

Chapter 5

Spinoza



Figure 5.1: Baruch Spinoza

5.1 Readings and Study Questions

- Readings: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book I,
 - Beginning to Proposition 10: Read all
 - Prop. 11 to end : skip demonstrations and scholia
 - Read Appendix
 - Study Questions:
 1. What is the “geometrical order” that Spinoza follows in his *Ethics*? Why do you think he uses this method? What is the difference with the presentation of the *Meditations*?

2. How do you understand the relationships between substances, modes and attributes? Give an example to illustrate.
 3. Spinoza gives four proofs of God's existence. Describe them briefly. How do they compare with Descartes'?
 4. How does Spinoza show that there is only one substance?
 5. How do you understand Spinoza's claim that "whatever is, is *in* God" (Prop. 15, my emphasis)?
 6. How can Spinoza maintain together that (1) Everything that exists necessarily follows from God's nature; and (2) God is a free cause of everything?
- Readings: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book II:
 - Beginning to Prop. 13 (stop at the Corollary)
 - Prop. 40 to 44
 - Prop. 49
 - Study Questions:
 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. Explain Prop. 7: "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)
 4. What are the kinds of knowledge according to Spinoza? Which one is the source of error?
 - Text Analysis: Part III, Prop. 2, Scholium (Text available on the course website)
 1. Provide an analysis of the passage:
 - (a) Describe the point that the author intends to make?
 - (b) Explain the argument that the author is using to establish the point.
 - (c) Formulate one question for further discussion of the passage (clarification request, argument request or objection)

5.2 Introduction: Spinoza's Life and Works

Spinoza's life

- Born in 1632 in Amsterdam – Background: Portuguese, Jewish, and moderate means
- 1656: excommunicated and then (1660) expelled from the city for his unorthodox (to say the least) religious views:
 - Bible human-made, and full of contradictions
 - Against providentialism, the notion of a human-like God, creatio ex nihilo (creation out of nothing), immortality of the soul etc.
- Then lives a secluded life – makes lenses, turns down offers of positions as professor at Heidelberg
- Dies in 1677 in The Hague

Spinoza's Works

Apart from his comments on *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* (1633), will not publish anything under his own name

- *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*
- *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being*
- *Theological-political treatise* where he expresses his revolutionary ideas about religion and politics
- *Ethics* posthumously published, along with the *Political Treatise* and other works

Spinoza's Intellectual background

Spinoza is a man of his time: aware of the new science, the new philosophy, and the new political developments in the 17th century Western Europe. In particular, he is mostly influenced by Descartes's philosophy. That said, he will reject:

- Descartes' method of doubt – to which he prefers the geometrical order

- Descartes' metaphysical dualism (the idea that there exists two substances: body and thought) – to which he substitutes a kind of monism (only one substance exists), of which thought and extension are the attributes (the two faces of a same coin if you wish)
- Descartes' idea of the human nature, its ability to knowledge and happiness – Spinoza being much more “optimistic” on all these points

Spinoza's *Ethics* is extremely abstract. But it is nothing like a mathematical treatise which has nothing to do with the real world as we experience it, quite the contrary. His entire system of philosophy (metaphysics and epistemology) is oriented toward the possibility of a life of fulfillment for humans. For example, one of the most intriguing and beautiful features of the philosophy of Spinoza is, I think, his attempt to account for a seeming paradox, i.e. the possibility humans' freedom and well-being in a world of eternal necessity. After all, the title speaks for itself.

5.3 The Geometrical Method: Spinoza: an heterodox Euclidian

The Geometrical Order: what is it?

- Euclid's *Element of Geometry*
- Aristotle's method for proper science: axiomatic method
- Common notions, general principles and logical deduction

Why the Geometrical Order?

- Reminder: analysis and synthesis according to Descartes: the order of analysis is more understandable (*Meditations*)
- Spinoza: There is a controversy about whether the geometrical order is central to his philosophy. It certainly seems to make it harder to access. A few possible explanations: (1) the geometrical order allows to present a perfect body of truth; (2) the geometrical order is as neutral as the mind of the reader should be when reading Spinoza's ideas about God and Religion; (3) Take seriously the most basic (and self evident) idea we have of what existence – substance – and see how far we can go with it.

Differences between Spinoza's and Euclid's method – The status of definitions

While in Euclid, definitions are “postulates”, that is “requests” that the reader accept the existence of the objects defined (lines, points etc.), it is not the case for Spinoza's definitions:

- The definitions are not complete.
- The definitions do not contain the postulation of the existence of the defined objects

In addition, in Spinoza's work, the scholia are essential for understanding.

What does guarantee the truth of the definitions?

The question of the truth of the first definitions and axioms is, of course, crucial for any axiomatic method. The first principles from which everything else is deduced cannot be themselves deduced, on pain of an infinite regress. But then, where do they come from and what does guarantee their truth?

- In Aristotle: intuition and dialectic
- In Spinoza: These definitions come from an intellectual grasp (see Part IV appendix): Using our intelligence constitutes the life of our mind, i.e. the life of the best part in us. It is what gives us the opportunity of feeling joy when sharing with other spirits. The definitions come from the collection and organization of all the thoughts that the good spirits of the time share and discuss– *Zeitgeist*.¹

→ *The definitions are meant to correspond to common, uncontroversial, notions that everyone should agree on.*

5.4 Basic Metaphysics: Substance, Nature and God

5.4.1 Substance, attributes, and modes – Prop 1-10

One crucial aim of the first two books of the *Ethics* to lay down a view of the universe and of human nature, such that humans can free themselves from the superstitions of common religions, and understand how to live well in leading a life of reason. The view of the universe that Spinoza offers

¹Cf. Cristofolini, *Chemin dans l'Ethique*, PUF, 1996

may seem abstract and impersonal. These characteristics are precisely what should allow us to achieve true fulfillment, free from the mystifications of the institutional religions.

In the first book, Spinoza deploys the essentials of his metaphysics, that is to say, his view on the fundamental constituents of the world. This view is rather simple:

in the universe there exists nothing but substances and their affections (Proposition 6, Corollary)

and we will learn soon after this that there is only one substance: God, or Nature.

But before we turn to Spinoza's views on God, let us see what are the main concepts of his metaphysics.

Substance : “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself”

Substances are the fundamental constituents of the universe

Substances necessarily exist as primary and infinite beings, which moreover are unique of their kind (that is, two substances cannot share the same attribute)

Attributes : the ways in which the intellect conceives of substances as their essence

The essence is unique, but is grasped by the intellect under various aspects, or points of view .

Modes : all the ways in which a substance can be modified or, in Spinoza's terminology ‘affected’ (without, of course, changing anything of its true, essential, nature of substance.)

A substance remaining unchanged in its essential nature, it still can be modified in various ways. These modifications are the modes.

Just as the essence of a substance, a single mode of a substance is going to be grasped by the intellect under various aspects or points of view. This will be the *modifications of the attributes*.

Example :

- An analogy²
 - Substance = ocean
 - Attribute = movement (in general)
 - Modes = Particular waves

Note that we could consider the substance-ocean from the point of view of another of its attributes, for example its color (in general), the modes of which are the various variations of color of particular parts of the ocean

—→ *We can have one unique substance, the essence of which is understood from the point of view of its various essential attributes, and the variations of which constitutes its particular modes.*

- In Spinoza's philosophy:
 - Substance: the only substance is God
 - Modes: ideas, bodies, minds, in fact, everything that exists in God
 - Attributes: an infinity, including thought and extension (these are the only two attributes that the *human* intellect can conceive of.)

—→ *These concepts are classical concepts at the time. Anybody with a minimal baggage in philosophy would find them "natural". Spinoza's starting point is the philosophical language that all philosophers of the time accept.*

5.4.2 Deus sive Natura – Prop 11-15

Once all the characteristics of substances have been deployed, Spinoza turns to a much more controversial claim: that there exists only one substance in the entire universe, and that this substance is nothing else than God.

God exists necessarily – Prop 11

Four proofs of God's existence:

1. Ontological Argument: based on the definition of God as infinite substance – given that substances necessarily exist

²from A. Robert Capogrini, *History of Western Philosophy*

2. Modal Argument: if God's existence is not impossible, then God necessarily exists.

Premise: Causal Principle: For all X , there must be a cause for X 's existence or non-existence

Consequence of the premise: For all X , either X exists necessarily, or X 's existence is impossible.

3. Cosmological argument: The existence of finite beings requires the existence of an infinite being.
4. Ontological Argument, version 2: an absolutely perfect being necessarily exists.

→ *Just as Descartes' argument, Spinoza's "proof" of the existence of God rely heavily on strong assumptions (the definition of God, the definition of a substance, the causal principle etc.).*

God: the unique substance – Prop 12-15

- God is the unique substance: otherwise, there would exist a substance which shares an attribute with God, which is impossible
- God IS everything, and everything is IN God. God is the entirety of the universe – God = Nature
- In particular, it is a mistake to think that there exists a corporeal substance, which is distinct from, and created by God.
 - if the corporeal substance is indeed a substance, it cannot be caused but by itself
 - there cannot be but one substance
 - there is no contradiction in thinking that the corporeal substance is also in God, if one conceives of the corporeal substance as infinite, one and indivisible. A contradiction arises only if one misconceives of the corporeal substance as finite, multiple and divisible. But a substance is necessarily infinite and indivisible.

→ *Everything exists "in" God: according to Spinoza, there is only one unique infinite and indivisible substance. Everything that exists is then either*

a mode or an attribute of the unique substance. But what does it mean exactly? In what sense do all mathematical truths, laws of nature, humans, emotions and feelings, tables, chairs and cockroaches all live “in” God?

5.4.3 Eternal Necessity – Prop 16 to end

Everything exists necessarily as a consequence of God’s nature – Prop 16

- Everything happens necessarily as a consequence of God’s nature, as an infinity of modes

Mathematical necessity – just like it follows from the essence of the triangle that the sum of the three angles equals 180 degrees, it follows from the essence of God that everything that exists does indeed exist.

This is the sense in which God is **causes** of everything: the cause - effect relationship is understood here in the sense of a *logical, necessary connexion*.

Nothing can escape such a natural, logical, eternal necessity:

... I think I have shown quite clearly (Pr.16) that from God’s supreme power or infinite nature an infinity of things in infinite ways – that is, everything – has necessarily flowed or is always following from that same necessity, just as from the nature of a triangle it follows from eternity to eternity that its three angles are equal to two right angles. (Prop. 17, Scholium)

- That said, not everything exists in the same way: Spinoza distinguishes between:

- the immediate and infinite attributes of God: *natura naturans* (naturing nature)

- the further, finite modifications, or modes of these attributes: *natura naturata* (natured nature)

Examples (Prop 31 and 32):

- intellect and will are modes of the thought – that is, modifications of an attribute of God – and hence belong to the *natura naturata*, and not the *natura naturans*

- movement and rest are modes of the corporeal substance

There are some controversies as the precise status of these two kinds of beings, and how they relate to God between commentators. Let us focus on the main point:

—→ *Everything that exists exists as necessary modifications of a unique, indivisible and eternal substance, modifications which are the logical consequences of the nature of the substance.*

God: free cause of everything? – Freedom within Necessity

God did not create the world by an arbitrary act of free will. On the contrary, everything is a necessary consequence of its nature. This means that nothing could have been different from it actually is. But then, in what sense can God be said to be “free” ? See the scholium of Prop. 17

- Many take the notion of *contingency* to be crucial to freedom. Something is *contingent* only if it could have been otherwise. So, under this view, applied to freedom, some act is free only if the agent could have done otherwise.

- According to Spinoza, this is a misconception of the notion of freedom. Freedom does not require contingency, but only that there is no external constraint.

—→ *In short: According to Spinoza, freedom and necessity do not conflict with one another: only necessity and contingency do. But Freedom is not contingency. And what contingency is really another name for our ignorance of the causes (Prop. 33, scholium 1).*

So, with Descartes and Spinoza, we find ourselves with the following notions of freedom. A agent is free:

1. when he or she acts under no external constraints but his or her own nature, or his action is the effect of no other cause than himself or herself
2. when he or she is in a state of indifference
3. when he or she applies an absolute, arbitrary free will
4. when he or she gives himself or herself his or her own rules, that is, is autonomous

—→ Spinoza denies that there exists anything like (2) or, even more, (3)

—→ If (2) and (3) do not exist, then (1) and (4) both amount to the same thing: a agent is free whenever he or she is the only cause of his or her actions, the notion of cause being understood here in the logical sense.

—→ *Spinoza proposes an original understanding of freedom, one which makes free action compatible with necessity.*

Nature has no ends: against the anthropomorphic conception of God

- Spinoza closes the first book by a vigorous attack against the view according to which:

Now all the prejudices which I intend to mention here turn on this one point, the widespread belief among men that all things in Nature are like themselves in acting with an end in view. Indeed, they hold it as certain that God himself directs everything to a fixed end; for they say God has made everything for man's sake and has made man so that he should worship God. (Appendix)

This view includes:

1. A finalist view on God and Nature: God and Nature has ends
2. An anthropomorphic reasoning concerning the nature God and Nature: Gods and Nature have similar features as humans
3. Human-centered views on morality
4. A “superstitious” view on religion: God and Nature are to be worshiped

Definition 12 – *Anthropomorphism*

Anthropomorphism is the projection of human's characters on non-human things

anthropos: *man* (cf. *anthropology*)

morphos: *form*

- Why do we reason in this way?
 - Because our starting point is always ourselves, we tend to conceive of the world as similar to ourselves
 - Because we tend to judge of things according to how they relate to our own aims and ends (good and bad are but other words for agreeable and disagreeable to us)
 - Any reasoning of this kind in fact reveals our *ignorance of the true causes*

cf. Xenophanes: if cows had Gods, these Gods would have horns
- Why is it damageable to us?
 - leads to superstition, which leads to unhappiness
 - leads to more ignorance (God's ways are ununderstandable)
 - Such ignorance serves the institution of the church, and their subjugating the ignorant masses. Anybody who tries to understand the true causes within nature is called an heretic. The ignorance of the masses is essential to their power.
- Why is it false?
 - From what we've seen before: everything follows necessary from God
 - God cannot have ends, because he does not lack anything
 - Our imagination is not true knowledge

—→ *Spinoza here attacks the entirety of the traditional view of God, the world, and humanity. His criticisms are all the more virulent than he thinks this view actually prevents us to find true happiness and well-being.*

5.4.4 Conclusion

- In the first book of the *Ethics*, Spinoza deploys his metaphysics, that is, what he thinks the ultimate nature of reality consists of. He provides a clear summary of his worldview in the appendix:

I have now explained the nature and properties of God: that he necessarily exists, that he is one alone, that he is and

acts solely from the necessity of his own nature, that he is the free cause of all things and how so, that all things are in God and are so dependent on him that they can neither be nor be conceived without him, and lastly, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from his free will or absolute pleasure, but from the absolute nature of God, his infinite power. (Appendix)

—→ *The entirety of the universe, or nature, or God, is a unique, uncaused, eternal and indivisible whole logically and necessarily expressing its essence.*

- As we have, the ethical horizon of such a worldview is already present. According to Spinoza, God, or Nature is not worship, not to revere, but to understand in its true nature.

—→ *It is already clear that intellectual like and true knowledge are the keys to true fulfillment.*

5.5 Human beings, and the Mind- Body Relationships

5.5.1 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 13 – *Materialism*

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

- Idealism (Berkeley)

Definition 14 –

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

- Mind-Body Dualism (Descartes)

Definition 15 – *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.

5.5. HUMAN BEINGS, AND THE MIND- BODY RELATIONSHIPS 143

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.*

5.5.2 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?
- 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.

- 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.*

5.5.3 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.*

5.6 Knowledge – Prop 20-67

5.6.1 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.*

5.6.2 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 16 – 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.*

5.6.3 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.*

5.7 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 latter 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 divide 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 understands that human servitude consists in both arrogance and despotism, that is, in living under the law of blind desire and expecting that others will accommodate.

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.

5.7. CONCLUSION: FREEDOM AND WELL-BEING WITHIN THE REALM OF NECESSITY¹⁵¹

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.*

