

North American Spinoza Society

NASS MONOGRAPH #11 (2003)

A Note on the Physics of Spinoza's Time

Joe VanZandt

Descartes' Error and Spinoza's Truth

Errol Harris

Spinoza Studies in the Czech Republic

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University of Economics, Prague

Consciousness of God in Spinoza's Ethics

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**What It Means to "Agree with Nature":
Spinoza's Transformation of Stoic *Convenientia***

Firmin DeBrabander

Morgan State University

Spinoza's "*Catholica religio*" — A Reply to Akkerman

Wim N. A. Klever

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North American Spinoza Society (NASS)

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**What It Means to "Agree with Nature":
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**Spinoza's "Catholica religio":
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Editor's Note

Steven Barbone
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The eleventh volume of the *NASS Monograph* continues the works begun in volumes 9 and 10. This present issue opens with a short note by **Joe VanZandt**; this note helps shed some light on the nature of physics in the 17th century, a cornerstone for both **Jeffrey Bernstein** and **Lee Rice** in *NASS Monograph* 10 (2002).

The second work, by **Errol Harris**, is a very timely review of Antonio Damasio's recent work on mind. Harris notes that Damasio's recent studies on the nature of mind support Spinoza's own theory adumbrated three and one half centuries earlier.

Following Harris' piece concerning the nature of the human mind, it would be appropriate to consider the nature of the divine mind. **James Thomas** takes up this issue in his article on the nature of God's consciousness.

The early Stoics focused on logic, physics and ethics and proposed no political system. Spinoza, however, seemed to follow the Stoic guidelines as well as have much to say about politics. **Firmin DeBrabander** examines how Spinoza could reconcile the two lines of thought.

Finally, readers may remember the disagreement between **Wim N. A. Klever** (*NASS Monograph* 9) and **Fokke Akkerman** (*NASS Monograph* 10) concerning a possible textual emendation to the TTP. This volume contains Klever's reply to Akkerman's response.

A word of thanks is due to the NASS Board for its help in putting together the present volume: **Paul Bagley** (president), **Douglas Den Uyl** (vice president), **J. Thomas Cook**, **Idit Dobbs-Weinstein**, **Charles Huenemann**, and **S. P. Kashap**.

A Note on the Physics of Spinoza's Time

Joe VanZandt
Lawrence, Kansas

The lively and informative exchange between Jeffrey Bernstein and Lee Rice¹ needs a friendly amendment from the history of science, an amendment that does not undermine the central point being made by Bernstein, but is relevant to some of the details of his analysis.

In the seventeenth century, the precise distinction between a scalar quantity like speed and a vector quantity like velocity — without which notions of force and acceleration cannot be explicated — was not clearly made, even by Descartes, despite his well-known view of how to measure the “quantity of motion” of a body correctly. Descartes defined quantity of motion as the product of the mass of a body and its speed, i.e., momentum, if speed is understood as velocity. Newton made implicit use of the concept of vector quantities in the *Principia*, but as an articulated concept in mathematics, vectors are first systematically developed in the early nineteenth century by mathematicians such as Möbius, Gauss and Hamilton. No discussion of it exists at all in Spinoza, nor need it have, given the extremely limited purposes of the physical digression at E2p13. As Rice notes, this section of the *Ethics* does not provide a real *physics*, but a physicalist account of *res extensa* of sufficient depth to make plausible that an underlying physics could be given. If this is so, and I consider it likely, one must question certain of the terms, and concepts denoted by them, in Bernstein's interesting account.

The first point that needs to be argued somewhat more clearly is to be found in the very title of the second section of the paper, “Spinoza against the Plenum: Nature as Forces” (11-13). In this section, the author uses the term ‘force’ as if it were an unproblematic notion, asserting that “nature is constituted by forces which are fluid and continuous motion” (11). Since the term ‘force’ has such a central role in mechanics, in particular in Newton's second law, it seems unwise to use the term too

1. Jeffrey Bernstein, “The Ethics of Spinoza's Physics,” and Lee Rice, “Comments on Bernstein,” *NASS Monograph* 10 (2002), 3-19 and 20-31, respectively.

loosely in this discussion of Spinoza's exposition of physics. For earlier, in the first section of the paper, the author explicates Spinoza's views by stating, "In other words, the stability of bodies is due to — in fact our bodies are *constituted by* — certain proportions of movement and rest (i.e., forces)" (9, emphasis in original). Just how we are to understand physical force as a certain proportion of movement and rest is not obvious. That Spinoza, like earlier philosophers including Descartes, asserted a rectilinear principle of inertia seems unobjectionable, although whether this constituted a prior discovery of Newton's first law of motion is much less clear. But forces involve accelerated motions, not merely inertial ones, and of this there does not appear to be any discussion in the physical digression, nor any way to infer it from his axioms. While 'speed' and 'slowness' are terms that appear and are closer to the concept of 'velocity' than 'motion and rest,' they are not explicated.

That the striving to persevere in existence is in some intimate way related to the principle of inertia seems quite likely, but there are rather severe problems in identifying *conatus* as inertial mass *per se*, for ideas as much as bodies exhibit *conatus*, and it seems unlikely that one would want to attribute mass to ideas. *Mass*, as a measure of the quantity of matter in the way Newton understood it, does not appear in Spinoza, possibly precisely because of the way in which the notion of an individual is to be understood, which — and here I believe Bernstein is right — is essentially nominalistic. In any case, the law of inertia says nothing whatever about inertial mass; that, too, arises only in the context of a change of motion — acceleration — and forces. The question of the identity of inertial and gravitational mass was troubling from the beginning, and the history of physics has many examples of trying to demonstrate this identity, either rationally or experimentally, most notably the Evös experiment of 1888, which showed their equivalence to at least 1 part in 10^8 , at that time the most precise quantitative measurement ever made. Since that time, variations on that experiment have become far more precise, lending strong credence to Einstein's postulate, although not yet providing the kind of proof both physicists and philosophers would like to have. Since Spinoza had neither the second law of motion, nor the law of universal gravitation, it is hard to imagine that he could even anticipate such an issue, for there was nothing for him to see as problematic. Generous interpreters, myself included, often find foreshadowings of future discoveries in odd places.

The question of whether the principle of inertia is better suited to an atomistic or plenum description of the world is somewhat odd. The principle of inertia is an ideal principle in either case, for even the atomist does not claim to be able to reproduce a vacuum suitable for testing, and the supporter of the plenum simply abstracts from the countervailing

motions that other bodies may impart, as Descartes clearly does in the *Principles of Philosophy*. That Newton's æther is very much like *res extensa*, as Rice would have it, is unconvincing. The æther has no mechanical properties, after all.

Now, the real issue in the history of science is this: was anyone able to give an account of projectile motion or planetary motions which was truly consistent with the rectilinear principle of inertia? The answer is surely that before Newton (and possibly Leibniz), no one could. Galileo did a lot more than toy with the notion of a curvilinear principle of inertia; in the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief Systems of the World*, this "proper motion" seems to be required. It is often forgotten that the Copernican model of the world did not do away with the cycles, epicycles, and eccentrics of Ptolemy; in fact, the model required a few more. The reason is simple. The motion of the planets was taken to be intrinsically circular. To make circular orbits conform to observation, epicycles are inevitable. But Galileo could see no way to support a view which did not take circular motion as natural. That is why Galileo never reconciled himself to Kepler's communication regarding his measurement of the orbit of Mars; elliptical orbits seemed completely irrational, even to a mind as open as Galileo's surely was. How is one to make this reconciliation? Well, it takes a mathematical advance to make it possible. Until the invention of the calculus and its application by Newton (most prominently, at least) to physics, one could not show that the motion of an object whose inertial properties were rectilinear would result in motions corresponding to conic sections under a central force. Descartes was reduced to the introduction of vortices into the plenum to account for such motions, and this was plainly *ad hoc*. So far as I can see, Spinoza did not take up the question. This, more than anything else, was the crowning achievement of Newton's physics, and certainly the most compelling result.

It is unclear why Spinoza chose to assert the rectilinear nature of the principle of inertia through the example of an object reflected from a hard surface, for that is the only place that one can infer the rectilinear nature of inertia from these propositions so far as I can see. Descartes was far more direct in his assertion that the inertial motion of bodies is in a straight line, as Rice points out, in the second part of the *Principles of Philosophy*, where it is given as his second law of nature. Spinoza's example may have been intended further to express that all motion is to be understood as a result of contact, I suppose, although that is far from certain. In fact, the whole physical digression seems peculiarly placed in the *Ethics*, but I suspect, as I stated above, that some sort of skeleton of how a physical system would interact seemed necessary to ensure that the claim that the order and connection of modes considered under the attributes of thought

and extension was not *too* abstract. Whether it succeeds in this, if that is indeed its purpose, may certainly be debated.

Descartes' Error and Spinoza's Truth

Errol Harris

One of the clearest thinkers and most illuminating writers on brain functioning and its effects upon consciousness is Antonio Damasio.¹ He makes no attempt to deny or to explain away consciousness (as does Daniel Dennett and those who follow his line of argument) but, although he is aware of the crucial question how neural discharges relate to experience and believes that scientists should aim at discovering the relation between neural functioning and consciousness, as a neurobiologist he does not directly address it. Further, he does his best to define the sense in which he uses pertinent terms.

He succinctly expresses his position in the following statement:

The study of human consciousness requires both internal and external views. Although the investigation of consciousness is condemned to indirectness, this limitation is not restricted to consciousness. It applies to all other cognitive phenomena. Behavioral acts — kicks, punches and words — are nice expressions of the private process of mind. Likewise electro-encephalograms and functional MRI scans capture correlates of the mind but those correlates are not the mind. [...] Whether one likes it or not, *all* the contents of our minds are subjective and the power of science comes from individual subjectivities.²

It is odd that in a footnote Damasio remarks that Dennett takes the same view, whereas to me it seems that Dennett's attitude is directly opposed to

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1. This article was written in 2000, before the appearance of Antonio Damasio's book, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*, Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003.
 2. Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotions in the Making of Consciousness*, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1999, 82f. This work henceforth referred to as *FWH*.

the scientific recognition of subjectivity.³

In his book *Descartes' Error*,⁴ it is not the contention that our awareness is ineluctable that Damasio queries, but only Descartes' fundamental dualism. He complains that *cogito ergo sum* indicates the precise opposite of what he, Damasio, believes: that beings were beings long before the dawn of humanity, and that elementary consciousness only appeared at some later epoch of evolution (148). Here he overlooks the fact that it is only because he is conscious that he can believe this, and that without consciousness he would have no knowledge, no belief, no science of neurobiology and evolution, and no awareness of his own or other existence.⁵ The undeniable fact of consciousness, then, is logically prior to the knowledge of other existences whatever that knowledge may reveal of prior evolution. This philosophical point, however, is secondary to Damasio's conviction that Descartes was wrong to encourage the belief in a disembodied mind, and hence to undermine the possibility of what later has emerged as a sounder conception of body-mind relation.

At the same time, he provides incidentally copious evidence in favor of Spinoza's E2p13, "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body — that is, a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else."⁶ While giving no indication that he is aware of Spinoza's assertion, Damasio tells us that a feeling "may not be an elusive mental quality attached to an object, but rather the direct perception of a specific landscape: that of the body," and again that "the body, as represented in the brain, may constitute the indispensable frame of reference for the neural processes that we experience as the mind" (xiv).

He has no doubt that the mind is what we consciously experience, and he recognizes that the body, as represented in the brain, is its frame of reference. This does not mean (either for Damasio or Spinoza) that what we are aware of is what goes on in the brain (we are not by nature skilled neuroscientists), but that what we are aware of is what is being processed

3. Cf. Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Boston, New York: Little Brown and Company, 1991.

4. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, NY: G. P. Putnam, 1994. Except as noted, all references to Damasio are to this work.

5. In his later book, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio shows that he is aware of the primacy of consciousness in these respects.

6. Spinoza, Baruch, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, and Selected Letters*, tr. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992. All quotations from the *Ethics* are from this translation.

through the body — that the body provides the frame of reference within which the mind works. This amounts to much the same as what R. G. Collingwood (in company with Hegel and F. H. Bradley) maintains, that bodily feeling is the fundamental basis of consciousness. What Damasio has done is to provide scientific evidence that was not available to the authors of these highly important philosophical theories.

In one short paragraph, Damasio states with complete clarity the main thesis of Dennett's argument:

[B]ecause of the brain's design, the requisite broad-based knowledge [for social behavior] depends on numerous systems located in relatively separate brain regions rather than in one region. A large part of such knowledge is recalled in the form of images at many brain sites rather than a single site. Although we have the illusion that everything comes together in a single anatomical theater, recent evidence suggests that it does not. Probably the relative simultaneity of activity at different sites binds the separate parts of the mind together [84].

Here there is no refusal to admit mental images nor any explicit contention that the mind is the brain. Damasio makes no attempt to evade or disavow consciousness; he simply takes it for granted as the product of certain brain activities. Neurophysiologist though he is, he does not refrain from epistemological statements that he does not defend, the truth of which he simply assumes (cf. 97). He contends that "the factual knowledge required for reasoning and decision making comes to the mind in the form of images" (96). In short, it is, and necessarily involves, consciousness (although, as we shall see later, the sense in which images are consciously experienced may be questioned). Further, so far from denying or trying to explain away the self, Damasio insists that it is indispensable to image-making and that subjectivity is a key feature of consciousness (99). The self, he says, "is not the infamous homunculus, a little person inside our brain perceiving and thinking about the images the brain forms. It is, rather, a perpetually recreated neurobiological state" (99).

Like Pinker and Dennett,⁷ Damasio makes frequent use of the term "representation" in reference to topographical brain activity, but it is only in another work, *The Feeling of What Happens*, that he tells us precisely what he means by it. It is a "'pattern that is consistently related to something,' whether with respect to a mental image or to a coherent set of neural activities within a specific brain region" (*FWH*, 320). Clearly, it is to the neurophysiologist, who is conscious of the neural activity and its

consistent relation to something, and to us who perceive the image, that the relation is represented. There is no implication that the function of the brain is representation. It is we, the scientist and the reader, who consciously perceive the consistent relation. Possibly Dennett and Pinker intend the same meaning when they use the term, but if they do, they must assume that it involves a conscious appreciation of what is represented, an implication that at least Dennett appears to deny.

Images

Salient in Damasio's theory of the relation of the mind to the brain is the formation of images and what he calls dispositional representations. One may well ask what a disposition is when it is not operative, and Damasio goes a good way to making this intelligible. A dispositional representation, he tells us, is a potential pattern of neuron activity in a small ensemble of neurons (a "convergence zone"), and the dispositional character of the pattern of activity results from the strengthening and weakening of synapses (i.e., the state of the synapses connecting the neurons in the ensemble. Cf. 102, 104).

Images, clearly, can be experienced only in consciousness. Damasio quite clearly explains that the image is not in the brain, the dispositional representations are not topographically organized and nothing resembling the image is likely to be found in the brain, apart from the fact that patterns of activity in the primary visual cortex can be detected as being "consistent" with the structure of the image. (This is the case with visual images. It is difficult to understand what characteristics of patterns of activity in the primary sensory cortex could make them consistent with an auditory or an olfactory image). These patterns of activity are excited by the convergence zones when stimulated by whatever it is that prompts the formation of the image.

Of course, there is no homunculus in the brain who observes the patterns of activity and registers their consistency to the image envisaged. The observer is the neurophysiologist; and Damasio tells us that the "codes" (if there are any) involved in the ensembles of neurons are entirely

7. Cf. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, London: Penguin Press, 1998, 24: "[T]he mind is not the brain but what the brain does." However, what the brain does (so far as we know) is no more than transmit electro-chemical signals along nerve fibers in highly complex patterns and combinations, which the mind does not and cannot; and what the mind does is feel, think, and judge. Dennett, claims, "It is very hard to imagine how your mind could be your brain — but not impossible" (16). Dennett proceeds to argue at length that the mind is the brain.

unknown. A yet deeper mystery would be how such codes could be decoded to present an image to the conscious subject.

According to Damasio, all knowledge is deposited in dispositional representations: innate knowledge guiding biological regulation and instinct in the hypothalamus, brain stem and limbic system; acquired (learned) knowledge in higher order cortices and grey-matter nuclei beneath the level of the cortex. The former by and large does not involve images; the latter does, as well as records of rules and strategies by which we operate upon the images. And Damasio is convinced that all thought consists of images, even when in the media of words and abstract symbols, and that only what is imaged can be known. He seems to forget that he has said that innate knowledge does not involve images, and the implicit admission here is that knowledge proper is always conscious. In short, all thinking and acquired knowledge, for him, is conscious. This consciousness is somehow constructed and generated by brain activity, but the relation between the two remains unexplained.

Evolution

Damasio's speculations about the evolution of the brain (neural development) are more credible than Dennett's, who adheres rigidly to the neo-Darwinian doctrine that all evolution results from chance mutation and natural selection. The fantastically complex and delicately coordinated structure and functioning of the brain cannot be the result of pure chance. There are not enough genes in the genome, Damasio reminds us, to determine the precise structure of all the neural circuits in the brain (involving 10 trillion synapses). The structure of the old brain, the hypothalamus, brain stem and basal fore-brain with the probable addition of the amygdala and the cingulate area, is probably determined more or less precisely by the genome. These areas govern and regulate the vital bodily functions and homeostatic processes essential to the survival of the organism and are the product of the evolutionary process. The cerebral cortex, on the other hand, and the parts of the brain that have evolved more recently are only generally structured by the genes and much of their organization is developed long after birth, shaped by experience of the outer world and other people. This occurs, he contends under the influence of (a) predetermined structure, (b) individual activity and the environment, and (c) "self-organizing pressures arising from the sheer complexity of the system" (112). In the second of these influences, chance plays some part, but there is no suggestion that the brain could have evolved as a result merely of random mutations in the genome, or the accidental discovery of what Dennett calls "good tricks." Damasio emphatically maintains, however, that the innate circuits of the old brain play an important part in modulating the activity of

what has evolved later and the subsequently developed capacities of the neocortex. The postulation of “self-organizing pressures’ is significant as an admission of the holistic character of brain activity and its plastic architecture; for self-organization presupposes a recognition, felt or implicit, of the whole to be organized.

Body as “*Ideatum*”

The thesis, however, which is most strongly suggested by Damasiós exposition is that the body is the object of the mind’s consciousness. Having explained how activation of innate circuits alters the state of the body so as to remedy defects, as when a declining level of blood sugar causes a feeling of hunger and prompts action to seek and consume food, he concludes:

The goal of the entire process was saving your body. The signal to initiate the process came from your body. The signals that entered your consciousness, in order to force you to save your body, also came from your body. As the cycle concluded, the signals that told you that your body was no longer in danger came from your body. You might say that this is government for the body and by the body, although it is sensed and managed by the brain [116].

The signals from the body (we are told) enter consciousness and tell “you” (your self or mind) that your body was no longer in danger. The body is the object of the mind throughout. But the “government” of the body is also said to be sensed and managed by *the brain*, and how this may be is not clear. Stimulation of the relevant part of the brain (itself part of the body) by bodily changes elsewhere (e.g., decline in the level of blood sugar) no doubt activates neural circuits so as to bring about the necessary behavior, but neural firings and transmissions do not amount to sensation. Surely it is the *mind* rather than the brain that *senses* the bodily process. Further, “management” implies assessment of circumstances and decision. Can the brain pass judgments and decide? Damasio says that “neurons in the hypothalamus detect” bodily change, as if the neurons were conscious — but that surely cannot be what he really intends. Not even neurons are homunculi. The question what in the brain corresponds to “you” who are told by the signals from the body what the condition of the body happens to be is answered in a subsequent exposition (see below).

This example is of a bodily condition (hunger) in which it is natural for the object of sensation and subsequent consciousness to be the body.

But Damasio goes on to argue that the body is intimately involved in more complex and developed forms of consciousness; and here the distinction between mind and brain becomes still more important.

Brain circuits innately pre-organized, he asserts, help the organism to classify things as good or bad — that is, to make value judgments. They establish for it “a set of preferences — or criteria, biases or values.” Biases need not be conscious, but preferences based on criteria are conscious value judgments. Instinctive drives, which are bodily states combined with emotions (which themselves turn out to be bodily changes), influence, or even determine, these judgments. So our inherited predispositions affect what, in humans especially, is altered and developed through learning and cultural experience. Instinctive and suprainstinctive are inseparably interwoven; but the actions of the latter require, above and beyond the former, “the control of animal inclination by thought, reason, and the will” (124). What remains to be discovered is the neural activity corresponding to these, especially the last, and that they involve consciousness can hardly be disputed. Two important points emerge. One is that the body is the object of consciousness:

It is not only the separation between mind and brain that is mythical: the separation between mind and body is probably just as fictional. The mind is embodied, in the full sense of the term, not just embrained [118].

And the other is that not only brain activity but consciousness is indispensable to social activity:

suprainstinctual survival strategies generate something probably unique to humans: a moral point of view that, on occasion, can transcend the interests of the immediate group and even the species [126].

A moral point of view is possible only for a self-conscious mind which is aware of the self in its social relations and can make judgments of right and wrong that may induce it to oppose its own instinctual inclinations. How and where patterns of neural transmission in the brain bring about such self-conscious reflection is puzzling enough, Damasio tells us that they may be similar in their overall formal design to those governing biological drives; but that such patterns could themselves amount to moral judgments (although they may “represent” them) hardly makes sense.

Emotion

That the object of the mind is the body becomes further apparent in Damasio's account of emotion. In the old brain certain automatic (virtually reflex) reactions to general features of specific stimuli (presumably what Tinbergen called "sign stimuli") are "wired in" — for example, in chicks, the ducking of the head on the appearance of a swooping wingspan. Such responses are unconscious, but Damasio conceptualizes them as primitive decision making. They are activated by dispositional representations in the amygdala which are said to process and detect them. These stimuli trigger body changes and states characteristic of an emotion (e.g., fear). No conjecture is offered here to what extent these body changes are felt in less highly developed creatures.

More evolved social organisms faced with more complex unpredictable situations engage systems in the neocortex in order to make decisions. Here the body changes characteristic of the emotion are felt and the nexus between the perceived object and the emotional state is cognized. Thus, more highly evolved animals can learn to anticipate and prepare for hitherto unforeseen situations. The more elementary automatic reactions are called primary emotions, but in the higher animals (particularly humans) secondary emotions supervene.

The primary emotions remain the basic mechanism, and secondary emotions are generated by images consciously and deliberately entertained, the objects of which have in the past been associated with emotional states. The subconscious memory of these associations (acquired dispositional representations separate from the innate dispositional representations needed for primary emotions) automatically and unconsciously excite bodily changes, endocrine, autonomic and musculo-skeletal, aimed at the entire organism in spectacular coordination. The mental evaluative process (that is, presumably, the images and their remembered emotional accompaniment) along with the bodily changes, Damasio avers, constitute the emotion. The perception of these changes he designates feeling. "If an emotion," he writes,

is a collection of changes in the body state connected to particular mental images [...] *the essence of feeling an emotion is the experience of such changes in juxtaposition to the mental images that initiated the cycle.* In other words, a feeling depends on the juxtaposition of an image of the body proper to an image of something else [145].

It is primarily the body that is the object of the mind. The bodily

state is subconsciously present at all times, and when we have feelings connected with emotion “attention is allocated substantially to body signals, and parts of the body landscape move from the background to the foreground of our attention” [149]. What we are conscious of throughout is this body landscape:

Not only can the brain construct, in some of its systems, a multifarious neural view of the body landscape that other brain systems have induced, but the construction of the view itself, as well as its use, can be influenced by the body directly [e.g., by chemical transmitters (144)].

The “neural view” is presumably the integrating pattern of neural activity that is “viewed” by the neurophysiologist; but Damasio goes on to assure his reader that the body state is felt:

You perceive changes in your body state and follow their unfolding over seconds and minutes. That process of continuous monitoring, that experience of what your body is doing while thoughts about specific contents roll by, is the essence of what I call a feeling [145].

It is clear from this that the neural view translates into consciousness as feeling and thought. Damasio never attempts to explain this translation and never professes that this is his intention. He gives us a neuro-physiological account of what happens when certain conscious states occur.

Comparison with Spinoza

It is intriguing to compare this theory with Spinoza’s view of the passions. As already quoted, Spinoza declares that the mind is the idea of the body and nothing else. For Spinoza all passions are ideas, inadequate insofar as they are passive, adequate insofar as they are active. E3def3 states, “By emotions I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.” In E3p18, Spinoza writes, “From the image of a thing past or future man is affected by the same emotion of pleasure or pain as from the image of a thing present.” For Spinoza, love and hatred are respectively pleasure and pain, (primary emotions) accompanied by the idea of an external cause. And just as Damasio asserts that emotion alters cognitive processing and that “feelings are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image” (159), so Spinoza insists, in the *Short Treatise on God, Man and Human Well-Being* (Chapter II of the

Second Part) that the cognitive aspect of ideas is prior:

We thus maintain that Knowledge is the proximate cause of all the "passions" in the soul. For we consider it once for all impossible that any one, who neither thinks nor knows in any of the preceding ways and modes, would be capable of being incited

to Love or Desire or any other mode of Will.⁸

While Damasio refers explicitly to Descartes, he never mentions this particular doctrine of Spinoza's, for which he provides so much favorable evidence.

Somatic Markers

So convinced is Damasio of the participation of the body in mental activity that he has put forward what he calls the somatic marker hypothesis to the effect that bodily feeling typical of secondary emotions (derived as we have seen from primary emotions) and associated with images that we form of the anticipated outcome of our actions, direct and are, in fact, indispensable to social reasoning. He argues that the thought by which we direct our conduct could not in practice be governed solely by formally composed inference, because practical decisions proceed from very varied circumstances, and the consequences of action are complex and unpredictable, giving rise to innumerable possible alternatives, so that purely formal reasoning would be interminably inconclusive and would take far longer than the time available for practical decision-making. What in fact happens, he contends, is that in rapid succession we contemplate images of the options with which we are presented, and that associated with these, as a result of past experience (commonly of reward and punishment), are bodily sensations, pleasant or unpleasant, characteristic of secondary emotions, and these (as the case may be) attach positive or negative markers to the images. The somatic-markers enable us immediately to accept or reject the presented option without any explicit reasoning.

The term somatic-marker, he explains, is adopted because the feeling refers to the body in the most general sense, both visceral and nonvisceral feelings being included. The effect of the marker is to direct attention to the negative or positive outcome of the contemplated action and to act as a warning signal (or the reverse) enabling us either to reject or to accept a course of action immediately. The hypothesis is proposed as applicable primarily to practical and social reasoning, but Damasio speculates that it may also apply to scientific reasoning, giving in evidence statements by Henri Poincaré, Leo Szilard and Jonas Salk who testify that direct insights and intuition occur and are necessary for creative advance in mathematics, physics and science generally.

Damasio sums up his position as follows:

8. Baruch Spinoza, *Short Treatise on God, Man, and Human Well-Being*, tr. A. Wolf, London: Black, 1910.

The action of biological drives, body states, and emotions may be an indispensable foundation for rationality. The lower levels in the neural edifice of reason are the same that regulate the processing of emotions and feelings, along with global functions of the body proper such that the organism can survive. These lower levels maintain direct and mutual relationships with the body proper, thus placing the body within the chain of operations that permit the highest reaches of reason and creativity. Rationality is probably shaped and modulated by body signals, even as it performs the most sublime distinctions and acts accordingly [200].

The outcome of the argument is that the basic object of the mind in all cases is the body, for even the images juxtaposed with emotional feelings are excited by the convergence zones in the early sensory cortices, so that what is being imagined is the consequence of an original reaction in a sense organ. A further implication of the somatic marker hypothesis is that the fundamental substrate of consciousness is bodily feeling. By providing neurophysiological evidence of this correlation of mind and body, Damasio is giving strong support to much neglected theories that have been put forward by Spinoza and other philosophers in the past, the reexamination of which might well be rewarding.

Body-Mind Unity

The tenth chapter of *Descartes' Error* is so apt a modern neurophysiological confirmation of Spinoza's theory of body-mind relationship that one is tempted to quote long passages in illustration. "The body," Damasio repeats, "provides a ground reference for the mind." He describes how an experience of somebody walking behind one on a dark night generates sensations (many of them sub-conscious) of visceral and muscular responses, relayed to the brain via neural and chemical routes, which bring about a profound departure from normal bodily feeling — changes occurring in both brain and body proper. The sense of danger is thus an awareness of the body. But not only so,

it is the entire organism rather than the body alone or the brain alone that interacts with the environment [...] when we see, or hear, or touch or taste or smell, body proper *and* brain participate in the interaction [224].

This insistence on the integral reaction of the entire organism is especially

significant.

Damasio illustrates his point further by describing how the viewing of a favorite landscape involves not only visual cortices but the cornea, lens, and iris of the eyes, the reflex adjustment of which focus the image, the muscles which control eye-movement, head and neck movements, all of which depend on two-way signals going from body to brain and from brain to body. Signals from the outside world are processed in subcortical structures of the brain as well as the sensory cortices and the association cortex along with other interconnected centers; associated knowledge is activated from dispositional representations, and memory images are formed, which excite organismic changes, some in the brain and some in the body proper. All this is involved in the perception of the landscape, which is no mere reception of signals from the environment, but the direct awareness of bodily feelings which include the sensations afforded by the sense-organs. Many of the bodily reactions are required in order to maintain homeostasis, so that “perceiving is as much about acting on the environment as receiving signals from it.”

Here we have evidence not only that the object of the mind is the body — as Damasio puts it: “I am saying that the body contributes more than life support and modulatory effects to the brain. It contributes a *content* that is part and parcel of the workings of the normal mind” (226). It is also evidence supporting the view that perception is not simply the reception of a “datum” but is an active interpretation of the sensory input requiring at least implicit judgment.

Again, corroborating Spinoza, Damasio writes, “While mental events are the result of activity in the brain’s neurons, an early and indispensable story which brain neurons have to tell is the story of the body’s schema and operation” (228).

The Self

Damasio is convinced that the self is an essential feature of human consciousness. Referring to the imagined episode of becoming aware that somebody is following you home on a dark night, he says that the detected threat initiates complicated chains of biochemical and neural reactions — some in the body proper and some in the brain — which are not mutually differentiated. They amount to an awareness of danger, a feeling of alarm, an urge to walk faster, and a hope you are finally out of danger. The consciousness is an amalgam of bodily feeling and mental imagery rooted in the organism. But an essential feature of it is the “you” — “a very real mental construction I will call the ‘self’.”

[T]he self is a repeatedly reconstituted biological state.

It is certainly not a homunculus or a Cartesian Theater, nor even a central knower and inspector of everything happening in our minds. But it requires a number of brain systems to be active as well as numerous body systems. The core for the neural representation of the self is probably provided by primordial representations of the body proper in action. The basic reference is to the body, successive states of the organism, severally renewed each moment in multiple concerted maps, and each anchoring the self that exists at any one moment (I am paraphrasing Damasi s statement). The important emphasis is on coordination and coherence of the resulting experience.

Damasio bases his conviction of the significance of the idea of a self upon the reports of his brain-damaged patients (those who are not severely anosognosic). As they become aware of their deficiencies, they immediately locate the difficulty they suffer in some part of their persons which they survey from the vantage-point of self. He concludes that our experiences tend to have a consistent perspective, as if most (though not all) the contents of the mind are grasped and "owned" by a single subject. He assumes that this perspective is "rooted in a relatively stable and endlessly repeated biological state," and that the stability of this notion is due to the predominantly unchanging structure and operation of the total organism, slowly developing (he contends) "elements of autobiographical data."

The neural basis of the self consists first of a set of representations of the body (i.e., how it feels now and has felt lately, just prior to processes leading to the perception of some object — Damasio maintains that subjectivity depends largely upon changes taking place in the body state during and after the processing of an object of perception). This includes background feelings of body and emotional states. The collective representation of the body, says Damasio, constitutes the basis for a "concept" of self.

Secondly, there is a varied set of representations (images, presumably, or what others have called ideas) of key events identified as autobiographical. On the basis of such events the conception of one's identity can be constructed: images of what we do, whom and what we like, the objects we habitually use, the places we frequent and the actions we habitually perform. These involve the activation of topographically organized sensory neural maps. Along with these are special facts from our past such as where we live and work, the nature of our job or profession, the people to whom we are related and with whom we are friendly. nationality, and so forth. Finally there are recent memories in temporal relation with present events and our expectations and plans for the immediate future. Damasio

concludes:

In brief, the endless reactivation of updated images about our identity (a combination of memories of the past and of the planned future) constitutes a sizable part of the state of the self as I understand it [239].

The idea or feeling of the self (however we wish to represent it) is a consistently reconstructed evanescent reference state in which sensory signals and feelings of emotion occur “in the coordinated activity of multiple brain regions.”

When responses are generated to some object, the self as described above does not know that its organism is responding, but Damasio says that a process which he calls the ‘metaself’ could know provided that the brain creates some kind of description of the perturbation of the state of the organism resulting from its responses to the presence of an image, that the description generates an image of the perturbation, and the image of the self perturbed — all displayed in rapid interpolation with the image that triggered the perturbation. In short, the description concerns the perturbation of the organism’s state resulting from the brain’s responses to the image.

It seems that what he envisages as the basis of the metaself is a “convergence zone” or “third-party neuron assembly” reciprocally connected with the images of the self and its object, which builds a dispositional representation of the self in the process of changing as the organism responds to the object. What is so constructed is initially non-verbal, but becomes verbal when language enables us to say “I.” This is the source of subjectivity which, he asserts, is the key feature of consciousness. Referring to Dennett’s hypothesis of a “virtual machine” as the device for generating subjectivity, Damasio declares that, despite some similarity between his notion of image construction and Dennett’s of sequence construction creating our experience of a “stream-of-consciousness,” his (Damasio’s) device is definitely *not* a virtual machine. In fact, in a later chapter, Damasio rejects the view that the mind and the brain are related “only in the sense that the mind is the software program run in a piece of computer hardware called brain” as a modern variant of the Cartesian doctrine (cf. 247f).

The dominant ideas in this account of the self and the mind are the essential part played by the feeling of the body, the coherence and wholeness of the felt organism, the significant coordination of the activity of different parts of the brain, the idea of the metaself and the importance of subjectivity, as keys to the notion and nature of consciousness. All these ideas

prove to be of preeminent importance in consideration of the problem of the relation between body and mind.

Bodily Feeling as Foundation of Consciousness

In his later book, *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio approaches more nearly the problem of consciousness with which I am concerned in these reflections; but still, from the viewpoint of a neurobiologist, he can hardly tackle it directly, for it is essentially a philosophical problem. Besides Descartes, Damasio is not unacquainted with other philosophers, and he is aware that consciousness has long been an important topic in philosophy, yet he refers with appreciation only to the work of contemporary philosophers as having created within the past decade what is currently known as the field of consciousness studies. Consciousness, however, (or mind) has, one way or another, been a major concern of philosophy throughout its history.⁹ My immediate concern is to try to throw light, if possible, on the relation between neural activity and consciousness, between the brain and the mind, and Damasio's study provides a wealth of evidence for some of the philosophical theories that seem to me to bring us nearest to understanding this relation. In particular, he continually gives support to Spinoza's above-quoted doctrine.

It is significant that, while his references to Dennett are always respectful, Damasio's own position is virtually diametrically opposed to Dennett's. Everything that Dennett plays down, Damasio insists on as of prime importance. He asserts that consciousness is an entirely private, first-person phenomenon "part of the private, first-person process we call mind" (*FWH*, 12). A sense of self, he declares, is an indispensable part of the conscious mind — all human consciousness is necessarily "consciousness with a sense of self" (*FWH*, 16). Mental images, he maintains, are fundamental to consciousness, and what constitutes images are *qualia* (*FWH*, 9).

That the object of the mind is essentially the body is the constant implication of what Damasio tells us, for instance:

Consciousness begins when brains acquire the power, the simple power I must add, of telling a story without words, the story that there is a life ticking away in an organism, and that the states of the living organism, within body bounds, are continuously being altered by encounters with objects or events in the environment, or,

9. Cf. my *Nature, Mind, and Modern Science*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1954, Introduction and *passim*.

for that matter, by thoughts and by the internal adjustments of the life process [FWH, 30].

The important implications here are not only that the primary object of the mind is the body, but also that the living organism is an integral whole of organic activity, both physiological and mental. These implications give further credence to the theory I have suggested in other contexts.¹⁰

But not only does Damasiós submission support Spinoza, at times he inadvertently subscribes to what Descartes originally propounded — *cogito ergo sum*; in Damasiós terms, “Consciousness, as we commonly think of it, from its basic levels to its most complex, is the unified mental pattern that belongs to the object and the self” (FWH, 11).

Emotion is identified with bodily changes, visceral and musculo-skeletal. In this Damasio follows James and Langer, but he distinguishes emotion from feeling, which, nevertheless, is the feeling of the bodily changes, of which we human beings can become conscious (as most animals, presumably, do not); thus what we become conscious of is the body. As he develops his theory of the structure of consciousness, this identification of the body as the object (Spinoza called it the *ideatum*) of the mind becomes more and more apparent.

The main points of Damasiós teaching are:

- (i) that emotion is the complex of bodily changes occurring in response to specific stimuli as an integral part of the regulation of metabolism and physiological processes that maintain homeostasis and promote the survival of the organism. These changes are unconscious and those which are overt are observable by others;
- (ii) the bodily changes involved in emotion include modifications of brain activity which come to constitute the basis for the feeling of the emotion;
- (iii) feelings are private and are not observable by others than the feeler, who, however, may not be conscious of them;
- (iv) “feelings are poised at the very threshold that separates being from knowing and thus have a privileged connection to consciousness” (H, 43);
- (v) “consciousness is rooted in the representation of the body” (FWH, 37).

10. Cf. my book, *The Foundations of Metaphysics in Science*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993, chs. 16-17, and *The Restitution of Metaphysics*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 2000, ch. 12.

Emotion *per se*, as a feature of the survival mechanism of the organism (part of the homeostasis regulation), is unconscious; but as it modifies certain brain processes, it generates an image (according to Damasio), presumably of the body changes engendered, through the medium of which it is felt. In the first instance, feeling also is not conscious, but it becomes conscious when it is *known*, in conjunction with a “sense of self” (36). This seems to imply that the images of the body changes are not conscious as such but only when known in conjunction with the sense of self. What unconscious mental images could be I find difficult to understand, unless they are simply neural activity in the sensory centers in certain areas of the brain, stimulated before any sense of self has developed. This neural activity may be said to “represent” images of which we are not aware until we become conscious that we (our selves) have them. Consciousness for Damasio thus not only involves images but also requires a sense of self. How this comes to be we must next consider.

The Structure of the Conscious Self

The foundation of the sense of self is what Damasio calls the proto-self, which he describes as “an interconnected and temporarily coherent collection of neural patterns which represent the state of the organism” (FWH, 174). Of this, he tells us, we are not conscious. Of course, we are not conscious of any neural patterns; but the state of the organism which they are said to represent can be felt, and feeling may be more or less conscious according as attention is paid to it.

The next phase is the core-self, inhering in the second-order non-verbal account that occurs whenever the proto-self is modified by an object. Of this, he says, we are conscious. Core-consciousness is of the here and now, involving working memory but not conventional long-term memory.

The third and ultimate phase is the autobiographical self requiring long-term autobiographical memory of incidents in the past (which may be explicit or merely implicit), and anticipated future developments.

What triggers consciousness is the internal “exhibition” of a specific kind of wordless knowledge that our organisms have been changed by (interaction with) an object. Its simplest form is a “feeling of knowing,” and Damasio seeks to discover how such knowledge is gained and why it arises in the form of feeling.

Our first question must be how wordless knowledge is internally exhibited and to whom. Certainly not to a homunculus. Then it must be to the self, but self-consciousness is also an item of wordless knowledge that has to be exhibited. The only intelligible answer can be that the knowledge

is exhibited to our selves in the form of feeling, and the feeling is of the state of the organism as modified — that is, the feeling of the body and the processes that maintain its life (homeostatic, visceral, and autonomic, including those that constitute emotion). Damasio describes the process in terms of neural maps in the brain, (i) of the organism, of its internal states as signalled to the brain by the processes that regulate its life; and (ii) of the object in the sensory and motor areas which it activates. These are first-order maps which stimulate second order maps that can become images. The maps, presumably are what the neuroscientist discerns, but the images can appear only (in the first instance) to the core-self.

What emerges from the evidence marshalled by Damasio is (among other things) that the primary object of the mind is the body, that the awareness of the body, at the initial level, takes the form of feeling, and that consciousness is essentially the self's knowledge of itself (*qua* proto-self) being modified by an object (an external cause). This is just what Spinoza tells us: that the mind is the idea of individual actually existing thing which is the human body — its *ideatum* (E2p11,13), that emotion is the affection of the body, and that passion is the idea of the body as affected by an external cause (E3def1-3, post1).

Spinoza Studies in the Czech Republic

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Though it may be surprising to some, Spinoza's philosophy has also put down its roots in the cultural milieu of a small nation in the middle of Europe. This report summarizes the development of the reception and the study of Spinoza's philosophy within the framework of Czech philosophical thinking. To better understand this, we may divide this whole development in four stages:

1. The early period (from the 18th to the end of 19th century):

Spinoza's philosophy was barely known in this period. The basic ideas of his metaphysical doctrine were introduced to Czech philosophers and scholars in a very restrained and mostly critical way. The earliest more interesting introductions are presented in the works of B. Bolzano, and Aug. Smetana, etc.

2. The main period (the first half of the 20th century):

Czech philosophers' interest in Spinoza grew very rapidly in this period, especially after the origin of the Czechoslovakian Republic in 1918. Many of them evolved very quickly due to international contacts. (For example, some of those scholars collaborated with the Societas Spinozana in the Hague.) Two of Spinoza's anniversaries (1927, 1932) were great stimuli for these studies. The most important works of the Dutch philosopher were translated into Czech in order to open up the possibility of study to the general public. Spinoza's ideas started to influence Czech philosophical thinking. Unfortunately, this hopeful and promising development was stopped by the Second World War.

3. The Communist period (the second half of the 20th century):

In consequence of the Communist coup d'état in 1948, which signified the onslaught of Marxist ideology, philosophical life was very suppressed in the Czechoslovakian Republic. This suppression was most significant from 1948 until 1960. Czech philosophy was restored to life after 1960, but the Soviet military occupation in August 1968 destroyed what had developed philosophically. From 1970-1990, there appeared only a few papers and new translations of Spinoza's *Ethics* with one memorial volume edited on the occasion of Spinoza's anniversary in 1977.

4. The post-communist period: The "velvet revolution" and the fall of the

Czechoslovakian Communist party opened new possibilities the reception of Spinoza studies in Czech philosophy. Czech scholars and students can again study freely. Nobody and nothing prevents them from resuming access to and contacting the world and Spinoza societies too. New monographs and papers on Spinoza are being published, and his works are again translated in the Czech language (for example, the *Cogitata Metaphysica* and the *Reeckening van Kanssen*). So, as elsewhere in the world, the Czech cultural milieu again is able to research and study Spinoza's philosophy.

A bibliography of Czech Spinozistic literature follows.

Consciousness of God in Spinoza's Ethics

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Spinoza's language about God in the *Ethics* suggests he is conscious of himself as one of us might be if one's consciousness was infinite. God has an idea "of his essence and of all the things which necessarily follow from it" (E2p3dem),¹ and he "loves himself with an infinite intellectual love" (E5p35). These passages suggest that Spinoza's God has a unique and infinite self-consciousness, whereas I argue it is more appropriate to say Spinoza's God is a metaphysical being and is only conscious to the extent that finite minds are conscious of their experience.

Spinoza's psychology directs us to realize the nature of God in ourselves (E2p40schol2, E5p31). Consequently, it is unsuitable and misleading to ascribe a unique and infinite self-consciousness to Spinoza's God, because this and the psychology's direction would make it incompatible with the compassion and love of community Spinoza clearly wanted to effect (E5p36&cor). As little gods, we would have less use for one another than Spinoza wished. It is therefore important to dispel the view of Spinoza's God as "an old man in the sky" and establish that Spinoza's God is conscious of himself only as much as we are of each other.

This is what I shall call the "intersubjective view" of God's consciousness in Spinoza's metaphysics. An interesting objection to it is that it appears to contradict Spinoza's doctrine of God's necessary existence.² If the intersubjective view is true and the consciousness of Spinoza's God is that of finite minds of each other, then the divine

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1. All translations of Spinoza's *Ethics* are from Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, tr. Edwin Curley, London: Penguin, 1994.
 2. Syliane Charles, Department of Philosophy, University of Ottawa, personal communication, April 2000; cf. J. Thomas, "F. H. Bradley's Objections to the Ontological Proof," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 56/2 (2000) 367-381.

consciousness might fail to exist, because these finite minds are contingent beings and might all fail to exist. However, God's infinite idea exists in itself, according to Spinoza, as he designed many versions of the ontological proof (E1p7&14, E1p11). So, it seems that, for Spinoza, God's consciousness cannot be a community of finite minds.

This objection appears to rely on a version of St. Thomas' Third Way, and it is interesting to describe their relationship and how Spinoza was in some respects sympathetic to this reasoning, although he never took it as far as to ascribe a unique and infinite self-consciousness to God. In the Third Way, Aquinas argued that the contingency of finite beings implies a necessary one, as otherwise they might all fail to exist and there might be nothing, "and thus even now nothing would be in existence — which is absurd" (ST Ia, q2, a3).³ What is absurd in this supposition, for Aquinas, may stem from the Aristotelian conception of contingency, according to which contingent facts are necessary after they occur; in other words, if it rained today, it is necessary that it rained today, although it may not have rained today, as the prior conditions might have failed to bring this about. Thus, saying it is necessary that it rained today is not the same as saying it necessarily rained today, and it is therefore possible that all finite things — and finite minds — fail to exist. But however much this supports the objection, it may fail to agree with Spinoza's concept of contingency.

One can argue it does so fail because this conception of contingency was to undergo modification affecting, on historical grounds, Spinoza's view of it. Duns Scotus regarded it as problematic for God's freedom. God's foreknowledge of our acts was possible, according to St. Thomas, on grounds that it derived from God's knowing our actions directly at the time we decide to act. This ensures our freedom to act otherwise while also ensuring God's omniscience and the possibility of a complete science of contingent facts. However, if God's knowledge of contingent facts is necessary, then so is God's knowledge of his own acts, and this contradicts free creation and the possibility of God's intervening in the order of nature to bring about miracles, which led Scotus to make an event necessary or contingent in accordance with the manner in which it is conceived.⁴ This makes the concept of contingency similar to the standard possible-worlds conception of today's modal logic, which Leibniz and Malebranche also developed in Spinoza's time. And if Spinoza shared this outlook, he would

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger, 1948.

4. Duns Scotus, *Contingency and freedom — Lectura I 39*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1994.

have denied the premise of the above objection to the intersubjective view of God's consciousness.

However, Spinoza explicitly stated that he saw all truths as necessary and none as contingent. In this regard, his view was very similar to that of F. H. Bradley at the turn of the century. A fact is only apparently contingent, if it appears so at all. This appearance depends on one's failure to understand the conditions under which the fact is necessary (E2p44schol). So, once again, one can ask whether Spinoza would have agreed that the intersubjective view of the consciousness of God fails to agree with Spinoza's doctrine of God's necessary existence, as finite minds, too, would have to exist necessarily (even if their necessary existence derived from their involvement in the nature of God). Indeed, the Third Way is very similar to Spinoza's second *aliter* proof of God's necessary existence in E1p11. This reads that "if what now necessarily exists are only finite beings, then finite beings are more powerful than an absolutely infinite Being. [...] we exist, either in ourselves or in something else, which necessarily exists," and therefore a necessary being exists (E1p11dem3). One may say, at once, "but no, the argument is *for* this necessary being, on which the necessity of finite beings depends, and it would be question-begging to assume this in one of the premises; and this wouldn't be Spinoza's style of argument.' However, Spinoza may be allowed this premise, even if, for the sake of argument, there is no God, because the point of the premise is that the principle of sufficient reason holds. The explanation for the necessary existence of finite minds might be in the stream of events rather than in God's consciousness.

So, again, the conditions appear to hold for an objection to the intersubjective view of God's consciousness, as Spinoza appeared to have agreed in his second *aliter* proof that finite minds depend for their own reality on the independent reality of God's consciousness. What I have to say about this is that it is possible to give a very different interpretation of Spinoza's argument. For Spinoza, the "striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" (E3p7), and this *conatus* in ourselves and in God is perhaps what Spinoza was talking about in terms of the power to exist. This *conatus* is the intuition of being, one may argue, as this is found in the "motion and rest" that Spinoza saw as the "immediate infinite" mode of extension (or motion simply, as rest is apparently relative to motion) (Ep64).⁵ As Spinoza also saw this intuition of being as essential to substance (E1p17schol, Ep6), it had to be one of its attributes (E1def4), and I intend to say more to justify

5. Baruch Spinoza, *The Letters*, tr. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995.

such a paradoxical implication in the next few pages. One may, at this stage, also argue that the immediate infinite mode of thought is affirmation and that this is the attribute of thought, because Spinoza similarly suggested that the affirmation of a triangle “pertains to the essence of the idea of the triangle” (E2p49dem).

When the argument in E1p11dem3 is understood in these terms, then the power, or *conatus*, of finite beings is finite owing to the finitude of the concept that informs their intuition of being rather than owing to the finitude of the intuition of being informed by it. Because Spinoza rejected the scholastic universal in favor of geometric reasoning (see E2p40schol1), we can say he endorsed the second form of abstraction outlined by Aquinas, where the “form is abstracted from the matter, as the form of a circle is abstracted by the intellect from any sensible matter” (ST Ia, q40, a3). The form and the matter in the case of extension would be the concept and the intuition of motion through space, and together they could be said to constitute the “face of the whole universe,” or Spinoza’s “mediate infinite” mode of extension. Spinoza thought the mediate was derivable from the immediate infinite mode, together with the “absolute nature” of its attribute (E1p22). Thought’s mediate infinite mode would be the “absolutely infinite intellect,” on this reading (cf. Ep64). Spinoza signaled his difference with Descartes on the nature of God in saying we necessarily exist “in ourselves or in something else,” so that the necessity of one’s existence is the same whether or not it is explained in God. In either case, it is explained through the intuition of being we share with the nature of God. The argument is that the intuition of being in one’s self is greater the more complete is the self-concept that informs it. In developing its content, the experiencing subject is becoming more active and powerful, but if its reasoning is ever complete, then perhaps it is only as the idea of a community of knowing subjects rather than as an idea of the one subject in whom all is known.

In other words, you do not have to view Spinoza’s argument in E1p11dem3 as a demonstration of God’s existence in the sense of a being with a unique and infinite self-consciousness. God’s necessity, as demonstrated in the argument, is the same as that of finite beings, and it is a need for an intuition of being for anything to be. Where Spinoza concluded that there exists an infinite God, this in no way suggests the need for a unique and infinite self-consciousness as opposed to the intuition of being underlying all finite beings and the whole undertaking of their development. In fact, the objection in question to the intersubjective view of God’s consciousness confuses the contingency and finitude of finite beings. Whereas finite beings are necessary, as much as the *conatus* of being is everywhere necessary, one can still hold that finite beings are

finite, as Suarez did; he regarded the apparently contingent being of finite beings as really just their finitude with respect to space and time.⁶ Spinoza would have taken a similar view of contingency and hold that the intuition of being of finite beings is consciousness as such — as well as metaphysical being — and that finite beings express God's nature through their ways of developing this intuition in concepts.

An issue for this reading of Spinoza would be an incompatibility apparent between its identification of the infinite modes with their attributes and Spinoza's distinction of the attributes and modes — an issue that suggested to Robinson that the attributes are subjective.⁷ A mode is conceived through something other than itself (E1def5), whereas an attribute is conceived through itself (E1p10, E1def3&4). As the attributes would be modes of substance, rather than substance as it is in itself, they might fail to define its essence. As a response to this objection, it only needs to be remarked that the attributes as infinite modes constitute principles governing the nature of substance, even if they are only indirectly and by way of an identity different from substance itself (E2def2). On this reading, an infinite mode is the reality of substance as it appears within the consciousness of finite minds, and it is the intuition of being through which they develop their objective concept of substance; this is the way substance is actually in and conceived through itself (E1def3). Spinoza associated the attributes with *natura naturans* and modes, even infinite modes, with *natura naturata* (E1p29schol). However, each is an aspect of substance, and because the attributes are conceived through themselves, clearly aspects of their nature reside in each of these categories.

As Alqui remarked, the infinite self-knowledge of God, too, is a mode and thus opposed to substance and its attributes, which would be an issue for anyone who says Spinoza's God has a unique and infinite self-consciousness.⁸ To be self-conscious is to distinguish one's self from others; moreover, as Spinoza's God is the "free cause" of all the modes of substance (E1p32, E5pref), God has to act in opposition to an independent reality — you are not free to do anything unless reality offers a stable enough environment to complete some acts.⁹ Charles sees God's freedom in Spinoza's system as God's immanence, as opposed to the determination of things through their transitive causes, as nothing then determines God to

6. Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952.

7. L. Robinson, *Kommentar zu Spinozas Ethik*. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1928.

8. F. Alqui *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981.

act.¹⁰ Such freedom would be mere impulse and blind, however, unless God has an objective idea of an independent reality, and thus an answer to the issue of how God becomes conscious of himself as somehow opposed to an independent reality would have to be forthcoming to answer the issue of God's freedom.

Charles developed her solution to the latter issue in answering Tschirnhaus' objection regarding the dominance of thought (Ep70) (conveyed to Spinoza in a letter from Schuler).¹¹ The issue was one of how Spinoza could maintain the parallelism of the attributes while the system of the attributes appears as a system of modes of the attribute of thought. This is actually very similar to Alquié's issue of how a substance, in and conceived through itself, is to become a mode, in and conceived through something other than itself. In each case, it is a matter of how the attributes themselves appear within the system as their own modes, and if the problem can be solved for thought, then it can be solved for each of the attributes; and this would preserve the parallelism of the attributes, as each would then appear as modes of each and the order and connection of the modes would be the same in each.

Charles understands the attributes as each an immediate experience of the infinite *puissance* of substance, and they can thus enter into the content of the infinite idea as objectively conceived through the attribute of thought. They can do so in any attribute insofar as they are qualitatively distinct but identical in immediate experience to the whole concept developed through an attribute. Charles is nowhere so explicit, but this is a view she suggests and it is a very satisfactory solution. Saying God has a unique and infinite self-consciousness is something else, however, and I argue in the following paragraphs that Tschirnhaus' correspondence with Spinoza demonstrates the latter's insistence on grounding concepts on the "formal reality" of an attribute (e.g., the psychical reality of thought), as opposed to their objects; moreover, Spinoza's rational psychology and definition of *attribute* (E1def4) show the need to reduce God's

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9. J. Thomas, *Intuition and Reality: A Study of the Attributes of Substance in the Absolute Idealism of Spinoza*, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999.
 10. Syliane Charles, "La libre ncausalit divine chez Spinoza," *De Philosophia* 15/1 (1999), 13-32.
 11. Syliane Charles, "La conception spinoziste de la connaissance divine," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association, Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities, 24-27 May 2000, Edmonton, AB, Canada, Canadian Philosophical Association; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Ottawa, ON, Canada.

consciousness to that of finite minds of each other, if this consciousness is to be objective.

Tschirnhaus' Ep70 began with a reading of E2p5 as stating that the "*ideata* are the efficient cause of ideas" (Ep70) and then pointed to this claim seeming to contradict E1ax4, as used in E2p7dem. This was objection 1 of three objections contained in Tschirnhaus' Ep70. The one pertaining to the dominance thought, discussed above, was objection 2. Spinoza apparently only deigned to respond to objection 1, pointing out that Tschirnhaus had made a very obvious error in reading E2p5; however, the objections relate to each other very closely, and the issue in each case depends on whether one assumes the correct reading of E2p5. What Spinoza actually wrote in response to Tschirnhaus was that he misread E2p5. In fact, it reads that the "ideas, both of God's attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, as their efficient cause, but God himself, insofar as he is a thinking thing," that is to say, it is the essence of God, the formal reality of the attributes, that determines the object of God's infinite idea of his nature (Ep71).

However, Tschirnhaus understood E2p5 to mean that the "*ideata* are the efficient cause of ideas," and he appeared to regard the object of extension as something like the world in which one encounters chairs, tables, winds, and rainbows, and reflection on one's ideas of such things in thought has no place in such a world. Thus, if the order and connection of things within each attribute is developed through consideration of its object, then thought, in which such reflection occurs, is going to be more extensive than extension, which was Tschirnhaus' objection 2. Moreover, one can view Spinoza's position on Gueroult's reading,¹² on which the concepts developed through consideration of the attributes differ in their formal reality while designating the same objective reality. An issue, then, is that the order of extension offers no place for ideas of the imagination, so that (against E2p8) they are not "in God's attributes," which was Tschirnhaus' objection 3.

In E2p7dem, Spinoza wrote that "the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect." Tschirnhaus correctly understood this to mean that the cause of the objective reality of an idea is its formal reality, or the attribute of thought (E2p40schol2), such that the "order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E2p7). As each attribute is an immediate experience of the infinite *puissance* of substance, the same order and connection appears in the concept developed through consideration of

12. Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 2 vols. Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1968.

the formal reality of extension or of any other attribute, as suggested in E2p7schol. Ideas of the imagination are also contained in the order developed through consideration of any attribute, although they would be correctly seen as imaginary and have their place as such in the reality of substance.

One should therefore recognize that in Spinoza's system the objects of ideas derive from the formal reality of thought. However, Spinoza was no subjective idealist. In his system the objectivity of ideas depends on the intellect's being passively related to the attribute of thought. To further develop this argument, then, one notes that Spinoza's rational psychology and his definition of *attribute* in the *Ethics* suggest this source of objectivity would fail if God's consciousness was unique and infinite, rather than being that of finite minds of each other, which is evident from an analogy of God's self-knowledge and his self-love.

"Strictly speaking," wrote Spinoza, "God loves no one" (E5p17cor), as God's ideas are entirely adequate and love develops through the increase of activity and pleasure occurring as a function of the adequacy of ideas (E5p17dem). Spinoza then surprisingly stated that God has an infinite intellectual love of himself and that this self-love is the mutual love of a community of finite minds, "not insofar as he [God] is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human mind's essence" (E5p36). In context, it is clear that Spinoza's qualification was intended to forestall the reader's thinking God loves anyone at all insofar as God is infinite, rather than to encourage the reader to think that God's infinite intellectual love is anything more than this mutual love.

God's infinite idea is similarly a function of God's activity. As the idea of the attributes and modes of God in the infinite intellect is entirely adequate, we can suppose the experience of it in this intellect is entirely active (E3p1). Yet, it is then no longer related to the attributes, as they are "what the intellect perceives [*percipit*] of substance as constituting its essence" (E1def4), and to perceive is to be passive (E2def2). One can only admit that the intellect's appropriation of the activity and independent being of the attributes and its corresponding conceptualization of the nature of substance is never complete, as the intellect is always to some degree passive. Whether the finite resembles the infinite intellect is irrelevant to this issue, as it affects ideas in either intellect. The adequate idea of the *puissance* of substance is possible only if it is conceived to be partly appropriated in one's own consciousness and partly appropriated in another's consciousness. God's infinite idea of his own nature is therefore nothing other than an idea of the intersubjective reality of finite minds, and in Spinoza's understanding, God is only conscious insofar as we are

conscious of each other as modes of this reality.

One can argue as well that God's infinite idea must bear some relation to the self-knowledge of finite minds. On one account of God's relation to such minds, this conception of Spinoza's God follows immediately, as God's thought is said to be immediately identical to the experience of all true ideas and thus identical to every adequate self-concept. It is otherwise possible to contend that the infinite idea is the idea of these adequate self-concepts rather than the immediate experience. An adequate self-concept, however, is an idea of idea, and for any adequate idea of idea, Spinoza said there is an infinite series of ideas of idea (E2p21schol) which corresponds to the infinite series of finite causes (E1p28) and the infinite series of the causes of the finite mind's individual ideas (E2p48). However, God's unique and infinite self-concept is neither in nor of this series of finite and transitive causes, as these ideas of idea are, according to Spinoza, nothing other than the finite mind's own ideas of itself (E2p49cordem). God is in fact the cause of the whole series inasmuch as it is everywhere conceived through the *puissance* of substance.

On the relation of God to finite minds, Seth Pringle-Pattison set up the alternatives in a letter to F. H. Bradley. According to the latter, the universe must be experienced in the form of a perfectly harmonious system in an Absolute center of experience. Yet, Bradley denied that this Absolute center would hold the experience of a self or a theistic God. The Absolute was infinite, as was Spinoza's substance, whereas the self has to determine its own nature through its opposition to other selves and to an independent reality. "When we speculatively rise to the idea of a universal Self, the tendency," wrote Pringle-Pattison, "is either to abolish the particular selves before it or to make it simply the *form* of the many particular selves or thirdly to make it a particular self coordinate with the others. The last is the view of popular theology & is obviously untenable as a philosophical position."

As I understand it, this "view of popular theology" was in fact held by J. S. Mill, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead, but it is unclear that Spinoza took any of these views. As Pringle-Pattison seemed to further suggest, the view of popular theology would be either self-contradictory or reducible to saying reality constitutes a community of finite minds: "From our finite point of view a world-self (which shall have a self-centred life of its own & yet also live in finite selves) is necessarily inconceivable & therefore appears as *one self more*." And he appeared to endorse an

irrationalist, transcendentalist option a little further down in asking the question, “But is such a self therefore impossible?”¹³ As Spinoza rejected transcendence, Pringle-Pattison’s option of holding God to be a self despite reason would have seemed to him mistaken.

As earlier noted, moreover, Spinoza rejected the type of abstraction involved in taking God to be a self that is “simply the *form* of the many particular selves,” as such reasoning is subjective and the resultant form corresponds to no actual individual in nature (E2p40schol1). The other alternative, one of allowing God to be “a universal Self” in such a way as to “abolish the particular selves before it” is perhaps closest to what Spinoza would have referred to as the *conatus* of God. But this is not the self for Spinoza, and the only adequate concept derived from it is the idea of a community of selves.

A significant objection to this conception of God in Spinoza’s *Ethics* would be that it led him to exclude *agapé*, or disinterested love, and to promote the obvious vices of obsessive attachment to sensual pleasure and the mere means to an end. This is problematic, as Spinoza attacked the vices of obsessive attachment to sensual pleasure, wealth and honor in the early sections of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*,¹⁴ suggesting a disinterested love would have been preferable. Aquinas drew on the *agapé* of Aristotle’s ethics of friendship to develop *caritas*, or Christian charity. Aristotle’s idea of a pure friendship, or *agapé*, derived from the notion of a love of virtue, as opposed to one of sensual pleasure or a mere means to an end. It derived from the self-love of good persons, who therefore cared for each other for the sake of the virtue they cared for in themselves. Aquinas took this notion and turned it into Christian charity, or the love essentially of the virtues of God. This would be the other’s “good.” Pure friendship would, for Aquinas, still be a love of the other for the sake of the other’s good, in this pure sense, as opposed to people’s loving one another for the sake of what they simply enjoy or consider useful to each other (ST IIa IIæ 23, 1).

Given the intersubjective view and the analogy of God’s consciousness and love, each finite mind’s activity must depend to some degree on others, as each one’s self-concept depends to some degree on another’s conception of one’s self. Spinoza clearly explained the devotion

13. Letter from Pringle-Pattison to Bradley, 26 Dec. 1894 as cited in C. A. Keene, *Selected correspondence: June 1872-December 1904*. Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1999 (volume 4 of *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley*.)

14. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, and Selected Letters*, tr. Samuel Shirely, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.

of finite minds to each other as a result of the overall feeling of the pleasures and freedoms community affords (E5p15dem), and he clearly expected this devotion to make us more useful to one another (E4p71dem). However, what appears to be at issue for Aquinas and Spinoza is the subjectivity of the vices and passions, or the lack of any objective standard to determine the good. If the intersubjective view of God holds, then one can say an aspect of the self takes in other selves. This is not to say each finite self has a unique and infinite self-consciousness, of which the others are modes; rather, one's self-concept, because it includes other selves in its content, is distinct from the reality of any one of these selves; and because the pleasures and freedoms of community derive from this concept, they constitute an objective standard to determine the good. They derive, in other words, from the ways one's whole self-concept affects one's desire rather than the ways one can be satisfied in another or one's self. This seems to be what Spinoza meant in suggesting that the passions result from our mistaking a pleasure affecting a part of the self for one affecting the whole (E4p42dem).

What is not at issue is whether some sort of exchange is involved in even the purest of friendships. As Aristotle and Thomas would have admitted, friendship of any sort involves some exchange. What they and Spinoza considered problematic was the exchange of only a part of a self for the whole of a self, as when one exchanges one's self for sensuality or money, as one justly would for virtue. A devotion to another for the sake of one's self, taken in the sense of the self-expansion afforded by community, would be an acceptable sense of *agap * and follow directly from Spinoza's psychology and metaphysics.

What It Means to “Agree with Nature”: Spinoza’s Transformation of Stoic *Convenientia*

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In order to illustrate fortitude comparable to that of the Stoic philosopher, Seneca recounts the tale of Stilbo who was asked whether he had lost anything in the recent siege of his homeland and replied, “Nothing; I have all that is mine with me,” even while, Seneca explains, Stilbo’s estate had been ravaged, his wife and daughters lost, and he himself stood captive before the conquering armies (*Ep.* IX, 18-20). Stoicism may be considered an eternal philosophy — a stage in the history of consciousness, as Hegel puts it — commanding perpetual appeal for the fortitude of soul it professes to deliver. Stoicism touts a triumph of the individual over the caprices of Fortune, and yet the path to this triumph, the Stoics maintain, is delivered by “agreement with nature” — *homologia* in Greek, *convenientia* in Latin — which they identify as the *telos*. Stoicism seeks to establish a new way of being in this world, an attachment to things transformed through detachment, the essential endeavor of its psychotherapy. Stoic consciousness is especially evident in the early modern period, in the thought of Justus Lipsius, for example, whose advertized aim is to fortify the individual against the relentless upheavals of the religious wars. Since these wars emerged within Christianity itself, Stoicism provided an attractive alternative for moral and theological inspiration, but by and large, only as a means of reinvigorating or reinforcing — not deposing — the Christian tradition.¹

In Spinoza’s *Ethics*, however, Stoic themes inspire a naturalistic ethics that seeks no reconciliation with the Judæo-Christian tradition but freely disparages its otherworldly emphasis. Susan James speaks of “Spinoza the Stoic,” whose philosophy echoes the central structure of the

1. Jacqueline Lagrè, for example, argues that many early modern thinkers drew upon Stoicism in forging “un credo minimum,” a minimal set of dogmas which captured the essence of Christianity, and would, in this form, succeed better in transmitting Christian peace. Cf. *La Raison Ardente: Religion Naturelle et Raison aux XVIIe Siècles*, 1993, 85.

Stoic system: a God immanent to nature, determined in its workings, and impersonal as a result;² virtue that is readily indicated in the natural impulse for self-preservation; human unhappiness diagnosed in terms of passions, and a prescription for intellectual therapy that delivers tranquillity. Furthermore, Spinoza invokes the Stoic theme that virtue entails agreement with nature. However, as a matter of notable divergence, Spinoza ultimately accords politics considerable attention and significance, as his two treatises on the subject attest, while the Stoics are commonly characterized as disdaining politics. Andr Lang maintains that this much is immediately clear in the fact that politics is conspicuously absent from the triumvirate that comprises Stoic philosophy: logic, physics and ethics.³ Philosophy — the path to virtue and happiness — and political interest and attachment appear to be mutually exclusive for the Stoics, as is not the case for Spinoza. This divergence takes root, in fact, in their respective accounts of *convenientia*, what it means to agree with nature. The Stoic account of this *telos* precludes political interest, while Spinoza transforms the notion of *convenientia* such that it constitutes precisely the bridge between ethics and politics.

In the first place, how do the Stoics paradoxically diminish the value of worldly goods through the endeavor of agreeing with nature? In the spirit of Hellenistic philosophy, the Stoics maintain that the natural impulse (*hormé*) is the basis of moral value, the primary indicator of virtue. While Epicurus takes that impulse to be towards pleasure, the Stoics claim that it aims at self-preservation. Since nature is providential, according to the Stoics, the primary impulse with which it affixes us is necessarily good, and it follows that self-preservation is worthy of pursuit. Human beings are unique in that they pursue self-preservation rationally. By virtue of our rationality, the Stoics hold, we share in the nature of God, whom they define as the *logos* internally directing the *cosmos*, and therefore, if we would agree with that nature, we achieve *homologia*, literally, the attunement of individual intellect with divine intellect. Harmony with divine intellect provides insight into the providential workings of the world and, thereby, acquiescence regarding events of apparent misfortune. After all, the philosopher is secure in his knowledge that events that appear tragic or even plainly absurd to the common spectator are imbued with providential significance and occur for the sake of ultimate good — indeed, that they are ordered for human benefit, in particular. Chrysippus illustrates the depth of this confidence when he declares that even “bed-bugs are

2. “Spinoza the Stoic” in *The Rise of Modern Philosophy*, ed. Tom Sorrell, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 289-316.

3. Andr Lang, “La Place du Politique dans le Syst Sto

useful for waking us, that mice encourage us not to be untidy.”⁴

The passions are the primary obstacle to harmony with nature and are to this extent alienating. In contrast to their Platonic and Peripatetic peers, the Stoics maintain, furthermore, that the soul is exclusively rational in nature, indicating the degree to which it is susceptible to absolute control. The passions are merely irrational judgments and thus avail themselves to the possibility of utter extirpation. Specifically, the passions reflect improper esteem for external things. Since nature is providential, however, don't we rightly value its contents? Martha Nussbaum explains that the mistake of passions, according to the Stoics, “comes not in thinking things good, but in thinking them to be much better than they are.”⁵ We must transform our attachment to nature's fixtures, since, so long as we are excessively attached to external goods, we, too, suffer the variations of fortune that batter them. Therapy involves a reevaluation of natural goods, therefore, such as those things which conduce to health and prosperity, in order to reveal that they are not the ultimate repository of goodness. Goodness is found in understanding alone, the Stoics conclude, the rational attunement with the cosmic *logos*, which suffers no loss at the hands of fortune because, for one thing, understanding is beyond her reach, and furthermore, because such attunement includes the perception that loss is woven into the fabric of providence.

Life's necessities are consequently deemed indifferent to virtue and happiness. The *summum bonum*, Cicero tells us, consists in rationally “choosing what is in accordance with nature and rejecting what is contrary to it.”⁶ Since agreement with nature consists in rational selection, it provides the inimitable impassivity of the sage that enables him to be “happy even on the rack.” The sage only cares to select those things nature presents as worthy of pursuit, and therefore, rational, but he cares not whether the objects of his selection should slip into demise. The worldly performance of his selection is merely an “after-growth,” Cicero explains (Cicero, 3.32), which suggests troubling political consequences. Indeed, it would seem to follow, for example, that if the sage should “pursue the Nazis on the battlefield or in the lawcourts, it will be not because he attached any intrinsic value to the righting of these wrongs, but because he

4. Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantis*, in *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol I, trs. and eds. Anthony Long and David Sedley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 1044D.

5. *The Therapy of Desire*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 370.

6. *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, tr. H. Rackham, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 198, 3.31.

has come to believe that this is what the universe requires of him right now” (Nussbaum, 416). According to the Stoics, we can allow neither urgency to such a pursuit, nor disappointment at its failure. The Stoics might counter that their sage constitutes precisely a triumph for politics: like Plato’s philosopher-king, he deserves to rule because he has no interest in worldly goods, and thus resists the lure of tyranny. But without worldly motivation, what is to guarantee that the philosopher will invest concerted effort in saving the kingdom, especially if its demise proceeds according to Providential logic? Furthermore, what kind of political creature is the sage who is mindful of the possibility of rational suicide?

The doctrine of rational suicide best exemplifies the Stoic endeavor for detachment, but also proves quite problematic. Cicero reports that when a sage finds a dearth of things that agree with nature and unworthy of rational selection as a result, “it is appropriate for him to depart life” (*De Fin.* 3.60). The Stoics risk contradiction in one respect by seeming to value external things after all, since it is their scarcity that inspires suicide. More importantly, if suicide is rational, it contradicts the premise that the natural impulse for self-preservation is the basis of virtue. And yet without the willingness to abandon life, Stoic detachment does not achieve its full power, the power that enables Stilbo, who asserts that he has lost nothing, to “wrest the victory from his conqueror,” as Seneca proclaims.⁷ Detachment is ultimately a worldly triumph, therefore, but is only complete with the possibility of suicide. However, such extreme detachment suggests a further aim with more troubling political consequences.

Though the sage may be a supremely resolute and patient political creature, his detachment is an individual feat first and foremost, and aims at autonomy. Seneca often advises the prospective philosopher, for example, to “simply stay at home, for at home, inside himself, he has whatever he needs” (Nussbaum, 363). The sage is perfectly self-sufficient, and suicide is the ultimate expression of his absolute self-control and self-determination. Such sentiment prompts Pascal Severac to argue that Stoic *convenientia* consists in agreement with oneself⁸ — or rather, I might add, agreement *within* oneself. In other words, community is absent from Stoic agreement. The sage has no need for others, and performs social duties only if nature should demand it of him, according to his place in the

7. “De Constantia” in *Moral Essays*, vol. I, tr. John W. Basore, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928, V.6.

8. “Convenir avec soi, convenir avec autrui: Éthique stoïcienne, Éthique spinoziste,” *Studia Spinozana* 12 (1996), 105-120, (115).

universe. On one hand, the Stoics suggest that community is only possible between sages, since they alone demonstrate true friendship.⁹ Nevertheless, the Stoics never portray community as necessary to the attainment of wisdom in the first place, insofar as Stoic wisdom entails precisely the realization that I require nothing anyone else can give me. Seneca concludes that “it is impossible [...] for anyone either to injure or to benefit the wise man, since that which is divine does not need to be helped and cannot be hurt; and the wise man is next-door neighbor to the gods and like a god in all save his mortality” (*De Con.* VIII.1-2). The wise man transcends society because he is like a god; in some fundamental sense, he is extra-social.

I suspect that Stoicism appealed to Spinoza insofar as it provides the basis for a naturalistic ethics and contrasts with the Judæo-Christian tradition in this respect. Spinoza echoes the Stoic formula that virtue is indicated in natural impulse. The essence of each existent thing consists in a *conatus* to persist in its own being (E3p6), Spinoza maintains, and specifies that, as a result, the essence of any existent thing in no way includes elements of its own destruction, which necessarily come from outside (E3p6dem). Spinoza, too, grounds virtue in natural impulse, but in so doing, identifies virtue and power: “that is, virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is man’s very essence, or nature, insofar as he has the power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature’ (E4def8).¹⁰ This power is just the ability to fulfill the logic of the *conatus*, to satisfy its particular demands. Since the specific laws of human nature include rationality, to act from virtue — from that uniquely human power — is to preserve one’s being under the guidance of reason (E4p24dem). Under the guidance of reason, moreover, we strive to understand, which the mind deems its exclusive advantage (E4p26). Spinoza connects the *conatus* to understanding in this manner, and once the determinism of things is grasped, we arrive at what Alexandre Matheron terms “le moment Stoïcien de l’*’*thique*,”¹¹ when “we can desire nothing but that which must be,” whereupon “the endeavor of the better part of us is in harmony with the order of the whole of Nature’ (E4app32). Grasping natural necessity delivers tranquillity, according to Spinoza, such as in

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9. Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, tr. R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925, VII.124.
 10. Spinoza, Benedict. *The Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*, tr. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.
 11. “Le Moment Stoïcien de l’*Éthique* de Spinoza” in *Le Stoïcisme aux XVIe et XVIIe Siècles*, ed. Jacqueline Lagrée. Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen 1994, 147-162.

relieving hatred and anger against offenders once we recognize that their deeds are determined (E2p49schol). Nevertheless, this tranquillity is not achieved by virtue of confidence in the providential ordering of things, as the Stoics would have it, since Spinoza rejects teleology. Rather, for Spinoza, tranquillity must be achieved by virtue of a different dynamic, a twist on the notion of the passions and their subsequent therapy. And such tranquillity is not merely resignation at the sight of infinite determinism; rather, Spinoza insists that it is joy.

As the Stoics attribute passions to irrational judgments, Spinoza defines them as confused ideas, but adds that they involve the mind affirming a greater or lesser force of existence of its body (E3Gendefaf). We are active, Spinoza explains, “when from our nature there follows in us or externally to us something which can be clearly and directly understood through our nature alone,” and passive “when something takes place in us, or follows from our nature of which we are only the partial cause” (E3def2). Passivity and activity are not simply distinguished by degrees of understanding the experience at hand, but also by representing what “can be clearly understood through our nature alone,” that is, through our rationally guided *conatus* for self-preservation. Though passions can occasion increased bodily power, and satisfy the *conatus* to this extent, their deficiency is indicated in the fact that they are passive experiences. Passions are not guaranteed sources of power for self-preservation, for they do not proceed from within the logic of the *conatus* itself, but from other bodies’ intentional strivings that only incidentally benefit me. For example, pain is a passive experience, according to Spinoza, since it can never proceed according to the logic of the individual’s *conatus*, which strives exclusively after self-preservation, and necessarily comes from without. In short, Spinoza is concerned with the physical deficiency the passions imply, while for the Stoics, their import consists solely in the state of mind they indicate. Accordingly, whereas the Stoics put no stock in the consequences achieved by a therapeutically corrected soul, consequences matter for Spinoza.

Passions are likewise alienating; they stifle agreement with nature, according to Spinoza. But in what sense? Spinoza invokes the notion of *convenientia* in E4, and grounds it in his physics of bodies. According to his physics, bodies that can combine together to form a greater body have greater power to persevere in motion. Human bodies, subject to the same laws of physics, persevere in their characteristic motion, namely, self-preservation, according to the same dynamic. What agrees with our nature is good (E4p31), Spinoza tells us, and explains that agreement amounts to what serves to preserve our nature (E4p31dem). Insofar as we are subject to passions, he says, we cannot be said to agree in nature (E4p32), because

“things which are said to agree in nature are understood to agree in respect of their power, not in respect of their weakness or negation, and consequently not in respect of passive emotions” (E4p32dem). Passions indicate a lack of power. If the human body would persist in its endeavor for self-preservation, it requires combination with other bodies that agree with it, in the manner of any body in nature. Passions such as hatred, anger or envy cause persons to repel one another, and commit a disservice to individual pursuits of self-preservation in the process; passions such as anxiety and pain cause persons to turn inward and render them unwilling or unable to contribute what power they possess. Spinozistic *convenientia*, therefore, is physical in nature, and social as a consequence. Any body whatsoever that would fortify my vital power may be termed agreeable, but that which emulates my individual pursuit and has the same needs and the same talents to serve those needs as my pursuit requires, most agrees with my nature. Accordingly, Spinoza holds that nothing is more beneficial to man than man (E4p18schol). Where the Stoic primarily agrees with — or within — himself, Spinoza insists upon agreement with environment, and specifically, other persons. Passions alienate me from my nature, which nature transcends the mere outlines of my individual modality, and bleeds into the world around it from which it first emerged and to which it will return again.

Since they are related to vital power, the passions elude the possibility of absolute control, for which ideal Spinoza explicitly rebukes the Stoics (E5præf). Like any natural body, the sustenance of my individual power relies upon the contribution of other bodies. I am always at the mercy of external forces much greater than me (E4app32), I am always subject to influences so powerful that I cannot prevent them. In other words, I am always passive to some degree. The best therapy I can hope for, therefore, is to mitigate the degree to which I am passive, and, reflecting the vitalism of Spinozistic agreement, therapy is conceived accordingly. Stoic therapy is founded on the principle of withholding assent from irrational judgments, on the basis of knowing what agrees with nature, that is, what is rational and therefore worthy of assent. Such knowledge proves calming because it includes the vision of divine providence — the vision that we are the object of divine solicitude, as Bernard Carnois puts it.¹² Spinoza can allow for no such vision. He admits, nevertheless, that understanding provides the remedies for the emotions (E5præf), and yet he maintains that “no emotion can be checked by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is

12. Bernard Carnois, “Le Désir selon les Stoïciens et selon Spinoza,” *Dialogue* 19/2 (1980), 255-277, (270).

considered an emotion⁷ (E4p14). Contrary to the Stoics, the content of knowledge itself does not prove joyful for Spinoza, since it details a universe bereft of special concern for us. And the only way to treat harmful emotions is to combat them by means of stronger emotions, emotions of greater endurance, that is, emotions that display greater vital power in the manner of bodies. Knowledge serves this end, Spinoza maintains, insofar as it is itself a source of emotive force. Knowledge is a joyful experience (E3p58); indeed, it expresses native power, specifically, the mind's effort of preservation that consists in the pursuit of understanding. When achieved, knowledge of God provides the greatest emotive force of all, because it is so total and can be summoned from any perception whatsoever. This dynamic does not suggest that the passions can be extirpated, however, but only describes a means of combating their perpetual emergence.

The joy of intellectual love of God is not complete without vital flourishing. Accordingly, suicide is inimical to virtue as such and is not properly characteristic of the rational person, as Spinoza has it, since the *conatus* whose logic is illuminated and rendered self-transparent cannot suggest its own demise (E4p20). Suicide is always suggested and compelled by external influences, Spinoza maintains, and does not — nay, cannot — proceed of itself from within any individual, who is wholly dedicated to the project of self-preservation. As such, suicide can only amount to a check against a person's power, and consequently, virtue, as is not the case for the Stoics who celebrate its perpetual possibility as the decisive mark of virtue. Blessedness calls for vital flourishing, according to Spinoza, since the therapy that delivers “the power to arrange and associate affections of the body,” i.e., emotions, requires that we are not assailed by overwhelming affections in the first place (E4p10). It follows that this, in turn, requires the larger protection only social cooperation can provide. Furthermore, Spinoza asserts, “he whose body is capable of the greatest amount of activity has a mind whose greatest part is eternal” (E5p39). That body is more active which consorts with bodies that agree with its nature, i.e., conduce to its vital endeavor. Intellectual activity is sustained and deepened by the diversity and plenitude of goods that comprise our environment. Spinoza suggests this much in praising that particular form of pleasure he calls *hilaritas*,¹³ wherein all parts of the body are affected equally, and its power of activity is evenly distributed (E4p42). To evince the pleasure of *hilaritas*, which is categorically good, requires an environment of diverse and yet balanced resources, which renders this strikingly un-Stoic account of the wise man:

13. Shirley translates this as “cheerfulness.”

It is [...] part of a wise man to refresh and invigorate himself in moderation with good food and drink, as also with perfumes, with the beauty of blossoming plants, with dress, music, sporting activities, theatres and the like [...]. For the human body is composed of many parts of various kinds which are continually in *need* of fresh and varied nourishment so that the entire body may be equally capable of all the functions that follow from its nature, and be equally capable of simultaneously understanding many things [E4p45schol].

Indeed, whoever would conceive the whole must be intimately acquainted with its manifold expressions.

Because virtue involves vital interest, according to Spinoza, which interest entails agreement with one's environment, politics finds root in philosophy — and serves ethics at the same time. Spinoza maintains that, of itself, the individual pursuit of power implies social cooperation. If I would promote my endeavor to persevere in being, I seek out the aid of other persons engaged in the same endeavor. He for whom the path and means to self-preservation is most lucid, is most rational, and is a superior partner in social cooperation. He is powerful and thus a valuable resource, and his insight makes him a willing partner. In this respect, he who pursues his interest most faithfully most agrees with *my* nature, paradoxically. Therefore, Spinoza declares that those philosophers are wrong “who believe that the principle that every man is bound to seek his own advantage is the basis, not of virtue and piety, but of impiety” (E4p18schol). Since vital interest is internal to virtue, it delivers the requisite urgency of politics that Stoicism lacks. Political motivation is clear for philosopher and non-philosopher alike, as Spinoza has it. If he would taste the joy of blessedness, the philosopher must seek out the vital aid of his neighbors and entice them with his own resources in the first place. Virtue involves maximizing individual power, and attracting contributions in the first place. What better venue for this, then, than politics, which unabashedly advertises the attainment and augmentation of power as its common aim?

Virtue is inconceivable without politics, as Spinoza has it. The Stoics lack this formula, and, accordingly, fail to convey comparable political urgency. Politics remains little more than a troubling sideshow for the Stoic, who has discovered all he needs “at home within himself.” He satisfies the demands of virtue by playing his role in the universe, and acts the part of the political citizen only if that is called for. But there is no satisfaction intrinsic to worldly involvement for Stoicism. For Spinoza, on

the other hand, the moral *telos* is rightfully joyful because the whole person is activated and engaged. He is part of nature, and as such, is most himself when he is in agreement with his environment. The virtuous individual strives in concert with the motion of the whole universe, and is autonomous to the extent that he succeeds in expressing native power. To Seneca's philosopher who asserts that he has lost nothing even when all his worldly goods slip away, Spinoza might reply that his happiness is unrecognizable. For, internal to the endeavor to be happy, do well and live well, is the endeavor to be, do, live, actually exist (E4p21), and the particular endeavors only fulfill the more eminent one.

Spinoza's "Catholica religio" (TTP 19, Gebhardt 231/16) Rejoinder to Akkerman

Wim N. A. Klever

My "Spinoza's Concept of Christian Piety: Defense of a Text Correction by Bruder in the TTP"¹ is criticized by Fokke Akkerman in his "Divine Law and the Right of the State: Against a Textual Conjecture in the TTP."² I need not to explain the debated "question" for the readers of the monographs. Neither shall I repeat the arguments I gave for the proposed correction of *pietate* for *pietatem* in G. 232/33 and G.233/25. But the points of Akkerman's critique have to be rebutted, not only on account of their inaccuracy, but even more because they presuppose and support an interpretation of the TTP as a whole which cannot be reasonably defended. It so appears clearly that the 'm' introduced by Bruder and myself is not a thing of minor importance.

First, I did not deny, of course, as it is suggested by my opponent, that the expression "*aliquem pietate colere*" is grammatically correct Latin or that it is Spinozistic Latin. I did not propose to change an application of this figure in other places of the text and even quoted Spinoza where he declares that it is the exclusive responsibility of the highest political authority to determine "*qua ratione unusquisque debet proximum pietate colere*" (G. 232/26-27). What I did claim is the curiosity of the expression *in the narrow and broad context*. According to the usual reading "all" [people] without exception (*nullo excepto, absolute*) would have to be loved. This objective might have been the content of Spinoza's assertion, were it not the case that he evidently purports that there *are* exceptions. If somebody tries to destabilize the political situation of his country by bribing people during elections (*opem alicui cum [...] totius reipublicae damno ferre*, G. 232/3-4),³ he is a person towards whom we do not have to

1. NASS Monograph 9 (2000), 17-27.

2. NASS Monograph 10 (2002), 32-36.

3. See Klever, 19, note 5, regarding Spurius Maelius.

be pious. On the contrary, he is to be hated and put to death. This case is the *immediate and narrow* context of the first mentioned instance of “*omnes pietate colere*.” I cannot imagine that Spinoza, thinking of historical and actual cases of criminality and infringement of the law, would at the same moment have required us to be kind to everybody without any exception. The same remark must be made for the second appearance of the debated expression in G.233/24-25. Here the context indicates even more clearly and convincingly, that piety towards everybody cannot be meant by Spinoza as implying no exceptions, since he explicitly refers to them by quoting Deuteronomy 17:7, where the Jews were bidden to slay transgressors of the law according to its fundamental axiom “hate your enemy.” Akkerman tries to make a point of the antithetical parallelism in Spinoza’s text (*omnes pietate colere* versus *neminique damnnum inferre*). I would certainly agree with this argument, if we would not be forced by the immediate context to correct the text and so interpret the passage in a way that saves the coherence of the whole passage. The incoherence, of which my reading is accused, lies on the other side.

Further, I do not see why a typically Christian misreading of Spinoza’s manuscript by a type-setter would be “unlikely,” as Akkerman maintains, on account of the purported fact that “the TTP invites Christian dissent throughout” (Akkerman, 34). Fundamental disagreement between the customary interpretation of Christ’s gospel and Spinoza’s restatement of it does not prevent the strong influence of the traditional view, especially where we talk about the work of people who were not trained theologians nor followers of Spinoza’s philosophy.

Akkerman’s third argument — namely that “Bruder is not a reliable guide in this matter” — is ridiculous because this is exactly the thing we are discussing. Moreover, if Bruder’s conjecture might be so easily and arrogantly discarded, we would also have to dismiss eminent scholars like Stern, Gebhardt, Gawlick, Francès and a couple of Spanish translators, mentioned by my opponent.

Let us come to the broader context, i.e., to the interpretation of the TTP as such, broached by Akkerman under the head of “divine law.” First the reproach to my address. “Klever is uneasy about the absolute character of the divine command to love one’s neighbor” (35). No, I am not and I have so written in that essay. Loving one’s neighbors equals unconditional obedience to the sovereign, which equals the love of God. But what happened is that I *specified* the neighbors to be loved with Spinoza as *loyal compatriots*. Whoever, fellow citizen in my country or foreign person, threatens the political system in which I participate, has to be hated and destroyed by me, since I am instructed by my reason, as well as by

prophets and Christ, to bring about, as far as I can, justice and charity, and the only way to do this is to be a good and cooperative citizen. Therefore Spinoza did not hesitate to write, contesting the whole Christian tradition, that “hatred to the other nations⁴ [...] is not only allowed but obligatory” (*odium in reliquas nationes [...] non tantum licitum sed pium est*, TTP 17, G.215/6&18). The preemptive USA-action against Iraq, accordingly, is an act of piety and an act of obedience to God’s command, if the USA truly were endangered by that country.⁵

Akkerman is surprised (“Klever *even* writes” [35]) about my claim that “the Mosaic prescription to hate one’s enemies [...] is not cancelled by Christ” and continues his critique with the remark “that Christ’s teaching is of an entirely different order.” On the next page he again makes use of the significant interjection ‘even’, where he explains that by the Law of Moses, the then revealed religion was adapted to the needs of their state, “even to the point of *hating their enemies*”; Christ would have substituted for this old regime “the universal religion, in the interests of the whole world.” I must have committed an enormous blunder! But Moses, too, because he ordered the same hatred of enemies, which according to Akkerman cannot be a part of Christ’s “universal religion,” let alone its foundation.

However one has to follow the whirled line of Akkerman’s argument, one thing is indisputable, namely that *he* thinks that “hating one’s enemies” does not constitute the complement of the prescription of reason and imaginary revelation alike for “loving one’s neighbors.” I agree with him that the teaching of Christ is “of an entirely different order” than the legislative activity of Moses. But again, this is not the point of our discussion. Of course Christ does teach moral doctrines; or better, he is a moralizing teacher (apart from his being a doctor for his disciples). The purpose, however, of his teaching and training activity was, as it was explicitly stated by Spinoza in TTP 7 with a reference to Matthew 5:17, “to bring the law to fulfilment.” And hatred of the internal and external enemies of his fatherland as a Jew was a fundamental principle of its Mosaic Law that he naturally did not want to cancel. On the contrary, he reminded his audience of this constitutional article as being an ancient and firm law that ought to be the leading principle of their life. The apparent rejection of hating the enemy — Matthew 5:44, “But I tell you, love your enemy [...]” — is refuted by Spinoza in TTP 7 (G.103/24ff).

4. This hatred alternatively described as “devotion to the fatherland” and “hating others” (*reliquos*).

5. Another thing is whether the assessment of the degree of danger and of the consequences of an attack is to the point.

Akkerman (36) makes a distinction between three successive stages in Jewish history: 1) the period of the independent *imperium*, 2) the period of the Babylonian captivity, 3) the time of the diaspora. “Christ revealed to them, when he saw that they would be dispersed throughout the whole world, the universal religion, in the interests of the whole world.” This “catholic religion,” as Spinoza calls it, does not contain in the opinion of Akkerman the command to hate the enemy, but only to love one’s neighbors, whereby it is implied that all peoples of the world belong to this category. If not, why does he add, then, the phrase “in the interests of the whole world”? Or why would he have opposed this third period to the first, in which the Jews “even” had to hate the enemy?

Returning now to the context of the second fragment of our discussion (G.233/10-25) we *must* discover and admit that Spinoza himself does not at all contrast the three periods! The Hebrews had to punish and hate their lawless compatriots and to segregate themselves from the other nations which they likewise had to hate. During their Babylonian captivity they had to care and to fight for the safety of that state too, because they could only be safe by the safety of that state according to the word of Jeremiah (Cf.G.231/6-7). After this remark Spinoza continues *in one breath and in the same sentence*: “*et postquam Christus eos per totum orbem dispersum iri vidit, docuit ut omnes absolute pietate m colerent.*” In other words, Christ asks from his followers, wherever they would emigrate, the same attitude of absolute loyalty and service to the country in which they would afterwards take domicile, as the Jews had to pay to their own fatherland and later to the Babylonian authorities. Without the text correction of “*pietate*” into “*pietatem*,” the passage would be incomprehensible. And why would Christ require universal charity, love of all people in the world, in a chapter that circles around the theme that “piety towards one’s fatherland is the highest form of religion one might achieve” (G.232/9-10)?

“Klever’s contention about this paragraph [...] is wrong” (36). I, for my part, think that Akkerman badly misunderstands one of the two main objectives of the TTP: namely that Christ’s moral doctrine aims at nothing less and nothing more than practicing justice and charity along political lines, in complete obedience to the laws of the state one is living in.⁶ This, and nothing else, is the content of the “catholic religion” that he preached. Indeed, Christ teaches a universal law. See Akkerman’s quote from Spinoza

6. The other objective of the TTP is the promotion and defence of the *libertas philosophandi*. I exposed this intention of Spinoza’s writing the TTP in my translation and commentary of this text, to which I gave for clarity’s sake a new name, *Definitie van het Christendom*. Spinoza’s TTP opnieuw vertaald en toegelicht, Delft: Euburon, 1999.

(G.212/18ff) on the top of his page 36. But Akkerman ought not crush down Spinoza's crystal-clear exposition of what this means: "In chapter 14 we have demonstrated, that he fulfils the law of God, who according to God's command cultivates justice and charity. From this it follows, that God's reign is there where justice and charity have the power of political law" (*vim iuris et mandati habent* G.229/10-12).

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