

## SPINOZA'S ETHICAL PROJECT

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### Resumen

Sostengo que los escritos primeros de Spinoza (el KV y el IE) sean estimados como unas etapas primitivamente desarrolladas de una doctrina que se encuentra en su forma final en la cuarta y quinta partes de la *Ética*. Los dos elementos temáticos (la servidumbre y la libertad) de esta versión final están bosquejados por un análisis estructurado de E4 y E5. *Palabras claves*: Afectividad, Descartes, Ética, intuición, libertad, naturalismo, religión, servidumbre, Spinoza(Espinosa), estoicismo

### Abstract

I argue that Spinoza's earlier writings (KV and DIE) should be considered as early developmental stages of an ethical doctrine presented in its final form in Parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethica*. The two thematic elements of this final version (servitude and liberty) are then outlined via a structural analysis of E4 and E5.

*Key words*: Affectivity, descartes, ethics, intuition, liberty, naturalism, religion, servitude, Spinoza, stoicism

### 1. Where is Spinoza's Ethics?

Despite his never holding an institutional teaching position, Spinoza devoted himself continuously to the development, clarification, and teaching of his philosophy to others. These included university students (such as Casarius)<sup>1</sup> whom he tutored, study groups in Amsterdam and

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<sup>1</sup> For Casarius see Ep13 (110) and the introduction to Spinoza's *Letters* (11). For Spinoza's letters page references are to the translation of S. Shirley, with notes and introduction by Jacob Adler, Steven Barbone, and Lee Rice (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995). Translations from the text of Spinoza, where given, are my own. I prefer the edition of J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land [*Benedicti de Spinoza opera quotquot reperta sunt*. 3rd edition. 4 vols. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1914] to that of Carl Gebhardt [*Opera, im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*. 4 vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Verlag, 1925]. A new and critical edition of the *Opera Posthuma* is under preparation in the Netherlands,

elsewhere which discussed his developing positions, correspondents with whom he exchanged considerable information, and of course the wider readership of subsequent ages to whom he ultimately addressed his works. Much of his attention in all of these efforts was devoted to apportioning a degree of clarity and sophistication appropriate to the mind of his reader or interlocutor.<sup>2</sup> One of the central problems in interpreting the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is precisely that of understanding the audience to whom he destined the work. Different answers to this question produce interpretations as far-ranging as the esotericism of Strauss and the literalism of Harris.<sup>3</sup> This is a problem, mercifully, from which I can here prescind; since, whatever the outcome of those disputes, it is fairly clear that the nature of Spinoza's moral philosophy does not depend upon them in any direct way.

Even when Spinoza had set to himself the task of expositor of Descartes, he made every effort to underline to his reader the central differences between his own thought and that of Descartes. As the axiomatic reconstruction of Descartes in the PPC makes clear,<sup>4</sup> the entire cartesian system, including its view of the place of human morality in the universe, rests upon the presuppositions of a plurality of substances, creation of a material universe through the free decision of an immaterial deity, the presence of freedom in human beings, and the objective predication of goodness and perfection to natural objects. Throughout both the PPC and the appended *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza continuously interjects his reasoned opposition to these foundational principles. It is interesting to note that Lodewijk Meyer, in his preface to the PPC, emphasizes the differences between Spinoza and Descartes rather than making any effort to commend Spinoza on the correctness of his interpretation. In Ep12A Spinoza asks

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and will probably resemble closely the Van Vloten and Land edition. References to the *Ethica* are internal. E2P13Cor is the corollary to Prop. 13 of Part 2. Other abbreviations are Dem(-onstration), Schol(-ium), App(-endix), and Def(-inition). Similar references hold for the PPC. CM, KV, and the political works are referenced by chapters and paragraphs; and the DIE is referenced by paragraph numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The letters, for example, to Blyenbergh, Oldenburg, Schuller, and Tschirnhaus represent ascending levels of confidence and philosophical sophistication in Spinoza's correspondence.

<sup>3</sup> See Léo Strauss, "Comment lire le *Traité théologico-politique* de Spinoza," in G. Almaleh, A. Baraquin, and M. Depadt-Ejchenbaum (Eds.), *Ecrits de Léo Strauss sur Spinoza et le judaïsme* (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 189-256. A critical analysis is offered by Errol Harris: "Is There An Esoteric Doctrine in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*?" in E. Harris, *The Substance of Spinoza* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 125-148.

<sup>4</sup> See the introduction to Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, tr. S. Shirley, with introduction and notes by Steven Barbone and Lee Rice (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

Meyer to sharpen this opposition, not just in the preface, but in the text (PPC) and appendix (CM) which follow.<sup>5</sup> As Collins (1977, 121) notes, these precautions “. . . manifest the insistent activity of an original mind, its determination to make its own intent shine through even the oblique medium of a reconstruction of a predecessor's thought.” The seventeenth-century reader of the PPC could not have failed to pose the question of the nature or even possibility of a moral philosophy for Spinoza's system, given the fact that the four foundational theses called into question from a metaphysical and cosmological perspective in this work, constituted also the basis of ethics from a cartesian perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Spinoza had already developed the basis of a moral theory prior to his work on the PPC in the *Korte Verhandeling*. This work is often treated as either a forerunner of the *Ethica*<sup>7</sup> or as a simplified version thereof written for the use of those not trained in the new philosophy and its *mos geometricus*.<sup>8</sup> To so interpret it, however, is to overlook its many differences of development, emphasis, content, and style. I would suggest, following Collins (1977, 122-123), that the KV would better be approached as a first effort on Spinoza's part at clarifying and developing philosophical questions. The chapter format used in the work, and also in CM, corresponded roughly to that of the scholastic treatises of his own day, and it is interesting to note that the only place where Spinoza subsequently made use of this quasi-scholastic style was in his political writings. While the work begins, as does the *Ethica*, with the nature and existence of god, the two appendices to it can also be regarded as fragmentary sketches for reworking and even perhaps correcting the main divisions of KV. Spinoza also here tries his hand at the dialogue form, but the internal difficulties are many; and Collins's remark (1977, 123) about the overall result is perhaps the most charitable which one could devise: “They failed to breathe the Platonic fire and, in addition, they educated Spinoza negatively to seek a more impersonal, necessitating and demonstrative medium than dialogic writing could offer.”

A close relation likewise exists between the opening paragraphs of the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* (DIE) and parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethica*.

<sup>5</sup> See Ep12A (108-109) and notes thereto, and also Offenberg 1977, which presents the newly-discovered letter in Latin, with notes and English translation.

<sup>6</sup> Much of Leibniz's philosophical reflexion can be interpreted as an attempt to prevent the extension of Spinoza's metaphysical critique of Descartes to the moral order. See Lee Rice, “Individuation in Leibniz and Spinoza,” *NASS Monograph* §8(1999), 19-40.

<sup>7</sup> See Foti (1979) as an example.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of secondary sources, see Suchtelen (1990).

In the DIE §12-13<sup>9</sup> Spinoza speaks of a model of 'perfect human nature' as the goal of ethical reasoning, a theme which is developed in the Preface to E4 in terms of a 'model of human nature'.<sup>10</sup> But, whereas the purpose of that model is identified at once in the DIE as the "union which the mind has with the whole of nature," talk of such a union (through intuitive knowledge and the *amor intellectualis dei*) is deferred in the *Ethica* until the closing sections of E5.

As with the KV, I would like to again suggest that the DIE represents a developmental stage in Spinoza's moral philosophy, rather than simply an unfinished preface to a later work whose systematic teachings do not differ except by way of more rigorous development. Much of Spinoza's teaching in this earlier work has been used (see, for example, Wetlesen 1977 and Wetlesen 1979) to attribute a mystical element to spinozistic ethics; but, if a developmental approach like the one I here propose is taken, the very absence in the *Ethica* of the specific texts to which mysticism is attributed may go a long way toward explaining the final form of Spinoza's ethical theory.

Developmental hypotheses for Spinoza will remain no more than hypotheses from a textual viewpoint. We lack early versions or drafts of all his works,<sup>11</sup> and even the correspondence which we have is at best an excerpt from a larger body of letters which were destroyed (at his request) following his death. My proposal, then, is that we should look, not for sameness or identity in moving from the KV or DIE to the *Ethica*, but rather to differences which can be interpreted as growth and development. The sole justification on which such an hypothesis can hang is that it better enables us to make sense of what happens in the *Ethica*—which, as its title and chronological position both indicate, is intended to offer Spinoza's *final* statement on the nature of moral philosophy. It is well known that Spinoza's original plan included a tripartite division for the *Ethica*,<sup>12</sup> while the version which comes down to us has five parts, the fourth and fifth probably

<sup>9</sup> See Dijn (1996, pp. 24-25) and the author's commentary (pp. 35-36). This work contains the text of the DIE (Latin and English) with paragraph by paragraph commentary. See Rice (1997) for a critical review.

<sup>10</sup> See Rice (1991). An earlier and much different discussion is also to be found in the KV: see Ganaud (1990).

<sup>11</sup> See Steenbakkens (1994), and also Piet Steenbakkens, "La nouvelle édition critique du texte latin de l'*Ethique*," in Groupe de Recherches Spinozistes (Ed.), *Travaux et documents 2: Méthode et métaphysique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 105-120.

<sup>12</sup> See Ep28 (June, 1665) to Johann Bouwmeester (pp. 180-181).

encompassing the 'ethics in the *Ethics*' which was originally to be cast into a single closing part. In what follows, I want to suggest that this final division of ethics in the *Ethica* into two parts represents an important logical and normative feature of Spinoza's moral philosophy.

## 2. Ethics and Servitude

Spinoza's ethics is constructed upon his account of the psychology of human behaviour, which in turn is an offspring of his general metaphysics. In this respect his ethical theory is classical in structure. It is not, like contemporary metaethical theories, an account of normative predication and the function of normative discourse in language, but rather a first-order normative theory which purports to outline and argue the prospects for human well-being (Aristotle's *eudaimoni'a*, Spinoza's *beatitudo*) in a system of nature viewed as largely amoral. Spinozistic nature is neither amicable to human well-being (as aristotelian nature, viewed teleologically, was conceived to be) nor hostile to it (as Schopenhauer was later to view nature), but indifferent not only to human thriving but also to the normative categories fashioned as a practical component of the moral enterprise. It can also rightly be described as wholly naturalistic, given Spinoza's rejection of a supernatural domain and, with it, of a *deus iudex*.

Division into five parts notwithstanding, the logical structure of the *Ethica* is tripartite, beginning with a general sketch of metaphysics in E1. In his insistence that a new psychology of human nature be constructed consistent and continuous with the 'mechanical philosophy', Spinoza rejects cartesian free-will, and sets about to establish the basis of a scientific psychology of human behaviour (E2 and E3). Finally (E4 and E5) the ethical project for which the work is properly named represents its culmination.

E2 represents a patiently worked out development of the consequences of rejecting cartesian dualism. The result is a new psychology of human cognition. E3 represents an equally detailed account of the affective component of human behaviour, which springs from a rejection not just of mind-body dualism, but also of Descartes's theory of will. For Spinoza the human being is as much an *animal sentiens* as an *animal cogitans*, so the division of spinozistic psychology into two subparts of equal importance within this tripartite division makes tolerable sense. The theory of *conatus* developed as a psychological model in E3 has extensive normative implications in the third of this tripartite division.

So far, then, we have three general parts, the second divided into two further subparts. But the ethics in the *Ethica* is similarly divided into two parts which Spinoza apparently conceived as sufficiently distinct to merit the division, entitled simply 'servitude' and 'freedom'; and like cognition and affectivity for psychology, this latter subdivision reflects the two poles of the ethical project as Spinoza conceives it.

The opening Preface and definitions of E4 make it clear that a transition to the moral dimension is being made. In the Preface we find the '*exemplar naturae humanae*', an individual blueprint for human behaviour designed to satisfy the normative goal (well-being or *beatitudo*). The concepts of good (E4Def1) and evil (E4Def2) are constructed in terms of augmenting or diminishing proximity to the exemplar, end is defined (E4Def7) in terms of the satisfaction of appetite, and virtue equated with power (E4Def8). The single axiom reminds the reader, as Spinoza has done often before, of the human situation as a part of nature, a nature infinitely more powerful than any human being or collection thereof, and wholly indifferent to human goals. In developing a problematic for ethical reasoning, Spinoza largely follows the Stoics, according to whom the central danger for human beings is that of being overpowered by our affects, and the central goal that of attaining control of them through (but not necessarily by the use of) reason. But, while this conception of the problematic is stoic in origin, Spinoza's means of dealing with it are his own. Though he reminds the reader in the Preface to E5 of his disagreement with the Stoics in their claim that affects can be overcome by an act of will (whether free, as Descartes had claimed, or not), such a claim occurs again and again throughout E4. An affect can only be checked by a contrary affect (E4P7), and cognition of what is *true* cannot directly counter the effects of a passive affect (E4P14).

What Spinoza here seeks, in contemporary behavioristic terminology, is a technology of behaviour. *Knowing* that a certain response is destructive in no way contributes to its removal from the repertory of our behaviour: it must rather be *replaced* with a response which contributes to our well-being (an action, rather than a passivity), and this requires the 'rigging' of external causal chains in such a way that stimuli which hitherto produced destructive behaviour are reinforced to produce a different and positive pattern of response. Granted that we are always and everywhere passive in many respects to our environment, that environment is in turn often and largely a product of our own activity. We are not passive *reflexions* of the environment, but rather passive *players*: the being that does nothing is nothing, or, as Spinoza prefers to put it, "Nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow" (E1P36).

Our passive responses to the external environment can, as a result of our active intervention in the conditions upon which that environment effects us, become *activities* — i.e., “active affects which are defined by human power” (E4AppDef3). As parts of nature we remain passive with respect to its effects upon us; but, in our ability to understand, order, and redistribute those effects, we attain a measure of activity. Freedom, conceived in a spinozistic sense, is neither the exercise of desire divorced from its empirical conditions (Descartes) nor of will displaced into a world outside space and time (Kant), but rather *freedom from* the harmful effects of environment upon our prospects for survival. It is not the transcendent freedom of which many philosophers speak, but a freedom which accords well with our ordinary sense — a freedom for which wars have been fought, governments toppled or created, and human institutions devised.

The above consideration makes it clear that Spinoza's political theory is a product of his model of servitude and liberation from environmental harm, and explains why he provides a logical bridge to political theory in E4 (E4P37Schol2). Civil society is not a product of human reason or freedom, but a product *for* reason and freedom: a tool produced by our affective responses to an environment which plays out, in human and nonhuman respects, as largely hostile to our well-being. Its existence is warranted by the fact that the behaviour of all human beings some of the time, and of some human beings all of the time, is largely a passive response to an environment over which they exercise little control, and about which much knowledge is wanting. Freedom in this sense can be constructed as a component of servitude, and indeed must needs be so constructed; since “. . . human power is very limited and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have absolute power to adapt to our purposes things which are external to us” (E4AppDef32).

Spinoza is neither wildly optimistic nor unduly pessimistic about human prospects for the engineering of servitude to human goals. Civil societies can be constructed, even if they seldom are, so as to contribute to human thriving; and the happiness possible within a social community affectively committed to the use of reason as arbitrator is real and within reach. It is, one should hasten to add, also a far cry from the “union of the mind with the whole of nature” of which Spinoza speaks so optimistically in both the KV and the DIE. Is there a higher happiness or well-being — based not upon the instrumental use of reason to serve civil ends, but rather on the inherent *power* of reason itself? With this question, Spinoza passes to the second of the two questions which constitute his ethics.

### 3. Ethics and Salvation

Although the ethics in the *Ethica* is subdivided into two projects, both deal in an integral manner with the reconciliation of rationality and affectivity. As Macherey notes:

La question éthique fondamentale est donc celle de la réconciliation du rationnel et de l'affectif, dont le *de Libertate* expose pour finir les conditions. Celles-ci sont de deux ordres : et c'est pourquoi, à l'alternative abstraite de la liberté et de la servitude, il faut substituer la considération des pratiques effectives qui ouvrent les voies de la liberté. (Macherey 1994, pp. 26-27).

In E4 the order of reason itself is a product of human appetite, driven by the desire for self-preservation. This order is incarnate in civil society, which, while committed to the order of reason as a means of securing peace and well-being, is a product of appetite (fear, the desire for security, sociality). In E4, the primary concern is with a reason which is under the control of the affects; whereas, as Spinoza notes in E5Pref, "In this part, then, I shall be dealing with the power of reason, pointing out the degree of control which reason has over the affects. . ."

This transition from the ethics of servitude to that of freedom involves a change of perspective rather than a change in the psychological basis upon which Spinoza constructs his ethics. Affective activity and passivity in E3 (see E3Def1-2) had been connected to cognitive activity (adequate ideas) and passivity (inadequate ideas) — and their bodily correlates — as these were described in the psychology of E2 (see E2Def3-4). Spinoza reiterates in ESP20 that ". . . it is by virtue of one and the same appetite that a human being is said to be active as to be passive [*unum eundemque esse appetitum per quem homo tam agere quam pati dicitur*]." The first twenty propositions of E5 are continuous with the closing arguments of E4, and summarize the degree to which reason may gain control over appetite. Spinoza reminds us in E5Pref that such control is always limited in time and by the number and strength of the stimuli affecting us in the external environment. One might summarize his cautious optimism in this manner: there is no affect which is such that reason cannot control it under some circumstances, and there is likely to be no circumstance which is such that every affect can be controlled under it. Adequate knowledge of the manner in which the environment impacts us is here the key, an echo of the baconian dictum that knowledge is power. This cluster of propositions terminates with the affective component of such an adequate knowledge of things: *amor dei* in the sense of *amor erga deum* (ESP16).

The scholium is E5P18 illustrates a central problem for all that follows it:

It may be objected that in understanding god as cause of all things, we thereby consider him to be the cause of pain. I reply to this that, insofar as we understand the causes of pain, pain ceases to be a passive affect (E5P3); that is, by E3P59, to that extent it ceases to be pain. So insofar as we understand god as cause of pain, *to that extent we feel pleasure*. [emphasis mine]

Some authors have stressed from such passages the impersonality of the spinozistic god and the lack of realism in his ethics.<sup>13</sup> How, one may reasonably ask, can a person racked in the agonizing pain of the terminal stages of cancer, possibly extract pleasure from the knowledge that such pain ultimately traces back to an infinite god as its cause? Other authors<sup>14</sup> see Spinoza as here opening a door to mysticism and the possible transcendence by the individual of the physical and durational order which gives rise to passivity (and thus to pain). I shall return to the issue of pain shortly.

With E5P22 Spinoza makes the transition from *amor dei* in the sense of '(our) love of god' to *amor dei* in the sense of 'god's love (of us)'. The logical grounds for such a transition are built into his monism: any act of love, toward anything and by anyone, is, from the perspective of the unity of substance rather than that of the diversity of modal agency, an act of the one substance which god is. This point, I should insist, is noncontroversial: Spinoza has as much right to speak of god's love in this sense as has any thinker. But its very noncontroversiality invites the charge of triviality, and the linkages which Spinoza attempts to make (E5P21-P31) between the *amor intellectualis dei* and the third kind of knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*) certainly argue against his viewing either as trivial.

In discussing reason (the second kind of knowledge) in E2P40Schol2, Spinoza had characterized it as arising from "common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things." His discussion of intuition in E5P25 provides a slightly less cumbersome definition of it than that given earlier in E2: "The third kind of knowledge proceeds from the adequate idea of certain of god's attributes to adequate knowledge of the essence of things, . . . , and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand god" (E5P25Dem). So intuition is a direct knowledge of things through their individual essences or natures as comprehended in one or more of the divine attributes (thought or extension for us).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Fox (1990), Hart (1990), Levine (1994), and Radchik (1992).

<sup>14</sup> See Dijn (1990 & 1992), Curley (1978), Gebhardt (1932), Leslie (1993), Singer (1988), and Wetlesen (1979).

Problems abound, since the section beginning at E5P25 has been the subject of the most diverse interpretations in all of the secondary literature concerning Spinoza, especially the notion of mind eternity. Many of these problems are epistemic in nature (Bennett 1984 is a good example), and most are concerned with the ability of any mind to know *completely* the features by which objects are individuated, a problem somewhat analogous to the epistemic status of leibnizean monads. Without denying their reality or importance, I can prescind from them here in order to focus on the ethical function of intuition, ignoring the question of its epistemic possibility.

And here we find some points of clarity as well. Intuitive knowledge arises naturally from reason itself (E5P28), includes a reflexive self-knowledge (E5P31), is a form of activity rather than of passivity in relation to the environment (E5P38), and has a corporeal or physiological correlate (E5P39) no less than any other state of mind.

Since Spinoza conceives of intuitive knowledge as both active and adequate, its affective correlate, the intellectual love of god, is both wholly adequate in its causality and completely self-determined. A number of commentators (e.g., Bennett 1984, pp. 369-372) see an ambiguity or even an inconsistency in such a notion of *amor dei*, because Spinoza trades here upon its objective sense; but, as I argued above, such a sense is well within the reach of his theory. Bennett's suggestion that Spinoza could have been confused here is rather incredible in light of the fact that Spinoza himself underlines the difference (in E2P17Schol) between the idea of Peter which is *Peter's mind* and the idea of Peter which is *in Paul's mind*.

If we examine closely the characterization which Spinoza provides of intuition in general we see that it proceeds from an adequate knowledge of an attribute to an adequate knowledge of an individual *which is a part or expression* of that very attribute.<sup>15</sup> The possessive-objective features in this case, far from being muddled, become identical because of the identity of the finite individual as part of the infinite attribute itself. Two further logical consequences immediately follow. Intuitive love, like intuitive knowledge, is wholly active, and so both can be predicated directly of god: "God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love" (E5P35). But that very love (and knowledge) is expressed in the finite modes which comprise the nature of god: "The mind's intellectual love toward god is a *part* of the infinite love wherewith god loves himself" (E5P36, emphasis mine). To the

<sup>15</sup> The epistemic aspect of this claim, not here examined, is the mind's ability to see a particular event as following necessarily from certain general laws of nature through a knowledge, complete in some sense, of all the initial conditions which, combined with the laws, imply the occurrence of the event.

extent that a finite mind (or body) is active, it comprises an actual part of the mind (or body) which is god (E5P36Dem). There is no confusion in Spinoza's exposition, but simply a conscious and straightforward accounting of the consequences of divine immanence in nature.

The attribution (or accusation) of mysticism here is, so far as I can see, unwarranted.<sup>16</sup> Spinoza is clear in his insistence that the eternity and intuition which he here attributes to mind is a *part* only of what we are: "He whose body is capable of the greatest amount of activity has a mind whose greater part is eternal" (E5P39). Such a body is not the prototype of the 'body-builder' in twentieth-century stereotypes, but rather the body which is *sensitized* to its environment. But how much of this is genuinely possible? — i.e., what are the prospects for acquisition of intuitive knowledge and for developing a body largely sensitive to its external environment? The only clue provided by Spinoza is in the earlier DIE (§22, Dijn 1996, pp. 46-47): "The things which I have so far been able to know by this type of knowledge have been few [*Ea tamen, quae hucusque tali cognitione potui intelligere, perpauca fuerunt*]." Nowhere does Spinoza suggest that we can expect *all* of the body of our knowledge to be miraculously converted into a knowledge of this kind. Rather, the occurrences of it, however powerful, are both fleeting and rare (*perpauca*).

The important lesson to be gleaned from the numerical example (the fourth proportional) which Spinoza uses to exemplify the types of knowledge in E2P40Schol2 is that, unlike platonic or aristotelian cognitive hierarchies, in Spinoza we do not have three kinds of *objects*, but rather a single class of objects (*res*) which can be apprehended in three different manners. The first of these (imagination) has as its affective correlate the passive affects, which lie at the root of religious superstition (see Boss 1994, Christian 1965, Cook 1998, and Misrahi 1977). The second of these has as its affective correlates a behavioural repertory by which the agent is able to exercise limited control over its environment. The third, and most difficult, correlates to an ability to understand the order of nature to such a degree that one can understand the necessity by which events follow from it. Its difficulty and infrequency do not reduce its value, and certainly may even enhance it. But an increase in its frequency, however slight, is symptomatic of the fact that servitude is, to a limited degree, being transcended within the life of reason.

<sup>16</sup> A more detailed textual analysis which argues against mysticism and against Gueroult's account of intuition as inherently deductive in nature is given by Hubbeling (1986).

We may now return to the problem of pain and overcoming it through intuition. Far from being a sign of mysticism or human transcendence, Spinoza's remark in E5P18Schol ("Insofar as we understand god to be cause of pain") is rather in most instances a counterfactual. While there may be cases (lesser pains) which can be overcome (and thus transformed into pleasure) by acts of bodily and mental integrity, such cases are rare. In most cases we remain, as Spinoza so often reminds us throughout the *Ethica*, parts of nature which can and will be overcome by forces far beyond our intellectual or technological reach. In the most dramatic cases, intense pain overpowers the ability of the body to integrate its forces and the (correlative) ability of mind to *feel* the pain in any manner except passively. In the closing statement of E5 ("All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare"), the 'things' in question are not a few *lives* of full beatitude or joy, but rather a few *instances* of beatitude or joy in many lives, those which can attain a limited measure of wisdom and comprehension.

This interpretation of Spinoza's project of freedom in E5 is more modest than that of many of its defenders, and less trivial than that of most of its detractors. Perhaps what most bothers many in the latter category (Bennett is a good example) is the religious imagery which is inevitably associated with many of Spinoza's remarks in the second half of E5. There are two ways to see such religious imagery in Spinoza. The first is that of the naturalization of supernaturalist theology, a species which could be cynically described as "anything you can do, I can do better."<sup>17</sup> There is some legitimacy in approaching Spinoza's use of religious imagery in this manner, for Misrahi (1977) is surely correct in his verdict that Spinoza's ethical system is ultimately a *challenge* to christian thought. The naturalization of religious imagery is a transformation which eliminates the supernatural aspects which lie at the very heart of the religion of the *vulgus*: Spinoza knew that no less than his readers, then and now.

But unlike Hume (see Boss 1994, Biasutti 1979), Spinoza is not cynical regarding the origin and prospects of the religious impulse in humankind. He sees religious feeling and imagery as a necessary outcome of the modal position of human beings in nature. Spinoza's attitude, unlike Hume's, is not disrespectful; and I doubt that he would view the neomarxist view of the 'withering away' of religiosity as anything but a piece of psychological rubbish. Religious imagery is here to stay, *not* because it purveys hidden *truths* about nature and its laws (see Laux 1993, Hammacher 1997, and

<sup>17</sup> See Cohen (1986), Hart (1990), and Watt (1972) for examples of what I am here calling the 'cynical' interpretation.

Giancotti 1978), but rather because as parts of the general order of nature, human beings operate largely with knowledge which is inadequate and with affective responses which threaten debilitation. The naturalizing of religious language is thus a proper and necessary goal of Spinoza's own ethical project. To say this is not to suggest that such a naturalizing goal will satisfy the religious believer or the theologian.<sup>18</sup> But it is to insist that, for an ethics which seeks to transcend the limits of imaginational theology, such a naturalization contributes to our understanding of the limited place we have in nature, and thus to a furthering of the ethical project as Spinoza conceives it.

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<sup>18</sup> See Cook (1998) for a discussion of the some of the issues involved in such a naturalistic transformation.

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