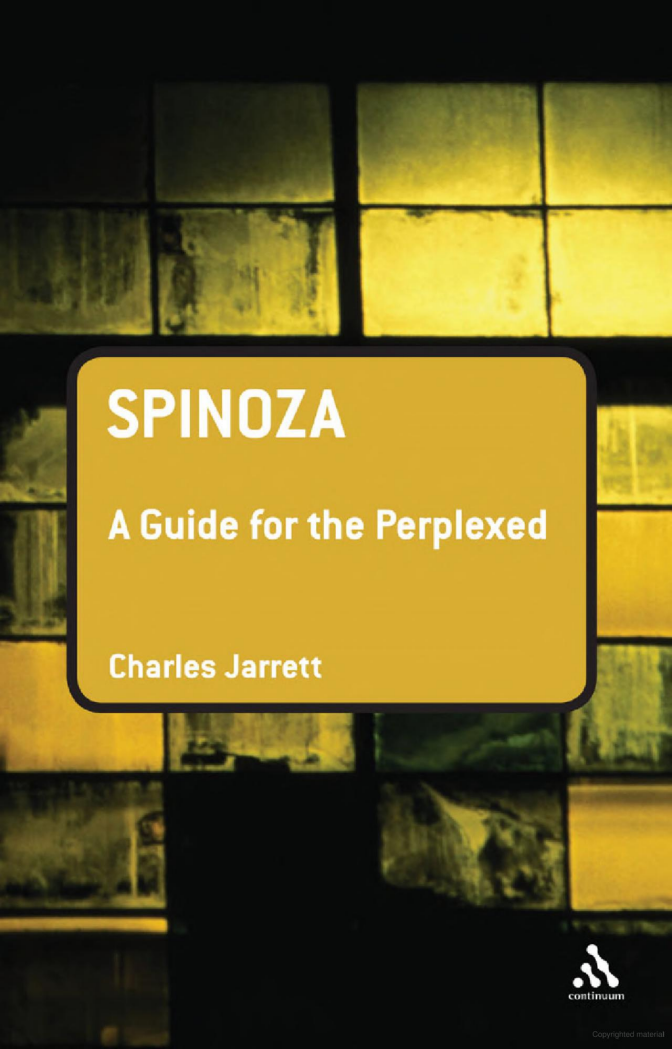

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

This work is an introduction to Spinoza's philosophy. It is intended primarily for those with little or no prior knowledge of his philosophy or even of philosophy itself.

As a 'Guide for the Perplexed', it is also designed as an aid for those who have begun to read Spinoza, but who have been unable to proceed very far. Some of the reasons for this difficulty will be discussed later in this work, as will the means by which I hope to dispel it.

Readers who turn to Spinoza's *Ethics*, but who have very little background in philosophy, may well be puzzled by unexplained terminology and references to metaphysics, epistemology, the ontological argument, or the problem of universals. This work therefore begins each chapter on the five parts of the *Ethics* (Chapters 5–9) with a very brief overview of the subject or topic under consideration. Each of these chapters also provides an informal statement of some of Spinoza's main theses, a recommended order of readings, and a short discussion intended to clarify Spinoza's major claims and some of his arguments. A brief comparison of Spinoza's views with those of others and a discussion of disputed issues are also provided.

Spinoza's two political works are less highly structured than the *Ethics* and my presentation of them is correspondingly somewhat different. For each of these, I provide an introduction, a presentation of Spinoza's main claims, and a short discussion of some of the issues he raises.

I have tried to bring out the major theses and themes of Spinoza's philosophy without delving unnecessarily into the technical details of his arguments or proofs. It may be helpful to new readers to point

out that there is general agreement about many of the main elements of his philosophy. There are also, however, many disagreements about important doctrines. These include questions concerning what, precisely, Spinoza's God or substance is, the relations between the human mind and body, the nature of his ethics, and his doctrine of the eternity of the intellect.

Like others who have written introductions to Spinoza, I hope that this work will be of some interest not only to a general audience, but also to those with a special interest and background in Spinoza, philosophy, or the history of philosophy generally. For the most part, however, scholarly debates are avoided. Interpretations that differ from my own are noted, but only briefly discussed. References to more advanced scholarly discussions are also provided.[1]

ABBREVIATIONS

This book generally follows the style of abbreviation used in Yovel (1999). One exception is that 'cap' is used for the numbered sections of the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*.

C	Spinoza, Benedictus de (1985), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press).
CM	*Cogitata Metaphysica* (*Metaphysical Thoughts*). This is the appendix to PPC.
E	*Ethica* (*Ethics*). 'E' is followed by part number (I–V) and one or more of the following:
App	Appendix
ax	axiom
c	corollary
cap	*caput* (heading in E IV App)
d	demonstration
def	definition
def.aff.	definition of affect (in E III)
exp	explanation
gen.def.aff.	general definition of affect (in E III)
lem	lemma
p	proposition
post	postulate
Pref	Preface
s	scholium

Thus, for example, 'E I p14c2' refers to the second corollary to proposition 14 of the first part of the *Ethics*, and 'E II p10cs' to the

scholium following the corollary of II p10. A comma indicates 'and'. Thus 'E IV p1,d' refers to proposition 1 and its demonstration in Part IV.

Ep	*Epistolae* (*Letters*). These are numbered as in Spinoza (2002).
G	Gebhardt, Carl (ed), *Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitaetsbuchhandlung, 1925) 'G' is followed by volume (I–IV), page, and line number. Thus 'G II. 10. 8–16' refers to Volume II, page 10, lines 8–16.
KV	*Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en deszelvs Welstand* (*Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*). 'KV' is followed by part number (I or II), chapter number, and section number (1, 2, etc.). Thus 'KV I. 6.3' refers to Part I, chapter 6, section 3.
M	Mignini, Filipo (ed. and trans.), *Benedictus de Spinoza: Breve trattato su Dio, l'uomo e il suo bene* (L'Aquila: L. U. Japadre, 1986).
PPC	*Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae* (*Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*), that is, *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II* (*Parts I and II of René Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*). 'PPC' is followed by part number (I, II, or III) and proposition, etc., as in E.
S	Spinoza, Benedictus de (2002), *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company).
TdIE	*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*).
TP	*Tractatus Politicus* (*Political Treatise*).
TTP	*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theologico-Political Treatise*).

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

THE NETHERLANDS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

ORIGIN OF THE NETHERLANDS

The modern state of The Netherlands arose from the union of seven of the 17 provinces that Philip II of Spain inherited in 1555 from his father, Charles V.[1] The Eighty Years War against Spain, which was actually a series of three different revolts,[2] began in 1568 and in 1579 the seven northern provinces formed the Union of Utrecht. This was an agreement to act as one, at least 'in matters of war and peace'.[3] In 1581 they adopted the Act of Abjuration, their declaration of independence from Spain.[4] These provinces achieved official independence in 1648 with the Treaty of Münster, although de facto independence dates from 1609.[5]

The seven northern provinces were Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland, Overijssel, Friesland, and Groningen.[6] They became what is now known as The Netherlands, while the southern provinces are now mainly Belgium and Luxembourg.

GOVERNMENT

Each of the seven provinces had its own governing assembly and each had one vote in the States General, the governing body of the republic.[7] There was also a *stadholder*, or governor, for each province as well as for the provinces as a whole. From 1572 to 1795, the States Stadholder was nearly always the Prince of Orange, including Frederick Hendrik and William I through William V.[8]

The provinces were largely self-governed, however, and The Netherlands itself was a loose confederation, with a relatively weak central government.[9] Holland was the wealthiest and politically

most powerful of the provinces and its head of state, the Grand Pensionary Jan de Witt, was the effective ruler of The Netherlands from 1650 to 1672.[10]

RELIGION

Catholicism in Western Europe had a monopoly on religious orthodoxy until the Protestant Reformation. This was initiated by Martin Luther (1483–1546) when he posted his 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door in 1517. Although Luther's primary complaint concerned the sale of indulgences, it eventually led to the establishment of a new orthodoxy, Lutheranism. Another reformer, John Calvin (1509–1564), agreed with Luther that priests may marry, gained political control of Geneva, and established a new Protestant religion, Calvinism. This teaches that the Bible alone has religious authority, that is, it contains everything needed for knowledge of God and of our duties to God and our neighbours. In addition, it holds that good acts can be done only with the grace of God. It also holds that everything which happens is divinely predestined.

The northern provinces became officially Calvinist,[11] despite the large number of Catholics within their borders,[12] while the south remained Catholic.

Religious tolerance was selective and it was extended, sometimes, to Jews, but not to Catholics, Arminians (Remonstrants), or others. An interesting story about this is recounted by Nadler.[13] In the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the authorities in Amsterdam investigated a report of a strange language being used in a nearby house. They investigated, took the occupants of the house to be Catholics praying in Latin, and arrested them. When informed that the occupants were Jews who were praying in Hebrew, the authorities released them. Indeed, they gave the Jews permission to set up a congregation. Permission to build a synagogue, however, was evidently refused in 1612.[14]

POLITICS

The major political division was between Orangists, who favoured a strong central government with a powerful sovereign from the House of Orange, and the republicans, who advocated local control and 'true freedom'.[15] Members of the Reformed Church, the Calvinists,

were in the former camp, while Spinoza, his friends, and Jan de Witt were in the latter. Tolerance of others, freedom of speech, and freedom to practise one's own religion were major issues in dispute.

1672 was the *annus horribilis*, or 'disaster year', for The Netherlands. The French and the English attacked in concert, the stock market crashed, the art market collapsed, and there was rioting in the streets.[16] On 4 August, Jan de Witt resigned as Grand Pensionary and on 20 August, a mob got hold of him and his brother. They were 'beaten, stabbed, and shot to death'[17] and then hung upside down and mutilated. Parts of their bodies were cooked and eaten.[18]

When Spinoza learned of the killings, he told Leibniz that he planned to go outside and post a notice at the site which read 'ultimi barbarorum' (greatest of barbarians). His landlord, however, locked him in the house to prevent his 'being torn to pieces'.[19] As Nadler relates, Spinoza was linked to de Witt and a 1672 pamphlet 'proclaims that de Witt basically gave Spinoza the protection he needed to publish the *Theologico-Political Treatise*'.[20]

In the end, the French gained little, the English fleet was defeated, and William III's defence of the republic resulted in increased prestige and power for himself and the Orangists.[21] In 1689, following the 'Glorious Revolution', he became King of England and co-ruler with Queen Mary II, thus replacing her father, James II.

THE DUTCH GOLDEN AGE

The seventeenth century, or most of it, is also known as the Dutch Golden Age. It was a period during which Dutch naval power became dominant and, not coincidentally, its economy became the strongest in Europe.[22] The Dutch East Indies Company gained control of trade in Taiwan and Japan, as well as parts of South-east Asia and Eastern Africa, and it established a settlement, initially for 'refuelling', at the Cape of Good Hope.[23] The Dutch West Indies Company established settlements in North and South America, as well as in the Caribbean. These companies had warships and an army, not merely merchant ships, and they committed mass murder[24] in their effort to control trade. They were major participants in the slave trade.[25]

Dutch art and architecture experienced its golden age as well, starting in the 1590s.[26] Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn

(1606–1669) and Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) are now, surely, the best known among the many Dutch painters of the time.[27] Rembrandt, incidentally, lived for a while 'around the corner from Spinoza',[28] although there is no evidence that they knew each other more than in passing.[29]

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Aristotelianism was the dominant philosophy taught in the universities both during and well before the time of Spinoza and Descartes. (Descartes died in 1650, when Spinoza was 17.) Descartes, in fact, went to the Jesuit school at La Flèche in France, where he was no doubt strongly influenced by the work of Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), the principal theorist of the Jesuits. Suárez was the last in a long line of eminent theologians and philosophers that includes Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Duns Scotus (1266–1308), and William of Ockham (1285–1347). His *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (1597) is an admirably comprehensive and detailed work on metaphysics and on Aristotle.

Aquinas had combined a primarily Aristotelian philosophical framework with Catholicism in the thirteenth century, comparable to Augustine's synthesis of Plato and Christian doctrine in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The Aristotelian and indeed Christian worldview promulgated a cosmology, or theory of the structure of the universe, that we call 'Ptolemaic'. It was set out in perhaps its most refined form in the *Almagest* by Claudius Ptolemy (*c.* 90–*c.* 168), although Aristotle had advanced it in the fourth century BC. It is said to be a 'geocentric' conception because it holds that the earth is the centre of the universe and the sun, moon, and planets revolve around it. The Aristotelian worldview also regards natural phenomena as having both efficient and final causes. Everything, that is, is 'due to' an antecedent cause as we ordinarily understand it and everything is also 'for something' in the sense that it has a purpose or goal.

The Ptolemaic view was challenged by Nicholaus Copernicus (1473–1543) in his book *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, published in the year of his death. This maintained, or suggested, that the sun is the centre of the universe and that the planets, including the earth, revolve around the sun. This 'heliocentric' or sun-centred conception was later advocated by Galileo in his *Dialogue* and by

Descartes in *Le monde*. Galileo (1564–1642) published his work and got into trouble with the Inquisition because of it. Descartes, on hearing about this, decided against publication of his own treatise.

Descartes' later works were not well received by the Dutch authorities. Indeed, the teaching of Cartesianism was prohibited in the universities.

A short list of some of the other most famous natural philosophers or scientists of the age includes the following:

1. Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), astronomer and astrologer, who formulated three laws of planetary motion.
2. Robert Boyle (1627–1691), perhaps the first modern chemist. Spinoza corresponded indirectly with him, through Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society. Oldenburg sent Boyle's book to Spinoza and Spinoza sent back some criticisms. A short exchange followed, always mediated by Oldenburg.
3. Christian Huygens (1629–1695), physicist and mathematician. Spinoza made some lenses for him.
4. Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723), 'the father of microbiology'. He was born in the same year as Spinoza, in Delft.
5. Isaac Newton (1643–1727), or 'the incomparable Mr. Newton', as John Locke put it in his *Essay*. He produced a unified theory that accounts for both terrestrial and celestial motion and was the co-inventor, with Leibniz, of the calculus. The question of priority has long been controversial.
6. Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), physicist, philosopher, and mathematician. He once met and conversed with Spinoza and he corresponded with Spinoza about optics. Spinoza was quite reluctant to allow him to see a manuscript of the *Ethics*.

Extraordinary advances in mathematics were also made in the seventeenth century. Descartes invented analytic geometry, while Leibniz and Newton, as just noted, created the calculus. Other notables in this field include Pierre de Fermat (1601–1665), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), and Christian Huygens. Lesser known but still notable are John Hudde (1633–1704) and Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus (1651–1708). Spinoza corresponded with both of them as well as with Huygens.

Several scientific societies were established in the seventeenth century. In England, the Royal Society was founded in 1660 and

granted a charter to publish by King Charles II in 1662.[30] Oldenburg was its first secretary and he was an extremely active correspondent with others throughout Europe. Other scientific societies that were formed in the seventeenth century include the French Académie des sciences, the German Leopoldinische Carolinisch Akademie der Naturforscher, and the Italian Accademia dei Lincei (Academy of the Lynxes).

CHAPTER 2

SPINOZA'S LIFE AND THOUGHT

SPINOZA'S LIFE

Family and early life

Spinoza was born in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam on 24 November 1632. His parents were Sephardic Jews, that is, descendants of Jews who in the Middle Ages lived on the Iberian peninsula (primarily Spain and Portugal). At the time of Spinoza's birth, the Sephardic community in Amsterdam was relatively well established, while the Ashkenazi Jews were more recent, and poorer, immigrants.[1]

Spinoza's mother was Hanna Deborah Senior and it is apparently from her father, Baruch Senior, that Spinoza received his Hebrew name.[2] 'Baruch' means 'blessed' and is 'Benedictus' in Latin. At home and within the Portuguese community he was called 'Bento', which is Portuguese for 'blessed'.

His father was Michael d'Espinoza (also 'Miguel d'Espinosa'), who was born in Vidigere, Portugal in 1587 or 1588.[3] Spinoza's paternal grandfather, Isaac, had left Portugal with Michael to escape the Portuguese Inquisition. In 1497 Jewish children in Portugal were forced to convert to Catholicism and in 1547 the Pope established 'a free and unimpeded Inquisition' in Portugal.[4] Members of the Espinosa family, like many others, had been imprisoned and tortured in Portugal.[5]

Aside from Spinoza's mother and father, his immediate family, at his birth, included an older sister, Miriam (born 1629) and an older brother, Isaac (born between 1630 and 1632).[6] A younger brother, Abraham (also known as Gabriel), was born between 1634 and 1638.[7] Finally, he also had a sister or half-sister, Rebecca. It is

unclear, according to Nadler, whether her mother was Hanna (Michael's second wife) or Esther (Michael's third wife).[8] Rebecca moved to Curaçao between 1679 and 1685 and she and one of her sons died there in a yellow fever epidemic in 1695.[9]

Spinoza's father was a fairly successful merchant, who imported a variety of goods such as citrus fruits, raisins, and oil.[10] He was also active in the leadership of the community.

Spinoza went to the local school, run by the Talmud Torah congregation. This had six levels or grades, the two highest of which were mainly for rabbinical training. Spinoza seems to have attended only the first four, after which, at around age 14, he apparently worked in his father's business,[11] which he later ran with his brother, Gabriel.

The years from 1649 through 1654 must have been difficult. Spinoza's older brother died in 1649 and this was followed by the death of his older sister Miriam in 1651, of his stepmother Esther in 1652, and of his father in 1654.

In perhaps 1654 or 1655,[12] and maybe as early as 1652,[13] Spinoza began to attend a private school set up by Franciscus van den Enden. There Spinoza studied Latin, as well as Descartes' philosophy, and he participated with others at the school in the production of various plays. Klever holds, on the basis of new documents that he and Bedjai independently discovered, that van den Enden is 'a proto-Spinoza; the genius behind Spinoza'.[14]

There is also a story about van den Enden's daughter, Clara Maria. Colerus portrays Spinoza as being in love with her and wanting to marry her, but many commentators are sceptical. Nadler is among them and he notes that if this is supposed to relate how Spinoza felt in 1657, Spinoza would have been 25 and Clara Maria 13.[15] Colerus also says that another student, Keckkering, was jealous. Keckkering was 18 at the time and in fact married Clara Maria in 1671.[16]

Van den Enden moved to Paris in 1670. He was charged with plotting to assassinate Louis XIV and was hanged in 1674. One of his alleged co-conspirators was beheaded and the other was shot while resisting arrest.[17]

Spinoza was excommunicated by the Amsterdam synagogue on 27 July 1656. The complete explanation of this is still debated. There is no doubt, however, that at least a central part of the reason for it was Spinoza's heretical views. According to Lucas, Spinoza had revealed some of his views and attitudes to others and they then

reported him to the authorities of the congregation.[18] These views included rejection of the orthodox conception of God as a lawgiver and of the Jews as a chosen people.[19] In 1659 a report was made to the Spanish Inquisition concerning Spinoza and Juan de Prado, who had also been excommunicated. They were reported to have said that they had been excommunicated 'because of their views on God, the soul, and the law'.[20]

After his excommunication, Spinoza stayed in Amsterdam, probably at van den Enden's, but he may instead have lived in Leiden. He 'studied at Leiden', according to the Inquisition report.[21] He may have helped in teaching at van den Enden's school and he participated in 1657/58 in various plays.[22] He may also have translated Margaret Fell Fox's *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jewes* and one of her letters from Dutch into Hebrew.[23]

Spinoza's closest friends or 'intimate circle', as Wolf puts it, were not numerous.[24] Simon Joosten de Vries (1633?–1667) was a merchant who at his death left Spinoza an annuity, only part of which Spinoza accepted. Lodewijk Meyer (1630–1681) received both a Ph.D. and an M.D. in 1660 from the University of Leiden. He became the director of the Amsterdam Theatre, founded a society of arts, and was an author himself. Another author was Pieter Balling, an agent for merchants. Jarig Jelles (d. 1683) was a merchant, but hired a business manager 'to devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge'.[25] Finally, there were Johan Bouwmeester (1630–1680) and Georg Hermann Schuller (1651–1679). Both were doctors and it was the latter, apparently, who attended Spinoza during his last illness and was present at Spinoza's death.

Rijnsburg

Spinoza moved to Rijnsburg, which is near Leiden, in the summer of 1661. The earliest piece of his correspondence that we have is a letter from Oldenburg, dated 26 August 1661. It is from this letter that we learn that earlier in the summer Oldenburg visited Spinoza and conversed with him about philosophy.

While in Rijnsburg Spinoza dictated to a student the first part of what would become the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (PPC).

The house in which he rented a room still stands and is preserved by Het Spinozhous Vereniging (the Spinoza House Association).[26] They have reconstructed his library and have set up his room, which is rather

large, as it was when Spinoza lived there. It is on the ground floor, to the right of the entrance to the house, and it has direct access to the back yard. Among the furnishings is a lens-grinding instrument.

Voorburg

Spinoza moved to Voorburg, which is close to The Hague, probably in April of 1663.[27] There he continued work on what would become the *Ethics*. He also finished composing the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* and an appendix to it, the *Metaphysical Thoughts* (CM), which his friends encouraged him to publish. It appeared in 1663, published in Amsterdam by Jan (Johannes) Rieuwertsz.

In 1665 Spinoza began work on the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TTP).

The Hague

Spinoza's final move was to The Hague, probably in 1669 or 1670, where he again rented a room, first in one house and then, about a year later, in another.[28]

In 1670 he published the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which was immediately attacked and condemned as godless and blasphemous.[29]

In 1673 Spinoza was offered, but declined, the chair of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. He accepted, however, an invitation to visit the military headquarters of the Prince of Condé, whose French forces had invaded The Netherlands. The prince was not there, however, and although Spinoza stayed for a while, his mission remains a mystery.[30]

As we learn from Ep 68, Spinoza had the *Ethics* ready for publication in 1675, but because rumours got out that he was going to publish an atheistic work, he decided to wait. He began work on the *Political Treatise* (TP), which he did not finish.

Spinoza became ill about a week before his death and he died on 21 February 1677. The cause of his death was evidently phthisis (tubercular and/or fibrous). He may also have had silicosis as a result of grinding lenses for many years.[31]

His papers were sent to Rieuwertsz in Amsterdam, edited by his friends, and published in 1677 as his *Opera Posthuma*, in Latin, and *Nagelate Schriften*, in Dutch.[32] The *Opera Posthuma* contains his

Ethics, an edited selection of his correspondence, and three incomplete works: the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the *Political Treatise*, and the *Grammar of the Hebrew Language*. The *Nagelate Schriften* contains all of these except the last.

Brief chronology

1632 24 Nov.	Birth of Spinoza in Amsterdam
1638	Death of Spinoza's mother, Hanna Deborah Senior
1652?	Spinoza begins to attend van den Enden's school
1654	Death of Spinoza's father, Michael d'Espinosa
1654–56?	Spinoza runs his father's business with Gabriel
1656 27 July	Excommunication by Amsterdam synagogue
1656–61	Spinoza remains in Amsterdam[33]
1661	Spinoza moves to Rijnsburg, where Oldenburg visits him. He works on the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, and the *Ethics*
1663	Publication of the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* and its appendix, the *Metaphysical Thoughts*. Spinoza moves to Voorburg, near The Hague
1665	Spinoza begins work on the *Theologico-Political Treatise*
1669 or 1670	Spinoza moves to The Hague
1670	Publication of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*
1673	Spinoza goes to Utrecht (a diplomatic mission?). He declines the chair of philosophy at Heidelberg
1675	Spinoza considers publication of the *Ethics* and begins the *Political Treatise*
1676	Leibniz visits Spinoza
1677 21 Feb.	Death of Spinoza in The Hague
1677	Publication of the *Opera Posthuma* and the *Nagelate Schriften*

THE CHARACTER OF SPINOZA'S THOUGHT: PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND THEOLOGY

Spinoza's thought deals with nearly every major issue and field in philosophy. It addresses central issues in metaphysics, philosophy of mind, the theory of knowledge, ethics, and political philosophy. It

also provides a cosmology, a psychology, and at least a partial physics. Although we now regard the former subjects as parts of philosophy and the latter as parts of science, he recognizes no sharp division between them.[34]

In this he is like other thinkers of the seventeenth century, who do not think of philosophy, or at least 'natural philosophy', as distinct from the various sciences. Descartes, for example, explicitly maintains that philosophy encompasses everything we can know.[35] Newton's main work is entitled *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*.[36] We, in contrast, regard it as one of the greatest foundational works in science.

Perhaps this should be expected. For modern science originated partly in the sixteenth and primarily in the seventeenth centuries. It arose with the work of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, Newton, Huygens, Boyle, Leeuwenhoek, and many others. It was a revolution in thought and the revolutionaries had just begun to create the modern sciences of cosmology and astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology.

A third field, however, is also prominent in Spinoza's thought. It is theology, taken in its most basic sense as an account, or as knowledge, of God. Spinoza's philosophy thus seems to us a curious mixture not just of two fields, but of three: philosophy, science, and theology.

But in this, too, Spinoza is not unique. Both Plato and Aristotle invoke a concept of the divine to account for features of the physical world. Plato's Demiurge arranges the heavens for the best and Aristotle's unmoved mover, or movers, accounts for motion. In addition, Descartes himself holds that all knowledge depends on knowledge of God. Indeed, he attempts to derive a principle of the conservation of the 'total quantity of motion' from the constancy of God's will. Newton, in turn, takes space and time to be 'God's sensorium' and appeals solely to God to account for the paths of comets, or at least to explain why, as he thinks, the comets do not collide with the planets.

This apparent failure to distinguish philosophy, science, and theology seems quite odd to us, but it is a reflection of the attempt to provide a unitary, reasoned, and comprehensive account of the world, including ourselves.

It seems odd to us partly because we are so accustomed to the specialization and division of labour that has arisen since the seventeenth century. Astrophysics, quantum physics, evolutionary

biology, and organic chemistry, to name just a few, are highly specialized fields of scientific enquiry, as are philosophy of mind, ethics, and philosophical logic, in philosophy. Theology, in turn, has its subfields as well and the 'Renaissance person' who combines them all seems an ideal of the past. Graduate training in a moderate number of these fields would normally take a lifetime.

Questions about the nature of philosophy, of science, and of theology, and of their relations to each other, are matters of deep disagreement and I will not try to settle the issues here. My own view, however, is that philosophy, if it does nothing else, raises and attempts to answer the big questions about ourselves and the universe. It is a systematic and reasoned attempt to understand the world, including ourselves. This makes it a theoretical enterprise and continuous, at least in part, with modern science.

Its aim, however, is not just to understand. The quest for knowledge has usually, and quite rightly, been conjoined with the conviction that while knowledge is intrinsically valuable, it is useful as well. 'Reason', as Spinoza and many others have held, has both theoretical and practical aims.

CHAPTER 3

THE *TREATISE ON THE EMENDATION OF THE INTELLECT*

INTRODUCTION

A natural starting point for a consideration of Spinoza's philosophy is his early work, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE).[1] Its full title is *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and on the Way by which it is Best Directed to the True Knowledge of Things*.[2] As this indicates, one of its primary concerns is with philosophical method. However, its first 30 sections, out of 110,[3] are devoted primarily to a discussion of value and of a change in Spinoza's plan of life. Here Spinoza sets out his conception of the highest good and in the course of this he explains why the subject of the treatise, the emendation or improvement of the intellect, is important.

This part of TdIE may be outlined as follows:

§§1–11	The change in Spinoza's plan of life
§§12–13	The true good and the highest good
§§14–16	The general means by which to attain the highest good
§17	Provisional rules of life (to be accepted while pursuing the true good)
§§18–24	The four kinds of knowledge or perception
§§25–30	The means to the highest good

THE CHANGE IN SPINOZA'S PLAN OF LIFE (§§1–11)

The *Treatise* begins with an extraordinary sentence:

> After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the

> things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected – whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity.[4]

Spinoza's philosophy is thus motivated by the search for the true good or, as he later characterizes it, the highest good.

As his first sentence indicates, this is not something that is 'good in itself', or good independently of its effects on us. Indeed, Spinoza holds that nothing is good or bad in itself. Instead, he maintains that things are good only insofar as they affect the soul with joy and they are bad only insofar as they affect the soul with 'negative' (unpleasant) emotions.

Spinoza's subsequent discussion (through §11) contains an account of his struggle to devise and even think about a new goal as well as to free himself from the pursuit of ordinary goods. In the course of this discussion, he criticizes these ordinary pursuits and he also considers the question of the attainability of his new goal.

THE TRUE GOOD AND THE HIGHEST GOOD (§§12–16)

§§12–13. §11 ends Spinoza's 'autobiographical' or 'historical' account of his thoughts. §§12–16 set out his conception of a true good and the highest good, but first he makes some preliminary remarks.

These prefatory remarks and Spinoza's initial identification of the supreme good are as follows:

> good and bad are said of things only in a certain respect, so that one and the same thing can be called both good and bad according to different respects. The same applies to perfect and imperfect. For nothing, considered in its own nature, will be called perfect or imperfect, especially after we have recognized that everything that happens happens according to the eternal order, and according to certain laws of nature.

> But since human weakness does not grasp that order by its own thought, and meanwhile man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek the means that will lead him to such perfection. Whatever can be a means to his attaining it is called a true good, but the highest good is to arrive – together with other individuals if possible – at the enjoyment of such a nature. What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that it is the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature.[5]

Spinoza here expresses a view that is now sometimes called 'anti-objectivist' or 'anti-realist'. The idea is that things as they are in themselves are neither good nor bad, nor are they perfect or imperfect. To maintain that nothing, 'considered in its own nature', is good or bad can also be expressed by saying that being good and being bad are not 'real properties' of things. Nevertheless, he holds, we can construct an idea of a 'stronger human nature', and can legitimately call a thing 'good' or a 'true good', insofar as it is a means of attaining such a nature. Such a view can also be called 'constructivist', insofar as it requires construction of an ideal with reference to which things are to be evaluated as good or bad.

Spinoza's position is set out quite briefly here, but it is reiterated and characterized more completely in both the *Ethics* and the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* (KV). We will consider it further when we turn to the *Ethics*.

Another remarkable feature of Spinoza's thought about ethics is also found in this passage. For Spinoza claims or suggests that ethics rests, in part, on ignorance. Our failure to understand the order of nature, that is, our 'human weakness' (*humana imbecillitas*), is apparently cited as a precondition either of our constructing an ideal (or 'exemplar' as he puts it in the *Ethics*[6]), or of seeing no reason why we cannot attain it, or of both. That we are ignorant of the causal order of nature is stressed by Spinoza in several places.[7]

§§14–15. The means by which the highest good is to be attained are enumerated in §§14 and 15. They include: (1) understanding as much of nature as is required; (2) establishing a social order to allow as many as possible to attain the supreme good; (3) the development

of moral philosophy and the education of children; and (4) medicine and (5) mechanics (to save time and effort).

This seems to be the outline of a programme. Spinoza's *Ethics* contributes primarily to (1) and to the development of moral philosophy, specified in (3). His political works seem to provide a necessary preliminary to (2).

§16. Most important, however, is the development of a method for emending or healing (*medendi*) the intellect and for purifying it. Thus all sciences are to be directed to one goal, the attainment of the 'highest human perfection', and whatever does not advance this is to be rejected as useless.

PROVISIONAL RULES OF LIFE AND KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE (§17)

§17. Spinoza here sets out provisional rules for living (*vivendi regulae*). These include: (1) speak to the understanding of the multitude (*ad captum vulgi loqui*); (2) indulge in pleasures only to the extent that they promote health; and (3) seek money only insofar as it is necessary for life and health and for following the customs of society (when they do not conflict with his overall aim).

THE FOUR KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE OR PERCEPTION (§§18–24)

§§18–24. These sections provide a survey of kinds of knowledge ('perception') that we have. These are: (1) from hearsay or conventional signs; (2) from casual experience; (3) when we inadequately infer the essence of one thing from another thing; and (4) 'when a thing is perceived through its essence alone, or through knowledge of its proximate cause'.[8]

THE MEANS TO THE HIGHEST GOOD (§§25–30)

§25. Spinoza recounts what is necessary for his goal. This consists generally in the knowledge necessary for determining the extent to which we can change things, and 'This done, the highest perfection man can reach will easily manifest itself'.[9]

§§26–30. What kind of knowledge should we choose? After discussing each kind, he answers in §29 that it is mainly the fourth kind. §30 indicates that the remainder of the work will determine the method for obtaining this kind of knowledge.

'human perfection', 'a stronger (and more enduring) human nature', and 'knowledge of the union of the mind with the whole of nature'. In §13, however, he does identify 'a stronger (and more enduring) human nature' with 'knowledge of the union of the mind with the whole of nature', and he characterizes this as our perfection. As we have also seen, he seems to suppose, in §§2, 9–10, and 14, that what he seeks is happiness (or the highest happiness, according to §2) and he indicates that this depends on love of the eternal, which 'feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness'. In §14 Spinoza also apparently equates his own happiness with his attainment of a stronger and more lasting human nature. Thus Spinoza apparently takes all of these descriptions to be equivalent.

Attainability

The question of the attainability of our goal is a large one, which we have considered very briefly in our remarks on §§12–13 above. For Spinoza seems to suppose there, quite naturally, that we construct or pursue a goal when, and perhaps only when, we do not see anything that prevents our attaining it. Ignorance of the causal order of nature thus appears to be a necessary presupposition of ethics. That our goal should be possible for us – that is, not ruled out by what we know – is also indicated when Spinoza maintains in §13 that it is a stronger *human* nature that we seek. For he holds that individuals cannot persist through changes in their species.[15]

We have also seen that Spinoza provides several different descriptions of his ultimate goal and, indeed, he sometimes leaves open what precisely the highest goal is. In §25, for example, he indicates that what the goal is will become apparent after we come to know the extent of our power over natural things.[16] The question thus arises whether we can, or should, specify our highest goal independently of its attainability.

In the *Ethics*, we might add, Spinoza's ideal is one of complete self-determination.[17] This, however, would require that we not be parts of nature, or that we be unaffected by anything outside of ourselves, and Spinoza himself recognizes that this is impossible.[18] But he also holds that blessedness can be achieved.

Of course, if we think on our own about the construction of an ideal, we might well say about some alleged ideal that it is to be rejected, as an ideal to be seriously pursued, precisely because it is

not 'realistic' or attainable. This is a familiar objection to 'utopian' schemes, for example.

An equally standard reply is to say that it may not be attainable, but it can still define what is better and worse. So even if it is not fully attainable, it is valuable even to move toward it.

It is perhaps tempting to suppose this to be a successful defence only for certain types of goals (or goal-specifications). These are goals whose attainment admits of degree, such as being happier, wiser, or richer. If, in contrast, the goal is to be happy, wise, or rich, then however difficult it may be to define these precisely, one either succeeds or doesn't.

Even with a goal that is all-or-nothing, however, it can be replied that if one can approach them more or less closely, then even these notions can be used to specify a viable non-utopian aim. Thus if one can be said to be closer to or further from attainment of the goal, then the goal might still be a useful (or rather 'viable' or 'reasonable') one to propose, even if attainment of it is impossible.

Some of Spinoza's goal-characterizations in TdIE seem to be all-or-nothing, while others seem to admit of degree. 'Knowledge of the union of the mind with the whole of nature' sounds like one item of knowledge that one either does or doesn't have.[19] So, too, the attainment of supreme and continual joy to eternity seems to be an all-or-nothing affair, as does 'love of the eternal and infinite thing'. But love admits of degree or quantity; the question can always be raised about how much of it you have. 'A stronger human nature' is like this as well; for after you have achieved it, we can ask how much stronger you have become and we can always seek to become even stronger. Compare this with the endeavour to preserve yourself for an indefinite period of time.

Another question concerns a subclass of goals that are fully attainable. Consider a goal that is all-or-nothing, does not admit of degree, and does not consist in continuous activity. If this is the supreme good, the ideal perfection for which we strive, or our highest goal, the question is simply this. Suppose this goal to have been attained. Then what?

Consider a goal such a winning a gold medal at the Olympic games, marrying a certain person, or attaining a net worth of a billion dollars. What is one to do if – or after – such a goal is attained?

The same question arises when, like the Buddha or the Platonist within sight of the Good, your highest goal has been achieved, but you

are still alive. Are you simply to remain in an enlightened state as long as you can or are you to teach and help others, rule the state, or, for that matter, engage in farming or fishing? Although these alternatives may not be exclusive, it has often enough been thought that they are – that continued contemplation or the vision itself is the ideal state. If so, then the goal is not only to attain perfection. It is not just to become perfect or enlightened, but to become and remain so indefinitely.

Spinoza insists in KV that we must always achieve more and in the *Ethics* that while the goal of complete self-determination is strictly speaking impossible to attain, it is a model by reference to which we make assessments. So it seems that there is, or can be, an advantage to setting out an ideal that cannot be fully attained.

Existence and uniqueness

Spinoza seems simply to assume that there is a highest good and that there is only one. Furthermore, he speaks as if this must be the same for each person. All of these claims can be challenged.

Hobbes, for example, denies that there is an ultimate end or highest good and he denies that happiness consists in the attainment of it. Human life itself consists in a succession of one desire after another, which comes to an end only in death, and happiness he regards as a 'progress' from the satisfaction of one desire to the next.[20]

In TdIE Spinoza, as we have seen, describes the highest good in a variety of ways. On one of these, it is that when possessed which will provide 'supreme and continuous joy to eternity'. On another it is the attainment of a greater (or the greatest) human perfection. The former suggests a state that excludes unsatisfied desires; the latter, in contrast, does not.

One conception of a highest good is of that for the sake of which all else is done and which itself is not done for the sake of anything else. Not being done for the sake of something else is also said to be something that the agent, at least, regards as 'intrinsically good'. In contrast, being done for the sake of something else is said to be 'extrinsically good'. The question whether there might be more than one highest good is then settled by definition. For if achieving A and achieving B were highest goods in this sense, they would have to be the same.[21]

The question whether there is a highest good in this sense, for one person or for all, appears to be a psychological one. Is there some

one goal that a given person aims at in everything that person does? This seems exceedingly unlikely, but if there is, then that person regards achievement of it as the sole intrinsic good.

If we ask you for your motivation for doing something, an answer is typically forthcoming. If we keep asking it, it frequently becomes unclear, quite quickly, what is to be said. For example, if I am asked why I am writing this now, I might say that it is in order to complete this work. But why do I want to do that? To publish it, perhaps. Why? To heighten my reputation or to inform others and to help them see the truth. But again, why? At this point or some other I might well say 'Just because' or 'Just because I want to' or even 'Because I enjoy it'. The former two answers seem to indicate that I have no further reason and even that it is a most basic desire. The latter answer suggests that doing something because you like or enjoy doing it is itself an ultimate explanation. If you persist in asking yet again why that is so, you seem to be asking for a cause, not a reason.

In §3 of TdIE Spinoza remarks that the things ordinarily pursued by people, and regarded by them as the highest good, if we judge by their actions, are wealth, honour, and sensual pleasure. He did not, or would not, I expect, think that *every* act of a person might be motivated solely by one of these. Surely a more plausible view is that the desire for wealth, for example, is very strong, or even dominant in the sense that this desire is stronger than others in most cases of conflict. For surely you may take shelter from the rain, for example, because you think you will be uncomfortable if wet, not because, and certainly not solely because, of your desire for money.

Life goals: A preliminary discussion

If *we* ask the question seriously it is hard to know where to begin. People have different attitudes toward the construction of a life plan and they have different degrees of interest in it. Some plan in detail their careers, their love lives, and even the timing and number of the children they will have. Others are content to see how things turn out. Systematic and detailed planning is perhaps exceptional.

The question seems most pressing, perhaps, for those in transition to adulthood, where greater economic and emotional independence from parents is expected. It is also characteristically addressed by those who must deal with a variety of other important life changes, such as the loss of an important job or a loved one. But Tolstoy

reminds us that it can also arise for those who have, by any ordinary measure, achieved great success in life.[22]

As the question is typically presented you must decide 'what to do with your life', or with the rest of it, but this form of expression seems odd. It seems to reveal a conception of your life as an object to be used, as if you are one thing and your life is another. However that may be, the choice at first is between school and work. One can of course do both, but it is not easy, and the question, 'In what field?' remains. If one is in college or university, for example, one must decide on a subject. Do you want to be a lawyer, a physicist, a teacher, a businessperson, or what? But this is to classify people, and indeed oneself, primarily in terms of an occupation.

The life plan of many, to judge by their reports, includes getting a good job, getting married, and perhaps having children.[23] This, apparently, is how we conceive of our lives. An ideal life is a successful one and this most importantly includes success in an occupation and success in love. It is thus a conception that seems to reflect or embody a division within us between our public and private lives.

If we enquire into the meaning of 'a good job', we find that it is one that provides a great deal of money, or at least 'enough'. Even more ideally, the job is both lucrative and enjoyable. But it is also important to succeed in your personal life, that is, in love, so that you have someone with whom to share life and perhaps with whom to have and raise children. Thus marriage, as a public mark of success or acceptability, can also be an important element of a life plan.

Variations on this 'decision problem' of course exist and other circumstances or attitudes are possible. Your life may have already been planned out for you by your parents or, in varying degrees, by a tradition in your society. So you may be expected to follow the occupation of your parents or to have no occupation, but instead marry someone who does. This of course does not obviate the decision problem, because it remains true that whether you do what is expected is up to you.

Questions about our career and family life are enormously important to us, of course, but Spinoza says little about them.[24] He himself is said to have had one possible love interest during his life, but he never married.[25] Although he evidently earned some money by grinding lenses, his own primary activity was the development of his philosophy.

PART II

THE *ETHICS*

idea beforehand of what some of the main theses and lines of thought are. It is a main task of this work to provide that.

Spinoza's vocabulary is best discussed and clarified in context, where it is needed. The meaning of his terms, even when familiar to us, like 'idea', is also tied to disputes with his contemporaries. So they are not fully understood except in relation to divergent uses of the terms.

The second obstacle

The virtues of the geometrical order are many. It emphasizes the importance of argument, that is, of reasons for accepting a claim, and thus it seems especially well suited for the presentation of philosophical and scientific results. For the provision and examination of reasons is what marks out philosophy and science from mere dogma.

By its nature, however, the geometrical order cannot provide reasons for its most basic claims, which in theory are found only in the axioms. In addition, it does not exhibit the thought that has led to the selection of some claims rather than others as axiomatic, nor does it speak informally about the problems and perplexities that surround every important philosophical issue. It does not, in short, exhibit the process of discovery, in which so much of philosophical thinking consists.

So in this respect it is often thought to be most inappropriate for philosophy. But if philosophy is conceived not just as a process, but as a process that can and does result in solutions to problems, or answers to questions, then the geometrical method represents the pinnacle of the endeavour. This, ideally, is a comprehensive and unified theory that exhibits the most basic concepts at issue and sets out fundamental claims from which all others are derived.

The problem for readers consists primarily in its apparent lack of direction, although in mathematics there is also often a nagging question about its utility. Spinoza's theory speaks of how it is best to live, however, and of what is of most value in life, so the second of these problems does not seem to arise. The first, however, is solved by providing readers with a clear statement of what Spinoza's most important claims are. This I will try to do in the introductory sections on each part of the *Ethics*.

CHAPTER 5

THE *ETHICS*, PART I: GOD

BACKGROUND

Introduction to metaphysics

Metaphysics is concerned with fundamental questions about what is real. Are there different kinds or types of reality? If so, what are they and how are they related to each other? Are some things more real than others? Is there anything that is most real?

The original source of our word 'metaphysics' is Andronicus of Rhodes, who edited Aristotle's works in the first century BC. Andronicus uses the expression *ta meta ta phusika* to refer to works that were located after (*meta*) Aristotle's *Physics* (*phusika*) in the collection of Aristotle's writings. The expression, which is a transliteration of the Greek, means literally 'the (things) after the physics'.

The word is also sometimes taken to indicate that the subject deals with what is 'beyond' or 'above' physical objects. In Book III of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle characterizes the subject as the science of 'being qua being'. In contrast to this is physics or philosophy of nature, which studies physical things as physical, not merely as beings or as things that have being. Aristotle also describes his subject as 'theology' (in Book XI) and as the study of the first causes and principles of things (in Book I).

Most of the classical issues in metaphysics are still of contemporary concern and they are typically called 'problems'. Thus we have the problem of universals, the problem of the external world and of other minds, and the mind–body problem.

The problem of universals deals with questions about the existence or ontological status of Platonic forms, that is, the alleged correlates

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