

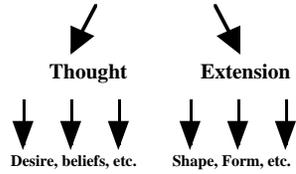
# Overview of Spinoza's Ethics: Happiness & well-being lies in the life of reason.

"Spinoza's ultimate goal in the Ethics is to demonstrate the way to human happiness in a deterministic world filled with obstacles to our well-being, obstacles to which we are naturally prone to react in not entirely beneficial ways."

Steven Nadler, Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), x.

## "The one and only substance, in itself, and is conceived through itself" D3.

There are infinite attributes, but only attributes thought & extension can be known



**God or Nature:** (1) Understood as consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal & infinite essence"; he strips the idea of God by emphasizing the unity (not distinction) between God & man (2); Substance & Attributes: Ultimate nature of reality is a single substance Substance does exist & that it is infinite follows from our ability to think certain ideas clearly & distinctly. Substance is "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: I mean that the conception of which does not depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed." Substance, then, has no external cause but has the cause of itself within itself. Thus, there is a single substance with infinite attributes. An attribute is "that which an intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance." (3) But we can know only 2 attributes: thought & extension (Descartes had thought that these 2 attributes affirmed dualism of mind & body but Spinoza saw thought & extension as different ways of expressing the activity of a single substance; (4) He distinguishes between two aspects of God/Nature: *natura naturans* is God as substance insofar as God is considered a free cause; (b) *natura naturata* is God as modes-things-in-so-far as they are "in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God." (5) What in earlier language we might call the "world", Spinoza now calls the modes of God's attributes. The world is not distinct from God but is God expressed in various modes of thought and corporeality. (6) Spinoza gives us a picture of a tight universe where every event unfolds in the only possible way in which it can occur, for "in the nature of things nothing contingent is granted, but all things determined by the necessity of divine nature for existing and working in a certain way." In a special way God is free, not that He could have created a different kind of world but that though He had to create just what He did, He was not forced to do this by some external cause, only by His own nature. On the other hand, people are not even that free, for they are determined to exist and behave according to God's substance, of whose attributes is a mode. All modes of God's attributes are fixed from eternity, for "things could not have been produced by God in any other manner or order than that in which they were produced." Thus, everything is intimately connected, the infinite substance producing a continuity through all things, particular things being simply modes or modifications of the attributes of substance, or Nature, or God. 7. Because everything is eternally as it must be, and because particular events are simply finite modifications of substance, there is no direction toward which things are moving, no end, no purpose, not final cause. The universe has no goal; we are only doing what we must. Like math, which does not deal with final causes, but with the essences of things, offered to men another standard of truth. Thus, Spinoza reduces biological to the mathematical.

## METAPHYSICS: Part I: "On God"

"The universe is a single, infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance which is "God or Nature."

Propositions 1-15 present the basic elements of his picture of God: God is the infinite, necessarily existing (that is, uncaused), unique substance of universe. There is only one substance in the universe; it is God; and everything else that is, is in God. God is identical with the universal, active causal principles of nature, the substance of it all.

Proof: (1) no 2 substances can share an attribute or essence (Ip5). There is a substance within infinite attributes (i.e., God (Ip11). Thus, the existence of that infinite substance precludes the existence of any other substance. For if there were to be a 2nd substance, it would have to have some attribute or essence. But since God has all possible attributes, then the attribute to be possessed by this 2nd attribute would be one of the attributes possessed by God. But it has already been est. that no 2 substances can have the same attribute. Therefore, there can be, besides God, not such 2nd substance [SEP, 2.1 God or Nature].

### All-Inclusive:

Everything is a part of Nature.

### Absolutely & Necessarily

### Deterministic:

All things within nature, namely everything are necessarily determined by Nature. There are no exceptions.

### No Teleological Purpose:

There are no purposes for Nature or within Nature. Nothing happens for any ultimate reason or to serve any goal or overarching plan.

### Ordinary Causal Order of Nature:

Whatever takes place does so only because it is brought about by the ordinary causal order of Nature.

## ANTHROPOLOGY & EPISTEMOLOGY Part 2: "On the Nature & Origin of the Mind"

He focuses on the nature of the human being and his place in Nature.

### Unity:

*mind & body are one & same thing in Nature, possessing only two attributes: "Thought" (or "thinking essence") & "Extension" (material essence).*

Why? The course of Nature is one, since Nature is one substance, a unity though it proceeds under each attribute in parallel coordination with its unfolding in every other attribute: Though Nature has an infinite number of attributes or essence, each constituting a kind of universal nature of things, we know of only two of them: Thought & Extension.

### Mode:

Any individual object or event is only a "mode" of Nature, manifesting itself under 2 attributes: **Thought** (as a mental or spiritual thing or event) & **Extension** (as a material thing or event).

### Subject to Causal Nature:

The human being is as much a part of Nature as any other thing, subject to the same *causal determinism* that governs all Nature.

## Method:

A. In common w/ Descartes, Spinoza believed we can achieve exact knowledge of reality by following methods of geometry. Descartes had worked out basic form of this method by starting with clear & distinct first principles & attempting to deduce whole content of knowledge. What Spinoza added to Descartes' method was a highly systematic arrangement of principles & axioms. Whereas Descartes' method was simple, Spinoza almost set out literally to write a geometry of philosophy, that is, a complete set of axioms or theorems (almost 250 altogether) that would explain whole system of reality the way geometry explains relations & movements of things. In geometry, conclusions are demonstrated, & Spinoza believed that our theory of nature of reality could also be demonstrated.

B. Spinoza like Descartes believed that our rational powers are capable of forming ideas that reflect the true nature of things: "Every definition or clear and distinct idea is true." It must follow, therefore, that a complete & systematic arrangement of true ideas will give us a true picture of reality, for "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."

C. Spinoza rejected Descartes' approach of starting w/ clear & distinct idea of his own existence & from this formula, "I think therefore I am", & then proceed to deduce other parts of philosophy. Spinoza believed philosophy must formulate ideas about God first so that these ideas could appropriately affect conclusions we draw about such matters as human nature. His philosophy begins with problem the nature & existence of God.

## 3 Levels of Knowledge:

How can Spinoza claim to know the ultimate nature of reality? A. He distinguishes between three levels of knowledge & describes how we can move from the lowest to highest. We begin with things most familiar to us, and, says Spinoza, "the more we understand individual things the more we understand God." By refining our knowledge of things we can move from (1) imagination; (2) reason; (3) intuition.

### Level # 1: Imagination:

Our ideas are derived from sensation. They are concrete, & specific; the mind is passive. Though our ideas are specific, they are vague & inadequate, for we know things only as they affect our senses. For example, I know that I see a person, but as yet I don't know simply by looking what this person's essential nature is. I can form a general idea, such as human, by seeing several people, & the ideas I form from experience are useful for daily life, but they don't give me true knowledge.

### Level # 2: Reason:

Scientific knowledge whereby everyone can participate in this kind of knowledge because it is made possible by a sharing in the attributes of substance, in God's thought & extension. At this level a person's mind can rise above immediate & particular things & deal with abstract ideas, as it does in mathematics & physics. At this level, knowledge is adequate & true. How so we know that these ideas of reason & science are true is that truth validates itself. "He who has a true idea knows at the same time he has a true idea, nor can he doubt concerning the truth of the thing."

### Level # 3: Intuition:

Through intuition we can grasp the whole system of nature. At this level we can understand the particular things we encountered on the first level in a new way, for that first level we saw other bodies in a disconnected way, & now we see them as part of the whole scheme. This kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things. We also become more & more conscious of God, & hence, "more perfect and blessed," for through this vision we grasp the whole system of Nature & see our place in it, giving us an intellectual fascination with the full order of Nature, of God.

## Mind/Body:

Descartes was left with insoluble problem of how mind interacts with body because he saw them as two distinct substances. For A. Spinoza, this was no problem because he viewed mind & body as attributes of a single substance. (1) There is only one order of Nature, to which mind & body belong. (2) Humankind is a single mode. (3) It is only because we are able to speak of body as mode of extension that we speak of a body, & as a mode of thought that we speak of a mind. (4) There can be no separation of mind & body because they are aspects of the same thing. (5) The mind is the idea of the body, which is his way of describing the relationship of the mind to the body. (6) The structure within which the mind & body operate are the same.

## Ethics:

- A Human behavior is an integral part of Nature.
- (1) Human behavior can be precisely in terms of causes, effects, & mathematics as any other natural phenomenon.
  - (2) Although people think they are free and are able to make choices, they are victims of an illusion, for it is only human ignorance that permits us to think we possess freedom of the will. People like to think that in some special way they stand outside the rigorous forces of cause & effect, that though their wills can cause actions, their wills are themselves not affected by prior causes.
  - (3) But Spinoza argued for the unity of all Nature, with people as an intrinsic part of it.
  - (4) Thus, Spinoza develops a naturalistic ethics whereby all human actions, both mental & physical, are said to be determined by prior causes.
  - (5) All people possess as a part of their nature the endeavor to continue or persist in their own being (called conatus).
  - (6) When conatus refers to mind & body, it is called appetite;
  - (7) insofar as appetite is conscious, it is called desire.
  - (8) As we become conscious of higher degrees of self-preservation & perfection, we experience pleasure, & with it a reduction of such perfection, we experience pain.
  - (9) Our ideas of good & evil are related to our conceptions of pleasure & pain: "By good I understand here all kinds of pleasure & whatever conduces to it, & more especially that which satisfies our fervent desires, whatever they may be." There is no intrinsic good or bad, for we call something good if we desire it & bad if we dislike it. Goodness & badness reflect a subjective evaluation. But because our desires are determined, so are our judgments.
  - (10) Like the Stoics, who argued all events are determined, called for resignation & acquiescence to the drift of events, saying that though we cannot control events, we can control our attitudes. Spinoza states that through our knowledge of God we can arrive at "the highest possible mental acquiescence. So, morality consists of improving our knowledge by moving from the level of confused & inadequate ideas to third level of intuition. Only knowledge can lead us to happiness, for only through knowledge can we be liberated from bondage of our passions.