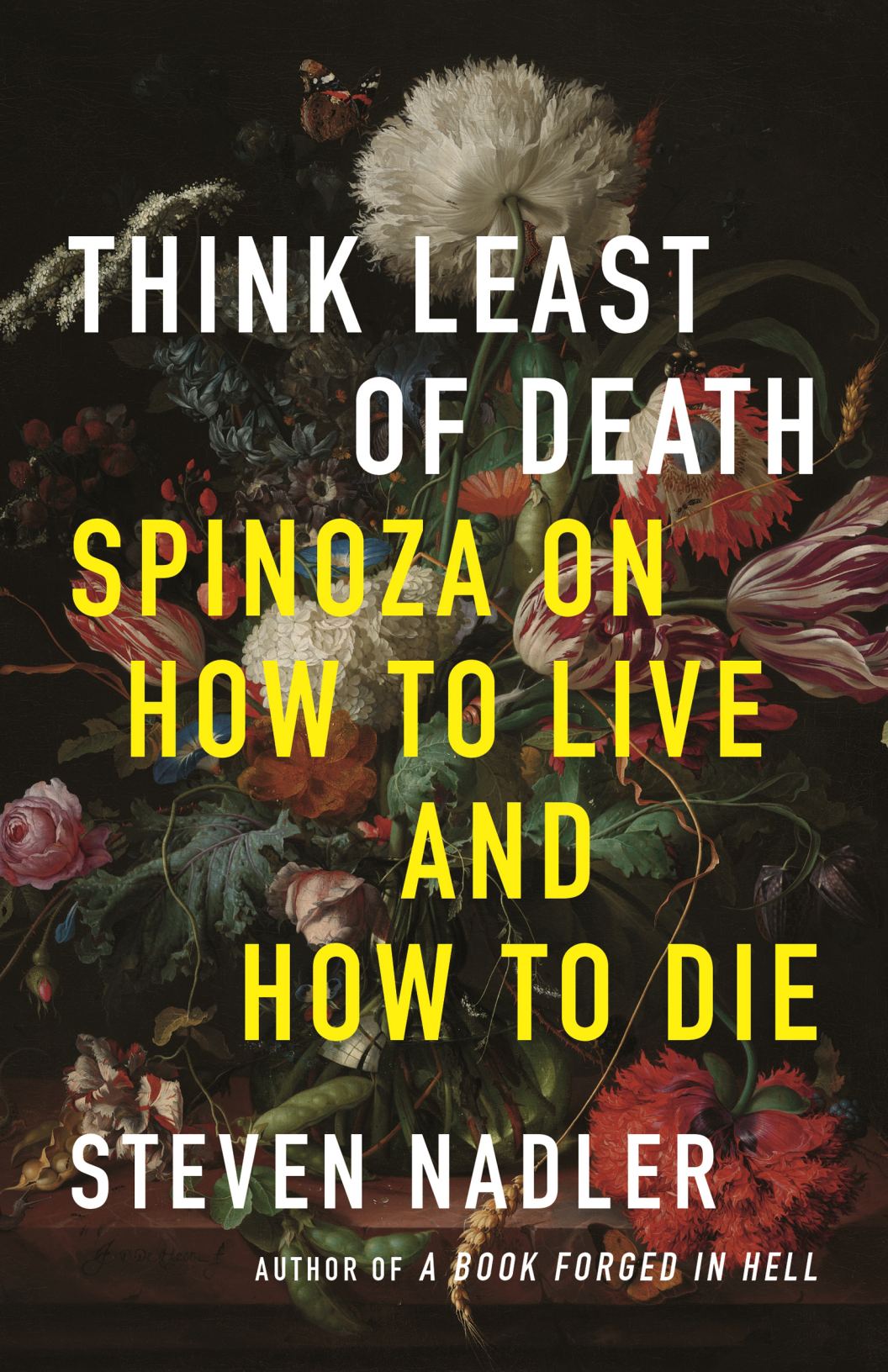
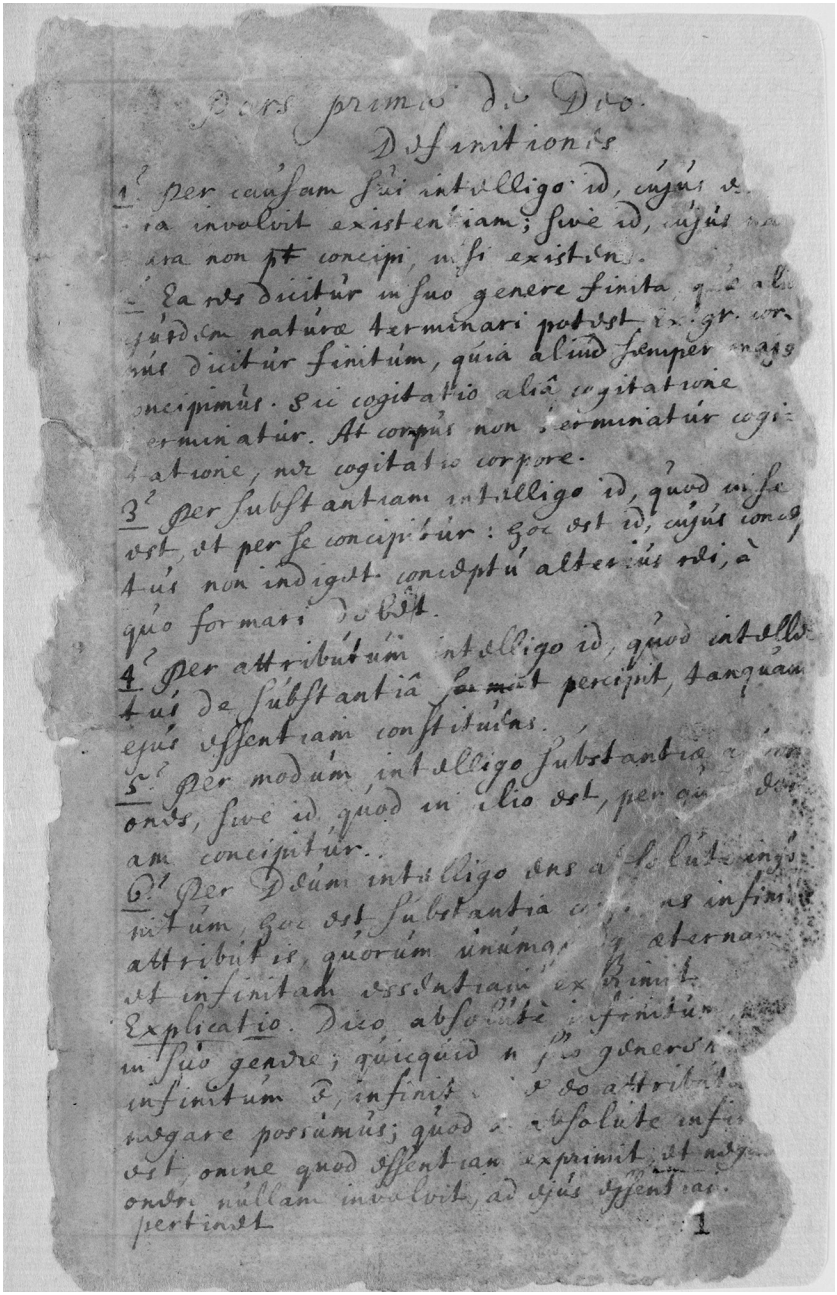

THINK LEAST OF DEATH
SPINOZA ON HOW TO LIVE AND HOW TO DIE
STEVEN NADLER
AUTHOR OF A BOOK FORGED IN HELL

THINK LEAST OF DEATH



Pars primo de Deo.

Definitiones

1° Per causam sui intelligo id, cujus essentia involvit existentiam; sive id, cujus natura non potest concipi, nisi existens.

2° Ea res dicitur in suo genere finita, quæ aliquid ejusdem naturæ terminari potest. Ex. gr. corpus dicitur finitum, quia aliud semper majus concipimus. Sic cogitatio alia cogitatione terminatur. At corpus non terminatur cogitatione, nec cogitatio corpore.

3° Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est, et per se concipitur: hoc est id, cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debet.

4° Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejus essentiam constituens.

5° Per modum intelligo substantiæ affectiones, sive id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur.

6° Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum, hoc est substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque æternam et infinitam essentiam exprimit.

Explicatio. Dico absolute infinitum, non in suo genere; quicquid enim in suo genere infinitum est, infinitas et de attributis negare possumus; quod autem absolute infinitum est, omne quod essentiam exprimit, et negationem nullam involvit, ad ejus essentiam pertinet.

1

The first page of Spinoza's *Ethics*, from the only surviving manuscript of the work, discovered by Leen Spruit in 2010 in the Vatican Library (*Vat. Lat.* 12838). Image reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

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STEVEN NADLER

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"On Spinoza's Free Man," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1 (2015): 103–20.

"Spinoza on Lying and Suicide," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24 (2016): 257–78.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Spinoza

C: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2 vols., edited and translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016).

Ep.: *Epistola* (Letter).

Ethics: Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata; cited by part (roman numeral), proposition (p), demonstration (dem), definition (def), scholium (s), and corollary (c).

G: *Spinoza Opera*, 4 vols., edited by Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitaetsbuchhandlung, 1925).

KV: *Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs welstand* (*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*).

S: *Spinoza: The Letters*, edited by Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, and Jacob Adler, translated by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995).

TIE: *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*).

TTP: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*).

Other Works

AT: *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols., edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1974–1983).

CSM: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols., edited and translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoohoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

CSMK: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, *The Correspondence*, edited and translated by John Cottingham,

Robert Stoohoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

FWC: *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 2 vols., edited by Jacob Freudenthal, Manfred Walther, and Michael Czelinski (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2006).

THINK LEAST OF DEATH

1

"A NEW WAY OF LIFE"

Every day billions of people devote a significant amount of time to worshiping an imaginary being. More precisely, they praise, exalt, and pray to the God of the major Abrahamic religions. They put their hopes in—and they fear—a transcendent, supernatural deity that, they believe, created the world and now exercises providence over it.

In the prophetic writings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this God appears endowed with familiar psychological and moral characteristics. He—the Abrahamic God is typically conceived as masculine—has knowledge, perception, intention, volition, and desire, and He experiences emotions such as jealousy, disappointment, pleasure, and sadness. God is powerful and free, unconstrained in His omnipotence. He issues commandments that He expects to be fulfilled, and He exercises harsh judgment over those who fail to obey them. God is also good, benevolent, and merciful, and the providential plan conceived and pursued by God is grounded in wisdom and justice.

This all-too-human God does not exist, or so argues the seventeenth-century philosopher Bento de Spinoza.[1] Such a divinity is a superstitious fiction, he claims, grounded in the irrational passions of human beings who daily suffer the vicissitudes of nature. Feeling lost and abandoned in an insecure world that does not cater to their wishes and yet, at the same time, finding in that world an order and convenience that seems more than

accidental, they imagine a governing Spirit that, on the model of human agency, directs all things toward certain ends. Here is how Spinoza describes the common psychological process:

> They find—both in themselves and outside themselves—many means that are very helpful in seeking their own advantage, e.g., eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish. Hence, they consider all natural things as means to their own advantage. And knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. For after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use.[2]

A comforting thought indeed, but no more true for the consolation it brings. Such people "who feign a God like man . . . wander far from the true knowledge of God." There is no transcendent deity; there is no supernatural being, no being who is separate or different from or beyond Nature. There was no creation; there will be no final judgment. There is only Nature and what belongs to Nature.

The word 'God' is still available, even useful, particularly as it captures certain essential features of Nature that constitute (at least among philosophers in Spinoza's time) the definition of God: Nature is an eternal, infinite, necessarily existing substance, the most real and self-caused cause of whatever else is real.

(Spinoza defines 'substance,' the basic category of his metaphysics, as "what is in itself and conceived through itself," that is, what has true ontological and epistemological independence.) Thus, God is nothing distinct from Nature itself. God is Nature, and Nature is all there is. This is why Spinoza prefers the phrase *Deus sive Natura* ("God or Nature").

Early in his philosophical masterpiece, the *Ethics*, Spinoza says that "whatever is, is in God," and "from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways."[3] All things, without exception, are in and a part of Nature; they are governed by the principles of Nature and brought about by other natural causes. Spinoza can be read either as a pantheist—and historically this seems to be far and away the most common interpretation—or as an atheist, as some of his most vehement critics (and fans) have done. Either way, what is non-negotiable is the denial of the personal, anthropomorphic Abrahamic God.[4]

It follows that there is, and can be, no such thing as divine providence, at least as this is typically understood. Everything that happens in Nature and by Nature's laws happens with blind, absolute necessity. Every thing and every state of affairs is causally determined to be as it is. Neither Nature itself nor anything in Nature could have been otherwise. As Spinoza puts it, "In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."[5] In Spinoza's view, this is not the best of all possible worlds; it is not even one among many possible worlds. This is the *only* possible world. "Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced."[6]

Needless to say, there are not, and cannot be, miracles, understood as divinely caused exceptions to the laws of nature. It is not just that miracles are highly unlikely or difficult to detect—they are metaphysically impossible. Nature cannot possibly contravene its own necessary ways. Events we take to be miraculous are simply those of whose natural causal explanation we are ignorant. "Nothing happens in nature which is contrary to its universal laws. . . . The term 'miracle' cannot be understood except in relation to men's opinions, and means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of another familiar thing, or at least which cannot be so explained by the one who writes or relates the miracle."[7]

Teleology, too, is a fiction.[8] There are no purposes for Nature and no purposes in Nature. Nature itself does not exist for the sake of anything else, and nothing is directed by Nature toward any end. Whatever is, just is; whatever happens, just happens (and had to happen). Neither the universe itself nor anything in the universe was created to achieve some goal.

What is true for teleology is also true of moral and aesthetic values. Nothing is good or bad or beautiful or ugly in itself. "As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, *or* notions we form because we compare things to one another."[9] God did not create the world because it was good; nor is the world good because God created it. Again, whatever is, just is and had to be as it is, period.

Such is the universe that Spinoza describes and establishes through the "geometrical method"—a series of definitions, axioms, demonstrated propositions, corollaries, and scholia—in the metaphysical parts of the *Ethics*. It seems, on the face of it, a

rather bleak picture, one worthy of the most radical form of nihilism.

But there is more.

The inviolable necessity of Nature governs not only the world of physical bodies—where apples fall from trees and rocks roll down hills—but also the domain of human activity, including whatever happens in the human mind. Thoughts, ideas, intentions, feelings, judgments, desires, even volitions—our everyday acts of willing and choosing—are all as strictly necessitated by the laws of thought as bodies in motion are by the laws of physics. Indeed, Spinoza boldly proclaims in the beginning of Part Three of the *Ethics*, where he turns to human psychology, "I will treat the nature and powers of the emotions, and the power of the mind over them, by the same method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies."[10] One mental act or psychological event follows another with the same necessity and deductive certainty with which it follows from the nature of the triangle that its interior angles add up to 180 degrees. In the mind, no less than among bodies, a strict causal determinism rules, and nothing could have been otherwise than as it is.

This means that there is no such thing as freedom of the will. The idea that what one wills or desires or chooses is a kind of spontaneous act of mind—possibly influenced by other mental items, such as beliefs or emotions, or states of the body, but by no means absolutely determined by them—is an illusion. "All men are born ignorant of the causes of things. . . . [They] think themselves free because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think even in their dreams, of the

causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant of those causes."[11] There is, to be sure, a kind of freedom available to human beings, and it is in our best interest to strive to attain it; this is what the *Ethics* is all about. But human freedom does not, and cannot, consist in the classic capacity to have chosen or willed or acted otherwise than as one did. "In the mind, there is no absolute, or free, will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity."[12]

There is no point in lamenting any of this—the demise of a providential God, the emptying of the world of all meanings and values, our loss of free will—or wishing things were different (since they could not possibly be different). To spend one's life in a state of passive resignation or bewailing one's fate and cursing Nature for the hand one has been dealt is not only a waste of time, but irrational and harmful. It is, in effect, to suffer, and to be (in Spinoza's word) a "slave" to the passions.

But what is the alternative? Is there, within that eternal, infinite, necessary, deterministic, and meaningless world, a way for finite, mortal beings such as we are, subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, to flourish? When there is no wise, just, and providential God directing things to some end, when everything is governed by an inviolable, lawlike necessity and nothing could have been otherwise, can we nevertheless hope to achieve, through our own resources and effort, a life of well-being, even "blessedness" and "salvation"?

It is precisely this question that moved Spinoza, around the time of his *herem* (ban or excommunication) from the Amsterdam Portuguese-Jewish community, to abandon the life of a merchant and begin investigating that deepest and most impor-

tant of moral inquiries: what is human happiness and how can it be achieved?

Much of Spinoza's life is shrouded in mystery. He was born in Amsterdam on November 24, 1632, to the Portuguese immigrants Miguel de Espinoza and his second wife, Hannah Deborah. Miguel and Hannah both came from "converso" families—ostensible Catholics whose Jewish ancestors had been forcibly converted—and returned to the open practice of Judaism only upon their arrival in the generally tolerant environment of the Dutch Republic. Miguel was a merchant, and the relatively well-off family was prominent among the Amsterdam Sephardim. Spinoza and his brothers attended the Jewish community's school, and they helped out in their father's business.

On the whole, however, we know precious little about Spinoza's youth and early adulthood—including the reasons behind the *herem*, other than that it was for what the ban document calls "abominable heresies and monstrous deeds"—and only slightly more about the years of his maturity before his untimely death on February 21, 1677. When he died, the circle of friends responsible for compiling Latin and Dutch editions of his unpublished writings apparently decided to destroy all correspondence of a personal nature, thus robbing future generations of any insights these letters might have contained about his life and his thoughts on nonphilosophical matters.

Still, what is generally agreed to be the very first piece of writing we have from Spinoza begins with a rare autobiographical narrative. For a brief moment, we witness Spinoza as he reflects on the trajectory of his life in the opening paragraphs of the unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, which he

probably began around 1658, just a couple of years after his excommunication.

> 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 that 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.[13]

Before the *herem*, which took place in the summer of 1656, Spinoza and his brother Gabriel had been running the importing business that they inherited from their father after his death. Although the business, encumbered with serious debt, was certainly not a great source of "honor and wealth," the living it afforded Spinoza was sufficient to make him hesitant to give it up "to devote myself to some new and different objective." Despite feeling some dissatisfaction with the life he was leading, "it seemed ill-advised to risk the loss of what was certain in the hope of something at that time uncertain." At the same time, he sensed that "supreme happiness" lay elsewhere than in the mercantile life, with its often uncontrollable ups and downs and its imperfect and fleeting rewards, and he was concerned lest he lose the opportunity to achieve that higher good.

> The things which for the most part offer themselves in life, and which, to judge from their actions, men regard as the highest

> good, can be reduced to these three headings: riches, honor, and sensual pleasure. With these three the mind is so distracted that it is quite incapable of thinking of any other good. With regard to sensual pleasure, the mind is so utterly obsessed by it that it seems as if it were absorbed in some good, and so is quite prevented from thinking of anything else. But after the enjoyment of this pleasure there ensues a profound depression which, if it does not completely inhibit the mind, leads to its confusion and enervation. The pursuit of honor and wealth, too, engrosses the mind to no small degree, especially when the latter is sought exclusively for its own sake, for it is then regarded as the highest good.[14]

Like many thinkers before him, the young Spinoza came to realize that the alleged benefits of material and social success tend to be short-lived and unpredictable. Moreover, they are invariably accompanied by a variety of evils, including anxiety, envy, and unfulfilled desire. Seeking a more enduring source of satisfaction, he concluded that it was time "to embark on a new way of life." Despite the risk and uncertainty involved, he was convinced that doing so was in his own best interest. "I should be abandoning a good that was by its very nature uncertain . . . in favor of one that was uncertain not of its own nature (for I was seeking a permanent good) but only in respect to its attainment." In fact, he reasoned, "I should be abandoning certain evils for the sake of a certain good." Thus, he gave up a conventional life guided by mundane values and devoted to the pursuit of transitory goods for the life of philosophy and the pursuit of "the supreme good"—true happiness.

What Spinoza reveals in these opening lines of his earliest work is that his intellectual project was, from the start, fundamentally

and essentially a moral philosophy in the broadest sense of the term.

Classical moral philosophy was about the achievement of personal well-being. For ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as the Cynics, Skeptics, and Stoics, the concern of ethics was primarily with how a human being was to lead the good life. Their discussions of virtue were geared toward revealing how one might achieve *eudaimonia*, often translated as "flourishing" or "happiness" (with the understanding that such a life also involved treating other human beings in certain considerate ways). For medieval Latin philosophers in the Christian tradition and thinkers writing in Hebrew and Arabic in the Jewish and Muslim traditions, the goal was much the same, although it was now understood as blessedness and salvation in a context that included a providential God. (As some scholars put it, ancient and medieval ethics are more "egocentric" than modern conceptions—more focused on "the good" than on "the right."[15])

Spinoza fits well in this broad eudaimonistic tradition. It is certainly tempting, when reading Spinoza, to concentrate on his shockingly "heretical" account of God and Nature in the *Ethics*, as well as on his rejection of miracles and the divine authorship of the Bible and on his unforgiving critique of what commonly passes for religion in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, published to great alarm in 1670. After all, it was these bold and radical views that so scandalized his contemporaries, and they have been the focus of scholarly and popular attention over the centuries.[16] However, the overriding goal of Spinoza's philosophy—what all

of his metaphysical, epistemological, political, theological, and religious theories are in the service of—is nothing less than demonstrating the path to true well-being, to a condition of human happiness that is stable, complete, and not subject to the vagaries of chance. The question that, above all else, moved him in the first place to abandon the apparent security of the family business—and just as importantly, a comfortable place in his community—and devote himself to philosophy was a very ancient one: what is the good life?

What Spinoza discovered, and what he wants us to know, is that there is a particular way of living that represents a kind of perfection of our human nature. It is, in fact, a condition that constitutes true human flourishing, and it even makes us somewhat like God or Nature itself.

If there is one theme that runs throughout and unites Spinoza's writings, it is freedom. The *Theological-Political Treatise* is about freedom of thought and expression—a personal, civic, and religious liberty whereby neither the political nor the ecclesiastical powers-that-be may interfere with one's "freedom to philosophize." The treatise, in fact, concludes with perhaps the most remarkable statement of toleration of the early modern period:

> Nothing is safer for the republic than that piety and religion should include only the practice of loving-kindness and equity, and that the right of the supreme powers concerning both sacred and secular matters should relate only to actions. For the rest, everyone should be granted the right to think what he wants and to say what he thinks.[17]

The *Ethics* is concerned with a related but different kind of freedom: not so much the freedom to think or say or do what one

wishes, but rather the freedom that consists in being an active and self-governing agent. One can live at the mercy of circumstances, rashly pursuing and avoiding things whose comings and goings are well beyond one's control. The free person, by contrast, is in control of his life. He *acts* rather than reacts. He will certainly do what he wishes, but what he wishes—and thus his behavior—is guided from within, by knowledge rather than by imagination, sentiment, or feeling. The free person is led by reason, not by passion. The life of the free person is, in short, the model life for a human being.

2

A MODEL OF HUMAN NATURE

In Spinoza's world, there are no imperfections. Nothing is flawed, botched, or defective. There is no evil, and nothing falls short of what it is "supposed" to be. Everything is perfect. In Spinoza's value-free Nature, however, all this really means is that everything is what it is. Perfection is just reality. For a thing to be perfect is simply for it to have the reality it does. "By reality and perfection," he notes, "I understand the same thing."[1] 'Perfection' is, first and foremost, an ontological notion, not an evaluative one.

Comparisons can be made, of course, and some things have more reality, more perfection, than others. God, or Nature, as infinite eternal substance has infinite perfection; trees, giraffes, and human beings as finite things—what Spinoza calls "finite modes" of the unique, eternal, infinite substance—have finite perfection. Put another way, Nature itself is absolutely perfect; whatever is *in* and a part of Nature shares in Nature's perfection and is perfect in its own limited respect.

There even remains an *evaluative* sense in which one finite thing can be said to be more perfect than another finite thing, and one thing can be said to be more perfect now than it was before or will be later. Such appraisals, however, are for the most part merely subjective opinions. When 'perfection' is taken in an evaluative sense, Spinoza insists, nothing brought about by the ordinary course of Nature is, by itself, perfect or imperfect; it is

all a matter how something happens to be assessed by some observer.

As for products of human artisanship—works generated by art and craft—these are judged as more or less perfect only according to how well they appear to match up either with the artisan-maker's original intention or with some individual's conception of what an ideal specimen of that kind of thing should be.

> After men began to form universal ideas, and devise models of houses, buildings, towers, etc., and to prefer some models of things to others, it came about that each one called perfect what he saw agreed with the universal idea he had formed of this kind of thing, and imperfect, what he saw agreed less with the model he had conceived, even though its maker thought he had entirely finished it.[2]

Because one person's ideal of a certain kind of thing may be different from another person's ideal of that kind of thing—owing to either a difference in their experiences or a diversity of taste—the former's evaluation about what is or is not "perfect" will diverge from the latter's. If two people have different "universal ideas" about what a house or a table or ice cream is or should be, they will arrive at different judgments about how perfect this or that house or table or ice cream is. Such assessments are based on nothing more than highly subjective, variable, even arbitrary standards or criteria, and there is no adjudicating between them.

Similarly, natural things that "have not been made by human hand" are judged to be more or less perfect only because of the common (but false) belief that Nature, like art—and perhaps because Nature is believed by "the common folk" to be the product of God's providential artisanship—is teleological: that it acts

in purposive ways to achieve certain ends. "So when they see something happen in nature which does not agree with the model they have conceived of this kind of thing, they believe that Nature itself has failed or sinned, and left the thing imperfect." A withered tree is in fact an "imperfect" tree only in the mind of a perceiver who has a certain conception of what a tree is or should be and how nature should function. It has nothing to do with what the tree is in itself. Spinoza concludes that "men are accustomed to call natural things perfect or imperfect more from prejudice than from true knowledge of those things."[3]

In Spinoza's view, then, just because the model in comparison to which something is assessed is thoroughly subjective, 'perfect' and 'imperfect' are typically likewise wholly subjective notions that do nothing more than express individual and idiosyncratic opinion. They have their source in and are valid for only the person making the judgment. "Perfection and imperfection," he says, "are only modes of thinking, i.e., notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another," or to some ideal of that species in a person's mind.[4] Something is perfect or imperfect *only* if someone believes it to be so; its perfection or imperfection consists only in her believing it to be so; it is perfect only for her and in her eyes (and for whoever else happens to share her conceptual ideal of the thing); and she will believe it to be perfect only because she has come up with some general but personal conception of what that thing *should* be.

Spinoza suggests that similar considerations apply to other evaluative notions—including, it would seem, 'good' and 'bad.'[5] "As far as good and bad are concerned," he says, "they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are

they anything other than modes of thinking, *or* notions we form because we compare things to one another."[6] This would appear to empty the two most important ethical concepts of any real normative force. Nothing would be truly good or truly bad; it would all be in the mind of the beholder. There would be no right and wrong answers on such matters, and when we hold different opinions about what is good and what is bad, we would simply have to agree to disagree.

Is such a radical moral subjectivism Spinoza's ultimate position?[7] Does he really believe that there are no objectively true judgments about the perfection or goodness of things—judgments about what is good and what is bad that are true (or false) independent of what anyone happens to think? Is there no kind of person or action or way of life that is *truly* better than another?

It all depends. If one is asking whether, in an evaluative manner, anything is perfect or good in its own right, absolutely and without relation to anything else, then the answer is "No, certainly not." Spinoza is quite clear about that, right from the beginning of his philosophical career. In the early (and soon abandoned) *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, he insists that "good and bad, or sins, are nothing but modes of thinking, not things, or anything that has existence."[8] In a chapter titled "What Good and Bad Are," he takes issue with the claim that good and bad are "real beings," that is, things or qualities of things that they possess independent of other things. "Good and bad," he says, "are nothing but relations." For the sake of clarity and certainty, Spinoza puts his case in the form of a "proof":

> All things which exist in Nature are either things or actions.
> Now good and bad are neither things nor actions.
> Therefore, good and bad do not exist in Nature.[9]

So much for good and bad being intrinsic or nonrelational features of things or states of affairs.

And yet, what if there should be a way of assessing perfection or goodness that, while relative to some standard, is based on comparison not to what is a subjective or arbitrary or imaginative model of what a thing should be—a model that merely reflects this or that person's experience or taste—but rather to a model that is grounded in the true nature of things? Then there might indeed be a way for such judgments to be more than just an expression of personal preference or opinion.

Because Spinoza is concerned with what is the good life for a human being, the question comes down to this: Is there some objective criterion for evaluating the life of a person and saying that his or her life is "good"? That this individual is better or "more perfect" than another person? Is there some way of acting and some mode of living that, independent of what people may happen to think, is objectively better for a human being? Much as Socrates, in Plato's dialogue *The Apology of Socrates*, makes the categorical and unqualified claim that "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being," is there a nonsubjective standard according to which Spinoza can recommend one kind of life as preferable, all things considered, over any other kind of life?

As a matter of fact, Spinoza does recognize such a standard. He calls it the "model of human nature [*exemplar naturae humanae*]." Unlike the model tree or model ice cream that someone might adopt as a matter of personal preference—what they just happen to find visually attractive or what is more to their taste in desserts—Spinoza's "model of human nature" is independent of subjective particularities and, instead, metaphysically grounded in what it is to be a human being. A person is

more or less perfect, then, according to how close to or distant from this model he and the life he is living are. And something is good (or bad) according to how well it contributes to (or interferes with) a person's achievement of this model life. Spinoza concedes that, despite the subjectivism lurking in such evaluative terms, "still, we must retain these words." Indeed, we are permitted, even required, to use them in a way that carries some real metaphysical and evaluative weight, at least when the model to which we appeal when we use them is not merely a figment of our imagination or the product of our peccadilloes.

What, then, is this "model of human nature"? What is the ideal that is supposed to supply the standard by which we can judge the lives of human beings in a more objective and better founded way than the ideal model of ice cream allows us to judge one flavor as better than another? To answer this question, we need first to examine what a human being is for Spinoza.

In Part Two of the *Ethics*, Spinoza makes a number of statements about the human being that were unremarkable in the seventeenth century (and remain so today):

"The essence of man does not involve necessary existence."[10]

"Man consists of a mind and a body."[11]

"Man thinks."[12]

A human being is a finite thing whose durational existence is brought about by a sequence of natural causes, not by virtue of its own essence; the concept of what it is to be a human being does not imply the actual existence of any human being. A human being has a mind and a body, whatever the relationship

between these might be. And the mind (whatever it turns out to be, whether an incorporeal soul or just some matter in motion) accounts for the fact that a human being is a thinking thing; the mental states of human beings are thoughts. There is nothing here with which philosophers as different as Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, both of whom influenced Spinoza in many respects, could not agree. In Descartes's dualist picture, a human being is a union of two distinct and radically different substances: mind (soul), or immaterial thinking substance, and body, or material substance. The fundamental attribute or nature of mind is Thought; the fundamental attribute of matter is Extension, or space. There is therefore nothing that mind and body have in common. Minds or souls do not occupy space and so cannot have spatial properties (such as size, shape, divisibility, or motion), and bodies do not think and so cannot have mental states (thoughts, desires, or volitions). But somehow these two disparate substances, while remaining "really distinct" and thus capable of existing one without the other, are supposed to unite—that is, be united by God—to compose a human being.

> Even if we suppose God has joined some corporeal substance to such a thinking substance so closely that they cannot be more closely conjoined, thus compounding them into a unity, they nonetheless remain really distinct.[13]

Hobbes, on the other hand, is a materialist. While agreeing that a human being has a mind and a body, he does not admit any immaterial substances in his ontology. The terms 'substance' and 'incorporeal,' he insists, "are words which, when they are joined together, destroy one another, as if a man should say an *incorporeal body*."[14] In Hobbes's universe, whatever exists is just

matter in motion. Human thinking and all that goes along with it is but a subset of the motions in the human body.

Spinoza disagrees with Hobbes and allows that there are immaterial or non-extended things in the world. But he also disagrees with Descartes's claim that the human mind and the human body are distinct *substances* and that the human being results from the union of two things. There is and can be only one substance or ultimate reality—God or Nature—and so the human mind and the human body must be *modes* of or items in God or Nature. Moreover, in Spinoza's view, there is a deep and fundamental unity to the human being that cannot be captured by Descartes's conception of two independent things somehow coming together to form a (temporary) union.

Much of what Spinoza has to say about human nature—and about the nature or essence of any finite mode of Nature, whether it be a tree or a giraffe—follows from his conception of what precisely God or Nature itself is.

The fundamental essence of God or Nature is power. What God or Nature is, as eternal infinite substance, is eternal infinite power. As he puts it, "God's power is his essence itself."[15] This power lies at the basis of everything in Nature. Every singular thing in Nature is a particular and determinate expression of this power. To be a finite mode of Nature just is to be a finite parcel of Nature's infinite power.

However, finite individuals do not all express the infinite power of Nature in the same way. God or Nature, in addition to being power, also has what Spinoza calls "attributes." An attribute is a *way* of being in Nature. Each attribute represents a very general manner in which that power of Nature can manifest itself, and there are infinitely many such attributes. (Otherwise

God or Nature would not be infinite.) The two attributes or ways of being with which we are familiar are Thought (essentially, the mental way of being) and Extension (that is, being spatial, the physical way of being). The power of Nature manifests itself under the attribute of Thought as minds and the thoughts or ideas of minds, and under the attribute of Extension as spatial bodies in motion and at rest. Every particular mind, then, is a finite expression of God or Nature's infinite thinking power; likewise, every particular body is a finite expression of God or Nature's infinite power in the form of matter and motion.[16]

(To put this in terms that might make better sense in a post-Einstein world, Spinoza's Nature is, at its most fundamental level, energy. That energy is converted into matter in the form of bodies in motion and at rest. The same energy is converted into thinking in the form of minds and ideas or thoughts.[17])

The finite parcel of power that constitutes each singular thing in Nature is what Spinoza calls *conatus*, which can be variously translated as "striving," "tendency," or "endeavor." He also calls it "the power of acting," or the individual's "force of existing." In any particular finite thing, this power is a striving to maintain itself as that thing. Proposition 6 of Part Three of the *Ethics* states that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." The demonstration of this proposition goes as follows:

> For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way, i.e., things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts. And no thing has anything in itself by which it can be destroyed, or which takes its existence away. On the contrary, it

> is opposed to everything which can take its existence away. Therefore, as far as it can, and it lies in itself, it strives to persevere in its being.[18]

Every individual necessarily strives to persevere, and what this involves is an effort to preserve, and even increase, its *conatus* or power of acting. It is, in effect, a striving to increase its power of striving. In fact, every individual just *is*, essentially, such a *conatus* or striving to persevere. *Conatus* is not a temporary or accidental feature of the thing, something that the thing can be without. Rather, *conatus* involves "an indefinite duration" and goes right to the heart of the thing's individuation. *Conatus* constitutes "the actual essence" of anything.[19] It is the thing's nature, and so is nothing different from the thing itself.[20]

What all of this amounts to is a rather unique conception of what a human being is. Contrary to Descartes, not to mention a long philosophical tradition that precedes him, a human being for Spinoza is not constituted by a union of two independent, really distinct things: a mind (soul) and a body. Rather, a human being, like any finite creature, is a *conatus*, a determinate, finite parcel of Nature's infinite power that is striving to maintain and increase itself. The human mind *is* this particular finite striving as it is manifested under the attribute Thought, and the human body *is* this particular finite striving as it is manifested under the attribute Extension.

In other words, a human being is primarily and fundamentally a unity, and the bifurcation into mind and body is only secondary and relative to the attributes of Nature. After making the striking claim that "the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now com-

prehended under this attribute, and now under that," Spinoza concludes that "a mode of extension and the idea [i.e., mind] of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways."[21] The "thing" that is expressing itself in two ways is the individual *conatus*; a person's mind is one expression of that *conatus*, and the person's body is another expression of the same *conatus*.

An individual's *conatus* explains the human body's physical resistance to any threat to its integrity and well-being. In the human mind, it manifests itself as will—not as some abstract faculty of willing ("the will"), but the particular mental acts of affirmation or negation that make up much of our thinking life. When the human being is considered conjointly as a mind and a body, *conatus* constitutes appetite. When a person is conscious of the striving of his mind and body together, when he is aware of an appetite, it is desire.[22]

Besides explaining *what* an individual is, *conatus* also explains *why* an individual does what it does. If we are talking about human beings, *conatus* is the motivational force that lies at the root of all of a person's endeavors. Everything one desires and does, whatever one seeks to achieve or attain or avoid, is—consciously or not—egoistically motivated by the striving to maintain and increase one's power.[23] *Conatus* is the aversion to things that might weaken one's power and the desire for those things that (as far as one can tell) promote one's well-being and preserve and increase one's power. There is no more fundamental motive for human action in Spinoza's scheme. There may be altruistic behavior, whereby we intentionally do things that aid the well-being of others. However, the deep (but not necessarily conscious) impetus for such actions is always self-preservation

and self-improvement. We may not always do that which will in fact promote our perseverance, and we will, in our ignorance, often do things that end up being contrary to our perseverance. But whatever we do—whether it helps us or hurts us, and however we may happen to understand our desires—arises from the *conatus* to persevere.

Now the power or striving that constitutes the nature or essence of any individual, while always "on," does not remain unmodified throughout a person's lifetime. It is constantly subject to change, often from moment to moment. In particular, the *conatus* can enjoy an increase or strengthening, or it can suffer a decrease or weakening. This is the heart of Spinoza's account of the emotions or affects. An affect just *is* any such change in an individual's power of acting, whether for better or for worse.

> By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time the ideas of these affections [in the mind].[24]

It is important to note—and Spinoza stresses this—that an affect or emotion is neither the cause nor the result of the change in a person's power. Joy, for example, does not bring about or follow from a move to a stronger condition. Rather, the affect *is* the transition itself from one condition to another. One experiences or undergoes an affect. It is, he says, "a passage."[25] An affect is either the decline to a worse condition or the enhancement to a better condition; it is not the origin or the product of the move. In the case of both mind and body, Spinoza is referring simply

to an improvement or deterioration in power, in the strength of the individual's *conatus* or ability to preserve itself, resist outside forces, and even seek increase.

An individual can be active or passive with respect to any changes in its condition. It all depends on whether the increase or decrease in its power comes about in part through the action of external things upon it or wholly from within. A passive affect, or passion, is a change in the individual's power whose adequate cause—that is, whose complete causal explanation—lies not wholly in the individual itself but partly in external things. Passions are modifications in power that an individual undergoes or suffers. An active affect, on the other hand, is a change in the individual's power whose adequate cause lies completely in the individual itself.[26] If one is improved or harmed or weakened by interaction with other people, objects or events, then the transition suffered is a passion. If the improvement in one's condition comes about wholly through one's own resources—for example, through the knowledge that one possesses—then the transition experienced is an active affect, or action.

While passions or externally caused changes can be for the better or for the worse, actions are always improvements in an individual's power. This is because, as we know from the *conatus* doctrine itself, no individual will do anything through its own nature and capacities alone, and independent of how it is affected and made to feel by other things, except pursue its own perseverance and an increase in its power. And when a rational being is truly active insofar as he is moved by the knowledge he possesses, the things he does are guided by a true understanding of what is in his own best interest and thus bring about an improvement in his condition.

Most of Spinoza's attention in Part Three of the *Ethics* is devoted to the passions and the ways in which a human being's condition is affected by his causal interactions with the physical and social world he inhabits. The passions include all of our emotional, temperamental, and volitional responses to things. Our passionate joys, loves, hates, sympathies, desires, inclinations, repulsions, and vacillations of mind are all a function of the ways in which our power is improved or diminished by objects and people, as well as of the ways in which the mind casually associates ideas and moves from one thought to another. Thus, "the mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting," and "when the mind imagines those things that diminish or restrain the body's power of acting, it strives, as far as it can, to recollect things that exclude their existence."[27]

There are three primary passive affects; all of the other passions are versions of or can be derived from these. The primary passive affects are joy, sadness, and desire. Joy (*laetitia*) is "that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection," or the passage to a greater power of acting caused by something outside the individual.[28] It is the feeling of having one's condition improved by another thing. The corresponding affect in the mind-body composite is pleasure (*titillatio*). Sadness (*tristitia*), on the other hand, is "that passion by which [the mind] passes to a lesser perfection." It is the feeling of having one's condition caused to deteriorate. The corresponding mind-body affect is, as one might expect, pain (*dolores*).[29]

All of the other passions either have joy or sadness at their core or are variations on joy or sadness. Love, for example, is nothing but joy accompanied by a conception of the object that is the cause of the joy. One loves the object that one believes

brings about an improvement in one's condition or the person who benefits one. Hate, similarly, is sadness accompanied by a conception of the object that is the cause of sadness. One hates the object that brings about a deterioration in one's condition or the person who causes one harm.[30] These passions bring about a corresponding modification of the individual's striving. Desire becomes focused on possessing (and, in some cases, possessing uniquely) the object or person that is loved or avoiding or destroying the object or person that is hated.

Spinoza is sensitive to the immense richness and diversity of the emotional life of a human being. In his analyses, there seems to be no end to the variations to which the basic affects are subject. The relevant factors include not only the number of people or objects involved, but also the character of each. Different people react to different things in different ways; even the same person may react to the same thing in different ways at different times. This does not mean that there is any kind of causal indeterminacy or choice or spontaneity in the passions. This is ruled out by Spinoza's universal determinism. But it does mean that when different causal ingredients are involved, the effects will necessarily be different. Among the causes of the differences in the passions between people are the differences between their bodily constitutions. (These differences will, necessarily, be paralleled by differences in their respective minds; since the mind and the body are two different expressions of one and the same thing, the affections of the mind mirror the affections of the body.) Proposition 51 of Part Three of the *Ethics* states that

> different men can be affected differently by one and the same object; and one and the same man can be affected differently at different times by one and the same object.

Its demonstration goes as follows:

> The human body is affected in a great many ways by external bodies. Therefore, two men can be differently affected at the same time, and so they can be affected differently by one and the same object.
>
> Next, the human body can be affected now in this way, now in another. Consequently (by the same axiom) it can be affected differently at different times by one and the same object, q.e.d.

It follows that "what the one [person] loves, the other hates, what the one fears, the other does not, and that one and the same man may now love what before he hated, and now dare what before he was too timid for."[31] Above all, desire itself will vary according to the affects behind it. The object of one person's desire is the object of another person's aversion.

So much for Spinoza's account of human nature and of the power and processes that constitute it. It is this description of what a human being is—this particular metaphysics of mind and body—that allows Spinoza to say that there is in fact an objective, non-arbitrary determination of what constitutes a more perfect or ideal human being. There is, he believes, a "model of human nature" at which all individual human beings aim, at least in principle if not consciously and with full intention.[32]

The model of human nature is the human being that is most successful in its striving for power and perseverance. It is the human being of maximal *conatus*. If every individual is, essentially and by its nature, striving to maintain its being and even increase its power, then this condition of maximal power

is the ideal state toward which every individual naturally and necessarily—that is, objectively and by its nature—strives. A tree is striving to be a maximally powerful tree, and a giraffe is striving to be a maximally powerful giraffe. A human being, in turn, is striving to maximize its human power, and it is precisely such a successfully striving human being that the "model of human nature" is supposed to capture. In this way, the model is no merely subjective ideal, some creature of the imagination or reflection of personal taste; rather, it is securely anchored in the true reality of things.[33]

If the model of human nature is a metaphysically grounded, objective standard for judging how successful a human being is in doing what human beings necessarily do, then it can also serve as a standard for objective judgments about what is good and bad. Something is good if it is a cause of joy, of an increase in one's condition. Of course, it may be good in only a partial or temporary sense—it causes an increase of power in only a part of one's being or for only a short period of time. Too many sweet desserts may be pleasurable and a source of joy for the moment, but in the end they bring about a deterioration in one's condition. By contrast, something is truly good if it contributes to and facilitates a human being's holistic striving to maintain and increase its overall power and come closer to the model human being, and something is truly bad if it interferes with, or even diminishes, such striving.

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

> we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect insofar as they approach more or less near to this model. . . . When I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite . . . we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or decreased.[34]

What this means is that something's being good may be relative to its effect on an individual and its power but is certainly not a subjective affair. Relativism is not subjectivism. If something "aids or restrains" an individual's power of acting (its *conatus*), and if it is a cause of a positive passive affect, of joy, this is an objective, non-mind-dependent matter of fact. It is a *relational* (not an absolute or intrinsic) matter of fact about the thing, but an objective matter of fact nonetheless. Similarly, being soluble in water is an objective, non-mind-dependent feature of salt—it is independent of anyone's beliefs about or attitude toward salt or water. It is not, however, an intrinsic and absolute (nonrelational) feature of salt, since it is dependent as well on the chemical constitution of water and the interaction between the two.

There is nothing here that is not consistent with Spinoza's repeated claim that nothing is good in itself, on its own, or "considered in its own nature," since nothing is good except insofar as it is a cause of joy in some individual, that is, insofar as it is useful to that individual and aids it in its striving. Spinoza does say at one point that "by good here I understand every kind of joy and whatever leads to it."[35] This suggests that there is *one* thing that, for any individual, is good on its own, and not merely instrumentally, as a means to joy—namely, the increase in power that is joy itself. Calling joy "directly good" and sadness "directly evil," he says that forms of joy are "good per se."[36] Aside from

the increase in *conatus* that is joy, however, everything else is instrumentally good only as a means to joy. And joy itself is good only *for the individual who experiences it*. In other words, being good is, in all cases—including joy itself—a completely *relational* feature of a thing or experience; it is a function of the causal relationship that the thing bears to something else. If something does not aid or increase the *conatus* of some individual, then it is not good but is either bad or "indifferent."[37] After all, "music is . . . neither good nor bad to one who is deaf."[38]

The model of human nature, then, is not, like many other models, idiosyncratic, variable, and arbitrary. It is not the product of a personal and peculiar choice or an invention of the imagination. Rather, it has an independent and metaphysical basis in reality and conceptually represents a state toward which every individual human being, by its nature, is internally striving. Thus, anything that helps a human being come closer to this condition of being a maximally powerful human being, to resembling the relevant exemplar, is relatively but objectively good.

Something like the model of human nature is an abiding feature throughout the two decades during which Spinoza developed his philosophy. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza describes how "man, conceiving a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time seeing that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, is spurred to seek means that will lead him to such a perfection."[39] A few years later, having abandoned that first attempt at laying out his thought and starting anew, Spinoza devotes Part Two of the *Short Treatise* to what he calls "the perfect man." This would,

again, be an individual who has achieved the ideal human condition. Spinoza defines this character as "the man who unites with the most perfect being, God, and thus enjoys him." This union with God is, in fact, an epistemic or intellectual achievement. It is a state of rational knowledge, and its embodiment in the perfect human specimen represents the peak condition of human nature. Moreover, what is good and what is bad is relative to this notion of human perfection, as will be the case in the *Ethics*. "Whatever helps us to attain that perfection, we shall call good, and whatever hinders our attaining it, or does not assist it, we shall call evil."[40]

"The perfect man" lives on in the *Ethics*, still serving as the model of human nature—and exemplar of the best way of living—toward which we necessarily strive. His name has been changed, however. He is now "the free man."[41]

3

THE FREE PERSON

It is a good thing that Spinoza's "free man" (*homo liber*) is in control of his emotions. Given some of the things that have been said about him over the years, he would certainly be forgiven were he to lose some of his equanimity. Among other things, he has been called "unrealizable," "irrelevant," a "reductio ad absurdum," "confused," "inconsistent," and, perhaps most demeaning of all, "an inadequate idea."[1] A lesser man (a less "free" man) would by now have responded with resentment, anger, even hate and revenge. Fortunately, acting on such irrational passions is not in the free man's character.

Spinoza introduces the notion of the free person in Part Four of the *Ethics*. It comes after his explanation that things are good or bad or perfect or imperfect only relative to some ideal model, and especially a model representing an individual of maximal *conatus*, or power of persevering. However, Spinoza does not explicitly mention the free person when he first discusses the "model of human nature" and the role it is supposed to play. In fact, the free person as such is nowhere to be found in the first sixty-five propositions of Part Four.

This has led to some confusion as to whether the free person is to be identified with the model toward which all human beings are necessarily striving (whether they realize it or not) and that serves as the criterion according to which things are to be judged truly good or bad for them.[2] But they are indeed one and

the same. The free person represents an ideal human being—not some subjectively and passionately generated ideal human being, but just that ideal that has a metaphysical foundation in human nature. And when human beings actually recognize that ideal for themselves, when they set it as the goal of their endeavors, they do so on the basis of a deep understanding of what they truly are. Becoming a free person, a human being of maximal striving or power, is the object of informed and rational desire.

This has not prevented the notion of the free person from being misunderstood and unjustly maligned. Many have insisted that Spinoza's free person is an inadequately conceived, unrealizable, even impossible model, something that a human being can at best only asymptotically approximate but never actually become. Part of the reasoning offered for seeing the free person as an impossible ideal is that such an individual is alleged to be without any passions whatsoever, devoid of all of the passive affects that we regularly experience as we live in and interact with the world, especially our fellow human beings.

This, however, would be to misread Spinoza. While the free person does represent an ideal, it is (in principle) a realizable condition of our very concrete human nature. The free person is, in fact, identical with the person who, in Spinoza's description, acts "according to the dictate of reason." It is certainly a difficult task to achieve this condition, and it requires a good deal of therapeutic work on the passions. But, I will argue, it is a mistake to think that Spinoza regards the free person as an attractive but unattainable ideal that lies outside the realm of human possibility.

Before we consider the life of the free person, there is a rather conspicuous issue that needs to be addressed. Spinoza's language

in the *Ethics* is gendered, unavoidably so for linguistic reasons. Latin, the language in which he wrote all his works, does not have a grammatically gender-neutral noun for 'human being' or 'person.' While *humanitas* means "humanity" or "human nature" generally, for individuals there are only the masculine nouns *homo* and *vir* and the feminine noun *femina*; the neuter *humanum* would mean, rather awkwardly, "human thing." However, *homo* can be used when the gender of the person is unknown or irrelevant. (By contrast, *vir* would be used to indicate only a male human being.) Thus, while I began this chapter by referring to 'the free man' because of the familiarity of that phrase to readers of Spinoza in the standard English translations, it will appear here only in quoted sources; in my own discussion I will use 'free person' as a perfectly legitimate translation of *homo liber*.

This distinction is related, however, to a larger, more important issue. Is Spinoza's moral philosophy itself gendered? Does Spinoza believe, in fact, that only men, and not women, have the capacity and opportunity to become "free"? Questions of grammar aside, some of his substantive remarks suggest as much. At the end of his *Political Treatise*, Spinoza has some disparaging things to say about women and their intellectual capacities. Is it possible that Spinoza, whatever may be his intentions in the applied political theory of that late work, really means to exclude, *in principle* and through the metaphysical ethics of the *Ethics*, half the human race from the possibility of achieving a good life? I will return to this question toward the end of the chapter.

By the end of Part Three of the *Ethics* and through the early propositions of Part Four, Spinoza has drawn a fairly dark

picture of our ordinary lives. Having completed his account of the passions—externally caused changes in an individual's condition or *conatus*—that typically govern our desires, he notes (with uncharacteristic poetry) that "from what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate."[3] Rather than being in command of ourselves, we are, through our ever-changing emotions, at the beck and call of things outside us. Our happiness seems well beyond our control.

The situation brightens considerably, however, as Spinoza moves beyond the pathetic picture of life enslaved to the passions and begins depicting the model human life, the *exemplar* that represents the perfection of human nature and the maximization of its power of persevering. He does not (yet) call this model 'the free person,' but rather a life guided by reason. It is a life in which an individual, on the basis of his 'adequate ideas'—a clear and distinct and true understanding of things, as opposed to the inadequate ideas that come (passively) by way of sense experience and the imagination—actively does and pursues only what is truly beneficial and useful for himself (as well as for others).

Spinoza defines activity in terms of causality. An individual in nature is active to the extent that it is itself the adequate or sufficient cause of its condition and of what it does. By contrast, an individual is passive to the extent that its condition and actions are determined by the way in which it is affected by other things. Someone or something is active if what it does follows from or is an expression of its *conatus* or nature alone; it is passive if what it does partly reflects the *conatus* or nature of some other being that is acting on it.

> I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e., when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.[4]

In the case of human beings, a person's behavior—his desires and choices—can be partly determined by what other things are and how they happen to affect him (for example, the pleasure or pain they cause or the enticing appearance they present), or it can be determined by his knowledge alone, that is, by his own rationally informed beliefs about what is truly good. In the latter case, he is active, since what he does fully and adequately expresses only his internal striving to persevere.

Spinoza also equates activity with freedom. There is no freedom of the will; this is a mere illusion based on the false belief that there is such a faculty called "the will" and on our ignorance of the causes that govern our mental lives, including our volitions.[5] Nor does freedom require some kind of arbitrariness or absence of determination; one can be free even though one could not have decided or acted otherwise than as one did. Even necessity is not incompatible with freedom. Writing to Hugo Boxel, a lawyer in Gorinchem, Holland, in 1674, Spinoza insists that to say "that the necessary and the free are two contraries is extravagant and contrary to reason."[6] Although there is nothing in Spinoza's cosmos that is not causally determined or necessitated—either by its own nature or by its causes—it does not follow that nothing is free. It all depends on where the determination is coming from.

Freedom is a matter of active autonomy and causal independence relative to external things. To be free is essentially to be self-determining: to think, to desire, and to act on the basis of one's own nature—that is, one's *conatus*. The opposite of freedom is not determination or necessity, but constraint, or being compelled by an external power. As Spinoza defines freedom at the beginning of the *Ethics*, "that thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone."[7]

Strictly speaking, only God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) is absolutely free, since only God or Nature exists and acts from the necessity of its nature alone. Whatever Nature causes follows necessarily from the intrinsic power of Nature. Besides, there is nothing outside God or Nature that might compel it to act. However, finite individuals in Nature, which are invariably affected by other finite things external to them, can be more or less free, since they can be more or less self-determining. Insofar as a person does what is an expression of his own nature alone, he is active and free[8]; insofar as he does what is an expression of both his nature and the nature of the external things that are affecting him, he is passive and unfree ("in bondage"). I am more free if I do what I do because of what I essentially am than if I do it because some sweetly alluring object moves me.

Spinoza also equates activity and freedom with being moved and guided by adequate ideas in the mind. As we have seen, all human beings are motivated to pursue what they believe to be in their own self-interest and supportive of their striving to persevere.[9] This endeavor can be directed in a number of ways. For a human being to be active and free means that what he desires and what he does are determined by the clear and distinct ideas

in his mind, by a true knowledge of what really *does* contribute to maintaining and increasing his *conatus*. On the other hand, he is passive and enslaved when his desire is led by inadequate ideas—the deficient beliefs that come by way of the senses and the imagination. "The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone."[10]

Freedom, in other words, is entirely a matter of whether a person does what he does because of what he knows or because of how he is made to feel by external things and the opinions formed from such fortuitous encounters. Freedom comes in degrees: to the extent that a person has inadequate ideas, he is acted upon; to the extent that these inadequate ideas guide his choices, what he does follows not from his own nature alone but from his own nature combined with the natures of the external causes. To pursue something because it is a source of intense physical pleasure is to be determined as much by the nature of that thing as by one's own nature. But when a person's behavior is determined by his adequate ideas and not by the way external things happen to affect him, he is active and free. What he does follows from his nature (*his* adequate ideas) and thus is certain to be in accordance with and supportive of that nature's striving to persevere.

It is worth noting, however, that the presence of adequate ideas in a person's mind, even if they are more numerous than the inadequate ideas, is insufficient, by itself, to render that person free and active. What matters, according to Spinoza, is not just what you know but also how powerful that knowledge is.

The human mind is an agonistic arena, with adequate and inadequate ideas (knowledge and passions) struggling for dominance. All ideas, all mental states, have some affective

component. There is no idea in the mind that does not stand as either an increase or a decrease in the mind's *conatus*. Those ideas with the greater affective power will win out and effectively determine desire. The presence of a true idea is not by itself, in its *truth*, sufficient to conquer false beliefs and the misleading desires that arise from them. Simply knowing that something unpleasant is nonetheless good for me—taking bad-tasting medicine, for example, or undergoing a vaccination shot—is not going to defeat my passionate resistance to doing it. It is only the strength of the affect that in part constitutes a true belief that can overcome the affective power of the inadequate ideas of the senses and the imagination. To put it crudely, I have to really want to take that medicine and get better in order to overcome my resistance to taking it. "No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered an affect."[11] Insofar as adequate knowledge represents an increase in the mind's power of acting, it will involve an affective dimension that is opposed to the affect accompanying "the other imaginations by which the mind is deceived." In short, only affects can successfully oppose affects. "An affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained."[12]

A person is therefore free when his adequate ideas are more powerful, affectively speaking, than his passions or inadequate ideas. Only then do his adequate ideas constitute the dominant desires and the determining factors in what he does. Only then is it the case that what he does follows from his nature.

> The desires which follow from our nature in such a way that they can be understood through it alone are those that related to the

> mind insofar as it is conceived to consist of adequate ideas. The remaining desires are not related to the mind except insofar as it conceives things inadequately, and their force and growth must be defined not by human power, but by the power of things that are outside us.[13]

We are ordinarily only very imperfectly free—even, according to Spinoza, only rarely free—since we lead most of our lives under the sway of the passions. Our desires are all too often guided by inadequate ideas—beliefs that come from sense and imagination—as we pursue things that we think will make us feel good and avoid those that appear to be a source of pain or discomfort. Even people who are devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and have thereby gained a significant store of adequate ideas are not always determined to act by those adequate ideas alone.

Spinoza's moral philosophy thus involves a series of equivalencies. Activity is the same as freedom, and freedom is the same as being self-determining, and being self-determining is the same as being in such a condition that what one does follows from one's nature alone, and this is a matter of having adequate ideas (which follow from one's own intellectual nature and not from the natures of outside things) determining one's actions by being more affectively powerful than one's inadequate ideas.

There are two more pieces of the puzzle to put into place before we have a sufficiently detailed picture of what exactly a free person is.

Spinoza is a rationalist—not just because of his metaphysical or epistemological views, but especially because of his ethical

theory.[14] Spinoza identifies being active, free, and determined by adequate ideas with "living according to the guidance of reason." The adequate ideas that represent an intellectual understanding of things and that guide the person who is active and free are the product of reason. They come from our nature as rational beings.

There are, in Spinoza's scheme, three kinds of knowledge. He calls them, appropriately, "knowledge of the first kind," "knowledge of the second kind," and "knowledge of the third kind."[15]

The first kind of knowledge consists only in inadequate ideas. These are the partial, perspectival, and variable ideas that come from sense experience and the imagination. Spinoza describes these ideas as "mutilated, confused and without order for the intellect." This "knowledge from random experience"—so-called because it involves ideas arriving in a way that is haphazard and not under our control—is not really knowledge at all but mere opinion. It is also, he says, "the only cause of falsehood." Such highly personalized ideas are unreliable guides as to how the world is or how one should act; they inform us only of how things happen to affect us, either at present or in the past. If all I know about something is how it looks, smells, and feels to me from where I am viewing it at the moment, or from where I have viewed it before, I clearly have only a very superficial understanding of it. Knowledge of the first kind is purely subjective.

By contrast, knowledge of the second kind and knowledge of the third kind are invariably and necessarily true. Spinoza calls knowledge of the second kind 'reason' and knowledge of the third kind 'intuition.' Both consist in adequate ideas that represent a deep, metaphysically grounded understanding of things in the world and reveal their true natures. "It is of the nature of

reason to perceive things truly, viz., as they are in themselves."[16] But if the adequate ideas of reason are to show *what* things really are, then they must also provide the right kind of causal information and show *why* things are as they are and why they could not have been otherwise.[17] The adequate knowledge of something requires knowledge of its causes.[18]

Just as important, reason, because it involves causal understanding, thereby also makes known the *necessity* of things. "It is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent."[19]

Finally, because all things are in and follow from—are modes of—God or Nature, the adequate ideas of things known by reason also necessarily include a knowledge of the "eternal and infinite essence of God." As Spinoza puts it, in one of the strikingly bold statements of the *Ethics*, "the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence."[20]

Among the parts of Nature of which reason provides a deep understanding is the human being. Reason tells us what we are—what human nature is—and how we relate to the rest of Nature. (In other words, all of those metaphysical and epistemological propositions in Parts One and Two of Spinoza's *Ethics* are the product of reason.) Consequently, reason must also grasp what is truly good (and truly bad) for a human being, since this is determined by what best aids (or most interferes with) the human striving for perseverance and power.

Reason thus serves as a reliable guide to what Spinoza calls "the right way of living." Reason identifies the end of human endeavor and points out the best means for achieving it. The person who lives by the guidance of reason knows what to do and why he should do it. The rational person acts according to his

own nature—unlike the person who, guided by the passions, lives according to the nature of external things—and does what is truly in his own best interest. Reason directs the life of freedom.

There is one final element to be inserted into the sequence of equivalencies between freedom, activity, self-determination, and living according to reason. It is an explicitly moral notion, and it has an ancient pedigree.

The Greek and Roman philosophers of antiquity all placed virtue at the center of their ethical thinking. Differences aside, they generally believed that virtue was essential to the best way of living. A person could have everything else in the world, all the wealth, power, honor, friends and lovers he wanted, but if he did not have virtue, he was not leading a good life.

In Aristotle's influential view, everything in nature (and this includes human beings) has an essential function, something that is its natural role or purpose. Acorns are supposed to grow into oak trees, fire is meant to burn, and the purpose of eyes is to see. A virtue is what causes a thing to perform its proper function with excellence. "Every excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well."[21] (The ancient Greek term typically translated as 'virtue' is *areté*, which can also be rendered as 'excellence.') A virtuous eye sees well—it performs its perceiving function with excellence. In the case of human beings, their proper function is rational thinking, both pure contemplation and thinking in connection with action. The human virtue, then, is what allows a person to exhibit excellence in both intellectual

and practical affairs. Aristotle's virtuous person invariably knows what the right thing to do is and derives the right kind of pleasure in doing it.

Spinoza's moral philosophy may not be a "virtue theory" in the classical sense. It is too idiosyncratic in many ways, especially as it must accommodate his deterministic metaphysics of Nature and his unusual conception of what a human being is. What Spinoza does share with his ancient forebears, however, is the notion that the kind of life that is a moral ideal or model is, in all cases, an embodiment of virtue.

Spinoza's virtue is not like Aristotle's virtue. He initially defines virtue as power. "By virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e., virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone."[22] This is a little misleading, however, since ultimately not every exercise of power is an expression of virtue. Simply doing something is not, by itself, acting virtuously, especially if the action has been determined by external circumstances and thus only partially reflects the power of the agent. As the definition states, only an exercise of power that follows from the individual's own nature alone counts as virtue.

In a statement that strongly recalls the ancient Stoic doctrine of virtue as "acting in accordance with nature," Spinoza clarifies his meaning: "Virtue . . . is nothing but acting from the laws of one's own nature."[23] As we have seen, the nature of any thing is just its *conatus*, or striving to persevere in existence. Thus, the laws of any thing's nature prescribe that the thing strive to preserve its being. Therefore, as Spinoza concludes, "the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being." The

virtuous person is the person who follows the laws of his own nature and acts so as to preserve his own being. Virtue, in other words, is *successful* striving for preservation. "The more each one strives, and is able, to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue."[24] The opposite of virtue, on the other hand—and this presumably would be vice, although Spinoza does not use this term but rather the phrase 'lack of power'—is acting not according to one's own nature but according to the nature of things outside oneself. The person lacking virtue or power "allows himself to be guided by things outside him, and to be determined by them to do what the common constitution of external things demands, not what his own nature, considered in itself, demands."[25] This should sound familiar, since it just is the person who is a slave to the passions and to the external things that cause them. The virtuous person, by contrast, is identical to the person who is active, self-determining, and living according to the guidance of reason. The virtuous person, that is, is free.

As Spinoza sees it, the life of rationality, freedom, and virtue is our metaphysically grounded goal because it represents the highest expression of our nature and the peak of human flourishing. We human beings, whether we realize it or not—and it may take reading Spinoza's *Ethics* to realize it—naturally and necessarily strive to achieve the condition of freedom that is rational virtue.[26] Every individual is moved by its *conatus*, by its essence or nature, to preserve its power or activity and even increase it to as high a degree as possible; a life lived under the guidance of reason represents a more powerful condition and a fuller realization of our human *conatus*. An individual living such a life is therefore the *naturae humanae exemplar*, the

"model" or "more perfect" human being, in accordance with which things are judged to be good or bad, depending on their utility for attaining this condition.

This brings us, at last, to the *homo liber*. The enigmatic phrase makes its first appearance late in the *Ethics*, and it seems to have a special significance. As we have seen, any person can be more or less free, depending on the degree to which she is active, self-determining, and directed by reason. But the way in which the notion of the free person is presented suggests that a free person is more than just someone who happens to live according to the dictates of reason more often than not.[27] What the free person represents, in her motivation and behavior, is in fact a perfect instance of an individual who in her actions follows reason's prescriptions. The free person is a kind of paragon—someone who is ceaselessly and without exception guided by reason and its adequate ideas. The free person *never* fails to do what reason commands; indeed, the free person *cannot* fail to do what reason commands, given the affective power of her adequate ideas. Spinoza's free person—unwavering in her rational virtue and exemplifying the human condition of maximal power and activity—is the true "model of human nature" toward which we naturally and necessarily strive.[28]

And this is where the trouble begins.

How, one might ask, can the ideal for our essentially imperfect mundane lives be a life that seems so unlike our own? How can such complicated and passionate creatures as ourselves possibly embody the free person's extraordinary, and apparently unrealizable, mode of living and acting?

It all depends on how one interprets Spinoza's concept of the free person. One possibility is that a free person is not merely someone who is guided exclusively by reason and adequate ideas in his actions, with his passions or inadequate ideas having, relative to his adequate ideas, insufficient affective power and efficacy over his desire and so never succeeding in motivating his behavior. Perhaps it is more radical than that. What if the free person does not have *any* passions or inadequate ideas whatsoever? A free person, then, would be not just active, and not just always active, but absolutely and purely active, experiencing no passivity whatsoever.[29] The free person's *conatus* would never be affected, positively or negatively, by external things.[30] By Spinoza's own standards, the free person, so understood, would be perfectly free and, in effect, *not a part* of Nature at all.

Real human beings, on the other hand, cannot be causally unaffected by external things—they cannot *not* be a part of Nature. As finite creatures in Nature, they are always and necessarily subject to passive affects, to having their *conatus* (in body and mind) modified, for better or for worse, by things outside them. Spinoza could not be more clear about this:

> It is impossible that man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause.
>
> From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires.[31]

It would seem to follow, then, that actually existing human beings could not possibly realize the ideal of the free person. Such

a model of human nature, if understood as a purely active individual without passions, could not be instantiated in the messy causal nexuses that we necessarily inhabit in this world.[32] Existing human beings will *always* experience passions. Even individuals who in their concrete lives never fail to follow the guidance of reason cannot avoid having passive affects. Such consistently rational individuals might be acting freely, but compared to the paradigmatic freedom of the free person it would have to be a deficient or secondary kind of freedom. Their freedom would consist not in not having any passions—like all living human beings, they *do* and *must* have passions—but in the fact that their adequate ideas are regularly affectively stronger than their inadequate ideas and thus serve unfailingly to determine their desire.[33]

On this view, Spinoza's free person—who, as one scholar sees it, does not experience any emotions whatsoever, active or passive, since his power "would not fluctuate"[34]—ends up being a limiting case, a kind of moral asymptote.[35] Parts Four and Five of the *Ethics* might well tell us how to become more free, even how to get as close to the ideal as is humanly possible. But the only thing that can be absolutely and purely free in the sense of devoid of passions (as well as in the metaphysical sense of being something that "exists from the necessity of its nature alone"[36]) is an eternal being of infinite power that is unaffected by anything outside it—namely, God or Nature.[37] The free person would thus be, if not an incoherent notion, an existential impossibility—something that we can aim for and use as a guide for our behavior, but not a condition we could ever achieve. Striving to actually become the free person would be tantamount to striving to be God.[38]

This way of thinking about Spinoza's free person, however, gets it wrong. It confuses being a free person with being purely

and absolutely free and active in the sense of having a mind that contains *only* adequate ideas.

Spinoza does say, in one of the more puzzling propositions of the *Ethics*, that "if men were born free, they would form no concept of good and bad so long as they remained free"; the corresponding demonstration claims that "he who is born free and remains free has only adequate ideas."[39] Given Spinoza's notion of adequate ideas and his definitions of good and bad, this would seem to imply that a person who is born free and remains free will never experience an externally caused increase or decrease in his power—that is, he will never experience any passions. However, the free person is not to be identified with an individual who is "born free," a counterfactual condition that Spinoza explicitly says is impossible. The proposition does suggest that as long as one *is* free one is unaffected by external things ("he who . . . remains free has only adequate ideas"), but he may mean this to be true only of someone who is *born free* and never ceases to be free, not of someone who, in the course of life, becomes and remains free—although, admittedly, it is hard not to read the demonstration as saying that the freedom of *any* free person (whether born free or not) provides him with immunity from inadequate ideas.

Still, much of what Spinoza has to say about the free person is difficult to reconcile with the idea that the free person is exempt from passive affects altogether. As we shall see in the following chapters, the various propositions in which Spinoza reviews the free person's character and behavior emphasize the ways in which such an individual responds to things like hunger, worldly enjoyments (including the "appreciation of beauty"), and, especially, social relations, including friendship. It is hardly

the picture of someone who does not even experience the inadequate ideas passively generated by living in and as a part of Nature.[40]

The singular and opaque proposition about someone who is "born free and remains free" aside, then, the text of the *Ethics* strongly indicates that Spinoza does not envision the model human being as a causally isolated individual, as immune to affects brought about by external things, as free of all passions and inadequate ideas—which, in effect, amounts to being "outside of Nature"—and thus as a necessarily unrealizable ideal for real human beings.[41] The free person *is* a part of Nature, as every individual is, and so throughout his life will be affected accordingly.

The free person, the exemplar of human nature, is in fact nothing but the person who (unfailingly) lives under the guidance of reason. This is clear from how the free person first makes her appearance in the *Ethics*. In the scholium to proposition 66 of Part Four, after a long discussion of what it is to live under the guidance of reason, Spinoza notes that

> we shall easily see what the difference is between a man who is led only by an affect or by opinion, and one who is led by reason. For the former, whether he will or no, does those things he is most ignorant of, whereas the latter complies with no one's wishes but his own, and does only those things he knows to be the most important in life, and therefore desires very greatly. Hence, I call the former a slave, but the latter, a free man.

He then segues into the next seven propositions, all devoted explicitly to the "free man" and his behavior, by saying that "I wish now to note *a few more things* concerning the free man's

temperament and manner of living."[42] The extensive discussion of the now explicitly named *homo liber* that follows is clearly just a continuation of what has been said about the life directed by reason.

Acting under the guidance of reason, even doing so without exception, to the extent of being an instance of the free person does *not* mean having only adequate ideas. What it *does* mean is that the free person's nature, through his adequate ideas, is the sufficient cause of all of his actions, even if he is also subject to changes brought about by other things and thus susceptible to passive affects. The free person is the individual who, while experiencing passions, never lets those passions determine his actions; he always does what reason dictates. The free person is in control of himself. He is active rather than passive in what he does. His desire and behavior follow the command of reason, not the passions. The freedom of the free person lies not in the absence of passions, but in their lack of motivational efficacy.

> As far as desires are concerned, they, of course, are good or evil insofar as they arise from good or evil affects. But all of them, really, insofar as they are generated in us from affects which are passions, are blind . . . and would be of no use if men could easily be led to live according to the dictate of reason alone.[43]

Through his "strength of character,"[44] Spinoza says, the free person can "restrain" the passions—at least those that he cannot "remove" by transforming them into adequate ideas by understanding them—and keep them from determining his actions.[45]

Spinoza has some harsh things to say about philosophers—such as Descartes and the Stoics—who insist that any individual, with the right preparation and through willpower alone, can

achieve "an absolute dominion over the passions."[46] No amount of training, whether by reason or indoctrination or some other means, can thoroughly eliminate the passions from a natural human life, as some Stoics claimed. But neither is it possible to make the passions answer solely to the will—if there were such a thing—such that "we can command them absolutely." The passions will be there, whether a person wants them or not and no matter how free the person is. What we *can* do, in Spinoza's view—and this is what a free person is especially good at doing—is take advantage of certain epistemological "remedies" for the passions and thereby moderate or restrain them. The "power of the mind over the affects" that the free person enjoys consists in the ability not to make them disappear from one's life altogether or to make them obey some imagined faculty called "the will," but to weaken their power as passions. With the right knowledge—of herself, and especially of her body as an extended thing—the free person can counter her inadequate ideas and even turn them into *active* affects by coming to an understanding of their causes and thereby attaining a clear and distinct knowledge of them. In other words, the free person can transform a sadness into a joy.[47]

The free person, then, acts always on the basis of what he knows truly to be in his own best interest. He knows the goods and evils of the world and excels at navigating them. As Spinoza says when he finally launches his discussion of the free person, one who is led by reason "complies with no one's wishes but his own, and does only those things he knows to be the most important in life."[48]

What makes the free person "free," then, is that his actions are consistently determined by his adequate ideas. He has pas-

sions or inadequate ideas, but he *never* acts on their basis. Because the free person's adequate ideas are always affectively stronger than his inadequate ideas, desire always takes its lead from knowledge. This exceptionless rational consistency is what distinguishes the model human being from the more ordinary person who regularly, and maybe even mostly but not always and necessarily, follows the dictates of reason. 'Self-determining' does not mean "purely active" if this is taken to imply that there is no passivity. What it does mean is simply that an individual is not "determined to do what the common constitution of external things demands" but rather "what his own nature, considered in itself, demands."[49]

In the end, the freedom of the free person is not God's freedom—we are not striving to be God—but it is a God-like freedom: a self-determination for real human beings that, in its own finite way, resembles or approximates the kind of absolute and infinite self-determination enjoyed by God or Nature.

A question naturally arises at this point regarding the scope of human freedom. In Spinoza's view, do *all* human beings, at least in principle if not in fact, have the possibility of becoming free? Of course, there are relevant natural differences between individuals, just as there are differences in the economic, political, social, and environmental circumstances of their lives. Poverty, disease, physical or mental disability, prejudice, the rule of an oppressive regime, and other factors beyond one's control can all present serious, perhaps insuperable, obstacles to achieving the ideal human condition. Spinoza recognizes this. Some people are simply too irrational by nature to participate consistently in the

life of reason—such as "fools and lunatics," he notes—and others cannot even think of devoting themselves to the intellectual activity required to become truly free until their material condition improves.

But what about biological sex, that perhaps most obvious and fundamental differential characteristic that comes not by choice but by nature? Does Spinoza believe that, as a general rule, biological males and females have an equal shot at becoming free persons?

Some of Spinoza's comments at the end of his relatively short life do not give one hope for a positive answer to this question. As noted above, in the final chapter of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza has some disparaging things to say about the intellectual capacities of women. In his discussion of democracy, he argues that women should not have equal political rights with men, because women are "under the power of their husbands," not simply by custom or culture—in which case it could be rectified by the right social policies—but "by nature . . . of their weakness."[50] He insists, that is, that women are not equal to men "in strength of character and native intelligence—in which the greatest human power, and consequently right, consists."[51] Because where intelligence goes so goes freedom, it would seem on the basis of these remarks that Spinoza could conclude that freedom is beyond the reach of women.

It is unfortunate that these are the very last words we have from Spinoza's hand, as he died before completing the treatise (or even that chapter). But do they really represent what is—or, perhaps, what should be—his considered view on the capacity of women to become free? In the *Ethics*, at least, human freedom is, in principle, something that can be achieved by any human

being, or at least by those not suffering from sufficiently debilitating disabilities. Because "the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, and now under that," and because "a mode of extension and the idea [i.e., mind] of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways," it follows that the very particular capacities of the human mind are a reflection of the particular capacities of the human body.[52]

> In proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we can know the excellence of one mind over the others.[53]

Spinoza does not intend these remarks to be limited to the male body and the male mind; it is not the male mind that is "more capable of understanding distinctly" and of greater "excellence." On the contrary, he says quite explicitly that "to determine what is the difference between *the human mind* and the others [i.e., the minds of other beings in nature], and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human body."[54] The subject of this discussion is the *corpus humana* and the *mens humana*.

There are, of course, the obvious differences between biologically male and female bodies. But from the epistemological and ethical perspective of intellect and freedom, such differences are irrelevant. There is in Spinoza's texts no indication of a radical

generic difference between male and female bodies as *human* bodies sufficient to warrant a generic difference between male and female minds in terms of human rationality.[55] The intellectual reasoning required for freedom is accessible to all human minds. There are no Spinozistic philosophical grounds for excluding women as a group from the ranks of those who can achieve the life of the free person.[56]

Spinoza's claim that "it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause," is applicable to all human beings, including those who have reached that condition of superb rationality and maximal power that is the free person and the model of human nature.

As we have seen, the conception of such an ideal individual, in relation to which things are judged good or bad according to whether or not they are useful for attaining that condition, is present throughout Spinoza's oeuvre, including his earliest writings. In none of those works is there any indication that Spinoza thinks that perfecting ourselves or "acquiring a human nature much stronger and more enduring than [one's] own" is an impossible, unattainable ideal.[57] On the contrary, he seems to regard it as, at least in principle, something that can be achieved by a living human being. As he says in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, after introducing the notion of that stronger and more enduring human nature, "this, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me."[58]

It may turn out that becoming a free person, while in principle possible, is so very difficult—given the knowledge and understanding that needs to be attained and the self-mastery required—that it is practically beyond the reach of most people.[59] The passions are extremely powerful, and they tend to govern much of our ordinary lives. Even the person in whom the adequate ideas of reason are of maximum affective potency, and thus whose *conatus* is at the peak of its powers, will eventually succumb to the influence of passive affects. Spinoza notes that "there is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger."[60] It follows from this that "the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."[61] Not even the free person, then, is immortal. He may enjoy a long and happy existence, one lived fruitfully under the guidance of reason and doing only what is most important, but eventually some passive affects—at least those involving disease, decay, and other infirmities brought about by the forces of nature—will get the better of him as well. This does not mean that he will at any time be determined in his deliberate actions by the power of external things, but it does mean that he will, at some point, die.

Spinoza concludes the *Ethics* with one of his more memorable pronouncements: "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." No doubt this applies to, among other things, becoming a free person. Perhaps the best most people can realistically hope for is to become more and more free, to persevere as long as possible under reason's tutelage and thereby approximate, as close as they can, the ideal but perfectly human condition of the free person.

Spinoza's universal determinism makes it difficult for him to formulate prescriptive claims. If everything is causally necessi-

tated, there may be little room for him to say that one *ought* to live the life of rational virtue, as if there is a moment at which one can just spontaneously decide to change one's ways. Still, with our innate striving to persevere, we cannot but feel the allure of this ideal expression of our human nature. Moreover, we cannot but wonder what such an ideal life would be like and what its advantages would be. If one were indeed a free person, how would one think and feel and behave? What would one do in various circumstances? How would one persevere in one's own ideal condition? Just as important, how would one, in the pursuit of preserving and increasing one's own power, treat other human beings?

Fortunately, Spinoza is not content simply to tell us that we are, by our nature, striving to be rationally virtuous individuals. He explains what it takes to reach this condition, as well as why its achievement is so difficult and rare and why so many fall far short of the goal. He is also concerned with providing some insight into the particularities of the life of freedom. Much of Part Four of the *Ethics* is devoted to showing exactly what it would be like to be a free person: what actions one would perform and what states of mind one would experience in performing them. What emerges from these propositions is Spinoza's own highly distinctive, often attractive, sometimes counterintuitive, but nonetheless rigorously demonstrated vision of the best kind of life for a human being.

4

VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

Spinoza died on February 21, 1677. That same day, his landlord in The Hague, Hendrick van der Spijck—a painter who owned the house on the Paviljoensgracht in which Spinoza lived—drew up an inventory of the late philosopher's rooms. The document, now in the Notarial Archives of the Municipal Archives of The Hague, lists some (but not all) of Spinoza's possessions. It includes furniture, linens, clothing (including "two pairs of shoes, black and gray, with silver buckles"), and even a painting: a small *tronie*, or anonymous head portrait. The short document also mentions "a bookcase with various books."[1]

A week and a half later, at the request of Spinoza's sister Rebecca and their nephew Daniel de Caceris, a new inventory was ordered. Rebecca and Daniel, who was now also her stepson, were looking to get a full accounting of Spinoza's goods. They wanted to see whether their sale might bring in enough money to pay for the funeral and to cover Spinoza's debts (including funds owed his landlord, who had generously advanced some money to Spinoza's creditors), with perhaps something left over for themselves.[2] The notary document reads as follows:

> At the request of Rebecca Espinosa and Daniel de Caceris, the supplicants are hereby authorized to have an inventory of the estate and goods left behind by the late Baruch Espinosa conducted; and it is ordained that Mr. Spyck, in whose house the said

> goods are currently sitting, allow and permit this, so that, it having been done, the said goods might be disposed of as appropriate.[3]

This second inventory was conducted later that day, and it is much more detailed than the earlier one.[4] This time, among the more personal items (including seven shirts, two sets of "underclothes," and two towels), and immediately following the list of "linens" and just before the list of "wood work"—an armoire, several small tables, a chess game, "some telescopes in bad condition"—there is a catalog of 160 books. They are ordered by size—folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo—and recorded in various ways: sometimes only a title is given, sometimes just an author's name, and sometimes both; in a few cases, neither title nor author is listed, but only a description of the book's subject matter (such as "French dialogues"). In many but not all cases, there is also a date.

Spinoza's library contains works in a variety of languages: the majority of the books are in Latin, but there are also books in Spanish, Dutch, Hebrew, Italian, and French, as well as a number of multilingual volumes and some whose language is indeterminate from their entries in the inventory.[5] Even more striking is the breadth of genres and subject matter: Bibles and Bible commentaries (Jewish and Christian); Talmudic and other rabbinic literature; Jewish and Christian (including Reformed and Counter-Reformation) theology; dictionaries, grammars, thesauruses, and lexicons; and works in politics, medicine, history, philosophy, mathematics, science, poetry—even Petronius's *Satyricon*!

The philosophical treatises include such moderns as Descartes and Hobbes, but surprisingly few works of Greek and Roman

antiquity. Aristotle is there, but not Plato. The Skeptics, the Cynics, and the Epicureans are not represented at all—Spinoza did not even have a copy of Lucretius's popular philosophical poem *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Order of Things*). What he did own, however, were several texts by or related to the ancient Stoics. He had a duodecimo copy of Cicero's *Epistolae* (along with a handy *Thesaurus Ciceronianus*) and a bilingual (Greek and Latin) edition of Epictetus's *Encheiridion*, published in 1596. The inventory also contains two recent editions of Seneca's *Letters*: one in the original Latin, prepared by the latter-day Flemish humanist and Stoic Justus Lipsius, and one in Dutch, translated by Spinoza's friend (and Descartes's translator) Jan Henriksz Glazemaker.

We do not know when Spinoza acquired each of the books in what was, for the seventeenth century, a relatively rich collection, especially for someone who earned his living grinding lenses. There is no record as to when he purchased or borrowed or was gifted this or that volume. Some of them he could have acquired only in the final years of his life. We can easily imagine, however, that the books on Stoic philosophy, all editions published before his *herem* in 1656, were in Spinoza's possession around the time of—and maybe even inspired—his move away from the mercantile life; they certainly played a formative role in his philosophical development.

In his doxographical account of the origins of the Stoic philosophy, Diogenes Laertius, writing in the third century CE, relates that Zeno of Citium and his followers claimed that "between virtue and vice there is nothing intermediate."[6] Virtue is an all-or-nothing affair. One is either virtuous or one is not. The paragon

of virtue is what the Greek Stoics called the *sophos*, "the wise man." It is characteristic of one who has reached this virtuous condition that "he does all things well." He always acts the right way, for the right reasons, and with the right sort of feelings. Although the wise man is "free from vanity," he is also "ever vigilant for his own improvement, following a manner of life which banishes evil out of sight and makes what good there is in things appear."[7] The wise man possesses only knowledge; he is not given to mere opinions and never assents to what is false. Nor will he feel envy, hatred, or even grief, "seeing that grief is irrational contraction of the soul." The wise man also exercises his wisdom in practical affairs. He neither hurts nor gives offense to others, but he also never shows pity or indulgence. He honors his parents and the gods. Indeed, wise men are themselves godlike, "for they have something divine within them." Above all, "the wise man alone is free, and bad men are slaves, freedom being power of independent action."[8]

Zeno's *sophos*, who will reappear among the later Roman Stoics as the *sapiens*—often translated from Latin as "the sage"—is not exactly Spinoza's free person. The Stoic sage is said to have achieved complete freedom from the passions, whereas Spinoza's free person is subject to the passive affects, albeit while always remaining in full control of them. As we have seen, Spinoza explicitly criticizes the Stoics on just this point. Still, much of Spinoza's moral philosophy shows that his reading of the ancient (and modern) Stoic sources was not without great effect. Above all, the life of his free person resembles, to a remarkable degree, in both its general contours and in its details, the life of the Stoic sage.[9]

As the free person goes about living virtuously, he acknowledges and follows the "dictates of reason" without exception.

These rational prescriptions for a good life—what to do and how to think and feel—are grounded in the individual's *conatus* and represent a kind of enlightened propositional expression of that natural striving for perseverance and power.[10] In their most general form—and Spinoza says that he wants first to present these things "briefly, before I begin to demonstrate them in a more cumbersome order"—the dictates of reason demand

> that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can.[11]

These broad directives, and the practical guidance that reason provides on how to pursue such ends, is objectively and universally valid for all human beings. Reason takes no account of this person's particularities or that person's passionate preferences. Like Immanuel Kant's categorical (moral) imperatives, the dictates of reason transcend personal differences and offer universal prescriptions on human behavior.

Among the first of reason's commands is that "we ought to want virtue for its own sake, and that there is not anything preferable to it, or more useful to us." Virtue is pursued not because of some reward to be gained, either now or in a hereafter, but because, as our optimal condition, it is its own reward—virtue *is* what we are ultimately striving for. But reason *would* naturally command this because acting from reason is the same thing as virtue. "Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage."[12]

Of course, no one is born free. The model life of the free and rationally virtuous person is an achievement.[13] And what is good (and bad) is to be judged according to how well (or poorly) it aids us in reaching that goal. If virtue—successful striving to persevere—is good in itself and pursued for its own sake, there is nothing more essential to that condition than the possession of adequate ideas. Knowledge, then, insofar as it is both a means to and constitutive of virtue, is also the true good. This is why the person who is guided by reason strives for understanding and does not consider anything else of value except what leads to understanding. "What we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding; nor does the mind, insofar as it uses reason, judge anything else useful to itself except what leads to understanding."[14] What the free person wants for himself is

> to perfect, as far as [he] can, [his] intellect, or reason. . . . Perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, i.e., his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding.[15]

Knowledge, unlike finite, transient material goods, is an infinitely renewable, infinitely shareable resource. It is something that any individual can pursue and obtain without limit and without prejudice to another person's acquisition of it.

However, man cannot live by knowledge alone. Insofar as we are necessarily always a part of Nature and unable ever to bring it about "that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being, nor that we live without having dealings with things

outside us," reason also prescribes that we should strive to possess the "many things outside us which are useful to us."[16] The free person is not an isolated, asocial human being, a kind of rational hermit shunning relations with others and ascetically avoiding engagements in the world. One of the important functions of reason in the life of the free person is to prescribe ways of dealing with things "outside us." Since external things can be a source of joy—when they are the cause of an increase in an individual's *conatus* or power—reason prescribes that we seek out such good things that actually help preserve our being and increase our power.[17] These would include both social intercourse with other human beings and the objects and activities that are ordinarily a source of sustenance, enjoyment, and fulfillment.

Spinoza insists that "men who are governed by reason—that is, men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage—want nothing for themselves that they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honorable."[18] The free person is also cheerful, kind, and forgiving. He is not, in temperament, susceptible to the many states of mind that are a source of interpersonal strife: hate, envy, mockery, disdain, anger, vengeance, and other evil affects. "He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other's hate, anger, and disdain toward him with love, or nobility."[19] Hope and fear do not govern his actions, nor is he given to pride, scorn, humility, or despondency.

Among the things that bring joy to the rationally virtuous person are other human beings leading lives of rational virtue, and so reason prescribes to the free person that he unite with others who share his nature (and that he act to improve the lives of others so that they *do* share his nature). It is useful for the free

person to live among those who also live according to the guidance of reason, not the least because being so situated reinforces his own rational behavior. The free person will therefore "form associations" and "join himself to others in friendship."[20] He will, Spinoza says, "rejoice" in the human relationships in which he finds himself and that he perceives to exist among others.[21]

The free person will even marry, for "marriage certainly agrees with reason, as long as the desire for physical union is not generated only by external appearance but also by a love of begetting children and educating them wisely."[22] Presumably, the marriage, while not motivated or directed by lust or governed by inordinate love, will not be a passionless union.

In addition to other human beings, the free person will certainly need bodily nourishment. "To be preserved, the human body requires a great many other bodies."[23] And there is no reason to think that Spinoza intends the free person to be living at a mere subsistence level. These "great many other bodies," insofar as they contribute to the preservation and strength of the free man's body (and therefore of his mind) and the perseverance and increase of his *conatus*, will be a source of (passive) joy. The life of the free person, then, will not be a sensuously impoverished one, driven by the ascetic self-denial of bodily pleasures. The free person will not withdraw from the world.[24] Rather, he will know how properly to use the world to his own advantage. Like Aristotle's virtuous person, Spinoza's free person will avoid extremes and aim for the mean, relative to his own needs and capacities. He will partake in moderation of those things that aid his *conatus* and bring him joy, while avoiding any excessive pleasures that would debilitate his body and inhibit his mind.

> To use things, and take pleasure in them as far as possible—not, of course, to the point where we are disgusted with them, for there is no pleasure in that—this is the part of a wise man [*viri est sapientis*]. It is the part of a 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.[25]

Such participation in the pleasures of the world will necessarily entail inadequate ideas in the mind of the *vir sapiens* living under the guidance of reason.[26] What is important, however, is that in the free person these passive affects and inadequate ideas, as pleasant and useful as they are, remain subordinate as motivational elements to adequate ideas. They simply are not what move him to action. The passions brought about by the free person's mundane engagements—the visual allure of a beautiful body, the bouquet of a fine wine—are not affectively strong enough to determine desire. Rather, it is his reason that guides him to pursue and partake of worldly joys to the degree that he does—namely, to just that degree that he rationally recognizes as "good." Desire so governed by reason will thus necessarily result in moderation.

A free person, then, does not know gluttony, drunkenness, lust, greed, or ambition. Spinoza defines these vices as "an immoderate love or desire for eating, drinking, sexual union, wealth and esteem."[27] As forms of love, they are directed at things that bring joy or pleasure. Ultimately, however, they result in sadness, as they all involve an eventual diminishing of one's overall *conatus* or power in body and mind, especially as they distract one from

the pursuit of what is truly good—that is, knowledge and understanding—or even incapacitate one in that endeavor. Thus, through "the power of the mind that moderates these affects," the free person is restrained, sober, and chaste. His enjoyment of food, drink, and the amusements that can enrich a life is an active enjoyment insofar as it is done under the guidance of reason. He eats and drinks the way he does, not because of the immediate and short-lived sensuous pleasure it brings him, but because he knows that it is essential for his physical and mental well-being.

The free person has a lot going for herself. She takes joy in the life she leads and wants for nothing. She devotes her time to the pursuit of wisdom and other true goods, gets along well with others, and knows how properly to enjoy the finer things in life. She is virtuous, active, and self-controlled.

But is she happy?

It depends, of course, on what one means by 'happiness.' Is happiness a state of mind, a purely subjective affair, whether that be a transient feeling or a more stable and long-term sense of satisfaction with the way one's life is going? Or is happiness, as Aristotle and others have insisted, an objective matter of fact, a condition or way of being that, while certainly accompanied by an enjoyable state of consciousness, is more than just feeling or thinking about oneself and one's life in a certain manner?

Here, again, Spinoza takes his lead from the ancient Stoics.

The life of freedom under the guidance of reason, Spinoza says, "teaches us wherein our greatest happiness, or blessedness, consists." Virtue is not only "the greatest freedom," but is "happiness itself." In part, this is true by definition. Virtue, as we

have seen, just is excellence and success in the human striving for perseverance, and this success is identical to happiness. "The foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being, and . . . happiness consists in man's being able to preserve his being."[28]

While happiness so defined is ultimately, in the virtuous person, an abiding condition of both mind and body, with the *conatus* flourishing through each in its own way, it also has a subjective element: a particular attitude toward that condition and toward the world, as well as the state of satisfaction that accompanies it. What the free person knows, through her adequate understanding of Nature and her place within it—and especially her recognition of the necessity that governs all things—leaves her well equipped to handle, and even thrive amidst, life's vicissitudes.

Spinoza reminds us that happiness, at least as it is commonly conceived, can be an unpredictable and fleeting achievement in a world that does not cater to our desires. But he insists that his doctrines

> teach us how we must bear ourselves concerning matters of fortune, or things that are not in our power, that is, concerning things that do not follow from our nature—that we must expect and bear calmly both good fortune and bad. For all things follow from God's eternal decree with the same necessity as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles.[29]

He has shown that most of the passions are constantly directed outward, toward things and their tendency to affect us one way or another. Aroused by our desires, we seek or flee what we be-

lieve to be the cause of joy or sadness. Such is the life of bondage. It is a very troubled existence. Spinoza suggests, in fact, that it is a kind of disease to suffer too much love for a thing that is mutable and never fully under our power, even when we do, for a time, have it within our possession.

> Sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions and enmities arise except from love for a thing which no one can really fully possess.[30]

However, when a person sees the necessity of things and recognizes that the objects he values are, in their comings and goings, not under his control, he is less likely to be overwhelmed with emotion at their loss or acquisition. Desire, anxiety, hope, and fear are diminished by the perception that things are not subject to one's will but necessitated by an infinite number of causal factors. The rational individual knows that all bodies and their states and relationships—including the condition of his own body—follow necessarily from the essence of matter and the universal laws of physics, along with the causal contributions of other bodies. He also sees that all ideas, including every state of his mind, follow necessarily from the essence of thought and its universal laws and from other finite mental causes. What he understands is that he cannot control what Nature brings his way or takes from him. Consequently—and this is a necessary effect of the knowledge he has—he is no longer anxious over what may come to pass and is no longer obsessed with or despondent over the loss of his possessions.

> The more this knowledge that things are necessary is concerned with singular things, which we imagine more distinctly and vividly, the greater is this power of the mind over the affects, as experience itself also testifies. For we see that sadness over some good which has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept. Similarly, we see that [because we regard infancy as a natural and necessary thing], no one pities infants because of their inability to speak, to walk, or to reason, or because they live so many years, as it were, unconscious of themselves.[31]

A person who sees the necessity of things regards their passage with calm and composure. He is not inordinately and irrationally affected in different ways by past, present, or future events, since he regards them all as if from an eternal perspective. He will confront the ups and downs of fortune with self-control and a serene mind. The resulting life is more tranquil, and not given to sudden disturbances of the passions.

Since we cannot control the behavior of other people and the fortuitous succession of external objects that we value and in which we place our hopes and dreams, we ought instead to try to control our evaluations and responses themselves and thereby minimize the sway that people and objects, and the passions they provoke, have over us.

> Human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have ex-

> tended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow. If we understand this clearly and distinctly, that part of us which is defined by understanding, i.e., the better part of us, will be entirely satisfied with this, and will strive to persevere in that satisfaction [*acquiescentia*].[32]

It would be hard to find in Spinoza's writings a clearer echo of the doctrines of Seneca and Epictetus.[33]

The free person's clear and distinct perception of her own place in Nature and of the determinism that governs all natural things leads not to a fatalistic resignation and retreat from the world, but to an ability to bear things with equanimity and navigate the world successfully. She enjoys a release from the anxieties that ordinarily arise from outwardly directed desires that are based on a false belief in the freedom and contingency of things. Knowledge and understanding, in other words, lead to tranquility and self-control. The rationally virtuous person knows "true peace of mind."[34]

So yes, the free person is happy, in the truest sense of human happiness.

We now know what it is to be a free person—the exemplar of human nature that is the centerpiece of Spinoza's moral philosophy. The general contours of how this virtuous individual thinks and acts and feels under the guidance of reason are relatively clear. The stage is set for a closer look at some of the more salient details of what Spinoza calls "the right way of living." What is it like, in terms of both one's inner life and one's outward

behavior, to be a free person? What exactly is it that the free person will and will not do? How will she react in certain circumstances, and how will she respond to various challenges? Just as important, how will she treat other human beings? And to pose the ultimate question, how will she face her own mortality?

5

FROM PRIDE TO SELF-ESTEEM

In the third and fourth centuries CE, a number of highly devout Christian men and women retired to the deserts of Egypt to pursue an ascetic and solitary life, far from the corrupting enticements of the cities. These so-called Desert Fathers (and Mothers) devoted themselves to prayer and study, meditating on such spiritual matters as the nature of human sin and the path to divine salvation. Perhaps the best-known among these monks, nuns, and hermits is Anthony the Great—Saint Anthony—who is famously depicted in many masterpieces of Western art as tormented by the demons whose lures he, like Jesus before him, confronted (and resisted) in his desert retreat.

One of Anthony's early successors was a man named Evagrius Ponticus, often called Evagrius the Solitary. It is Evagrius who is often credited with first formulating a catalog of fundamental "temptations"—evil thoughts that, as perversions of our natural faculties, are the inner sources from which most forms of sinful behavior arise. Evagrius's list was codified three hundred years later by Pope Gregory I into what the philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas would name the seven cardinal or capital sins or vices.[1] Today they are more often called the Seven Deadly Sins, and they include gluttony, lust, greed, sloth, pride, anger, and envy. Each sin has its corresponding virtue: gluttony is opposed to temperance, lust to chastity, greed to charity, sloth to diligence, anger to patience, envy to kindness, and pride to humility.

As we have seen, the free person—one who is "strong in character"—is not given to the first three of these sins, which relate to the appetite for external things. The rationally virtuous person is moderate in his enjoyment of goods of the body. He avoids the extremes of too much and too little when it comes to the pleasures of food, drink, sex, the accumulation of wealth, and so on. He satisfies such desires under the guidance of reason rather than passion. Thus, just as love for another person should be generated "not by external appearance only, but mainly by freedom of mind," so that it does not degenerate into lustful concupiscence, so "it is necessary to use many different kinds of food," but only "to nourish the body in the required way."[2]

But what about the remaining sins, those that have more to do with one's thoughts or one's attitudes toward other people than with the consumption of or delight in material goods? As might be expected, here too the free person is an epitome of rational self-control, unmoved by the internal passions that typically lead to vicious behavior. He "hates no one, is angry with no one, envies no one, is indignant with no one, scorns no one, and is not at all proud. . . . He strives most of all to conceive things as they are in themselves, and to remove the obstacles to true knowledge, like hate, anger, envy, mockery, pride."[3]

There is an interesting difference, however, between the first set of (appetitive) sins and the second set of sins, which, for lack of a better term, can be called "psychic." In the former case, the virtues of the free person will consist in finding the "Goldilocks" mean between extremes—not too much food, not too little, but just the right amount of the right kind to sustain a healthy life. In the latter case, by contrast, the rationally virtuous person will be at an extreme. It is not that he will experience just the right

amount of hatred, envy, indignation, scorn, or pride; rather, he will be free of these particular thoughts altogether, at least when it comes to his regard for other people. Although not immune to the passions, including sadness—like all human beings, he is a part of Nature and subject to affections brought about by external causes—the free person will have a life of active (not passive) joy and the various affects that derive from his rational nature alone. The free person will certainly recognize, and even appreciate, the value of certain passive affects, such as the love of a friend and the refreshment of food, but he will do so from a purely rational point of view.

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For Spinoza, every one of the moral weaknesses—he avoids such a theologically loaded term as 'sin'—is grounded in a passion, whether it be joy or sadness.[4] Several, in fact, are nothing but forms of hate, which is sadness accompanied by the idea of the external cause of the sadness. One hates the person or thing that, directly or indirectly, brings about the decrease in one's power. Depending on the circumstances and the parties and objects involved, hate can be pure or it can be expressed in a more particular way as anger, envy, or vengeance toward someone or something.

HATE

Spinoza devotes quite a number of propositions in Part Three of the *Ethics* to the passion of hate, just because it is the basis of so many other deleterious mental attitudes. In his account, we hate not only the things that cause us sadness but also things that

resemble things that cause us sadness. We will hate things that affect something we love with sadness, and we will hate things that affect something we hate with joy. We also tend to hate people who hate us (especially if we think we have given them no cause to hate us), as well as things that other people hate (unless we hate those people themselves)—and if we already hate the thing, we will now hate it even more. To add yet more complexity, Spinoza shows that, "if someone imagines that someone like himself is affected with hate toward a thing like himself which he loves, he will hate that [person]."[5] If A believes that B, who is like A, hates someone or something C that is also like A and that A in fact loves, A will hate B.

On the other hand, we will "rejoice"—feel joy—when we see something we hate affected with sadness. We also strive to make other people hate what we hate (as well as love what we love). If all of this sounds rather petty, that is because it is. Remember that Spinoza is describing the attitudes of individuals who are living under the sway of the passions. Their loves and hates will not be admirable, at least not by the standards of reason.

What hate produces are bad actions—that is, actions that are contrary to the perseverance and power of others, not to mention of oneself. Hate is followed by a desire to do evil to the one who is hated. "He who hates someone will strive to remove or destroy him."[6] A person who hates will act so as to cause sadness in, or even eliminate, other people and things. Thus, most of the harm that we do to others, physical or otherwise, has its origin in hate, and a person who hates is inclined toward vicious behavior.

This is why Spinoza says that "hate can never be good," neither for oneself nor for others, although he quickly qualifies this

by noting that this applies only to hate toward other *people*.[7] The qualification is due to the fact that, as we shall see in chapter 8, it is always in one's own best interest to be surrounded by others who share one's nature, and especially others who are flourishing as rationally virtuous individuals. Rather than hating other people, we should strive only to improve them. On the other hand, there surely come moments in the course of life at which it will be to one's advantage to hate, and therefore to seek to destroy, nonhuman things that are noxious and detrimental to one's perseverance—for example, the *Yersinia pestis* virus (which causes bubonic plague), or an asteroid streaking directly toward earth. In such cases, hate and the destructive behavior that it generates may indeed be a good thing.

Plague viruses, killer asteroids and the like aside, however, hate is essentially bad. When it comes to other human beings, a free person "hates no one." The rationally virtuous individual will never intentionally act in such a way that he worsens the life of another person. On the contrary, he strives always to improve the lives of others—not out of any altruistic sentiments but from rational self-interest (see chapter 8). Even when another person, whether out of hate itself or one of its more particular manifestations, acts poorly, the free person will not respond with hate. "He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other's hate, anger and disdain toward him with love or nobility."[8] (Spinoza defines 'nobility,' *generositas*, as "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship."[9])

The free person does not engage in hate because hate, grounded as it is in sadness, represents a diminishing of one's *conatus*, and no one who is guided by reason—who is acting

"from the laws of his own nature"—will ever strive to weaken his own power. Since the free person is doing everything he can to experience joy, not sadness, "he will strive to bring it about that he is not troubled with affects of hate."[10] And because the free person seeks to improve the lives of others, he will strive also to ensure that they too are not affected by sadness, including hate. By returning another's hate with love, then, he seeks to transform *their* hate into love. This happens when the person who hates recognizes that he is being loved in return, and as a result he experiences joy; this feeling of joy, which has its cause in the person who loves him, moves him to seek to please the one he was previously hating—that is, to affect him not with sadness but with joy. At the same time, by loving someone who was hating me and turning him into someone who loves me, I increase my own joy, and thus my love. In Spinoza's view, then, hate generally breeds more hate, while love fosters love.[11]

This does not mean that the free person will never experience hate at all. If my account of Spinoza's free person is correct and she is as much a part of Nature as any other individual, then she too must necessarily be subject to the fluctuations in *conatus* brought about by external things. And not all of those changes will be for the better. Even the free person will experience passive affects that are decreases in some part or another of her body and/or mind; the free person will not be immune to sadness. Nor can she remain unaware of the object that has brought about her pain or sadness. If that is all hate is—an idea of the thing that is the cause of sadness—then the free person may occasionally have a moment of hate.

Remember, however, that what the freedom of the free person consists in is not that she never suffers passive affects, at least

in some parts of the body-mind complex, but that those passions never direct her behavior. The free person will occasionally feel hunger, thirst, and pain. No amount of freedom can perpetually keep someone from stubbing their toe on a table. These occasions of sadness are small-scale and temporary, however, and do not decrease the free person's *conatus* overall. The affective (motivational) power of her adequate ideas is always stronger than the affective power of her inadequate ideas, and so she will always be rational and active in what she does. Thus, any hate she may have for the table that has caused her pain will be surpassed by a more powerful positive affect—perhaps the rational insight that the painful experience was causally necessitated, and that under the circumstances there was nothing she could have done to avoid it (although she will certainly take steps to prevent it from happening again). What Spinoza says is not that the free person does not ever experience hate, but that she "strives most of all to . . . *remove the obstacles to true knowledge, like hate*." Free persons may not be able to evade all the sorrows that life naturally brings, and occasionally these sorrows will be accompanied by hate, at least toward nonhuman items. However, sorrow can never compel free persons to allow hate to govern their response to the world.

ANGER AND ENVY

The absence of hate toward other human beings frees up a good deal of psychic space in a free person. For several of the other cardinal sins are, on Spinoza's account, simply different expressions of hate. Thus, without hate, there cannot be anger. Nor can there be vengeance, indignation, or envy. Indeed, a great variety

of negative affects depend upon hate as their basis, and an exponentially greater variety within these secondary negative affects arises as a result of variations in their causes or occasions. As Spinoza notes, "There are as many species of joy, sadness and desire, and consequently of each affect composed of these . . . or derived from them (like love, hate, hope, fear, etc.) as there are species of objects by which we are affected."[12]

Spinoza defines anger as the striving to harm—cause sadness in—someone whom we hate. And when we believe (rightly or wrongly) that this person whom we hate and are striving to harm has already done us some harm, anger becomes vengeance.[13] Anger is yet another instance where hate breeds hate.

Indignation is ordinarily taken to be a form of anger. In indignation, we feel anger when we witness someone being treated cruelly or unfairly; we are angry on behalf of the maltreated individual. Spinoza, although for some reason suggesting that his own definition of this passion departs from its "common usage," nonetheless says that indignation is "a hate toward someone who has done evil to another."[14] It is therefore "necessarily evil" and will not be a part of the free person's psychological profile.

What is true of the free person's management of hate applies, necessarily, to his dealings with anger, vengeance, and indignation. These passions are bad, as they represent sadness and a weakening of one's power.[15] A free person, then, will be angry with no one; consequently, he will also never seek vengeance, and he will be free of indignation. Just as love conquers hate, so it can defeat any particular form that hate takes. When witnessing an injustice, then, the rationally virtuous person will not respond with hate, vengeance, or indignation. His is a striving to do good and not evil. He will desire to change the offending behavior, not

by harmful means, but by improving the lives of both parties and moving them to a condition that fills him (and them) with joy. He will seek to correct their behavior, not punish it. Instead of hate, there will be love, and instead of vengeance, there will be mercy.

Among the Seven Deadly Sins, Spinoza seems to take a special interest in envy, perhaps because, while envy is, like vengeance, a form of hate, it may be a more common social vice than vengeful actions. It may also therefore make a greater contribution to divisiveness between people, setting them against each other as they desire, in vain, things that they regard as good but that are possessed uniquely by others.

Envy is initially defined by Spinoza as "hate, insofar as it is considered so to dispose a man that he is glad at another's ill fortune and saddened by his good fortune."[16] We will experience joy when we imagine someone or something we hate to be affected with sadness. However, such *Schadenfreude* seems to be more a consequence of envy than the nature of envy itself. A better, more intuitive depiction of the passion of envy emerges when Spinoza claims that

> if someone imagines that a thing he loves is united with another by as close, or by a closer, bond of friendship than that with which he himself, alone, possessed the thing, he will be affected with hate toward the thing he loves and will envy the other.[17]

Spinoza says that this hate toward a thing we love, when "combined with envy," is jealousy. It involves a "vacillation of mind" insofar as we both love and hate the thing possessed by the other person. While we are jealous for the thing, we envy the other person who has bonded with it. So perhaps envy is best defined as

hate toward another who has acquired or united himself with something we love. Either way, "envy is hate itself, or sadness, that is, an affection by which a man's power of acting or striving is restrained."[18]

A free person, unmoved by hate, will therefore also be free of both jealousy and envy. He will rejoice in another's good fortune, even if the other's good fortune comes at some initial cost to himself, because he knows that the improvement in another's life will ultimately bring him benefit as well.

Because of his rational nature, a free person will not be moved in the passionate ways that less free individuals are. Once again, through his understanding of Nature and his place therein—especially the limitations of his power and the necessity that governs all things—the loss of a beloved person or thing to another will be received in the free person with equanimity and peace of mind. "We shall bear calmly those things that happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow."[19]

COWARDICE

Cowardice is not among the cardinal sins. However, courage is typically included as one of the four cardinal virtues by both ancient moral philosophers and Christian theologians. Its opposite, then, cowardice, has as good a claim as any other vice to being a significant, if not cardinal, character flaw.

It is not especially difficult to come up with a workable definition of courage. It is essentially the virtue that allows one to

know and do what is proper in the face of danger. Aristotle, for one, calls courage a moral excellence that represents a mean between two extremes with respect to feelings of fear and confidence. The extreme that is an excess of confidence is rashness: the rash person rushes headlong into dangerous situations that she may not be prepared to handle. The extreme that is a deficiency is cowardice: the cowardly person falls short of confidence and so is overly fearful. The courageous person knows, relative to her own capacities, when to confront danger and when to avoid it.[20] She does not go on the offensive no matter what the circumstances, but neither does she always run away to elude a threat.

Spinoza does not have much to say about cowardice or courage per se. But there is one proposition in the *Ethics* whose content and demonstration echo the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean. "The virtue of the free man," he states, "is seen to be as great in avoiding dangers as in overcoming them."[21] At the extremes, as Spinoza sees them, are "blind daring" and "fear." The free person is neither cowardly nor foolhardy. He is as capable of restraining rashness as he is of resisting fear, and he "avoids dangers by the same virtue of the mind by which he tries to overcome them." However, there is some ambiguity here. Spinoza could be describing the free person's good sense of when *not* to confront a dangerous situation and when wisdom counsels flight. "In a free man, a timely flight is considered to show as much tenacity as fighting; or a free man chooses flight with the same tenacity, or presence of mind, as he chooses a contest."[22] On the other hand, it may be that the wisdom of the free person keeps him from falling into potentially threatening situations in the first place, situations in which he will need to decide whether to fight or flee. The free person will know that pursuing a particular

course of action might put him in circumstances where danger lurks, and he will therefore avoid that path—not out of fear, but from reason.

PRIDE

Pride, one of the original cardinal sins, seems, like envy, to be of particular concern to Spinoza. We find it and its opposite, despondency, as well as the more basic self-esteem, informing much of what he has to say about the condition of both the "enslaved" individual and the free person. Perhaps, like Thomas Aquinas, who insisted that "pride is the beginning of all sin," Spinoza believed that there is something foundational about pride relative to other vices.[23]

While someone may take pride in another's character, deeds, or accomplishments—much as parents will be proud of their children—it is essentially a self-regarding state of mind. To feel pride in something is to regard it as somehow reflective of or even belonging to oneself. A parent who is *impressed* by her child's achievement can attribute full responsibility for it to the child himself. If a parent takes *pride* in that achievement, however, then she herself takes some ownership in what the child has done. The child's talent somehow shines back on the parent.

For Spinoza, pride (*superbia*) is not merely thinking highly of oneself. Rather, it is thinking *too* highly of oneself, more than is warranted. He defines pride as a joy that arises when "a man thinks more highly of himself and what he loves than is just."[24] As such, it is a joy grounded in ignorance of oneself insofar as it reflects a basic lack of knowledge of one's own true power or worth. Spinoza calls such self-overestimation

> a species of madness because a man dreams, with open eyes, that he can do all those things which he achieves only in his imagination, and which he therefore regards as real and triumphs in, so long as he cannot imagine those things that exclude the existence [of these achievements] and determine his power of acting.[25]

The source of this self-overvaluation is frequently what one believes to be the opinion of others about oneself. Their assumed estimation feeds one's sense of self, often beyond what is justified. Pride thus leads someone to surround himself with those whom he believes, rightly or wrongly, think highly of him. For this reason, "the proud man loves the presence of parasites, or flatterers."[26]

The opposite of pride would have to be thinking less of oneself than is just. Spinoza suggests, however, that such a thing does not really exist. "No one thinks less highly of himself than is just, insofar as he imagines that he cannot do this or that."[27] The reason for this is that if someone imagines that he cannot do something, this imaginative state of mind, as a sadness that is a weakening of one's power, is typically strong enough actually to keep him from being able to do what he envisions. Such thoughts become debilitating. Still, Spinoza concedes, a person can think less highly of himself than is warranted, either because he believes himself disdained by others, or because he is uncertain about what he can do in the future, or because he is so overcome by fear of shame that he will not undertake things that he is in fact capable of doing. Spinoza calls this condition of thinking less of oneself than is justified "despondency."

Pride and despondency (and their correlates relative to the assessment of other people, overestimation and scorn) are

"contrary to reason" and "always bad," based as they are in ignorance. However, as vengeance is to anger, and anger is to hate, so pride and despondency are grounded in more fundamental conditions. The real culprits here are what Spinoza calls *acquiescentia in se ipso* and its opposite.[28] *Acquiescentia in se ipso* is a matter of being satisfied or content or pleased with oneself. The standard English translation of *acquiescentia in se ipso* in Spinoza's writings is 'self-esteem.'[29] The opposite of self-esteem is either humility or, in certain cases, repentance.

Both self-esteem and humility are, like pride and despondency, affects that arise from reflection upon one's own power. Spinoza defines self-esteem as a joy that a person experiences as he considers the strength of his own *conatus* or power, that is, his virtue. "Self-esteem is a joy born of the fact that a man considers himself and his own power of acting." Humility, on the other hand, is "a sadness born of the fact that a man considers his own lack of power, or weakness."[30]

Self-esteem is, in fact, a form of self-love. When a person turns his attention to his power of acting and comes to appreciate it, he experiences joy. And because he regards himself—his own power—as the cause of this joy, he loves himself.

Self-esteem is not necessarily a bad thing. Nor does it always end up in pride, or an overweening estimation of oneself. Sometimes it does, but sometimes the self-appreciation is true and accurate. It all depends on the source and justification of the self-esteem. It can be grounded in the imagination (the "first kind of knowledge") and in beliefs about the opinions of others, or it can be based in reason.

The most common form of self-esteem arises when a person simply experiences his own power, including increases in that power brought about by other people or things, in the ordinary

and "random" course of experience. Even though those increases in power have, at least partially, an external source, the power itself is the individual's own, and so he also sees himself as an "internal" cause of the joy he feels. "When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of acting."[31] So understood, self-esteem is not very different from the kind of "feel good about yourself" encouragement provided by popular self-help gurus.

Self-esteem of this relatively effortless sort can be fostered and strengthened by the opinions of others. Spinoza considers a person who imagines that he is the cause of joy in another person, through something he has done. He will necessarily experience a corresponding sympathetic joy and see himself as the cause of that joy within himself.[32] Thus, he will love himself. Moreover, if he believes that this other person recognizes and appreciates him as the cause of the joy she is experiencing, his self-love will be reinforced by the esteem that he believes that she has for him.

> This joy is more and more encouraged the more the person imagines himself to be praised by others. For the more he imagines himself to be praised by others, the greater the joy with which he imagines himself to affect others, a joy accompanied by the idea of himself. And so he himself is affected with a great joy, accompanied by the idea of himself.[33]

Because no one can really know what another person thinks of them, a person's belief that he is the object of another's esteem is always a matter of speculation. The joy that this person believes others take in his action is "only imaginary," mere opinion, and he thus conceives of himself as pleasing to others without any real justification. The esteem of others may truly be there, but

then again it may not. Thus, the resulting "exultation at being esteemed" rests on a very shaky foundation. Even if the esteem of others does exist, it is a rather transient and unpredictable thing. Therefore, the self-esteem that it generates is an unstable and even troublesome phenomenon.

> The love of esteem that is called empty is a self-esteem that is encouraged only by the opinion of the multitude. When that ceases, the self-esteem ceases. . . . That is why he who exults at being esteemed by the multitude is made anxious daily, strives, sacrifices, and schemes, in order to preserve his reputation. For the multitude is fickle and inconstant; unless one's reputation is guarded, it is quickly destroyed.

Self-esteem grounded in the esteem of other people gives rise to a nasty competition for honor and reputation that is good neither for individuals nor for the fabric of society.

> Because everyone desires to secure the applause of the multitude, each one willingly puts down the reputation of the other. And since the struggle is over a good thought to be the highest, this gives rise to a monstrous lust of each to crush the other in any way possible. The one who at last emerges as victor exults more in having harmed the other than in having benefited himself.

Self-esteem that arises from the imagination or the opinion of others, Spinoza concludes, "is really empty, because it is nothing."[34]

The direct opposite of self-esteem—humility—is, like despondency, "very rare."[35] Human beings are not accustomed to dwelling on their weaknesses or incapacities or to looking upon themselves with sadness. On the contrary, Spinoza insists,

"human nature, considered in itself, strains against [this]." We are moved by our power, not our lack of power, and so our focus is on joy, not sadness.

The other contrary of self-esteem is repentance. Like humility, repentance involves reflection on one's own weakness or lack of power. The difference is that repentance connects that lack of power with an action that we believe we have done from freedom of the will. Spinoza defines repentance as "a sadness accompanied by the idea of some deed we believe ourselves to have done from a free decision of the mind."[36] We repent (or, to use a related notion, feel guilty over) things that we have done that bring us sadness and that we believe we could have refrained from doing. Because freedom of the will is an illusion and there is no such thing as undetermined decisions, repentance, like pride and despondency, has its basis in ignorance. "Repentance," Spinoza insists, "is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason; instead, he who repents what he has done is twice wretched, or lacking in power."[37]

Spinoza concedes that, although humility and repentance are not virtues, they may be socially and politically useful. "Because men rarely live from the dictate of reason, these two affects, humility and repentance, and in addition hope and fear, bring more advantage than disadvantage."[38] In a world where people are more often led by passion than by reason, humility and repentance—as counters to pride and arrogance—will play an important role in keeping "weak-minded men" who are "all equally proud, ashamed of nothing, and afraid of nothing" from hubristically overreaching or engaging in sinful or criminal behavior. Humility, despite being a form of sadness, can at least contribute to a kind of passion-based social harmony and community

that makes possible the pursuit of the true good, knowledge and understanding. Better to have a society of individuals who underestimate, rather than overestimate, themselves.[39]

The free person will not be proud. But neither will he be humble, at least not in Spinoza's sense of an unjustified underestimation of self. "Humility is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason."[40] The free person will not be given to despondency or repentance, mainly because he will not suffer the ignorance and illusions that give rise to such "wretchedness." He will have self-esteem, but not the kind based on imagination or the opinion of others. His self-esteem will come solely from within, from a reflective appreciation of his own power—especially his power of understanding and the joy it brings—and it will be rational. Spinoza calls it "the highest thing we can hope for."[41]

Just as many affects that arise as passions can also be generated in an active manner, from one's own nature and inner resources—joy, for example—so self-esteem can have its source in mundane experience and the way one believes one is regarded by others, or it can come from a true and adequate knowledge of oneself. "Self-esteem can arise from reason, and only that self-esteem which does arise from reason is the greatest there can be."[42] This higher variety of self-esteem consists in the joy that a person experiences when he clearly and distinctly reflects on his power of acting and understanding. Through reason, he comes to appreciate his own virtue such as it truly is. "Self-esteem is a joy born of the fact that man considers himself and his power of acting. But man's true power of acting, or virtue, is reason itself, which man considers clearly and distinctly. Therefore, self-esteem arises from reason."[43]

The rationally virtuous individual cannot help but adequately know what she is and what she can do. A free person will always have a true and accurate assessment of her own power. She will appreciate it, but not more (or less) than is justified. And because her reflection on herself reveals how powerful she is precisely through her own nature, through her power of reason, it is a joyful awareness. She will thus love herself as the cause of this joy. But it is a purely rational self-love. It does not have its source in, or depend on reinforcement by, any outside opinion.

For this reason, the joy of rational self-esteem, unlike the self-esteem that follows the presumed opinion of others, is free of anxiety and instability. It does not fluctuate with one's reputation among the fickle multitude. Indeed, the free person does not care very much about what most other people think of her. "A free person who lives among the ignorant strives, as far as he can, to avoid their favors."[44] Her self-esteem rests on something stable and predictable: a knowledge of her own virtue and power.

Thus, the self-esteem of the free person, far from bringing disquiet, trouble, and competition, is a steady, comforting, and tranquil state of mind.[45] This may explain why, when discussing the "blessedness" of the free person toward the end of Part Five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza subtly changes his vocabulary, playing on the various meanings of *acquiescentia* (repose or resting). Instead of referring to self-esteem as *acquiescentia in se ipso*, he now writes of *acquiescentia animi*, which can be translated as a satisfaction or peace of mind.[46] The free person, in his equanimity, takes a serene pleasure in himself, and his rational self-esteem is an essential part of his happiness.

This is not, however, the end of the matter. The free person who goes beyond just living according to the dictates of reason

and has actually achieved the third kind of knowledge—seeing through the certainty of intuition how the essences of things follow from the essence of God—will understand that his own power in fact derives from a higher source: God (or Nature) itself. His knowledge of himself and of his power will necessarily include a knowledge of how he is but a mode of the one true substance and his power is merely a finite parcel of Nature's infinite power. "Insofar as our mind knows itself and the body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God."[47] The free person who knows himself through the third kind of knowledge and consequently esteems himself will also love God as the eternal cause of his power and joy.

This suggests, although Spinoza does not make this point explicitly, that the rational self-esteem of the free person will be accompanied, to the extent that it involves a recognition of one's dependence on God, not only by a supreme contentment of mind but also, somewhat paradoxically, by a kind of humility—not in the sense of an underestimation of oneself, but in a joyful acknowledgment of one's proper, albeit subordinate, place in an infinite whole.[48]

Writing in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, a monumental work of Jewish philosophy from the twelfth century that was of great influence on Spinoza, Maimonides describes the "protection" from the vicissitudes of fortune enjoyed by one who has perfected his intellect and thereby achieved the highest condition of virtue. "His God is within him, no evil at all will befall him." This sage, Maimonides says, can walk through "a widely extended

field of battle, and even if one thousand were killed to your left and ten thousand to your right, no evil at all would befall you."[49]

We should not take this too literally. The virtuous person, given his superior knowledge of the cosmos and of nature—for this is what virtue consists in for Maimonides, as it does for Spinoza—will certainly be able to navigate his way through the world more successfully than others and minimize the amount of pain and sorrow he suffers. He will be able to avoid just those kinds of obstacles to happiness that ensnare others. Maimonides cannot mean, however, that this paragon will never, ever suffer injury or significant loss. What he does mean is that this person will rise above the pains and sorrows that do occur over the course of his life. He will consider them as of no account when compared to the true and permanent good that he enjoys: knowledge of God.

Likewise, the life of Spinoza's free person will not—cannot—be a perfectly dispassionate one. He will experience many of the emotions that ordinarily characterize human existence, including joy, but also sadness. The difference, however, is that he will never let his sadness get the better of him. Where a less free person will occasionally react to pain or sadness with hate, anger, envy, or vengeance, and where a less free person will bask in pride and (on rare occasions) suffer despondency, the rationally virtuous individual will maintain his equanimity and peace of mind. His happiness consists not in a life without affect, but rather in a life in which he, not other things, is in control of his feelings and his behavior. He will reflect on his life with joy and be satisfied with himself—not because other people praise or admire him, but because he, as the oracle at Delphi commands all of us, knows himself.

6

FORTITUDE

One of the many tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* concerns the tragic story of Jason and Medea. As the young woman hears the harsh terms that her father, King Aeëtes, sets for the Argonauts to claim the Golden Fleece, she fears the danger they pose for the man with whom she has quickly fallen in love. Medea is torn between her feelings for Jason, whom she desperately wants to help, and loyalty to her father. With "reason powerless to master her passion," she eventually opts for love over duty.

> I am dragged along by a strange new force. Desire and reason are pulling in different directions. I see the better way and approve it, but follow the worse.[1]

Medea's internal struggle has often been seen as emblematic of a moral quandary that ancient Greek philosophers called *akrasia*—literally, 'lack of power'—and that contemporary thinkers call 'weakness of will' or 'incontinence.' *Akrasia* is the condition of an agent who knowingly and voluntarily acts contrary to her better judgment. In this clash between the better and worse angels of our nature, a person knows exactly what she ought to do, she knows what is the better course of action, and yet she somehow fails to act on that knowledge and instead does what she knows is contrary to it.

The problem of weakness of will should be distinguished from a related but nonetheless different problem—namely, whether it

is possible to know what the right thing to do is and yet not be motivated to do it. In such a case, a person knows the right course of action, but still asks "Why should *I* do it?" A failure to act in accordance with moral duty can arise simply from a lack of motivation. With weakness of will, on the other hand, the assumption is that the person truly is motivated to do what is right—Medea feels the pull of duty to her father and a desire to submit to his authority—but this motivation gives way to an opposing impulse.

In Medea's case, at least as Ovid depicts it, *akrasia* is a matter of reason being overpowered by passion. This is consistent with how philosophers have often accounted for the phenomenon. Plato, for example, divided the human soul into distinct parts, with incontinence explained by the baser part, appetite, leading the soul against the commands of the superior part, reason. In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato presents an allegory in which the soul is represented by a chariot drawn by two horses. The white horse is reason, which seeks to take the chariot upwards. The unruly black horse, pulling in the opposite direction, is appetite, and the driver of the chariot must struggle against it dragging the vehicle downwards. The battle, Socrates explains in the dialogue, is between "an innate desire for pleasure" and "an acquired judgment that aims at what is best." Sometimes, he notes,

> these internal guides are in accord, sometimes at variance; now one gains the mastery, now the other. And when judgment guides us rationally toward what is best, and has the mastery, that mastery is called temperance, but when desire drags us irrationally toward pleasure and has come to rule within us, the name given to that rule is wantonness.[2]

Plato believed that *akrasia* is a real phenomenon, that sometimes people who know and are moved to do what is right nonetheless willingly act contrary to that knowledge. His philosophical mentor, the real-life Socrates, reportedly disagreed, arguing that no one knowingly does what is wrong. If one fails to do what is good, it is because one is lacking some essential information—perhaps either a general principle about what kinds of things are good or the perception that some particular item is in fact one of those good things. "When people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains—that is, of good and evil—the cause of their mistake is lack of knowledge. . . . What being mastered by pleasure really is, is ignorance."[3] For Socrates, knowing the good entails doing the good.

Spinoza owned a three-volume edition of Ovid's works—published in Amsterdam in 1634—and he had it ready to hand while composing the later parts of the *Ethics*. The topic of *akrasia* is prominent throughout Part Four, especially in Spinoza's discussion of "the cause why men are moved more by opinion than by true reason, and why the true knowledge of good and evil arouses disturbances of the mind, and often yields to lust of every kind." Spinoza apparently agrees with the poet's diagnosis of Medea's predicament. He even quotes Medea's lament from Ovid's Latin text, "*video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor.*"[4] However, while it may be that Spinoza, too, sees incontinence as resulting from a conflict between reason and passion, things are not as simple as Plato, at least, makes them out to be.

Spinoza rejects any kind of division of the human mind into distinct faculties, with one potentially at odds with another.

There is not a rational part, an appetitive part, or a volitional part. Thus, *akrasia* cannot be explained by one faculty of the mind being mastered by another. The human mind, as the mode of Thought that corresponds to the mode of Extension that is the human body, is simply an idea that is itself composed of other ideas. Considered strictly as ideas in the mind, the adequate ideas of reason are no different from the inadequate ideas of sense and imagination. All ideas have an "objective" or representational content that involves an assertory force of some kind. My idea of a unicorn represents and affirms that a horse is white and has a horn coming out of its forehead. Ideas are *of* things and make claims about them. The ideas of reason are true, while the ideas of sense and imagination are often false and always incomplete and "mutilated." But any real conflict between our ideas occurs not on the level of their truth or falsity, but rather in their conative powers. As we have seen, all ideas, as modifications of the mind's *conatus*, have an affective component, and "an affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to and stronger than the affect to be restrained."[5] Like Nature itself, the mind is a domain of competition among items striving to prevail. In the mind, these items are ideas, and the affectively more powerful idea, regardless of its truth or falsehood, will win out. Spinoza insists that if a true idea conquers a false idea, it is not because it is true. "No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect."[6]

A human being's striving for perseverance can be guided by either adequate ideas or inadequate ideas. "Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its

being and it is conscious of this striving it has."[7] What happens in the case of *akrasia* or weakness, then, is that an adequate idea of reason, which directs the agent to do what is truly good and in his own best interest, comes into conflict with a passion, an externally caused idea of sense or imagination, which in its inadequacy very often misleads him as to what is good and right. In this psychic skirmish, the affectively stronger idea will be the one that terminates in choice and action. If the passion is stronger than the rational idea, then the agent will end up doing—knowingly and voluntarily—what appears to be (and may very well be) a source of joy but is in fact contrary to his better judgment. In *akrasia*, there is indeed a clash between knowledge and passion, but it is decided affectively, not epistemically.

Spinoza demonstrates why irrational passions often conquer rational knowledge in a series of propositions that rely on his account of the various ways in which affects gain their respective strengths.[8] He explains that an affect toward something that we imagine to be actually present to us is more intense or stronger than an affect toward something that we imagine as not present, whether it be something that will exist in the future, has existed in the past, or will never exist. For the purpose of understanding *akrasia*, it is in fact affects toward things in the future, as compared to things actually present, that are of the greatest importance. "Other things being equal, the image of a future thing . . . is weaker than the image of a present thing; and consequently, an affect toward a future thing . . . is milder, other things equal, than an affect toward a present thing."[9] Moreover, an affect toward a future thing that we imagine will soon be present is stronger than an affect toward a future thing whose presence is more distant or uncertain.

By themselves, none of these claims amounts to an explanation of incontinence. After all, a rational affect toward some known present good, all things being equal, will be stronger than an irrational affect toward some imagined future good, and so the person will do what reason prescribes. *Akrasia* occurs when the rational idea promises a good whose attainment lies far in the future, while the imaginative idea or passion regards some pleasure that is either immediately present or at least temporally more proximate than the rational good. Reason may tell a student that it would be best to stay home and study, as this is in her long-term interest, while the imagination offers an enjoyable vision of a night out carousing with friends. The temporal proximity of the social pleasures will give the imaginative idea superior affective power over the rational idea, and so she will choose to go out with her friends. "A desire that arises from a true knowledge of good and evil, insofar as this knowledge concerns the future, can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment."[10]

There is more to it, however, than just the prospect of immediate joy or pleasure in an apparent good versus the distant joy of a true good. The force of any passion or inadequate idea is a function not only of the power of the agent herself, but also of the power of the passion's external causes.[11] And if that congeries of external causes is strong enough, the power of the passion—the imaginative idea of the pleasure to be gained by a night out with friends—will be greater than the power of the adequate knowledge generated by the agent's rational nature alone.[12] The student will choose to party because the power of her adequate idea is no match for the power of the idea whose strength derives from sources outside her. "A desire that arises

from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented."[13]

The person guided by the passions will thus flout the guidance of reason and choose the lesser of two goods or the greater of two evils. He will opt to avoid the present pain of a vaccination, despite the more intense suffering that illness will bring in the future. He *knows* full well what he should do, but he will fail to do it. Such weakness is not so much a reasoned choice by a calmly deliberating but perverse mind as the outcome of that affective struggle among ideas. All ideas, as modifications of desire, are motivational. An idea that represents something as a source of joy, as "good," regardless of whether it is a rational idea or an imaginative idea, will necessarily move us to pursue that perceived good. And the strength of that motivation, the power of the desire, will determine whether in fact we do pursue it.

So in a sense, Spinoza agrees with Plato. Weakness of will or incontinence occurs when passion interferes with reason.[14] However, it is not a matter of some irrational pleasure overriding or preventing us from carrying out the dispassionate commands of our rational nature. It is not body versus mind or undisciplined appetite versus cool intellect. There is affective power on both sides. In an individual suffering from *akrasia*, a properly formed rational judgment about what is best is affectively too weak to overcome the affect of an externally generated desire for some other course of action. Sometimes our inadequate ideas are just that much stronger than our adequate ideas, and we end up doing what, all things considered, is against our better judgment.

Writing a few years after the publication of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes employs the metaphor of a tree to explain how he sees the structure of human knowledge:

> The whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics, and morals.[15]

In the *Meditations*, Descartes tends primarily to the roots of the tree of knowledge, "which contains the principles of knowledge, including the explanation of the principal attributes of God, the non-material nature of our souls and all the clear and distinct notions which are in us."[16] In the *Principles of Philosophy*, which he intended as a textbook to replace the old Aristotelian-Scholastic curriculum of the college faculties, he goes beyond epistemology and metaphysics and presents the most general principles of physics and provides explanations of particular natural phenomena according to the tenets of the new mechanical philosophy.

It was not until later, just before his fateful departure in 1649 for Sweden to serve as philosophy tutor to Queen Christina, that Descartes finally turned in a serious way to the branches of the tree of knowledge, particularly "morals." In the final work to be published in his lifetime, *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes addresses not only the range of human emotions, desires, and other "excitations of the soul," but also the path toward happiness and well-being. His discussion ranges over a number of states of character that make up the traditional list of virtues and vices:

courage, generosity, humility (both the "virtuous" and "unvirtuous" variety), even 'self-satisfaction,' which he defines in a way not unlike what we find in Spinoza:

> The satisfaction which those who constantly follow virtue always have is a disposition in their soul which is called tranquility and repose of conscience. But that which one acquires afresh when one has just done some action one thinks good is a passion, namely, a species of joy, which I believe to be the sweetest of all, because its cause depends only on ourselves.[17]

As for virtue itself, Descartes defines it as a kind of self-mastery. In a 1645 letter to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, who was living in exile in the Netherlands and to whom he would later dedicate *The Passions of the Soul*, he says that virtue consists in "a firm and constant will to bring about everything we judge to be the best," that is, "to carry out whatever reason recommends without being diverted by [the] passions or appetites."[18] In the final part of the *Passions*, Descartes takes up this theme again and insists that the virtuous person understands the obligation to use well "the free control of his volitions . . . and never lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things he judges to be best." Virtue, in the Cartesian scheme of things, consists in the fixed practical resolution to do what reason prescribes.

For Spinoza, of course, there is no "free control" of the will. Our volitional acts are as causally determined as anything else in Nature. However, the key to virtue—to living according to the guidance of reason and avoiding a life enslaved by the passions and the *akrasia* that inevitably attends them—lies in an internal dynamic not unlike what Descartes envisions. (Spinoza was well acquainted with *The Passions of the Soul*—he owned a Latin

translation of this French treatise—as well as the letter to Elisabeth.) Instead of a free decision of the mind to carry out reason's judgments, however, virtue involves cultivating the strength of one's rational ideas so that they are affectively more powerful than the passions on a consistent basis.

The opposite of weakness is strength. And what distinguishes the virtuous person—the free person—from one given to weakness of will is the inner strength to resist the passions and act only according to the dictate of reason. This is what Spinoza calls *fortitudo*, fortitude or strength of character. "All actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands I relate to strength of character."[19]

Strength of character is further divided into tenacity and nobility, according to whether the action in question under the guidance of reason is a matter of directly maintaining and increasing one's own power or also improving the life of another.

> By tenacity [*animositas*] I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being. By nobility [*generositas*] I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship. Those actions, therefore, which aim only at the agent's advantage, I relate to tenacity, and those which aim at another's advantage, I relate to nobility. So moderation, sobriety, presence of mind in danger, etc., are species of tenacity, whereas courtesy, mercy, etc., are species of nobility.

I will return to nobility, or rationally motivated benevolence toward others, in chapter 8. What matters with respect to the problem of *akrasia* is the general strength of character that

allows one—whether striving only for one's own advantage or also for the advantage of another—to act always according to the guidance of the adequate ideas of reason and thus to enjoy the freedom of the free person. Fortitude defined as the efficacious desire to preserve one's being solely from the dictate of reason just is the power to stand by one's resolution to act rationally and not give in to the passions.

If virtue is living and acting according to the dictate of reason, always doing what is truly good and thereby finding success in the striving for perseverance, then fortitude is a kind of *super-* or *meta*-virtue. It is the "virtue of the mind" through which one is able to live virtuously and maintain one's mastery over the passions. It is fortitude that allows a person to resist the urges of lust, greed, gluttony, cowardice, ambition, and other irrational appetites. Moreover, Spinoza notes, "a man strong in character hates no one, is angry with no one, envies no one, is indignant with no one, scorns no one, and is not at all proud."[20] In short, fortitude is the antidote to *akrasia*.

There should be something perfectly familiar about this. We regard a person as strong of character when she abides by the principles to which she is committed. Rather than give in to heteronomous desires that lead her to act contrary to those deeply held beliefs, she stands by them and the norms they represent. A person of weak character, on the other hand, is easily swayed to violate his values, whether it be by the persuasion of others (peer pressure, for example), the hope of profit, or some other inducement.

And yet, not just any set of principles will do. We are typically reluctant to praise someone as being of strong character if the values that they refuse to abandon are base or immoral, or

even just plain silly. Strength of character is a virtue and is admirable; pathological obedience and sheer stubbornness are not. Although this may seem question-begging—especially in the absence of some objective measure for distinguishing proper from improper values—it does seem to capture something intuitive about the way in which we discriminate ethically between agents. We esteem the person whose commitment to honesty and fair-dealing is such that he will not violate someone's trust even if it means a rich reward, but we censure the person who persists in an abhorrent activity as a matter of principle—the loyal and stalwart Nazi, for example.

In Spinoza's account, the principles that unfailingly guide the free and virtuous person come from reason and so represent what is truly good for human nature, and thus for himself. The strength of character of the free person leads him always to do what is right and in his own best interest and the interests of others. What is peculiar about Spinoza's account, however, is the additional feature that such fortitude is explained not by pure willpower or a kind of stoic resistance to the urges of base pleasure, but rather by the greater affective power of the second and third kinds of knowledge. Fortitude is manifest in a person who consistently has rational ideas that are conatively stronger than the irrational, inadequate ideas of passion.

The free person, then, will not suffer from *akrasia*. He will never sacrifice a greater good for a lesser one, least of all for the sake of the immediate enjoyment of some pleasure or the immediate avoidance of some pain. His priorities are settled by reason alone, albeit through the affective strength of desires grounded in reason's ideas. Spinoza notes that, "from the guidance of reason alone, we shall follow the greater of two goods or

the lesser of two evils," and that "from the guidance of reason we want a greater future good in preference to a lesser present one, and a lesser present evil in preference to a greater future one."[21] Reason will also direct the free person to pass over a present greater good that has seriously bad consequences in the long run in favor of a present lesser good that has no deleterious consequences—which is as much as to say that he will choose a present evil with good long-term consequences over a present good with bad long-term consequences.

What this shows is that the free person, unlike ordinary individuals in thrall to the passions and thus susceptible to incontinence, is unmoved by the temporal factors that so often make immediate gratification tempting and lead those individuals to act contrary to their better judgment. To the free person, it is all the same whether the good to be achieved or the evil to be avoided is in the present, the near future, or the distant future. This is because he regards things through reason, and reason depicts all things in their true natural necessity and from what Spinoza calls "the perspective of eternity" (*sub specie aeternitatis*). The free person essentially sees things as God sees them, taking no account of their place in some durational order.

> It is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary and not as contingent. And it perceives this necessity of things truly, i.e., as it is in itself. But this necessity of things is the very necessity of God's eternal nature. Therefore, it is of the nature of reason to regard things under this perspective of eternity . . . without any relation to time.[22]

A person who regards things through the adequate ideas of reason is thus not more moved by the proximity of a present joy

than by his vision of a joy far in the future. This is the lesson of proposition 62 of Part Four of the *Ethics* and its demonstration:

> Proposition: Insofar as the mind conceives things from the dictate of reason, it is affected equally, whether the idea is of a future or a past thing, or of a present one.
>
> Demonstration: Whatever the mind conceives under the guidance of reason it conceives under the same perspective of eternity, or necessity, and is affected with the same certainty. So whether the idea is of a future or a past thing, or of a present one, the mind conceives the thing with the same necessity and is affected with the same certainty. . . . And so, insofar as the mind conceives things from the dictate of reason, it is affected in the same way, whether the idea is of a future or a past thing, or of a present one.[23]

From the perspective of eternity, which bears no relationship to time or duration at all, all things are equally proximate or distant—or rather, the notions of temporal proximity and distance are simply not applicable. Things are perceived through their formal essences and in their proper intellectual order, in their true and eternal relationships, as opposed to the random order and haphazard relationships in which they unfold in sense experience, relative to how they happen to affect a person at a given moment.

All things being equal, then, the free person regards things that do happen to lie in the future with the same affect as he regards things that happen to be present, and he desires a present good no more than he desires a future one simply because of its presence. Hence, as Spinoza succinctly puts it, the mind of the

free person "will necessarily neglect a lesser present good for a greater future one, and what would be good in the present, but the cause of some future ill, it would not want at all."[24] What matters is simply what is good or better, regardless of where it occurs in time.

Assuming, however, that the free person is still subject to passions, the question remains as to how he is able to resist the affective power of inadequate ideas. The adequate ideas of reason, with their eternal perspective, may have the upper hand epistemically. These ideas are always true. But, as we have seen, "no affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect." So why should the adequate ideas of reason always take the lead in the free person when it comes to empowering desire and causing action and thereby keep him from succumbing to *akrasia*? After all, the desires generated from passions in the mind derive much of their power from the power of their external causes, which can be greater than the power of the agent himself. What really accounts for the free person's strength of character?

The answer is that the free person has ready at hand an arsenal of strategies for keeping the passions weak and resisting their vigor.

To begin with, there is innate in any human mind an assortment of adequate ideas that are inherently strong and fecund. These are ideas that the mind has by its very nature. The mind, as we have seen, is the idea or correlate in the attribute of Thought of a certain mode of the attribute of Extension, namely, the body. The formal essence of the mind—its essential core, so to speak—just is the knowledge or adequate idea of the formal essence of

its body as a mode of Extension. This adequate idea of what its body is necessarily involves a knowledge of what extension or body per se is, as well as anything that follows from this knowledge: what properties bodies in general have, what motion and rest are, how bodies causally interact, and so on. These ideas are all innately adequate in the mind, since any ideas that follow from ideas that are adequate in the mind must also be adequate.[25] Similarly, the mind must have innate, adequate knowledge of itself as a mode of Thought, and this necessarily involves knowledge of what Thought is and whatever affections may pertain to a thinking thing.

Spinoza calls these innate ideas "common notions": always present in the mind, they are permanent features of its cognitive furniture. They may not be constantly at the mind's forefront, but because of their ubiquitous manifestation in experience they are particularly apt to become conscious ideas. This gives them a particular strength relative to other ideas. To the extent that a person is virtuous and pursues understanding, he will have greater consciousness of these innate adequate ideas and the information they convey about what he is and his place in Nature. Moreover, because the mind's adequate ideas about the body—which present features common to all bodies—are always confirmed by our sensory experience of bodies in the world, their strength is constantly reinforced.[26]

These adequate ideas also serve either to transform passively acquired inadequate ideas into adequate ones or at least to weaken their power. The key to "restraining and moderating" the passive affects, Spinoza insists, is to understand them. "An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it"; moreover, "there is no affection

of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept."[27] Knowing truly what any affect of the body is involves detaching its idea from the sensory or imaginative idea of some present external cause and uniting it to an idea of what the body itself is. A person thereby perceives that affect not as something that his body is now, at this moment, suffering because of some other body interacting with his own, but as something that is explained through his common notions about bodies. Likewise, the idea of that bodily affect in the mind—the emotion that corresponds to it—will be understood to follow from the nature of thought and the principles that govern the mind's affections and operations.

> We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly, and with which it is fully satisfied, and so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts.[28]

An individual will have a better understanding of the sadness he may be feeling when he conceives it not in relation to the loss of a loved one, but in relation to his own constitution and the striving by which his body and mind persevere. In this way, the virtuous person actually removes a passion and turns it into an active idea of reason, one with a particular strength borrowed from the adequate ideas already in the mind with which it is now connected.

The other strategy, which involves not transforming passions but weakening them, is to come to an understanding of their absolute necessity. This demands broadening one's perspective by

situating the sensed or imagined external cause of the passive affect in the infinite chain of natural causes that determine it. A mind that sees all things as necessary "has a greater power over the affects, and is less acted on by them."[29] Instead of thinking of my sadness or joy as being caused by just one person or thing operating through some imagined free act of will or intrinsic causal power, I regard that person or thing merely as an intermediary between innumerable other causes and the affect I experience. This view serves to distribute the causal responsibility for the affect widely and dilute its power significantly, perhaps taking away its strength altogether. The intensity of the affect is weakened as it becomes less focused on one particular individual and more on a long sequence of necessitating causes. After all, Spinoza insists, experience itself testifies that "sadness over some good which has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept."

Above all, the free person has God on her side—or rather, the idea of God or Nature. Because all things are in and caused by God, the adequate idea of anything reveals its true relationship to God and to the highest principles of Nature that follow from God's attributes. The idea of the external thing presently bringing about some affect is thereby causally and epistemically anchored in the idea of the infinite eternal substance itself. It is especially important to reach this kind of insight through a clear and distinct understanding of the affects of one's body and mind—an understanding that reveals these affects, as modes of the mind and the body, to be modes of a mode of God.

Such knowledge represents a remarkable increase in the power of the mind and thus is a joyful experience. And because one sees the idea of God to be the ultimate ground of the knowledge, and

thus of the joy, the deep understanding of one's mind and body and their respective affects is necessarily attended by a love of God. "He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects."[30]

There is, however, even beyond this "ordinary," somewhat durational love of God—which one must actively pursue and can progressively achieve over time—a higher, "eternal" love of God that necessarily belongs to the mind by its very nature.

The mind's own innate and adequate knowledge of what it essentially is, as a mode of the attribute of Thought, reveals its true and eternal causal relationship to God or Nature. The mind sees its power as but a finite expression of the power of that infinite substance. "Insofar as our mind knows itself and the body under a perspective of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God."[31] The mind conceives itself, in other words, through the "third kind of knowledge," which, as we have seen, "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things."

The mind has this intuitive knowledge of itself as being in and following from God regardless of what may or may not be happening in the body and the mind in duration—that is, in their interaction with other things in the world. This knowledge, in fact, is what the mind essentially *is*. As the mind's "highest virtue" and its "greatest perfection," this knowledge is also a supreme joy. Because the joy consists in understanding, and because God is recognized as the cause of this understanding and of the mind's power and perfection, it follows that one knows that the true cause of the joy is God. Thus, one loves God.

> From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God (*Amor Dei intellectualis*). For from this kind of knowledge there arises joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, i.e., love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God.[32]

The intellectual love of God is a love that "follows necessarily from the nature of the mind insofar as it is considered as an eternal truth, through God's nature."[33] The mind's intuitive knowledge of the eternal essences of the body and of itself, which involves perceiving the relationship of each to the essence of God, *is* the eternal essence of the mind. Consequently, unlike the ordinary love of God, the intellectual love of God is eternal. It is not a matter of a joy that arises from converting an episodic passion or inadequate idea into an adequate one, a process that occurs in duration. In the intellectual love of God there is no passage from a lesser condition to a superior one (although Spinoza says that, "for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show," he will pretend "as if it were now beginning to be, and were now beginning to understand things under a species of eternity"[34]). The ideas of body and mind involved in the intellectual love of God are eternal, and thus so is the knowledge and the resulting joy and love. "The intellectual love of God, which arises from the third kind of knowledge, is eternal . . . the mind has had eternally the same perfections which, in our fiction, now come to it, and [they are] accompanied by the idea of God as an eternal cause."[35] Although this knowledge and the eternal joy and love it generates is obscured in most people by the onslaught of inadequate ideas that so occupy the

mind in this durational lifetime, Spinoza insists that each of us must "nevertheless feel that our mind, insofar as it involves the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is eternal."[36]

The joy of true knowledge is the greatest joy there is, and the love of God that follows it is the strongest emotion the human mind can experience. The ordinary love of God, once achieved, and the intellectual love of God are "the most constant of all the affects," with the intellectual love of God constituting "the greatest satisfaction of mind [*acquiescentia mentis*] there can be."[37] Indeed, the intellectual love of God cannot be overcome or destroyed. As an active affect that is perpetually, even "eternally" present in the mind of the free person, who knows that the power and perfection of his mind itself derives from God, the intellectual love of God is also the most potent weapon he has against the passions.

Through all of this cognitive work—which involves both "rightly ordering and connecting the [ideas of the] affections of the body" and, more importantly, understanding the mind itself through the third kind of knowledge—one enjoys a highly effective resistance to the passions and a practically invincible power in the ideas of reason. "A greater force is required for restraining affects ordered and connected according to the order of the intellect than for restraining those that are uncertain and random."[38] Because of the understanding he has by virtue of his adequate ideas—having a "perfect knowledge of [his] affects"[39] and of the essence of his mind—the free person enjoys an affective firewall against the strength of the passions. And to the extent that any individual moves closer to this ideal condition, he becomes more active, powerful, rational, virtuous, and free, and consequently less susceptible to the weakness of *akrasia*.[40]

7

HONESTY

Spinoza's *Ethics* may contain more inscrutable and perplexing claims than any other work in the history of philosophy. And among its definitions, axioms, 259 propositions and numerous scholia, corollaries, prefaces, and appendices, there may be no statement that is as challenging as proposition 72 of Part Four. This theorem concerning the exceptionless honesty of the free person has generated its own cottage industry of scholarly commentary.

The proposition says: "The free person always acts honestly, never deceptively." On the face of it, this seems rather simple and straightforward. We would expect a virtuous person generally to be averse to dishonesty and false dealings with others. His character will incline him to tell the truth and not seek to lead people astray.

Complications arise, however, when we dig a little deeper and begin to wonder what exactly Spinoza means by "*always* acts honestly." Is there absolutely never an occasion on which it would be right and good for a free person to act dishonestly? Are there not situations in which it is reasonable, permissible, even morally obligatory to engage in some form of deception? And what precisely does acting *honestly* entail? Might it be the same as simply acting with honor? Is there such a thing as an honorable and honest lie?

It seems especially difficult to reconcile this proposition with Spinoza's portrayal of the free person as someone who is

unwavering in the pursuit of perseverance and self-interest. Surely, one might think, there will be times when a dishonest and deceptive act is in a person's rational self-interest and better contributes to the preservation of her being.[1] Is proposition 72, in fact, inconsistent with an essential element of Spinoza's moral psychology?

Like other features of Spinoza's philosophy that we have considered, the notion that a virtuous person living under the guidance of reason *always* avoids deceiving others and *never* tells a lie, if this is indeed Spinoza's position, has a fine Stoic pedigree. Marcus Aurelius, for one, believed that a sage would never act in a dishonest manner. In his *Meditations*, he counsels against hypocrisy and deceit. No amount of advantage to be gained, he insists, can justify a lie. "If it is not right, do not do it; if it is not true, do not say it."[2] (On the other hand, Seneca allows for deception, as long as it is done for, and actually serves, the *deceived* person's interest and well-being. One may hide the truth and even induce a false belief in order to relieve someone's suffering, fear, or anger.[3])

Perhaps the most (in)famous defense of honesty as an absolute duty is found in Kant's ethical writings. For Kant, at least on one prevalent reading, it is never morally permissible to tell a lie or act dishonestly—for example, by making a promise that one has no intention of keeping. Telling the truth and honest dealing is always a moral duty, no matter what the consequences of doing so may be in the circumstances. This is because no rational moral agent could reasonably envision lying or making a false promise being elevated to a universal law that commands

or permits everyone to act in that way. According to Kant, such a law would clearly be irrational and self-defeating, since it would undermine the mutual trust on which successful lying depends.[4] Even telling a lie in order to save an innocent life is apparently morally impermissible. In a 1797 essay titled "On the Supposed Right to Lie from Benevolent Motives," Kant considers the example of a person who is hiding someone from a would-be murderer. When asked by the killer whether the intended victim is in the house, Kant insists, he has a moral duty to answer honestly.[5]

Does Spinoza's free and virtuous person likewise find himself subject to an absolute prohibition against lying and other forms of dishonest and deceptive behavior? It all depends on just what is to count as acting "deceptively." It is also contingent on what that *conatus* or striving to persevere that characterizes every individual in Nature really is. Perhaps *conatus* is not merely a striving to persist in durational existence and extend the term of one's life, but rather a striving for the perseverance of a particular nature—a striving to exist with a certain degree of perfection and quality of life and character. If so, then when all is said and done, Spinoza may very well be claiming that the free person will, under the direction of reason and precisely in order to preserve his condition of rational virtue and maximal power, never fail to act with perfect honesty, even if such dedication to truth and candor ultimately hastens his durational demise.[6]

Under any reasonable understanding of 'virtue,' it is quite implausible to suggest that a virtuous person will *never* act dishonestly. Kant's view, it seems, is not just counterintuitive but

wrong. When the Nazis come knocking on your door in search of the Jewish family hiding in your attic, deception is the only morally acceptable response to their inquiries. But proposition 72, if taken at face value, also appears incompatible with Spinoza's particular account of virtue and his egoistic theory of motivation. It seems quite easy to think of circumstances in which *self*-preservation is optimized by dishonesty. If I can avoid serious harm or even save and prolong my life by telling a lie or otherwise deceiving someone, then it would seem that reason (as the epistemically informed expression of *conatus*) clearly dictates that I engage in the appropriate deception. Honesty here would seem, in fact, to be contrary to reason. And yet Spinoza clearly says that reason can never sanction a deceptive act, not even to save one's own life! Here is his demonstration of proposition 72:

> If a free man, insofar as he is free, did anything by deception, he would do it from the dictate of reason (for so far only do we call him free). And so it would be a virtue to act deceptively, and hence, everyone would be better advised to act deceptively to preserve his being. I.e. (as is known through itself), men would be better advised to agree only in words, and be contrary to one another in fact. But this is absurd. Therefore, a free man etc., q.e.d.

The scholium, in which Spinoza addresses the most obvious objection to the proposition, is especially instructive:

> Suppose someone now asks: what if a man could save himself from the present danger of death by treachery? Would not the principle of preserving his own being recommend, without qualification, that he be treacherous?

> The reply to this is the same. If reason should recommend that, it would recommend it to all men. And so reason would recommend, without qualification, that men make agreements, join forces, and have common rights only by deception—i.e., that really they have no common rights. This is absurd.[7]

It is common to read Spinoza here in a Kantian manner, and thus as arguing for the absurdity of rationally motivated deception in the same way that Kant shows that a practical maxim that allows for a lie could never reasonably be elevated to a moral law that allows lying generally.[8] The dictates of reason are universal. They are directed at and valid for all rational agents regardless of their particularities and passionate inclinations. Thus, if reason recommends to one person that he act deceptively—in this case, to save his life—then it would be making a universal recommendation to all rational agents. But this would be absurd and self-defeating, on a Kantian reading, since under such conditions trust would be completely eroded and "treachery" would not even be possible.

However, this is not what Spinoza is saying in the demonstration. From the free person's perspective, the problem with lying and other forms of deceptive behavior is not a logical one. Rather, the problem is that they bring about differences and divisions between individuals. If I tell a lie to someone, I put us at odds with respect to our beliefs, attitudes, and values. We would, as Spinoza says, "agree only in words, and be contrary to one another in fact." I would be creating in the other person a state of mind that is opposed to my own state of mind. And this would be contrary to reason, which demands that, in my striving for perseverance, I try to minimize differences between myself and others.

I need to have others be more like me, since something is good for an individual only to the extent that it agrees in nature with that individual. "The more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful, or better, it is for us, and conversely, the more a thing is useful to us, the more it agrees with our nature."[9]

Lying, in fact, not only creates epistemic differences between people but leads to them being more actively engaged against each other. When I lie to another person, my aim typically is to generate in him false ideas. Since only the inadequate and mutilated ideas of the first kind of knowledge are false, I would thus be seeking to increase his store of inadequate ideas; because inadequate ideas just are passions, this would be tantamount to increasing the strength of his very particular passions. And it is the passions, Spinoza insists, that set one person against another. "Insofar as men are torn by affects that are passions, they can be contrary to one another."[10] By lying, in other words, I am in effect creating another person whose passion-driven striving is more likely to be opposed to my own striving. Our relationship will be a competitive rather than a cooperative one.[11]

The rationally virtuous person, of course, knows all this, and thus he acts so as to increase the commonalities, not the differences, between himself and others. He will necessarily avoid those actions—like lying and other forms of deception—that serve to set people apart. Apparently, it is indeed generally in his own best interest *not* to lie and deceive.

Still, the question stands: what if there should arise, however rarely, an occasion on which the preservation of one's being and the increase in one's own power is in fact best served by deception?[12] This does not seem like a very far-fetched possibility. Despite Spinoza's demonstration for proposition 72, there

does appear, prima facie, to be a tension between the *conatus* doctrine of self-preservation and its motivational ramifications, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the claim that the free person always acts honestly and never deceives anyone.

The problem can conceivably be resolved if there is a way to interpret the proposition generously and moderate its practical import. For example, it may be that while a free person will never maliciously con, dupe, cheat, or swindle another, still, sometimes an intentional but relatively benign falsehood, a "white lie" or a misleading exaggeration, may be told for the sake of honest, good, and benevolent ends, and especially to help preserve one's own life.

Consider the proposition's precise wording. The Latin text, "*homo liber nunquam dolo malo, sed semper cum fide agit*," is literally translated as "a free man never acts with evil artifice, but always with faith." This suggests that there may be a distinction at work here between "evil artifice" (*dolus malus*) and "good artifice" (*dolus bonus*)—that is, bad trickery or deceit with malevolent intent versus good trickery or deceit with benevolent intent. Perhaps all Spinoza is saying in proposition 72 is that the free person will never deceive someone maliciously and in order to bring about in him sadness or weakness. Whenever the free person acts in a deceptive way, it will be for the sake of some good and virtuous end.[13] Acting always *cum fide*, then, would not necessarily rule out lying or deceit. If my intention in lying is not to harm another person but rather to preserve my own life or increase my own well-being, either directly or by saving or improving someone else's life, then perhaps reason would indeed condone and even counsel such behavior. Presumably, this is precisely what Seneca had in mind.

Spinoza is aware of the juridical distinction between *dolus malus* and *dolus bonus*.[14] But using these notions to justify reading proposition 72 as allowing even benevolent deceit seems inconsistent with reason's demand that one not foster differences between oneself and others—least of all differences in what one believes to be true. Even a well-intentioned lie will not lead to someone else "agreeing in nature" with me and thus being "useful" to me in my striving to persevere; on the contrary, it will work against achieving such commonality. In light of Spinoza's argument for the proposition, it is hard to imagine reason recommending this. Deception of any kind seems to be ruled out.

Moreover, it may be that the free person would never find herself in circumstances in which the only way to preserve herself or increase her *conatus* is by engaging in deception. Through her deep knowledge of Nature, including human nature, she would be able generally to avoid dangerous and life-threatening encounters; in that rare instance in which she cannot, reason will always provide her with a way out that does not involve deception.

The adequate ideas of reason give the free person an advantage in navigating her way through the vicissitudes of the world and the snares lurking in our social and political lives. She will know that the best way to preserve her being is to keep out of danger in the first place—by not making enemies, by not participating in violent or risky ventures, and generally by dealing honestly with others. And should she, despite all this, happen to fall into a perilous situation, she will know how to save herself without resort to dishonesty—perhaps by using reason itself to defuse the situation and engaging in persuasion to "improve" the other person and convert them from a threat to an ally. Being

neither dishonest nor deceptive does not mean that the free person is without guile or wiles.

There may be yet another approach to saving proposition 72 in its full and rigorous import while easing the apparent conflict with the *conatus* doctrine of self-preservation. It involves neither liberally reinterpreting what "acting honestly" or "deceptively" mean nor giving the free person special but perfectly honorable skills in preserving himself against threats to his life. What if *conatus* and the free person's striving for perseverance is to be understood not as an endeavor simply for continued existence as a durational being—that is, mere survival as a living and breathing individual—but rather for persistence in a special way of being, with a certain kind and quality of life?[15] After all, *conatus* is the active expression of an individual's nature, and thus it is a striving for the preservation of that nature. The nature of the free person is that of an ideal human being, with superb virtue and rationality. Thus, the *conatus* of the free person will be a striving not to persevere per se, but to persevere in that nature. It must be an endeavor for persistence as a virtuous and rational being enjoying that high degree of freedom and activity.

There is a strong case to be made for reading the *conatus* doctrine in a more than mundane "survivalist" manner.[16] In its most straightforward form, the argument is as follows: *conatus* is a striving for power; power is identical, for Spinoza, with reality and perfection; therefore, *conatus* is a striving for reality and perfection. But Spinoza is quite clear that there is a distinction between reality/perfection, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, mere continued existence in time. An endeavor in an

individual for the preservation of and increase in his reality and perfection is therefore not identical with an endeavor for continued existence in time.[17]

> Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration. For no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time.[18]

This is especially true for the free person, who enjoys a particularly high level of perfection, power, and activity.

In fact, in the free person the striving for perseverance, as an endeavor for reality and perfection, is a striving for knowledge and understanding. Spinoza says that "what we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding; nor does the mind, insofar as it uses reason, judge anything else useful to itself except what leads to understanding."[19]

Moreover, as we have seen, something is good only because it is useful to an individual and makes a positive contribution to their striving for perseverance, and "we know nothing to be certainly good or evil except what really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding."[20] This, too, suggests that the conscious objective of perseverance for the free person is not mere durational survival but rather the power and perfection of the intellect, that is, the "power of thinking" and the condition of rational virtue. (As Spinoza says, "the free man thinks of death least of all things," and thus the free person presumably does not focus at all on the end of his durational existence.[21] I return to this in chapter 9.) It is his own condition of rational virtue that the free person is striving to preserve and, if possi-

ble, increase. Since the transition in the power of the mind that is an *increase* in that power is Spinoza's definition of joy, we can also say that, like the ordinary person, what the free person necessarily strives for is joy; however, the free person has a more informed and refined conception than the ordinary person of what joy really is.

The free person knows that acts of deception put people at odds with one another by generating differences in their natures. Rather than being useful to him in his rational endeavors, those to whom he lies are more likely to stand in his way. So while dishonesty may allow one to survive longer, it would contribute to a deterioration in the conditions for success in the striving for understanding and perfection. "No thing can be evil for us through what it has in common with our nature; but insofar as it is evil for us, it is contrary to us."[22] Thus, the free and rationally virtuous person—who, as we have seen, will never sacrifice a long-term, permanent good for a more immediate but lesser one—may see that deception might on occasion and in the short term prolong his durational existence, but he also knows that in the long run it would bring about deleterious external circumstances and, ultimately, a decrease in his perfection. Reason, then, will not let him opt for a longer life if the only way to secure it is through a weakening of his character and a reduction in the quality of his life. In other words, to the free person virtue is of greater importance than durational survival. The free person's rational virtue is in fact what makes life worth living. If a longer life can be secured only at the cost of virtue, the free person will not make the deal.[23]

It seems, then, that the exceptionless honesty of the free person can be saved—at least in terms of its consistency within

Spinoza's system, and maybe even its intuitive plausibility—by an interpretation of the *conatus* doctrine that makes the striving of the free person something more than an endeavor for existence. When Spinoza says that reason would never counsel a free person to "save himself from the present danger of death by treachery," he means it. The price for saving his life—the eventual loss of his rational virtue itself—would be too high.

Is Spinoza proclaiming that no one, under any circumstances, should ever engage in lies and deceit? Proposition 72 is about how the free person will act under the guidance of reason. But does it leave open the possibility that someone who is less free and less virtuous can and even sometimes should act dishonestly?

Some scholars insist that this is something that Spinoza must, and does in fact, allow. In their view, he is not propounding any general and absolute principle against lying.[24] Although it is not in the rational self-interest of the free person to act dishonestly—and as long as he is guided by reason he will never so act—what is good for the free person is not necessarily good for everyone else. Someone who desires to be free and is actively working toward that condition but is not quite there may have to engage in behavior that the free person would never countenance. Just as a poor person who desires to be one of the idle rich would not be wisely advised to act in the leisurely and, well, idle way that a retired billionaire acts, so a less-than-free individual should not behave like the free person, at least if he hopes to survive long enough to achieve that state of supreme virtue.[25] Someone who is striving for but has not yet reached the ideal degree of freedom—and who therefore does not yet enjoy the benefits and

advantages of that freedom—should make use of any available means to save and prolong his life so that he might eventually get there, even if that requires deceit and betrayal. Maybe the free person will never act deceptively, the argument runs, but others will certainly have to.

There is something compelling about this argument. A less-than-free person will indeed, by his nature and by necessity, occasionally (and perhaps often) act dishonestly. As a purely descriptive matter, this is undoubtedly true. Such an individual will lie and deceive in order to persevere in his durational existence; he will, in fact, do a lot of things that the free person would never do. And in a sense, it is good for him to do so, if he wants eventually to become a rationally virtuous individual.[26]

But—and this is the important point—if he is lying and deceiving, even just to save his life, he would not and could not be doing it from the dictate of reason. He would not, that is, be acting virtuously or freely (in Spinoza's sense of 'free'). As Spinoza says in the scholium to proposition 72, if reason recommends something, it recommends it universally, to all people, regardless of their circumstances. It is thus inconceivable that reason would recommend one thing to the free person and something different to another person. It may indeed be "good" for the person who is less-than-free to lie or deceive, in that it brings some increase in power and perhaps even a significant prolongation of life. It is also true—again, as a descriptive matter of fact—that such an imperfectly rational individual, led by passion, will lie and deceive in order to survive. But to the extent that what is really good is what moves one closer to the ideal, to the condition of the free person, such behavior is not truly good. Freedom is living and acting according to the guidance of reason. If you

want to be free, even just more free than you currently are, you should live and act according to the guidance of reason.

What reason universally prescribes is what will either preserve the perfection of human nature in the free person or, if one is not yet a free person, move one closer to that ideal condition. And what reason universally *pro*scribes—to all people, both the free person and the one striving to become more free—is anything that makes it more difficult to achieve true freedom, including dishonesty and deceit.[27] The free person will always act honestly, never deceptively; the less-than-free person *should* always act honestly and never deceptively if he hopes eventually to be a free person.

8

BENEVOLENCE AND FRIENDSHIP

Egoism has long suffered from a bad reputation. The term itself tends to conjure up a decadent and amoral world, with everyone out for himself and no one looking out for others except to use them in self-serving ways. Perhaps not quite Hobbes's nasty and brutish state of nature, but not much better.

Psychological egoism—the view that human beings, as a basic matter of fact and whether they realize it or not, always act out of self-interest—seems to be a rather dark and overly pessimistic vision of human nature. Surely, the objection goes, some of what we do is altruistically motivated. Are we not—as parents, lovers, and friends—obviously capable of acts of true self-sacrifice? Ethical egoism—the view that one *ought* always to pursue self-interest and do what redounds to one's own benefit, that it is right and even morally obligatory to do so—has fared even worse. Such a doctrine seems, on the face of it, to permit, even require the worst kinds of behavior that would run roughshod over the rights and well-being of others in order to obtain what one desires and to achieve one's own selfish goals. A philosophy that licenses such reprehensible behavior would appear hardly to qualify as "ethical" by our ordinary moral intuitions.

Do Spinoza's views on freedom and the good life fall prey to such charges?

As we have seen, Spinoza is best understood as a psychological egoist. Everything that every individual in Nature desires and

does, whatever they seek to achieve or attain or avoid, is fundamentally motivated by the striving to maintain and increase their *conatus*. We are always and necessarily moved to pursue—that is, we desire—only things that appear (rightly or wrongly) to promote our well-being, and we are averse to whatever appears to weaken our condition. "We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness."[1] The striving for perseverance is paramount. It constitutes "the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation." Thus, Spinoza says, "man is determined to do those things" that promote his preservation.[2]

Moreover, with virtue essentially defined as the successful pursuit of perseverance and increase in power, Spinoza may also be called, with good reason, an ethical egoist.[3] One does well insofar as one pursues what is good, with the virtuous person alone able to determine what is truly good and what is not. And what is truly good is what, all things considered, is in one's own best interest and conducive to one's striving for perseverance. "Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage."[4]

The question, then, is this: can the unadulterated and exceptionless egoism of Spinoza's moral philosophy nonetheless provide normative grounds for treating others in ways that we ordinarily regard as ethical?[5] More precisely, does the free person's virtue and happiness come at the cost of the virtue and happiness of others? Given the natural assumption—perhaps rejected by shameless ethical egoists but intuitive to most everyone else—

that ethics is not just about the pursuit of self-interest but also involves acting toward others in certain beneficent and considerate ways, one might legitimately ask what is so "ethical" about Spinoza's *Ethics*. Where does he have anything to say about how we should treat other human beings?

The view that moral philosophy is about the achievement of personal well-being, even flourishing, has, as we have seen, a fine historical pedigree. For ancient philosophers, the concern of ethics was primarily with how to lead what they considered the good life for a human being. Their discussions of virtue were geared toward revealing how a person might achieve *eudaimonia* for himself. For medieval philosophers in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, the goal became blessedness and salvation. It was only later, and especially with Kant, that dutiful behavior toward others came to dominate ethical thought.[6] So perhaps it is anachronistic to expect a seventeenth-century work on "ethics" to explain and justify what we owe to others.

But ancient, medieval, and early modern philosophers, if not quite interested in moral "duties" such as these are understood by deontological moral philosophies, nonetheless saw it as part of their task when dealing with ethical matters to examine social or other-directed virtues as well. Plato, Aristotle, and others considered friendship and community to be essential ingredients in any good life. After all, among the cardinal virtues—along with fortitude, temperance, and prudence—is justice, and charity (supplementing faith and hope) is included among the theological virtues. Character and action, then, are to be assessed not only in terms of what they contribute to the

agent's own well-being, but also for their consequences for her fellow human beings.

Spinoza was clearly aware that any work titled *Ethica* has to say something about how we are to act toward others. Thus, in a series of propositions in Part Four, he sets about demonstrating how an individual guided by reason will necessarily do so. The challenge for him is to show how such rational agents motivated purely by self-interest might still be moved to treat others in those beneficent ways that we, with perhaps a more robust set of altruistic expectations, would recognize as "ethical" and virtuous.

Spinoza's egoism—like most egoisms—can certainly allow for activity that is directed at the welfare of other people, with no conscious and explicit thought of how such activity redounds to one's own benefit.[7] As one scholar has put it, Spinoza "need not deny the *phenomenon* of altruism"; rather, he is committed only to the idea that "the causal *origins* of these phenomena always lie in a singular psychological force, which is the individual's own endeavor for his or her own self-preservation."[8]

Our concern, however, like Spinoza's, is with the life of the free person, the rationally virtuous individual who is fully cognizant of *what* he needs to do and *why* he needs to do it. If, in his pursuit of a good life, he is engaged in projects that positively affect the lives of others, it will be in a conscious and principled way.

There is a cheap and easy way in which a moral philosophy based on egoism might ground treating other human beings in ways that intuitively pass ethical muster. It is captured essentially

by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." That is, one might argue that an egoistically motivated agent will still be moved to act benevolently toward others because that makes it more likely that they will act benevolently toward him in return. Treat others with kindness, because then they will reciprocate and treat you with kindness.[9]

However, nothing comes cheap and easy in Spinoza's system. As we shall see, the Golden Rule does seem to capture something essential in Spinoza's account of why one should treat others well, namely, because they will then treat one well in return. But the virtuous person of the *Ethics* is not going to rely on merely generating goodwill from others as an appreciative response to his own considerate actions. To the extent that the Golden Rule involves hoping for reciprocated beneficence based on another's feeling of pleasure and gratitude or even sense of obligation for the way he was treated, it appears to be grounded in the passions of both parties. Moreover, this seems a rather risky bet. Who knows how others will behave, especially if they too are egoistically motivated? But even if the expectation of reciprocation is solidly based on true and certain knowledge of what another will do, this will not suffice for Spinoza's rationally virtuous person.

The free person, led not by hope but by reason, is out not simply to modify the *actions* of those with whom he must interact in society. Rather, he wants to transform those individuals themselves, to modify their character. The virtuous person wants to make other people into virtuous individuals as well. In this sense, his quest is a rather Socratic one. In Plato's *Apology*, when defending himself against the charge of having corrupted his fellow citizens, Socrates replies that such an accusation is absurd, for no reasonable person would want to live among corrupted

citizens. "Am I so hopelessly ignorant," he says, "as not even to realize that by spoiling the character of one of my companions I shall run the risk of getting some harm from him?"[10] Like Socrates, Spinoza's virtuous person's quest is to *improve* those among whom he must live. He wants, in fact, to make them more like himself.

Another possible Spinozistic route to recognizably virtuous behavior toward others lies in the "first kind of knowledge"—the inadequate ideas that come from random experience and the imagination. When love is a passive affect—"joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause"—one loves the thing that brings about an increase in one's power. Spinoza then demonstrates that a person will strive to benefit individuals who cause him joy and whom he loves, as well as those whom he believes love him.[11] (He will also strive to benefit another person who hates someone or something that he hates.) But such benevolent treatment of others is grounded in the passions (in the *passive* rather than the active affects), an unstable and unpredictable foundation for ethical behavior. Passionate love waxes and wanes. It is too dependent upon the changeable ways in which a person is affected by other people or things outside himself, and so too would be the considerate actions that follow from it. The virtuous person will not typically act from passionate love; nor will he rely merely on the passionate love that others may bear toward him.

The same might be said about a person who acts benevolently toward others out of pity. Spinoza defines pity as "sadness that arises from injury to another." More precisely, he claims that "he who imagines what he loves to be affected with joy or sadness will also be affected with joy or sadness."[12] If I witness the suf-

fering of someone I care about, I will feel pity for them and be moved to do what I can to relieve their suffering, mainly in order to relieve my own empathetic suffering. While a person who comes to the aid of others out of love is moved by joy, or an increase in his *conatus*, the person who comes to the aid of others out of pity is moved by the decrease in *conatus* that is sadness. Once again, the altruistic behavior may seem laudable—Spinoza notes that "pity seems to present the appearance of morality"[13]—but this is not how the free and rationally virtuous person acts. Indeed, Spinoza insists that "pity in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is evil of itself and useless," and "the man who lives according to the dictate of reason strives, as far as he can, not to be touched by pity."[14] The free person is never moved to do what he does by sadness, or, for that matter, by any passion.

This might seem to make the life of virtue a cold and callous existence. But that would be to misread Spinoza. As we have seen, the free person is not without many sorts of emotions. However, what matters is not just *what* you do but *why* you do it. What makes the free person free is that he is moved by *active* affects—active love, active joy, and so on. To the extent that a person's *conatus* and desire is directed by *passions* like hope or love or pity, however, he is in a state of bondage, not virtue. His actions are dictated by what happens to affect him with joy and sadness and pleasure and pain, not by what he *knows* truly to be good and right. As Spinoza says, such a person suffers a "lack of power [which] consists only in this, that a man allows himself to be guided by things outside him, and to be determined by them to do what the common constitution of external things demands, not what his own nature, considered in itself, demands."[15]

Passionate affect is not what moves the truly virtuous and rational person to treat others in a generous and ethical manner. While the enlightened egoist will look out not just for his own welfare but also for the welfare of others, he does not do so because of love of others, hope for reciprocation, fear of being treated miserably, sympathy for fellow human beings, threats, or pity. He is active, not passive, and he does it because reason tells him to—because he knows it is right and good.

Spinoza thus draws a clear distinction between *benevolentia*, which he defines as "the will or appetite to do good born of our pity for the thing on which we wish to confer a benefit," and what he calls *pietas*, "the desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason."[16] The free person is moved by *pietas*, not *benevolentia*.

Spinoza begins his discussion of *pietas*—which I will translate as "active benevolence," to contrast it with benevolence arising from a passion—with a proposition that is closely related to his metaphysics of the individual and to the striving that characterizes any thing in Nature. He says that "insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good."[17] We briefly considered this and some related propositions in the chapter on honesty. It is now time to take a closer look at what they entail.

A thing that agrees with my nature is good for me because such a thing will necessarily aid the preservation of that nature. A thing that shares my nature must, like anything, strive to preserve its own nature, and insofar as its own nature is my own nature, it is therefore necessarily striving to preserve *my* nature.

This seems to be what is going on in the demonstration of this proposition:

> Insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it cannot be evil. So it must be good or indifferent. If the latter is posited, viz. that it is neither good nor evil, then nothing will follow from its nature that aids the preservation of our nature, i.e. (by hypothesis), that aids the preservation of the nature of the thing itself. But this is absurd. Hence, insofar as it agrees with our nature, it must be good, q.e.d.[18]

On the other hand, to the extent that a thing is of a nature different from or contrary to my own, it is either indifferent for me (neither good nor bad) or evil (since, as contrary to my nature and to what agrees with my nature, it necessarily works against the preservation of that nature). A corollary adds that "the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful or better it is for us." Spinoza's point is essentially that things that agree in nature are good for each other and necessarily contribute to each other's flourishing.

This argument has come in for rough treatment by many commentators, most of whom see some kind of fallacy at work.[19] Just because another person and I, as human beings, share a general nature, it does not follow that that person's striving on behalf of *his* manifestation of that nature works also on behalf of *my* manifestation of that nature. Be that as it may, Spinoza concludes that there is nothing "more excellent than those [things] that agree entirely with our nature," and nothing is better for one's own self-preservation than uniting oneself with something that shares one's nature—that is, another human being who is very much like oneself. Therefore, the person who is acting

rationally—acting out of virtue and according to the dictates of reason—will behave in such a way that he promotes the virtue and rationality of other human beings so that their natures will be more like his own. That is, he will treat others in such a way that their own *conatus* or power of acting is increased (which is what virtue is) and their life thereby improved. And he will do so because he, egoistically motivated as he is, recognizes through reason alone that it is to his own benefit to do so.

So far, this is all rather vague. It is interesting, and possibly true, but not very informative to know that my own interests are somehow best served when there are others who are very much like me. It would be nice to have a little more detail as to how one stands to gain by improving the character of others. How exactly is my own welfare promoted by helping other people improve themselves and move toward lives of virtue and reason? Why do I, as a virtuous person living according to reason, benefit by striving to increase the powers of others? Why should I work on their behalf to make them more like me?

One answer to these questions seems to be a rather straightforward quantitative one: basically, two heads are better than one, especially if they are in agreement about such important matters as what is good and what is bad.

> For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature unite with one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as

> far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all.[20]

Although much is left unsaid by Spinoza in this passage, he seems to be arguing that two human beings represent a strengthening (by doubling) of one and the same power—just as two energy drinks provide twice as much fuel to the body, or just as two people pushing a car provide more power than one person. This is suggested by his claim that "our power of acting . . . can be determined, and hence aided or restrained, by the power of another singular thing which has something in common with us."[21] Two things of the same nature, thus two things striving on behalf of the same goal—namely, the preservation of that nature—will increase the power working on behalf of that goal and thus the likelihood of its successful achievement. Through my effort to improve the lives of others, then, I am creating accomplices who will contribute to the realization of my goal (which, because of our shared nature, also happens to be their goal).[22]

Of course, human beings are also useful to each other insofar as they are *not* like each other. A community made up only of carpenters or philosophers will function much less efficiently than a community made up of people with a variety of talents and skills who complement each other. But Spinoza's deeper point here is that human beings are good for and useful to each other only to the extent that they agree with one another in a deeper and more general way—as a matter of character—and thus share a common project and a common vision of things. As we saw in the discussion of honesty, it is our differences and particularities, not our commonalities, that divide us and set us against each other. And as we saw with hate, anger, envy, and so

on, nothing contributes more to our mutual differences—not to mention differences and changes within the same person over time—than the passions. Our most profound dissimilarities and disagreements regard the ways in which we perceive and feel about things. "Insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature. . . . Men can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions; and to that extent also one and the same man is changeable and inconstant."[23] Our bodily differences and differences in the objects with which we come into contact and in the ways in which they affect us—and these can include changes that a single individual undergoes over his lifetime—give rise to divergent ways of perceiving the world and reacting to it. Human discord is based on our passionate desires for things, along with a basic fact about the things that, through the inadequate ideas of sense experience and the imagination, we ordinarily value: namely, not everyone can equally share in their possession. Passionate desires tend to be directed at finite, mutable goods that very often only one or a few people can obtain. Thus, they (and consequently their subjects) frequently come into conflict.

> A man—Peter, say—can be a cause of Paul's being saddened, because he has something like a thing Paul hates, or because Peter alone possesses something which Paul also loves, or on account of other causes. . . . And so it will happen, as a result, that Paul hates Peter. Hence it will easily happen that Peter hates Paul in return, and so (by IIIp39) that they strive to harm one another; i.e., that they are contrary to one another. But an affect of sadness is always a passion. Therefore, men, insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions, can be contrary to one another.[24]

Lives in thrall to the passions are lives of conflict.

By contrast, virtuous human beings who live according to reason "agree in nature."[25] This should be understood in both a negative sense and a positive sense. In the negative sense, they agree in nature because those factors that, above and beyond what is common in human beings, make for differences—the passions—are diminished.

More important, in a positive sense, individuals who live according to reason value the same things and pursue the same goods. Unlike the case of the rivals Peter and Paul, however, the supreme good that virtuous rational people value and pursue is, as we have seen, not a finite, transient commodity in a zero-sum competition. Rather, it is something that is eternal, imperishable, and capable of being shared equally by all. "The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally."[26] The good in question is knowledge.

We can now fill in some detail in Spinoza's argument. To the extent that I, a rationally virtuous agent, can successfully help some other person to be virtuous and guided by reason, that person will do only what is truly good for his nature—that is, for human nature. But this nature is exactly what he has in common with me and all other human beings. Thus, what this other, newly rational person now strives for is what is good not only for himself but for all human beings, including myself. "Insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things that are good for human nature, and hence, for each man, i.e., those things that agree with the nature of each man."[27] Above all, a person guided by reason pursues the true good that is good for everyone—knowledge and understanding—and thus acts in such a way that he aids the human striving for perseverance. This

is why Spinoza concludes that "there is no singular thing in nature that is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason," and that "men will be most useful to one another when each one most seeks his own advantage [according to the guidance of reason]."[28]

It is thus in *my* best interest to make others more rational, and to the extent that I am rationally virtuous, I know this and will act accordingly. More generally, any rationally virtuous person will know that she is better off surrounded by other rationally virtuous individuals, all of whom are striving for the same thing: the maximization of the true human good and thus the perfection of their common nature. She will therefore undertake, through her actions, to help others reach this condition of rational virtue. That is, she will treat other human beings—and perhaps especially those who are most under the sway of harmful passions—with active benevolence, nobility, justice, and charity. "He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other's Hate, Anger, and Disdain toward him, with Love, or Nobility."[29]

This appears to be the upshot of Spinoza's main argument for an egoistic grounding of the rational virtue of active benevolence toward others and working to improve their lives by making them rationally virtuous as well. But the utility to me, as a free and rationally virtuous person, of another rationally virtuous person goes beyond the very general fact that the things he pursues are what are good for human nature generally, hence good for everyone, hence good for me. There are in Spinoza's account additional connections between the virtue and flourishing of others and my own well-being such that I should, for my own sake, promote an improvement in their lives.

Not only will a person guided by reason be useful to me in my own rational striving for perseverance and improvement because he will be free of such divisive and harmful passions as jealously, envy, and hate—just those affects that would make him oppose me in my endeavors—and because he is promoting what is good for human beings generally, but he is likely also to be of *positive* and *direct* assistance to me in my individual striving. This is because to the extent that he is rational, he will clearly and distinctly see that the more rational and self-determining *I* become, the more free I will be of the divisive passions that would make me interfere with his pursuit of the good life and the more I will see that it is in my own best interest to improve *his* life. That is, to the extent that I improve his life, he will be someone who clearly and distinctly sees that the more he helps me improve my life, the more useful I will be to *him*. It is in my best interest to make him into the kind of person who will know that helping me increase my power of acting is in his own best interest. So there is a sense in which I aim to aid him in leading a better life for the sake of the very particular, personal, and positive aid he will actively provide me in return—not, however, because of reciprocated goodwill, but because of mutual enlightened self-interest.

Spinoza also believes that surrounding oneself with rational and virtuous individuals will do much to positively reinforce one's own desire to live according to reason, and thus one's own pursuit of perfection, and that a rational person recognizes this reinforcement to be a good and desirable thing. In his analysis of the affects, Spinoza notes that "if we imagine that someone loves, desires, or hates something we ourselves love, desire or hate, we shall thereby love, desire or hate it with greater

constancy."[30] Seeing someone else love virtue and desire knowledge will make me love and desire virtue and knowledge all the more. Thus, it is useful to me and in my interest, as I strive to reach a more perfect and free condition, to have others love virtue and desire knowledge.[31]

> The good which man wants for himself and loves, he will love more constantly if he sees that others love it. So he will strive to have the others love the same thing. And because this good is common to all, and all can enjoy it, he will therefore (by the same reason) strive that all may enjoy it.[32]

Finally, seeing an improvement in a being similar to oneself—that is, seeing another human being experience the true joy (or increase in the power of acting) that comes through virtue—causes one to feel a sympathetic joy and undergo a similar increase in one's power. "If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect."[33] Thus, again, it is to one's own good that there are other free and virtuous people.[34]

Spinoza's claims are rather paradoxical, for they mean that a person is most useful to other people when he is rationally pursuing his own self-interest. "When each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another."[35] Enlightened egoism, in other words, leads to maximal mutual utility. Spinoza insists that this conclusion is not only deductively certain but also "confirmed by daily experience" and obvious to everyone. We all know, he suggests, that "man is a god to man."[36]

What all this amounts to is that a person guided by reason, in seeing what is truly in his own best interest, will strive to bring

other people to the same level of rational perfection as himself. The active benevolence toward others exhibited by the rational person does not consist merely in considerate and tolerant behavior in his interactions with them. His virtuous or rational benevolence is not just a passive attitude of forbearance toward the foibles of his fellow human beings.[37] Nor is it simply a kind of classically liberal and value-neutral generosity whereby he provides to others the things they need to pursue what they believe (rightly or wrongly) to be good and thereby accomplish their goals and projects, whatever they may be.

Rather, the virtuous and rational person—the free person—will be actively engaged and take steps to ensure that other people are also guided by reason and pursuing the true good, knowledge. For this is what will maximize their utility to him as he strives for his own perfection. "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men."[38] In other words, a rational and virtuous person will act so that other people also become rational and virtuous. He will behave toward them in such ways as will help *them* achieve the life of reason. But because it is also in *their* best interest to be rational and virtuous, all this is just to say that the person guided by reason will strive to further the interests of others and act in ways that truly benefit them, albeit from what are fundamentally selfish, not altruistic, motives.[39]

This is how Spinoza's egoism leads to what we would ordinarily consider ethical behavior.[40] A desire to do good for others and help them in their striving for perfection is generated by one's own striving for perfection under the guidance of reason. Spinoza's view, in short, is that rational egoism leads not to rampant disregard for the well-being of others, but to the highest

and most secure level of beneficence. As he insists, "I have done this to win, if possible, the attention of those who believe that this principle—that everyone is bound to seek his own advantage—is the foundation, not of virtue and morality, but of immorality."[41] Spinoza's virtuous person is not just engaged in kind, considerate behavior toward others; he is not simply responding to them with love or treating them in fine ways out of pity, sympathy, or hope for reciprocal consideration.[42] As Spinoza puts it at the end of Part Two of the *Ethics*, foreshadowing what he will demonstrate in Part Four, "This doctrine contributes to social life insofar as it teaches . . . [that each person] should be helpful to his neighbor, not from unmanly compassion, partiality, or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand."[43] Through his actions, the virtuous person, like Socrates, wants to improve the lives of others to make them more virtuous, more perfect, and thus more happy.

What we have been considering by way of Spinoza's discussion of rational benevolence is essentially his account of friendship, at least as practiced by the free person. As we have seen, the two primary virtues of the free person are *animositas* ("tenacity"), or "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being," and *generositas* or *pietas*, "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship [*amicitia*]."

Perhaps the best-known philosophical discussion of friendship is found in Aristotle's ethical writings. Aristotle defines the truest form of friendship as goodwill among virtuous people, with each wishing good for the other for the other's sake.

> To a friend, it is said, you must wish goods for his own sake. If you wish good things in this way, but the same wish is not returned by the other, you would be said to have [only] goodwill for the other. For friendship is said to be reciprocated goodwill. But perhaps we should add that friends are aware of the reciprocated goodwill. For many a one has goodwill to people whom he has not seen but supposes to be decent or useful, and one of these might have the same goodwill towards him, but how could we call them friends when they are unaware of their attitude toward each other. Hence, [to be friends] they must have goodwill to each other, wish goods and be aware of it.[44]

A virtuous person will recognize the excellence (*areté*) of another virtuous person and see that this person's excellence has value in its own right; thus, she will naturally want to see such a person flourish and will do what she can to further that flourishing. What this means is that she will do good for and bring good things to that person. She will behave toward him in considerate ways and contribute resources that aid him in the acquisition and proper exercise of the practical and intellectual virtues, and she will do all this for no other reason than to see him flourish, *for his own sake*.

Friendship for Spinoza likewise involves goodwill—whereby one's actions "aim at another's advantage"—and includes such things as "courtesy and mercy."[45] A free person, then, through his *generositas*, "strives to join other men to him in friendship . . . to lead himself and others by the free judgment of reason, and to do only those things that he himself knows to be most excellent"[46]—most excellent for them, and most excellent for himself.

However, on Spinoza's egoistic account of human endeavor, the goodwill at the heart of friendship, even for the virtuous person, is not purely altruistic, as we have seen. For Spinoza's rationally virtuous person, the fundamental motive for friendship is self-serving. One does wish good for the other. However, one does so not for the other's sake but for one's own. As Spinoza sees it, even the most virtuous, rational, and free person needs to cultivate friendships, if only for aid in the sustenance of her own virtue, rationality, and freedom—to maintain and increase her own power of acting—through communion with similarly rationally virtuous people. "It is especially useful to people to form associations, to bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people of them, and absolutely, to do those things that serve to strengthen friendships."[47] In Spinozistic friendship, a virtuous individual wishes for good for another person, for that other to flourish as a rationally free and virtuous individual. But she does so because she knows that it is in her own best interest to be in relationships with other rationally free and virtuous individuals.[48]

Aristotle famously distinguishes between friend relationships that are entered into for some ulterior purpose—such as utility or pleasure—and friendship "of the highest kind." The latter occurs only between "good people similar in virtue" who, while they certainly derive pleasure from the friendship, are not friends for the sake of that pleasure.[49] Spinoza's account, likewise, allows for a distinction between true friendship and deficient varieties. There are, first of all, genuine friendship relations between equally virtuous people; these would, in Aristotle's terms, be instances of 'perfect' or 'complete' friendship. As Spinoza puts it, "Only free men are very useful to one an-

other, are joined to one another by the greatest necessity of friendship."[50] In such cases, two or more individuals, each of whom is free and guided by reason, are wishing and effectively doing good for each other, knowing full well that they do so for the sake of how that contributes to their own striving for perfection. This would be an instance of what Spinoza, in one of his letters, calls *sincera amicitia*: friendship between those who share a love of truth and knowledge.[51]

Then there is a less perfect kind of friendship between a virtuous person and a nonvirtuous person. In this lopsided case, the virtuous, rationally motivated person is dedicated in the relationship to helping the nonvirtuous person become free and virtuous, although she does so, once again, for her own sake. The benevolence might be reciprocal, but then again it might not be. If the nonvirtuous party does indeed reciprocate—because he is acting primarily from passive affect (love, hope, gratitude, or pity) and not under the guidance of reason—he does not know what the true good is and thus may not actually be benefiting the virtuous party or aware of the advantage to himself of striving to do so. The goodwill may be there on both sides, but it is not equally informed or efficacious.[52] This less than ideal relationship, like Aristotle's friendships for pleasure or utility, falls well short of "true" Spinozistic friendship, in which there is reciprocal goodwill informed by reason; it hardly seems to qualify as friendship at all and seems more like a pedagogical or mentoring relationship.

One might object that it is somewhat inappropriate to describe the rational benevolence exhibited by the virtuous person as "friendship." It seems, that is, that the kind of relationship Spinoza has in mind is too broad and communal—perhaps even too

political—to qualify as friendship. We ordinarily think that a person can have only a few real friends—a very limited circle of close personal relations. By contrast, Spinoza's rationally free person is out to create, sustain, and participate in as large a community of fellow rationally free people as possible, all pursuing a common good—a kind of mutual aid (or mutual advantage) society for gifted individuals. The free person's goal, one might say, really is not to cultivate friends but simply like-minded individuals who share his nature and with whom he can work together to live peaceful, cooperative, and constructive lives in civil society—colleagues rather than enemies, *amici* instead of *inimici*.

Spinoza says: "The desire by which a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is bound to join others to himself in friendship, I call being honorable [*honestatem*] . . . what is contrary to the formation of friendship, I call dishonorable [*turpe*]."[53] Relations among individuals governed by *honestas*—again, essentially being helpful to each other rather than enemies—does not appear, on the face of it, to capture the intimacy that we find among true friends.[54]

However, why should the greater social scope of rational benevolence exercised by Spinoza's virtuous person disqualify it from being truly a form of friendship? Why must there necessarily be, *in principle*, a narrow limit to the number of friendships one can cultivate? Spinoza does recognize that, as a matter of fact, the extension of the kind of relationship he has in mind can only go so far, and that you cannot be friends with *everyone*: "The capacity of one man is too limited for him to be able to unite all men to him in friendship."[55] But it would seem that someone who is guided by reason would strive to engage in true, personal friendship with as many people as he can. After all, he

knows that it is in his own best interest to do so. As for those with whom one cannot establish such a relationship—perhaps because they lack the proper intellectual or material resources (for example, Spinoza says, "the poor")—improving their lives "falls upon society as a whole." Such a contrast between the *generositas* (*pietas*, *honestas*) of the virtuous individual and the guidance and charity practiced by society at-large suggests that there is indeed something deeper, more intimate, and more personal about Spinozistic *amicitia*.

It is worth noting as well that the argument from Part Four of the *Ethics*—with reason commanding the virtuous person to create and sustain the good life in others—is the philosophical counterpart to what Spinoza, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, sees as the moral command that is the universal message of the Bible. All who are not philosophers and thus who do not know intellectually why they ought to engage in benevolent activity should nonetheless be moved by the edifying stories of the ancient Hebrew prophets (as well as by the teachings of Jesus) to "obedience" to God's supreme law: "Love your neighbor as yourself."[56] Scripture's message can reasonably be understood as an imperative to cultivate with as many people as possible a personal relationship of true friendship; reason's dictate, therefore, may be similarly understood.

It would seem, then, that the reciprocal, intentional, enlightened goodwill exhibited by Spinoza's free individuals certainly can count as friendship.

Spinoza's dictates of reason universally command certain modes of behavior. The virtuous individual—the free person who lives under the guidance of reason—will recognize just what these

dictates are and will necessarily and consistently follow them. Among reason's prescriptions is the imperative to act honorably toward others and treat them always with justice, honesty, and charity—to "desire for the other the good he wants for himself." When the desire to improve the lives of others is directed by reason, we behave in the most ethical of ways.

Unfortunately, not everyone is capable of attaining the full condition of rational virtue. The free person is a rare commodity. Most people, in fact, over the course of their lives, make very little headway toward the model of human nature. However, this does not relieve them of the self-serving obligation to treat other human beings with benevolence and deal with them justly and charitably and form friendships. Even those most enslaved by the passions need to live peacefully and cooperatively with others in society, for their own good.

This brings us back to love and pity. These passions will never be what move the free person to acts of true benevolence; after all, "pity in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is evil of itself and useless." Still, love, pity, and other passive affects cannot be dismissed as altogether without value, at least for those destined to coexist with others in lives that fall far short of freedom.

Spinoza insists that, while there is a single fundamental motivation for all human action—*conatus*, the egoistic striving for perseverance—one and the same kind of action can have its source in very different states of mind. Kind, generous, or just behavior can be carried out either actively or passively. "To every action to which we are determined from an affect which is a passion, we can be determined by reason, without that affect."[57] One can act benevolently toward others either from love or pity or from rational knowledge of what is truly good for oneself.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza insists that true religion has nothing whatsoever to do with ceremonial rites, sectarian laws, and ecclesiastic hierarchies. True religion, authentic piety, is found in obedience to a simple moral maxim: "To know and love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself." What the knowledge and love of God and the love of one's neighbor amount to is nothing more than following the Divine Law that commands one to treat fellow human beings with justice and charity.

For those who are destined to lives uninformed by philosophical understanding—who will never truly know, through reason, *why* one should act so as to improve the lives of others—there nevertheless remains an effective, albeit less "active" path toward pious and ethical behavior. Deficient in the way of adequate ideas, they must be inspired to practice justice and charity toward others by means of the passions and the ideas of the imagination.

One particularly good way in which this can happen is through literature—for example, the edifying narratives of the Bible. Spinoza insists that the moral imperative is in fact the primary and universal meaning of both Hebrew Scripture and the Christian gospels: "From Scripture itself we learn that its message, unclouded by any doubt or any ambiguity, is in essence this, to love God above all, and one's neighbor as oneself."[58] Through the prophetic writings, "God asks no other knowledge of himself than the knowledge of his divine justice and charity, that is, such attributes of God as men find it possible to imitate by a definite rule of conduct."[59] What Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other biblical writers express is "the knowledge of God which it is the duty of every man to have . . . that God is supremely just and supremely merciful, that is, the one perfect pattern of the

true life."[60] In their anthropomorphic portrayal of God as a just and merciful ruler and the stories they tell about this character and the human beings with whom he interacts, the various authors of Scripture have constructed a work of literature that, in its appeal to the imagination, is superbly tailored to inspire readers to moral behavior. Love, pity, and hope (and, if necessary, fear)—these passions are, for most people, an essential and powerful impetus to "obedience" to the Divine Law and actions that benefit their fellow human beings.

The free person, by contrast, is endowed with a true knowledge and intellectual love of God. Living virtuously according to reason, the free person does not need fictional stories to tell him how to act or motivate him to do what he should do. He always does the right thing for the right reason and with the right state of mind.

He knows that it is in his own best interest to deal justly and charitably with others, to help them flourish and lead lives of virtue and reason. The lives of others are just as important to the free person as his own manner of living.

9

SUICIDE

In the year 65 CE, the Roman philosopher and politician Lucius Annaeus Seneca was implicated in a plot to assassinate the emperor, Nero Claudius Caesar. We do not know whether Seneca was indeed one of the conspirators, but the mentally unstable Nero was not in the mood to make fine distinctions. He went on a vindictive rampage, purging Rome of anyone even lightly suspected of being involved in the scheme. Seneca, his teacher and adviser, was ordered to commit suicide. In his *Annals of Imperial Rome*, Tacitus provides a moving portrait of the final moments of the philosopher, accompanied by his wife Paulina, who insisted on dying with him but actually survived.

> Then, each, with one incision of the blade, he and his wife cut their arms. But Seneca's aged body, lean from austere living, released the blood too slowly. So he also severed the veins in his ankles and behind his knees. Exhausted by severe pain, he was afraid of weakening his wife's endurance by betraying his agony—or of losing his own self-possession at the sight of her sufferings. So he asked her to go into another bedroom. But even in his last moments his eloquence remained. Summoning secretaries, he dictated a dissertation.[1]

Tacitus also reports Seneca's last words to his friends: "Being forbidden to show gratitude for your services, I leave you my one remaining possession, and my best: the pattern of my life."

The ancient Stoics, perhaps more than any other philosophical movement before French existentialism in the twentieth century, took seriously the philosophical question of suicide: Is suicide a justifiable act—morally, rationally, or otherwise? Under what conditions would it be reasonable, even necessary to end one's own life? Since the Stoic sage or wise person does only what is rational and "according to nature," this is tantamount to asking whether a sage would ever end his own life, and if so, why. According to Cicero,

> when a man's circumstances contain a preponderance of things in accordance with nature, it is appropriate for him to remain alive; when he possesses or sees in prospect a majority of the contrary things, it is appropriate for him to depart from life. This makes it plain that it is on occasion appropriate for the wise man [*sapiens*] to quit life although he is happy, and also of the foolish man to remain in life although he is miserable.[2]

The most important doxographical source on the views of the early Stoics, the *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, written in the first half of the third century CE, reports that "they [the Stoics] say that the wise man will, for a good reason, end his own life, both on behalf of his country and on behalf of his friends, or if he is suffering unbearable pain, mutilation, or incurable disease."[3]

Oddly, Diogenes, who is generally quite thorough, does not discuss or even mention Seneca. Spinoza, however, does. The Roman Stoic makes a cameo appearance in the *Ethics* just when Spinoza turns to discussing the rationality of suicide.

It was Seneca's hand that held the knife that sliced open his veins, but was it not Nero who really killed him? Socrates may have

drunk from the cup of poison hemlock by himself, but do we not hold the city of Athens responsible for his death? One might even ask whether suicide—understood as a person intentionally and fully through his own power bringing about his own death—is in fact a real phenomenon. Is anyone ever really the free and responsible agent of his own death? Should we not rather, in all cases in which a person dies by his own hand, look to something beyond the individual's control—a diseased state of mind, the force of circumstances—that caused him to do what he does? Is suicide, strictly understood as an autonomous action, truly possible?

Spinoza, for one, seems to be saying that no one acting under his own power ever kills himself. "That a man should, from the necessity of his own nature, strive not to exist . . . is as impossible as that something should come from nothing."[4] If, as Spinoza insists, someone "acts" and is free only when he does something that follows from his own nature or power alone—when he is an adequate cause without any contribution from the power of external causes—and if his own nature or power is and can be only a striving to persevere, then it is apparently impossible for this person actively and freely to end his own life.

But people do kill themselves, and Spinoza very well knows this. Everyone knows this. People kill themselves from sorrow, and they do it from grief. They do it from despair, fear, anger, depression, even hope. Whether the act is done under extreme duress, as in Seneca's and Socrates's cases, or as a result of some personal trauma or psychopathology, and regardless of whether people who kill themselves could possibly have acted otherwise, it is an obvious matter of fact that they do intentionally and voluntarily end their own lives. Seneca may have been given no alternative, but it was his hand and nobody else's that opened his

veins. The question, then, is not whether suicide is possible, but whether it is ever a *rational* and (in Spinoza's sense) *virtuous* thing to do.[5] Would a free person, acting from the dictate of reason—"from his own power"—ever commit suicide?

In several contexts in the *Ethics* and elsewhere, what Spinoza says suggests that his answer to this question is no, that no individual can, freely and under the guidance of reason, acting from his nature alone, choose to end her own life. Suicide is always a bad and irrational thing, and so the free person—who always acts from the dictate of reason and pursues only what is truly good—would never do it.[6]

Upon closer examination, however, it seems that things are not so clear-cut. In fact, there are grounds to conclude that Spinoza can, should, and perhaps even does recognize that suicide can be a rational choice for an individual to make. Under certain circumstances, Spinoza's free person may indeed have compelling reasons—reasons based on knowledge and understanding and not on the passions—to end his life.

The most important and relevant passages on the subject of suicide appear in Part Four. Proposition 20 says, in part, that "the more each one strives, and is able, to seek his own advantage, i.e., to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue." A scholium about suicide follows directly from this:

> No one, therefore, unless he is defeated by causes external, and contrary, to his nature, neglects to seek his own advantage, or to preserve his being. No one, I say, avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature. Those who do such things

> are compelled by external causes, which can happen in many ways. Someone may kill himself because he is compelled by another, who twists his right hand (which happened to hold a sword) and forces him to direct the sword against his heart; or because he is forced by the command of a tyrant (as Seneca was) to open his veins, i.e., he desires to avoid a greater evil by [submitting to] a lesser; or finally because hidden external causes so dispose his imagination, and so affect his body, that it takes on another nature, contrary to the former, a nature of which there cannot be an idea in the Mind (by IIIp10). But that a man should, from the necessity of his own nature, strive not to exist, or to be changed into another form, is as impossible as that something should come from nothing. Anyone who gives this a little thought will see it.

The problem with suicide is that it is apparently ruled out by the *conatus* doctrine of self-preservation. The claim of this scholium is that it is existentially impossible for a being that is necessarily striving to persevere also to endeavor, through its own nature—that is, through its *conatus* alone—to cease persevering. The only explanation for why anyone would kill himself, Spinoza is saying, is either because his innate striving for perseverance has been overcome by the force of external causes, by affects of which he is not the adequate cause but that have their source in some thing or event outside him and that are stronger than his power of persevering, or because it is the only way to avoid a greater evil. In the first case, which is more compelling—and probably more familiar, when we think about why people kill themselves or allow themselves to die—the power of reason (an active affect) has been trumped by the power of some passion (passive

affect). As Spinoza says elsewhere, "Those who kill themselves are weak-minded and completely conquered by external causes contrary to their nature."[7] In suicide so understood, a person's active endeavor for perseverance is no (affective) match for, say, the passions of grief and sadness over the loss of a loved one or the pain of a terminal illness.[8] He is inconsolable, he cannot see how he can go on living, and so death seems the only option. Romeo, believing Juliet to be dead, drinks the poison; Juliet, now seeing that Romeo is dead, stabs herself. End of story.

In the relevant passages, it is tempting to focus on the notion of being "defeated [*victus*]" by external causes and on the role that the passive emotions play in the suicide and thereby to subject Spinoza's claims about suicide to a fairly narrow interpretation: suicide understood as a *free and rational action* is impossible. On this reading, suicide is *always* a matter of *akrasia*, the result of passion overcoming reason by its affective strength; the suicide is always compelled, never free. Spinoza could still allow that suicide, conceived as *voluntarily* ending one's own life, is possible. Just as someone who opts for immediate gratification over a long-term good does so willingly albeit against his better judgment, so one who is under the sway of the passions may willingly kill himself. This is because there is still desire and choice at the root of the self-destructive act. However, this would not be a truly free and rational act—it would not be "active" in Spinoza's sense—since desire and choice are in this case taking their lead not from reason but from passion.[9]

The free person, however, is never led by her passions; she is always guided by reason. Therefore, she always does what her nature, through its own resources, requires (although typically in response to, and thus limited by, context and external circum-

stances, a rather important point that we will return to). In the free person, reason—which demands "nothing contrary to our nature" and invariably determines the free person's behavior—would thus never recommend suicide; on the contrary, suicide would seem to be always opposed by reason, or so Spinoza would, on this narrow reading, hold. The virtuous person, who is successful in living according to his own nature and not according to the natures of things outside himself—that is, who is successful in the exercise of *conatus* and the striving for perseverance—will never kill herself.

And yet, as natural as this reading may seem, it may not—and should not—be Spinoza's view. Just as with the case of the exceptionless honesty of the free person, it all depends on how we are supposed to understand the *conatus* doctrine of self-preservation. A free person will always act honestly, even when deception would save his life, because what he is striving for in perseverance is not mere continued durational existence but the preservation of his perfected nature, his condition of rational virtue, his extraordinary power of thinking and understanding—in short, his joy. In a similar vein, might it not seem to a free person that, in terms of the quality of his life and character, death is preferable to continued existence?

Consider a case where the prospect of continued durational existence holds out no hope whatsoever of the continuation of joy but only a vision of misery and sadness. It is certainly conceivable that a free and rational individual could, with his adequate understanding of himself and of the world, have a deeply informed perception of what the future entails in terms of his well-being and the high level of his *conatus* or power of striving. Such an individual would know, with superb clarity of vision,

whether the remainder of his life would in the long run involve perseverance in his rational perfection or, on the contrary, an inevitable and unending decrease in power—that is, prolonged sadness, that "passion by which [the mind] passes to a lesser perfection." Would not the free person's own rational nature, his endeavor to preserve his virtue, power, and perfection and to do everything he could to avoid sadness or a lessening of that perfection, dictate that it would be preferable to terminate his mundane existence?[10]

Perhaps this individual is suffering from a painful and incurable disease. Or it may be that the external circumstances of his life are about to become so bleak, meager, and threatening that the chance of remaining active, free, and happy are practically nil. Maybe the political situation in which he must live is so bad—for example, a violent and capricious tyrant who enjoys widespread support from the ignorant masses—that the social and material conditions necessary for the pursuit and maintenance of the life of knowledge, understanding, and virtue cannot possibly exist. Of course, ending one's own life permanently removes any possibility of free rational living. As Spinoza says, "No one can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well, unless at the same time he desires to be, to act, and to live, i.e., to actually exist."[11] But for the free person, actual durational existence is not an end in itself but only a necessary condition for a free and rationally virtuous life. And if there is no hope for the latter, there would seem to be no reason to persevere in the former.

Spinoza insists that "from the guidance of reason we want . . . a lesser present evil in preference to a greater future one."[12] This appears to be precisely the situation of the free person in the face

of a future that, he knows with certainty, would bring nothing but sadness and misery in the form of an inevitable lessening of his power.[13] Rather than continue living with a loss of much that makes life meaningful—indeed, living with the painful knowledge of what once was but is no longer and never will be again—reason might, maybe even necessarily would, counsel putting an end to it all.

One might object to this more generous reading of Spinoza on suicide on the following basis. A person contemplating a future of decreased power—having the thought that he will suffer a loss in his virtue or perfection—may be affected by sadness,[14] and the free person could never have such a thought, since he would never experience sadness.[15] After all, Spinoza says that "if men were born free, they would form no concept of good and bad so long as they remained free,"[16] and the demonstration claims that "he who is born free and remains free has only adequate ideas." Given Spinoza's notion of adequate ideas and his definition of good and bad, this implies that a person who is born free and remains free will never suffer a decrease in his power—that is, will never experience sadness. Thus, it would seem to be impossible for the free person to choose suicide because of (sadly) thinking about a future of lesser perfection.

As we have seen, however, the free person (who is not the same as an individual who is "born free") is not immune to passive affects, not even sadness. The free person is a part of Nature, as every individual is, and so throughout his life will be affected accordingly. Spinoza does not say that the free person will never experience sadness; he says only that a person who is *born free*—a condition that Spinoza explicitly says is impossible—will never experience sadness.

Granting this fact about the free person, however, it might still be objected that the cases described—a person facing a permanently debilitating and painful illness or the prospect of a wretched existence under a tyrant—are just the kinds of situations in which a person's rational active affects *are* indeed overcome by more powerful passive affects, and therefore that they cannot represent instances of an individual *freely* and *rationally* choosing to end his own life. Even if the person is not yet suffering the symptoms and pain of the illness, is it not his *sadness* over the prospect of a future of diminished power, not his reason, that moves him to kill himself? Similarly, even if the tyrant and the slavish majority he commands have not yet begun to execute his harsh authority, would it not be the passions of fear and sorrow engendered by the anticipated regime that lead the virtuous person to end it all?

Perhaps for an ordinary person, even an ordinary person who generally lives under the guidance of reason, these would be instances where that individual's power has been "completely conquered by external causes contrary to [the individual's] nature," and so the act of suicide for such a person might certainly be the result of an irrational and passionate affect. But by definition the free person *never* acts except under the guidance of reason. Though he may experience passions—and it would be odd if even the free person did not feel some sorrow at the prospect of illness or tyranny—they never determine his actions. And if it is conceivable that a free person can have a clear enough vision of his future to see adequately that he will not be able to maintain his perfected nature, then it would seem that it is his reason that would direct his *conatus* toward ending his durational life. Even if the free person feels sadness when contemplating a future of

lesser perfection, the desire and decision to end his life would not be driven by this sadness—it would be dictated by reason.

Still, one could push the objection yet further and insist that this is not in fact what would be going on with the putative rational suicide. The free person in the situation described, it might be claimed, does indeed appear to be moved by sadness—his choice being directed more strongly by an imagined future sadness (the eventual loss of perfection) than by a present sadness (the imminent loss of life). And Spinoza explicitly says that insofar as we act from reason, we are motivated *only by joy*, by a vision of what is good. "By a desire arising from reason, we directly follow the good, and indirectly flee the evil."[17] Thus, for a rational suicide to be possible, the free person must be representing the end of life not as the lesser evil (in which case he would be moved to action by sadness) but as a good. But, the objection concludes, this does not seem to be something he (or anyone) can do.[18]

This objection raises the more general problem of how to understand the claim according to which a person, under the guidance of reason, would prefer a lesser present evil to a greater future evil. If the free person guided by reason cannot be moved by sadness, how can he be making choices between evils, which, it would seem, are always perceived with sadness?

However, Spinoza also says that the person who is guided by reason will, in his mind, represent the lesser of two evils as a good. With his greater intellectual vision of things, he will recognize that whatever serves to prevent a greater evil is itself a good. "From the guidance of reason, we shall follow a lesser evil as a greater good . . . for the evil which is here called lesser is really good."[19] Thus, for the free person, the ending of his own

life, if it is seen to be a way to avoid a greater evil, such as the permanent loss of his rational perfection, will be regarded by him as a good. In this way, he will not in fact be motivated by sadness.

To be perfectly clear: suicide will never be the course of action that would be chosen by the free and virtuous person if left absolutely to her own rational devices and by her nature or essence alone, abstracted from all contexts and relationships to other things and without taking account of any other factors. If the free person were "outside of Nature" and not subject to any external influences or bounded by any circumstances, she would not and could not kill herself. This is what Spinoza means when he says that "no one . . . avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature . . . that a man should, from the necessity of his own nature, strive not to exist, or to be changed into another form, is as impossible as that something should come from nothing."[20] But a free person, like all human beings, necessarily inhabits this complicated world. As we have seen again and again, "it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause," and the free person is not exempt from this condition. Thus, given the very concrete circumstances in which he might find himself, suicide may be the course of action that the free man's reason, his own nature, dictates.

These worldly circumstances do certainly limit the free person's choices, perhaps even severely. In fact, as we saw above, Spinoza includes the choice "to avoid a greater evil by [submitting to] a lesser" among the category of things that count as being

"defeated" and "compelled by external causes" and lead to suicide.[21] However, the worldly circumstances should not be seen as external forces that, by their power, affectively overwhelm the free person's own active striving and thereby render him passive and unfree. The case of choosing a lesser evil in circumstances beyond one's control seems quite different from the other cited cases—for example, the person whose hand with a sword is twisted into his body by another person. The rational person must respond to the circumstances in which he finds himself, and yes, this represents a constraint upon the options he faces. However, one can be trapped, even "defeated," by one's circumstances, and an action can be "compelled by external causes [*causis externis coactus*]" in the sense that one must choose only among certain available options, and yet the outcome can still be a free and rational act: there may simply be no better alternatives and so one chooses what seems best, from the perspective of reason.[22] In his response to external circumstances, the free person is always rational, always in control. And if, given those circumstances, suicide is the only rational option, this does not detract from the freedom of the act. The choice is, of course, as determined as everything else in Spinoza's cosmos; nothing could be otherwise than as it is. But the act, while necessary, is nonetheless undertaken with reason and knowledge and for the goal of preserving, and maybe maximizing, virtuous activity.

Despite the fact that Spinoza offers Seneca's suicide as an instance of someone who is defeated by external causes and who, "contrary to his nature . . . neglects to preserve his being" and so kills himself, Seneca actually represents a perfect instance of the *rational* suicide. This Stoic philosopher had as clear a vision as anyone as to what his options were: a peaceful death by his own

hands at the peak of his virtue, what was likely to be a violent death by Nero's soldiers, or maybe an unbearable life under an unpredictable tyrant. He also had an especially clear view of what was the lesser of the evils. Perhaps Spinoza even recognizes this:

> Someone may kill himself . . . because he is forced by the command of a Tyrant (as Seneca was) to open his veins, i.e., *he desires to avoid a greater evil by [submitting to] a lesser.*[23]

Seneca chooses precisely what reason prescribes in such a case, and thus he represents a good counterexample to the idea that Spinoza must be insisting on the necessary irrationality of suicide in all cases. Seneca seems perfectly to embody the import of the claim that "from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils."[24]

In the end, Spinoza's view of suicide appears to be quite close to that of the ancient Stoics, at least according to what we find in the reports by Cicero and Diogenes Laertius.[25] The Stoic sage will, if necessary, sacrifice his life for the sake of his rationality, and it is his rationality itself that directs him to do this. Cicero says that "wisdom her very self upon occasion bids the wise man to leave her."[26] It would seem that the same principle governs the life of Spinoza's free person.

This account of Spinoza on the possible rationality of suicide puts him on the right—humane—side of contemporary debates on euthanasia. While many suicides are indeed affairs of passion—the precipitous, irrational actions of people overcome by physical or mental illness or tragedy and whose minds are clouded by despair and depression—we also recognize that one can make a

very rational, clear-eyed decision to end their life. This is the free choice sometimes made by people facing the prospect of (and perhaps already suffering from) an extremely painful terminal illnesses or the onset of severe dementia. With no hope for recovery or even relief from incapacitating pain, or with a knowledge that they will soon see a complete loss of memory and self-identity, they will opt to die before full debilitation and with their self and their dignity intact.

Conceding, on Spinozistic grounds, that reason might counsel ending one's durational existence also fits well with one of the most impressive and memorable propositions of the entire *Ethics*: "The free man thinks least of all of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death."[27] As the free person considers taking his own life for the sake of preserving his rational virtue, what occupies his mind is not in fact his impending death and the end of his mundane existence. In fact, he avoids thinking about his durational demise as much as he can.[28] His attention is focused on the superior *conatus* that constitutes his formal essence and the rational knowledge that constitutes his virtue. In his enjoyment of rational *acquiescentia*, what he thinks about, above all, is his power.

At the same time, the free person cannot be unaware of his own mortality. Part of his adequate knowledge consists in an understanding of his place in Nature, and this reveals to him that he is but a finite mode that is currently but only temporarily enjoying a durational existence. How, then, will the free person, rationally and affectively, face the fact that that existence will, at some point, come to an end?

10

DEATH

The plague hit Amsterdam especially hard in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1663, there were close to ten thousand deaths, about 5 percent of the city's population; the following year the toll climbed to over twenty-four thousand. The English diplomat Sir George Downing reported in July 1664 that "there dyed this last weeke at Amsterdam 739, and the plague is scattered generally over the whole country even in the little dorps and villages, and it is gott to Antwerp and Brussells."[1]

Among the casualties of the outbreak that July was the son of Pieter Balling, a Mennonite merchant in Amsterdam and one of Spinoza's closest friends. Spinoza was clearly touched by the loss of Balling's young child, and he commiserated with the man who had just finished translating into Dutch his treatise on Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*.

> It has caused me no little sadness and anxiety, though that has greatly decreased as I consider the prudence and strength of character with which you are able to scorn the blows of fortune, or rather opinion, when they attack you with their strongest weapons. For all that, my anxiety increases daily, and therefore by our friendship I beseech and implore you to take the trouble to write me at length.[2]

Balling believed that he had had some "omens" about his son's impending death—"when your child was still healthy and well," Spinoza recalls in his letter, "you heard sighs like those he made

when he was ill and shortly afterwards passed away"—and wrote to Spinoza seeking his interpretation of them.

We do not have many letters by Spinoza, and few of those extant reveal much about his warm personal relations with others. In his correspondence with Balling, however, we find him doing what he can to bring some consolation to his grieving friend, including offering reflections on the sympathetic ties that bind a father's soul to that of his son. What Spinoza does not do, despite making an allowance for Balling's superstitious belief in omens, is console him with some delusory hope that he would eventually be reunited with his child in God's heaven.

The letter is the last we have between Spinoza and Balling, who himself died of the plague within the year. Spinoza's own grief at the loss of his dear friend was no doubt great. Perhaps he returned to Amsterdam to be with the other members of their intellectual circle. He may even have gone to a Mennonite memorial service and, despite his distaste for religious ceremonies, observed in fellowship some rituals of mourning.

Spinoza himself was never in robust health—throughout his life he apparently suffered from some kind of pulmonary ailment, one that was exacerbated by the glass dust created by his lens-grinding and that would lead to his death at the age of forty-four. No doubt Balling's passing led him, if only for the moment, to contemplate the finiteness of his own durational existence and reminded him of the folly of thinking there was something more to be anticipated in a hereafter.

The specter of death is lurking everywhere in the *Ethics*, from the metaphysics of human beings as temporally limited modes of an eternal infinite substance that are striving for perseverance,

to the physics of the human body as a certain proportion of motion and rest that can be so modified by external forces that "the human body is destroyed," to the psychology of suicide.

However, it is not until the final propositions of Part Four and the life of the free person that Spinoza explicitly addresses a long-standing philosophical question: What is the appropriate attitude to take toward death? Should one fear death? Is it to be anticipated with sadness? Dread? Or maybe even hope? Should one face death with resignation or agnosticism? Socrates, for one, opted for a suspension of judgment that allowed him to face the possibility of a death penalty with equanimity. In his speech to the Athenian assembly, which had convicted him and was now pondering the sentence to impose, he proclaims that

> death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything, or, as we are told, it is really a change—a migration of the soul from this place to another. Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvelous gain. . . . If, on the other hand, death is a removal from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be than this. . . . How much would one of you give to meet Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true.[3]

Socrates's open-mindedness about what death holds in store is calculated not simply to forestall terror at the prospect of death, but in fact to make death seem like an attractive and desirable state, a perfect and well-deserved ending to a life devoted to virtue.

Spinoza takes a very different tack. His view is that the proper and rational way to deal with death—whether an impending demise or mortality per se—is not to think about it at all.

Proposition 67 of Part Four says that "a free person thinks least of all of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death." The demonstration of this proposition goes as follows:

> A free person, i.e., one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone, is not led by fear, but desires the good directly, i.e., acts, lives and preserves his being from the foundation of seeking his own advantage. And so he thinks of death least of all. Instead, his wisdom is a meditation on life.

Both the free person living under the guidance of reason and a person who is led by passion may end up doing what is good and right. The difference between them is *why* they do what is good and right. The person acting from fear does what is good because he is directly focused on the evil that follows doing what is bad. He flies blindly into the arms of the good as he runs away from the bad. This is the case, for example, with people who, with the fear of God put into them by ecclesiastics, perform virtuous actions not because they are the virtuous thing to do (and in their own best interest) but because they are afraid of divine wrath. "The superstitious know how to reproach people for their vices better than they know how to teach them virtues, and they strive not to guide men by reason, but to restrain them from fear, so that they flee the evil rather than love virtues."[4] The motivation here is sadness, not joy.

The free person, by contrast, pursues only the good and does so directly, not because he is avoiding the bad. He is pursuing

joy, not dodging sadness. Spinoza illustrates this with a culinary example. "The sick man, from timidity regarding death, eats what he is repelled by, whereas the healthy man enjoys his food, and in this way enjoys life better than if he feared death and directly desired to avoid it."[5]

The same principle that governs the healthy person's enjoyment of food applies to the free person's striving for perseverance. He is not fleeing death but delighting in the strength of his own power and his relationship to God or Nature. His rational self-esteem is a joyful appreciation of what he is, what he can do, and the life he is leading. He pursues what is good not by accident, with his gaze fearfully set on what is bad, but directly and intentionally, just because it is what reason counsels him to do. This satisfying "meditation on life" leaves the free person little opportunity, much less desire, to think about death, whether by adequate idea or by fantasies of the imagination.[6]

A free person will die, of course, like all human beings. As a part of Nature, he is not immune to changes brought about through external causes. Although, as we have seen, he does have a greater strength than others to resist the passive affects, eventually some changes will overwhelm his *conatus* and bring about the demise of his durational body and, consequently, his durational mind. "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."[7] The free person knows very well that he is mortal. Unlike the person guided by fear and other passions, however, he is not consumed by this thought; he is not obsessed with death.[8] The prospect of death does not determine how he behaves, and it certainly does not lead him to engage in any superstitious rituals that are supposed to either forestall his death or ensure that

it is followed by some kind of immortal bliss. The free person does not fear or dread death, and the thought of it does not terrorize or sadden him—not because he knows that something better awaits him in some afterlife, but because death just does not hold his attention. He is too busy appreciating the life he is leading and enjoying the intellectual love of God that is its crowning achievement.

The free person's eyes are on the prize, and the prize is right there with him: his own freedom and virtue. Instead of the irrational fear of death, he knows the rational joy of living.

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Throughout this study, we have considered various ways in which Spinoza's views echo the wisdom of ancient Stoicism. What he has to say about virtue, the good life, happiness, and suicide was clearly influenced by what he read in Seneca, Epictetus, and others. On the topic of death, however, Spinoza goes his own separate way—in fact, he heads in the completely opposite direction. While Spinoza's free person rarely, if ever, thinks about death, the Stoic sage meditates upon it constantly. Epictetus advised, as part of his therapeutic strategy for peace of mind, that one should "keep before your eyes day by day death and exile, and everything that seems terrible, but most of all death."[9] Seneca, too, recommends thinking often about one's own mortality, as essential to overcoming both fear of one's death and grief at the death of others. "Rehearse this thought [about death, that it is the evil that puts an end to all evils] every day, that you may be able to depart from life contentedly. For many men clutch and cling to life, even as those who are carried down a rushing stream clutch and cling to briars and sharp rocks."[10] This Stoic strategy

of *memento mori* could not be more removed from the activity of Spinoza's free person.

Aside from the fact that he is consumed with appreciating the joy of living under the guidance of reason, there is a further dimension to the absence of thoughts about death in the free person: there is nothing to think about. The free person understands that there is no afterlife, no postmortem realm of reward and punishment, no world-to-come. When a person dies, there is, for that person, nothing.

Spinoza denies that there is any such thing as an immortal self that persists beyond this life. When you are dead, you are dead. Gone. Finished. The denial of immortality seems, in fact, to have been a constant in Spinoza's thinking, going back even to around the time of his *herem*. In 1658, he was reportedly telling some visitors to Amsterdam that among the reasons for his expulsion from the Sephardic community was his proclaiming to others that "the soul dies with the body."[11]

But if there is no such thing as immortality, then there is nothing to be afraid of after death—nor, for that matter, is there anything to hope for. As Epicurus so elegantly put it, "Death, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and when death is come, we are not."[12] This ancient lesson is something that the free person understands well.

Spinoza does allow, in some of the most puzzling propositions of the *Ethics*, that there is a sense in which the human mind is eternal, that there is something that "pertains to the mind's duration without relation to the body."[13] But, as we shall see, there

is nothing personal about this eternal part of the mind. It is certainly not something that would encourage thinking about death, much less something in which one might find comfort or that should be an object of hope or fear.[14] The propositions on the eternity of the mind in Part Five of the *Ethics*, in fact, constitute the core of Spinoza's assault on the belief in immortality (at least as this is traditionally understood in the Abrahamic religions) and on the superstitious eschatological convictions that typically accompany it.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul may be the most pernicious of all the irrational ideas that religious authorities and their allies encourage in their followers. The belief in an immortal self leads inexorably to a life governed by the passions of hope and fear: hope for eternal reward in heaven and fear of eternal punishment in hell. These emotions about the fate of one's soul in some world-to-come can be extremely strong and dominate our affective lives. A person will do anything—anything!—to earn that divine reward and avoid that divine punishment. Meanwhile, priests, preachers, and rabbis say that they know precisely what one needs to do to achieve the desired eternal outcome. The result of this combustible combination of desperation among ordinary folk and superstitious beliefs and deception perpetrated by ecclesiastics is a slavish obedience by the former to the latter. People throw themselves on the mercy of ministers and allow them to dictate their behavior and run their lives and even their polity. The upshot is not only psychological bondage to the passions, where desire is guided not by reason but by the emotions of hope and fear, but a social and political bondage as well. Moses Mendelssohn seems to be expressing this same insight when he says that the "inadmissible idea of the eternality

of punishment in hell" is "an idea the abuse of which has made not many fewer men truly miserable in this life than it renders, in theory, unhappy in the next."[15]

What Spinoza is up to in the final propositions of the *Ethics*, then, is a refutation of a powerful delusory belief that is the foundation of the personal and public bondage that keeps us from lives of freedom. By undermining the belief in immortality, he is trying to undercut the influence that, he fears, the clerical class increasingly exercises over mind and polity. He is, in effect, taking away from ecclesiastics what may be their most potent weapon.

Spinoza proclaims in proposition 23 of Part Five that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains that is eternal."[16] In the first instance, this eternal part of the mind—and he is discussing something that is a constituent of every durationally existing mind—is simply that which constitutes the formal essence of the mind, namely, the "idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, from the perspective of eternity."[17] The essence of the human mind just *is* the idea of the essence of the human body, and this "core" idea is no less eternal than the eternal essence of the body that is its object. It is an eternal idea in God or Nature under the attribute of Thought, corresponding to the eternal formal essence of the body under the attribute of Extension. It is nothing but a knowledge of the human body *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Now the human mind enjoys actual durational existence when the formal essence of the human body is itself instantiated with an actual durational existence. The human mind exists only

when and for as long as the human body exists. During that durational existence, the human mind acquires, on top of its essential (eternal) core idea of the essence of the body, many sensory and imaginative ideas that reflect the affections of the body as it interacts with other bodies. The pings and bumps and impressions that happen to the body are expressed by sensations and feelings and images in the mind. But when the existing body comes to its durational end, those sensory and imaginative ideas come to an end as well. The body after death no longer suffers affections from other bodies, and so the corresponding ideas of those affections—perceptions, sensations, and other images—are no longer present in the mind. What *is* left in the mind after death is simply the eternal idea of the essence of the body. Moreover, what is true of the human mind and body is true of *everything* in nature. The eternal idea of the eternal essence of a body is there, in the Thought attribute of God or Nature—in the "Infinite Intellect"—before, during, and after the durational existence of that body, whether it be human beings, giraffes, or trees. It is nothing that human beings can take pride or comfort in, and it is nothing personal—it is certainly not any kind of "self" that bears some conscious relation to the self in this life. It is just an eternal idea of what a particular body is.

What proposition 23 describes is what might be called the "basic" eternity of the mind. It is an eternity that is naturally and necessarily a part of the human mind's fundamental nature. Several propositions later, after an interlude on the "third kind of knowledge," Spinoza returns to the topic of the eternity of the mind. Now, however, it seems as if the mind's eternity is something that can vary from person to person and can even be increased over time. Spinoza here proceeds in a way that suggests

that one can have a more or less eternal mind, and he explains this as a function of the extent to which one's mind is occupied by the adequate ideas of intellectual understanding. What it amounts to, essentially, is that the more knowledge of the second and third kinds that the mind acquires in this lifetime, the more of that mind remains after death. This is because the adequate ideas constituting the second and third kinds of knowledge are, like the idea of the formal essence of the body that is the mind's essential core, eternal. They are God's knowledge of things, conceived from the perspective of eternity.

All individuals share in that basic eternity of the mind that consists in the eternal idea of the eternal essence of the body. This eternity is not something one gains through cognitive effort but is a part of the mind's fundamental makeup. During this lifetime, however, the adequate ideas that one acquires through the pursuit of knowledge do make up an additional subset of the ideas of the mind. This allows a knower to participate to a greater degree in eternity.

> The mind's essence consists in knowledge; therefore, the more the mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains . . . the more the mind understands things by the second and third kinds of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains unharmed.[18]

The more adequate ideas a person acquires in this durational life—the more true knowledge she possesses—the greater is the part of the mind that those ideas constitute, and thus the more that mind, while existing in the here and now, participates in eternity. Once the knower's life comes to an end, however, all that remains of the mind are these ideas, that is, just those items in the mind that are eternal. Adequate ideas are eternal truths, and

the knower can, in a manner of speaking, "embrace" these truths while she is a living human being. When she passes away, those truths that once formed a part of her mind persevere eternally in God or Nature.

Spinoza does say that "the eternal part of the mind is the intellect."[19] But what he has in mind is not the intellect as some kind of personal faculty, like a Cartesian soul. The intellect is simply a collection of ideas—albeit without the sensations, self-consciousness, and memory that give that collection selfhood in this durational life—and that is what remains after death.[20]

Spinoza immediately concludes from all this that "death is less harmful to us the greater the mind's clear and distinct knowledge, and hence, the more the mind loves God,"[21] and that the more a mind understands things by the second and third kind of knowledge, "the less it fears death."

A mind that knows the truth about its own eternity thereby knows that the most important part of it—its knowledge, its adequate ideas—will not be touched by death, precisely because what is eternal is unaffected by death. Such a mind knows that "the part of the mind that . . . perishes with the body"—the ideas of sense, imagination, and memory—"is of no moment in relation to what remains."[22] The durational mind, with its rich perceptual and emotional life, may come to an end, but the essence of the mind and the eternal ideas it once knew persevere eternally as ideas in the Infinite Intellect of God or Nature.

Just as important, a mind that knows the truth about its own eternity also knows that there is nothing personal about that eternity. What is eternal in an individual is just a body of ideas, a far cry from the kind of personal immortality promised by Christianity and other religions. There is among these eternal ideas no consciousness, no memory, no passions, nothing that

links them up with the durational life in which they once played a role. It is not one's *self* that is eternal.

A free person is therefore not given to superstitious, imaginative beliefs about what happens after one dies.

> If we attend to the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of the eternity of their mind, but that they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, or memory, which they believe remains after death.[23]

The clear and distinct knowledge of what the mind is and what its eternity consists in thus frees the mind from just those passions concerning death and its aftermath that can so dominate a person's life. Knowing that death is the end (and not some new beginning) eliminates any kind of hope or fear or other irrational affect directed at an imagined afterlife. A free person will not think about death because she knows that there is nothing there of any concern to her. She does not fear death, since there is nothing to be afraid of, but neither is there anything to hope for. Her focus will be on the exercise of rational freedom in this her durational life and the well-being that virtue naturally and necessarily brings. "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself."[24]

As one scholar nicely sums up the lesson of this part of the *Ethics*, the person who has obtained eternity in the sense Spinoza promises has not conquered the death of the body, but rather has done something just as important: he has conquered the fear of death.[25]

A rationally virtuous person will enjoy life, not fear death. She will pursue what is good because it is good. She does what she

does because of what she knows, not because of how something might happen to make her feel, and what she knows is how what she does is in her own best interest. She will reap the benefits of knowledge and refrain from anything that brings sadness or stands in the way of persevering in her human flourishing and intellectual perfection. She will cultivate positive and productive relations with others and help them move toward flourishing lives as well. In all of this lies her strength, her freedom, and her happiness. And if at some point in her durational existence she should happen to think about her death? She will naturally regard it with the equanimity, peace of mind, and contentment (*acquiescentia*) that is "the highest thing we can hope for."

11

THE RIGHT WAY OF LIVING

I began this book by noting that there is a theme running throughout Spinoza's major treatises, one that provides some unity to their ostensibly diverse subjects. That theme is freedom. The *Theological-Political Treatise* is about intellectual, political, and religious freedom—or, as the work's subtitle indicates, "that a republic can grant freedom of philosophizing without harming its peace or piety, and cannot deny it without destroying its peace and piety." The *Ethics*, on the other hand, is about the freedom of the individual: not so much the physical liberty to do what one wants to do or the intellectual liberty to say what one thinks, but the inner freedom that consists in *choosing* to do what one *knows* is good and in one's own best interest. This is freedom as autonomy, whereby one's thoughts, desires, and choices (and ultimately one's actions) follow from one's own nature and not from the effects that other things have on one.

What Spinoza offers in the *Ethics*—beyond the bold and "heretical" metaphysics of God, the highly original analysis of human nature and knowledge, and the catalog of the human passions—is an account of how best to live. He calls it "the right way of living" (*recta vivendi ratio*), and it consists in seeking one's own advantage under the guidance of reason. It is the life embodied by the free person.

The free person is not an impossible ideal. It is neither a self-contradictory concept—a human being who is outside of Nature

and not subject to the passions—nor a nomological impossibility, ruled out by the laws of nature. This superb condition of freedom and virtue, living exclusively under the guidance of reason while still a part of Nature and subject to (but not guided by) passive affects, would clearly be something extraordinarily difficult to attain, much less sustain over the course of a lifetime. Still, it remains for Spinoza—for us—the natural and necessary object of our most profound desire, and something that we can hope to achieve, at least in principle. In the final paragraph of the *Ethics*, Spinoza, referring to the therapy he has described for becoming more free and reducing the power of the passions, notes that, "if the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found."[1] Since the free person is simply the individual who consistently and without exception lives according to reason, and thus is on a continuum with the ordinary person who has become more free, there is no reason not to think that free person, too, lies in the realm of the possible.

Representing the metaphysically grounded perfection of human nature, the free person is what every individual, whether he realizes it or not, is ultimately striving to become. The life of the free person is, as we have seen, "the highest thing we can hope for." The free person flourishes as a human being and thus knows happiness itself.

The bar is set rather high, however. Perhaps there never has been a free person, not in the entire history of humankind. Spinoza, from personal experience, knows that "men are moved more by opinion than by true reason . . . and often [yield] to lust of every kind."[2] If merely increasing one's freedom is "hard," we can only imagine how much more so it must be to so improve oneself that one is perfectly free, never succumbing to the power

of the irrational affects. A free person is, Spinoza concedes, a "rare" thing indeed. But what should one conclude from this?

Here, once again, Kant may prove useful. Having insisted that the only thing "good in itself" or "absolutely good" is a good will—that is, a will that is motivated to perform (or refrain from) action for the sole reason that moral duty so commands, regardless of one's own particular inclinations or desires—Kant considers the objection that perhaps there never has been someone whose behavior can, with any certainty, be attributed to a good will. So be it. But this is merely an empirical claim; it does not (and cannot) refute such purity of motive being the ideal for rational moral agents.

> If we attend to experience of people's conduct we meet frequent and, as we ourselves admit, just complaints that no certain example can be cited of the disposition to act from pure duty; that, though much may be done *in conformity with* what *duty* commands, still, it is always doubtful whether it is really done *from duty* and therefore has moral worth.

Rather than admit that the true good must lie elsewhere, Kant is content to join others in lamenting "the frailty and impurity of human nature, which is indeed noble enough to take as its precept an idea so worthy of respect but at the same time is too weak to follow it."[3]

Spinoza, too, has demonstrated, rigorously and a priori, that the freedom and rationality of the free person—the "exemplar of human nature," on my reading—represents our ideal condition.[4] If we find ourselves unable to become free, then so much the worse for us. The problem lies not in the ideal goal set before us, but in our own ignorance and weakness—our failure either

to recognize that goal or to successfully implement the means to reach it.

Readers of the ethical parts of the *Ethics* inevitably, and not surprisingly, end up puzzled by particular aspects of what Spinoza presents as the "right way of living." More generally, they may also wonder about the nature and legitimacy of his entire moral project. There are in fact two basic questions that seem perennially to arise and about which little consensus has been reached. One concerns the "dictates of reason" and the kind of prescriptivity or "ought-ness," if any, they bear and for whom. The other concerns how to reconcile Spinoza's propounding a model of a good life with his strict and absolute determinism: if everything in the universe is causally necessitated and nothing could be other than as it is, including human choices and actions, then what is the point of telling his readers that they should strive to be like the free person? Either they are already free or they are not. If they are free, they were determined to be so; if they are not free, that too was determined and there is nothing to be done about it.

There is a good deal of scholarly disagreement over whether the dictates of reason and the life of the free person that they direct represent a normative model for ordinary human beings. Is it the case that everyone who is not free, no matter what their circumstances or condition, *ought* to strive to become free? And in striving to become free, *ought* they to act like a free person and be directed in their behavior by the dictates of reason alone? Are the dictates of reason thereby prescriptive for *everyone*, the free and the unfree alike? And if so, what kind of "ought" is it?

This debate about whether or not the dictates of reason are universally prescriptive and thus directives of behavior for all people often turns to the proposition about honesty as a case study.[5] Granted, the free person will always act honestly and never deceptively. This is because she is enjoying human perfection and so does not fear the end of her durational existence so much that she would put her perfected condition at risk by deceiving others. But to return to an issue broached in an earlier chapter, what about less free individuals? Should they also be expected to act honestly without exception? Must they too always heed the call of reason? It is all well and good to be told how the free person will think and act and what this person's life is like: what she does and how and why she does it. But most of us are not free persons. And it could be argued that it seems foolhardy, even dangerous, to have everyone acting as if they are free. What is good for the free person is not necessarily good for the ordinary person; on the contrary, what is good for the free person might even be bad for the ordinary person. After all, continued durational existence is necessary for the pursuit of freedom and perfection, and it may be occasionally necessary to tell a lie or otherwise deceive someone in order to persevere durationally.[6]

There is another way to frame the question. The free and rationally virtuous person recognizes the dictates of reason as prescriptive: they tell her how she ought to live. At the same time, the kind of "ought" embedded in the dictates of reason is a rather attenuated one, since there is no way the free person is going to act contrary to them. The adequate ideas of reason causally determine a free person to think and act in certain ways, and so what the dictates effectively represent are also *descriptions* of how such a person actually and necessarily lives.[7] This is why the propositions about the free person are phrased as "The free per-

son does this . . .” and “The free person does not do that. . . .” But what about individuals who are not so blessed? Are the dictates of reason also prescriptions on how these persons *should* live in order to become more free?[8]

As we have seen, the most general dictates of reason are that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage and what is really useful to him, want what will really lead him to greater perfection, and “absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can.” Also, reason “prescribes” (Spinoza’s term) that “we should want virtue for its own sake” and, on the social level, that we should want nothing for ourselves that we do not also want for others.[9] One can easily imagine these very broad dictates to be universal prescriptions, guiding the hearts and minds of all human beings. They are, in a sense, nothing but a propositional expression of the *conatus* that is the essence of every individual, and so they must be innately (if implicitly) present to all minds. Everyone, at some level, more or less knows that they should pursue their own advantage (although they may have mistaken beliefs as to what their advantage consists in).

But what about the more particular behaviors and attitudes of the free person—always acting honestly, avoiding the favors of the ignorant, preferring a greater future good over a lesser present one, not thinking of death, and so on?[10] Should the ordinary person observe these dictates as well?[11] Is “the right way of living” the right way of living for everyone, whether they are free or only seeking to be free? And what about those who do not even have a proper conception of what freedom is and thus are not at all aware that they should be seeking it?

I believe that the correct answer to the question of whether reason’s dictates are descriptive (of the free person’s activity) or prescriptive (for everyone) is: yes, all of the above. What the

adequate ideas of reason causally lead the free person inexorably to think and do is also, for the less free person, an exhortation. If you want to be more free and eventually become a free person—and whether you realize it or not, you *do*!—then here is what you need to do. After all, the propositions in the *Ethics* about what the free person specifically will and will not do are simply "a few more things concerning the free man's temperament and manner of living" that follow demonstrably, "in the cumbersome geometric order," from the most universal dictates of reason. Thus, less free persons, too, must share in those primary dictates' universality. There does not seem to be any logical reason to distinguish the domain of some dictates of reason from that of others.

Dealing honestly with other people is prescribed by reason as among those things that are "useful" and that aid one in striving for greater perfection. If reason universally commands everyone to seek his own advantage, to want what will really lead to greater perfection, and to act in ways that benefit others, then it equally commands everyone to seek understanding, act honestly, hate no one, avoid the favors of the ignorant, and so on. "The dictates of reason are practical principles for promoting our power," as one scholar puts it, and this implies that they are practical principles for all, since all are (necessarily) striving to promote their power.[12] As Spinoza observes in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, "No one can doubt how much more advantageous it is to man to live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason. As we have said, these laws and dictates aim only at the true advantage of men."[13]

Of course, the ordinary, less free person will often behave in ways that the free person would not, depending on the degree

to which he is under the sway of the passions. People who suffer from *akrasia* will act contrary to their better judgment because the affective strength of the passions can be greater than the affective strength of adequate ideas. Others simply may not have the adequate ideas that would otherwise lead them to rational conduct. Spinoza concedes that sometimes this is okay. After explaining that neither humility nor repentance is a virtue, he notes that such attitudes can nonetheless be useful.

> Because men rarely live from the dictate of reason, these two affects, humility and repentance, and in addition hope and fear, bring more advantage than disadvantage. So since men must sin, they ought rather to sin in that direction. . . . Those who are subject to these affects can be guided far more easily than others, so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason, i.e., may be free and enjoy the life of the blessed.[14]

There are occasions on which the ordinary person, it seems, simply *cannot* do what the free person would do, or at least not as the free person would do it. The first step, then, is to take advantage of certain passive affects so that one may sufficiently improve one's condition as to begin to follow the guidance of reason; those passions are subsequently left behind, like a ladder once climbed and then kicked away because it is no longer needed.

It seems, moreover, that the best way to become free is to act as the free person would act—to do what a free person does and, as far as one can, assume a free person's temperament. This means following the dictates of reason. At first this will not involve following those dictates as the free person follows them—naturally and as the necessary effect of one's own adequate

ideas—but rather with an intentional commitment, as a kind of obligation to externally imposed commands.[15]

There is an apt comparison to be made between the way in which the nonfree person does virtuous things as a matter of "obligation" to the dictates of reason, in the *Ethics*, and, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the way in which the unphilosophical common folk are led to observe the Divine Law and behave with justice and charity toward their neighbors because of faith. Unlike the rationally virtuous person, who is just and charitable because she knows, through intellectual understanding, that it is in her own best interest, the nonphilosophical individual, guided by the imagination, is to be inspired to follow God's commandments through the morally edifying stories of Scripture. Where the "pious" behavior of the philosopher follows necessarily from her nature alone, among the untutored masses, Spinoza insists, piety is a matter of "obedience."[16]

The unfree person, then, should act like a free person, obeying the dictates of reason. Eventually, however, as he acquires a deeper understanding of those dictates, he will become habituated to reason's guidance. Having pursued knowledge, which is what reason demands, his adequate ideas will increase and grow more powerful, effectively governing his behavior in a causal manner, just as they do for a free person.[17] The external "ought" becomes more of an internal "ought."

This strategy is suggested by Spinoza's recommendation that "the best thing we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life."[18] The maxims that he then lists are precisely reason's

guidance to the free person.[19] One such "rule of reason" is to conquer hate with love and not to repay it with hate in return. Another is that "the common dangers of life can best be avoided and overcome by presence of mind and strength of character." Yet another is to avoid anger, ambition, and the kind of esteem that depends on the opinion of others. An individual who is striving to become more free, and ultimately a free person, "will observe these [rules] carefully—for they are not difficult—and practice them." By doing so, he "will soon be able to direct most of his actions according to the command of reason."[20] In other words, if one acts like a free person—following the dictates of reason—one will become more free, and eventually, it is hoped, even a free person.

This is not unlike what Aristotle claims is the way to become a virtuous person: do the things a virtuous person would do and try to do them as the virtuous person would do them, in the right way. One will then become habituated to virtue and those actions and thoughts will come to one naturally. "It is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good."[21] Virtue, for both Aristotle and Spinoza, begins with following the rules of action that the virtuous person observes. In time, these actions will flow from one's character—or, to put it in Spinozistic terms, will follow necessarily from one's adequate ideas.

The dictates of reason, as affectively powerful adequate ideas in a free person's mind, cause her to act in certain ways. She will still experience them as prescriptive, and thus as directing her to certain ways of acting, but she will always and naturally do what they prescribe. For ordinary people, on the other hand, they

are prescriptive in a stronger sense. They command things that an individual, because of the passions, would not necessarily do and thus might not end up doing at all.

What the dictates of reason do is prescribe modes of thought and behavior that satisfy a desire that is basic in, even constitutive of, all human beings: to persevere in the best and highest sense. That is why one ought to follow them.[22]

All of this, however, raises a further question. To become more free and eventually to become a free person, the ordinary person should live according to the dictates of reason. The dictates are normative in this sense. However, that seems to be only a hypothetical or conditional normativity. *If* you want to be free, then you should observe reason's prescriptions. But ought one to strive to become a free person in the first place? What if I do not really want to become free, either because I have no adequate conception of what it is to be free or because, while I know both what freedom is and what reason commands, I am happy with the way things are and, lacking sufficient inspiration, am not interested in pursuing it? In a "weak" person, the affective strength of passions may be so strong that the power of the adequate ideas of reason stand no chance of governing desire.[23] One may simply not feel the motivational pull of freedom strongly enough and so will not feel properly compelled to do the things that reason prescribes in order to be free.

Spinoza grants that no one is *obliged*—in an enforceable way—to live according to reason. This is especially true in the "state of nature," but also within a polity as long as it is not one in which a wise sovereign has instituted rational laws that truly contrib-

ute to the freedom of citizens (and punish disobedience). Only in such an ideal commonwealth would there be an obligation—a legal or political obligation—to be rational. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, he notes that,

> among men who are considered as living only under the rule of nature, one who does not yet know reason, or does not yet have a habit of virtue, has a supreme right to live according to the laws of appetite alone—just as much as one who guides his life according to the laws of reason. That is, just as the wise man has the supreme right to do everything that reason dictates, or to live according to the laws of reason, so also the ignorant and weak-minded have the supreme right to do everything appetite urges, or to live according to the laws of appetite.[24]

Without man-made laws and the contracts or agreements for which they provide sanctions, there are no obligations. Even within a state, where there are statutory obligations, it may be that the laws that the (nonphilosophical) sovereign has established do not oblige me to live *rationally* and *virtuously*. Absent some wise sovereign's command that I should live according to reason, then, is the life of the free person normative? Is there any compelling reason why I should want to become rationally virtuous?

It should be clear by now that this is not at all the right question.

It is not as if the fundamental striving for freedom is a matter of some undetermined and deliberate choice that one may or may not make. All human beings are, necessarily, striving for freedom, for the life of rational virtue. This is because all human beings are, by their very nature, striving for the preservation of

and even increase in their power and improvement in their being. They are all striving to attain or maintain perfection as human beings. They may experience this as a desire for joy or pleasure, or they may (if sufficiently endowed with understanding) be aware of it as what it is: a striving for freedom, rationality, and virtue.

Some individuals excel at this striving for rational virtue—namely, those who *are* free and who live according to the adequate ideas of reason. They know what is truly good, truly conducive to virtue, and they pursue it. Others are not doing a very good job of it at all. While they too, unbeknownst to themselves, are striving for freedom, they do so on a deficient and misguided basis, under the guidance of the passions and inadequate ideas. These people are on the wrong path and harbor false beliefs about what is valuable. They assume that the pleasures they seek in the world are truly good and will bring them to the condition they believe to be their proper goal. They are wrong on both counts. They are striving to persevere, but mistake what perseverance consists in or demands. What they are really striving for—again, whether they realize it or not—is perseverance in the best manner: freedom, happiness, blessedness.

Those who are guided by the passions will not recognize the life of the free person as normative, nor, consequently, the dictates of reason as prescriptive. Because they do not consciously desire the end proposed by reason, they are not sufficiently motivated to adopt the rational means toward that end. Even if they do know what actions and attitudes reason prescribes, they may ask: why should I do that? What they fail to see in their ignorance is that following reason is in fact the way to reach precisely what they are ultimately, necessarily, and by their own nature striving for: the life of the free person.

"Why should I want to become a free person?", then, is the wrong question because you *do* want to be a free person! Everyone wants to be a free person. Or, to put it more precisely—since everyone already is, to some more or less shoddy extent, a free person—everyone wants to become freer than they are. And with a little enlightenment, they will come to realize this. Only then will they find the dictates of reason normative—as offering the true and necessary means to the better, more virtuous, and freer life that they desire.

Where does such enlightenment come from? If turning to the life of freedom is neither some kind of purely spontaneous free choice nor even a motivated but not fully determined decision—since no such things exist in Spinoza's world—why might a person suddenly find herself with a desire to change her life? What might spur a person to seek, instead of the alluring but transitory pleasures of the world, the true good of understanding and the joy and blessedness that accompany it?

There is no better way to answer this question than to turn back to the self-portrait that Spinoza offers at the start of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and with which this book began. He was a businessman, an Amsterdam merchant dealing in dried fruits and other comestibles, and a member in good standing of the Talmud Torah congregation of Portuguese Jews. But this life and the values that informed it left him unsatisfied. Something was missing. Intellectually and emotionally unfulfilled, he thus naturally sought, as he puts it, "some new and different objective."

> 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 that 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.

That, apparently, is how it works. During the course of one's life, there may come a moment at which one senses that the goods one is pursuing are not true goods and the pleasures they bring are not true joy and happiness. Something happens—a nagging question, some personal loss, a feeling of dissatisfaction, perhaps a glimpse of something better—that nudges one in a new direction. It is all causally determined, like everything in Nature—a natural and necessary sequence of events under the attribute of Thought.

No one is blameworthy if they fail to change the course of their life. There is no formal obligation or duty that is being neglected, no punishment that will be imposed. But the personal cost of ignoring the life of reason is significant, while the rewards of pursuing it are great.

This should make it clear, as well, how to resolve the second problem mentioned above, namely, reconciling an absolute determinism with the project of an ethics. This question is raised in a particular form by one of Spinoza's friends and correspondents, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus. Writing to Spinoza in 1674, Tschirnhaus asks:

> if we were compelled by external things, who could acquire the habit of virtue? . . . But in how many ways does it not happen that if we are determined to something by external things, we resist this with a firm and constant heart?[25]

In a sense, Tschirnhaus's question is misguided, and not just because he misunderstands Spinoza's conceptions of 'freedom' and 'determination.'[26] Tschirnhaus apparently thinks that the fact that we can resist the determination of external things shows that we have a freedom of will that, while perhaps inclined by circumstances in one direction, nevertheless maintains a true independence. Spinoza can grant that we can resist the determination of *external* things, and that we can do this with freedom, but argues that it does not follow that such (free) acts are not at all determined (in his strong sense). As we have seen, Spinoza's view is that free and virtuous behavior is compatible with determination from within, by reason and knowledge.[27] When the affective strength of our adequate ideas is stronger than the passions caused by external things, and we thus do what those adequate ideas determine us to do, we are active and free.

But a more general point is raised by Tschirnhaus's query, one concerning the *acquisition* of the *habit* of virtue. And this is the question that Spinoza seems to address, somewhat obliquely, in his reply:

> As for what he has maintained . . . "that if we were compelled by external causes, no one could acquire the habit of virtue," I do not know who has told him that it cannot happen from a fatal necessity, but only from a free decision of the mind, that we should have a firm and constant disposition.[28]

Undetermined freedom of will is not a necessary condition for voluntary moral improvement—for becoming someone with "a firm and constant disposition." The quest for a better, more rational, more satisfying life does not require any kind of causal gaps. One does not need a libertarian capacity to act one way or another in order to change one's life. It can begin as determined by external causes. All it takes, as we have just seen, is some event—or perhaps some edifying and inspirational reading—that draws the curtain aside and reveals both the undesirability of what is and the desirability of what can be.

The demonstrations of Spinoza's *Ethics* are in fact calculated to do just that. Reading his geometrically ordered treatise and grasping the conclusions for which he so rigorously reasons should move one—intellectually and affectively—in a certain way. We pick up the text, slowly make our way through its propositions and their demonstrations, and lo and behold, we come to see the truth about the cosmos, about ourselves, and about the pursuits that have so occupied our lives. We decide—as a result of antecedent causes—that a change is needed, a new direction, a new way of life.

Spinoza's goal is to get us to see that the life of the free person is the right way of living and the best life for a human being. It is an "active" life of autonomy, virtue, and power. In the free person, desire is guided by reason and knowledge, not by irrational passions. The free person does what he knows to be good and what is truly in his own best interest (as well as in the best interest of others), not what merely *appears* to be good or happens to be a source of pleasure.

It is also the life of true happiness. It is therefore the life we all desire to lead, whether we know it or not.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1: "A NEW WAY OF LIFE"

1. Bento was Spinoza's given name in the Portuguese-Jewish community of Amsterdam. Baruch was the Hebrew name used in the synagogue, and Benedictus is the Latin version of his name that appears in his published writings. All three names mean "blessed."

2. *Ethics* I, Appendix, G II.78–79/C I.440–41.

3. *Ethics* Ip15 and Ip16.

4. For pantheistic readings, see Bennett (1984) and Curley (1988). For an atheistic reading, see Nadler (2008).

5. *Ethics* Ip29.

6. *Ethics* Ip33.

7. *TTP* VI, G III.83–84/C II.154–55.

8. The place of teleology in Spinoza's philosophy is a topic of much discussion. For attempts to find a role for it in his system, see Garrett (1999) and Lin (2006b).

9. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.208/C I.545.

10. *Ethics* III, Preface, G II.138/C I.492.

11. *Ethics*, Appendix, G II.78/C I.440.

12. *Ethics* IIp48.

13. *TIE*, G II.5/C I.7.

14. *TIE*, G II.5–6/C I.7–8.

15. See Sidgwick (1907, 91–92) and Williams (1985).

16. There is also good reason to believe that Spinoza's views on God, the Bible, the soul, and other philosophical and theological topics—which he may have been discussing in the community as a young man—are what occasioned his *herem*; see Nadler (2001, 2018).

17. *TTP* XX, G III.247/C II.353.

CHAPTER 2: A MODEL OF HUMAN NATURE

1. *Ethics* IIdef6.

2. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.206/C I.544.

3. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.206/C I.544.

4. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.207/C I.545.

5. The standard English translation of the *Ethics* (by Curley) uses 'good' and 'evil' for the Latin terms *bonum* and *malum*. But 'evil' is too morally (and theologically) weighted a term for Spinoza's system. As Deleuze (1981, 34) notes, for Spinoza, "there is no Good or Evil, but there is good and bad."

6. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.208/C I.545.

7. A number of scholars have indeed read Spinoza as a kind of subjectivist about values. Frankena (1975) argues that Spinoza is a subjectivist about both moral evaluation and, it seems, moral properties. A subjectivist or antirealist reading, in one version or another, is also offered in Harvey (1981), Rutherford (2008), Melamed (2011), and Jarrett (2014), among others. Mattern (1978), on the other hand, believes that Spinoza, while offering a kind of "idealism" about moral qualities, is not a subjectivist. Youpa (2010a) makes the case against subjectivism, but by arguing that Spinoza does not hold a desire-satisfaction theory of value. Deleuze (1981), Bennett (1984, 293), Garrett (1996), Miller (2005b), Kisner (2010a; 2011, especially chap. 5), and, if I read him correctly, LeBuffe (2010) also offer nonsubjectivist readings, all in different ways. See also Lagrée (2002), who argues for "une norme pratique . . . absolue" in Spinoza (although she may go too far in suggesting that this is more than a "norme relatif").

8. G I.43/C I.87.

9. G I.49/C I.93. See also the beginning of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, where he notes that nothing "considered in its own nature [*in sua natura spectatum*]" is good or bad (G II.5/C I.7).

10. *Ethics* IIaxiom1.

11. *Ethics* IIp13c.

12. *Ethics* IIaxiom2.

13. *Principles of Philosophy* I.60, AT VIIIA.29/CSM I.213.

14. *Leviathan*, Part Three, chap. 34, sect. 2.

15. *Ethics* Ip33.

16. See *Ethics* IIdef1: "By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as He is considered as an extended thing."

17. While I hope the analogy is useful, I recognize that it is not totally apt, since in physics (as Matt Kisner has reminded me), when something is converted, it changes into something different and is thereby used up. Obviously the infinite power of God or Nature cannot be used up but remains eternal, albeit manifesting itself as finite minds and bodies.

18. In the text of the *Ethics*, the demonstrations of the propositions cite the earlier propositions and other elements on which they logically depend. For ease of reading, however, I have left out those internal citations.

19. *Ethics* IIIp7 and IIIp8.

20. See *Metaphysical Thoughts*, G I.248/C I.314.

21. *Ethics* IIp7s.

22. "Desire can be defined as appetite together with consciousness of the appetite" (*Ethics* IIIp9s).

23. Matheron (1969, 247) calls this "l'egoïsme biologique le plus brutal." The perseverance that is the characteristic effect of *conatus* is not neces-

sarily an individual's *conscious* end or goal. Only someone who is actively led by reason recognizes that she is striving to persevere and increase her power. This shall become clearer in my subsequent discussion.

24. *Ethics* IIIdef3.

25. The term he uses is *transitio* (G II.191/C I.541).

26. *Ethics* IIIdef3.

27. *Ethics* IIIp12 and IIIp13.

28. *Ethics* IIIp11s. Joy is not always a passion, since an improvement in one's *conatus* can be brought about actively.

29. It is odd for Spinoza to speak of desire as a species of affect. This is because desire, at least as he initially defines it (*Ethics* IIIp9s), really just is the power or striving itself whose transitions constitute the affects.

30. *Ethics* IIIp13s.

31. *Ethics* IIIp51s.

32. This does not imply that all human beings consciously have such a model in mind. The greedy person, for example, may not realize that his desire for money is ultimately a (falsely guided) desire to increase his power of persevering to the maximal condition represented by the *exemplar*.

33. For a contrary view, see Jarrett (2014, 78), who argues that Spinoza's ethics is a "constructivist" one, and that "the terms 'good' and 'bad' . . . have no meaning except in virtue of the construction of a concept of an ideal person," and that this concept is not objectively grounded in any essence or in the reality of things.

34. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.208/C I.545–46.

35. *Ethics* IIIp39s.

36. *Ethics* IVp41 and IVp45c2s.

37. *Ethics* IVp31dem.

38. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.208/C I.545.

39. G II.8/C I.10.

40. Part Two, chap. 4, G I.60/C I.103.

41. Not all scholars would agree with my identification of the model of human nature with the "free man" of the *Ethics*. LeBuffe (2010, 187–90) and Garrett (1996, 278), for example, do agree, while Kisner (2011, chap. 8) does not.

CHAPTER 3: THE FREE PERSON

1. These harsh assessments of the free man are found in Bennett (1984), Garrett (1996), De Dijn (2004), Garber (2004), Jarrett (2014), Kisner (2010b, 2011), LeBuffe (2010), Marshall (2014), and Matheron (1969), among others.

2. There is general, but not universal, agreement that the free person is the "model of human nature" mentioned in the Part Four preface. For a dissenting view, see De Dijn (2004) and Kisner (2010b, 2011).

3. *Ethics* IIIp59s.

4. *Ethics* IVdef2.

5. As Deleuze (1981, 113) elegantly puts it, "The whole effort of the *Ethics* is to break the traditional link between freedom and will—whether freedom is conceived as the ability of a will to choose or even create (freedom of indifference), or rather as the ability to regulate oneself on a model and to realize that model (enlightened freedom)."

6. Ep. 56, G IV.259/C II.421.

7. *Ethics* Idef7.

8. Of course, the source of an individual's power and nature is God or Nature, but since the individual is a mode of God or Nature, this is not a matter of being determined by an *external* cause.

9. Bear in mind, however, that the content of one's conscious beliefs, while expressive of self-interest and the striving to persevere, may not explicitly be about *conatus*.

10. *Ethics* IIIp3.

11. *Ethics* IVp14.

12. *Ethics* IVp7.

13. *Ethics* IV, Appendix, G II.266/C I.588.

14. This is not to deny that Spinoza is indeed an epistemological rationalist; he certainly is. But his epistemological rationalism is, in my view, ultimately in the service of his moral philosophy.

15. *Ethics* IIp40s2.

16. *Ethics* IIp44dem.

17. See Ep. 60 (to Tschirnhaus): "The idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause."

18. *Ethics* Iaxiom4.

19. *Ethics* IIp44.

20. *Ethics* IIp47.

21. *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.5, 1106a15–17.

22. *Ethics* IVdef8.

23. *Ethics* IVp18s.

24. *Ethics* IVp20dem.

25. *Ethics* IVp37s1.

26. More precisely, what we naturally and necessarily strive for is joy, or an increase in our power. And the condition of maximal power for a human being is this life under the consistent guidance of reason—the life of the free person. However, a person in bondage to the passions will not make this connection, and so he will not consciously strive for the life of reason.

27. Quite a few scholars have denied this identification of the free person and the person living according to the guidance of reason. See, for example, Garber (2004), Bennett (1984), Youpa (2010b), and Kisner (2010b).

On the other hand, Jarrett (2014) agrees that the free person is identical to the person living according to the guidance of reason and not simply introduced for the first time in *Ethics* IV (p66s).

28. Again, only the philosophically enlightened person will recognize that what he is in fact striving for is the life of reason and freedom. A greedy person, for example, will be moved by the striving to increase his power that is his essence, but the object of conscious desire for him will be money, and he will not see that striving as satisfied by the life of reason.

29. In Kisner's (2011, 165–71) formulation, the free person "has only adequate ideas" and is "perfectly active" and "perfectly free." Garber (2004, 186) likewise insists that the "free man" is an unattainable ideal "because he only acts, and cannot be acted upon. He is, in a sense, causally isolated from the rest of the world: he can act on other things, but other things cannot act on him. . . . As a consequence, Spinoza's free man must be immortal, incapable of dying, for death can only come from an external cause."

30. See Garber (2004, 184); Kisner (2010b, 92–93); LeBuffe (2010, 187); Jarrett (2014, 62). Bennett (1984, 325) says that "it is hard not to see Spinoza as committed to offering sensory deprivation as an ideal."

31. *Ethics* IVp4 and IVp4c.

32. Jarrett (2014, 61, 63), for example, insists that the free person "could not actually exist [in time] . . . no actual human being who exists in time can attain or 'match' the model, and thus be a perfect person."

33. This is why Kisner distinguishes the free person from the person who, acting under the guidance of reason, is free to some degree. Kisner (2010b, 98) says that "the free man is introduced without fanfare in a scholium and treated entirely within the span of ten propositions." But this cannot be right, since Spinoza's language in the relevant propositions implies that he has already been talking about "the free man" well before explicitly introducing that phrase.

34. Kisner (2011, 177).

35. Bennett (1984, 317) calls the free person "a theoretically convenient limiting case, like the concept of an ideal gas—one whose molecules have zero volume." Matheron (1969, 281) says that "la condition maximum est donc irréalisable," not because it is in principle impossible or conceptually incoherent, but because of the "exigencies" of the passions, which will always keep reason from attaining the strength required to fully master them.

36. *Ethics* Idef7: "That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone."

37. Bennett (1984, 317); Jarrett (2014, 62–63); Garber (2004).

38. This is how Garrett (2010, 202) reads the free person.

39. *Ethics* IVp68.

40. Kisner (2011, 166), too, recognizes that the free person is sometimes described by Spinoza as if he "could be harmed by others and thus is

passively affected by external things," including "having sensations of them"; he acknowledges that this clashes with what he alleges is Spinoza's claim that "a free man has only adequate ideas" and is "perfectly active." Kisner suggests that this is because Spinoza conceives of the free person differently in different passages, depending upon the use to which the concept is being put and the point he is trying to make. He argues, ultimately, that the free man must not be identified with the "model of human nature," and even that "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" (178).

41. I provide a longer and more detailed defense of this in Nadler (2015). Exceptions to this way of reading Spinoza are rare, but see Alquié (2003, 326–27), who (equating "l'homme libre" with "l'homme sage") notes that the free man "vit dans le temps, dans le monde, dans la cité . . . le sage aura toujours des affections . . . le sage verra son corps soumis aux autres corps, et donc son âme remplie d'idées inadéquates. Il percevra, il imaginera, il aura des passions." Kisner (2011) would agree with my claim that the model human being is not a causally isolated individual, but only because he distinguishes the model from the free person.

42. *Ethics* IVp66s (emphasis mine).

43. *Ethics* IVp58s.

44. The term Spinoza uses is *fortitudo*.

45. *Ethics* IVp69. I should note, however, that my reading of the "free man" being subject to (but in control of) the passions might seem difficult to reconcile with certain passages of the *Ethics*—most clearly, IVp68, where Spinoza says that "if men were born free, they would form no concept of good or bad." Since the concept of bad is tied up with passions, this suggests that a free person experiences no passions. However, this proposition, as Spinoza admits, is about an impossible ideal—someone who is "born free"—and not about the free person per se.

46. See *Ethics* V, Preface.

47. See, for example, *Ethics* Vp18s.

48. *Ethics* IVp66s.

49. *Ethics* IVp37s1. For a more extended and detailed argument on the nature and possibility of the free person, see Nadler (2015).

50. Spinoza grants that if the subjugation of women to men is simply a matter of "convention," then their exclusion from the political arena is "without any reasonable cause."

51. *Political Treatise*, chap. 11, G III.359–60/C II.603.

52. *Ethics* IIp7s.

53. *Ethics* IIp13s.

54. *Ethics* IIp13s (emphasis mine).

55. This is what Lloyd (1994, 165) calls "a shared human nature that transcends difference." As Gullan-Whur (2002, 97) notes, the physiological and

chemical differences between male and female bodies do allow Spinoza to supply "a metaphysical infrastructure for a mentality which is to some extent exclusively female." But, she argues (rightly, I think), this would not warrant a deep and substantial difference between the sexes in human nature, which is expressed at the highest level in the capacity for intellectual reason. She concludes that "the argument of the last page of the *Political Treatise* is inconsistent with Spinoza's general *Ethics* doctrine, and must be judged an embarrassingly feeble philosophical aberration" (110).

56. For a careful, more extended discussion of these issues, see Gullan-Whur (2002). See also Matheron (1977), Lloyd (1994), and the essays in Gatens (2009).

57. Again, *Ethics* IVp68, might be taken to indicate that the free person is an impossible ideal, but as I have argued, I believe this to be a misuse of the proposition (see note 45).

58. Some scholars suggest that Spinoza in fact changed his mind on this question between the earlier writings and the *Ethics*; see, for example, Garber (2004).

59. Temkine (1994, 441) suggests that for Spinoza there have been a small number of historical individuals who *were* free men: Thales, Socrates, Solomon, and Christ.

60. *Ethics* IVaxiom1.

61. *Ethics* IVp3.

CHAPTER 4: VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

1. The transcribed text of this first inventory is in FWC I.336. The original document is in the Municipal Archives of The Hague, Notarial Archives I, 1597–1842, no. 372/850, fol. 24.

2. In the end, the estate was encumbered with so much debt that Rebecca and Daniel declined any legal responsibility for it; see documents 154, 155, 158, 159, 160, in FWC I.366–71. Van der Spijck ended up selling off Spinoza's goods at auction in order to recoup some of the money he had laid out for his boarder.

3. FWC I.339.

4. The second inventory is also in the Municipal Archives of The Hague, Notarial Archives I, 1597–1842, no. 372/850, fols. 27–32. It is photoreproduced in FWC I.343–54.

5. This breakdown is from FWC II.185.

6. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII.127.

7. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII.117–18.

8. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII.122.

9. For studies of Spinoza and the Stoics, see James (1993), DeBrabander (2007), and Miller (2015c).

10. There is, in fact, a good deal of debate as to whether the "dictates of reason" are descriptive or prescriptive. Curley (1973, 371) insists that they are prescriptive, "hypothetical imperatives with necessary antecedents, and so, in effect, categorical." For a contrary view, see LeBuffe (2018, chap. 3) and Rutherford (2008). I return to this question in chapter 11.

11. *Ethics* IVp18s.

12. *Ethics* IVp24.

13. See *Ethics* IVp68s. Garber (2004) has argued that the dictates of reason are distinct from the principles that guide the free person.

14. *Ethics* IVp26.

15. *Ethics* IV, Appendix IV, G II.267/C I.588.

16. *Ethics* IVp18s.

17. *Ethics* IVp19.

18. *Ethics* IVp18s.iii.

19. *Ethics* IVp46.

20. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XII; IVp37s1; IVp70dem.

21. *Ethics* IVp51, alt. dem.

22. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XX.

23. *Ethics* IVp39dem.

24. Contrary to the reading defended by Garber (2004).

25. *Ethics* IVp45s.

26. Hübner (2014, 138n49) argues that the wise man is not to be identified with the free person or "one who is led by reason alone." But the context of the relevant passage will not bear out such a distinction; it is clear that we are still in the midst of a discussion of "he who lives according to the guidance of reason."

27. *Ethics* IIIp56s.

28. *Ethics* IVp18s.i.

29. *Ethics* IIp49sIVA–B, G II.136/C I.490.

30. *Ethics* Vp20s.

31. *Ethics* Vp6s.

32. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XXXII, G II.276/C I.593–94.

33. See, for example, Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, 1: "Some things are up to us and some are not up to us. . . . So remember, if you think that things naturally coerced are free or that things not your own are your own, you will be thwarted, miserable, and upset, and will blame both gods and men. But if you think that only what is yours is yours, and that what is not your own is, just as it is, not your own, then no one will ever coerce you, no one will hinder you, you will blame no one, you will not accuse anyone, you will not do a single thing unwillingly, you will have no enemies, and no one will harm you, because you will not be harmed at all."

34. *Ethics* Vp42s. Rutherford (1999) suggests translating *acquiescentia* here as "contentment."

CHAPTER 5: FROM PRIDE TO SELF-ESTEEM

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Q. 84.

2. *Ethics* IV, Appendix, XX, XXVII.

3. *Ethics* IVp73s.

4. Spinoza reserves the term "sin" (*peccatum*) for disobedience of civil law; see *Ethics* IVp37s2.

5. *Ethics* IIIp45.

6. *Ethics* IIIp39.

7. *Ethics* IVp45 and IVp45s.

8. *Ethics* IVp46.

9. *Ethics* IIIp59s.

10. *Ethics* IVp46dem.

11. *Ethics* IIIp43.

12. *Ethics* IIIp56.

13. *Ethics* IVp40c2 and IVp40s.

14. *Ethics* III, def. aff., XX.

15. Once again, Spinoza is in good Stoic company. In "On Anger," Seneca notes that "a man is not powerful—no, cannot even be called free—if he is captive of his anger" (III.4.iv).

16. *Ethics* IIIp24s.

17. *Ethics* IIIp35.

18. *Ethics* IIIp55s, cor.

19. *Ethics* III, Appendix XXXII, G II.276/C I.594.

20. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.8, 1107a–b.

21. *Ethics* IVp69.

22. *Ethics* IVp69c.

23. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Q. 84, art. 2. Spinoza's inclusion of humility as a kind of vice, on the other hand, is contrary to the Christian theological tradition.

24. *Ethics* IIIp26s.

25. *Ethics* IIIp26s.

26. *Ethics* IVp57.

27. *Ethics* III, def. aff., XXVIII.

28. *Acquiescentia* in Spinoza has been the subject of several recent studies, including Rutherford (1999) and Carlisle (2017).

29. See Carlisle (2017) for a discussion of the different ways of translating *acquiescentia in se ipso*. She opts to leave the phrase untranslated, to preserve continuity between that species of *acquiescentia* based on imagination and that based on reason. Rutherford (1999), on the other hand, believes that an important contrast is captured by the difference between *acquiescentia in se ipso* and *acquiescentia mentis*.

30. *Ethics* III, def. aff., XXV and XXVI; IIIp55.
31. *Ethics* IIIp53.
32. *Ethics* IIIp30.
33. *Ethics* IIIp53c.
34. *Ethics* IVp58s.
35. *Ethics* III, def. aff., XXIX.
36. *Ethics* III, def. aff., XXVII.
37. *Ethics* IVp54.
38. *Ethics* IVp54s.
39. Soyarslan (2018) argues, however, that in fact, even by Spinoza's standards, humility cannot perform this socially and epistemically useful role.
40. *Ethics* IVp53.
41. *Ethics* IVp52s.
42. *Ethics* IVp52.
43. *Ethics* IVp52dem.
44. *Ethics* IVp70. The free person cannot totally ignore the minds and opinions of others, at least not insofar as he seeks to bring them, too, to a state of freedom and virtue, and so must find a way to communicate effectively with them and not turn them off.
45. On this tranquility, see Carlisle (2017).
46. This is how Curley translates it; see *Ethics* Vp42s (C I.617). Carlisle (2017) opts for "contentment of mind." Rutherford (1999) puts a good deal of weight on this terminological distinction and insists that *acquiescentia in se ipso* accompanies the second kind of knowledge, while *acquiescentia animi* accompanies only the third kind of knowledge.
47. *Ethics* Vp30.
48. Carlisle (2017, 233) makes this point nicely.
49. *The Guide of the Perplexed* III.51, in Maimonides (1963, II.626–27).

CHAPTER 6: FORTITUDE

1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 7, 10–21.
2. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237e–38a. The Greek term that the translator renders as "wantonness" is *hubris*.
3. Plato, *Protagoras*, 357d–e.
4. *Ethics* IVp17s.
5. *Ethics* IVp7.
6. *Ethics* IVp14.
7. *Ethics* IIIp9.
8. For illuminating analyses of Spinoza on *akrasia*, see Lin (2006a) and Marshall (2008). For less sympathetic readings, see Bennett (1984, 284–26) and Della Rocca (1996, 242), who suggests that "a key element

of Spinoza's account of irrational action is without adequate grounding in his system."

9. *Ethics* IVp9c.

10. *Ethics* IVp16.

11. See *Ethics* IVp5.

12. In the end, external causes will always win out; after all, no human being is immortal.

13. *Ethics* IVp15.

14. Strictly speaking, it is wrong to refer to Spinoza's account of "weakness of will," since there is no such thing as a will in Spinoza. It is not the weakness of the will that explains *akrasia* for Spinoza, but the affective weakness of rational ideas.

15. Preface to the French translation of the *Principles of Philosophy*, AT IX-2.14; CSM I.186.

16. Preface to the French translation of the *Principles of Philosophy*, AT IX-2.14; CSM I.186.

17. Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, III.190, AT XI.471, in Descartes (1989, 121).

18. Letter to Elisabeth, August 4, 1645, AT IV.265–66/CSMK, 257–58.

19. *Ethics* IIIp59s.

20. *Ethics* IVp73s.

21. *Ethics* IVp65 and IVp66.

22. *Ethics* IIp44c2dem.

23. *Ethics* IVp62.

24. *Ethics* IVp62s.

25. *Ethics* IIp40.

26. For a fine analysis of this point, see LeBuffe (2018, 131), although I do not agree with his account of the origin of the "common notions," which he sees as derived from sense experience.

27. *Ethics* Vp3 and Vp4.

28. *Ethics* Vp4s.

29. *Ethics* Vp6s.

30. *Ethics* Vp15.

31. *Ethics* Vp30.

32. *Ethics* Vp32s.

33. *Ethics* Vp37dem. See Alquié (1998, 333–34).

34. *Ethics* Vp31s. As Garrett (1996, 284) puts it, it is "not merely a transition to greater perfection, but perfection itself."

35. *Ethics* Vp33 and Vp33s.

36. *Ethics* Vp23s.

37. *Ethics* Vp20s and Vp27. For an analysis of the two kinds of love of God in Spinoza, see Nadler (2017).

38. *Ethics* Vp10s.

39. *Ethics* Vp10s.

40. On the resistance of intuitive knowledge to *akrasia*, compare Sandler (2005), who argues that the power of intuition is invincible, and Soyarslan (2014), who argues that even intuitive knowledge is liable to *akrasia*.

CHAPTER 7: HONESTY

1. Other scholars have acknowledged the puzzling nature of Spinoza's claim about the exceptionless honesty of the free man. See, for example, Garber (2004), Garrett (1990), and Rosenthal (1998).

2. *Meditations* XII.17; see also *Meditations* III.7.

3. See, for example, *On Anger* III.39.

4. Kant (1996, 74).

5. Kant (1996, 611–15). This absolutist reading of Kant has been challenged by various scholars, including Carson (2010) and Varden (2010).

6. It is tempting to read Spinoza's reasoning here as analogous to Kant's. But Matheron (1969, 537n87) insists that it is not Kantian at all, since deceit is not self-contradictory but only contradictory with the commands of reason. Even so, both Spinoza and Kant make the fundamental point that it is irrational to engage in deceit.

7. *Ethics* IVp72.

8. See, for example, Bennett (1984, 317), Gabhart (1999, 626), and DeBrabander (2007, 82).

9. *Ethics* IVp31c. This principle is the core of Spinoza's argument for benevolent behavior toward others, as we will see in chapter 8.

10. *Ethics* IVp34.

11. It should be noted that generating passions qua false and inadequate ideas in another person does not *necessarily* lead to opposition and competition; two people, one led by reason and another by passion, may still agree in their behavior and even their aims. For example, in a political context, lying can be an effective tool for assuaging an angry crowd and making them compliant with laws that are rational. Or so one might conclude from the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the need to encourage "obedience" in the multitude by way of the imagination.

12. The problem has been recognized by many scholars, including Bidney (1962, 317), Bennett (1984), and Garrett (1990). Gabhart (1999) claims that the "contradiction" between *Ethics* IVp72s and the *conatus* doctrine of IIIp4 may be only "apparent."

13. Using this distinction between two kinds of *dolus* to resolve the problem is suggested by Garrett (2010, 204).

14. This distinction appears at work in *TTP*, chap. 16. Garrett (2010, 204) points to annotation 32, in which the distinction is explicitly cited; however, it is not clear that this annotation is by Spinoza himself.

15. As Matheron (1969, 255, my translation) puts it, "We all want to preserve our being, and we all know that we want to preserve it. But, not knowing what our being is, we confuse it with the mere fact of not dying."

16. See, for example, Matheron (1969, 246), Garrett (1990), Yovel (1999), Miller (2005a, 2005b), Youpa (2003, 2009), and Carriero (2017). On the other hand, Delahunty (1985, 226–27) and LeBuffe (2005), among others, opt for the "mundane" survivalist reading (although LeBuffe believes that Spinoza intends *both* the mundane and the intellectualist senses of survival).

17. An endeavor for continued mundane existence is a necessary condition for the endeavor for perfection; see *Ethics* IVp21. However, if there is no hope for perfection, for a life that, if continued, involves "living well," then should reason recommend continued existence?

18. *Ethics* IV, Preface, G II.209/C I.546.

19. *Ethics* IVp26.

20. *Ethics* IVp27.

21. *Ethics* IVp67.

22. *Ethics* IVp30.

23. See Youpa (2009, 254): "When it comes to a choice between deceit and continued durational existence versus honesty and the termination of durational existence, reason prescribes the latter pair." See also Rutherford (2008, 506–7). Yakira (2004, 79) also suggests that "the rational man" will do things that endanger his life "if there are some forms of life that are not worth living," and that "risking one's life must sometimes be the correct way of self-preservation," by which he means preserving "one's freedom and one's rationality." Matheron (1969, 537–38) notes that "the free man will be of good faith even if this must cost him his life. . . . For *conatus*, let us recall, does not reduce to the simple conservation of brute biological existence. To persevere in *our* being (and not in being in general) is to actualize the consequences of our essence; and the consequences of our essence are precisely the commands of Reason." The free person, Matheron says, cannot change his nature and lie any more than "a circle, to survive, will become a square" (my translation).

24. Garrett (1990, 2010); see also Garber (2004).

25. The analogy comes from Garrett (1990).

26. As Garber (2004, 195) puts it, "If I want to become free, I shouldn't necessarily act as if I already am free."

27. Youpa (2009, 256) makes this point well: "The sort of thing that preserves and increases the freedom of the perfectly free man is the sort of thing that preserves and increases the freedom of the partially free man."

CHAPTER 8: BENEVOLENCE AND FRIENDSHIP

1. *Ethics* IIIp28.

2. *Ethics* IIIp9s. Spinoza's egoism is similar to (and may have been influenced by) that of Hobbes, whose works Spinoza read in the 1660s while

composing the *Ethics* and who claimed in his *Leviathan* that "of the voluntary acts of every man the object is some good to himself" (*Leviathan* XIV.8). For a comparison of Spinoza and Hobbes on this question, see Curley (1988, chap. 3). For Hobbes's discussion of the passions generally (which is strikingly similar in important respects to Spinoza's analysis), see *Leviathan* VI.

3. Since an increase in power is identical to joy, and since only readers of Spinoza—or the enlightened rationally virtuous individual acting on the basis of adequate ideas—will think in terms of perseverance, that is, of *conatus* and its fluctuations, perhaps it is more appropriate to call Spinoza a psychological and ethical *hedonist*, with joy being the object of desire, the motivation for action, and the standard for what is right; see LeBuffe (2010, 130–35). LeBuffe, in fact, argues against reading Spinoza's theory as a psychological egoism, or at least as a version of psychological egoism on which desire is always a *conscious* desire for perseverance; he prefers to read it as an "unrestricted psychological hedonism" whereby what "we consciously desire is an end that we associate with *laetitia* [joy]" (132). However, because desire remains the desire for one's own joy, and because joy just is the increase in one's power to persevere, I do not see why Spinoza's account cannot qualify as a psychological egoism. The end of desire is always what appears to be in one's own interest; as LeBuffe himself says, "a person always acts for the sake of his own advantage" (133).

4. *Ethics* IVp24.

5. It is surprising that a number of recent publications—including *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's* Ethics (Koistinen 2009) and monographs ostensibly devoted to the ethical dimensions of the *Ethics*, such as LeBuffe (2010)—do not address this important issue. For illuminating discussions of it elsewhere, see Della Rocca (2004) and Kisner (2011, chap. 7).

6. This is not to say that duty-based moral theories were not around well before Kant, especially natural law accounts in medieval and early modern thought. (My thanks to Matt Kisner for reminding me of this point.)

7. This might seem inconsistent with my claim that Spinoza's psychological egoism entails that we are always and necessarily moved to pursue only things that appear to promote our well-being and are averse to whatever might weaken our condition. "We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness" (*Ethics* IIIp28). However, this motivational egoism does not imply that we are consciously aware that we are striving to pursue what promotes our own well-being: we can be moved by what appears to improve our condition without having our self-interest explicitly in mind.

8. Garrett (1996, 302–3).

9. This is, admittedly, a bit of a misrepresentation of the Golden Rule, which proclaims that you should treat others as you would have others treat

you only as test for determining when an action is morally permissible or required; it does not say that the motive for ethical behavior is the hope for reciprocity.

10. *Apology* 25e.

11. *Ethics* IIIp39.

12. *Ethics* IIIp21 and IIIp22s.

13. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XVI.

14. *Ethics* IVp50 and IVp50c.

15. *Ethics* IVp37s1. See also Ep. 23 (to Willem van Blijenburgh), where Spinoza says: "In my *Ethics* (which I have not yet published) I show that this desire [to act justly toward others] necessarily arises in the pious from a clear knowledge which they have of themselves and of God" (G IV.151/C I.389).

16. *Ethics* IIIp27c3s and IVp37s1. Curley translates *pietas* as "morality" (C I.565). As we saw in chapter 6, Spinoza also uses the term "nobility" (*generositas*) for practically the same phenomenon: "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship" (*Ethics* IIIp59s).

17. *Ethics* IVp31.

18. *Ethics* IVp31dem.

19. See Garber (2004, 189). See also Bennett (1984, 300–301), Steinberg (1984), and Della Rocca (2004, 129, 134). Kisner (2011, chap. 7) offers responses to these and other objections on Spinoza's behalf.

20. *Ethics* IVp18s.

21. *Ethics* IVp29dem.

22. For an illuminating analysis of this argument, see Matheron (1969, 261–63).

23. *Ethics* IVp32 and IVp33.

24. *Ethics* IVp34dem.

25. *Ethics* IVp35.

26. *Ethics* IVp36.

27. *Ethics* IVp35dem.

28. *Ethics* IVp35c1 and c2.

29. *Ethics* IVp46.

30. *Ethics* IIIp31.

31. For a thorough analysis of this argument, see Della Rocca (2004).

32. *Ethics* IVp37dem2.

33. *Ethics* IIIp27.

34. Notice that while these two final arguments do involve passive affects strengthening the rational person's own pursuit of virtue, neither implies that in him the *motive* for benevolence (encouraging virtue in others) arises from the imagination or a passive affect. Rather, what happens is that the rational person sees via reason that surrounding himself with other rational virtuous persons will reinforce his own pursuit of virtue.

35. *Ethics* IVp35c2.

36. *Ethics* IVp35s. Spinoza is here obviously putting himself partially at odds with Hobbes, who says in the dedication to *De Cive*—a copy of the Latin edition of which was in Spinoza's library—"I say that each saying is true: man is a God to man, and man is a wolf to man [*homo homini Deus, & homo homini lupus*]" (Hobbes [1782, vi]).

37. However, this rather weak reading may be what is suggested by *Ethics* IVp46: "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."

38. *Ethics* IVp37.

39. Kisner (2011, 142–46) agrees that the motive for rational benevolence in Spinoza is egoistic: the justification for benevolence is that it benefits the agent. But he adds that this does not mean that benevolence is only of instrumental value—valuable solely for its consequences (for example, leading other people to treat the agent with benevolence)—because, he argues, quite convincingly, acting benevolently is *constitutive* of one's own virtue and thus is good in itself (for the agent).

40. Matheron (1969, 270, 273, my translation) agrees that the fundamental motive for altruistic behavior in Spinoza is egoistic: "Reason commands us to think of nothing other than our own personal advantage. . . . When each person is a good egoistic calculator, the common good is *ipso facto* assured. . . . If [a rational person] wishes for an equal increase [in the power] of those who are similar to him, it is solely because of the practical consequences that thereby result for him."

41. *Ethics* IVp18s. Bennett (1984, 306), for one, is not impressed with these propositions of the *Ethics*: "Spinoza fails at every step in his journey towards his collaborative morality."

42. The free person does, however, have a reasonable (and reasoned) expectation of reciprocal benevolent behavior from those whom he has brought to a state of virtue, but this is different from the passion of hope about an event in the future that is uncertain.

43. *Ethics* IIp49sIVc.

44. *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.2, 1155b31–56a5.

45. *Ethics* IIIp59s. Spinoza elsewhere employs yet another term—*honestas*—for "the desire by which a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is bound to join others to him in friendship (IVp37s1). Taking into account my comment in note 16, these items in Spinoza's moral vocabulary can be summarized as follows:

IIIp59s:
fortitudo ("strength of character") = all actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands

animositas ("tenacity") = the desire by which each one strives solely from the dictate of reason to preserve his being
generositas ("nobility") = the desire by which each strives solely from the dictate of reason to aid other men and join them to him in friendship

IVp37s1:
religio ("religion") = whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have an idea of God or insofar as we know God
pietas ("morality") = the desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason
honestas ("being honorable") = the desire by which a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is bound to join others to himself in friendship

It seems that *fortitudo* and *religio* are essentially the same. Similarly, *generositas*, which involves a desire from the dictate of reason both to aid others and to join with them in friendship, appears to amount to a combination of *pietas* and *honestas*.

46. *Ethics* IVp70dem.

47. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XII.

48. One might object to my egoistic reading of Spinoza on the motive for friendship by appealing to just that distinction presented in *Ethics* IIIp59s, discussed earlier, between *animositas* and *nobilitas*. The former, as "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being," seems to be the egoistic virtue, while the latter, as "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship," seems prima face to be the altruistic virtue. After all, just after introducing the distinction, Spinoza notes that "those actions that aim only at the agent's advantage, I relate to tenacity [*animositas*], and those that aim at another's advantage I relate to nobility." This suggests that the virtuous person pursues friendship not "only" for her own sake or advantage, but also for the advantage of the other for the other's sake. Perhaps, then, Spinoza's view is not all that different from Aristotle's: the virtuous person, in pursuit of her own flourishing, also acts for the good of another for the other's own sake.

However, my egoistic reading is consistent with the definition of *nobilitas*, since the egoism I find in Spinoza's rationally virtuous person does not demand that she not act for the advantage of another. On the contrary, this agent is indeed striving to improve the life of another and make him rationally virtuous as well. What my reading does demand, however, is that the virtuous person act for the advantage of another *because* it is to her

advantage to do so. I do not see how Spinoza's virtuous person could not be perfectly aware, with a clear and distinct understanding, of all of those reasons, examined earlier, why it is to her advantage to improve the lives of others, and being thus aware, would not desire to do so *for those reasons*. So the difference between *animositas* and *nobilitas* is not the difference between egoistically motivated behavior and altruistically motivated behavior; rather, it is between egoistically motivated behavior that improves only the agent's life and egoistically motivated behavior that also improves the life of another. Because the person acting from *nobilitas* is "striving solely from the dictate of reason," and the dictate of reason is neatly summed up by Spinoza as the "demand" that "everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can" (IVp18s), it is clear that what is moving this person—who cannot but have the dictate of reason in mind to guide her—to act for the advantage of another is her own advantage.

49. *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.3, 1156b7.

50. *Ethics* IVp71dem.

51. In Ep. 19 (January 5, 1665) to Willem van Blijenbergh, who was certainly not a friend of Spinoza's, he writes: "To me, of the things outside my power, I esteem none more than being allowed the honor of entering into a pact of friendship with people who sincerely love the truth; for I believe that of things outside our power we can love none tranquilly, except such people. Because the love they bear to one another is based on the love each has for knowledge of the truth, it is as impossible to destroy it as not to embrace the truth once it has been perceived. Moreover, it is the greatest and most pleasant that can be given to things outside our power, since nothing but truth can completely unite different opinions and minds" (G IV.87/C I.358–59).

52. In an illuminating article, Lucash (2012, 311–13) also distinguishes between "true" and "ordinary" friendships in Spinoza: in the latter, both parties "receive both benefits (increases in power) and harm (decreases in power) from one another." On my reading, however, while I agree with Lucash that "true friendship can only occur among free people," it is not essential that either party in an imperfect friendship suffers.

53. *Ethics* IVp37s1.

54. My thanks to Don Rutherford for pressing me on this point.

55. *Ethics* IV, Appendix XVII.

56. See *TTP*, chap. XII, G III.165/C II.255, and chap. XV, G III.188/C II.281–82.

57. *Ethics* IVp59.

58. *TTP* XII, G III.165/S 151.

59. *TTP* XIII, G III.170/S 156.
60. TTP XIII, G III.171/S 156.

CHAPTER 9: SUICIDE

1. Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, XV.62–64 (translation from Tacitus [1977, 376]).
2. *De finibus* III.60 (translation from Cicero [1931, 279–81]).
3. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* VII.130 (translation from Diogenes Laertius [2018, 358]).
4. *Ethics* IVp20s.
5. Miller (2005a) wants to distinguish two questions: whether suicide as a rational action is possible, and whether suicide is ever morally justified. But for Spinoza, for whom an act directed by reason is identical to a virtuous action, it seems the two questions collapse into one.
6. It is quite common to interpret Spinoza this way. Thus, Bennett (1984, 240) insists that there is "an error of which [Spinoza] is sometimes guilty—namely, implying that there cannot be a sane suicide." As Bennett reads Spinoza, "it is impossible that someone should actively, voluntarily, rationally, calmly seek" to kill himself. Similarly, Matson says that Spinoza sees suicide as having one thing in common with certain other actions (such as rashness in war or engaging in life-threatening pursuits): their irrationality. For Spinoza, according to Matson (1977, 410), "the suicide is (perhaps temporarily) insane." See also Lloyd (1996, 94). Miller (2005a, 17) argues that "Spinoza maintains that no one chooses to kill himself . . . only for a 'perverted human nature' is suicide a possibility."
7. *Ethics* IVp18s.
8. This seems to be the upshot of what he says in IVp20 and IVp20s. Oddly, however, none of the three examples that Spinoza gives in the scholium is an instance of this. In fact, the first example does not seem to be a case of suicide at all, but rather murder. Similarly, the third example does not seem to be a case of suicide but simply of having one's nature radically changed by external circumstances or by death of any sort (see Gabhart [1999, 624]).
9. Gabhart (1999) argues that Spinoza's claim about suicide renders him incapable of distinguishing suicide from "any other form of death," since all deaths now seem to be simply the result of external forces overcoming an individual's nature. However, the element of voluntariness in the case of suicide may allow Spinoza to distinguish suicide from other types of externally compelled death.
10. A complication for my claim that "a free and rational individual could, with his adequate understanding of himself and of the world, have a deeply informed perception of what the future entails in terms of his

well-being" is *Ethics* IIp30–31, where Spinoza claims that the human mind can have only an inadequate knowledge of the duration of things, including itself and its own body. The pressing question, then, would be whether that "clarity of vision" with which the rationally virtuous person contemplating suicide regards her prospective life can still have the certainty required for a rational decision to end it. However, I do not think that adequate knowledge of my durational existence is necessary for such insight. My thanks to Thomas Colbourne (McGill University) for raising this problem for my reading.

11. *Ethics* IVp21.

12. Ethics IVp66.

13. A suggestion along these lines has been made, but not argued for, by LeBuffe (2005, 191–92), who says that, on Spinozistic grounds, "we may sometimes be better off pursuing a lesser evil that we can attain as opposed to a greater good that we cannot . . . there are cases even in which lying or committing suicide reflect more self-control than the alternative. . . . Indeed, Spinoza's account of suicide at IVp20s suggests that in some very unfortunate circumstances, suicide may be the best sort of action for a person to undertake." (See also LeBuffe [2010, 192–93], where he links this to the case of Seneca.) Bennett (1984, 240), by contrast and taking this as a point on which to criticize Spinoza, says that Spinoza "apparently had a blind spot about this, and just could not see that a person wanting to kill himself may be thinking about how bad it will be for him if he lives." I agree with LeBuffe and am offering argumentation to bolster the claim, but I disagree with Bennett over whether Spinoza did indeed fail to see the possibility of rational suicide.

Miller (2005a, 24), on the topic of honesty, notes that the benefits of treachery may be superseded by the preservation of one's rational virtue (which resolves the tension between *Ethics* IVp72 and the *conatus* doctrine), but he does not take the same approach to Spinoza's view of suicide and so concludes that, for Spinoza (in contrast to the Stoics), suicide cannot be a rational action. Likewise, Lloyd (1996, 94) insists that "Spinoza is repudiating the ethic of noble suicide associated with some of the Stoics."

14. I say "may be" since if such contemplation of a future of decreased power is by way of an adequate idea, it may be not sadness but (as an instance of understanding) joy. My thanks to Karolina Hübner for pointing this out to me.

15. See *Ethics* IIIp13 and IIIp19.

16. *Ethics* IVp68.

17. *Ethics* IVp63c.

18. My thanks to Don Rutherford for posing this problem for my reading. John Grey has objected to an earlier version of my account (Nadler 2015) by insisting that suicide as a free and rational action is impossible for Spinoza because the free person, who acts only by adequate ideas, cannot have an adequate idea of his own death (Grey 2017).

19. *Ethics* IVp65c.

20. *Ethics* IVp20s.

21. *Ethics* IVp20s.

22. Bennett (1984, 237–38) offers a good example to illustrate this point.

23. *Ethics* IVp20s (emphasis mine).

24. Bennett (1984, 238) makes a similar point about Seneca. In Seneca's case, Bennett insists, "the action flowed from his nature," including "his belief that if he did not die that night he would suffer a worse death in the morning." LeBuffe (2005, 192) and Barbone and Rice (1994), on the other hand, disagree and insist that Seneca does not freely kill himself (although LeBuffe seems subsequently to have changed his mind; see LeBuffe [2010, 191–92]). This is also the view of Matson (1977, 410), who concedes that the choice is based on a vision of what the future holds, but insists that this implies that the source of the act lies outside the individual. "A man who kills himself does so because he believes, rightly or wrongly, that extinction is preferable to the miseries the world is going to inflict on him; certainly an external cause." Carriero (2017, 166), too, agrees that, because *conatus* is a striving not merely for continued duration but for perseverance in perfection, suicide *qua* "opting for the lesser evil" (as Seneca does) might be seen as "persevering in being," although Carriero does not explicitly identify this as a "rational" thing to do.

25. For a comparison of Spinoza and the Stoics on suicide, see Miller (2005a).

26. *De finibus* III.18.60–61 (translation from Cicero [1931, 279–81]).

27. *Ethics* IVp67.

28. Grey (2017) insists that Spinoza's free person *cannot* have an adequate idea of his own death.

CHAPTER 10: DEATH

1. Quoted in Israel (1995, 625).

2. Ep. 17, G IV.76/C I.353.

3. Plato, *Apology*, 40c–41a.

4. *Ethics* IVp63.

5. *Ethics* IVp63s.

6. Grey (2017), in fact, insists that the free person *cannot* think about his death, at least not by means of an adequate idea. I am not convinced, however, that this is correct. If the propositions of the *Ethics* count as adequate ideas, then those propositions that demonstrate the finiteness of any human life—and especially IVp3, which says that "the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes"—must constitute for the free person an adequate understanding of his mortality.

7. *Ethics* IVp3.

8. As Deleuze (1981, 40) puts it, in a life guided by the passions "we do not live, we only lead a semblance of life; we can only think of how to keep from dying, and our whole life is a death worship."

9. *Encheiridion*, 21.

10. *Ad Lucilium Epistolae Morales*, Ep. 4, lines 5–9 (translation from Seneca [1979, 15–17]).

11. This appears in reports to the Spanish Inquisition in 1658 by Brother Tomás Solano and Captain Miguel Perez de Maltranilla; see the reports in Révah (1959) and the discussion in Nadler (2001, 29–30).

12. *Letter to Menoecus*.

13. *Ethics* Vp20s.

14. It is a further question as to whether there is something, if not personal, at least *individual* about this eternal part of the mind, something that I can recognize as referential to my durational self. I argue that, in fact, there is not necessarily anything individual about the eternity of the mind, although this may represent a tension in Spinoza's account; see Nadler (2001, chap. 5).

15. Mendelssohn (1983, 123).

16. *Ethics* Vp23.

17. *Ethics* Vp22.

18. *Ethics* Vp38dem.

19. *Ethics* Vp40c.

20. That self-consciousness and memory are connected to a durationally existing body and thus are not features of the eternal mind, see *Ethics* IIp23 and Vp21, respectively. For an illuminating discussion of the two dimensions to the eternity of the mind doctrine, see Garber (2005). For a fuller explanation and defense of the anti-immortality analysis provided here, see Nadler (2001). Not all commentators agree that Spinoza's eternity of the mind doctrine amounts to a rejection of personal immortality; see, for example, Wolfson (1934, II.310–11), Donagan (1974; 1988, chap. 10), Bennett (1984, 375), and Rudavsky (2000, 181–86), among others.

21. *Ethics* Vp38s.

22. *Ethics* Vp38s.

23. *Ethics* Vp34s.

24. *Ethics* Vp42.

25. Garber (2005, 113).

CHAPTER 11: THE RIGHT WAY OF LIVING

1. *Ethics* Vp42s, G II.308/C I.617.

2. *Ethics* IVp17s. Among other experiences, in 1672 Spinoza witnessed an angry mob murder and dismember the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Johan De Witt, and his brother Cornelis, who were accused (falsely) of treason during the war with France.

3. Kant (1996, 61).

4. Kisner (2011, chap. 8), however, among others, argues that the free person is not to be identified with the model of human nature.

5. See, for example, Garrett (1990).

6. See Garrett (1990) and Garber (2004) for versions of this argument. See also, if I read him correctly, Kisner (2011, 113).

7. Rutherford (2008), in fact, argues that for the free person the dictates of reason are not normative at all, but only descriptive of how the free person lives. According to Rutherford, Spinoza draws conclusions about how human beings necessarily act under the influence of reason, not about how they ought to act.

8. See Curley (1973) and Kisner (2011, 118). Kisner argues against Rutherford's reading.

9. *Ethics* IVp18s.

10. LeBuffe (2014) argues that in fact *all* of the dictates of reason, because they are grounded in the common notions, are known to all and basically represent "common sense."

11. This way of dividing the dictates is suggested by Kisner (2011, chap. 6).

12. Kisner (2011, 112). Curley (1973, 371) describes the dictates of reason as, "in Kantian language, hypothetical imperatives with necessary antecedents, and so, in effect categorical imperatives."

13. *TTP* XVI, G III.191/C II.284.

14. *Ethics* IVp54s. On the "virtuous passions" in Spinoza, see Kisner (2008).

15. But not, as I discuss below, with a real—that is, legally or morally binding and thus enforceable—obligation.

16. See *TTP*, XVI, annotation 34.

17. In fact, simply by following the dictates of reason, one is already to that extent "free."

18. *Ethics* Vp10s.

19. Spinoza in fact refers to *Ethics* IVp46 and IVp46s—which describe how "he who lives according to the guidance of reason" behaves—as identical with the first "maxim."

20. *Ethics* Vp10s.

21. *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4, 1105b9–11.

22. Kisner (2011, 118–19) likens the most general dictates of reason to the laws of nature, which are "normative in virtue of our desire to persist in existence and increase our power." He argues that "Spinoza's natural laws, like Hobbes', are essentially descriptive claims that serve as normative principles in virtue of our desires. . . . 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." I am curious, however, why Kisner does not see this reasoning as applying also to the more particular dictates of reason, those that lead the free person to be honest, and so on, since those dictates as well contribute to satisfying the "desire to follow reason" and "to increase our power."

23. Insofar as the adequate ideas of reason are in a person's mind, the dictates of reason must have *some* affective power, and therefore they must carry some motivational force.

24. *TTP* XVI, G III.190/C II.283.

25. Ep. 57, G IV.264/C II.425–26.

26. Spinoza says in his reply that, with respect to "that definition of freedom which he says is mine [i.e., 'what is not determined to something by any cause'] . . . I do not know where he got it from" (Ep. 58, G IV.265/C II.427). Moreover, it is clear that what Tschirnhaus means by 'determined' is not what Spinoza means. For the former, something is determined only if there are causal conditions that are an 'inducement' (his term) to the event or that make it more likely; for Spinoza, determination is a causal necessitation that does not allow for alternatives (which is what Tschirnhaus calls not determination but 'compulsion'). This is why Tschirnhaus can say all things are determined, but not all things are compelled; there are human acts that are determined by antecedent factors but not compelled, and thus free because they could have been otherwise.

27. Of course, if what Tschirnhaus is asking is whether it is possible to act virtuously if we are *always* efficaciously compelled and determined by external things, then Spinoza would agree that it is not.

28. Ep. 58, G IV.267/C II.430.

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INDEX

Note: Some terms and concepts central to Spinoza's moral philosophy appear regularly throughout the book. These include: reason, virtue, joy, knowledge, freedom, the free person, adequate and inadequate ideas, affect, passion and *conatus*. These items receive page indexing only when it is a matter of either their first presentation or special treatment.