

5.4 Human beings, and the Mind- Body Relationships

5.4.1 Readings and Study Questions

Readings : *Ethics*, II, beginning to Prop 19 + III, Prop 2 and Scholium

Study Question :

1. How does Spinoza conceive of the relationships between thought and extension? How does it compare to Descartes? (pay close attention to Prop 7 Scholium)
2. How do you understand the 7th proposition: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things”?
3. What are the relationships between the human body and the human mind according to Spinoza? How does it compare with Descartes? (look at II, Prop 10-13 and III, Prop 2 Scholium)
4. What does our imagination consists in for Spinoza? How does it compare with Descartes? (Look at II, Prop 17 sq.)

5.4.2 Thought and Extension – Prop 1-9

Introduction: From God to Humans

In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza proceeds to deduce the nature of the modes of the substance, that the nature of that exists. Of course, given that there is an infinity of such modes, it is impossible to deal with all of them. One mode is of particular interest for us: humans.

How can we conceive of the relationships between bodies and minds?

A central question of metaphysics is the issue of which are the fundamental constituent of reality. If we think about it, we seem to encounter in the world two kinds of “stuff”: material things and ideas. Ideas and bodies don’t seem to be made of the same “stuff”. So, it is tempting to say that, at the fundamental level, there are two kinds of beings: matter and thought. If we go this route, however, the question arises as how thought (ideas and minds) relate to matter (things and bodies) and vice versa. If their nature is

essentially different, then it is difficult to conceive how they can “interact” at all. But certainly it seems to us that our mind is acting on our body, and vice versa. So that we find ourselves in front of a difficulty:

- **dualism**: either we say that thought and matter are **two** distinct kinds of beings, but then we do not know how to account for their *interactions*;
- **monism**: or we say that thought and matter are but **one** thing, but then we have to explain how ideas *reduce* to matter, or how matter *reduce* to ideas.

This delineate the debate on the nature of the relationships between thought and matter in the 17th century. The options available were:

- Materialism (Hobbes)

Definition 16 – *Materialism*

Materialism is the metaphysical view that the ultimate nature of reality is matter, and nothing else.

- Idealism (Berkeley)

Definition 17 –

Idealism is the metaphysical view that the ultimate nature of reality is thought, and nothing.

- Mind-Body Dualism (Descartes)

Definition 18 – *Mind-Body Dualism*

Mind-Body dualism is the metaphysical view that the ultimate nature of reality has two fundamental constituents: matter (extension) and thought.

—→ *Spinoza is going to propose an original solution to the above problem: a monistic view, in which neither is thought is not reduced to matter, nor is matter reduced to thought*

Spinoza: the two faces of the same coin

- God, the unique substance, is an thinking thing *and* an extended thing – it is both matter and thought, even if it is unique

How so? In particular, is Spinoza saying that God is corporeal??? is he saying God is a mind??? Is he saying that God has both a bod and a mind???? None of these.

- Extension and Thought are two faces of the same coin:

Consequently, thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways. (II, Prop 7, Scholium)

Examples: the circle and the idea of the circle are two ways of conceiving of the same thing: the circle as it exists in God.

- As a consequence, there is an idea of everything in God:

In God there is necessarily the idea both of its essence and of everything that necessarily follows from his essence. (II, Prop 3)

This means that there is not only thought relating to human minds. We can conceive of the entire universe under the attribute of thought. There is an idea for every single thing in the infinite understanding of God. Hence everything has a “soul”, not only humans.

- Given this, the problem of interaction is not a problem anymore:

The problem was:

- ideas and bodies seem to be related to each other
- for example: when I think “let raise my arm” (idea), my arm (body) is raised.
- conversely: when I cut myself with a knife (body), I feel pain (idea)
- So: it seems that there is an interaction between bodies and ideas, that they can be coordinated.

- The problem was (in particular for Descartes) that if ideas and bodies are of essentially different nature, then it is unclear how they can interact at all. How does an idea cause effects in the bodies? How does a body cause an effect on thoughts?

With Spinoza, there is no need for any kind of interaction, because extension and thought are not two different kinds of beings: they are two aspect of the ultimate reality.

When I have the idea of raising my arm, and that my arm raises, it is the *same event* which I conceive under two different aspects.

This is the meaning of the crucial Proposition 7:

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. (II, Prop 7)

- Note on the notion of “parallelism”: many say that Spinoza’s view is a kind of parallelism. This is slightly misleading because it seems to suggest that there are two different causal orders, which are harmonized by God. This is not what Spinoza claims.

The intuition behind this idea of parallelism is still interesting, i.e. the idea that the causal order of ideas and the causal order of extended things or bodies are independent even if coordinated. That said, we should make sure that we do not separate the two “ontologically”, that is, that we do not understand ideas and bodies as separate beings.

—→ *Thought and Extension are not two kinds of beings, but rather two points of view from which one can comprehend the unique being there exists: the substance, God, or nature. The substance, as well as its modes, are comprehended under various perspectives.*

5.4.3 Mind-Body relationships in humans – Prop 10-13

Human Beings: their general mode of existence

- Human beings are not substances (Prop 10) – this should be pretty clear given the definition of a substance (a substance is unique, infinite, causa sui etc. Humans are none of that). So, what are they then?

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- Given that there exists only the substances and its modes, a human being must be a mode of the substance: that is, a modification of the substance-God.

Human Beings: Body and Soul

- It is common to think about human beings as constituted of a body and a soul / mind (remember Descartes). How are we going to understand this?

- The human soul is the idea my body – the whole thing, the person if you wish, existing in the sole substance which is God.

The soul and the body are thus the two faces of the same coin: two ways to comprehend one single mode of the substance: the person or human being.

- The human soul and the human body thus do not interact!

Just as thought and extension never interact, but rather express the unique substance in different manners, our soul and our body express a unique mode of the substance in different manners.

Everything that happens to my body – internal movements as well as interactions with the other bodies – is reflected, albeit confusedly, in my soul under the form of ideas.

Conversely, everything that happens in my mind is an idea of what happens to my body.

There is no interaction between the body and the mind: they both express a common dynamical chain of causes within the substance.

—→ *We are just a mode of the substance. We can comprehend such a mode under two attributes: the body and the mind. But the body and the mind are not two different “things”. Rather, they are the same thing understood either as extension either as thought.*

The principle of inertia and the conatus

- There is an essential characteristic of all beings, which the effort towards auto-preservation, or **conatus**. (III, Prop 6)

- Just as everything else, the conatus is separately conceived under the two attributes of extension and thought.
 - Extension: this is what we call the principle of inertia
 - Thought: conatus

With Spinoza, inertia becomes universal law, which applies to both bodies and minds.

- The conatus for human beings:

We – body and soul – are “affected” all the time, that is, external bodies cause transformations in our own body, to which correspond the ideas of these transformations in our mind. All these affections (desires, emotions, feelings etc.) either decrease or increase our power to persevere in our being. Naturally, we tend to have our power increased instead of decreased.

—→ *So: for human beings, the conatus consists in an effort to increase the power to persevere in our being.*

Individuality

One problem: how do we have the idea of only one body, while our body is made of billions of parts? The need to answer this question is the reason why Spinoza develops a ‘physics’ in the middle of Book II (after Prop 13).

- Simple bodies

What the simple bodies are is difficult to grasp :

- they cannot be atoms because Spinoza takes that extension is infinitely divisible.
- the only way to make sense of this is that simple exist only as ideas in God.
- they are distinguished by the ways they move, i.e. the ways in which they modify the substance from the point of view of extension

As for us, all actual bodies are composed.

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- Composed bodies and individuals:
 - Bodies are distinguished through the difference in movement
 - Conversely, a group of bodies which “all move in the same way” is a composed body, or an individual.

→ *An individual is defined by the constant and regular relationships between parts. So, we have an idea of our body as unique because of the ways in which the parts of our body move together.*

5.4.4 Conclusion on Human Beings

In Book II, Spinoza starts tackling what he considers the most important issue: to put back humans within the realm of nature. We humans are nothing but a mode of the substance, and as such, we are part of the necessary causal order in which the substance expresses itself. We do not “disturb” nature, we follow it, just as any other being.

- Free will as an illusion

We are part of nature, and nature consists in a series of causes and effects. So, our life consists in a series of causes and effects as well. Our body and mind go under various transformations, some due to their own nature, some due to the external bodies and minds.

What we call free will is an illusion (or bad faith). We call free any event of which we don't understand the necessary causes.

See text analysis

- Affections and Imagination

- Our body gets affected in tons of ways. Our mind gets the ideas of these transformations of our body.

- Our Imagination consists in our ability to represent the effects of bodies on our own body, whether they are present or absent.

- A representation includes two parts :

1. knowledge of the effect (that the cause has on our own body)
2. Ignorance of the essence of the cause

- Our imagination is the source of error. Just like with Descartes, a sure way to err is in believing that our representations inform us about the actual properties of external bodies.
- That said, by contrast to Descartes, our imagination is, within the philosophy of Spinoza, something positive:

1. It is the *conditio sine qua non* of communication, language, and psychological life
2. We have some power on our representations. Affects are either passive or active. Our affects divide into passions and actions according to whether the cause of what happens lies outside of our nature, or whether the cause of what happens lies within our nature.

Our imagination will never be completely active of course. But we can enhance our power over the necessary chain of events thanks to **knowledge**. If we possess an adequate ideas (or knowledge) of the true cause, then we become an adequate cause of this event.

—→ *So: error, superstition and anthropomorphism are due to our misusing our imagination. Imagination and reason can work together at perfecting ourselves, and reaching joy.*

5.5 Knowledge – Prop 20-67

5.5.1 Readings and Study Questions

Readings : Ethics II prop 20 - 67 (pay close attention to Prop 40 Scholium 2)

Study Question :

1. What are the kinds of knowledge according to Spinoza? Which one is the source of error?

5.5.2 Knowledge of the first kind: opinion or imagination

Knowledge of the first kind: induction

- knowledge of the first kind consists in deriving universal rules from singular instances presented to the senses – we tend to take as a law some observed correlations.

- Origin of superstition (cf Lucretius): pretend read God's will in vague and confused experience.

Two origins of knowledge of the first kind

1. sense-perceptions
2. words heard or read and then ideas from them – par ouïe-dire

Knowledge of the first kind: confuse and inadequate

The first kind of knowledge is the only source of error : the two other kinds provide necessarily true knowledge.

This is because:

- a necessary condition for true knowledge is to have adequate ideas
 - to have an adequate idea of an event is to clearly situate this event within the chain of causes: *to understand why and how this is necessarily the case*

- But knowledge of the first kind depends on how the external things affect my body, and the ways in which external things affect my body is independent of the proper order of causal connections.

→ *So, knowledge of the first kind remains confused and inadequate because it never allows us to understand the necessity inherent within nature.*

5.5.3 Knowledge of the second kind: Reason

Knowledge of the second kind: Sciences

- Method: common notions + use of inferences and logic
- Object: common properties of things: sciences, philosophy

Reason: knowledge of necessary truths

- Knowledge of the second kind: always adequate idea, which appear to us clearly and distinctively

Definition 19 – Adequate idea

An adequate idea is an idea of an object in which the object is understood in its logical, necessary, connexion with the substance. Adequate ideas have two main characteristics:

1. *the object is understood in its true necessity (Prop 44): why it exists as a logical consequence of God's nature*
2. *the object is understood as outside of time – “sub specie aeternitatis” – eternity and necessity go together (Prop 44 Corol 2)*

- Example: contrast between our knowledge of ourselves as individuals in space and time (first kind) with our knowledge of ourselves as a timeless and necessary mode of the substance

→ *So, knowledge of the second kind provide us with true knowledge of necessary truths. Because the entire causal order of existence is reduced to the logical order of the unfolding of God, we can hope to understand everything that exists clearly and distinctively as timeless, necessary consequences of God's nature. This is what reason can offer.*

5.5.4 Knowledge of the third kind: intuition**Why reason is not enough**

What is lacking in knowledge of the second kind is that:

- we do not have a direct understanding our nature and the nature of all other modes of the substance. Instead, reason is discursive and mediate.

- we cannot hope to understand any particular thing: only the universal notions and laws of nature. This is because, God being infinite, the chain of necessary causes which leads to the necessary existence of a particular being is infinite. Reason, being mediate, cannot comprehend anything infinite

Knowledge of the third kind: intuition

By contrast, knowledge of the third kind consists in

- an *immediate conscience or intuition* of our being mode of the substance along with all other beings.
- providing direct knowledge about the attributes of God, from which we can derive adequate knowledge of the essences of particular things.

Knowledge of the third kind: prospects

- Can we reach such knowledge? Not clear – but if we do, it is a mystical experience
- What would such knowledge provide us? Nothing less than true happiness, joy and blessedness
 - *So, knowledge of the second kind is supposed to provide us with an immediate intuition of the necessity of our existence and of the existence of other beings as modes of the substance. If we can attain such knowledge, then we can also attain the highest level of happiness. This will be developed in Book V of the Ethics. That said, the end of Book II gives a taste of it.*

5.6 Conclusion: Freedom and Well-Being within the Realm of Necessity

In the first two books of the *Ethics*, Spinoza has exposed his metaphysical and epistemological views. We have now in hand Spinoza's complete account of what exists, how it exists, how we human beings fit in it, and how we can know about it.

As I said in the introduction, the aim of the *Ethics* is imminently practical: we have been through all this *in order to understand how to reach well-being and happiness*.

The end of Book II is clear on this: Spinoza gives an overview of the practical advantages of his philosophy:

1. Knowledge of God-nature leads to true freedom and the greatest happiness
2. Attitude regarding what does not depend on us – happiness because of tranquility of the mind

3. Social relationships: love against hate
4. Government: citizens as free men and not slaves

All this will be explained in the last two books, where Spinoza deals first with the ways in which we are affected and which attitude we can have towards these affections, and second with the ways in which we can reach blessedness in the intellectual love of God- Nature.

- The core of Spinoza's ethics is his "physiological" explanation of our affections (emotions if you wish). According to him, any time we are affected, such an affection results in our power to either increase or decrease. In the former case, we experience JOY, and LOVE of the cause of the affection. In the later case, we experience SADNESS, and HATE of the cause of the affection. This explains (3) above.
- Now, we are not necessarily passive when we are affected. In fact, affections divides into two categories: actions and passions. According to Spinoza, there is no way we will ever be able to suppress our passions. To master our passions does not amount to repress them, but rather to transform them in active affects. This can be achieved when we are enlightened by reason and we understand them by clear and distinct knowledge. This explains (2) above – and also how Spinoza's philosophy is **not** as close to Stoicism as one may think.
- From the points above, one understand that human servitude consists in both arrogance and despotism, that is, in living under the law of blind desire and expecting that others will accomodate.

Wisdom will not be for every body: not because of natural abilities (or disabilities) but because most of our lives are spent in passivity under external causes

- Knowledge of the nature of God-Nature will not only provide us with a form of tranquility of mind (negative happiness) but also with the greatest happiness through the intellectual love of God:
 - We see ourselves as adequate causes
 - We see ourselves as part of God

This explains (1) above.

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Spinoza speaks virulently against the Christian valorization of suffering, and advocates a philosophy of joy, of the enhancement of our perfection (Cf. Philosophy = meditation of life, not meditation of death (IV, Prop 67))

- The free republic: knowledge also brings freedom to citizen. By contrast, tyrannic powers dwell on the subjects' ignorance. This explains (3) above.

—→ *Clearly and distinctively understanding our existence as part of the eternal necessity of the substance is the way to both true freedom and the greatest happiness.*

