including the passions, provide knowledge of how our power is affected: "knowledge of good and bad is nothing but the emotions of joy and sorrow, insofar as we are conscious of them" (4p8). The reasoning for this claim is that the emotions, corresponding to changes in our power, represent these changes and – since knowing a thing entails representing its causes – the causes of the changes, in other words, good and bad things. On this view, the joy I experience from reading philosophy represents and, maybe even provides knowledge, that doing so is good for me. This sort of representation provides crucial feedback for determining whether one has correctly implemented reason's guidance. To use the previous example, suppose that I decide to seek out friendship with a person whom I judge to be rational. Since this judgment can only be based on inadequate ideas of experience, I cannot be completely certain that I have judged correctly. I can only evaluate this choice, then, by considering whether the friendship is promoting my power, which, in turn, I can only determine through my affects, ideas representing how my relationship with the person changes my power. This partly explains why Spinoza emphasizes the importance of "always acting from the emotion of joy" (5p10s), because it provides a guide to rational action.

One might object that passions cannot be reliable barometers of our perfection, on the grounds that Spinoza regards some joys as bad and some sorrows as good. If a joy is bad, then it must decrease my perfection. Since joy is supposed to indicate an increase in my perfection – "joy is not in itself bad, but good" (4p41) – a bad joy must be an unreliable indicator of

[16] In the seventeenth century it was generally understood that passions or, at least, affects were an important part of our capacity to respond to the world. See James (2006, 201).

perfection; conversely, if a sorrow is good, then it increases my perfection and, thus, the sorrow too must be unreliable.[17] To respond to this objection, we must first consider Spinoza's view on bad joys and good sorrows. We may focus our attention on bad joys, since he claims that sorrow is only good insofar as it checks bad joy. Spinoza explains that a particular kind of joy, *titillatio*, can be bad because it "is related to man when part of him is affected more than others" (3p11s). Spinoza argues that this can create an imbalance which actually decreases the body's power of activity: "The power of this emotion can be so great as to surpass the other activities of the body" (4p43d). Thus, *titillatio* is bad in the sense of 'excessive.' Consider an example of excessive *titillatio*: my joy from eating can become excessive if I eat to the point that it is detrimental to my health, decreasing my ability to act.

There is a prima facie difficulty with this explanation, for it is not clear how *titillatio* qualifies as a kind of joy, if it decreases one's power. The key to a Spinozistic resolution is his claim above that excess joy is related to a particular part of the body: one receives joy from even excessive eating because it accompanies an increased power of activity in some part of the body, namely the part occupied with digestion.[18] Excessive eating makes one a more powerful eater, able to digest more food and store more energy. The problem is that this localized increase in power disrupts the proportion of motion-and-rest for the entire body, thereby decreasing the net power of the entire bodily system. Consequently, even bad joys can still be regarded as accurate barometers of perfection: *titillatio* reliably tracks a *localized* increase in one's power of activity, for instance, the power of a particular region or system of the body.[19]

This explanation for how bad *titillatio* accurately tracks perfection can be generalized to Spinoza's other examples of bad joy, most of which are kinds of love. Since love is joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause (3p13s), we can explain the varieties of bad love as joy, in the sense of *titillatio*, accompanied by the idea of an external cause: "therefore *titillatio* accompanied by the idea of an external cause is love, and thus love can be excessive" (4p44d). In other words, love can become bad when it

[17] Bidney recognizes this problem but regards it as insoluble (1940, 304).

[18] My claim here presupposes that a passive joy accompanies some increase in the power of the body. It follows from parallelism that the corresponding inadequate idea also involves an increase in one's power. One might question how having inadequate ideas, which entails being passive to external ideas, could involve being active at all. As I have explained, all of our ideas are adequate to some degree. In other words, inadequate ideas have some degree of adequacy. For further discussion of the possibility of how to make sense of passive increases in our power, see Kisner (2008).

[19] This point is recognized by Hoffman (1991, 175).

corresponds to localized increases in power which disrupt the entire body's power of activity. The immoderate loves (*ebrietas*, *libido* and *avaritia*) offer obvious examples, since one's sensual powers are heightened, at the expense of one's other powers, namely reason (3p56s). The only bad joys which do not qualify as love are joys accompanied by the idea of an *internal* cause: pride (*superbia*) (3p26s) and passive self-contentment (3p30s). While these joys are different in that they involve ideas of the self, they can just as easily be explained as kinds of *titillatio*. 4app30 indicates that Spinoza intends to explain all bad joys (and desires) in this way: "since joy is usually related to one part of the body in particular, the emotions of joy (unless one exercises reason and care), and, consequently, the desires that are generated from them, can be excessive" (see also 4p60).

On the basis of this discussion, we can say that Spinoza's inclusion of bad joy is not only consistent with, but also a consequence of claiming that joy tracks perfection. Following a strong naturalistic line, Spinoza intends many of his claims about human beings to apply univocally to all things, including each of the various parts and systems of our body: just as we have a *conatus*, each part of our body, insofar as it tends to persist in its existence, has a *conatus* as well. Just as our *conatus* undergoes changes in its power of activity, so too will the *conatus* of the parts of our body. Each of these changes will have a corresponding idea of joy or sorrow in the human mind. Furthermore, since some global decreases of power for the entire human body will inevitably be accompanied (or caused) by localized increases of power from its parts, it follows that some localized joys will also accompany (or even contribute to) global sorrows.[20] The important point is that Spinoza is committed to this conclusion in part because he is committed to the view that joy accurately tracks changes in perfection (for each system of the body).

The foregoing provides us with a more specific picture of how the passions contribute to rational deliberation. At any time, the mind contains any number of joys and sorrows corresponding to changes in the power of various parts of the body. Although we may be conscious of many of these ideas, the only ideas that track our perfection correspond to the power of activity for our entire being, its proportion of motion-and-rest. This requires us to discriminate the joys that are consistent with the flourishing of the entire body from those which are not. Such discrimination would

[20] This also explains why Spinoza holds that *hilaritas*, in which all parts of the body are equally affected with pleasure (3p11s), "is conceived more easily than it is observed" (4p44s): how often will every part and system of the body simultaneously increase in power?

be facilitated by the fact that, according to Spinoza's theory, any harmful localized joy should be accompanied by sorrow, corresponding to the overall decrease in one's power of activity. For example, although one may feel joy from excessive sensual joys, there will also be sorrow from the resulting neglect of his rational nature. Rational deliberation, then, requires sorting through and discriminating among the passions in this way. So, suppose that one wants to determine whether his relationship is harmful or not. If the relationship gives him joy, he would know that his perfection is increased in some way. However, since it could be a destructive joy, in the sense of *titillatio*, he would need to consider whether it is fundamentally sensual in nature, related to only one part of the body, or whether it was balanced in a way that reflected the well-being of the entire body and contributed to reasoning. While the passions may not provide perfect guidance on these matters, they provide the only available evidence for judging them.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explained the psychological processes by which we determine the actions that best promote our good and, thus, our freedom. Spinoza generally understands practical deliberation as consisting in the interplay between ideas inclining us to act, which entails that our ultimate action is determined to a great extent by our most powerful ideas. Furthermore, how deliberation unfolds depends on the adequacy of the ideas involved. When our ideas are adequate, our deliberation is based on certain representations, leads us to actions that benefit us and directs our train of thought in accordance with rational principles. Because of this last point, deliberating with adequate ideas inclines us to consider the logical consequences of our ideas and the causal consequences of possible actions. When our ideas are inadequate, our deliberation is based on less certain representations, which direct our thoughts according to imaginative principles and are less likely to direct us to beneficial actions. These principles are generally derived from the characteristic way that we form ideas based on bodily impressions. Because bodily impressions are imprecise, ideas formed from them tend to associate things that are connected in time and space and have similar effects on the body. The imprecision of bodily impressions also inclines us to confuse our own emotional states with those of others, which leads to empathy. Consequently, inadequate ideas incline us to deliberate on the basis of experienced associations and similarities, as well as empathic responses.

On this basis, one might suppose that rational deliberation consists entirely of adequate ideas and completely follows logical principles. However, rational deliberation is ultimately concerned with particular actions, which cannot be represented through adequate ideas. Consequently, we must distinguish between the practical guidance of reason, general practical directives derived from adequate ideas, and rational deliberation, the deliberative processes by which we decide the particular course of action that best promotes our power, which necessarily involves inadequate ideas representing the particular features of our situation. While rational deliberation is not purely adequate, it can still qualify as rational when it is guided by reason in the sense that adequate ideas of our good direct us to action, thereby overpowering any opposing inadequate ideas.

This account of rational deliberation entails that inadequate ideas can make a positive contribution to our rationality in the sense of helping us to act in accordance with the guidance of reason, which is consistent with the general theme of this book that human freedom involves passivity. In particular, inadequate ideas contribute to rational deliberation in three ways: first, they help us to determine how to apply reason's guidance to particular situations; second, they determine whether there are mitigating circumstances that prevent reason's guidance from being applicable to specific situations; third, they provide feedback on whether we are acting in accordance with our good by indicating the state of our bodies' perfection. This last point specifically involves the contribution of the passions of joy and sorrow, which indicate increases and decreases in our perfection respectively. One might think that the passions cannot provide reliable representation in this regard, since Spinoza claims that some joys are bad and some sorrows good. However, he upholds this claim because some parts of the body can increase in power, increasing our joy at the expense of our total bodily power, which entails that bad joys will always be accompanied by greater sorrow. It follows that rational deliberation involves interpreting our emotions to distinguish the appropriate feedback on our degree of perfection and how it is affected by external things.

CHAPTER 10

The character of freedom

When we are rational, employing the deliberative processes described in the previous chapter, how, according to Spinoza, do we act? As I have argued, we cannot fully answer this question by taking an inventory of reason's practical guidance, since how we interpret and apply it depends on the particular situation. It is not surprising, then, that Spinoza's most developed views on rational action are contained in his account of the virtuous character, which indicates general rational dispositions and tendencies in action. This chapter explains Spinoza's understanding of this character, what he calls "*fortitudo*" (3p59s), usually translated as "strength of character." I argue that the virtuous character should be understood as affective dispositions to act, arising from adequate ideas representing our good. Since these ideas are also the source of the natural law, these tendencies can be understood as the dispositions to follow the natural law. A central conclusion of this chapter is that our passivity plays a central role in Spinoza's understanding of the virtuous character. This is because we develop the virtuous character by using reason to direct natural tendencies, which arise from our dependence on external things, namely the tendencies to seek joy and to please others. It follows that Spinoza's account of the virtuous character indicates how necessarily passive beings should implement reason's guidance, thereby providing a picture of living, human freedom.

The first section argues that we should understand *fortitudo* as describing a virtuous character and explains what this means in the context of Spinoza's psychology and ethics. The next two sections each examine one of the two specific traits of the virtuous character, courage (*animositas*) and generosity (*generositas*).[1] The chapter concludes by considering what light this investigation sheds on the virtuous and free life.

[1] In translating Spinoza's terms for the various character traits, I tend to use the most pedestrian translation, which is the route generally taken by Shirley. One should note that these terms sometimes have more specific meanings in other works to which Spinoza may have been responding, such as Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*. I choose not to attempt to pack this understanding into the translation

10.1 FORTITUDO

While the term '*fortitudo*' appears only once in the *Ethics* (3p59s), Spinoza assigns it great importance.[2] The penultimate proposition of the *Ethics* insists that a rational person will regard courage and generosity "as being of prime importance" (5p41). The reason is that *fortitudo* is responsible for "all the activities which follow from emotions that are related to the mind insofar as it exercises understanding" (3p59s). Since "understanding is the first and only basis of virtue" (4p26d), it follows that *fortitudo* is the basis for all virtuous activity. More specifically, it is the affective tendencies that incline us to virtuous behavior, what we would call a virtuous character. Indeed, *fortitudo* includes stock traits of such a character, for instance, courage, temperance and mercy.[3] The virtuous character is particularly important to Spinoza's ethics because, unlike the now dominant ethical theories, utilitarianism and deontology, Spinoza's ethics is not act-focused, ultimately concerned with determining the rightness or wrongness of acts, but rather, character-focused. While this commitment is implicit in Spinoza's perfectionism and eudaimonism, he states it explicitly in a letter to Blyenbergh, arguing that acts are only right or wrong in virtue of the character traits that they reflect:

> Nero's matricide, insofar as it contained something positive, was not a crime; for Orestes too performed the same outward act and had the same intention of killing his mother, and yet he is not blamed, or at least not as Nero. What, then, was Nero's crime? Nothing else than that by that deed he showed that he was ungrateful, devoid of compassion and obedience. (letter 23)

Although Spinoza thinks that character is ethically important, he offers no systematic theory or, even, term for it. Rather, he lumps character traits together with his account of the affects, so that traditional virtues such as temperance and courage are treated alongside sorrow and joy, without marking any difference in kind between them. However, Spinoza's

of the term, on the grounds that Spinoza would not expect his readers to be familiar with these works. One should also note that these terms usually have more specific meanings within Spinoza's ethical system, but again I prefer to uncover these by considering Spinoza's use and explanation of the term, rather than trying to pack any special meaning into the translation itself. I occasionally leave terms in the Latin, when translation is vexed or when the most straightforward translation has problematic English connotations.

[2] He does use the term in the *TP* to describe the "virtue of a private citizen" (1, 6).

[3] Though Spinoza's classification of these traits is unusual. Most notably, *fortitudo* is usually regarded as just one trait of the virtuous character, whereas Spinoza holds that all virtuous traits are kinds of *fortitudo*. Although this reclassification is provocative, it is unclear to me what, if any, significance it has. Spinoza also omits from *fortitudo* common virtues, such as justice and prudence.

character traits require more explanation than simple affects, first, because character traits are more strongly associated with actions than are affects generally.[4] Indeed, his character traits are often defined by the particular actions to which they give rise, rather than by a feeling or affective state. For instance, sobriety (*sobrietas*) is characterized by the tendency to avoid excessive drinking as much as a characteristic feeling. This is different from, say, sorrow, which is not necessarily linked to particular actions. Second, character traits are more settled dispositions to act than other affects. Whereas one only needs to be sad at a given moment to qualify as sad, we do not say that one has sobriety unless she demonstrates a consistent tendency to forgo excessive drinking.

Nevertheless, Spinoza's inclusion of character traits under the umbrella of affects implies that we should look to his theory of the affects to explain such distinctive properties of character traits. Both properties can be explained by Spinoza's understanding of affects as kinds of ideas, which contain the volitional power that moves us to act. With respect to the first trait, it follows that affects can serve as dispositions to act because, as ideas, they contain the volitional power that motivates and inclines our actions. For example, consider ambition (*ambitio*), which, for Spinoza, is an affect, more specifically, the desire for honor (3DOE 44). This desire must be the causal power of some idea or ideas that move us to seek out and act for the sake of honor, which entails that the affect of ambition is more or less equivalent to the disposition to act for the sake of honor. With respect to the second trait, affects can become settled or persistent dispositions, in other words, character traits, when they arise from ideas that are particularly powerful, exerting a strong and persistent influence over us. So, an ambitious person would be one who has extremely powerful ideas that provide him with persistent desires to act for the sake of his honor. According to this reading, character traits are kinds of affects, though they tend to be affects arising from powerful ideas that incline us to particular actions.

What would it mean, then, to have a specifically virtuous character? Since our virtue is equivalent to our power, the virtuous character must arise from ideas inclining us to act in ways that promote our power, which are adequate ideas. More specifically, this character must arise from adequate ideas of our good, since these are the adequate ideas that direct our action. Because adequate ideas of the good are also the source of the natural law, we can understand the virtuous character as the practical

[4] I depart here from Bidney, who argues that there is no difference between a character trait and affect (1940, 304).

dispositions of a person who has ideas dictating the natural law or, to put it more simply, the tendency to act in accordance with the law. This suggests that there is an important connection between the virtuous character and the natural law, for the former are the behavioral dispositions of one who recognizes the latter. This suggestion explains why Spinoza calls the virtuous character "the true freedom of man" (4p73s), to show that human freedom, unlike the freedom of a completely self-determined and rational free man, consists in general dispositions to act in accordance with certain general guidelines and values, rather than following strict rules. If this suggestion is correct, then understanding the virtuous character helps to fill a gap in our understanding of Spinoza's ethics by explaining how rational people implement natural laws, which, as we have seen, are too general and abstract to admit univocal application. To understand these tendencies, the next two sections consider the traits of the virtuous character more closely.

10.2 COURAGE

Courage is defined as the self-interested desire to act from reason, more specifically, to preserve one's being according to the dictates of reason (3p59s). For this reason, Spinoza's *animositas* should be distinguished from the common English meaning of 'courage,' a willingness to face danger. Indeed, Spinoza frowns on "blind daring," bravery for bravery's sake (4p69d).[5] Perhaps to mark the distinction between his *animositas* and this common notion of courage, Spinoza is adamant that *animositas* is consistent with running from a fight: "the free man chooses flight by the same courage or spiritedness that he chooses battle" (4p69c). Nevertheless, his *animositas* is like courage in one important respect, that it combats fear, since Spinoza understands fear as an irrational emotion (4p47s). Thus, Spinoza claims that "we ought to reflect on courage to banish fear" (5p10s). It follows that a courageous person is one who isn't intimidated and keeps a cool head in crisis, what Spinoza calls "resourcefulness in danger [*animi in periculis*]" (3p59s).

According to the previous section, courage should be understood as the affective dispositions that arise from recognizing some natural law, or, at least, the ideas that are its basis. While there is no reason to think that there is necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between virtuous character traits and natural laws, courage certainly appears to map on to the first of

[5] On this point, Bidney (1940, 308–9) shows that Spinoza follows Descartes in denying the Thomistic account of courage.

the two primary natural laws in 4p18s, "to preserve one's own being . . . in accordance with laws of one's own nature," in other words, in accordance with reason. It follows that courage, like the natural law, must arise from adequate ideas representing our good. We ought to be able to identify the specific ideas, since there must be a close connection between the virtuous disposition to act and the content of the adequate idea at its source. The reasoning behind this claim rests on Spinoza's understanding of ideas as essentially representational, "conceptions of the mind" (2def3).[6] Since ideas move us to act from their power or essence, it follows that they must move us to act on the basis of their representations and, thus, their content, which entails a connection between the representational content of our ideas and their volitions. For example, the idea that moves us to drink a glass of water must arise from an idea representing it as delicious, thirst-quenching or healthy.[7] Otherwise, ideas would have a power to move us independently of their representational power, which would be inconsistent with their representational essence. For instance, if an idea representing a glass of water as poisonous were to move us to drink anyway, it would have to possess some power independent of and at odds with its representational power.

It follows that the virtuous tendency to act with courage must be motivated by the content of some adequate idea. What, then, is this adequate idea? Since courage is the desire to preserve one's being according to the guidance of reason, courage is likely brought about by an adequate idea representing that it is good to do so. Assuming that the propositions of the *Ethics* are derived from adequate ideas, 4p24 indicates the relevant content: "to act in absolute conformity with virtue is nothing else in us but to act, to live, to preserve one's own being (these three mean the same) under the guidance of reason, on the basis of seeking one's own advantage." In other words, courage is the affective disposition to act that arises from understanding this proposition. In this way, my reading explains Spinoza's justification for regarding courage as virtuous, indeed, its precise demonstration: 4p24d.

The foregoing reading has the benefit of making sense of Spinoza's otherwise confusing taxonomy of courage, which includes such diverse traits as piety (*pietas*), temperance (*temperantia*), sobriety (3p59s) and religion (*religio*) (5p41). According to my reading, adequate ideas representing our good provide the power, in the form of desires (specific strivings), that

[6] On the importance of this point, see Della Rocca (1996a, 100).
[7] This view is more fully developed and defended in Della Rocca (2008a).

moves us to virtuous action. This suggests that the particular traits of the virtuous character are desires arising from and corresponding to specific aspects of adequate ideas representing our good, in other words, specific knowledge of our good. Since courage, according to this hypothesis, is a kind of desire for our good (specifically, the desire to act for our good from the dictates of reason), arising from specific knowledge of what benefits us (following the dictates of reason), it follows that the forms of courage are more specific desires to follow reason, corresponding to more specific knowledge of how following reason is beneficial. This is most obviously the case with piety, the desire to do good that arises from living in accordance with the guidance of reason (4p37s1), since this is a rational desire and, thus, a specific form of the desire to follow reason's guidance. This desire would naturally correspond to the knowledge that the guidance of reason is good for us (4p24), the same knowledge that motivates courage generally.[8] Since sobriety and temperance are also rational desires – to avoid harmful excessive desires – they are also kinds of courage, corresponding to the knowledge that such desires are harmful, which is indicated by 3p56s.[9] Finally, religion, the desire arising from knowledge of God (4p37s1), qualifies as a more specific form of the desire to follow reason, because the desire, arising from knowledge, is rational. Consequently, religion would seem to arise from adequate ideas representing God's nature (for instance, 1p16).

This reading draws attention to the important psychological role that knowledge of the good plays in acquiring courage. Spinoza claims that we have a natural tendency to seek joy, because we naturally strive to increase our power and perfection (3p12), which is the source of joy (3DOE 3). However, this tendency does not necessarily lead to virtue, since some joys do not increase our power, namely *titillatio*, which disrupts the proper functioning of the body (4p60), as I argued in the previous chapter. Knowledge of the good, then, is important because it directs and channels this tendency so that we only seek joy that indicates the body's true good. This claim is most evident in Spinoza's view of two particular forms of courage, sobriety and temperance. Spinoza holds that these traits oppose immoderate desires that arise from one's natural tendency to seek out joy: the former opposes

[8] In fact, it is hard to see how piety and courage are different. One could interpret piety more broadly such that it is both self-interested and other-interested, whereas courage is only self-interested, though I am disinclined to this reading since Spinoza holds that helping others is self-interested, such that other-interest is a form of self-interest. Rather, I regard courage as the desire to benefit oneself by following reason, and piety as the resulting desire to do good that arises from acting in accordance with reason.

[9] 3p56s shows, more specifically, that such desires are caused by external things and, as such, are passive.

drunkenness, while the latter opposes both luxury (an immoderate love of riches) and lust (immoderate love of sex) (3p56s).[10] Since these desires can lead to *titillatio*, we require adequate ideas of the good to direct our natural tendencies so that we avoid harmful desires. More specifically, these ideas show that certain joys can be excessive and that our true good consists in understanding, which does not require drink, sex and riches.[11] This knowledge redirects our tendency to seek out joy so that we only desire those things that truly benefit us, thereby developing the disposition to avoid excessive joys, in other words, sobriety and temperance.

Now that we understand how to make sense of courage in the context of Spinoza's psychology and ethics, what does it tell us about a virtuous and free life? To begin, a courageous person follows the first law of nature by avoiding excessive pleasures from the recognition that they are harmful. It is important to note that the tendency to indulge these pleasures is harmful not only because it disrupts the body, but also because it leads to activities that preoccupy and engage the mind to the neglect of our true good: understanding. For instance, a drunkard may devote himself almost exclusively to drinking. The problem is not just that the drunk doesn't spend time reasoning, but also that he fails to engage in those activities that are necessary to developing rationality. A drunk will not, for instance, devote time to cultivating the friendships that encourage rational behavior. Rather, he is prone to finding friends who share his immoderate desires, exacerbating the problem.

While Spinoza's treatment of courage emphasizes moderation, it does not follow that courage is prudish or ascetic. Although Spinoza's own tastes were simple, he is clear that sensual pleasures are good for us to the extent that they contribute to the well-being of the entire body.[12] Indeed, he vigorously opposes the self-deprivation of asceticism by claiming that we need to engage to some degree in a wide variety of activities in order to care for the various parts and systems in our body. Consequently, he holds that self-deprivation, since it rules out whole categories of activities as impermissible, is as likely to throw off the balance of our body as is excessive pleasure.

[10] See also 3DOE 48. While Spinoza claims that these pairs of traits (drunkenness, sobriety and so forth) are not opposites in the sense that they do not take opposing objects, they are clearly opposites in the sense of leading us to opposite actions.

[11] My claims here should not be taken as denying the phenomena of *akrasia*. We often do not act in the way that we judge to be best because our adequate ideas of our good can still be overpowered by contrary external forces, as argued by Lin (2006a). Thus, there are other reasons one may fail to demonstrate these traits, aside from lacking adequate ideas.

[12] For a good sketch of Spinoza's own character, see Nadler (1999).

It is the part of the wise man, I say, to 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. For the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things. (4p45c2s; see also 4p63s)

Furthermore, Spinoza rejects the values of asceticism – hatred of pleasure, delighting in one's own pain, the virtue of self-punishment – on the grounds that joy is ultimately good: "Nothing forbids our joy except a savage and sad superstition" (4p45c2s). For Spinoza, courage combats excessive desires, not to prevent pleasure, but rather to increase it, for, as we saw in the previous chapter, rational deliberation focuses on our good with the aim of cultivating joy (5p10s).

This discussion highlights the affective aspect of courage.[13] While we have focused on the way that courage combats excessive desires, we should note that courage combats more generally any emotion opposed to reason, including the entire affective range of sorrows, including hate, anger and indignity (4p73s). Indeed, courage itself is not merely an intellectual recognition that reason benefits us, but also a form of joy that comes from increasing our power by using reason. From an affective perspective, then, the life of a courageous man is dominated by joy not only from benefiting himself, but also from the love of himself and the things that strengthen him. This gives the courageous a positive outlook.

In ordinary conversation he will beware of talking about the vices of mankind and will take care to speak only sparingly of human weakness, but will dwell on human virtue, or power, and the means to perfect it, so that men may thus endeavor as far as they can to live in accordance with reason's behest, not from fear of dislike, but motivated only by the emotion of pleasure. (4app25)

This focus on the positive is captured by Spinoza's claim that the life of the free man "is a meditation upon life," and that he "thinks of death least of all things" (4p67).

The importance of joy to a courageous life brings into relief one of the most important practical directives of Spinoza's philosophy: "he who

[13] Virtue theories regularly characterize virtue in terms of having certain affective states. For a discussion of the ancients' views on the matter, see Annas (1993, 53–66). For a discussion of early modern views, see James (2006).

lives by the guidance of reason endeavors as far as he can to repay with love or kindness [*modestia*] another's hatred, anger, contempt, towards himself" (4p46). Given the discussion above, the reason for this claim should be obvious. What could possibly be accomplished by returning anger with anger? Nothing, since anger is a form of sorrow that indicates harm to oneself. Harming oneself will not correct the harm caused by the anger of others. In this way, Spinoza's philosophy captures a moral message central to ethical and religious traditions throughout history: turn the other cheek; repay hate with love, one of Christ's teachings which Spinoza greatly admired. It is interesting that, for Spinoza, this claim is derived not just from the value of loving others, but also from a desire to avoid the harm to oneself that arises from experiencing hate and anger.

As a final point, we should note that a courageous person upholds certain intellectual virtues. First, since courage is the desire to use reason, a courageous person demonstrates intellectual curiosity, actively seeking out knowledge and shunning activities that stand in its way.[14] Second, the courageous person will be intellectually critical, demanding a justification for dogma, conventions and common beliefs, though she will criticize out of a love of knowledge, without anger or derision. Third, courage demands intellectual modesty. This is indicated by Spinoza's criticism of pride, where one undeservedly takes credit for an increase in her power (3p26s; 3DOE 28).[15] Since knowledge increases our power, pride includes making undeserved claims to knowledge. Consequently, a courageous person would recognize where his knowledge falls short, for instance, by recognizing that what appear to be flaws in nature really only reflect his own ignorance: "whatever he thinks of as injurious or bad, and also whatever seems impious, horrible, unjust and base arises from his conceiving things in a disturbed, fragmented and confused way" (4p73s). Intellectual modesty also entails giving credit where credit is due. Consequently, while a courageous person will avoid pride, she will also take credit for her own accomplishments and take pleasure in her own understanding. Indeed, Spinoza claims that taking pleasure in one's own understanding, self-contentment, "is in reality the highest object for which we can hope" (4p52s).[16]

[14] This seems to be part of Spinoza's basis for praising *religio* as virtuous, because it represents a tendency to see God as the cause of things and, thus, a kind of curiosity about God's metaphysical significance.

[15] While pride is a kind of joy, Spinoza's criticism of pride takes issue not with joy, but rather with misidentifying its cause.

[16] For a helpful discussion of these issues, see Rutherford (1999).

10.3 GENEROSITY

Spinoza defines *generositas* as "the desire whereby every individual, according to the dictates of reason alone, strives to assist others and make friends of them" (3p59s). In this respect, *generositas* is closer to the English 'generosity' than to its original meaning: of noble birth or nobility. According to my general reading of the virtuous character, generosity should be understood as the disposition of one who follows the natural law, which, in this case, appears to be the second natural law from 4p18s, to act for the good of others. In this respect, the two main virtuous traits, courage and generosity, correspond to the two main natural laws. As such, this disposition is best understood as arising from an adequate idea representing that it is good to benefit others. The content for such an idea is indicated in 4p37, and was discussed in Chapter 7: "the good which every man who pursues virtue aims at for himself he will also desire for the rest of mankind." Consequently, while generosity is other-regarding, it does not involve selflessness. It follows that generosity technically should qualify as a kind of courage, since acting to the benefit of others would also mean acting on the desire to follow reason for one's own benefit, though it makes good sense for Spinoza to treat generosity separately because it is also other-regarding.

Spinoza's main claims about the nature of generosity are contained in his account of its two subtraits. We will begin by considering the first, *modestia* (often translated as "kindness"), which he defines as "a desire to do things that please men and avoid things that displease them" (3DOE 43). Thus, *modestia* is a form of generosity because it is a more specific desire to act with concern for others, which explains why Spinoza, at one point, treats *modestia* as interchangeable with *humanitas* ("*humanitas seu modestia*") (3DOE 43).[17] It is puzzling, then, that Spinoza also describes *modestia* as "a species of ambition" (3DOE 48exp), since he regards ambition as the opposite of kindness, the source of dominating behaviors.[18] This puzzle is worth investigating because it helps us to understand the nature of *modestia*. Spinoza explains that *modestia* and ambition belong to the same species in the sense that they are various ways of expressing the same power or

[17] By the same reasoning, *honestas*, the desire to form friendships (4p37s1), would also be a kind of generosity.

[18] 3DOE 48ex also describes forms of courage, such as sobriety, as kinds of ambition. My best explanation of this claim is that courage has, in a sense, the same origin of ambition, since our tendency to seek joy leads to our tendency to derive joy from the joys of others.

tendency of the mind (3p29s; see also 4app25).[19] How, then, can a single tendency give rise to such opposite traits?

To answer this question, we should first consider the tendency itself. Spinoza explains that the source of ambition is the tendency to desire to please or give joy to others. He argues that this tendency arises from the Imitation of the Affects (3p32s), which implies that we want to give joy to others out of a fundamentally self-interested desire to increase our own joy. Since the Imitation of the Affects leads us to imitate not only the desires, but also the ideas and, thus, the values and behaviors of others, this tendency should be understood as part of the broader tendency to adapt our behaviors to communities or, more simply, sociability.[20] It is not hard to imagine how this tendency can go wrong, leading us to develop an excessive concern for the approval of others, in other words, ambition, "the immoderate desire for honor" (3DOE 44). "The ambitious man desires nothing so much as public acclaim and dreads nothing so much as disgrace" (3p39s). Spinoza's claim that ambition is an immoderate desire means that it exceeds what is rational. This implies that we develop ambition when our social tendencies are not checked or directed by reason. This makes sense: if we lack reason, then we lack any basis for independently evaluating the correctness of others' beliefs, values and actions.[21] In this case, our social tendency leads us, uncritically, to base our beliefs and behaviors entirely on those of the community.

This discussion indicates precisely how ambition is harmful. While desiring to win the approval of others would be beneficial in a world of perfectly rational people, it is deeply problematic in our own, where it can lead the ambitious to excel at depravity. Furthermore, even when we are surrounded by rational people, the external pressure that they exert cannot be as effective at encouraging virtuous behavior as reason itself. To illustrate, compare two men, one who rejects drunkenness because of sobriety – a rational understanding of how drunkenness is harmful – and another, who rejects drunkenness out of ambition – the desire to please those around

[19] This suggestion is also supported by Spinoza's claim that piety and ambition are the same appetite expressed actively and passively respectively (5p4cs). Admittedly, Spinoza says that *piety* and ambition are the same appetite expressed differently, not *modestia* and ambition. Nevertheless, the passage indicates the general view that our tendency to act from a desire to do good, which would include *modestia*, arises from the same appetite as ambition.

[20] Spinoza explicitly endorses the fact of human sociability in 4p35s. His reasoning there is that we benefit more from communities than we are harmed by them and that we "find solitary life scarcely endurable." Spinoza's interest in human sociability is emphasized by Garber (2004).

[21] Rutherford (1999) makes a similar point about self-esteem, that it tends to be harmful when based only on the opinions of others and good when based on true reason.

him, who frown on drunkenness. The former will avoid excessive drinking at all times and under all circumstances, while the latter will do so only when he is in the company of those who disapprove. Consequently, in private he will be more prone to drunkenness: "The ambitious man will not exercise any kind of self-control if secrecy is assured; and if he should live in the company of drunkards and libertines, he will be more prone to these vices because he is ambitious." (3DOE 48ex). It follows that the ambitious are more likely to become slaves to things like alcohol because, without reason, they cannot internalize principles of action and, thus, effectively police their own behavior.[22]

Interestingly, Spinoza holds that ambition not only makes people slaves of external things, but also leads them to enslave others. He argues that ambition is the source of dominating behaviors because an ambitious person forces her desires on others, with the aim of acquiring joy from their joy. "So we see that it is in everyone's nature to strive to bring it about that others should adopt his attitude to life" (3p31cs). There are a number of ready examples of people who dominate by recruiting others into their desires: the colonial missionary who imposes his way of life on native people, the parent who demands that his children repeat his athletic successes. While both the parent and the missionary aim to please the target of their attention, they do so by imposing their values and beliefs, for instance, that it is valuable to worship as the missionary requires or to excel as the parent did. The root of this dominating tendency is the desire to derive joy from the joy of others: the child's joy at his athletic success or the native person's satisfaction from his new religion. In the case of ambition, this tendency inclines people to treat others as tools for amplifying their own pleasure and, in this way, as objects. It also inclines them to disrespect others in the sense of failing to recognize that others are capable of using reason to form their own conception of the good. Unsurprisingly, Spinoza regards the efforts of the ambitious as doomed: "in seeking the praise or love of all, they provoke mutual dislike" (3p31cs).[23]

With this picture of ambition in view, we can now see how *modestia* arises from the same tendency. Under the guidance of reason, we regulate our tendency to please others so that we only derive joy from their joy when it is genuinely beneficial. It follows that *modestia* is importantly connected to the knowledge that the joy of other people is only good

[22] This reading is supported by Spinoza's claim that ambition makes people slaves to the objects of their desires (4p44s).

[23] Unsurprisingly, ambition is also important to Spinoza's political philosophy. On this point, see James (2008).

for us when it is based on reason, in other words, the knowledge that nothing is good or bad "except what really conduces to understanding or what can hinder understanding" (4p27). In fact, *modestia* is arguably the disposition that arises from this knowledge, the adequate ideas represented by 4p27. According to this reading, *modestia* is best understood as a desire to please others only in ways that truly benefit them. Thus, an individual with *modestia* would derive no joy from seeing others experience harmful joy by pursuing excessive desires. In this way, *modestia* is critical to forming a genuine concern for others. Furthermore, since *modestia* combats the tendency to inflate the opinions of others, it also inclines us to regard them with a critical eye. In this vein, Spinoza claims that the virtuous derive no joy from unwarranted or false praise, recognizing what he calls "parasites and flatterers" (4p57), who offer praise not because it is deserved but rather for the sake of their own advancement. In this respect, *modestia* is a trait clearly possessed by Spinoza, the ability to steel himself against the values held by those around him, deferring his judgment to reason.

This discussion indicates the importance of *modestia* to our freedom, for *modestia* involves governing ourselves from reason and, thus, from our own power, rather than deferring to the opinions of others. Moreover, since *modestia* arises from the knowledge that our true good consists in understanding, it involves the recognition that the good of others consists in their rationality and, thus, freedom, which inclines us to promote and respect the freedom of others, thereby opposing the dominating tendencies of ambition. In fact, *modestia* involves the recognition that our own freedom requires respecting the freedom of others, since this is required by reason. Consequently, those with *modestia* respect the importance of allowing others to make decisions on the basis of their own reasoning and provide them with the assistance to do so.[24] Spinoza's view of *modestia* here (and its opposition to ambition) further demonstrates his commitment to the principle that virtue requires respecting others, as was explained in Chapter 7.

According to the foregoing discussion, ambition and *modestia* represent the potential consequences of human sociability. If our sociable tendencies are properly cultivated, we enter into relationships that make us happier, more powerful, virtuous, rational and free; if these tendencies are not properly cultivated, our sociable tendencies give rise to dominating, irrational relationships, which threaten all these things. This distinction

[24] This reading provides an alternative to James (1996), which considers how freedom requires suppressing our differences.

reverberates in Spinoza's distinction between behaviors that are honorable or praiseworthy and those that are base. For praiseworthy behaviors are best understood as those that are valued and praised by those with *modestia*, "praised by men, who live by the guidance of reason" (4p37s1). Base behaviors, in contrast, are those exhibited by the ambitious. Spinoza offers ingratitude as an example of something base (4p71s). Ingratitude – perhaps better understood as false gratitude – arises from the feigned friendships of the ambitious, who seek not to benefit one another, but rather to benefit themselves, by inducing others to help them. Consequently, their gratitude is not genuine thankfulness but feigned praise, calculated for their own benefit. Spinoza describes their false gratitude as a "blind desire" and more like a "bargain or inducement than genuine gratitude."

This discussion indicates an important practical consequence of *modestia*, the commitment to friendship. Since individuals with *modestia* derive pleasure only from the rational pleasures of others, they will seek out friendships with rational people and use friendships as opportunities for cultivating mutual rationality and, thus, mutual benefit. "The free man tries to establish friendships with others" (4p70d). "Only free men are truly advantageous to one another and united by the closest bond of friendship and are equally motivated by love in endeavoring to benefit one another" (4p71d). Spinoza's view on the importance of friendship is evident in his conception of *honestas*, the desire to form friendships (4p37s1), which he categorizes as a species of piety. It is important to recognize that Spinoza's view on the value of friendship is ultimately justified by the importance of relationships to developing one's character. Because we tend to mirror the ideas and, thus, actions, in other words, the character of others, rational behavior is infectious:

> The good which a man seeks for himself, and loves, he will love with greater constancy if he sees others loving the same thing. Thus he will endeavor that others should love the same thing. And because this good is common to all, and all can enjoy it, he will therefore endeavor (by the same reasoning) that all should enjoy it, and the more so the more he enjoys this good. (4p37, another proof)

The importance of rational people to forming our character gives special significance to Spinoza's claim that "there is no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to man than a man who lives by the guidance of reason" (4p36c1).

Spinoza's view of *modestia* also provides some insight into how rational people would conduct themselves in friendship. Since individuals with

modestia look out for their friends' best interests, they would challenge the harmful and irrational beliefs of their friends. However, rational friends would not impose their beliefs or values on one another, even if the beliefs were rational. While one might present her friends with reasons for accepting a conclusion or acting a certain way, there would be no point in demanding that her friends act accordingly, since reason shows that people's best interests are served by acting from their own power. By the same token, an individual with *modestia* would not allow her friends to accept uncritically her own beliefs and values, as might happen in the case of hero worship.

We may now turn to the second trait of generosity: mercy (*clementia*). This trait is difficult to pin down, since Spinoza offers no definition. He claims only that "the opposite of cruelty is mercy" (3DOE 38), which is somewhat unclear, since cruelty is defined in two ways: 3p41cs claims that cruelty arises from a situation of mutual hate, where one of the hated parties shows love to the other, which is returned with injury. In contrast, 3DOE 38 claims that cruelty is the same as savagery (*saevitia*) and consists in the desire to injure someone "we love." According to this second definition, we deem Paul to be cruel if he hurts one we love, Peter, regardless of Paul's or Peter's feelings for the other. Since these definitions are clearly different, it is difficult to determine what their opposite amounts to.

A better explanation for mercy is suggested by Spinoza's remark that "from the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are merciful, it likewise follows that they are prone to envy" (3p32s). To understand this claim, we must consider the source of envy, which, according to 3p32d, is the tendency to experience joy at those things that please others: "from the mere fact that we imagine somebody to enjoy something we shall love that thing and desire to enjoy it." Thus, envy arises from a more specific species of our sociable tendency to derive joy from the joy of others: the tendency to love things that others love (3p32s). Envy arises, then, from the same tendency as *modestia* and ambition. It appears that this tendency leads to envy when we identify the object of love as something that can only be enjoyed by the person possessing it. This suggests that mercy arises from recognizing that what is worthy of being desired – the things that truly benefit us – can be enjoyed by all, without competition. It follows that mercy is the disposition arising from adequate ideas indicating that the true good can be shared by all (4p36d). It follows that mercy is a form of *generositas* because it leads us to act with concern for others, more specifically, by opposing the main reason for acting contrary

to their good, the belief that doing so will harm one's own good. In this way, mercy disinclines us to enter into conflict over goods, which explains why Spinoza generally contrasts mercy with cruelty, which often arises from such conflicts.

Interestingly, Spinoza also regards mercy as the antidote to envy's sibling, pity (*commiseratio*), sadness for someone whom we regard as like ourselves (3DOE 18). Spinoza claims that pity is the same thing as sympathy (*misericordia*), which he defines as "love, insofar as it induces a man to feel joy at another's good fortune, and sadness at another's bad fortune" (3DOE 24). The two cannot be truly identical, since sympathy can be pleasurable, while pity cannot. It is more precise to say, then, that pity is a kind of sympathy, specifically sympathy for another's sadness.[25] Spinoza regards pity as similar to envy because they are both based in the false belief that true goods are in competition: we tend to pity people because we believe that they cannot attain the goods possessed by others.[26] It follows that mercy is an antidote to pity in precisely the same way that it is an antidote to envy, because it shows that the true good can be possessed by all.

Spinoza's criticism of pity may appear callous or, worse, immoral. We must admit that if feeling the sadness of others is necessary for morality, then he is guilty as charged. However, Spinoza's view does not imply that we should treat the suffering of others with indifference. On the contrary, Chapter 7 showed that, according to Spinoza, we have strong obligations to act with concern for others. He simply holds that under ideal conditions we should do so on the basis of reason rather than because of feelings of pity and sadness. While this might look vaguely like a Kantian commitment to follow reason rather than the emotions, such an impression is misleading. Unlike Kant, Spinoza understands our rational commitments as partly justified on the basis of their affective character: we should act to the benefit of others because it is a source of profound joy, the affective manifestation of increasing our perfection. It follows that helping others, even the most desperate, should not cause us to feel sadness, sympathy or pain. Rather, we should have a happy heart for the good that we have done. While this may strike some as inhumane, we should remember that we are not on this account any less bound to help them.

[25] Pity is also related to *benevolentia*, the desire to help those whom we pity (3DOE 35). Spinoza takes a negative view of all these affects, in so far as they are forms of sadness and represent decreases in our perfection (4p50).

[26] I mean 'possession' here broadly to include not just material things but also health, family and happiness. On this view, we sometimes pity others not because they lack some possession, but rather because life has dealt them a bad hand – they are sick or their loved ones are gone.

CONCLUSIONS

Each virtuous character trait is best understood as a disposition that arises from some adequate idea, specifically of our good, since these ideas direct our actions. Given the connection between the virtuous character and adequate ideas, it follows that the various virtuous traits can be distinguished by the content of the adequate ideas from which they derive. According to this way of thinking, courage, the desire to promote our interests by following reason, arises from adequate ideas indicating that following reason is good for us, while generosity, the disposition to act to the benefit of others, arises from adequate ideas indicating that it is beneficial to do so. This explains what Spinoza means when he claims that one character trait is a form of another: such traits are more specific forms of the desire or disposition, brought about by some more specific aspect of the adequate idea in question. Thus, the different forms of courage are more specific desires to follow reason, arising from an adequate idea representing a specific way that reason benefits us. So, sobriety, the disposition to avoid excessive drink, is a kind of desire to follow reason that arises from adequate ideas indicating that it is good to avoid excessive drink.

Pursuing this interpretive line leads to the following picture of the relationship among virtuous character traits. Generosity technically should be understood as a form of courage, since generosity is the desire to follow reason in one's dealings with others. Mercy, meanwhile, is a form of *modestia*, since the latter is a disposition to please others partly for one's own benefit, which is precisely what mercy is. Thus, mercy is a form of *modestia*, which is a form of generosity, which is a form of courage. Spinoza contrasts each of these emotions with mirror emotions, arising from the same tendency, but expressed without the guidance of reason. The specific forms of courage, sobriety and temperance arise when our tendency to seek out our good and experience joy is guided by a rational recognition that excessive desires are bad. Without reason's guidance, this tendency leads to drunkenness, luxury and lust. Meanwhile, the tendency to please others gives rise to *modestia*, when we recognize that we only benefit from the genuine pleasure of others, pleasure arising from their true benefit, and otherwise, to ambition. Mercy, as a specific kind of *modestia*, is mirrored by more specific kinds of ambition, envy, pity and sympathy, which arise when we fail to recognize that objects worthy of our desire are not in competition.

The main purpose of this investigation has been to shed light on a virtuous and free life. Our previous efforts to characterize the free life

have been hampered by the fact that reason's guidance, particularly the natural law, is too abstract and general to indicate precisely how rational individuals would act. However, since Spinoza's natural laws follow from adequate ideas of the good, the virtuous character can be understood as the disposition to act in accordance with the natural law. More specifically, courage (*animositas*) appears to be the tendency to act to increase our power, the first natural law explained in Chapter 6, while generosity (*generositas*) is the tendency to act with benevolence, the second natural law, which was explained in Chapter 7. Consequently, Spinoza's account of these traits describes generally how rational people will interpret and apply the natural law. It is clear that Spinoza's account of these traits considers the way that necessarily passive humans will apply them, since the traits arise from the tendency to seek what gives us joy and to please others, which, in turn, arise from our passivity, that we depend upon external things to increase our power. Consequently, unlike the free man who acts entirely on universalizable principles, it appears that humans demonstrate general tendencies in behavior corresponding to rational rules of thumb.

Examining these tendencies has shown that a free life is characterized, first, by courage, which directs us to moderate excessive desire and to avoid the various kinds of sorrow, including hate. It follows that we should avoid conflict and repay hate with love out of a desire to spare ourselves emotional pain. It follows that a courageous life is full of joy, optimism and intellectual virtues: curiosity and a desire to acquire knowledge, balanced with modesty in acknowledging the limits of one's knowledge. Second, a free life demonstrates generosity, which means acting for the true benefit of others. This involves *modestia*, which is best understood as the foil to ambition. Since ambition involves dominating others and disrespecting them by using them as mere tools for one's own pleasure, acting with *modestia* requires that we avoid imposing our will on others and respect them by recognizing that they benefit from acting on their own power and ideas. Spinoza holds that we express these traits by forming mutually beneficial relationships based on a rational commitment to one another's good, in other words, friendship. Generosity also requires acting with mercy, that is, from the recognition that true goods are not in competition with the goods of others. This same recognition disinclines us from envy and pity, which both arise from the false assumption that things of value are unavailable to either ourselves or others.

CHAPTER 11

The freedom of the citizen

I have argued that human freedom, unlike ideal freedom, necessarily involves a degree of passivity and, in fact, requires it, since our very survival depends on the assistance of external things. It follows that our ability to attain freedom depends on how we interact with external things and, thus, circumstances external to the agent, including political conditions. This conclusion suggests that we should look to Spinoza's political writings to determine what light they shed on a life of freedom, and this is the task of this chapter. The chapter's thesis is that a life of freedom involves democratic participation in the state. This is primarily because democracy operates on the principle of majority rule, which provides political actors with incentives to attend to the concerns of others. Since it is rational to care for the good of others, it follows that democratic participation helps to establish rational habits, thereby increasing the freedom of citizens. This view is particularly interesting because of its implications for Spinoza's understanding of autonomy, for claiming that our freedom requires certain political conditions, the conditions for democratic participation, entails that our autonomy does as well. Consequently, Spinoza's politics offers a theory of autonomy that is particularly sensitive to the importance of our social interactions and relationships in a broader community.

The first section considers how Spinoza's political philosophy generally bears on understanding a life of freedom and virtue. It argues that he understands the purpose of the state as helping people to achieve freedom, according to a positive, ethical sense of freedom as self-determination. The second section considers what Spinoza's political philosophy tells us about a life of freedom, focusing on the suggestion that a free life involves democratic political participation. The final section considers how Spinoza's view bears on the subject of autonomy, arguing that he upholds a commitment to both a substantive and a relational conception of autonomy. I argue that these commitments make his theory more attentive to the social conditions for autonomy.

11.1 VIRTUE AND THE STATE

What does Spinoza's political philosophy have to say about a free life? Since he holds that the "true freedom of man" consists in developing a virtuous character, as the previous chapter showed, one might answer very little, on the grounds that developing the virtuous character is an ethical rather than a political concern and, thus, the business of individuals, not the state. Spinoza, however, disagrees, as is evident in his view of the state's purpose.

> The state's ultimate purpose is not to dominate or control men by fear and deprive them of independence, but on the contrary to free every man from fear so that he may live in security as far as is possible, that is, so that he may best preserve his own natural right to exist and to act, without harm to himself and to others. It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the true purpose of the state is freedom. (*TTP* 20, 6)

According to this passage, the true purpose of the state is to promote people's freedom, which, as we have seen, entails helping them to acquire adequate ideas and, thus, the virtuous character. One might object to this claim on the grounds that Spinoza is here talking about a kind of negative political freedom – an absence of political constraints to pursuing one's desires – which should be distinguished from the ethical freedom discussed in the *Ethics*.[1] While Spinoza admittedly claims that securing freedom involves removing obstacles to people's pursuit of their desires – namely, threats to their security – he also claims that it involves helping people to become rational, "to employ their reason," "to enable them to develop their minds."[2] Indeed, the passage claims that the former contributes to freedom precisely because it makes possible the latter. Thus, the purpose of the state is to defend people's freedom in the positive sense of their rationality, precisely the same sort of freedom championed in the *Ethics*. This point is also evident in the *TP*, where he argues that liberty is tantamount to rationality – "the more we consider man to be free, the less we can say that

[1] Smith argues that Spinoza's ethics is concerned with positive freedom and his political work with negative freedom (2003, 29) and that there is nothing the state can do to promote positive freedom (1997, 137).

[2] My claim here is that political freedom, in the sense of removing obstacles to pursuing desires, is insufficient for but nevertheless helps to promote ethical freedom or rationality. This claim departs from Sorrell, who argues that these two notions of freedom in Spinoza are ultimately incompatible (2008, 156–7). On the other hand, my claim also departs from James, who suggests that Spinoza collapses them, arguing that liberty is "yoked" to security (2008, 141).

he is not able to use reason" (*TP* 2, 7) – and that the state aims to promote this rationality in its citizens: "The state must necessarily be so established that all men, both rulers and ruled, whether they will or not, will do what is in the interests of their common welfare; that is, either voluntarily or constrained by force or necessity, they will all live as reason prescribes." (*TP* 6, 3).

It is important to note that, while the distinction between ethical and political freedom comes naturally to contemporary thought, it does not make sense in the context of Spinoza's philosophy. Political freedom is usually construed as the ability of citizens to pursue their desires without political interference, while ethical freedom is understood as the condition for holding people morally responsible.[3] We have seen that Spinoza denies both conceptions of freedom. For the former is an absence of constraints, which Spinoza regards as insufficient for freedom, as I argued in Chapter 2. On the other hand, the latter is the condition for moral responsibility, which Spinoza denies has anything to do with freedom, as I argued in Chapter 3. Furthermore, this distinction is informed by the classical liberal view that ethics and morality are matters of personal conscience left to the judgment of individuals, whereas the state is concerned only with the political conditions required for people to pursue their own ideas of the good, a view which develops subsequent to Spinoza, particularly with Locke.

In fact, Spinoza turns this liberal way of thinking on its head by arguing that the state is charged with the main task of his ethics, securing freedom.[4] This implies not only that the activity of the state is ethical, but also that our participation in the state is ethical, since it helps to promote the freedom and the good of others. In other words, civic virtue is a kind of ethical virtue.[5] This conclusion resembles the ancient republican view, evident in Spinoza's influences, Tacitus and Machiavelli, that it is virtuous to participate in the state for the general good.[6] For instance, Spinoza

[3] For instance, this is how Kashap (1987) understands the term 'moral freedom,' in the title to his book.

[4] My claims here oppose Den Uyl, who argues that Spinoza's moral prescriptions are really just forms of political prescriptions, so that morality is ultimately derivable from whatever rules are necessary for a stable state (1983, 5, 88). My view is closer to that of Sacksteder (1975).

[5] In this way, Spinoza's ethical prescriptions have a double character, applying to us as individuals and as citizens. This point is reflected in Spinoza's notion of public and private virtue (*TTP* 1, 6). He claims that our private virtue is *fortitudo*, the virtuous or rational character, while our public virtue is the stability and security of the state. Since, as we will see, the security and stability of the state depends upon the rationality of its citizens, we achieve public virtue by helping individuals to achieve private virtue, that is, rationality and freedom. On private and public virtue, see Rosenthal (2001, 537).

[6] Tacitus' influence on Spinoza is documented by Momigliano (1990, Chapter 5) and Wirszbuski (1955).

praises Manlius Torquatus for putting duty to the state and the public welfare before duty to his own children (*TTP* 19, 10).[7] He similarly argues that a rational person will "order his life according to the general good" by living "according to the laws of his country" and desiring "to possess the general rights of citizenship" (4p73).[8] Indeed, he even argues that any action performed for the sake of the state is pious:

> It is certain that devotion to one's country is the highest form of devotion that can be shown; for if the state is destroyed nothing good can survive, everything is endangered, and anger and wickedness reign supreme amidst universal fear. Hence it follows that any act of piety towards one's neighbor must be impious if it results in harm to the commonwealth as a whole, and any impious act committed against him must be accounted pious if it is done for the sake of the preservation of the commonwealth. (*TTP* 19, 10)

On this view, any action performed for the sake of preserving the state is virtuous: serving in the government, paying taxes and even obeying the speed limit.

According to the foregoing discussion, a great deal turns on Spinoza's claim that the state's purpose is freedom in the sense of rationality. What, then, is the basis for this claim? The answer is found in his explanation of the social contract. Social contract theories hold that the state is justified by people's decision to support it, which entails that the purpose of the state is determined by people's motivation for this decision.[9] In order to determine this motivation, Spinoza engages in a thought experiment: to what sort of government would people agree if there were no government, in other words, if they were in a state of nature (*TTP* 16, 3–8)? His answer is that people would institute a state for the sake of increasing their power; otherwise, the contract is void: "any agreement can have force only if it is in our interests, and when it is not, the agreement fails and remains void" (*TTP* 16, 7). This answer follows from Spinoza's egoistic psychology, according to which all people seek what they perceive to be in their interests:

[7] Spinoza's republicanism also breaks from Hobbes, who was very critical of republicanism (*L* 21: 8, 139–40). For a good discussion of this point, see Smith (2003, Chapter 5). For a good discussion of Spinoza's republicanism, see Rosenthal (2003).

[8] I take issue here with Prokhovnik, who denies that Spinoza sees civic participation as contributing to our freedom (2004, 209) and argues that Spinoza treats our participation in the state as a duty, not contributing to a *vita activa* (216).

[9] Some have argued that Spinoza is not strictly speaking a social contract theorist because people are led to the contract by passions, not rational choice; see Matheron (1969), Negri (1991), Giancotti (1996) and Echeverria (1989). However, the fact that many are led to the contract by passions should not imply that some are not led to it by reason. On the contrary, since Spinoza accepts living in a state as a dictate of reason (4p73), agreeing to the social contract is rational.

"of two good things, every single person will choose the one that he judges to be the greater" (*TTP* 16, 6). Since increasing people's power is equivalent to increasing their freedom, it follows that people would choose to establish a state for the purpose of increasing their freedom. Thus, the purpose of the state is freedom. It follows that the state is obligated to help people increase their freedom in the sense that, otherwise, it would lose the consent of the governed, which is the source of its power: "the preservation of a state chiefly depends on the subjects' loyalty and virtue and steadfastness in carrying out their orders" (*TTP* 17, 4).

This view indicates a significant departure from Hobbes' view of the social contract. He argues that people agree to institute and obey the sovereign for the purpose of attaining increased security, which provides better conditions for making and keeping contracts, thereby helping them to satisfy their desires (*L* 17: 1, 106). On this view, the sovereign is required to do very little in exchange for the support of the people: simply defend the state from external threats and provide a modicum of security.[10] The sovereign is not obligated to be just, fair or promote freedom, as critics have been quick to point out. Spinoza's view, on the other hand, holds the sovereign to higher expectations, for the people expect that the sovereign will increase their power, which involves increasing their rationality and freedom. Consequently, security, for Spinoza, is not sufficient to ensure the compliance of the subjects, since this does not necessarily promote people's freedom. On the contrary, if the state is ruled by an iron fist, it will generate excess fear, harming people's rationality and freedom: "To protect their [the sovereigns'] position and retain power, they are very much obliged to work for the common good and direct all things by the dictate of reason; for no one has maintained a violent government for long, as Seneca says" (*TTP* 16, 9). The difference between the two is particularly stark with respect to the issue of freedom: whereas Hobbes grudgingly allows that subjects necessarily maintain some liberties – "the true liberty of the subjects," rights with which they are unwilling to part (*L* 21: 10, 141) – Spinoza upholds liberty as the state's "true purpose."

Spinoza's departure from Hobbes here can be traced to their different views on natural rights, which they both understand as our power in the state of nature (4p37s1, *TTP* pref.).[11] Hobbes claims that entering the

[10] This is supported by Hobbes' claim that the sovereign, even given the liberty of the subject, has unlimited power (*L* 21: 7, 138–9). The sovereign's power is only limited in the sense that the downfall of the state will end his power.

[11] Spinoza's relationship to Hobbes on this issue has been much discussed. See Den Uyl (1983, Chapter 3), Moreau (1994, Chapter 3, end of section 1 and section 2) and Smith (1997, Chapter 5).

commonwealth requires us to lay down many of our natural rights, to "give up my right of governing myself" (*L* 17: 13, 109). This is because he understands 'power' as the ability to "to obtain some future apparent good" (*L* 10: 1, 50), in other words, to satisfy one's desires. Clearly entering the commonwealth requires us to give up the ability to satisfy certain desires, for instance, to take whatever we want or to follow our private judgment in all matters. Spinoza, on the other hand, denies that entering the commonwealth requires giving up one's natural right, because he understands our power as our activity rather than our ability to satisfy our desires. Entering the state increases our power in this sense, because it is rational to live in a state (*TTP* 16, 10). It is even a dictate of reason that "man is more free in a state where he lives under a system of law than in solitude where he obeys only himself" (4p73). This is what Spinoza means when he claims that his state, unlike Hobbes', "preserves the natural right intact," that it increases our power to which the natural right is equivalent (letter 50; see also *TTP* 16, 8).[12] Consequently, as we will see shortly, Hobbes argues that the social contract requires people to "give up" their rights, whereas Spinoza argues that it increases their rights, by pooling them into "common ownership."

11.2 FREEDOM THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Given that the state is charged with promoting the freedom and rationality of citizens, how does Spinoza recommend that it do so? Since this is ultimately the driving question of Spinoza's politics, I cannot provide a thorough answer here. Rather, I will focus on one piece of the answer that is particularly important to understanding the life of freedom, a piece which is found in Spinoza's defense of democracy. He explicitly asserts two claims in favor of democracy, first, that it is "the most natural form of state," and, second, that it "approaches most closely to that freedom which nature grants to every man" (*TTP* 16, 11). The basis for both is Spinoza's distinctive interpretation of the social contract. He stresses that the social contract arises through the mutual cooperation and assent of all people, who are, in the state of nature, equal – that is, having equal power. It follows that agreeing to the covenant is a kind of democratic political action, since Spinoza understood democratic action as that in which equal participants

[12] Spinoza's tantalizingly cryptic remark to Jellesz has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Den Uyl (1983), Strauss (1965, 28) and Allison (1987, 187) read the letter as criticizing Hobbes for illicitly smuggling normative claims into the social contract. Smith argues that the letter criticizes Hobbes for dividing and weakening the sovereign's power (1997, 132).

act collectively, with a single voice.[13] In fact, Spinoza argues that the social contract necessarily gives rise to a democracy. This is because the covenant creates a sovereign power by pooling the people's individual powers, such that they have an equal claim over the sovereign power, at least, unless they elect to give up their rights and choose some other form of constitution. Describing the terms of the original social contract, Spinoza claims that people "therefore arranged that the unrestricted right naturally possessed by each individual should be put into common ownership, and that this right should no longer be determined by the strength and appetite of the individual, but by the power and will of all together" (*TTP* 16, 5). This view of the social contract entails the two claims above. With respect to the first, democracy is the most natural form of government in the sense that all states necessarily begin as democracies. Indeed, Spinoza defines a democracy as the right or power that arises when individuals agree to institute a sovereign, "a united gathering of people, which collectively has the sovereign right to do all that it has the power to do" (*TTP* 16, 8), which entails that all states formed through the social contract are, by definition, democracies. With respect to the second, democracy best preserves people's freedom from the state of nature in the sense that members of a democracy continue to have a say in their own government, as in the state of nature. Both claims are nicely illustrated by Spinoza's reading of the Hebrew state, according to which the Hebrews' original covenant with God established a kind of democracy, conferring to all people an equal right to interpret God's law:

> Since the Hebrews did not transfer their right to any other man, but, as in a democracy, they all surrendered their right on equal terms, crying with one voice, "Whatever God shall speak, we shall do," it follows that this covenant left them all completely equal, and they all had an equal right to consult God, to receive and interpret his laws; in short, they all shared equally in the government of the state. (*TTP* 17, 9)

While this is all that Spinoza explicitly writes in favor of democracy, he also implies that it leads to a more secure and stable state.[14] The main reason is that democracy maintains a natural state of equality between citizens, providing them with less reason to resent one another and enter into conflicts for power. It follows that democracies are less susceptible

[13] This is evident from *TTP* (17, 9), which I will discuss presently. This way of thinking is consistent with the contemporary view that democratic deliberation is deliberation in which the participants serve as equals.

[14] This point is emphasized by Sorrell (2008, 155) and James (2008, 130).

to internal division and dissent, which Spinoza regarded as the greatest threat to the survival and security of the state: "it is beyond doubt that the commonwealth is always in greater danger from its citizens than its enemies" (*TP* 6, 6); "let Rome be witness, unconquerable by her enemies, yet so often conquered and wretchedly oppressed by her own citizens" (*TTP* 17, 5).[15] Spinoza's notion that democracy best avoids internal division is most explicit in his reading of the Hebrew democracy, which failed, he argues, because the people transferred their right to interpret God's law to Moses, who vested it in a privileged class, the Levites (*TTP* 17, 9–10). This generated resentment toward the Levites, hardening the people's hearts against the religious duties that were the lifeblood of the Hebrew state.[16] In this way, the state failed because it abandoned its original democratic form. "If the constitution of the state had been as first intended, all the tribes would have enjoyed equal right and honor, and the whole structure of the state would have been quite sound" (*TTP* 17, 27). "The state might have lasted indefinitely if the just anger of the lawgiver had allowed it to continue in its original form" (*TTP* 17, 30).

With Spinoza's defense of democracy in view, we can return to the question of how states promote the freedom and rationality of their citizens. Since all states promote our freedom in the sense of our self-determination and rationality, the foregoing arguments for democracy imply that they best promote the rationality of their citizens. How, then, do democracies do so? To begin with, democracy best promotes rationality in the weak sense that democracy is the most stable state, which entails that it provides more enduring conditions for developing rationality.[17] According to this suggestion, democracy is just as good as any other constitutions at promoting rationality, except that it lasts longer and has less of the instability and conflict that infect other regimes. However, one might think that democracy promotes freedom in a deeper sense because the activity of democratic participation promotes the rationality of citizens. This reading has been suggested by political theorists, who interpret the state, in the light of Spinoza's metaphysics, as an individual with a *conatus* that works

[15] This is Spinoza's main but not only reason for thinking that democracy provides greater stability. He also suggests that other constitutions often vest sovereignty in too few people, who lack the resources to wield such power. Consequently, they are forced to divide their power, which is harmful to the state (*TP* 6, 5).

[16] According to Spinoza, the greatest strength of the Hebrew state was that it received the wholehearted support of the people because they identified patriotism with religious piety (*TTP* 17 and 18).

[17] Smith argues that Spinoza does not answer this question, failing to explain how democracies make individuals more rational (1997, 136). Yovel argues that democracy is the best state only because it is the most stable (1989b, 129), as does Sorrell (2008, 153).

to preserve the state and increase its power. It follows that the state is free, like any other individual, when it acts from its *conatus*. Spinoza's claim that democracy is the natural form of the state indicates that this *conatus* is expressed in the democratic participation of the people, which entails that democracy contributes to the self-determination of the state and, thus, those who participate in it.[18]

Of course, Spinoza does not explicitly assert that the state has a *conatus*, expressed through the democratic participation of the people. Rather, the explanation above presupposes a particular way of reading Spinoza's politics in conjunction with his metaphysics, an interpretive strategy that has generated some controversy.[19] However, we need not enter into this controversy to see the trouble with the explanation. If democratic participation is the *conatus* of the state, it follows that such democratic participation improves the freedom of only the state, not of individual citizens. This is because Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine does not imply that what is beneficial for the *conatus* of the whole is necessarily beneficial for the *conatus* of the parts. On the contrary, his claims about *titillatio* indicate that there can be a rift between the good of part and whole, since the good of some part of our body can interfere in the good of the whole body. To use a crude example, consider a team of laborers or, better, slaves, who are most effective and powerful at the expense of the individual's rationality and, thus, power. Of course, people who participate in democracy would be more self-determining in the political sense of having some say in their governance. But Spinoza's freedom requires a fundamentally different sort of self-determination, the sort that comes from having adequate ideas; one can have a political say in her own governance, while still being entirely irrational. In fact, Spinoza's distinction between a slave, child and citizen, discussed in Chapter 3, explicitly denies that we can equate political self-rule with freedom and other-rule with slavery.

While this particular explanation is unsuccessful, Spinoza provides other grounds for concluding that democratic participation promotes the freedom of citizens. To understand how, it is helpful to consider his claims

[18] Matheron suggests this line of explanation when he claims that states are directed by two powers: "a democratic *conatus* that, all things being equal, would flow onto an institutionalized democracy, and external causes that modify this *conatus* by sometimes giving it nondemocratic affections" (1997, 217).

[19] The controversy is whether Spinoza's claims about individuals should be read as applying to the state. The affirmative answer is defended by Matheron (1969) and Balibar (1998, Chapter 2). The opposing view is defended by Den Uyl (1983, 70). Rice (1990) and McShea (1975) suggest that the state is an individual in only a metaphorical sense. Gatens and Lloyd also address the issue (1999, Chapter 5).

about the most successful constitution. He argues that the state should be structured in a way that inclines even irrational people to identify their own personal interests with the public interest, in Virgil's words, to "frame a constitution so that every man, whatever his character, prefers public right to private advantage" (*TTP* 17, 4; see also *TP* 6, 3, quoted above).[20] The point is echoed in the *TP*:

> If the safety of the state is dependent on some man's good faith, and its affairs cannot be properly administered unless those responsible for them are willing to act in good faith, then that state will lack all stability. If it is to endure, its government must be so organized that its ministers cannot be induced to betray their trust or to act basely, whether they are guided by reason or by passion. Nor does it matter for the security of the state what motives induce men to administer its affairs properly, provided that its affairs are in fact properly administered. (1, 6)

Spinoza provides specific examples of how this should be done in his discussion of monarchy and aristocracy in the *TP*: he recommends that the state should be constituted so that nobody in government personally benefits from war, on the grounds that, if the political actors do not have a personal interest in warfare, they will be less inclined to act contrary to the public's interest in peace. Similarly, in an aristocracy he stipulates that "the remuneration of senators must be of such a kind that they derive more advantage from peace than from war" (*TP* 8, 31). To further decrease people's ability to profit personally from war, he forbids mercenaries and other paid soldiers. By the same reasoning, Spinoza recommends that in a monarchy the assets of counselors should be managed so that they all have a personal stake in the success of trade (*TP* 7, 8), which is usually best served through peace.

For our discussion, the important point is that this line of argument gives Spinoza grounds to prefer democratic structures because they have built-in mechanisms for ensuring that people's selfish motives lead them to act for the common good. This claim is best demonstrated by his proposed monarchy, in which the monarch must choose policies from among proposals offered by counselors, who are chosen from among the people. While this example concerns a monarchy, the policy in question is democratic, since it requires the government to obtain some form of consent from the people. Spinoza reasons that this policy will promote the common good on the supposition that, if the counselors come from the general populace, their interests will likely be shared by those of the other people. Given that people are self-interested, this measure ensures that the

[20] *Aeneid* VI, 129.

counselors, whether or not they intend to look out for the interests of their peers, will tend to do so. On this basis, Spinoza recommends that the counselors be chosen so that they represent the various segments of society.

> Human nature is so constituted that each pursues his personal advantage with the utmost keenness, regarding as most equitable those laws which he thinks are necessary for the preservation and increase of his own fortune and upholding another's cause only so far as he believes his own position to be strengthened thereby. Hence it follows that counselors must necessarily be appointed whose private fortune and advantage depend on the general welfare and the peace of all. So it is evident that if a certain number are appointed from every group or class of citizens, a proposal which receives the most votes in this council will be in the interests of a majority of subjects. (*TP* 7, 4)

This passage essentially argues that policies are more likely to serve the public good when they are decided by a majority of representatives from all parts of society, which speaks in favor of democratic policies generally.

It is important to recognize that this reasoning encompasses two distinct but related arguments for how democracy promotes the common good. First, since democracies are ruled by members of the general populace, who tend to have the same concerns as their peers, they tend to act for the common good; an average Joe is more likely than a spoiled monarch to act in ways that benefit most people. Second, since democracy follows the principle of majority rule, it provides incentives for individuals to act for their shared interests and collective good. This is because participants in a democracy who act only for the sake of their own selfish concerns are not likely to find themselves in the majority; if Spinoza's monarch looks out only for his own interests, he will be unlikely to find counselors to propose the policies he desires.[21] Rather, political actors in democracies must work together by compromising and forming coalitions, which requires them to consider the interests and concerns of others.[22] In this way, pursuing one's selfish interests requires participants in a democratic system, perhaps unwittingly, to act for the common good.[23]

[21] Hobbes also argues that a rational sovereign will act in the best interests of his people. For an explanation and critical discussion of this argument, see Kisner (2004).

[22] My view opposes Schneewind, who argues that Spinoza upholds an elitist society, where the masses cannot be trusted and are prevented from ruling (1998, 223–4).

[23] This line of reasoning bears strong resemblance to arguments for democracy from Van den Enden, Spinoza's friend and mentor. He defended democracy as being preferable to DeWitt's aristocratic republic, on the grounds that democracy focuses on the common good in a way that strengthens the state. While this reasoning guides the progress of *Free Political Propositions*, it is articulated clearly in the preface where he tells the reader that the fate of the Dutch republic hinges on its working for the common good (Van den Enden 2007, 133). In a way, the eventual downfall of the DeWitt regime proved Van den Enden's point, as it was secured largely through the popular support of the Orangists. On Van den Enden, see Klever (1991; 2001) and Israel (2001).

The foregoing argument also shows how democracies increase the rationality and freedom of citizens. Since democracies encourage people to act for the good of others, which is a dictate of reason, they encourage people to become more rational.[24] Of course, democracy only encourages people to act in accordance with reason, which is not the same thing as actually being rational, since people may act for the good of others not from adequate ideas but rather because they regard it as instrumentally valuable to achieving some other, merely apparent good. Nevertheless, even this helps people to become rational, for Spinoza claims that acting in accordance with rational principles can help people to become rational, even if they lack the adequate ideas from which such principles derive.

> The best course we can adopt, as long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right method of living, or fixed rules of life, and to commit them to memory and continually apply them to particular situations that are frequently encountered in life, so that our casual thinking is thoroughly permeated by them and they are always ready to hand. For example, among our practical rules we laid down that hatred should be conquered by love or nobility, and not repaid with reciprocal hatred. (5p10s)

Of course, merely acting as rational people act would not be as valuable as actually being rational, because it would not involve the power and activity that comes from having adequate ideas. However, the passage above suggests that acting as though we are rational can help us to become rational, that is, to acquire adequate ideas. Presumably if one is trained to approach situations with rational rules foremost in his mind, then he will tend to mimic rational thought processes and, eventually, to acquire the adequate ideas from which the rules derive. In this way, Spinoza endorses an Aristotelian point about the value of habits to developing a virtuous character. It is interesting to note that developing these habits is valuable even if they are imposed on us by others, which entails that the state can help to develop virtue by imposing character training.

How, then, does democratic participation inculcate rational thought processes, helping us to attain adequate ideas? While Spinoza does not explicitly speak to this question, his claims about democracy above suggest some possible answers. First, being a successful participant in a democracy requires, to some extent, setting aside one's own particular concerns, which

[24] While Spinoza's discussion of democracy in the *TP* was, sadly, not finished, the foregoing discussion provides some indication of what I think he would have said, a reading that is generally supported by Sacksteder (1975). Balibar (1998, 58) also theorizes that the final section would have considered how democracies can make people more rational, though he thinks that Spinoza was concerned there to devise strategies for controlling the inevitably irrational multitude.

can interfere in reaching consensus, and instead concentrating on the concerns shared by all. In this respect, democratic participation requires, to some extent, adopting the perspective of reason, which understands the good on the basis of our common nature, without attending to our particular differences. Second, since successful democratic participation requires forming consensus by working with others, it also requires seeing others as potential partners in collective action and, thus, recognizing their concerns and points of view as legitimate. This recognition is rational because reason indicates the intrinsic value of all people, as Chapter 7 argued. Finally, democratic participation encourages us to recognize the value of rationality, since rational behaviors are directed at the common good and, consequently, are more conducive to cooperative behavior. This recognition is also rational, because reason indicates that our true good consists in rationality. Thus, democracy provides both the opportunity and the self-interested motive for people to engage in more rational deliberative processes, which help them to cultivate the habits of a virtuous character. In this respect, democratic participation offers a kind of education, of the sort later defended by Mill, habituating us to the rational habit of acting for the good of others.[25]

One might object to my reading because it locates Spinoza's argument for the rationality of democracies in the *TP* and many commentators have argued that the *TP* abandoned or, at least, significantly weakened Spinoza's early preference for democracy.[26] Admittedly, one must take account of the important differences between the works. Most obviously, the *TTP* argues only in favor of democracy, whereas the *TP* is favorably disposed to monarchical and aristocratic constitutions.[27] Furthermore, as commentators have pointed out, the *TP* does not explicitly advance a social contract theory and is far more concerned with the multitude and the problems it creates.[28] Moreover, the commonwealth described in the *TP* arguably requires that members give up the right of their own judgment (*TP* 3, 3–4), which would run counter to Spinoza's earlier claim that members of democracies retain their right from the state of nature to follow their own judgment. These changes suggest that Spinoza became more suspicious of people's ability to govern themselves rationally, which is

[25] Mill (1991, 170).

[26] See Balibar (1998, Chapter 3), Prokhovnik (2004, Chapter 7, especially 221–3), Feuer (1958, 138) and Allison (1987, Chapter 6).

[27] Prokhovnik argues that Spinoza should not be read as a democrat because he is open to different constitutions, including, in some exceptional cases, dictatorship (2004, 213).

[28] See Matheron (1990). I should mention that there are other ways Spinoza's view may have evolved between the two texts, which I do not discuss because they are not at issue in this discussion.

supported by the historical record, since in the intervening years the DeWitts were murdered by an angry mob, which may have shaken Spinoza's faith in the people.

None of these differences, however, provide reason to conclude that Spinoza changed his mind about the superiority of democracy between the two works. While the *TP* concentrates more on the difficulties posed by the irrational multitude, Spinoza was aware of these problems in the *TTP*, where he defends democracy: "it is by no means the case that all men can always be readily induced to be guided by reason" (*TTP* 17, 7). The *TTP* similarly recognizes that

> not all men are naturally determined to act in accordance with the rules and laws of reason. On the contrary, all men are born in a state of complete ignorance, and before they can learn the true way of life and acquire a virtuous disposition, even if they have been well brought up, a great part of their life has gone by. Yet in the meantime they have to live and preserve themselves as far as in them lies, namely, by the urging of appetite alone, for Nature has given them nothing else and has denied them the actualized power to live according to sound reason. (17, 3)

Furthermore, we should not infer that Spinoza abandoned democracy from the fact that the *TP* sets forth acceptable monarchical and aristocratic constitutions. He argues in the *TTP* that the constitution of the state is determined by what people will agree to support, which, in turn, is often constrained by their culture and beliefs. For instance, he claims that some people are so habituated to monarchy that they cannot do away with their monarch, at least, not without creating tyrants and falling back into an even worse monarchy (*TTP* 18, 7–8). Spinoza's view here is no doubt informed by his assessment of the short-lived English republic, which culminated in Cromwell, whom Spinoza regarded as a despot. Spinoza uses similar reasoning to argue that the Netherlands should remain a republic (*TTP* 18, 10). It follows that democracy cannot be an option for all states. Consequently, the fact that Spinoza is open to considering other possible constitutions does not necessarily indicate that he has abandoned his preference for democracy.

On the contrary, there is a good deal of evidence to indicate that Spinoza maintained this preference in the *TP*. It seems unlikely that he would have saved discussion of democracy for the end of the book if he did not feel that it was the best government. More importantly, while Spinoza allows for monarchies and aristocracies in the *TP*, he argues that they should adopt democratic principles, including the participation of the common people in their own governance. For instance, Spinoza claims that the greatest threat to a monarchy is the possibility that the monarch will focus

on protecting his own interests, rather than the public interest, since such selfishness gives rise to dissension and division, thus weakening the state (*TP* 6, 1–8). Spinoza's solution is to involve the people in governance through the counselors, as we have seen. Consequently, while this constitution technically counts as a monarchy, it makes use of democratic principles. Spinoza's aristocracy works in much the same way: the aristocratic ruling class is determined not by family membership or social station but rather by election from among the general population (*TP* 8, 14). In fact, Spinoza holds that any man over the age of 30 is eligible (*TP* 8, 15–17), which, for the time, was a rather radical democratic view. Furthermore, Spinoza's aristocracy assures that the general populace is well represented, since there must be a single patrician for every fifty citizens (*TP* 8, 13).

11.3 RELATIONAL AUTONOMY

Philosophers of autonomy today tend to focus their attention on particular domains, for instance, moral philosophy or an area of applied ethics, such as informed consent. General theories of autonomy tend to focus on the psychological processes in virtue of which we regard people as autonomous, without considering, in a serious way, the political and moral dimensions of autonomy. Against this backdrop, Spinoza appears particularly interesting because he offers a broad theory of autonomy that describes not only autonomous psychological processes but also the ethical significance and, we now see, the political significance of autonomy. This section explains Spinoza's view on the political dimension of autonomy and considers a few arguments in its favor.

We should begin by considering why Spinoza regards autonomy as important to politics at all. To do so, it is helpful to compare his view to a natural way of thinking about autonomy, what I will call the agency view. The agency view regards autonomy as an intrinsic feature of rational agents, in other words, something that they all possess, largely independently of their social and political conditions. This approach seems natural in light of two common commitments. The first is that some degree of autonomy is a condition for moral responsibility. Since most agents are morally responsible, regardless of prevailing social and political conditions – whether they live in a free market democracy or totalitarian communism – it follows that they are also, to some degree, autonomous regardless of such conditions. The second is the notion that our autonomy consists in the capacity to engage in certain mental processes, for instance, deliberation that responds to reasons or legislating moral rules. Since agents also possess these capacities, largely independently of social

and political conditions, it follows that they are autonomous, regardless of such conditions.

The previous chapters have shown that Spinoza rejects both of these commitments. With respect to the former, he avoids connecting our autonomy with moral responsibility, as Chapter 3 argued. Consequently, he would not take the fact that we generally hold people morally responsible as evidence that they are free or autonomous; on the contrary, autonomy is to be counted among those excellent things, which "are as difficult as they are rare" (5p42s). With respect to the latter claim, Spinoza avoids thinking of our autonomy as consisting entirely in mental processes. While he holds that our autonomy consists in rationality, he does not think of rationality as existing entirely in one's head. Rather, Spinoza's parallelism doctrine entails that rational ideas and mental processes are identical to bodily states, which depend upon other bodily states and, thus, material conditions. Furthermore, Spinoza holds that our adequate ideas contain the power that directs our actions, which entails that our rationality consists in our actions as much as our mental processes. Since our actions are often constrained and determined by political and social conditions, it follows that our rationality and, thus, our autonomy depend on these conditions.

Consequently, Spinoza opposes the agency view by conceiving our autonomy as dependent on and, to a large extent, determined by social and political conditions. At the deepest level, this is because our autonomy is connected to our activity, acting from our *conatus*, which depends on such conditions. Our *conatus*, understood as our bodily striving to maintain a proportion of motion-and-rest, requires nourishment, shelter and the appropriate conditions for life, while our *conatus*, understood as our striving to understand, requires a steady diet of ideas. It follows that autonomy is not only rare but also fragile, for, just as our body can be starved by a lack of nourishment, our minds can be starved by intolerance and superstition, which restrict the flow of ideas. This is why Spinoza so admired the political and social conditions of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, which, more than any other state, allowed for the free exchange of ideas (*TTP* 20, 15). Indeed, Spinoza's politics can be read productively as responding to the fragility of human autonomy, by investigating the conditions for its development and recommending ways for states to cultivate them. In support of this reading, this chapter has shown that our interest in attaining the appropriate conditions for autonomy essentially provides the justification for the state, since, according to Spinoza, people agree to the social contract for the purpose of promoting their freedom and, thus, their autonomy. Furthermore, Spinoza defends democracy on

the grounds that it creates incentives for a sort of civic participation that promotes autonomy, as the previous section has shown.

Given the political importance of autonomy, how does Spinoza understand the political side of autonomy? Spinoza's view is dominated by two main commitments: first, he understands autonomy as substantive, as I explained in Chapter 3, which entails that the state promotes rationality by instilling particular ideas with a fixed content. On this basis, one might read Spinoza's politics as somewhat authoritarian, for if the state exists to promote specific fixed ideas, then it seems that the state would be justified, even required, to employ draconian measures for ensuring that people accept them. This concern is particularly pressing because Spinoza denies a libertarian view of freedom, as I argued in Chapter 2.

While Spinoza does not resort to traditional liberal measures for warding off these dangers, he does offer measures of his own. As I have argued in previous chapters, Spinoza's freedom requires respecting others, in the sense of recognizing not only their value but also the authority of their choices. This is because people fundamentally become free by acting on their own ideas, which entails that they must be allowed to reach their own conclusions. So, while Spinoza does think that it is the business of the state to encourage people to hold certain fixed beliefs, for instance, that benevolence is intrinsically valuable or, more controversially, that God has no will, he does not think that draconian measures are effective means of reaching this end. Spinoza is keenly aware that irrational people will react poorly to effects to help them become rational, so much so that he would rather offer them an irrational but relatively innocuous civil religion than convince them of the rational truth that God has no will, a measure which would more likely incite rebellion than rationality. This is precisely why Spinoza argues that a free state must ensure the political freedom of speech and thought, because doing so helps them to develop rationality and, thus, to achieve ethical freedom.

> The more one strives to deprive people of freedom of speech, the more obstinately they resist. I do not mean greedy, fawning people with no moral character – their greatest comfort is to think about the money they have in the bank and filling their fat stomachs – but those whom a good upbringing, moral integrity and virtue have rendered freer. (*TTP* 20, 11)

Consequently, we should not take Spinoza's substantive view of autonomy as licensing a state that enforces rational compliance to a strict set of ideas.

Spinoza's political theory of autonomy is characterized, second, by a commitment to what is sometimes called a relational conception of

autonomy, the notion that autonomy is essentially developed and expressed through our interactions with others, our social relationships and participation in communities. This general view is endorsed by a wide variety of philosophers, particularly many communitarians and feminists, who criticize excessively individualistic conceptions of autonomy.[29] They argue that, since autonomy amounts to self-determination, we cannot understand autonomy without considering how our identities are themselves determined by our relationships with others. Spinoza is friendly to this view not only because he understands autonomy as depending on social and political conditions, but, more fundamentally, because of his conception of human beings. The previous chapters have shown that human beings, understood at the most basic level, are collections of finite modes, which are determined by other finite modes. More specifically, our minds are collections of ideas, representing a particular body, which is determined by its interactions with other bodies. It follows that our minds and, consequently, our beliefs, ideas and character, are shaped by the external forces acting on us. This way of thinking irretrievably problematizes the notion of an autonomous person as a discrete, self-defining, independent individual. Rather, Spinoza holds that our identity, in the sense of our character, arises from our sociable tendencies, as the previous chapter argued. Consequently, he holds that our autonomy benefits from our particular relationships with others, especially the rational community, which provides us with the right ideas, models for our behavior and the emotional support to act in accordance with our best judgments.

There is something to be said in favor of Spinoza's thinking about the politics of autonomy. For his combination of a substantive and relational conception of autonomy renders his theory particularly discerning about the social dimension of our autonomy. To understand how, it is helpful to consider a few arguments against procedural conceptions of autonomy, which have been suggested by defenders of relational autonomy.[30] The first argument charges that procedural views do not sufficiently recognize

[29] For an overview of communitarian views on the subject, see Bell (2010). For an overview of feminist conceptions of relational autonomy, see the introduction to Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000). To some extent the difference between relational views and more traditional conceptions of autonomy is a matter of emphasis, since few would regard our autonomy as incompatible with social dependence and relationships, or deny that we develop autonomy, just as we become rational agents, through the assistance of broader communities. On this point see, Friedman (1997, 43–52).

[30] Although many feminists see procedural conceptions as friendly to relational accounts of autonomy, some have argued that procedural conceptions overlook the essentially social element of our autonomy. A substantive view of autonomy is defended by Wolf (1990) and Benson, though only Benson explicitly endorses a more relational conception of autonomy (2000). Other defenders of relational views have argued against specific versions of procedural accounts, such as Friedman (1986).

how autonomy is helped and hindered by social and political conditions. Relational views tend to hold that we are autonomous in virtue of our relationships, for instance, being a parent, spouse, coworker, whereas procedural views hold that we are autonomous in virtue of engaging in certain psychological procedures, such as reflecting or deliberating on the basis of reasons. While procedural views certainly provide some resources for recognizing how relationships can harm or benefit our autonomy, by considering how they affect the development of certain psychological capacities, these resources are arguably too limited. To explain this point, return to our example from Chapter 2 above of a woman in a deeply patriarchal society, who is deprived of fundamental social and political freedoms, including the ability to leave one's home without the company of a husband or male family member. While we can understand how this situation harms the woman's autonomy, to some extent, by considering her mental capacities and processes, for instance, whether she has developed the capacity to engage in meaningful reflection, the objection charges that such examination cannot provide a complete picture of her autonomy. For, if our identities are formed through our relationships with others, by being a citizen, professional or friend, then one cannot be genuinely self-directing unless she is able to develop her identity by engaging in these relationships. It follows that the woman's autonomy is harmed, independently of how it affects her mental processes, simply because she is prevented from forming genuinely independent friendships with women outside of her family and, furthermore, to relate to members of the broader community as an equal and independent citizen.[31]

While Spinoza was openly sexist, an arch rationalist and an architect of the Enlightenment, his view of autonomy is sensitive to the concerns that motivate this criticism.[32] For Spinoza holds that rationality is social, since reason places requirements on our interactions and relationships with others, for instance, that we treat them with benevolence and form friendships with them. It follows that our rationality and, thus, our autonomy require us to interact with and play certain roles in broader communities. With respect to the previous example, then, Spinoza's view implies that the woman's autonomy is harmed because she is deprived of the social interaction and relationships that her autonomy requires. In particular, his view of democracy, considered above, suggests that her autonomy is harmed

[31] I think this line of argument guides Stoljar (2000), though it is most clearly articulated in Benson (1991), (1994) and, to a lesser extent, (2000). The argument is also raised by Friedman (1997, 56–8).

[32] Other ways in which Spinoza's philosophy allows us to respond to issues like sexism and domination are addressed in Lloyd (1994, Chapter 5) and Gatens and Lloyd (1999).

because she is excluded from civic life. For democratic participation is beneficial because it encourages us to relate to one another as potential participants in collective political action and, in doing so, to recognize the value of others. It follows that democratic participation is valuable because of its connection to a certain way of engaging with and regarding other members of the state, in other words, to civic life. According to this reasoning, even if the woman had the right to vote, the restrictions on her movement and association nevertheless interfere in her ability to relate with others as an equal citizen, thereby harming her autonomy.

Spinoza's view is also supported by a second argument against procedural conceptions of autonomy: identifying our autonomy with mental procedures deprives us of the resources to understand how agency is helped or hindered by social and political conditions.[33] In the example above, understanding the woman's degree of autonomy requires us to attend to a constellation of political and social structures, including prevailing cultural views about the family, a legal system that enforces these views with violence or threats of violence and an economic system that prevents women from supporting themselves financially. Consequently, we cannot effectively diagnose threats to our autonomy without attending to these structures. This suggests that our theory of autonomy ought to provide us with the resources for analyzing these structures and their affects on us. Spinoza's view responds to this concern not only because he understands our autonomy as determined by a social and political context, but also because he specifies the particular conditions that promote autonomy: those that encourage us to employ rational principles, such as democratic deliberation, and to form relationships, particularly friendships, with rational people, whom we inevitably imitate. Furthermore, Spinoza explains how states can promote autonomy, through democratic mechanisms for civic participation and policies directed to the common good. Clearly, more work is needed to determine to what extent Spinoza's particular analysis and recommendations help us to understand the social dimension of autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

Spinoza argues that the purpose of the state is promoting people's freedom, in the positive sense of their self-determination and rationality. It follows that he understands ethics and politics as closely related, since both aim

[33] See Oshana (1998), Friedman (2000, 40–1).

to help people attain precisely the same sort of freedom. Consequently, we can look to Spinoza's politics for insight into the nature of a free life. Since the purpose of the state is freedom, which is a rational aim, it follows that our participation in the state is also rational. Furthermore, his defense of democracy implies that democratic political participation increases our virtue and freedom. This is because, first, political actors in democracies are members of the general populace, which entails that their self-interest inclines them to act for the good of the general public. Second, and more importantly, since democratic deliberation operates on the principle of majority rule, democracy also inclines self-interested people to identify and act for their common interests by forming coalitions and making compromises. This second reason entails that participation in democratic deliberation encourages people to act for the concerns of others, which promotes their rationality because Spinoza holds that adopting rational habits helps us to develop rationality. More specifically, democratic participation encourages us to adopt the perspective of reason and to recognize the value of others and rationality itself. It follows that democratic participation is important to developing rationality and, thus, to a free life.

Finally, this chapter has supplemented our previous explanation of Spinoza's views on autonomy by considering its political aspect. Spinoza regards autonomy as particularly important to politics because autonomy is roughly equivalent to freedom, which is the state's purpose. Consequently, the survival of the state depends on its ability to protect people's autonomy and its success can be evaluated in terms of this goal. Furthermore, Spinoza's politics is particularly attentive to the way that our autonomy is constituted by our relationships with others and depends on the political conditions for these relationships; in other words, he upholds a relational conception of autonomy. This is because Spinoza understands our power as depending on and expressed through our relationships with others, not only the friendship of the rational, but also the civic life of democratic participation, for Spinoza's defense of democracy implies that such participation promotes our freedom by inclining us to think about and interact with others more rationally. Spinoza's view is also attentive to the social aspect of autonomy because he upholds a substantive rather than a procedural account of autonomy. Procedural accounts are arguably less sensitive to the social aspect of autonomy, since our autonomy can be helped and harmed in ways that are not reflected in our psychological processes.

Conclusion: "The true freedom of man"

At bottom, this book is about a difficult question concerning Spinoza's theory of freedom, one which is posed by Spinoza's very definition of it. The definition offers a picture of ideal freedom, complete and perfect self-determination, which stands in stark contrast to the necessary passivity of human existence. The question is not how this is consistent, or how freedom can be a realistic ethical goal – though these are important as well – but rather, what freedom is for us, mere mortals, in other words, what is the nature of living, breathing, flesh-and-blood freedom? This question is as much one that, for Spinoza, is philosophical as it is, for his readers, interpretive. For, if freedom consists in self-determination, which humans, by their nature, can only possess to a limited degree, then understanding human freedom requires determining the precise extent to which they can become self-determined and the particular human activities that do and do not contribute to their self-determination.

In explaining Spinoza's response to this question, I have been keen to refute an opposing answer, one that is seductive in its simplicity but overlooks some of the most important and interesting aspects of his philosophy. The answer supposes that Spinoza only conceives of freedom in ideal terms, as divine self-determination, the perfect reasoning of adequate ideas or the ethical perfection of the free man. This answer suggests that Spinoza's ethics is rationalist through and through, holding us to the standards of perfectly rational agents, without regard to people as they actually are. Of course, this answer flies in the face of Spinoza's political philosophy, which dismisses the suggestion that people are perfectly rational agents as a fantasy based on misguided desires. It also flies in the face of Spinoza's metaphysics, which pointedly conceives of humans as mere collections of finite modes arising entirely from the power of other finite modes. In fact, since our freedom is our power, claiming that we are finite modes entails that our freedom must ultimately derive from external sources, prior modes in the infinite chain of causes. Consequently, humans cannot attain any

of these ideal conceptions of freedom, not even attaining adequate ideas, which is just the mental expression of perfect self-determination, being an adequate cause.

In response to these difficulties, a defender of the opposing view might try to paper over the tensions by turning a blind eye to problematic texts and commitments or explaining away the inevitable inconsistencies on a case-by-case basis. Alternatively, one might conclude that there is a deep tension in Spinoza's philosophy, that he sometimes conceives of humans as necessarily dependent and passionate, and at other times as capable of God-like self-determination. One might even conclude that he was an elitist, offering, on one hand, an ethics for the select few capable of attaining the true freedom of rationality and, on the other hand, a political philosophy to address the problem of managing the irrational masses. Rather than pursuing any of these routes, this book supposes that Spinoza offers idealized conceptions of freedom not as the final word on the nature of human freedom, but rather as a starting point for understanding human freedom. Consequently, the book has attempted to reconstruct what a free human life must look like, given both his conception of ideal freedom and his understanding of our passive and determined nature.

The results of this investigation, Spinoza's view of human freedom, can be summarized as follows. The rationalistic answer above is correct that human freedom requires self-determination in the form of having adequate ideas, at least, the most adequate ideas available to us. However, our necessary passivity and finitude entail that human reason is fundamentally limited: we can only have adequate ideas to a limited degree and even those adequate ideas can only conceive of a few things, abstract essences and properties that are common to all things. It follows that human reason provides little guidance about particular things. Since we ultimately are particular things, dependent on other particular things, reason is ultimately blind to many of the things that both threaten and are the source of our power. Consequently, our freedom, in the sense of our power, depends upon passive inadequate ideas, through which we attend to these particular threats and opportunities. In this way, human freedom requires both reason's infallible but general representations and representations of the imagination, which can be problematic but are indispensable.

This reading brings into relief a difficult question for Spinoza, one that is often overlooked: since the imagination is the source of all false beliefs and the irrational emotions that lead us into bondage, how can we employ imaginative ideas without falling prey to these problems? In other words, when do inadequate ideas help to promote our power and freedom

and when do they harm them? I have argued that Spinoza answers by assigning a particular distribution of labor to reason and the imagination. This distribution occurs in practical deliberation, since the imagination contributes to our freedom by determining how to respond to particular threats and opportunities. In this distribution, it is reason's part to conceive human nature and its place in the natural order, on the basis of which reason provides general guidance about our good, in the form of practical laws. Since this guidance is too general to direct our action in particular situations, the imagination also has a part to play in determining how to interpret and apply reason's guidance. Human freedom, then, requires us to engage in practical deliberation that strikes the right balance between reason and imagination. The right balance is one in which reason is responsible for setting our general ends and goals, while the imagination plays an instrumental role in helping us to achieve them. According to this view, we attain human freedom not simply by obeying reason's practical laws, but rather by negotiating practical situations on the basis of these laws, employing a kind of practical wisdom. Consequently, a free person will not always act in specific, prescribed ways. Rather, she will exhibit general tendencies and dispositions in action, in other words a virtuous character. In this respect, "the true freedom of man" is *fortitudo*, as Spinoza claims.

A central conclusion of this reading is that human freedom is practical. For it requires not just having the most adequate ideas possible and achieving a corresponding affective and psychological state, but also properly interpreting reason's guidance so that we act to promote our power. Consequently, it is a mistake to conceive of freedom as consisting entirely in pure intellectual activities, such as contemplation, philosophical reflection and scholarly pursuits. While these activities obviously can be important to developing adequate ideas, we also acquire these ideas through our relationships with rational people, by mimicking their behaviors and attitudes, and through our democratic participation, which requires us to respect the legitimacy of others' concerns, which leads to the rational recognition that benefiting humans has intrinsic value. Furthermore, Spinoza holds that acquiring adequate ideas also directs our actions, leading us to engage in the world for the good of all by promoting rationality. This is likely how Spinoza understood his own political activism (which is precisely what the *TTP* is, if not the *Ethics*). Indeed, it is not inappropriate to think of Spinoza as an intellectual ringleader for a group of radicals bent on changing the world: his mentor van den Enden was eventually executed for plotting to assassinate the King of France; another of his circle, Plockhoy founded a Utopian colony in Delaware; the Koerbagh brothers were

sentenced to hard labor for spreading dangerous views that closely resembled Spinoza's.[1]

This reading has important implications for how we think about Spinoza's ethics and its significance. To summarize these, without simply repeating what I have already said, I will take a different tack by considering the implications of my reading for understanding Spinoza's place in the history of ethics. Locating Spinoza within any historical panorama is challenging, partly because of his omnivorous philosophical tastes. He employs terms, concepts and theories from a wide variety of traditions: Judaism, scholasticism, ancient ethics, as well as the emerging new science and the political theories of his time.[2] Although Spinoza sometimes fancied himself an heir to many of these traditions, it is not always clear that his views bear anything more than a superficial resemblance to their ancestors. For instance, while he claims that love of God is our highest good, a view that one might find in Christian and Judaic philosophy, he understands this claim in a way that most Christians and Jews would regard as anathema. Consequently, it takes some philosophical legwork to determine the extent to which Spinoza's allusions reflect substantive philosophical kinship.

It is also difficult to locate Spinoza's ethics because it tends to identify views that are usually distinguished and sometimes, even, regarded as inconsistent. For instance, consider his claim that we become virtuous by increasing our power. Stated in this way, the claim appears egoist, in a rather Hobbesian spirit. But, since he understands our power as our *conatus*, which is our essence, this claim is equivalent to claiming that we increase our virtue by excelling in our nature, a perfectionist view more familiar from Malebranche or Leibniz. Furthermore, since Spinoza holds that increasing our power gives us joy, the claim is also equivalent to claiming that it is virtuous to promote one's joy, a somewhat hedonistic claim. Since egoism, perfectionism and hedonism are usually regarded as prima facie very different views, how should we categorize Spinoza's theory of virtue? The difficulty is not just that he belongs to several categories at once, but that he regards these claims as equivalent, thereby calling into question the distinctions between the categories themselves.

While there can be no neat or simple story of Spinoza's place in the history of ethics, this book has advanced a few key claims on the matter. The first concerns his relationship to the ancient Stoics. The notion that

[1] For the history of Spinoza's circle and their influence, see Israel (2001).

[2] While one might read this tendency, rather cynically, as a calculated political ploy, I like to think that Spinoza thought he was capturing a truth at the heart of these different intellectual traditions.

Spinoza's ethics is similar to the Stoics' is suggested by the therapy reading, since the Stoics understood ethics as cognitive therapy in the sense of providing knowledge that transforms our desires and affective states for attaining the end of happiness. The therapy reading also suggests that Spinoza aims to eliminate the passions as much as possible, which resembles the ancient Stoic view that the passions are irrational movements, antithetical to our rational nature and, consequently, to a virtuous life, which accords with nature. Furthermore, the Stoics were famously intolerant of anything less than perfect virtue, even though they admit that no person, with the possible exception of Socrates, has ever met this standard.[3] Consequently, the Stoic reading is further cemented by the standard view that the free man is the model of human nature, which entails that Spinoza's ethics holds us to unattainable standards.

This book, in contrast, puts greater distance between Spinoza and the Stoics, first, by showing that he does not hold us to unattainable ethical standards. This is because, on my reading, the free man is a thought experiment, illustrating reason's guidance and rational emotions, not the model of human nature. Apart from the arguments in Chapter 8, this claim is also supported by Spinoza's view of the good, discussed in Chapter 5. I argued there that Spinoza's many claims about the good are ultimately reducible to the claim that the good is what promotes our *conatus*. Since Spinoza claims that we should judge our good with respect to the model of human nature, this suggests that the model is actually an understanding of our *conatus*, not the free man.

Second, Spinoza departs from the Stoics because he accepts the value of human passivity. Spinoza's view on the value of passivity is evident not only in his view on the value of experience, but also in his theory of the highest good, which he explains as the love of God. Such knowledge counts as a kind of joy because knowing God increases our power, and as a kind of love because it comes about, at least partly, from an external cause, God, expressed as the prior modes that are the ultimate source of all our power. In this way, Spinoza claims that the thing of greatest value and the goal of an ethical life is an understanding of ourselves as dependent on and passive to God.[4] In fact, this understanding is the basis for Spinoza's morality, in

[3] In Plutarch's words, "just as in the sea the man an arm's length from the surface drowns no less than the one who has sunk five hundred fathoms" (*On Common Conceptions* 1063 A–B, trans. Long and Sedley 1987, 382).

[4] I am not claiming that the love of God is a passion, since it is an adequate idea and, thus, an active emotion.

the sense that the command to act with benevolence arises from the love of God, the recognition that we benefit from other individuals.[5]

Spinoza even upholds the value of the passions. This is because the passions provide us with a kind of knowledge that is particularly important to ethical or moral reasoning: the knowledge of our own virtue and perfection. Since the passions correspond to and represent increases and decreases in our power, they indicate the degree of our power and how it is affected by external objects. Furthermore, Spinoza's general views on the value of passivity above entail that the passions are valuable, because all of our inadequate ideas – that is, all passivity, understood at the mental level – qualify as passions. The argument for this claim goes as follows. According to Spinoza's definition of joy and sorrow, anytime that an inadequate idea represents an increase or decrease in our power, it qualifies as a kind of joy or sorrow. Since Spinoza holds that our mind strives to represent the body – "the first *conatus* of our mind is to affirm the existence of our body" (3p10d) – it increases our power simply to represent the body. Since all of our ideas represent the body (2p13), it follows that all of our ideas count as a kind of joy, unless they represent decreases in the power of the body. Consequently, all our passive ideas, including sensations, are either kinds of joy or sorrow, in other words, passions.[6]

While my reading generally moves Spinoza farther from the Stoics, it moves him closer to the tradition that understands morality in terms of laws. For I have argued that Spinoza's remarks on divine law and the dictates of reason should be understood as offering a theory of natural law, though one that downplays their status as divine commands. In this respect, Spinoza's theory is similar to, though more secular than, that of Grotius: whereas Grotius famously argued that natural laws would be binding, even if they were not commanded by God, Spinoza asserts that they are binding, even though they are not commanded by God.[7] Reading

[5] My strong claims here about the value of passivity should not be taken as implying the quietist view that the goal of an ethical life is to passively accept all things as necessarily determined and beyond our control, a reading which moves Spinoza closer to the later Roman Stoics. One might mistakenly believe this view is confirmed by Spinoza's claim that accepting his view of freedom teaches us "to expect and to endure with patience both faces of fortune" (2p49s). But Spinoza is here claiming that we should accept only what is beyond our control, not that we should regard all things as beyond our control. Furthermore, while Spinoza holds that understanding our own necessary passivity increases our activity (5p6), it does not follow that our activity consists entirely in understanding our passivity. On the contrary, achieving the highest good requires acting in accordance with reason's dictates (4p28; 4p24).

[6] Spinoza offers something like this argument in the final explanation of 3DOE.

[7] Grotius' view is expressed in his famous *etiamsi daremus* line from *On the Law of War and Peace*, "even if we should concede that there is no God" (1925, 13).

Spinoza as a natural law theorist also brings out his common ground with Hobbes. While we should be careful not to overstate the similarity, they share a fundamental conception of ethics as identifying the most rational means of attaining one's good. Furthermore, Spinoza draws on a number of distinctively Hobbesian claims in elaborating this conception: our good is fundamentally self-interested, the object of our desires, and subjective, in other words, determined partly on the basis of our desires. They even agree that attaining our good promotes our freedom, since Hobbes understands the good as what we desire and our freedom as the ability to pursue one's desires.

The subject of freedom also indicates Spinoza's fundamental break with Hobbes: whereas Hobbes conceives of freedom negatively, as a lack of constraints and obstacles to pursuing one's desires, Spinoza understands freedom positively, as acting from one's own power by using reason. This difference is connected to some of the more obvious differences between the two. In politics, both philosophers hold that the state is constituted by the power of the people, who comply with the sovereign's commands because doing so is necessary to the maintenance of the state, which promotes their interests. However, whereas Hobbes understands our interests as our survival and the satisfaction of desire, Spinoza understands our interests, more robustly, as increasing the power of our *conatus*. Consequently, Spinoza understands our true interests as satisfying desires that arise from our *conatus*, active or rational desires. This inclines Spinoza to place higher expectations on the state, for he holds that people only support the state on the supposition that it promotes their ability to act from their *conatus*, in other words, their freedom. Since Spinoza understands their freedom in the positive sense of their rationality, this means that the state must do much more than simply provide security and enforcement mechanisms for contracts. This leads Spinoza to defend democracy, which Hobbes strongly disliked, because it makes possible the civic participation that promotes rationality.

Spinoza's difference with Hobbes on the nature of freedom is also connected to their different ethical views. While both philosophers conceive of ethics as offering rational guidance for attaining one's good, Hobbes thinks that such guidance must be determined by a broadly empirical investigation of one's desires; thus, Hobbes famously conceives of ethics as the study of "consequences from the passions of men" (*L* 9: 48). Spinoza, however, understands the good as what promotes our ability to act from our own power or our freedom. Since he understands our power as our essence, which is known through a priori, metaphysical investigation,

Spinoza thinks that our good and the rational means to attain it can also be investigated in this way. In this respect, Spinoza offers a more rationalist and metaphysically robust conception of the natural law. This conception leads Spinoza to very different ethical views, most notably, on the value of benevolence. For a priori investigation reveals that our nature benefits from agreement with the nature of others, which entails that it is always valuable to promote the rationality of others and, thus, to act for their good. Indeed, since acting in accordance with reason is intrinsically valuable, it follows that it is good to act with benevolence, regardless of the consequences of doing so, a notion that Hobbes cannot countenance.

This rationalist approach moves Spinoza's conception of natural laws closer to Kantian moral laws. Since Spinoza's God has no will, his natural laws are better understood as rational rules rather than divine commands. Furthermore, Spinoza, like Kant, holds that these natural laws have an a priori basis. Indeed, Spinoza even holds that reason endorses maxims on the basis of their universalizability, which is why the perfectly rational free man never lies. Nevertheless, Spinoza's laws are still natural laws and, consequently, importantly different from Kant's. Most obviously, Spinoza holds that the laws are justified on self-interested grounds, because they promote one's good; for this reason, Spinoza's natural laws cannot be regarded as moral laws in the strict Kantian sense. We should not overstate the difference, though, for Spinoza holds that reason understands things impartially, since it takes no account of particular things or of one's position in space and time. Consequently, Spinoza regards benevolence as necessarily valuable, independently of one's particular relationship to others.[8] It follows that Spinoza's ethics, like Kant's, upholds the value of respecting others, in the sense of caring for their interests regardless of our particular relationships to them.

There is a further important difference between Spinoza's natural law and Kant's moral law: Spinoza denies that all universalizable principles are natural laws. This point is brought into relief by considering their different views on honesty. While both agree that the purely rational perspective rejects the permissibility of lying on the grounds that a maxim permitting lying cannot be universalized, Kant famously concludes that we are bound by a moral law that prohibits lying in all instances, whereas Spinoza does not recognize a prohibition against lying as a natural law.[9] This is because we,

[8] Saying that benevolence is always valuable does not imply that it is always recommended, since the value of benevolence might be outweighed by other considerations.

[9] See Kant's "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy."

unlike the free man, do not choose our actions purely on the basis of reason. Rather, we must also consider the details of particular situations, which indicate that lying is sometimes in our best interests. Thus, while Spinoza is known for his rationalism, his ethics is far more skeptical of reason's ability to provide practical guidance than Kant's. Indeed, Spinoza denies that reason's natural laws can be applied in a decisive and unproblematic way, which is more congenial to his eudaimonistic conception of ethics, as indicating the value of various goods so that we may plan our lives appropriately.

In discussing Spinoza's place in the history of ethics, I also aim to say something about his relevance and significance to ethics today. The foregoing discussion of Spinoza and Kant indicates that Spinoza distinguishes between the rational perspective and the practical perspective of agents. This distinction is interesting and, to some extent, attractive because it allows Spinoza to capture our intuition that ethical reflection should be in some respects impartial, while also leaving room for the ethical relevance of self-interest. Spinoza holds that the perspective of reason is impartial, but only in a very specific sense, since it is not selfless but rather blind to the spatial and temporal perspective through which we often assess our good. This entails that the perspective of reason is impartial in the sense of recognizing the value of all people, without discriminating on the basis of one's particular relations to them, and in the sense of disinclining one to value material goods, which often only have value in virtue of their spatial and temporal relations to individuals.

Nevertheless, Spinoza also allows for partial ethical reasoning, first, because he accepts that we must always choose action by consulting the more partial perspective that attends to our particular situations. Second, he allows for the ethical significance of the emotions, which Kant regarded as part of inclination and, thus, necessarily partial. Indeed, Spinoza holds that reason is itself affective, for it consists in adequate ideas, which are a kind of joy since they represent increases in our power. Consequently, Spinoza claims that the height of our rational powers, the knowledge of God, is a kind of joy. He similarly holds that following reason's dictate to act with benevolence necessarily involves and arises from love. Yet Spinoza is able, to some degree, to escape much of the force of Kantian objections to grounding ethical requirements in the emotions, because he grounds them in rational love, which is impartial in the same way as reason generally.

However, the most promising aspect of Spinoza's ethics is his view of autonomy, since it defends attractive Kantian intuitions about the ethical significance of autonomy. Spinoza holds that we are most autonomous

when we direct ourselves in accordance with reason and the natural law, in other words, when we are moral, according to a specific Spinozistic sense of the term. He also holds that autonomy is the basis for morality, in the sense that we can only recognize ethical directives, such as the natural law, by using reason, which requires our autonomy. Yet Spinoza captures these intuitions while avoiding some of Kant's more objectionable commitments. To begin with, Kant holds that we are autonomous when we legislate the moral law to ourselves because in doing so we act from reason, which is spontaneous, undetermined by any prior causes.

> Reason acts freely, without being determined dynamically by external or internal grounds temporally preceding it in the chain of natural causes, and this freedom of reason cannot only be regarded negatively, as independence from empirical conditions . . . but also positively by a faculty of beginning a series of occurrences from itself, in such a way that in reason itself nothing begins, but as the unconditioned condition of every voluntary action, it allows of no condition prior to it in time. (A553/B581)

In this respect, Kantian autonomy presupposes the denial of causal determinism, at least with respect to certain acts of will. Kant calls this position transcendental freedom, a causality "through which something happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause, i.e., an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself" (A446/B474). Kant makes sense of the possibility of such causality by appealing to transcendental idealism, the view that all appearances of objects "are to be regarded as mere representations and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are only sensible forms of our intuition" (A369). In other words, objects only have spatial and temporal properties in virtue of our peculiar way of representing them. It follows that the causal relations that hold between objects in space and time apply only to objects of experience, not reason, which is not an object of appearance.[10] In other words, acting from reason means acting independently of the causally determined relations among objects in space and time.

For the present discussion, I need only point out that transcendental freedom and idealism have been subject to a long history of criticism, which Spinoza's view avoids. For he rejects the notion that human freedom consists in spontaneity, arguing that following rational principles promotes our autonomy, rather, because it expresses our true nature. Spinoza also takes a strong stand against transcendental idealism, for his naturalism denies that humans should be understood differently from the way that

[10] On this point, see Allison (1990, 30–41).

we understand the rest of the natural world.[11] Consequently, to the extent that one finds these Kantian suppositions objectionable, Spinoza provides attractive alternative ways of thinking. Of course, Spinoza's philosophical system relies on other claims that are also objectionable to philosophers today, most notably, the notion that we have an essential nature, a striving to increase our power. However, many of Spinoza's claims can be defended on independent grounds. For instance, Chapter 2 argued that we can understand reason as contributing to our autonomy on the grounds that reason is intuitively basic to who we are. More work is needed to determine whether it is possible to provide a Spinozistic account of autonomy that is palatable to philosophers today.

Because Spinoza does not understand our autonomy as consisting in spontaneous self-causation, he is more attentive to how external things can promote our autonomy. Consequently, his view is attractive, finally, because it attends to the social and political context for developing and expressing our autonomy. For Spinoza, our autonomy consists in our rational powers, the development of which requires the assistance of external things, particularly rational people. According to Spinoza, we are psychologically constituted to imitate the affects, beliefs and judgments of others, so that our happiness is bound up with theirs. Consequently, we naturally seek the happiness and praise of others, which leads us to adapt our beliefs and behaviors to those of our communities. Of course, our social nature is a potential threat to our virtue, for, if not properly directed, it can lead us to an excessive concern for the opinions of others, what Spinoza calls ambition. However, our social nature can also be a great boon to virtue, leading us to model ourselves after and to draw strength from members of a rational community: parents, teachers and friends. It follows that our autonomy can also be threatened or strengthened by our relationships with others and the political and economic conditions that influence and structure these relationships. Most notably, Spinoza holds that democracy promotes our autonomy because it encourages deliberative processes that lead us to develop concern for the interests of others. In this respect, Spinoza is naturally aligned with contemporary accounts of autonomy that focus on its relational nature.

Furthermore, Spinoza's politics is exceptionally attentive to the social and political conditions for autonomy because he upholds a substantive rather than procedural account of autonomy. Procedural accounts tend to view autonomy as consisting in the psychological processes required for

[11] Of course, Spinoza's claims here are controversial today as well.

autonomy, certain kinds of deliberation and reflection. This is potentially problematic, since our autonomy consists partly in engaging in certain relationships, regardless of their effects on our psychological processes. Furthermore, examining autonomy at the psychological level is not always helpful to understanding complex social and political conditions for autonomy. Spinoza, in contrast, holds that autonomy consists in our rationality itself, which cannot be understood in isolation from our relationships, through which our rationality is expressed and which serve as the condition for developing our rationality, particularly, the rational character. Consequently, Spinoza provides a broad framework for conceiving of autonomy that integrates its social and political dimensions with consideration of its psychological and ethical dimensions.

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