AARON V. GARRETT

Meaning in Spinoza's Method

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MEANING IN SPINOZA'S METHOD

AARON V. GARRETT
Boston University

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Contents

Acknowledgments — *page* viii
List of abbreviations — x
Texts and editions — xi

Introduction — 1

1 A worm in the blood: some central themes in Spinoza's *Ethics* — 20

2 A few further basic concepts — 50

3 Emendative therapy and the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* — 73

4 Method: analysis and synthesis — 97

5 Maimonides and Gersonides — 123

6 Definitions in Spinoza's *Ethics*: where they come from and what they are for — 144

7 The third kind of knowledge and "our" eternity — 181

Bibliography — 224
Index of passages referred to and cited — 231
General index — 234

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Acknowledgments

After I defended my dissertation my supervisor, Yirmiyahu Yovel, suggested that I try to answer two further questions: (1) What did Spinoza understand by the third kind of knowledge in the *Ethics*? (2) What is the relation between the *Ethics* and Spinoza's earlier work, the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*? At the time I did not realize that, in trying to answer these two questions, I would need to rethink and revise how I understood Spinoza's method and ultimately reject most of what I had written in my dissertation. My deepest thanks to Yirmiyahu Yovel for supervising my dissertation and then helping me to move well beyond it. The manuscript from which this book was built was originally called "A Worm in the Blood." My editor properly pointed out that the title was somewhat nauseating and would probably condemn the book to be shelved in the biology section of bookstores. But please keep in mind that this was the original title and my guiding theme for finding some meaning in Spinoza's method.

Many people have helped me with writing this book, only a few of whom I can list. The community of Spinoza scholars is, fittingly, one of the kindest and most thoughtful in academe, and I have benefited greatly from it. Henry Allison, Michael Della Rocca, Shelly Kroll, Justin Steinberg, Amelie Rorty, and Andrew Pyle all read the manuscript in full and provided many helpful comments. Michael, in particular, read two drafts (!), forced me to clarify much murk in the manuscript (although there is much remaining), and gave me countless specific criticisms and corrections from which I benefited enormously. All aided me greatly in turning a draft into a book.

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This book is dedicated to my late grandfather Abraham Klein and to my late teacher Carl Cohen. Carl Cohen taught me that if human history is not rational at least humans ought to be. My grandfather taught me that some of the deepest ties can be elective. It was on his bookshelf I found my first copy of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

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Abbreviations

AT	*Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–76).
CM	*Cogitata Metaphysica*
CW	*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985).
DC	*De Corpore*
DM	*Discourse on Method*
KV	*Korte Verhandeling*
NS	*Nagelate Schriften*
PP	*Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*
PWD	*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1988–91).
TIE	*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*
TP	*Tractatus Politicus*
TTP	*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

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Texts and editions

All English translations of Spinoza's *Ethics* are my own except when noted. Some are taken from Edwin Curley (ed. and trans.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton University Press, 1985). Translations from Curley's *Ethics* will be abbreviated as *CW*, and this abbreviation will also be used when I make reference to his editorial apparatus and commentary. Curley's translations are far superior to mine, but I have relied on my clumsier translations to get across some of the technical oddities in Spinoza's Latin. All passages cited from the *Principia Philosophia Cartesianae*, the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, and the *Korte Verhandeling* are from Curley's edition, and Curley's translation is used. The abbreviation *NS* in some of Curley's translations refers to variant readings from the *Nagelate Schriften*, the Dutch translation of Spinoza's works. Thanks to Princeton University Press for allowing me to cite from Curley's edition. Latin quotes will be referenced to Carl Gebhardt (ed.), *Spinoza Opera*, 6 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925). Although the new French critical edition of Spinoza, Pierre-François Moreau (ed.), *Spinoza: Oeuvres* (Paris: PUF, 1999–), establishes texts which supersede Gebhardt, the edition references the standard Gebhardt page numbers. I will use the following standard abbreviations throughout: quotes from the *Ethics* will be simply referenced by part and number (i.e., "IIIP4"). The *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* will be abbreviated *TIE* and referenced by paragraph number (i.e., "*TIE* 99"). Abbreviations employed in the text to refer to Spinoza's other works will be *TTP* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), *TP* (*Tractatus Politicus*), *PP* (*Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*), and *KV* (*Korte Verhandeling*). All will be referenced by chapter and section numbers and when necessary Gebhardt page (abbreviated by volume and page), except the *PP* which will be referenced by proposition. Spinoza's letters will be cited in the text as "Letter" followed by a roman numeral number; i.e. Letter 30 will be cited as "Letter XXX." All translations from Spinoza's letters are from, Abraham Wolf (ed. and trans.), *The Correspondence of Spinoza* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1928),

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except when noted. Hobbes' *De Corpore* will be abbreviated in the text as *DC* followed by chapter and section numbers. Descartes' "Essay" which opens the *Discourse on Method* will be abbreviated *DM* and referenced by its sections (i.e. *DM* III). All passages from Descartes will be abbreviated *AT* and cited from the Adam and Tannery edition, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982). Translations are from John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (ed. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1988–91).

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most economically, politically, artistically, and intellectually vibrant cities in Europe, although still caught in religious and political struggles which rose and ebbed over the course of Spinoza's brief life.

His father Michael was a merchant. Spinoza worked with him until his death, and then briefly and unsuccessfully attempted to run the family business with his brother. At some point, likely in the early to mid 1650s, Spinoza began to drift away from the Jewish community and into various free-thinking circles centered around Franciscus Van den Enden.[6] Whatever caused him to drift away probably also eventually resulted in his excommunication in 1656, although we cannot be sure.

By 1656 Spinoza had already set a drastically different intellectual course from most of the other Jews of Amsterdam.[7] But expulsion from the Jewish community meant an inability to communicate and thus to financially interact with other Jews. Consequently, Spinoza had to pursue a different means of making a living, and so he became a lens grinder. We have a tendency sometimes to view early modern science through the writings of the great theorists, but it was an intellectual world centered on observation, scientific instruments, and experiments. Spinoza was respected for the quality and precision of his lenses, and the excellence of his work placed him within the experimental circles at the cutting edge of early modern science, even if he was far more notorious – from the early 1660s onward – for his heterodox teachings and works.

I consider relevant details of Spinoza's biography over the course of this book. But rather than give more of the particular details of Spinoza's life I will provide a broad sense of Spinoza's intellectual milieu. The spheres in which Spinoza circulated were unusual for an early modern philosopher, although the Dutch rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel (who was perhaps one of Spinoza's teachers) engaged with a similar variety of intellectual circles, as did a few others. I would like quickly to sketch the variety of these intellectual and social spheres by considering a contingent fact about Spinoza: his first name and the many languages into which it was rendered. Through this device we can get a synoptic view of the many milieus through and in which he circulated.[8]

[6] These biographical remarks are taken from Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and supplemented by Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

[7] There were other excommunications, though, and there are some parallels between Spinoza's relatively happy life and the far sadder tale of Uriel da Costa. See Carl Gebhardt (ed.), *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa* (Amsterdam: Hertzberger, 1922).

[8] On the issue of the complexity of signification for Spinoza see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton University Press, 1989), vol. 1. Much of the following is indebted to his discussion.

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In Latin Spinoza's name was Benedictus or Benedict. Latin was the language of most of Spinoza's philosophical writings and correspondence. It was the common language of European intellectuals that bridged their many linguistic and political rifts. It was the language of erudition and learning, the language in which Spinoza and the students of Franciscus Van den Enden performed Roman dramas, including works by Spinoza's beloved Terence. It was the language of Spinoza's major ancient influences: Seneca, Tacitus, Cicero, and Lucretius. Spinoza used Latin to communicate with intellectuals like Leibniz, Huygens, Oldenburg, Tschirnhaus, and many others. Latin was the language of science and thus was integral to his economic pursuits. Latin is the main language through which we know Spinoza the philosopher.

In Hebrew, Spinoza's first name was Baruch. It was the language of Scripture and religious observance in the community in which he was raised.[9] Hebrew was the religious language of the community he was eventually excommunicated from, and the language of the theologians he coolly criticized in the *TTP*. Spinoza knew the language intimately and even wrote a Hebrew grammar (although he probably wrote it for the use of radical Gentiles in understanding Scripture as a historical document).

Spinoza's first name in Portuguese was Bento. Portuguese was the language of his home and family, the language of the country from which his family had emigrated to Amsterdam. It was also the workaday language of the Jewish community that he grew up in and of the business he shared with his brother upon his father's death: "Bento y Gabriel d'Espinosa."[10] This language was, like Hebrew, intertwined with his Jewish roots. In the *TTP* Spinoza notes that, since the King of Spain granted civic rights and privileges to Spanish Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity, the *converso* families quickly forgot their identity. But, as the King of Portugal denied the Portuguese Jews any social or political status, they held fast to the Judaism that had been taken away from them even after their forced conversion. Why not? For, despite their professions of Christian faith, they were still treated like Jews (*TTP* III, III/42). The Portuguese community in which Spinoza grew up, with its traditional culture and languages and insular nature, was likely viewed by Spinoza the philosopher as

[9] It is notable that Spinoza equates one of the lower forms of knowledge with the calculations of merchants (*IIP40S2*). This is also the sort of knowledge on which theocratic authority is based.

[10] See W. G. Van der Tak, "The Firm of Bento and Gabriel de Spinoza," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 16 (1982), 178–89.

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pathological. At the same time Portuguese, and Spanish, clearly always had an appeal for Spinoza, and he owned a number of literary works including the novels of Cervantes. Portuguese was literally his mother tongue, the language of his mother Hanna and probably the language of his lullabies.

Spinoza, of course, spoke a fourth language: Dutch. Dutch was the language of everyday life once he left the Jewish community, the language of his discussion circles, and the language of politics. It was also the language of important Dutch radical texts like his friend Adriaan Koerbagh's *Een Blomhofvan allerley Lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet*, influential political works like Pieter De La Court's *Politike Discoursen*, as well as religious polemics like William van Blijenburgh's *De waerheyt van de christelijcke godst-dienst* (against Spinoza). One of Spinoza's works, the *KV*, has been handed down to us in Dutch, although it was probably translated from a lost Latin original. Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* was translated into Dutch immediately upon his death as *De Nagelate Schriften* (*CW* x), showing that Spinoza's circle wished to expand his philosophy from highbrow Latin to the more colloquial but extraordinarily intellectually rich Dutch language.

Benedict, Baruch, and Bento all mean the same thing, blessed or blessing. Spinoza's goal in his most important work, the *Ethics*, was to lead readers, who were capable, to their own blessedness, or more accurately to help them lead themselves. In his writings Spinoza used the Latin word "beatitudo" for blessedness (wisely he did not use his own name), which he described as "our greatest happiness" consisting "in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise" (II49s). But the many translations of his name and many words for blessedness point toward the difficulty intrinsic to his undertaking. Spinoza straddled numerous communities with different cultures and needs and had many influences arising from his engagements with these different communities. How to show those who were capable the way to blessedness? How to help them to recognize their power and to understand God and nature? How to show them that the desire for blessedness underlaid their many tongues, and their many ways of speaking, even when they did not know this? How to show them that blessedness arose from understanding the metaphysical underpinnings of an apparently chaotic world, underpinnings which showed much that we take for granted to be either false or so many expressions of a unified God or nature? And, not the least, how to show that which he wished to show them was true?

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Spinoza tried numerous tactics to get these points across in his different works, but the *Ethics* is clearly his ultimate statement on blessedness.[11] To this end, Spinoza employed a particular method, different from many of the other ways in which he had presented his philosophy over the course of his intellectual career. This book is concerned with exploring Spinoza's method, and seeing how the method bears on and is related to the goals of the *Ethics*.

"*IN MORE GEOMETRICO*" – SPINOZA'S GEOMETRICAL METHOD

Philosophical interest in method, interest in the best way to access and to express truths about morals, God, nature, mathematics, and reality as such, is as old as philosophy itself. This is not surprising. If all men, or at least all philosophically disposed men, desire to know, some obvious questions arise quite immediately and naturally: "Can we know at all?" "If we can, what can we know?" "What is the best way to know and to access the most important truths?" These have not turned out to be the easiest philosophical questions, but they are some of the most fruitful, witness Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*, Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Locke's *Essay*, Hume's *Treatise*, and many other of the greatest works of philosophy ancient, modern, and contemporary.

A number of recent works in the history of philosophy have emphasized that many disparate sorts of philosophers – from Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics to Locke, Hume, and Smith to Wittgenstein – share the idea that the purpose of a philosophical method is not just to offer a series of valid propositions or claims, but rather in some way to transform or change readers, to allow them to look at themselves in the world in a different way. What this different way is varies from philosopher to philosopher, but one constant is that a method must be constructed in such a manner as to allow readers to see the ways that the philosophy impacts them and their lives, and to learn to look at the world from a different perspective than they might otherwise.

The issue of the transformative purpose of method is interrelated with the questions of whether we can know, what we can know, and how best to know. Many of the best-known philosophers prior to the twentieth century were not primarily interested in providing ingenious arguments in response to outstanding problems or questions, but wanted to change

[11] The *TP* was written after the *Ethics* and was at least fairly complete, so one might claim it is the final word, but, as the *TP* is incomplete, and as it does not discuss metaphysics or mind, the *Ethics* still has pride of place.

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readers, dialogue partners, or listeners, or to allow them to change themselves, in such a way that they might become happier and wiser. Philosophy was not only viewed in terms of the solving of problems, but was also considered worth pursuing insofar as it was edifying and therapeutic; and these two goals clearly ought not be mutually exclusive. Clarifying a philosophical problem or better understanding an important issue are also sorts of self-clarification, clearing up our heads and making us think a little straighter. This sort of procedure of clarification also might make us happy and wise, or at least not so sad and stupid.

Much of what I will say about Spinoza in the following chapters will respond to and follow from this basic point: that Spinoza's philosophy is a kind of self-clarificatory therapy for those capable of self-clarification; that this self-clarification arises not just from reflection but also from other sorts of knowing; and finally that the choice of the method by which to establish appropriate knowledge and the vehicle or means by which to present it, as a consequence, is absolutely central.

Now I hope you are thinking: "That is an interesting, if somewhat fuzzy, way of presenting Spinoza and some of the motivations for his philosophy. But I have looked a bit at the *Ethics*, and no work of philosophy seems more ill-suited for such therapy. Spinoza's *Ethics* is an exemplar of a sort of philosophical formalism that places validity of argument far above the needs of the reader. The *Ethics* is a geometrical method, a philosophy bound by the laws of mathematical deduction. If this is a philosophical therapy, it seems to be a philosophical analogue of the Polar Bear's Club – the best therapy is to jump into freezing cold water, only in this case into the iciest and least human reaches of reason."

This is a fair objection. I will try to respond to it in the chapters that follow, but first we need to know something about Spinoza's method and its historical context. In the *Ethics* Spinoza derived a sequence of numbered propositions from definitions and axioms – much as Euclid did in the *Elements* – building each link in the expanding chain on the definitions, axioms, and propositions prior to it. Euclid derived the celebrated Proposition 47 of Book I of the *Elements* – the claim that "in right-angled triangles the square on the side subtending the right angle is equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle" – from prior and apparently far more obvious propositions about parallelograms (1.41) and angles (1.14).[12] In a

[12] John Aubrey described Hobbes as converting to the geometrical method while reading Euclid's *Elements* 1.47. Hobbes was astonished by the content of Euclid's proposition while at the same time recognizing the necessity by which 1.47 had been derived from far more obvious propositions. See Aubrey's "Life of Hobbes," III [1] and IV [8], in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. and intro. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994), lxiv and lvi–lxvii.

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of Richard Cumberland. In his influential *De Legibus Naturae* Cumberland set out to combat Hobbes by presenting an alternative theory of natural law emphasizing man's fundamentally benevolent character. Cumberland argued that in order to do this we need to render moral and political philosophy as a mathematical calculus. Cumberland – like Pufendorf, Locke, and Spinoza – was dramatically impacted by Hobbes' *De Cive*. *De Cive* was published in 1642, a month after the beginning of the English Civil War. Hobbes intended it to be the third work in a trilogy called *Elementa Philosophiae*, the first part of which was *De Corpore*, Hobbes' physics and methodology (not published until 1655 but existing in manuscript long before) and the second part *De Homine* (not published until 1658 but also long in manuscript) Hobbes' theory of perception and his psychology of the passions. Even without the rest of the *Elementa*, *De Cive* had an enormous impact on European intellectuals. In it Hobbes proposed that man was fundamentally self-interested, that morals was an artificial structure imposed on the passions by authority, and that these were harsh realities and harsh solutions that had to be taken into account in helping men to lead relatively happy lives in the chaos of early modern Europe.

In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to *De Cive* Hobbes made a remarkable assertion:

Philosophy is divided into as many branches as there are areas where human reason has a place, and takes the different names which the difference of subject matter requires, In treating of figures it is called Geometry, *of motion* Physics, of *natural law*, Morals, *but it is all* Philosophy; *just as the sea is here called British, there Atlantic, elsewhere Indian, so called from its particular shores, but it is all Ocean. The Geometers have managed their province outstandingly. For whatever benefit comes to human life from observation of the stars, from mapping out of lands, from reckoning of time, and from long-distance navigation*; *whatever is beautiful in buildings*, *strong in defence-works and marvelous in machines, whatever in short distinguishes the modern world from the barbarity of the past, is almost wholly the gift of* Geometry; *for what we owe to* Physics, Physics *owes to* Geometry.[19]

This claim about the centrality of geometry, that it distinguishes the ancients from the moderns and that the moderns owe all their successes to it, is startling. Philosophers like Cumberland – who saw themselves as responding to Hobbes – also accepted Hobbes' elevation of geometry and attempted to use it against the "Monster of Malmesbury" as Hobbes was sometimes called. If Hobbes was correct, then philosophy could be

[19] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed., trans. & intro. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4–5. On the history and import of *De Cive* see Richard Tuck's excellent introduction to this volume, viii–lii.

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geometrized like physics and natural reason could demonstrate necessary and unshakeable truths about metaphysics, morals, and politics, as certain as the truths of mathematics. It could establish moral principles of a different sort than Hobbes, if Hobbes could be shown to have made errors in his arguments.

But Spinoza was clearly deeply sympathetic to Hobbes and took over many of Hobbes' key insights. Hobbes' *mos geometricus* could also shear away the rhetoric and cant of despots and bigots, and leave bare and shining propositions that held even when they most "kicked against the pricks," truths that no rational mind could deny. In advocating the deductive science of morals, Locke argued it would provide a candle in the soul, illuminating even when the bigots "cram their Tenets down all Men's Throats."[20] Thus the *mos geometricus* had great allure to heterodox intellectuals, given the religious and social controversy surrounding much early modern philosophy. And it had particular allure to those like Locke, Cumberland, and Pufendorf who admired Hobbes (to varying degrees) and attempted to use his discoveries to counter him on particular issues.

It is important to remember, though, that the *mos geometricus* was just one of many *mores* with which early modern philosophers tinkered. Descartes, Leibniz, Malebranche, and numerous others offered their philosophies in a variety of dresses both to communicate with different audiences and to most effectively present different kinds of content. Descartes remarked in his early notes called *Olympian Thoughts* that, "[a]ctors taught not to let any embarrassment show on their faces, put on a mask . . . I will now do the same . . . [and] mount the stage masked."[21] As a philosopher he followed his own advice and donned many formal masks. The *Principles* offered the Cartesian philosophy as a synthetic curriculum to replace the scholastic manuals and compendia of Dutch universities like Utrecht, and the *Discourse* spoke to the community of early modern mathematicians and natural scientists as a prelude to a new science and a reform of the old ones. The *Meditations* provided a rigorous treatment of metaphysics and epistemology cloaked in an astonishing synthesis of Jesuit, Augustinian, and Stoical meditative literature, and in the "Replies to Second Objections" Descartes presented some cardinal insights of the *Meditations in more geometrico*.

Leibniz employed countless literary forms in his writings ranging from the semi-commentary of the *Theodicy*, to the pseudo-dialogue of the *New Essays*, to the Christological structure of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (moving from God the Father to Jesus), and to the distilled *Monadology*.

[20] Locke, *Essay*, IV.3 §20. [21] *AT* X 213 (*Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, I, 2).

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Malebranche ranged from the rambling – and extremely popular – essayistic style of *The Search after Truth* to the *Dialogues on Metaphysics* and the skeletal *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. And so on down the list of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century authors, major and minor.

The *mos geometricus* was one of these many forms taken by early modern philosophy and seen as by no means unique to Spinoza, although indicative of a particular set of philosophical interests. Spinoza himself experimented with other forms, incorporating a dialogue into the *KV*, using the scholastic manual style in the "Metaphysical Thoughts" attached to the *PP*, and even opening the *TIE* with a Cartesian/Augustinean autobiographical prelude. Yet readers of early modern philosophy associate the *mos geometricus* with Spinoza alone. And this is unsurprising: many of the other authors who employed the style are now obscure, or, as with Descartes and Locke, it is considered tangential to their philosophies, or they are known through one of their less-geometrical works (as Hobbes is in the English-speaking world). Further, Spinoza's *mos geometricus* is far more rigorous than the *mores* of the others (with the exception of Descartes), so, once a reader experiences the *Ethics*, it is difficult to view many of these other works as geometrical. Spinoza's rigor makes his *mos* seem something entirely different.

There is also the basic question of the relation of style to content in these different works. The fact that many early modern philosophers presented core sets of philosophical claims – whether Hobbes' contract or Descartes' *cogito* – in different works garbed in different rhetorical forms, implies that the content which they wished to express was divorced from the masks used to present it to different audiences.

Spinoza wrote several other important philosophical works in addition to the *Ethics*. Some of these works share themes, arguments, and concepts, but, for Spinoza, the *Ethics* is clearly the cardinal presentation of his general philosophy, the *TIE* is at best a prelude to it, the *KV* a draft, and the *TTP* and the *TP* are concerned primarily with politics and not metaphysics.[22] As a consequence the *Ethics* has an authority among Spinoza's works quite different from the *Leviathan* for Hobbes, the *Monadology* for Leibniz, or even the *Meditations* for Descartes (although this is the closest analogue). Spinoza wrote another work *in ordine geometrico*, the *Principles of Descartes'*

[22] The *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*TIE*), which I will treat at length in chapter 3, is a prefatory treatise to the *Ethics* concerned with method. The *Korte Verhandeling* (*KV*) is an early draft of the *Ethics*, only made widely available since 1851. The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*) is Spinoza's political masterpiece arguing that a tolerant state will be a successful state. The *Tractatus Politicus* (*TP*) is an unfinished late theoretical work on politics, Spinoza's final work. I will make a great deal of all of these works (with the exception of the *TP*) and Spinoza's letters in this book.

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Philosophy, a work I will discuss in the following, but this is a geometrical rendering of Descartes' philosophy for the purposes of teaching students not yet ready for Spinoza's own philosophy. The *Ethics is* Spinoza's metaphysics, philosophy of mind and ethics. Although there are important passages in other works, the *Ethics* is the only sustained and integrated presentation of the whole of Spinoza's philosophy (excepting political philosophy).

Given the cardinal place of the *Ethics* among Spinoza's works and its striking presentation, we might expect there to be a relation between the presentation and the content (although keeping in mind that it is not necessarily a unique relation, as the *PP* is also presented in a geometrical form). In order to begin to think about what this connection is we ought to examine the content of the *Ethics*.

The *Ethics* is divided into five relatively distinct sections made up of propositions that ultimately rest (either implicitly or explicitly) on the definitions and axioms which begin Part I. The structure of the *Ethics* mirrors one of Spinoza's central metaphysical claims, that all follows from first principles and that philosophers err when they fail to identify and begin with adequate first principles. For Spinoza, the first principle from which all others arise and to which all others refer is God. The philosophers before him failed to create adequate philosophies because they misdefined, misunderstood, and anthropomorphized God, and thus misunderstood the various principles arising from God. Conversely, to understand first principles is to see the way in which all things necessarily follow from God. And, as this reflects the real metaphysical structure of nature, so Spinoza sets out a definition of God at the beginning of *Ethics* I from which he derives its many propositions.

In this way, Spinoza's *mos geometricus* seems uniquely suited for his content, as it shows how and that propositions arise necessarily from a definition. If the definition the *mos geometricus* begins with is the adequate definition of God, then the necessary propositions which arise from this definition parallel and follow with the same necessity that all in nature follows from God. This is reinforced by a passage from the *TIE*:

> As for order, to unite and order all our perceptions, it is required, and reason demands, that we ask as soon as possible, whether there is a certain being, and at the same time, what sort of being it is, which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence[23] may be the cause of all of our ideas, and then our mind will (as we have said) reproduce Nature as much as possible. For it will have Nature's essence, order and unity objectively. (*TIE* 99)

[23] I will return to the distinction between objective essences and formal essences in chapter 3.

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This passage seems to imply that our minds ought to reproduce nature as much as possible by discovering the certain being which is the cause of all things, and understanding what sort of being it is. Through this, our minds will "reproduce" the order, unity, necessity and essence of nature. This appears to be what the Euclidean structure of the *Ethics* attempts to do, to order philosophy, and our ideas and minds, in relation to our understanding of the definition of God.

Unfortunately there are some basic and oft-repeated inadequacies of the *mos geometricus* which make the relation between the medium and the message, if suitable in theory, seemingly untenable in practice. First, the crucial feature of a Euclidean deduction, on which rests the claim to "reproduce" the objective order of nature, is that a geometrical method begins with definitions and axioms and derives propositions from them. The axioms are common features of minds and bodies, and Spinoza treats them as if they are intuitively obvious to all readers. We may, and should, interrogate them. But it is not difficult to see where they come from and why Spinoza thinks them clear (even if he is wrong that these are truly common notions).[24]

The definitions with which one begins a deduction, though, are the crucial support and warrant of the deduction. They lead to adequate principles when they are adequate and result in inadequate ideas when they are inadequate. Spinoza assumes the former in the quote from the *TIE* cited above and apparently assumes that the definitions with which he begins the *Ethics* are adequate and will lead to adequate cognition. In the *PP* Spinoza assumes that the inadequate Cartesian principles upon which his geometrical presentation of Descartes' philosophy are based result in various "errors," or inadequate ideas.[25] Thus, in either case, the definitions are crucial for what follows from them.

But from whence come the definitions and how are they justified? How do we justify the definition of God from which all derives, as well as the many other definitions employed throughout the work? It is not clear what such a justification would be. The definitions themselves must be clear and evident ideas, but this does not explain where they come from nor why a reader ought to agree to them if he does not recognize the ideas as

[24] See particularly IIP40S1, where Spinoza distinguishes axioms from "universals" arrived at through induction from the imagination.

[25] In the "Preface" to the *PP*, likely written by Meyer but clearly agreed to in all its details by Spinoza, Meyer remarks the "Author has only set out the opinions of Descartes and their demonstrations, insofar as these are found in his writings, or are such as ought to be deduced validly from the foundations he laid. So let no one think that he is teaching either his own opinions, or only those which he approves of" (I/131).

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"scientia intuitiva," is far more mysterious. Spinoza decribes the third kind of knowledge as proceeding from "an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essences of things," (IIP40S2). The final chapter of this book will attempt to make some sense of the third kind of knowledge. The crucial point will be that Spinoza considers this "adequate" knowledge and so I will have to consider adequacy at some length. I will also argue that the third kind of knowledge is connected with issues of individuation.

There is something satisfying about using a philosopher's own theories to evaluate basic points of his or her own doctrine. Furthermore, the two philosophers whose works Spinoza cites far and away the most, Maimonides and Descartes, both thought their theories of understanding central for understanding their works. But, as opposed to Maimonides, and in tandem with Descartes, Spinoza's deep suspicion of language seems to preclude the *Ethics* being anything but the first kind of knowledge. Words are always testimonies of someone else's mental states, of someone else's experience, and we have "mutilated" (Spinoza's technical term) access at best to what the words stand in for. And, as in the philosophies of both Descartes and Maimonides, it is not clear how the theory of understanding is to be applied. The resolution of these issues will be important for my argument and will rest on the centrality of the *mos geometricus* to Spinoza's philosophy.

In centralizing the *mos geometricus* in this work I am also posting a claim in the various debates over Spinoza's philosophy. Commentators have placed differing degrees of emphasis on the importance of the *mos geometricus* for understanding the *Ethics*. At one extreme, Harry Wolfson discounts it, remarking, "there is no logical connection between the substance of Spinoza's philosophy and the form in which it is written."[27] At the other extreme, the most dominant French Spinoza scholar of the twentieth century, Martial Gueroult, places it at center stage, as does his great successor Alexandre Matheron and some of Spinoza's most important critics such as Hegel and critical commentators like Harold Joachim.

My interpretation of Spinoza's method will be closer to Gueroult's and Matheron's interpretations than Wolfson's, although it will also be substantially different from their interpretations. I will claim that the most important function of the *mos geometricus* is tied up with what Spinoza calls "emendation" in the *TIE*, ridding oneself of inadequate ideas so that those adequate ideas that already make up our minds can better be expressed.

[27] Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1:55.

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What results is not merely a formal knowledge or anatomy of our mind, but rather the discovery and augmentation of those very powers always already in the human mind and body. This discovery is a process of "becoming what you are" to use Nietzsche's famous expression, recognizing that the being you always were was different from the myriad ways you represented yourself via the imagination.

The ultimate goal of this emendation – which I have discussed in the first section of the Introduction – is succinctly expressed in the brief "Preface" to Book II:

> I pass now to explaining that which must necessarily follow from God, or an eternal being, and its infinite essence. Not, indeed everything; for we have demonstrated that an infinity of infinite modes must follow from it (IP16): but that alone, which is able to lead us as if by the hand, to knowledge of the human Mind and of its highest blessedness.

The title of Spinoza's *Ethics* is aptly chosen. Spinoza's work is not *just* a metaphysics, although the first part of the *Ethics* is one of the most powerful metaphysics ever thought up by a philosopher. It is an "ethics," by which Spinoza means an account of how one ought to act in order to attain joy and blessedness. Yet the metaphysics is not just preparatory, it is the necessary precondition of a therapy – an emendative therapy – that allows readers to see what the relevance of the metaphysics is to them and to "become what they are." This is through proper knowledge God, of the human mind, and then its highest blessedness.

I will try to show the ways in which Spinoza's *mos geometricus* bears on this goal. The book is divided into seven chapters excluding this Introduction. Chapters 1 and 2 will present some of the basic concepts in Spinoza's philosophy – nature, laws, the three kinds of knowledge, adequacy, the infinite – that are important for understanding Spinoza's method. It will not be entirely obvious how all these concepts bear on the *mos geometricus* initially, but it will become clear as the book progresses. That this is the case, i.e. that apparently unrelated concepts are interconnected in often surprising ways is itself one of the hallmarks of Spinoza's method.

In chapter 3 I will discuss the key idea of emendation in Spinoza's philosophy. I will argue that Spinoza believes that adequate knowledge arises from a process of emending and clarifying the confused and mutilated ideas we already have, and with them ourselves. That self-clarification and the clarification of our ideas are interconnected is obvious, but it also points to the fact that the clarification of our ideas is therapeutic in a very particular way.

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The fourth and fifth chapters present some background for Spinoza's discussion of method, both the frequently discussed early modern background – Hobbes and Descartes – and two Jewish philosophers – Maimonides and Gersonides. I argue that Spinoza's geometrical method develops aspects of the work of all of these philosophers (as well as Bacon who is considered at length in chapter 3). As I noted above, one of the unique things about Spinoza is the diversity of contexts in which he circulated. The tension between these contexts and the single-minded force with which Spinoza expressed himself is one of the most exciting things to consider as an interpreter of Spinoza.

The sixth chapter is the heart of the book and provides an interpretation of Spinoza's theory of definition. I argue in this chapter that the sort of emendative therapy that Spinoza proposed in the *TIE* is part and parcel of the *Ethics* itself. Spinoza sought to move us from confused and mutilated ideas which we access through the flawed medium of language to those ideas that already make up our minds and have our bodies as their ideas. I will argue that some of the difficulties of interpreting Spinoza, of getting just at what he meant, are a necessary consequence of his method. I grant from the outset that this is an interpretation of the *Ethics*; there cannot be final proof in matters about which Spinoza says so little. But different sorts of evidence, both internal to the *Ethics* and from the *TIE*, the *TTP*, and the very important letter to Spinoza from his friend Tschirnhaus, will be brought to bear on the theory of definition.

The final chapter will apply the account of method developed in prior chapters to one of the cognitive goals of Spinoza's *Ethics*, forming a special sort of knowledge called the "third kind of knowledge" or "scientia intuitiva." Spinoza, unfortunately, says little about the content of this special sort of knowledge, and what he does say is extremely confusing. I do not promise entirely to sort out the third kind of knowledge, but I will argue that understanding how and why it is the cognitive goal of the *mos geometricus* helps bring light to some of Spinoza's more perplexing claims about it. In particular I will argue that the third kind of knowledge arises from knowledge we have of a very special essence, the human essence, and the way that this knowledge can augment our power and beatitude.

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CHAPTER I

A worm in the blood: some central themes in Spinoza's Ethics

> The Emmet's Inch & Eagle's Mile
> Make Lame Philosophy to smile.
>
> William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

In order to understand why Spinoza embraced the geometrical method in the *Ethics* it necessary to reflect on the general contours of his philosophy. It is also important to have a sense of what Spinoza's method – geometrical or otherwise – is trying to get at, what Spinoza is seeking to discover with it. The purpose of this chapter and the next is to set the stage for the chapters that follow, while at the same time developing a few basic questions about Spinoza's method. The first section of this chapter provides a brief sketch of Spinoza's *Ethics* and introduces some of Spinoza's key definitions and concepts. The middle sections will present a problem in Spinoza's *Ethics*: "What does it mean to be a part of nature?" "Part of nature" is one of Spinoza's most potent concepts but it needs careful interpretation in order not to render it inconsistent with other aspects of Spinoza's philosophy, particularly his criticisms of anthropomorphism and teleology.[1] The final section of the chapter will consider Spinoza's system from the "emmet's inch"[2] or the bottom-up perspective, as opposed to the "eagle's mile" or top-down perspective of Part I of the *Ethics* and the first section of this chapter. I will introduce the "bottom-up" perspective through a letter written by Spinoza to his friend Oldenburg describing a "worm" (by which Spinoza understood a small simple particle or being) floating through the bloodstream of a giant being and trying to make

[1] This is an important theme throughout Spinoza's philosophical works. Philosophers "place true happiness solely in virtue and peace of mind, and they strive to conform with nature, not to make nature conform with them; for they are assured that God directs Nature in accordance with the requirements of her universal laws, and not in accordance with the requirements of the particular laws of human nature" (*TTP* VI, Samuel Shirley (trans.), *Theological-Political Treatise* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991], 78).

[2] "Emmet" is an eighteenth-century word for ant.

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sense of the vast circulatory maze it finds itself within. Finally I will consider the problem of combining these two perspectives with an allusion to Wilfred Sellars' distinction between the manifest image and the scientific image.

AN OUTLINE OF SPINOZA'S ETHICS

Spinoza divided the *Ethics* into five parts.[3] Part I presents Spinoza's metaphysics. Spinoza populated his metaphysics with three basic sorts of entities – substance, attributes, and modes. A worm, for example, is a mode or a collection of modes. Ideas are also modes. Thus the idea of a worm, as well as any and all ideas worms might have, are modes. Thought as opposed to a thought or a group of thoughts, is an attribute. God is the only substance. These entities – substance, attributes, and modes – are referred to over and over again in the *Ethics*. Spinoza considers them to be exhaustive of what there is – anything and everything belongs to one of these three categories. A central question the *Ethics* investigates is: what are the consequences of holding these three entities as basic for one's understanding of self and world?

Here are Spinoza's definitions of each:

DEFINITION 3: By substance I understand what is in itself and conceived through itself, i.e., that the concept of which does not require the concept of another thing from which it must be formed.

DEFINITION 4: By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence.

DEFINITION 5: By mode I understand the affections of substance, or that which is in another, through which it is also conceived.

What can we tell about the three definitions on a quick examination? It is clear that substance is fundamentally different from attributes or modes insofar as substance is what it is independent of modes and attributes, while modes and attributes both presuppose substance. What it means to be a mode is to be an affection of a substance, and an attribute is "what the intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence." Consequently substance has pride of place among the basic entities in Spinoza's ontology.

These definitions also point toward another of Spinoza's basic distinctions, a metaphysical distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura*

[3] It appears that at a relatively early stage of its composition the *Ethics* was divided into three parts and what eventually became *Ethics* III–V was all one large section. The five-part structure of the *Ethics* appears to have evolved as the work was written. See Letter XXVIII.

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(it is conceived through the attribute of extension), and Charlie himself is a mode expressing itself both as thought (Charlie's mental states or thoughts) and extension (Charlie's body, Charlie's swimming, etc.). Furthermore, Charlie is both a mode and composed of many modes. This brings up an obvious question: are the mind and the body of a given thing the same mode (Charlie) now considered as an extended mode (Charlie's body), and now as a thinking mode (Charlie's mind) or are they two different modes?

Substance, attributes, and modes, despite the many controversies concerning how precisely to understand them, are the basic categories of Spinoza's metaphysics, and by extension Spinoza's account of nature and the world. There are two further definitions from Part I of the *Ethics* that are important for understanding Spinoza's basic metaphysical commitments:

DEFINITION 1: By *causa sui* I understand that, the essence of which involves existence, or that, the nature of which is not able to be conceived, except as existing.

DEFINITION 6: By God I understand an absolutely infinite being, that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes, [all of] which express the same eternal and infinite essence.

The definition of *causa sui*, or "cause of itself," is only rarely invoked in the *Ethics*, but its prominent place as "Definition 1" signals its importance. It is a somewhat peculiar definition as it equates a causal concept – cause of itself – with two ontological claims. What seems important about *causa sui* is that it implies that the *primum ens* in Spinoza's universe, that being whose essence involves existence and who cannot be conceived except as existing, is caused. Of course it is caused by itself, but the implication is that causation and reason extend to all beings. In principle there is nothing beyond cause and nothing beyond reason. This has many striking and heterodox consequences.

Ultimately, Spinoza equated *causa sui* with God. Although the definition of *causa sui* is first among Spinoza's definitions, the definition of God is the cardinal and crucial definition of the *Ethics*. For Spinoza, the definition of God does not supplant the definition of substance. Rather, in *Ethics* I Spinoza argues that God is the one substance from which infinite attributes and an infinite infinity of modes arise and which are understood and comprehended, insofar as they are capable of being understood and comprehended, in and through God. I will have much to say about Spinoza's definition of God in what follows.

The metaphysics that Spinoza presents in *Ethics* I is derived not just from definitions but also from seven axioms or common notions. Spinoza

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presents these axioms as if they are philosophical commitments that anyone and everyone might hold. But, like the definitions, they are highly equivocal. It is really only over the course of reading the *Ethics* that the reader begins to understand them.[8] They are all very important but there are two that demand particular consideration for my purposes:

AXIOM 3: Out of a given determinate cause an effect necessarily follows, and conversely, if no determinate cause has been given it is impossible that an effect will follow.
AXIOM 4: Understanding an effect depends on and involves understanding the cause.

Both of these axioms concern causes. Axiom 4 is a strong claim, one might imagine the following far weaker version that "Understanding an effect depends on and involves the cause." In this variant one need not understand the cause, it is just the case that when one understands an effect this depends in some way on the cause of that effect. For example, the variant could just assert that if it were not for the cause there would be no effect to understand at all, hence to understand an effect there must be a cause. Spinoza's real axiom is far stronger, understanding the effect depends on *understanding* the cause.

This has an obvious but important consequence for the *Ethics*. We need to first understand causes (not just recognize them) in order to understand effects. Consequently, a proper philosophy needs to be structured in accordance with this axiom; we need to build our philosophy in such a way as to understand causes. There is still the problem of how we access these causes, but our need to access them and understand them is clear.

Axiom 3 states that an effect will follow when there is a determinate cause, and, conversely, if there is no determinate cause it is impossible that an effect will follow. It is not clear exactly what Spinoza meant by "determinate," but the axiom has the following powerful consequence. If there is no determinate cause as to why something does not exist, God for example, then it is impossible for that thing not to exist, and consequently it necessarily must exist. This functions as a kind of principle of sufficient reason in some of Spinoza's most important propositions. Taken together with IA4 and the definition of *causa sui* they support a fully causal and fully rational world where everything has a cause, all causes entail reasons, and,

[8] Margaret Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4)," in Y. Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 133–60.

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consequently, to be is to have a cause and a reason. This identification of causation and existence, which I noted in the discussion of *causa sui*, is a central feature of Spinoza's metaphysics.

In the latter half of *Ethics* I (IP16–33) Spinoza works out some very dramatic consequences that these considerations have for metaphysics. One notorious consequence is determinism – "that every event is causally determined from antecedent conditions by the laws of nature." Spinoza also seems to be committed to some sort of "necessitarianism," either to the strong claim that "every actual state of affairs is logically or metaphysically necessary, so that the world could not have been in any way different than it is" or to something a bit weaker that does not require that all finite states are necessitated in all ways.[9] Over the course of Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues for an infinite and necessary world where all things arise from one fully rational God through which all things are what they are. I will discuss a number of the propositions of *Ethics* I in the following chapters at some length.

I would like to briefly sketch the remainder of the *Ethics* to provide a general sense of its overall structure. Part II of the *Ethics*, "Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind," offers the consequences for minds (infinite and finite) of Spinoza's account of God. Spinoza argues that thought and extension – both of which are substances for Descartes[10] – are each separate attributes expressing the eternal and infinite essence of God. Thus, Spinoza takes the heterodox step of identifying both the mental and physical with the divine attributes. Once Spinoza establishes this, he develops a number of surprising theses about the mind, including his notorious claim that the will is just a mode of the mind and thus that the will is as necessitated and as necessary as any other mode (IIP48, IIP49C). He also argues that thought and extension exhibit the same "order and connection" (IIP7), that the mind understands itself and all else through the body, and that the mind is literally the idea of the body (IIP11–13).

There are a number of definitions in Book II that will be important in later chapters. But, since I have been using "essence" willy-nilly, it seems particularly important to present this definition at the outset. Actually,

[9] Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," in Y. Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 191–2. Garrett provides a highly convincing argument that Spinoza is a rather strong necessitarian. But see Edwin Curley and Charles Huennemann, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered," in Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (eds.), *New Essays on the Rationalists* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 241–62.

[10] *Principles of Philosophy*, I.52–3.

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strictly speaking, Spinoza does not define essence as such, but rather "belongs to an essence":

> IID2: To the essence of something belongs that which when given, the thing is necessarily put forward, and which when removed the thing is necessarily taken away; or that, without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and vice-versa.

Curley (*CW* 447n1) points out that this a more restrictive definition of essence than the Cartesian definition of essence Spinoza offers in the *Principles* (the clause "that which when given, the thing is necessarily put forward" prevents God from necessarily belonging to the essence of each individual (IIP10CS)). The definition of essence is a touchstone throughout the *Ethics* connected with Spinoza's theory of definition, and thus relevant to his thinking about method.

Parts I and II of the *Ethics* form a unit for reasons I will discuss in a later chapter. Parts III, IV, and V also form a unit – although Part V provides a kind of syncretic conclusion to the entire book and is in this way different from any of the chapters that come before it. I will discuss why and how this is the case in the concluding chapter of this book, but, for the moment, "On the Origin and Nature of the Affects" (III) presents a theory of the affections and the passions grounded on the metaphysics presented in the first two parts of the *Ethics*. Spinoza's theory of the passions is extremely interesting, and built on one of his most fundamental concepts, the *conatus*. The *conatus* is a sort of metaphysical principle of inertia, the drive each individual has to persist in its existence: a human to persevere as a human, a rock to persevere as a rock, and so on. Spinoza uses the *conatus* to develop a theory of the passions and an account of the ways in which human beings persevere in their existence. In defining the passions in this way, Spinoza is developing some suggestions derived from Hobbes' and Descartes' theories of the passions.

Theories of the passions were central to the projects of many of the best-known philosophers of the eighteenth century (Descartes, Hobbes, Malebranche, Gassendi) as they provided a means to explain the ways in which the body affected the mind. The ways these philosophers defined the passions, and what precisely they meant by the body affecting the mind were quite diverse. But there is a general sense that a mechanistic physiology would provide a wedge into a rich variety of ethical phenomena. Spinoza diverges from all of the above philosophers in (1) denying that the passions were ways in which the body disturbed the mind and (2) considering the

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mental and the bodily as autonomous. Descartes and Malebranche accept (2) but not (1), Hobbes and Gassendi (1) but not (2). The *conatus* was, for Spinoza, the concept that anchored (1) and (2), as the tendency to persevere in existence holds of all modes, mental, physical, or both, yet it does not imply that mental is reducible to the physical.

There has been a tendency when considering Spinoza's philosophy to view Parts III and IV as interesting but ancillary to the meat of Spinoza's arguments. I think this is because when teaching philosophy there is a tendency to make major divisions between moral philosophy, philosophy of mind or epistemology, and metaphysics. Part I of Spinoza's *Ethics* is clearly a metaphysic. Part II is, at least in part, a philosophy of mind and theory of knowledge. In Part II Spinoza analyzes and compares different sorts of knowledge and cognition as well as issues surrounding the relation (or lack of relation) between mind and body. In addition he develops a theory of truth and adequacy. Much of what he has to say about issues in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and the theory of knowledge is relevant to current philosophical practice.

The case is somewhat different with moral theory. Although there has been a real resurgence of interest in the emotions and the passions among moral philosophers and philosophers of psychology, and an attendant resurgence in interest in Spinoza, most issues in moral philosophy are still dictated by a few philosophers writing before Spinoza – Aristotle and Plato – or after – Kant, Mill, Bentham, and Hume. Spinoza's concerns overlap with all of these philosophers on particular issues. But his way of doing moral philosophy built on a theory of the passions, although akin to Hume, is still foreign to the ways in which most contemporary moral philosophers do moral philosophy.[11]

Part IV of the *Ethics*, "On Human Bondage, or the Powers of the Affects," describes the ways in which we are limited and buffeted by our passions such that they diminish our power. But Spinoza also concurrently develops his concept of a "free man," a person who, despite the power of his (or her) passions, manages to be as little impacted by contingent circumstances as possible and to be happy, powerful, and free. The discussion of the "free man" includes some of the most powerful passages in the *Ethics* including two of Spinoza's best-known maxims: that the free man thinks least of all about death (IVP67) and that if men were born free they would have no ideas of good and evil (IVP68).

11 There is a notable list of counter examples, Annette Baier, Martha Nussbaum, and Amélie Rorty being some of the best known.

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remarks that in Part III he will consider the nature and force of the affects as if they were questions concerning "lines, planes, and bodies" just as he had considered God in Part I and Mind in Part II. Thus, due to the uniformity and universality of the geometrical method, we can show that human follies and absurdities are no more or less explicable than anything else in nature. They are explicable in precisely the same way as anything else is, through necessary reasons.

So, Spinoza assumes that there are general laws of nature and that these laws have great explanatory power. He assumes that we are parts of nature. There has been a tendency in reading Spinoza to consider this dictum to imply that we are all parts that interlock in a vast whole or community of nature. I will argue that to be a part of nature means something different than being a part of a whole in this sense. In other words, if we examine what it could possibly mean for Spinoza to be a part, we see that it cannot mean anything so teleological.

There is a general strategy in all of Spinoza's major works, but particularly the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, of taking over loosely defined terminology, like "part," and using it in a determinate way which is sometimes at odds with the colloquial sense of a term. I will argue in subsequent chapters that this strategy is important for how Spinoza understands method. So what does "part" mean? By extension, what is the relation between nature and the individual and how and what can the individual know of nature? Spinoza's answer is one of the most thoroughly naturalistic, in the above sense, that has ever been put to paper.

PARTS IN THE WHOLE OF NATURE

1665 was not a happy year for Amsterdam or London, and it was a low point in relations between Holland and England. The Anglo-Dutch war flared for a second time, eventually to be settled by the Peace of Breda. A devastating plague first struck Holland, and then moved on to London in late 1664, the plague remembered and immortalized more than fifty years later in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. In 1666 the Great Fire of London followed the plague. Comets and portents were sighted all over Christendom. Millenarians and religious enthusiasts awaited the end of the world in the year 1666, as "prophesied" in the Book of Revelations. Sects, ranging from large groups such as the followers of the self-proclaimed Messiah Sabbatai Sevi to small collections of radicals, proclaimed the end of the world, salvation for the blessed, and punishment of the wicked; and the signs, the plagues and violence, seemed to confirm it everywhere.

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Meaning in Spinoza's Method