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FREEDOM, ACTION, AND MOTIVATION IN SPINOZA'S *ETHICS*

Edited by
Noa Naaman-Zauderer

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Abbreviations

Descartes's Works

AT	*Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 12 vols. Paris: Vrin, 1964-1976.
CSM	*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1985.
CSMK	*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge University Press, 1991.
Passions	*Les Passions de l'Ame (Passions of the Soul)*
Principles	*Principia Philosophiae (Principles of Philosophy)*

AT, CSM, and CSMK are cited by volume and page number. *Principles* is cited by part and article number, and Passions is cited by article number.

Spinoza's Works

C	*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016.
CGH	*Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae (Compendium of Hebrew Grammar)*
CM	*Cogitata Metaphysica (Metaphysical Thoughts)*, Spinoza's appendix to his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy (Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae, Pars I et II, More Geometrico demonstratae)*
DPP	*Renati Descartes Principiorum Philosophiae (Descartes's Principles of Philosophy)*
Ep.	*Epistolae* (Spinoza's Letters)
G	

	Spinoza Opera, 4 vols., ed. Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.
KV	*Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch, en deszelfs Welstand (Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being)*
Letters	*Spinoza: The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Morgan, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.
S	*Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.
TIE	*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione (Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect)*
TP	*Tractatus Politicus (Political Treatise)*
TTP	*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Theological-Political Treatise)*

References to Spinoza's *Ethics* first cite the Part, and then use the following abbreviations:

ax	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
d	demonstration
D	definition
DA	Definition of the Affects
exp	explanation
le	lemma
p	proposition
post	postulate
pref	preface
s	scholium

Letters and S are cited by page number, and C is cited by volume and page number. G is cited by volume and page numbers, and sometimes by line number. KV and CM are cited by part and chapter number, TIE is cited by section number, TTP is cited by chapter and page number, TP is cited by chapter and section number, and CGH is cited by chapter number. Spinoza's Letters are cited by letter number.

1 Introduction

Noa Naaman-Zauderer

In volume 2 of his work *The Great Philosophers*, the German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers introduces what he takes to be the crux of Spinoza's philosophical project:

> The crucial problem is freedom. The contradiction in Spinoza seems unbridgeable. He denies freedom and asserts it. His whole philosophy is based on freedom. In thought and work and practice, his ethos aims at the promotion of freedom. The solution lies in the different meaning of freedom.
>
> (1974, 51)

Besides its emphasis on the pivotal role that freedom plays in Spinoza's philosophical ethos "in thought and work and practice," Jaspers's comment points to a duality in Spinoza's approach to freedom that may well be taken to bring to the surface a typical ambivalence in his attitude toward the new philosophical spirit of his day. Descartes – "the brightest star" of the intellectual heavens of the seventeenth century, to use Lodewijk Meyer's phrasing (G I 128/25, C1 226) – was the first modern thinker who advanced the merit of freedom as the highest virtue and the highest good for which we should strive as an independent end in both the theoretical and the practical spheres (Naaman-Zauderer 2010). Spinoza rejects the new ideal of the early modern era by dismissing the very idea of free will or free choice, and the related Cartesian view of human beings in nature as if exempt from its necessary laws by their godlike freedom of choice. Yet at the same time and with equal rigor, Spinoza follows his Cartesian predecessor in promoting freedom in his own peculiar sense of the term, making it the ground for the whole edifice of his *Ethics* as well as its ultimate goal. The difference in Spinoza's and Descartes's respective conceptions of freedom is thus as evident as their common conviction that freedom or activity is the highest of all human ethical goals in both the theoretical and the practical realms. The presence of these two opposing trends in Spinoza's approach to freedom resides in almost every work he has written but is most clearly and systematically manifest in the *Ethics*, his philosophical

masterpiece demonstrated in geometric order (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*).

Spinoza's *Ethics* is one of the boldest and most systematic attempts in the history of modern philosophy to confront the question of the encounter between the finite and the infinite. The account of freedom or activity that this work provides is perhaps the most prominent manifestation of this attempt. The present collection posits the themes of freedom, action, and motivation as the central principles that drive Spinoza's *Ethics* from its first part to its last. The infinite freedom or causal power of God *or* Nature that Part 1 of the *Ethics* establishes, as well as the ways in which this power manifests itself through its infinitely many modes, form the staple and the guiding principle of the rest of the work. As the brief preface to Part 2 indicates, the highest form of freedom or activity available to human beings, which Spinoza equates with blessedness, is the ultimate end to which the entire *Ethics* is directed. God's infinite activity or freedom is thus the sole and immanent ground not only of the necessity to which each singular thing is subject but also of the limited degree of freedom, activity, or causal power that constitutes each singular thing's actual essence.

The conception of the human mind as the idea of the human body that Part 2 of the *Ethics* provides sets the ground for a new understanding of the human affects and the nature of action in Part 3, in terms of the essential striving (*conatus*) of every singular thing to persevere in being. Spinoza's theory of the affects is the main locus of his account of human action and motivation. It explains how changes in the body's and the mind's power of striving – changes that form our emotional apparatus – shape our judgments of things as valuable to us and determine us to action. While clearly adhering to the new mechanistic science of his age, Spinoza's account of the affects breaks with the traditional passion-action dichotomy in various significant ways. The boundary separating active and passive affects does not overlap with the split between the mind and the body as in the Cartesian account of the passions. Given Spinoza's parallelism and the mind-body union, this division hinges on whether the change in the mind's and the body's power of acting is internally determined (in which case, it is an active affect or an action) or externally caused (and in this case, it is a passion). This account paves the way for Spinoza's ethical theory in Part 4, whose main focus is the analysis of the human bondage to passions – our lack of power to moderate and restrain the passions – and the relative degree of rational freedom we can attain by acting from the law of our own nature. Although human beings, as finite modes, can never be the causes of their own existence and are, as "part of nature," always acted on by external forces (4p2–4), we can, to some extent, be active or free – to the extent to which we produce effects that follow from and are explainable through our own essential power or

striving alone, which is precisely the extent to which we act from adequate knowledge. The ethical dimension of human freedom leads to its equality with virtue as they both consist in bringing about effects explainable through one's own power or nature alone. Part 5 of the *Ethics* begins with various techniques and means to enhance our rational freedom from passions; it then proceeds, in its last section, to the account of the mind's ultimate and highest form of freedom or blessedness – the culmination of the entire work.

On these grounds, it is surprising that the precise meaning of Spinoza's notions of freedom, activity, or action, as well as the pivotal role these notions play in his *Ethics*, have not been until recently at the forefront of the vast scholarly literature dealing with this monumental work. The last decade has exposed a growing interest within Anglo-American scholarship in Spinoza's conception of freedom and the human servitude to passions. Notably, the recent significant contributions of scholars such as Michael LeBuffe (2010), Matthew J. Kisner (2011), and Eugene Marshall (2013), among others, have enhanced our vision of Spinoza's thinking on these matters. Yet the issue is still relatively understudied; fundamental questions concerning the precise nature of these notions are still waiting to be addressed, and others remain highly controversial.

The present volume aims to fill this need. It brings together ten original contributions by internationally distinguished scholars who provide different, sometimes opposing interpretations of Spinoza's views of freedom, action, and motivation as they operate in each and every part of the *Ethics*, and within its manifold domains: ontology, epistemology, physics, action theory, moral psychology, ethics and meta-ethics, social philosophy, and finally the theory of the mind's ultimate freedom in the third kind of knowledge. The sequence of the chapters in this volume broadly follows the order of the *Ethics*. Each chapter develops its own cluster of issues but is at the same time integral to the general theme of the entire book. The main objective is thus neither to offer a comprehensive survey of Spinoza's view of freedom and activity in general, as operating in his entire corpus, nor to refer to all aspects of his *Ethics*. Rather, this volume provides a diverse array of up-to-date perspectives on the *Ethics* when read through the prism of Spinoza's views of freedom, action, and motivation in their ontological, cognitive, physical, affective, and ethical facets.

The common focus of the chapters in this volume is intended to enable readers to be engaged with a wide variety of new interpretations of these fundamental themes and to reconsider their consequences for other related issues in the *Ethics* and the threads unifying the entire work. We hope this multiperspectival orientation will shed a plurality of fresh and new lights on the issues at stake and will encourage further reflections on various passages within the *Ethics* itself. Moreover, some of the chapters in this volume prove the

relevance of Spinoza's *Ethics* to contemporary trends in philosophy of action and motivation. Our aspiration is that this collection will contribute to the growing interest in Spinoza's *Ethics* and spark further discussion and debate within and outside the vast body of scholarship on this important work.

The special relevance of Spinoza's *Ethics* to present-day debates in philosophy of action is acutely manifested in Michael Della Rocca's "Steps toward Eleaticism in Spinoza's Philosophy of Action," the opening chapter of this volume. Della Rocca powerfully shows how Spinoza's philosophy of action undermines and eventually transcends the contemporary debate over the nature of action by rejecting its core and taken-for-granted presuppositions. Della Rocca's key insight, which he establishes throughout the chapter by a close reading of the relevant passages in the *Ethics*, is that Spinoza's treatment of action leads to what he calls "the Parmenidean Ascent," according to which "there are no differentiated actions and there is at most one action, the action that is – and is of – the whole." Della Rocca opens his chapter by articulating in the form of two main questions the explanatory demand that drives recent and contemporary debates over action: the first question concerns how actions are to be differentiated from non-actions, and the second concerns how actions are to be differentiated from other actions. Della Rocca identifies and considers two different types of answer given to these questions by current and recent philosophy of action, whose leading representatives are, respectively, Donald Davidson and G. E. M. Anscombe. Della Rocca then compellingly shows how both types of answer ultimately fail to address the explanatory demand they themselves posit. It is at this point that Spinoza's philosophy takes on its full relevance. In showing us how to challenge the presuppositions of the debate, Della Rocca argues, Spinoza opens the way for progress in the philosophy of action. Spinoza's account of action rejects the first guiding question – that of how actions are to be differentiated from non-actions – by denying one of its presuppositions, namely, that there are non-actions and that there is a distinction between actions and non-actions, whose basis is to be articulated. Della Rocca offers strong textual evidence suggesting that, for Spinoza, action is pervasive. Given that to be active or to act – even to act for a reason or with an intention, as Della Rocca argues – is simply to exert causal power, and given that a thing's causal power is identical with its actual essence, activity and being emerge as one and the same thing. God or substance itself is nothing but God's activity taken as a whole, and so everything – both God and its modes (inasmuch as they express God's power) – is an action, that is, an exhibition of some causal power. The pervasiveness of action in and of nature, Della Rocca argues, entails that non-action has no place in the world. He then goes on to explain how Spinoza rejects the second question as well – that of how actions are to be

differentiated from other actions – by denying distinctions among actions as unintelligible and non-real. On his reading, regardless of whether an action is a complete (adequate) or partial (inadequate) cause of its effect, limited, differentiated actions cannot inhere in God and are therefore neither intelligible nor real. Della Rocca concludes that in rejecting both these questions, Spinoza makes a "Parmenidean Ascent" that rules out distinctions between differentiated actions and between actions and mere events. Della Rocca closes his chapter with some reflections on interpretive controversies and methods of interpretation in the face of conflicting textual evidence and a diversity of strands within a single corpus or philosophical work.

In sharp contrast to Della Rocca's Parmenidean reading of action, though with a few surprising points of agreement, Matthew J. Kisner, in his "Spinoza's Activities: Freedom without Independence," offers an original interpretation of the nature of activity in Spinoza's *Ethics* when applied to human beings. Most scholars tend to assume that Spinoza defines human action and activity in terms of adequate causation, that is, as consisting in causal and conceptual independence. For Kisner, by contrast, Spinoza employs two distinct yet closely connected notions of human activity, of which only the first consists in adequate causation. Activity in the first sense, which forms Spinoza's definition of action (3D2), consists in being an adequate cause and thus in being the sole causal and conceptual source of a certain effect. Yet, according to Kisner, Spinoza's *conatus* theory allows for another notion of activity, which consists in one's essential striving to persevere in being (3p6, 3p7). In equating our striving with our actual "power of acting" (*potentia agendi*), Kisner contends, Spinoza recognizes that striving necessarily involves activity. Yet on Kisner's reading, Spinoza does not equate a thing's degree of striving or power with the extent to which this striving is productive or efficacious in bringing about effects *on its own*. Rather, a thing is active in the second, broader sense to the extent to which it exercises causal power, irrespective of whether this striving is causally and conceptually sufficient for the production of a certain effect and regardless of whether one's endeavor to produce the effect is successful. This leads Kisner to argue that, though being an adequate cause is itself a kind of striving, things can strive (and thus be active in the second sense) without being adequate causes when they are only partial causes of effects. Drawing on these two basic kinds of activity, Kisner goes on to show how Spinoza's other notions of activity, such as freedom, virtue, and perfection, are also bifurcated into two groups: those requiring activity of adequacy and those requiring only activity of striving. Whereas the common view regards a person's degree of freedom, virtue, and perfection as equivalent to this person's degree of causal and conceptual independence with regard to some effects, Kisner claims that these notions of activity all consist in

striving and are therefore not restricted to such independence. For, besides activity of adequacy, human freedom, virtue, and perfection include other instances of striving to persevere and to increase one's power, which do not involve causal independence. This enables Kisner to show how activity in the broader sense includes cases of passivity and is therefore not identical with acting and with forming adequate ideas. Whereas acting and knowing consists exclusively in adequate causation, activity of striving includes cases of passivity and allows for things to be passively active. Such passive activity occurs when a thing cooperates with other forces in bringing about effects or when it undergoes exogenous effects (as in passive joy and its variants). Kisner concludes by explaining the significant bearings of his reading on how we should view Spinoza's main ethical goals. Rather than independence per se, he says, it is activity of striving that Spinoza counts as intrinsically valuable, which includes instances of causal dependence.

The next two chapters concern Spinoza's account of the primary affects in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, with a special emphasis on the ways in which this account deepens our understanding of his philosophy of mind. In "Descartes and Spinoza on the Primitive Passions: Why So Different?," Lisa Shapiro situates Spinoza's account of the primary affects in its historical context in order to undertake the broader task of showing how taxonomies of primitive or primary passions highlight structural features of a philosopher's account of cognition or thought and how shifts in these taxonomies reflect substantial differences in a philosopher's conception of mind from that of his predecessors. Central to her discussion, specifically, is a puzzle in Spinoza's account of the primary affects – his shift from adopting Descartes's list of six primitive passions in the *Short Treatise* to the three primary affects he marks in the *Ethics*: joy (*laetitia*), sadness (*tristitia*), and desire (*cupiditas*). To explore the philosophical motivation behind this shift, Shapiro explores Spinoza's later account of the primary affects vis-à-vis Descartes's taxonomy of the primitive passions in the *Passions of the Soul*, which she, in turn, analyzes against the background of Descartes's diversion from the taxonomy of Aquinas. After having carefully examined the Cartesian and the Thomist taxonomies, Shapiro shows how the differences between the two treatments of the primitive passions reflect substantial differences between these philosophers' respective conceptions of cognition. According to Shapiro, whereas Aquinas's taxonomy indicates his conception of how cognition conforms to essential features of the objects in the world, the primitive passions within Descartes's taxonomy highlight essential structural features of our representations of the world, which are essential features of experience. Drawing on Denis Kambouchner's (1995) emphasis on how Descartes's enumeration of the passions follows our experience of them as actions of the

mind (that is, as representations taken formally), Shapiro proceeds to inquire into the precise ways in which each primitive passion functions within Descartes's account of representation and thought, and how Descartes's shift from Aquinas's taxonomy reflects the change in his own conception of thought from that of Aquinas. Shapiro's careful analysis allows her to propose a new account of Spinoza's shift from the *Short Treatise* to his taxonomy in the *Ethics* in light of his critique of Descartes's conception of cognition. Here, she points to an essential difference between Descartes's and Spinoza's approaches to consciousness within their respective notions of thought. While Descartes considers consciousness an intrinsic feature of thought, for Spinoza, thinking is intrinsically representational but is not intrinsically conscious. Shapiro's discussion sheds considerable new light on how this and other fundamental differences between the two conceptions of thought underlie Spinoza's dismissal of wonder as an affect and his denial of the primacy of love and hatred, and how each of the three affects he considers primary has a distinctive function and role within his own account of mind.

Whereas Lisa Shapiro focuses on how Spinoza's theory of the primary affects illuminates his view of the basic structure of thought, John Carriero, in his "Spinoza on the Primary Affects," concentrates on the way in which Spinoza's theory of the primary affects enriches our understanding of the mind's relation to the body. Carriero begins with an in-depth account of the *conatus* of the mind: what the mind's basic drive exactly is, what would count as a conflict among ideas or minds that would diminish or thwart each other's striving to persevere, and how the content and the quality of the mind's cognition is related to the body's power of acting. According to Carriero, a singular thing's *conatus* – whether a tree, a hurricane, or a human mind – is not simply an endeavor to remain in existence, as many have assumed (at least with regard to non-human beings), but instead a striving to maximize its own reality or power. This enables Carriero to explain Spinoza's transition from a characterization of the mind's *conatus* as a striving whose first and principal tendency is to affirm the existence of the body (3p10d) to its characterization as an endeavor to increase its own power of thinking. Carriero argues that through "affirming" the existence of the body, the mind acquires the subject matter for its thought and its unique perspective on the world. Carriero then proceeds to show how the body's passage to a greater causal power – which he further articulates in terms of the strength and flow of its *ratio* (and, in the case of human beings, in terms of the flow of motion in the brain) – is related to the mind's passage to a greater understanding of itself and the world that it cognizes through that body. On this basis, Carriero develops an original treatment of the nature and working of the three primary affects and of how they are embedded in the architecture of the

human being. In particular, Carriero explicates the difference between *conatus* and desire through Spinoza's principle that the mind lacks an immediate cognition of its body itself, except through the ideas of the body's affections. Following Guéroult, Carriero argues that the mind's cognition of itself is not of the idea that the mind *is* (namely, the idea of the body *simpliciter*) but rather its cognition of the ideas that the mind *has* (which are ideas of the affections of its body). In desire, accordingly, what the mind is conscious of, according to Carriero, is not its own appetite or striving to persevere per se but rather particular affections or determinations of it. On his reading, moreover, joy and sadness are not to be identified with the transitions themselves (increase or decrease) in the body's and the mind's causal power, as scholars usually assert, but instead with the affections that cause these transitions. Carriero closes his chapter by considering some implications of his reading for the understanding of Spinoza's distance from hedonism, his denial of the primacy of love and hatred among the affects, and his rejection of teleology.

In her chapter, "Affectivity and Cognitive Perfection," Lilli Alanen addresses difficulties in reconciling Spinoza's non-teleological, naturalistic account of the affects with the kind of self-emancipation he advances through adequate knowledge. To make Spinoza's moral psychology consistent with his ethical goals, as Alanen maintains, many commentators tend to commit him to an extreme rationalism or intellectualism that promotes the exercise of reason for the sake of understanding alone. For Alanen, by contrast, Spinoza's naturalism is to be read along Aristotelian lines as stressing, besides cognitive perfection, the practical role of reason and rational activity. To establish this, Alanen provides an analysis of the mind-body union and the role of the body in the mind's affectivity and activity. She considers, first, how an increase in the mind's knowledge of its body is related to an increase in the mind's knowledge of itself qua idea, given the conceptual independence between the attributes. For Alanen, as for Carriero, the key to understanding Spinoza's moral psychology and ethical theory is his two-dimensional account of the mind's *conatus*. Qua idea, as Alanen points out, our mind strives to increase its own power of thinking or understanding and thereby enhance its share in the infinite intellect of God. Qua the idea of an actually existing body, the mind's first and principal striving is to maintain and affirm the existence of its body, of which it is conscious only by sensing or imagining its affections. This distinction allows Alanen to provide new solutions to some interpretive puzzles concerning Spinoza's distinction between active and passive affects, which she analyzes first in relation to the mind-body union and then in relation to the mind alone. Alanen ultimately argues that Spinoza's ethical project draws on a related distinction between two senses of human action or activity. When referred to the mind alone – as in Part

5 of the *Ethics*, whose main objective is to show the way leading us to salvation – human actions consist in thinking or understanding per se. When referred to the mind as the idea of the body and thus to the mind-body composite, human activity includes practical action that requires concurring external causes that render us only partial (inadequate) causes of their effects. To the extent that our mind can be considered an adequate cause, Alanen concludes, its activity is restrained to the former sense alone and, to that extent, in the strict sense, it is not our activity but God's or Nature's. Yet we can still be agents in a relative sense, to the extent that our actions – of which we are only partial causes – conform with God's in being governed by reason.

In his contribution to this volume, "Deciding What to Do: The Relation of Affect and Reason in Spinoza's *Ethics*," Donald Rutherford elegantly complements Alanen's chapter by taking on the challenge of showing how and to what extent Spinoza's naturalistic theory of action can coherently sustain the normative dimension of his ethical theory and, in particular, how it can allow for the possibility of human beings to deliberately guide themselves to pursue the right way of living. Rutherford does this by proposing an incisive interpretation of Spinoza's treatment of the affects in terms of their cognitive, motivational, and evaluative features, and by showing how the theory of action and practical reason that this treatment implies meets the demands of his normative ethics. According to Rutherford, in dismissing traditional models of human agency and the idea of free will, Spinoza does not rule out the idea of deliberative practical reason but instead leaves room for an account of human beings as rational agents who deliberate about alternative courses of action and decide to act in pursuit of objects they represent as good. Spinoza's theory of the affects, as Rutherford interprets it, provides revisionary notions of decision (*decretum*) and will (*voluntas*) that play an effective role in the explanation of human action. On Rutherford's reading, Spinoza's peculiar notion of decision denotes a mental assent to the doing of an action that entails a commitment to pursue a certain course of action rather than another, in accordance with the object of one's desire. While Part 2 of the *Ethics* demonstrates that doxastic volitions – affirmations and negations – are nothing over and above what is already present in our ideas, the account of the affects in Part 3 of the *Ethics* focuses on the role of the will and decision in the determination of action and involves cognitive, motivational, and evaluative elements. In at least some instances, as Rutherford maintains, human action is accompanied by a decision – a commitment to pursue the object of a desire determined by an affect – provided that no competing action makes a stronger claim on us. Thus, the primary affect of joy involves the mind's affirmation of the body's increase in power, a striving to sustain that increase in power, and a normative judgment

that this state and whatever promotes it is beneficial or good and is thus to be pursued. Rutherford closes his chapter by distinguishing two complementary roles that reason plays in the evaluation and determination of action. Qua abstract and universal knowledge, he contends, reason informs us in general of the kind of things that are good or bad for us, depending on whether they increase or decrease our power of acting. But to inform us of what we actually *ought* to do and to dispose us to act under the guidance of reason, the ideas of reason must generate desires in us by taking the form of active affects – adequate representations of changes in the body's power of acting – provided that no stronger countervailing desires deflect our behavior.

In line with the two previous chapters, Julie R. Klein's "Materializing Spinoza's Account of Human Freedom" proposes another reason to challenge the current understanding of Spinoza as a pure rationalist or intellectualist who views the pursuit of freedom and ethical perfection as a purely intellectual affair. Klein's chapter sheds light on the role of the body in Spinoza's account of freedom, with a further focus on the sociability and the political dimension of human cultivation, which she interprets as part of the material conditions of freedom. Klein begins with a discussion of Spinoza's break with the Cartesian ideas of free will, especially with the larger tradition of Christian metaphysical psychology, and its replacement with the *conatus* theory. She then offers an analysis of Spinoza's rearticulation of will, affection, determination, and action in terms of *conatus*, in both its mental and its material aspects, which enables her to show how his view has more in common with the non-dualistic medieval Jewish and Islamic Aristotelians than with Latin tradition and Christian metaphysical psychology. On this basis, Klein explores the destructive and constructive effects of our imaginative experience and its inevitable role in our cognitive and ethical growth. Given Spinoza's denial of transcendence and teleology, as she claims, sense experience and imagination do not inevitably lead to health, knowledge, or freedom, and human passivity, bondage, and inadequacy are as natural as activity, freedom, and adequacy. Yet, as Klein goes on to maintain, although imagined pleasures are real pleasures and may lead us to genuine goods and so to reason, these constructive imaginative desires still leave something to be desired – which is activity itself. While the *Ethics* provides practices and means by which we come to desire what is truly useful to us and enhance our power of acting, Spinoza views imagination as social, and hence political, rather than strictly individual. On these grounds, Klein shows how the identification of things that are genuinely useful is simultaneously epistemic, medical or scientific, and political. She shows further how the communicative structure of our imaginative affects, whose leading principle is imitation, shapes our desires for self-preservation and for enhancement of power. Klein closes her chapter

with a survey of the various uses Spinoza makes of the term "salvation" (*salus*) in both the *Ethics* and his other works, with a special focus on its theological, political, and medical senses that include success of the commonwealth considered as basic biological well-being, security or safety, physical health, and well-being through philosophical knowledge. According to Klein, even in the last section of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza considers the mind "without relation to the body," his account of the mind's salvation, blessedness, and intellectual love of God does not deny the existence of the body but only leaves it out of consideration, in accord with the changing forms of our cognition. In associating salvation with *gloria*, Klein concludes, Spinoza invokes the medieval Jewish philosophical commentary tradition, according to which the paramount state of intellectual activity is intimately integrated with bodily activity and the socio-political realm.

Another controversial aspect of Spinoza's theory of action and normative ethics concerns the metaphysical status of good and bad, and the role they play in the account of human motivation and action. The dependence of value judgments on human desires is most clearly articulated in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza famously asserts that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (3p9s). Although this and other related passages in the *Ethics* may seem to commit Spinoza to a subjectivist approach to values, according to which the good depends on our varying desires, later passages in the *Ethics* invite a more nuanced understanding of his view. In "Spinoza's Values: Joy, Desire, and Good in the *Ethics*," Steven Nadler supports a non-subjectivist reading of Spinoza's account of good and bad, and he sheds considerable new light on how good as a value relates to passion and desire in Spinoza's *Ethics*. According to the different versions of the subjectivist interpretation, as Nadler maintains, something's being good is nothing but a matter of opinion, a human "construction," an expression of desire. Nadler argues that, on the contrary, the evaluative qualities of good and bad are for Spinoza objective and (in a sense) mind-independent, albeit non-intrinsic and relational, features of things. Throughout the chapter, Nadler offers instructive distinctions between the variety of statements that Spinoza makes about good and bad in the *Ethics* and shows how they do not all apply to the same thing. Whereas some of Spinoza's statements concern the normative ethical question of what the goodness or badness of things actually is, other statements concern the meta-ethical question of what makes us judge something to be good, and yet others refer to the moral-epistemological question of how we come to know that something is good. On Nadler's reading, what makes something good in the most basic sense is not that it is the object of

someone's desire but rather that it causes an increase in that individual's power of acting. Correlatively, something is bad if it is the cause of a negative affect in an individual, that is, of a decrease in that individual's power. And what makes something good in the truest and fullest sense of the term, Nadler argues, is that it so improves the power of an individual as to bring it closer to the ideal condition of its nature, which is – in the case of human beings – the "exemplar of human nature" (*naturae humanae exemplar*). Being good or bad is thus, according to Nadler, a completely relational feature, a function of the causal relationship a thing bears to something else. Thus, as all other law-governed relationships in nature, goodness and badness, though not intrinsic qualities of things, are nonetheless objective and mind-independent matters of fact. Nadler closes his chapter by showing how, on Spinoza's psychology of the affects, whatever causes joy in a person is necessarily the object of that person's desire. Desire is thus *both* a necessary component of the objective state of affairs in which a thing's goodness consists for some person *and* the ground for that person's judgment about the thing's goodness. Yet what makes a thing good is that it causes an increase in one's power, even though it also causes in that individual a desire for it.

In discussing Spinoza's notions of freedom, activity, and action, most scholars tend to focus on the kind of freedom arising from reason, both theoretical and practical, and thus on Parts 3 and 4 of the *Ethics* and the first half of Part 5. What Spinoza calls "freedom of mind," which he identifies with blessedness, salvation, and intellectual love of God in the concluding section of the *Ethics*, has typically not been part of the discussion of his view of freedom. In "Spinoza on Human Freedoms and the Eternity of the Mind," Noa Naaman-Zauderer brings to focus this relatively neglected aspect of Spinoza's account of freedom – intuitive or intellectual freedom – which she views as categorically different from rational freedom and as deserving of separate treatment. To establish this reading, she first analyzes Spinoza's account of rational freedom in terms of adequate causation and then proceeds to show how the second and the third kinds of knowledge, on which the two kinds of freedom are founded, differ from one another in kind (*generis*) and not merely in degree, in both their objects and their intrinsic features. Naaman-Zauderer further shows how the difference between reason and intuition with respect to their objects is inseparably linked to categorical differences in their intrinsic features and procedures. Whereas reason, having common notions as antecedents, is conceptual in the sense that its objects fall under general kinds, intuition qua "cognition of singular things" is, according to Naaman-Zauderer, essentially experiential, non-conceptual, and non-inferential, having an immediate access to the unique essences of its singular objects. On this basis, Naaman-Zauderer proceeds to explain the

distinctive character of intuitive freedom. She first shows how the experiential and non-conceptual nature of intuitive self-knowledge is crucial for the mind's sense of ultimate freedom while perceiving itself sub specie aeternitatis, and thus "through God's essence," and how intuitive freedom, blessedness, and intellectual love of God consist in the mind's ability to experience itself apart from the body with which it is united. Naaman-Zauderer proposes textual evidence indicating that this ability allows the mind to immediately experience its own essence or power of thinking not only as a finite share of God's infinite intellect, as in rational freedom, but also, in some sense, as united with the divine and hence as divinely free and eternal in the strict sense of 1D7 and 1D8, respectively. But given that God is the only being whose essence involves existence, how can a finite mind experience itself as divinely free and eternal without thereby incurring a state of error typical of the first kind of knowledge? The key to understanding this enigma, Naaman-Zauderer argues, is Spinoza's invocation of the scholastic-Cartesian distinction between the formal and the objective reality of ideas. For Descartes, ideas differ from one another only in their objective reality, in accordance with the formal reality they represent, whereas in their formal reality, "there is no recognizable inequality among them." For Spinoza, likewise, as Naaman-Zauderer suggests, only when conceiving itself in its formal reality as a pure thinking activity and without relation to its object can the mind legitimately consider itself to be possessing the same degree of formal reality and activity as does God considered under the attribute of Thought. Thus, by releasing itself from the awareness of the body and the individual personality it imposes while conceiving itself formally, the mind legitimately experiences its own thinking activity as divinely real, eternal, and free.

Given Spinoza's anti-anthropomorphic conception of God *or* Nature and his theory of the affects, it is no surprise to find him insisting that, strictly speaking, God is not affected with any affect of joy or sadness, and that God neither loves nor hates anyone (5p17c). Nonetheless, the culmination of his *Ethics*, the notion of *amor Dei intellectualis*, does involve the idea of God's love of himself and of human beings. In "The Enigma of Spinoza's *Amor Dei Intellectualis*," Yitzhak Y. Melamed addresses this difficulty and considers various ways in which it may and may not be resolved. He begins with a careful consideration of various apparent inconsistencies in Spinoza's conception of divine intellectual love and then turns to discuss two possible preliminary solutions that one might be tempted to endorse. The first solution explains Spinoza's notion of divine love as a mere rhetorical gesture targeted at appeasing traditional readers; the second explains this notion as applying only to God considered as *Natura naturata* and not to God qua *Natura naturans*. Both solutions are lacking, according to

Melamed, either because they fail to capture the important positive content that Spinoza seems to be conveying here or because they fail to sit comfortably with other important passages in the *Ethics*. To reach a more satisfactory account of Spinoza's theory of divine intellectual love, Melamed provides a close examination of Spinoza's definitions of the primary affects and then proceeds to reconstruct the characteristics of the complex affects. The passion of love, he maintains, turns out to be a state of the mind (and the body) that cannot be fully explained through one's own mind alone, a state by which one's mind passes to a greater perfection and is accompanied by the idea of a cause external to it. On this basis, Melamed goes on to elucidate the way in which Spinoza applies these affects to God in the concluding section of the *Ethics.* He shows how, in order to satisfy the "improvement condition" of love, as he terms it (i.e., the mind's passage to a greater perfection), Spinoza supplements the component of joy with an equivalent notion of blessedness. Yet in order for love to be applicable to God, as Melamed maintains, Spinoza stipulates a complete inversion of the two remaining conditions of ordinary love – the explanatory dependence and the external causation conditions. Given that God's love is fully explained through God's idea or infinite intellect, this love is an action, not a passion. And given that the object of an intellectual love must be an internal cause, God's love is accompanied by the idea of himself as its cause. Melamed closes his chapter with a discussion of Spinoza's notion of "love of esteem" (*gloria*) – a species of joy accompanied by the *imagined* idea of oneself as its cause – and opposes it to "self-esteem" (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), which Spinoza defines in Part 3 of the *Ethics* as "joy accompanied by the idea of an internal cause" (3p30s) and which he later identifies with intellectual love.

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2 Steps toward Eleaticism in Spinoza's Philosophy of Action

Michael Della Rocca

1 The Unmet Explanatory Demand

The great and fundamental question in the philosophy of action is simply "What is action?" What is it in virtue of which such things as my singing the song "One" from *A Chorus Line* or my running across the street are actions and not mere events? Philosophy of action seeks to investigate the *nature* of actions, what it is that makes it the case that something is an action.[1]

Among the forms that this explanatory demand can take are two questions:

a What is it in virtue of which actions are differentiated from non-actions?

By "non-actions" I mean, *inter alia*, events, such as a ball's rolling downhill or a raindrop's falling, as opposed to actions, such as my splashing you with water. The second question is:

b What is it in virtue of which one action is differentiated from other actions?

Specific versions of this second question include: in virtue of what is an action of one type different from an action of another type? In virtue of what is an action mine as opposed to yours? And in virtue of what are certain actions of mine different from other actions of mine?

In recent and contemporary philosophy of action, there have been two broad and broadly different categories of answer to these questions, which seek to shed light on how actions can be differentiated in these ways. Thus, Donald Davidson and his followers adopt the so-called causal theory of action.[2] According to this approach, of which there are many varieties, actions are events that – while not intrinsically or by their very nature actions – achieve this status by virtue of causal relations of an appropriate kind to mental states, such as beliefs and desires, and intentions with certain contents. These mental

states are seen as reasons for the action. For a causal theorist, actions are distinct from non-actions because only actions and not mere events enter into the causal relations characteristic of actions. And actions are differentiated from other actions because of the different mental states that cause the different actions.

G. E. M. Anscombe takes a rather different approach. She and her followers do not or need not deny that actions enter into causal relations with mental states and with other events, but this understanding of action does not make causal relations central to what it is to be an action. Instead, items that are actions, intrinsically and by their very nature, are actions and are caught up in the life of an agent. On such a view, actions differ from non-actions not because of any extrinsic causal relations that the actions bear to mental states; rather, the actions differ from non-actions because they are inherently active, and the non-actions are not, and because the actions are, by their nature, such that it is appropriate to ask for what reason the action was performed. Similarly, actions are differentiated from other actions in virtue of the reasons that those actions may intrinsically manifest.[3]

While each approach has many proponents, each has also come in for substantial criticism. A key worry for a Davidsonian view is the famous problem of deviant causal chains, a problem raised by Davidson himself and many others, and one that (*pace* Michael Smith, Christopher Peacocke, et al.)[4] shows no signs of being resolved. The difficulty arises because an event's being an action is due to its standing in some causal relation to other items, such as beliefs and desires. The externality of this relation inevitably leaves room for unanticipated causal intermediaries between the relevant mental states and the event that is to be an action. Thus, to use an example offered by Harry Frankfurt,

> [A] man at a party intends to spill what is in his glass because he wants to signal to his confederates to begin a robbery and he believes, in virtue of their prearrangements, that spilling what is in his glass will accomplish that; but all this leads the man to be very anxious, his anxiety makes his hands tremble, and so his glass spills.
>
> (1999, 70)

For Frankfurt, Davidson, and many others, the causal theory of action – by relying crucially on external relations – fails to sufficiently unify reason and the caused bodily movement or event: these two items are thus, for the causal theorist, always in danger of falling apart in such a way that the event which occurs as a result of the reason is not rationalized by that reason. Thus, the causal relation is not sufficient for the occurrence of an intentional action and so cannot by itself provide a good explanation of intentional action.

The deviant cases arise because even given the reasons – the causes – it is conceivable that the effect does or does not occur. Here, we can see that the Davidsonian set-up presupposes something like a Humean account of causal relations in which causes and effects are not conceptually connected and stand in external relations.[5] Take one of those conceivable situations in which the reasons are present, and yet the effect – the relevant action – does not occur. If this is conceivable, then it seems also conceivable that, in a situation in which the causes wouldn't normally lead to the relevant effect, there could be an event – e.g., a twinge of nervousness – that intervenes between the reasons and the relevant action – e.g., the spilling of the drink – and makes it the case that, as it were accidentally, the event that matches the reasons occurs and is indirectly (but deviantly) caused by the reasons. That is the recipe for deviance, and this recipe works in part because, on Davidson's broadly Humean picture of causation, causes and effects are not conceptually connected and are only externally related. Given this picture of causation, the possibility of deviance is unavoidable, and so the causal theorist's account of action is necessarily incomplete.

Perhaps for this reason, Davidson despairs of finding a way to patch up this gap in his causal theory and sees himself as forced to invoke a primitive, unanalyzed notion of "the right way" for beliefs and desires, and reasons more generally to cause an action.[6] Such a response is unilluminating for there is nothing more to be said about the right way other than that it is the way in which events must be caused if those events are to be actions. For the account of action to appeal to the right causal relation – i.e. to a causal relation that makes the event in question an *action* – is for this account to appeal to action in the course of characterizing action. This can hardly be seen as an illuminating way to address the explanatory demand – formulated, e.g., in questions (a) and (b) – concerning action itself. I do not have space to show this here, but, despite ingenious attempts by Peacocke, Smith, Peter Railton, David Velleman, and others to shore up the causal theory, the problem persists in its original form.[7]

Anscombe's view does not invoke external relations in the way that Davidson and his allies do, and so Anscombe does not face the deviant causal chain problem. However, her position, like Davidson's, ultimately threatens to be disappointingly unilluminating. For Anscombe (and other theorists who reject the causal theory of action), it is the nature of certain events to be actions.[8] Such a view tells us *that* certain events are actions, and it may even say which events are actions, but it does not tell us *how* these events come to have this special status. The view merely appeals to the nature of the events in question as part of the life of a practical agent, but it doesn't tell us *how* an event comes to be caught up in practical life in this way. Again, as in Davidson's case, the account

of action fails to illuminate and fails to offer satisfactory answers to questions (a) and (b).

There is, of course, much more to be said about the complexity and the virtues of these two rival approaches to action. (I will explore such matters in future work.) But I think we can see that there is reason to believe that the debate over the nature of action is at a kind of standstill, with each major side in the end failing to properly address the explanatory demand that drives the philosophy of action. My suspicion is that, in order for progress in the philosophy of action to take place, we must question and challenge the terms in which the debate over action in recent and contemporary philosophy is conducted. And I believe that – at least in one important strand of his thinking on action – Spinoza shows us how to challenge the presuppositions of the debate over action and how, as it were, to transcend this debate. To confirm this belief, I will show how Spinoza – instead of trying to answer the guiding questions (a) and (b) – simply rejects those questions.

2 The Alleged Distinction between Action and Non-Action

Let's turn to Spinoza's approach to question (a):

> a What is it in virtue of which actions are differentiated from non-actions?

Spinoza rejects this question because he denies one of its presuppositions, a presupposition made by Davidson, Anscombe, and nearly all other recent theorists of action, viz. the claim that there are non-actions, and there is a distinction between action and non-action. For Spinoza, in other words, action is pervasive, and there are no things that are not actions.

Spinoza's official definition of action – or, rather, his definition of what it is for us to act – specifies that we act insofar as we are the complete cause of some effect:

> I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is (by 3D1), 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 (3D2).[9]

This definition may seem to leave much room for non-action: after all, with regard to changes of which I am only a partial and not the complete cause, Spinoza says that we are acted on and not active.

However, Spinoza employs both a strong and a weak sense of "action." 3D2 articulates the strong sense of the term. But Spinoza allows that, to the extent to which a thing approximates being the complete cause of an effect, then the thing is active. In other words, there are degrees of activity for Spinoza that are correlated with the degree to which a thing approximates being the complete cause of some effect. Thus, for Spinoza, to the extent to which a thing exhibits causal power, it is active.

This commitment to degrees of activity does not yet give us the result that, for Spinoza, action is pervasive. To reach this result, we must add the claim that each thing exhibits at least some causal power. And this is precisely what Spinoza says in 1p36: "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow."

The pervasiveness of causal power and, thus, of activity is also expressed in Spinoza's famous *conatus* doctrine near the beginning of Part 3 of the *Ethics*. I cannot here embark on a full-blown discussion of this intricate doctrine, but because it will play important roles in this chapter, I would like to highlight aspects of this account that we will have occasion to revisit. For Spinoza, each thing strives (*conatur*) to persist or to continue in existence, i.e. each thing has some tendency to bring it about – or to cause it to be the case – that it continues to exist. Indeed, for Spinoza, this tendency or striving of each thing to persist is the actual essence of that thing (3p7).[10] Thus, for him, exhibiting some causal power or being active is the essence of each thing. To be is to be active.

This causal power that, according to 1p36 and 3p6, each thing exhibits is merely an aspect of God's activity. Anything that exhibits causal power, such as a human being, a rock, or a table, is a mode or state of God or substance.[11] Thus, a mode that exhibits causal power is at the same time a state whereby God itself exhibits causal power. This is precisely what Spinoza says in 1p36d (invoking 1p25c). After saying in 1p25 that God efficiently causes both the essence and the existence of things, i.e. that God acts in certain ways, Spinoza says in 1p25c that

> Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

In 1p36d, invoking this corollary, Spinoza says that

> Whatever exists expresses the nature or essence of God in a certain and determinate way (by 1p25c), that is (by 1p34), whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God.

Each mode is an action (at least in the weak sense) because each mode is simply an aspect of God's activity.

I would also say that, for Spinoza, God or substance itself is nothing but God's activity (taken as a whole): there is no distinction between God's activity and God. To see this, consider Spinoza's claim that God's existence and God's essence are one and the same (1p20). Just as our actual essence is, as Spinoza indicates in 3p7, the exhibition of some causal power, so too God's essence (i.e. God's existence) is the exhibition of causal power. Thus, in saying that God's essence is the same as God's existence, Spinoza is suggesting that God is nothing but God's exhibiting causal power or God's activity.

Thus, for Spinoza, everything – both God and modes – is an action (in at least the weak sense, according to which an action is the exhibition of some causal power). Given this pervasiveness of action in and of the world, non-action seems to have no place in the world. Each thing either is, or is an aspect of, God's causal power and God's activity. Nothing is a non-action. Action is pervasive.

Anscombe and Davidson deny, of course, that action is pervasive, and so, Spinoza would, to this extent, disagree with them. A further difference between Spinoza and Davidson (and other causal theorists) in particular is that, for Spinoza, each action is inherently active; each action is, as we saw, an aspect of God's power. That is just what it is to be a mode, as Spinoza indicates in various places including 1p25c, 1p36d, and especially 3p7. As we saw, it is Davidson's denial of the inherent activity of actions that leaves him open to the deviant causal chain problem. Because actions are inherently active, for Spinoza, his account of action seems to avoid this problem.

At the same time, Spinoza differs from Anscombe, in particular, in that Spinoza has something illuminating to say about what makes an action an action: an action is an action simply because it causes something. To act just is to cause, for Spinoza. This account promises to be a more illuminating account of action than Anscombe's, which, while agreeing with Spinoza that actions are by their nature active, can shed no light on the nature of action other than to say that it is of the nature of an action to be an action. Spinoza can go deeper and say that it is of the nature of an action to be a cause. He thus reduces action to causation in a way that Anscombe does not. Spinoza gives, as I will say (to use a phrase that both Paul Hoffman and I have used in a similar context)[12] a stripped-down account of action in terms of causation.[13] And, in the process, Spinoza rejects, as we have just seen, the crucial presupposition of Anscombe and Davidson, and most philosophers of action that there is a distinction between action and non-action.

But how can such a reductive account of action merely in terms of causation be successful? It might seem that with Spinoza's simple appeal to causation in characterizing action, he is leaving out the crucial aspect of action that Davidson and Anscombe, and a host of others seek to capture, viz. the fact that

actions are typically done for a reason or with an intention, or because the agent regards something as worth pursuing. For both Davidson and Anscombe, though for different reasons, merely appealing to causal power does not capture what it is to act: they both appeal also to the reasons for action in their accounts of action. Anscombe states that in her account of action, she is investigating "what it is meant by 'reason for acting.'"[14] Davidson sees it as essential to being an action that an action is intentional – performed for a reason – at least under some description of that action.

Spinoza would, however, certainly deny that his account of action fails to capture what it is to act for a reason. His stripped-down account of action is at the same time a stripped-down account of acting for a reason or with an intention, or because one sees that there is something worth pursuing. The crucial notion in this stripped-down account of acting for a reason (etc.) is, as before, the notion of causation.

To articulate this notion of acting for a reason, consider why, for Spinoza, we regard something as good or worthy of pursuit, a kind of regarding which is arguably fundamental to acting for a reason. For Spinoza, we regard something as good because we desire it. As Spinoza says in 3p9s:

> We neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.[15]

For Spinoza, regarding something as good depends on desiring it or striving for it or willing it. But what is it to desire, will, or strive for something? I will focus on striving because willing and desiring are defined in terms of striving. Willing is striving that is related to the mind alone (and not the body). Desiring is appetite together with consciousness of this appetite.[16] Appetite – and hence, desire – is defined as striving related to the mind and body together (3p9s).

Spinoza's notion of striving stems from the Cartesian notion of bodily striving or tending.[17] Descartes says, e.g., that bodies, insofar as they are simple and undivided, tend to remain in the same state and, in particular, to move in a straight line given that they are moving.[18] As Descartes stresses (in *Principles* III 56), such striving carries no psychological presupposition; it merely indicates that a thing will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances, not that bodies have any thoughts "from which this striving proceeds." Non-thinking bodies, as well as thinking minds, can strive for Descartes. The general account of striving at work in Descartes is this:

> *x* strives to do F if and only if *x*'s state is such that *x* will do F unless prevented by external causes.[19]