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Nijmegen, July 31st, 2021

The Sovereign Illusion
Spinoza in the Wake of Descartes and Hobbes

for the acquisition of the title of Master of Arts in Philosophy

Erasmus University Rotterdam
2020-2021

Title	The Sovereign Illusion. Spinoza in the Wake of Descartes and Hobbes
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Number of ECTS	15
Submission Date	31 July 2021
Word Count	27.084 (excluding abstract, acknowledgements and bibliography)

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ABSTRACT

Seventeenth-century Europe is marked by the rise of mathematical science and the modern nation-state. The former facilitates the naturalization of human psychology. The latter forces rethinking political sovereignty through social contract theories. But as the faculties of mind are reduced to bodily affects, traditional ethics is threatened: reason no longer clearly rules the passions; if political reason is dissolved into affective undercurrents, the constitution turns out to rest on illusion. This thesis argues that Spinoza embraces the consequences of the naturalization of reason, contrasting his views with elements in Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my life as a student of philosophy, I have met with a great number of personalities, each more or less caught up with philosophical beliefs about the world, values, and how to engage with our spiritual ancestors, the great philosophers of old. The members of the department of the history of philosophy, part of the philosophical faculty of Erasmus University Rotterdam, stand out in particular, as they each personify the unlikely combination of the serious business of critical reflection with general friendliness and the spirit of support. One of them turned out to supervise my thesis, another to advice the Examination Commission regarding its evaluation. They are, respectively, professors Han van Ruler and Henri Krop.

In February of this year, professor Van Ruler was appointed supervisor for my thesis. Immediately afterward I took up my virtual pen to write him a letter expressing the great expectation I had for our cooperation, but also my gratitude with regards to how my philosophical career had developed. In one's life, one can seldom point to the specific moments of inspiration, and to those who serve as its medium. In my case, a course in the academic year of 2017-2018 on seventeenth-century metaphysics turned out to be just such a moment. During that course, its teacher, professor Van Ruler, asked what in God's name could be the meaning and the use of the spurious imaginations of such philosophers as Georg Wilhelm Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza, who concocted elaborate systems of philosophy, encompassing such issues as the nature of God and the soul, as well as mathematical theorems and the moral demands of reason and society. The question stuck with me, and became a guiding thread both in my subsequent studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen, and this thesis. Although I cannot claim to have come very far in answering it, the question continues to shed light on other, related problems.

During my years at Erasmus University, one other faculty member had inspired me to appreciate the light that Spinoza had to offer in engaging with the difficult questions of philosophy and life in general: Henri Krop. His habit of taking his students on a visit to the Spinoza House in Rijnsburg in particular appealed to me. This is a man who radiates the *philos* of *Sophia* – the thinker's affection for Wisdom – and a true sense of philosophy's connection to and relevance for the world.

To those close to me: thank you for putting up with my habit of occasionally retreating from the real world into the realm of ideas – my darkened room, that is, where ideas come to life under the pressure of controlled chaos. Many names come to mind, but, perhaps unbeknownst to him, I would like to mention just one (while I grant others the great gift of anonymity – a gift so dear to Spinoza, who knew the dangers of publicity): Sietse van Mierlo, with whom I occasionally enter into discussions about philosophical passion, theology, and of course, Spinoza. That he may continue to enlighten the philosophical paths of others, whilst keeping the flame of his own desire for truth alive.

INTRODUCTION

When a Frenchman, an Englishman and a Dutchman walk into a bar, what might they raise a glass to? Ironically, René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) might join in praising Reason, celebrating its supreme reign over the passions – before they either break out into a fight or prudently leave the premises (depending on the status of their self-mastery). The question guiding this thesis recounts the history of this imagined encounter, asking: what do these philosophers respectively think the sovereignty of reason consist in, and by which theoretical means do they justify it? In this introduction, I want to discuss some general points of convergence and divergence between our protagonists in the context of this problematic.

All three figureheads find themselves immersed in rapidly changing social, political, and intellectual environments. The most important changes include the rise of mathematical science and the formation of modern nation-states out of multi-layered feudal societies. Regarding the onset of modern science, what is philosophically interesting is the development of a new method. Traditional approaches to natural phenomena problematically relied on an ontological or universal distinction between passive matter and active form. So-called substantial forms were postulated to explain the behaviour of natural phenomena in terms of a deployment of a predetermined, natural purpose, proper to a thing insofar as it is of a certain kind. Slowly but surely this approach, propagated by the traditional institutions of learning, succumbed under the demand for theoretical clarifications and reliable predictions about the natural world. Meanwhile, a small number of intellectuals working on the basis of new principles were booking great successes. These principles refer back to the new method, which is predominantly analytic or 'geometrical': starting with a number of indubitable axioms or principles, truths are deduced concerning the cosmos, society, and our mental life. The three

philosophers we are concerned with were all engaged with the development of this new method. Some, like Descartes and Spinoza, wanted to prove the underlying axioms guided by nothing but the light of reason itself, capitalizing on the crucial experience of perceiving something distinctly and with absolute clarity. This, more than anything else, gave them the name of rationalists. Others, like Thomas Hobbes, having been convinced by the successes of the early inventors of this method, simply took the axioms as matters of fact or utility. As long as these axioms produced theories that could be verified by observation and explained in clear terms, they serve their purpose; no elaborate and cloudy metaphysics needed. Despite the lack of a *magnum opus* in epistemology and his more practically oriented interest (for politics, that is), Hobbes could be counted among the empiricists, even if only for his methodological principles and general style of philosophizing.[1]

Under the sway of this new method, grand systems of philosophy came to the fore that would influence both intellectual successors and the public imagination for centuries to come. In the case of Descartes, debates among philosophers and theologians broke out that were to have a considerable influence on the institutions of learning that were still very much under the influence of religious creeds. His approach to philosophy deeply challenged the legitimacy of appeals to authority, pointing to the rationality of each individual for him- or herself. In the case of Spinoza, something of an intellectual war broke out over the possibility of a godless philosophy, or of living in a world where God and nature had become indistinguishable,

[1] Though one should always be weary of the separation of ideological 'camps' (like the one Immanuel Kant made between rationalists and empiricists), such separations may serve as signposts for further investigation: under what conditions did the idea of this distinction gain shape? We are, nowadays, under the same conundrum regarding the distinction between 'analytic' and 'continental' camps, about which one may rightfully ask which ideas (if any), which historical confrontations, and which institutional formations caused the divide and keep it intact. In the seventeenth century, intellectual history was under similar conditions; our three protagonists made strong efforts to distinguish their thinking from the rigid sediments of neo-Aristotelean or Scholastic dogma. Although this posturing served to obfuscate otherwise clear continuities, it also helped define and usher in a new era of Western culture and its shifting self-understanding.

effectively destroying the image of a personal god who cares about our troubles and grants us our blessings. In the later, German context, this war would be called *Pantheismusstreit*, or alternatively bore the title of its instigator: the *Spinozismusstreit*. Last but not least, Hobbes has definitively put his mark on a way of thinking about society that still dominates our imagination; a way of thinking that reveals a deep pessimism about human nature. Were the power of civil laws to slacken for just an instant of time, human beings would reveal their true colours by creating general havoc and instigating civil unrest, with the collapse of society as a result. But Hobbes in fact constrained this pessimism by a deeper-lying optimism about the Law: it is possible, according to Hobbes, to conceive of the ideal preconditions of a lasting civil order, and therefore: of peace. Because there is a science of natural law, civil war could in fact be indefinitely forestalled.

All of the themes mentioned somehow go back to the question of revolt and the breakdown of order, something that was reflected in the collapse of feudal society. Descartes challenged the traditional hierarchy in the institutions of learning for the emancipation of the individual freethinker. Hobbes challenged the traditional conception of society as an order given by the grace of God, instituted for all ages by divine right. Spinoza challenged the notion of a sovereign principle itself, arguing – *first* – that though virtue and rational living are possibilities of human nature, they are never simply given by the reassurance of metaphysical argument, and – *second* – that God does not gracefully delegate his powers as might a King to his subjects and accomplices, but deserves the name of divinity for his boundless majesty, producing and multiplying infinitely many forms under the guise of a regularly unfolding Nature, having no particular consideration for humankind. In general, as I hope to make plausible by means of this thesis, whenever we imagine ourselves to be sovereign rulers over the passions that affect us; whenever we imagine ourselves to be subjects of a sovereign power that we share in and help constitute, we are doing just that – imagining. Under the sway of the

sovereign illusion, we forget the natural forces that encroach and empower us. Though we cannot do without illusions, the illusions that bind us are always up for negotiation; this reveals the ambiguity of the title of this thesis ('The Sovereign Illusion'): the supreme principle is illusory, and the illusion reigns supreme. Only if the sovereign image remains up for negotiation can reason and virtue come to pass in our midst, since these depend on harnessing as much power – all the strength and capabilities of the populace together – as we possibly can, so that we may grasp and deploy the potential that is by Nature distributed among us.

Finally, the gist of Spinoza's clearly *metaphysical* approach is, I argue, a unification of affective, ethical and political life without conceding the change of intellectual registers at the borders between those areas. For what such a change of register implies is the intrusion of a *transcendent illusion*[2] that may neatly distribute each phenomenon under its proper category, but only at the cost of an *immanent* perspective on the forces of Nature. Only this perspective allows one to grasp and become conducive to the productive differences that exist in the populace (or what is more properly called 'the multitude'), even if the individuals and social or ethnic groups that make up society seem static and incorrigible. For groups and individuals constantly negotiate the image of identity that binds them together and gives direction to their choices. That identity is never clearly and distinctly given, never rounded off.

In effect, this thesis attempts to fill a gap in the literature between two perspectives: (1) the reconstruction of the historical Spinoza and (2) the ideological armament of 'a' Spinoza. The latter necessarily occurs in order to prepare Spinoza for our times, to see whether the philosopher can enlighten our own situation or whether his power has been exhausted, and to prevent that the 'forceless force' of reason is smothered in static archives. But without the former, the complete lack of foundation similarly quenches the force of reason, using the

[2] The word is that of Hasana Sharp, cf. Sharp 2011, Ch. 4. In this context she refers to Deleuze, who gives a illustrative reading of the illusions of consciousness, see: Deleuze 1988, Ch. 2.

philosopher for any desired end whilst appealing to an even more dangerous force: the power of imagination.

Scope & Method

In this thesis, I provide some intellectual context to Spinoza's critique of sovereignty by means of a reading of René Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* (1649) and Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Cartesian naturalized psychology and Hobbesian natural law theory are two important factors to the coming together of Spinoza's project. Each in their way also built in checks against the arriving of Spinoza's radical standpoint.[3] My proposed reading of this history is one of an ongoing transgression of the conservative checks built into seventeenth century metaphysics – despite the great renewal going on in this age – that sought to maintain respectively a traditional principle in ethics (Descartes) and political philosophy (Hobbes). The project of naturalizing psychology is taken up by these philosophers, each productively crossing the borders protecting the spiritual sovereignty of reason over the passions, whether or not against their own conscious intentions.

Notice that people in the seventeenth-century spoke of 'passions' or 'affects' to stress the character of being 'overcome' by feelings, being affected by outside forces, rendering us passive in the face of them. Meanwhile, the praises of a life rid of the currents of passions was sung: a life dedicated to reason. In our post-romantic era, the emotions have a rather more positive connotation. We stress the motivational character of our feelings. But if we grasp the reality of our affective life under the title of 'emotions', we risk losing sight of what these seventeenth-century thinkers knew so very well: that in every appeal to our feelings another,

[3] Hobbes had famously written, when asked for a response to Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), "I durst not write so boldly."

more silent appeal is made to our spiritual and political destiny, and that we should therefore ask for the metaphysical principles at stake, and the political beliefs promoted.

In Chapter I, I will investigate the transition from teleology to mechanism in the seventeenth-century conception of nature and its consequences for psychology. In that area, most important was the replacement of the language of 'faculties of the soul' to passive sensations and emotions on the one hand and active volitions on the other. In the *Passions*, Descartes described the possibility of association therapy directed at educating the passions. Unlike many who preceded him, Descartes wanted to treat the passions strictly as a physician – not as a moralist. But despite this design, Descartes does in fact proceed to draw some moral consequences from his treatment of the passions. Moreover, the work raises some questions about the status of the ontologies of soul and nature that Descartes derives from the metaphysical ruminations conducted in the rest of his oeuvre. The stress laid on the sovereignty of the soul forces him into a neo-Stoic account of virtue that appeals to limiting one's desires and practicing self-control. An argument could be made for the clinical use of this approach to ethics, and indeed *generosité* is perhaps an ideal to which the private intellectual could strive, but it does not answer to the *social* distribution of affective types. In order words, it is questionable whether Descartes can answer to the need of curbing demagoguery.

In Chapter II, I will investigate Hobbes' reversal of the classical principle of ethics, which states that our will is guided by the thought of goodness; instead, goodness is principled on whatever we want. Because our ability to forge social bonds determine success (both in terms of simple wellbeing and in terms of power) our desires gain a social significance, but from this we cannot deduce that the will is of itself guided by consideration of goodness. Moreover, I will look at Hobbes' specific appropriation of natural law theory. Hobbes gave a decisive form to the consideration of the foundations of civil society by means of his social contract theory. By appealing to *a priori* natural laws or prescripts he envisioned a great

discontinuity between civil society and the natural conditions of human beings based on the idea that, without the hypothesis of the social contract, society is bound to fall into the barbarism of civil war. While psychology may help to clear up the conflicts of the passions arising in the state of nature, it stands helpless in explaining the transition to civil society, or rather: the passions and the conflicts they lead their bearers into are curtailed by a consideration of the ideal conditions of civil society. It never becomes quite clear how these conditions can be determined on rational grounds, i.e. that have the universal validity of justice, so that one would have to concede that sovereign power rests on a fiction that suppresses the subjects-to-be.

In Chapters III and IV, I develop my reading of Spinoza. In particular, Chapter III addresses the relevant elements in Spinoza's *Ethics* (published posthumously in 1677), leading him into discussion with Descartes. Spinoza explicitly criticizes Descartes' *Passions*, which is therefore an especially interesting point of entry for a comparison. Notably, Spinoza rejects the possibility of suspending one's judgment, which is fundamental to Descartes' conception of moral virtue. Moreover, Spinoza joins Hobbes in affirming the reversal of the classical principle of ethics. In Chapter IV, I address the political consequences of Spinoza's metaphysics of immanence and the resulting psychology, leading him into discussion with Hobbes. Spinoza appealed to the psychological reality of *conatus essendi* (striving to persevere) to inform his conception of natural 'right', which to his mind applies to human beings in the state of nature and civil society alike (being just another name for power). To him, then, there is a deep continuity between the conditions of human beings within and without the control of State power.

In the conclusion, I summarize the proceedings of the thesis and briefly reflect on the affordances of Spinoza's critique of sovereignty. It should be noted that my approach to this history of philosophy is clearly limited. As Rutherford (2006) notes "historians have challenged the assumption that early modern philosophy can be adequately comprehended in terms of the

major published works of its most famous figures".[4] This point is valid especially when it pertains to work that seeks to reconstruct the context in which an historical author intervened. However, as to my purposes, the validity of this point is limited. The thesis cannot be read as propounding theorems regarding the historical persons of Descartes, Hobbes or Spinoza, nor does it make conclusions regarding the final outlook of their respective philosophical oeuvres. Instead, the thesis should be read as an argument for the possibility of reading Spinoza in a certain way – namely, as a critic of sovereignty, be it moral or political – by means of contrasting his work with the writings of his contemporaries.[5]

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[4] Rutherford 2006, 2.

[5] In particular, Rutherford agrees with me that Hobbes "along with Spinoza formulates the most serious challenge in the seventeenth century to received ideas in moral and political philosophy"; 2006, 8.

I René Descartes: A Kingdom Divided

Introduction

René Descartes (1596-1650) took it upon himself to provide science – and, ultimately, all intellectual endeavours – with new foundations as the old ones were falling to ruin. These new foundations go back to the possibility, disclosed by Descartes, of deriving the essence of nature on purely rational grounds. Because of this possibility, the new mechanistic philosophy of nature – the idea that all natural phenomena can be reduced to the geometrical qualities of material particles and principles of motion – gained credibility and direction. However, the metaphysical argument leading up to the conclusion that physical nature could be understood in this manner proved unconvincing to many. Especially problematic was its foundational correlate, that the truth of mechanism relies on the certainty of the mental representation of matter in general as pure extendedness, and that this certainty was, moreover, based on the dubious foundations of the *cogito* argument and the proof for the existence and trustworthiness of God.[6] Whatever the status of the arguments that Descartes propounds in his metaphysical works to give credence to the mechanical conception of nature and the sovereignty of the soul, the framework thus developed affords an interesting approach to moral psychology that culminates in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649). Instead of focusing on the metaphysical arguments of the *Meditations* directly, I develop a reading of the *Passions* where I reflect on the constraints and affordances of Descartes' system of thought in passing.

[6] M, 6, 80: "… I do not see how God could be understood to be anything but a deceiver if the ideas [of sense perception] were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things. It follows that corporeal things exist. They may not all exist in a way that exactly corresponds with my sensory grasp of them … But at least they possess all the properties which I clearly and distinctly understand, that is all those which, viewed in general terms, are comprised within the subject-matter of pure mathematics."

In the first section, I will sketch the early modern skepticism vis-à-vis the dominant neo-Aristotelean, scholastic method of philosophizing. The 'School Philosophy' was increasingly considered insufficient, as it could not account for new scientific developments: it postulated obscure and mysterious entities that were supposed to function as explanatory causes which to the modern innovators were themselves in need of explanation. Despite its shortcomings, the teleological approach to rational psychology does account for the sovereignty of reason over the passions, a fundamental principle of ethics. Descartes defends this principle on wholly new grounds by means of the bifurcation of nature achieved in the *Meditations*.

The subject of section 2 is how Descartes hopes to bridge this split by means of his investigation into the passions. Commentators have stressed the fact that his theory of the passions strongly nuances the picture of Descartes as someone who disdains the body, who reduces the relevance of bodily sensation and affective life to nothing. His exploration of the passions indicates Descartes' appreciation of the mind-body unity as the modality in which human beings alone can strive to attain all the perfections available to them during their earthly existence. The soul, though dependent for its representation of most goods on the passions, nonetheless retains its dominion by its capacity for clinging only to what it clearly knows. It is in this context that Descartes introduces the neo-Stoic virtue of generosity, of which I address the moral and political significance.

I.1 Divide and Conquer: the Bifurcation of Nature and the Sovereignty of Reason

Many of the new philosophical problems that faced seventeenth-century thinkers welled up in the wake of their attacks on Scholasticism. With the success of the new science as championed and practiced by such frontrunners as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), skepticism grew with regard to the methodological principles propagated by the schools. With time, all intellectual disciplines came up for intellectual renovation. Though nearly all

early modern thinkers professed their allegiance to Christianity, and therefore attempted to rhyme as best they could their new ideas concerning nature, the soul, and goodness with religious dogma, their views on the meaning of being Christian varied widely. Though it seems likely that these philosophers would concur in their perspective concerning the supreme good and the nature of moral virtue and thus be conservative in issues of practical philosophy, nothing is further from the truth.[7] This is evidenced by Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, who drew the revolutionary moral consequences of the ongoing innovations in natural philosophy. It is all the more interesting to see why, despite his far-reaching renovation of the understanding of the cosmos and of psychology, Descartes remained morally conservative.

What methodological principles guided School philosophy that were increasingly considered useless by the modern innovators? Though the language of a 'natural order' was not criticized as such, the logic on which it rested was. The entrenched logic was Aristotle's logic of species and genera. According to this logic, all beings can be classified according to (1) a general principle (*genus*) that puts it in a class with other beings and (2) a specific difference (*differentia*) that sets it apart from other beings in that class. Thus, animals belong in the class of 'organisms' together with plants, but are differentiated from the latter by the faculty of sensation. This logic lends itself particularly well to the *hylomorphic* understanding of nature, or the idea that natural beings consist of matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*). The so-called *substantial form* is the principle of activity that is specific to the kind of thing something is; it allows one to describe activity in terms of the natural end (*telos*) to which a substance develops due to the kind of thing it is. Matter is a pure potency to be 'actualized' by the form that inheres it. This conception of nature conforms to the logic of species and genera, because we can approach the genus 'organism' as the material from which both plants and animals are made,

[7] Cf. Rutherford 2006, 16.

while the species 'animal' is instantiated by the form moulding the genus-material in a certain way, namely, to the end of being able to perceive.

The neo-Aristotelean schools had provided not only the categories of natural philosophy, but also the theoretical framework for rational psychology.[8] As I have already indicated, substantial forms serve as a principle of activity by which we can understand bodily motion: all entities have a natural tendency to move or behave 'according to their kind', i.e. to actualize the ends that are specific to them. Fire moves upwards; plants turn towards the Sun; animals seek pleasure and avoid pain, and human beings, additionally, act according to their ability to consider abstract ideas (e.g. the good, virtue, natural law). All of these activities are understood by reference to a more or less complex 'soul', ranging from the elemental to the spiritual. The human soul – the form belonging to the matter of the human body – can best be understood as a complex or layered entity, differentiated according to its powers or faculties, forming respectively one's organic (or vegetative), animal (or sensitive), and (essentially human) rational natures. Because there is indeed a hierarchy in these natures the power to act according to abstract principles allows human beings to supersede their merely organic and animal ends, and to live according to the demands of reason, i.e. to consider and esteem higher, spiritual goods.

While hylomorphism as a theoretical framework allows us to make distinctions between natural phenomena according to their complexity, affirming the belief in natural hierarchies both in the cosmos generally and in the human soul specifically (a belief that Descartes in his way too sought to protect), its mode of explanation is problematically speculative. That is to say, it treats nature as a functional whole by projecting natural aims on substances without

[8] The adjective 'rational' is used to distinguish the traditional approach to mental phenomena from the contemporary science called psychology. This approach was mostly based on *a priori* reasoning rather than the observational testing of hypotheses.

inquiring after the mechanism by which such aims are actualized.[9] Frustration with the lack of explanations of this kind fed the adversity against the Scholastic framework. Even if bodies have the appearance of goal-directedness, remarking this offers nothing in the way of explanation.[10] Instead, the new philosophers successfully supplanted teleological explanations in terms of final and formal causes by mechanical explanations in terms of efficient causes, postulating nothing but particles in motion according to mathematical laws to explain natural phenomena.[11] Since the existence of motion could not be derived from the merely geometrical qualities of matter, it was a correlate of early mechanist philosophy of nature that motion was brought into the universe by an initial divine act. But it is by means of the power of inertia that the initial impetus given to the universe could be preserved. Descartes spoke of the power (*vis*) of resistance inherent in bodies, exemplified by the fact that in the material universe "everything tends, so far as it can, to persist in the same state".[12] In effect, the principle of activity once sought in mysterious forms was now found distributed throughout the material universe by means of the power of inertia inherent in impenetrable bodies.

The new philosophers were quick to extend this result to the theory of mind. As Dominik Perler explains, with the transition from the teleological mode of explanation to philosophical

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[9] Nadler explains that Aristotle laid excessive stress on the formal cause that individuates a definite thing, while he "fails to state … just how a form *causes* or brings about what it does" (1998, 515).

[10] Of course, it was not until Charles Darwin that teleological explanations could reasonably be cast out of our understanding of biology. Indeed, Descartes necessarily failed to accomplish, but had great belief in, the project of reducing biological phenomena to the principles of physics. The alternative, of course, was to classify biology as a species of natural theology, i.e. to take it as the speculative science of natural purposes divinely enjoined to organic creatures.

[11] Final and formal causes yield explanations in terms of natural aims (finality) and the kind of thing something (formally) is, respectively. Efficient causation is understood in the way of local interaction, where one body interacts with another by means of impact. In general, it points to the 'how' of an event (rather than the the 'why' of the event (final cause); the 'what' of the passive medium (material cause), or the 'what' of the active factor (formal cause)). Nadler (1998) identifies the change in the conception of cause and the kinds of causes that are actually instructive with the shift in explanatory modes between Scholasticism and modern philosophy; 1998, 514.

[12] PP 2.43; CSM 1, 243-244.

mechanism, the functioning of the soul could no longer be described in terms of the 'absorption of forms' (part and parcel of the Scholastic theory of perception) and the 'actualization of faculties' (the Scholastic theory of mind in general).[13] Psychological phenomena were now to be explained in terms of the cooperation of the 'active', efficient cause originating from the object, together with the 'passive', material cause resisting in the sensory apparatus.[14] In this context, 'active' and 'passive' are not distributed according to a metaphysical distinction between matter and soul, but only according to perspective.[15] In the process of perception, for example, the body is passive *relative to* the activity to which it is submitted, but for perception to arise, the body enacts its own kind of activity in the form of resistance. Even if perception is a much more complex process than a simple, isolated collision of inorganic bodies, proportional to the complexity of the body-machine, it must nonetheless be approached in mechanical terms.

But what about this metaphysical activity, that is, what about free will?[16] As said, the approach to psychology as a matter of hierarchically organized faculties allows us to delineate and justify the dominion of reason over the animal and organic needs that organize and

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[13] Perler 2018, 8. Famous is Locke's exasperation in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (II.xxi.20), that faculties sprung up everywhere an explanation was warranted, thus saying that "… it being asked, what it was that digested the meat in our stomachs? It was a ready, and very satisfactory answer, to say, that it was the *digestive faculty*. What was it that made anything come out of the body? The *expulsive faculty*" (Locke 2004, 228). and many more such examples. In the words of Susan James, these concepts offer only a 'glorified redescription' instead of explaining the phenomenon at issue; James 1997, 69.

[14] Cf. James 1997, 74. Here, James has in mind specifically Hobbes' natural philosophy, presented in *The Elements of Philosophy*. Note, however, that Descartes affirmed the existence of purely spiritual passions that could not be explained by means of a reference to affection by external objects (nor even by motions of the internal organs).

[15] Descartes opens his *Passions* with this simplified, perspectival approach to activity and passivity when it comes to physics (PS, 1.1; CSM 1, 328). Similarly, Hobbes in the *Elements of Philosophy: On Body*, says that "*Action* and *reaction* proceed in the same line, but from opposite terms. For seeing reaction is nothing but endeavour in the patient to restore itself to that situation from which it was forced by the agent; the endeavour or motion both of the agent and patient or reagent will be propagated between the same terms; yet so, as that in action the term, *from which*, is in reaction the term *to which*" (EP 3.22; M1, 348).

[16] It is this kind of activity about which Hobbes will say that it is an 'absurd notion' (see II.1, below).

constrain our being insofar as it is not under rational control. If psychology were completely reduced to physiology, at least on the crude conceptual frame that mechanical philosophy provides for it, reason could no longer serve as an organizational principle. Classical ethics importantly relies on this presupposition of rational psychology; without it, it becomes unclear how behaviour can be attuned to the requirements of the abstract considerations of moral reasoning. Without establishing the sovereignty of the soul over the body, human existence is delivered to the anarchy of the passions. In fact, Thomas Hobbes *affirms* the natural anarchy of the passions, restricting the question of sovereignty to political reason (Chapter 2). Spinoza will go even further, denying even that political reason can supply the conditions for rational control (Chapter 4). It is a point of contestation whether Spinoza can still appeal to the sovereignty of reason as he does (Chapter 3).

In order to defend the sovereignty of reason, Descartes took a completely different route than the ancient and medieval philosophers. He proposed an approach to the soul that cuts through the differentiations made between faculties. To absolve the soul from serving in explanations of physical nature, Descartes defined matter and soul on completely separate grounds and believed himself to have found *a priori* reasons for doing so.[17] By means of his fundamental doubt experiment, Descartes was able to define the soul as *cogito* (the thinking I), and physical nature as the reality corresponding to the mental representation of extension, from which he believed the laws of motion could also be derived. By means of the bifurcation of nature thus established, all unconscious, non-deliberate processes can be legitimately relegated to physiology. Curtailing 'soul talk' in this way, Descartes set the standard for all who followed: the part played by the soul is ever decreased in favour of the body. The Aristotelean conception

[17] M, 6, 78; CSM2, 54: "… on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it."

attributed souls throughout organic nature, vegetative and sensitive souls being on a scale with the rational soul. While Descartes allocated the soul a special place in his theorizing by affirming that it encompasses all conscious states – thus placing sensory perceptions, passions and volitions on a single heap – most of these states presuppose a complex structure of physical states. In fact, many traditional faculties of the soul, such as giving heat and motion to the body, could now be attributed to the bodily mechanism itself.[18]

Nonetheless, those states that do presuppose such a 'complex structure of physical states' presuppose the unity of body and mind, and form a great challenge to Descartes' ontology. It is just this challenge that the philosopher hoped to resolve or at least bring productively face in the *Passions*. In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes had already signalled the strange relation of the passions to his ontology, and more in particular to his epistemology. For Descartes had found that the standards of truth are the clarity and distinctness of ideas, but the representations accorded by the passions could never live up to these standards – despite their urgent demand for the attention of the soul. Instead of speaking of the natural light of reason, Descartes therefore changes registers and speaks of 'what nature teaches'. Thus we read:

> Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.[19]

But what is the epistemic status of this teaching of nature? And what is the ontological status of the unity of mind and body, which are 'as it were' intermingled?

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[18] Thus in the *Treatise on Man*, we find all functions traditionally ascribed to (vegetative or sensitive) souls reduced to functions of the body; T, 202; CSM1, 108. See also M, 6, 78-79; CSM2, 54-55 for the distinction of faculties along the lines of the bifurcation of nature.

[19] M, 6, 81; CSM2, 56.

I.2 Spiritual unity?

In the *Passions*, Descartes all but destroys the idea that souls or immaterial forms alone account for all the activity in the world, reigning supreme over inert matter. Exemplary is, as mentioned, Descartes' denial that the soul gives motion to the body.[20] Even if thought has to be ascribed to the soul alone and not at all to the body, most of these thoughts are passions and merely represent physical states and inclinations or appetites that pertain to the body. The latter impressively springs into action, responding 'as nature ordained it' to the impressions it receives from the world around it, handling its pressure sometimes clumsily but efficiently most of the time. Only the volitions, or the *acts* of the will – opposed to its *passions* – have no precedent in the body-mechanism.[21] The volitions are therefore distinguished from "the principal effect of all the human passions" which is to "*move* and *dispose* the soul to want the things for which [these passions] prepare the body".[22] Nonetheless, the distinction between appetites and volitions is one only qua origin; they do not stand opposed within the soul as if there were different natures in man (as in Aristotle).[23] Appetites do make a claim on the soul by being represented there, but do not as such have the character of judgments. Judgments are the exclusive products of the soul by means of which it functions as an ordering principle, rearranging representations in clear order, and thus forming the rational directive for action.

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[20] PS, I.4-5; CSM1, 329. Indeed, this renders Descartes' saying in e.g. PS I.41; CSM1, 343, that the activity of the soul "consists entirely in the fact that simply by willing something it brings it about that the little gland to which it is closely joined moves in the manner required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition" inscrutable. Despite language pointing in that direction (e.g. the title of I.34 'How the soul and the body act on each other'; CSM1, 341), we should not take Descartes to supply a solution to the metaphysical problem of body-soul interaction in the *Passions*, other than the assurances that this interaction is an 'institution of nature'.

[21] PS, I.17; CSM, 335.

[22] PS, I.40; CSM1, 343, emphasis DZ. Similarly, in II.52 Descartes says: "the use of all the passions consists in this alone: they *dispose the soul to will the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition*, just as the same agitation of spirits that usually causes them disposes the body to the movements conducive to the execution of those things" (emphasis DZ).

[23] PS, I.47; CSM1, 345-347.

What remains, then, of the power of the soul, i.e. of its sovereignty over the body, is a power to assent or dissent in the face of the judgments that passions provoke (e.g. the fear of a snake may provoke the judgment that the snake is dangerous or evil, but reason can 'override' it). The passionate disposition together with wilful assent or dissent forms the judgment proper.

In its function of arranging representations in clear order, the soul is mostly engaged with the regulation of desire, for the "passions cannot lead us to perform any action except by means of the desire they produce".[24] Desire provokes a judgment of what is suitable to us and induces us to action, serving our wellbeing. Naturally, we can err in this regard, representing as beneficent what is harmful and vice versa. As the ambiguous unity that we are during our earthly existence, we rely on desire to form the directives of activity; we can at most correct the representations involved to accord with ideas that we had previously verified. That is, by experience we learn about the causes of our passions, and learn to recognize what associations have been carved into our bodies and minds because they were perceived to go together with other impressions. Recognizing these causes and associations, we can temper the passions and correct the judgments they imply by avoiding their causes, or by habituating ourselves to experience these passions in association with different impressions than were formerly felt to coincide with them.[25] We must, according to article II.138, "distinguish good from evil" and "know their true value, so as not to take the one for the other or rush into anything immoderately".[26] The standards of good and evil implied here simply converge under what we

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[24] PS, II.144; CSM1, 379. Desire incites the soul to will for the future what is represented as suitable to it, and what is represented as suitable to it depends on whether something induces love or hatred in us. Love fills us with joy once we use or possess its object, with sadness if we cannot possess it or if it is destroyed. Hatred fills us with joy once we destroy or dispose the hated object, with sadness if it continues to press upon us. See esp. II.86; CSM1, 358-359 & II.91-93; CSM1, 360-361.

[25] Descartes describes this principle of habituation in I.50, where he exemplifies this 'associative training' in terms of conditioning dogs to run toward the prey at the point of a gun after the shot is fired, instead of away from it (out of fear induced by the sound of the shot).

[26] CSM1, 377.

call the *health* of the body. And the health of the body is established by the question whether or not it is conducive to the formation of *reliable judgments*.[27] Insofar as the soul resides over the validity of judgments, it provides the conditions for deciding whether the body is healthy or not by means of checking the reliability of input. Moreover, insofar as the body is either conducive or opposed to the requisite calm for reliable judgments, moderation is its supreme virtue. In the best case, one is able to return the body to a healthy equilibrium by associative therapy or to trace aberrant representations to the law of its digression from the normal course of events. The colour-blind person may, for example, interpret the differentiation in responses of others to what appear to be undifferentiated impressions (each having the same colour), and train oneself accordingly to take the ambiguity (that it might be one of two colours, rather than always the same) into account. In the worst case, however, when no such law or behavioural 'trick' can be established, one can nonetheless suspend judgment. This is the optimism that underlies Descartes' belief in the sovereignty of the soul: if one is overcome by the passions, one can always turn inward.

What is the relevance of this affirmation? As the body can naturally err, because its representations are underdetermined (e.g. anxiety can have many causes, and it is sometimes simply impossible to trace them),[28] the sovereignty of the soul is at risk: how can the soul be the sole guarantor of truth in this world if there are representations, occurrences, realities, that escape its grasp – as in the case of the emotions? Perhaps these emotions themselves deserve, at least sometimes, priority over the strict standards of the soul; perhaps tranquillity is not to be

[27] I rely on Oksenberg-Rorty's imaginative summary of the gist of Descartes' argument: "Find a healthy body type and you'll find a reliable perceiver" (2006, 377).

[28] Descartes names underdetermination as the most pertinent cause of error in the *Meditations*: "… the mind is not immediately affected by all parts of the body, but only by the brain, or perhaps just by one small part of the brain, namely the part which is said to contain the 'common' sense. Every time this part of the brain in a given state, it presents the same signals to the mind, even though the other parts of the body may be in a different condition at the time" M, 6, 86ff; CSM2; 59-60.

esteemed over everything else. As mentioned before, Hobbes and Spinoza will – to an extent – affirm this priority of the passions, and except the threat of the anarchy of the passions (though Spinoza remains, at least in his posturing, a rationalist, and Hobbes curbs the anarchy of the passions by political means). Descartes, for his part, rejects the consequence and therefore idealizes the norms of rational control. He therefore pushes the Stoic maxim of distinguishing between desired goals that depend on us and those that do not.[29] This distinction is a principle of reason, which distinguishes between Fate and Fortune on the condition that all events depend on preceding causes, and are therefore determined from all eternity by divine fate. Fortune, on the other hand, is a mere figment of the imagination, which counts on luck to bring forth desired states of affairs. It is curbed by frequently "reflect[ing] upon the fact that nothing can possibly happen other than as Providence has determined from all eternity".[30] True virtue is doing whatever is (1) in line with good judgment, i.e. tempering the passions, and (2) factually lies within our reach.[31] The coincident passion of esteeming oneself for satisfying the desire for this virtue, i.e. for rational control, Descartes calls *generosity*. While the first of these conditions is determined by the principle of habituation, the latter is determined by the principle of reason.

However, there is a problem, while the latter principle formally makes the distinction between what is up to us and what is not (warning against counting on one's good luck), it does not provide any concrete signs. For this reason, "frequently to reflect" on divine Providence, or to achieve Stoic mastery is not up to oneself as much as it is a matter of education and practice. This is why Frans Svensson (2018) makes a distinction between 'moral' and 'perfect' virtue in Descartes. The former fulfils only the first condition mentioned above, i.e. to act in line with good judgment, and is the only thing truly up to us. For the same reason, to fulfil this condition

[29] PS, II.144; CSM1, 379 & II.148; CSM1, 381-382. For the historical origins of the concept of generosity, see Normore (2018).

[30] PS, II.145; CSM1, 379-380.

[31] PS, III.153; CSM1, 384 & III.161; CSM, 387-388.

is the only truly 'moral' aspect of our behaviour, since (1) it accords with the classical principle that makes metaphysical libertarianism (the existence of a free will) a necessary condition of moral responsibility, and (2) it puts a universal demand on human beings, since as rational beings they stand without excuse for fulfilling the requirement of living according to good judgment.[32] Perfect virtue, by contrast, coincides with the 'true' virtue of generosity, adding the further condition of knowing the limits of one's capacity to fulfil one's desires. Since this knowledge is a necessary condition for happiness, moral virtue by itself is insufficient for our bliss.

By means of the stress on the mind-body unity in his later work, Descartes reduces the traditional antithesis between reason and the passions, making them into reciprocal conditions of the good life. However, when forced to accept the natural fallibility of the passions *with respect to* the strict standards of clear and distinct understanding, Descartes sticks with rational sovereignty instead of inquiring after the possibility of another perspective on truth – namely, that provided by Spinoza, who wagers the point of view of affective coexistence.[33] Theological considerations may have played a part here, since it is divine benevolence itself that Descartes had established on the grounds of clear and distinct understanding. It is just such an understanding of divinity that Spinoza will destroy in the wake of his metaphysical experiment.

I.3 Concluding remarks and preview

The question remains whether these two objects of pure reason – the transparent, substantial soul and providential God – are necessary postulates of moral philosophy. It is at this point that Spinoza and Hobbes will intervene. 'Volition' as an act of pure will cannot explain how we can

[32] Svensson mentions only the second of these reasons; 2018, 209-210.

[33] Nonetheless, for a recent argument for the similarity between Descartes and Spinoza's views in moral psychology, even suggesting that most relevant themes in Spinoza have a Cartesian precedent, see Van Ruler (2020).

be active or how we can be the sufficient cause of an event. Instead, we must, according to Spinoza and Hobbes, explain it in terms of power. Simply put, if we *can* do something, it turns out that we have the *power* to do it. If not, then we lack this power and are overcome by external causes that are more powerful than us in some respect. By means of his concept of the 'small beginnings' of motion Hobbes explains the human will on completely mechanical grounds (see Chapter II). Spinoza similarly concludes that mechanically developing Nature reigns supreme, but refuses to decide that Nature is but an extended mass. Rather, extension and thought mutually and parallelly express the single order and majesty of Nature. Both Spinoza and Hobbes supply the intellectual tools that allow us to overcome the difficulties with postulating a reality (the soul) that intervenes in this order from without. Making a general distinction between (active) volitions on the one hand and (passive) passions on the other, Descartes retained some of the Scholastic differentiation of faculties that he sought to cut down on.[34] Accordingly, while having opened the door to a complete mechanization of our worldview, Descartes also attempted to save the appearances of spiritual values and the independence of self-consciousness, acting only on its own jurisdiction, freely choosing to assent or dissent in the face of materially produced representations of the world.[35] In response, radicals like Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza rejected this attempt as artificial and philosophically conservative.

It seems that Spinoza and Descartes reconvene over the issue of Providence. They each resent religious fearmongering that make of natural events occasions for a question regarding God's final ends in creation. Traditionally, these ends are attuned to God's justice, where human sin is recompensed by divine punishment. Within that frame of thought tragic events demand

[34] See especially PS, I.17.

[35] Cf. James 1997, 124-125. Susan James, who distinguishes Hobbes and Spinoza on the one hand from Descartes and Malebranche on the other to the extent that the latter duo made a distinction between active volitions and passive perceptions central to their theories of the passions. She calls Descartes' stance in this regard a 'cautious orthodoxy'.

the question of what sinful behaviour has been the occasion for the event to occur. There is, nonetheless, a large difference between Descartes and Spinoza's respective accounts of the mechanics of Providence. While the former only pushes back the question of final ends appealing to human finitude,[36] the latter positively denies that God pursues such final ends. Rather, God's majesty coincides with the limitlessness of his power. From this all things flow and receive their mark; their striving is the true expression of divine power.[37] Between divine, unlimited power and the finite power of things there is no difference of kind but only of magnitude. In the next chapter, I argue that Thomas Hobbes appeals to the Leviathan – his name for the sovereign State – in a way analogous to Descartes' appeal to the transcendent God, the reality of which he used to safeguard the possibility of final ends and the real separation of body and soul. The power of 'the mortal God' Leviathan infinitely surpasses any power that human beings can harness in their natural conditions. The latter power is delimited by their 'natural right' to any means necessary for survival, but this 'right' never comes to fruition because any sign of aggression or acquisition provokes distrust or violence from others. Therefore, *natural* right and *natural* power amount to nothing – they merely form the occasion for speaking about *civil* right and *sovereign* power. As the natural power of human beings is negligible, so their natural right to self-preservation can, paradoxically, never be recognized in the state of nature.

[36] PP, 1.28; CSM1, 202-203, esp: "…we should not be so arrogant as to suppose that we can share in God's plans."

[37] The notion of 'mark' here is Leibnizian. G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) used it to resolve a difficult problem within the Cartesian framework: the problem of how bodies can be active if they are defined by mere extendedness. For inertia and collision are external principles that do not explain the impetus in bodies to exercise a *force*. Both to explain the activity present in the material universe and body-mind interaction, Cartesians appealed to the creation and sustenance of the universe by God's divine will. Leibniz instead argued that activity could be understood by a principle in things themselves that is a mark of divine creation. The connection between Leibniz and Spinoza on this account is also made in Garber 1998, 594, conjectured on the basis of Spinoza's concept of conatus and his rejection of the Cartesian account of body as extended substance. Finally, however, Spinoza rejects – together with the notion of divine creation – the substantiality of individuals. 'Mark' should therefore not be read as a threshold between God's creation and individual substantiality, but as the continued expression of divine effluence in the striving of finite modes. For an explanation of the terms used here, see Chapter III, below.

Consequentially (though the kind of consequence is unclear), the claim to unlimited natural right is forsaken in the face of recognizing the transcendence of sovereign power.

Returning to Descartes, what we find with him is a kingdom divided. By his far-reaching advances into discovering the power of the body to preserve itself (even if mediated by *disposing* the soul to certain volitions), the appeal to souls to account for activity is greatly limited. However, by preserving the power to judge and to will for the soul in order to exercise its sovereignty over the body, and by leaving open the question concerning God's governance of the material universe, Descartes' final outlook is in an uncomfortable split. Meanwhile, the monster of moral concern lurks menacingly in the abyss dividing the kingdoms of Nature and Reason.

II Thomas Hobbes: A Bleak Vision of Man

Introduction

Thomas Hobbes breaks with the traditional distinction between free volitions and passive appetites. Moreover, according to Hobbes, reasoning is a process internal to affective life and can be understood within the framework of mechanism. Moral reasoning then also relates to evaluations internal to affective dispositions rather than conclusions reached on the basis of pure reason. This raises questions concerning moral education and society-formation. If all value-judgments are relegated to subjective experience rather than to an unchanging, intelligible realm, then how can individuals come to agreements about right conduct and a just ordering of society? If values are really only personal interests, then on which grounds can society be raised? To both Hobbes and Spinoza, the psychology of human beings is naturally conducive to conflict. However, whereas Spinoza nonetheless insists on the necessity of forging social bonds, Hobbes concludes that only an absolute sovereign power can effectively curb conflicts. The latter understands the sovereign as an 'unnatural' or 'artificial' being, which makes sure that human beings forcefully achieve transcendence over immediate concerns by means of a monopoly on violence and hence exerting terror on its subjects. By appealing to the hypothesis of an abstract right, Hobbes sidesteps the problems of forging social bonds that arise within his naturalistic anthropology. The institution of Law, which depends on the possibility of completely alienating or transferring one's natural right, becomes unhinged from the natural coexistence of human beings. Therefore, Hobbes puts a brake on the naturalization of *all* relations that is Spinoza's project.

II.1 Human Nature, or the Anarchy of the Passions

In this section, I address Hobbes' psychology on the basis of his description of "the Naturall Condition of Mankind",[38] or what we have come to know as the 'state of nature'. In this description, Hobbes elaborates an aetiology of value by means of which he effectively reverses the traditional principle of moral psychology. Value lies at the other end of desire, but desire is a complex phenomenon: it must be constantly rekindled and is less involved with ends (satisfaction) than with means (power). Since power is served by social recognition, desire is not an egoistic principle pure and simple. Nonetheless, social bonds are never so strong as to liberate the individuals involved from the misery of their natural conditions, which lead inevitably to conflict.

When Thomas Hobbes thought about life without government, he imagined it to take place in a world without values.[39] Only survival counts in a world filled with hungering beings, fighting over the scarce goods that nature provides. Whether anything exceeds personal interest qua value could only be agreed upon after those anxious brutes, our uncultured mirror images, had forsaken their unlimited claim to violent means for survival, in order to establish strong central forms of government. Only under the jurisdiction of a sovereign power with an exclusive right to the sword could anything of consequence be undertaken.[40] Only then, we might say, can something like an 'objective' world come into being, wrought from the constant upheaval

[38] L, I.13; Brookes, 100.

[39] The relevant section is the (in)famous Chapter XIII of the *Leviathan*, which concerns the state of nature.

[40] Cf. L, I.13; Brookes, 103: "In such condition [the natural condition, without government], there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."

of subjective needs and the mutual suspicion of whatever means the other might acquire.[41] Any project undertaken for the future, conducted to liberate us from our condemnation to a life in the moment, such as the beginnings of agriculture, provokes in others the need to steal or destroy in order to prevent the disbalancing of power and the emergence of yet another threat in an already dangerous world.

This nightmarish conception of pre- (or post-)societal existence does more than to justify central power (II.2). It also gives us an insight into a typically modern philosophical anthropology and theory of values. According to Hobbes, there is no independent realm of values to be realized universally, laying claim on the regard of rational beings irrespective of living conditions and character. Rather, values are only ever the by-product of the forces that dominate natural life and indirectly inform the social relations on which civil society depends. These forces are the passions, and in particular the desire for safety, comfort, and glory. In effect, desire precedes value. Value is attributed in the state of nature to whatever contributes to our personal survival (and perhaps that of our tribe, though even among its members, suspicion is constantly present). Yet, even the lofty values that come to the fore in civil life depend on a mirky contract with our untrustworthy peers, only kept in place due to a double fear: that of punishment on the one hand, and the threat of anarchy or tribalism on the other. Thus far, I have only depicted what Hobbes understood by the state of nature. Conjecturing as to the reason for Hobbes' pessimism regarding the capacity of humans to live together peacefully without the need for an absolute ruler, Gabriella Slomp interestingly compares Hobbes' intentions with those of Descartes: "in all his descriptions of human nature (unlike Descartes in the *Passions of the Soul*), Hobbes's interest in people is never from the standpoint of the physiologist or the psychologist, but rather from the perspective of the true political

[41] The language here is Kantian and hence anachronistic. Nonetheless, I think it expresses well certain similarities between Hobbes and (the post-Kantian) Hegel as the main text should make evident.

thinker".[42] Hobbes was, Slomp continues, interested in human psychology only to the extent that it was of political consequence. Because passions conducive to strong social bonds are apparently insufficient to create order and prevent conflict from arising, they are of little to no relevance for Hobbes. As we will see, Hobbes finally appeals not to any psychological principles in particular to justify State power (a point made by Georg Geismann in his comparison of Hobbes and Spinoza);[43] the psychology developed over the first chapters of *Leviathan* set the stage for the warlike nature of the human being's natural conditions, and give an indication of the relation between passions and reason. But finally it is the latter – i.e. reason by means of *a priori* principles – on which Hobbes bases the absolute sovereignty of the State, thus anchoring rationality and morality in a transcendent law-giver.

II.1a Desire and will

Now, we must elaborate the place of this theme in the wider context of Hobbes' project in *Leviathan* and elsewhere, differentiating between its appeal to moral psychology on the one hand (this section) and to natural law on the other (II.2). In *Leviathan* I.6, Hobbes gives a thoroughly mechanistic account of the passions, which he calls the "Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions". The voluntary motions of animals (and the human being is among them), may be what 'is first fancied in our minds', but "Fancy is but the Reliques of the same Motion, remaining after Sense"[44], which can be sufficiently described in mechanistic terms. That is, we need not postulate an immaterial substance that works according to its own laws in order to understand how thought works. The language of 'active volitions' depending wholly on the soul, arguably a Scholastic remnant in Descartes' writing, is completely dissolved. Sense

[42] Slomp 2000, 33.

[43] Cf. Geismann 1991.

[44] L, I.6; Brookes, 41.

immediately fires up the cogs of the imagination, which represents the causes of the sensations and the objects associated therewith, and the 'intention' that sensation stirs up in us, seeking the object in desire or retracting from it in aversion. 'Intention' here should not be taken as an inconsequential 'possible action' that one represents to oneself. Rather, it is a force, pushing its subject towards (in desire) or away from (in aversion) the object-cause.[45] Indeed, Hobbes scolds 'the Schooles' for denying the motion present in willing. It was common to refer to the will as a 'metaphorical motion', somehow transformed into the real motion of the limbs. This, to Hobbes, is an absurd notion, revealing only the failure to explain how faculties like appetite, will, and motion interact.[46] Mechanism provides just the explanatory framework to do so, nor should it keep still before the authority of Scholastic categories such as 'spiritual substance', 'metaphorical motion' and 'free will'.

The lengths to which Hobbes goes to replace the old philosophy are evident in his conception of the will. We have already seen that voluntary action is nothing other than 'the small beginnings of motion', passing through the imagination upon being struck by passion. However, this is not to say that voluntary action is not measured by deliberation. This deliberation, however, should not be viewed as a free-ranging exercise of the immaterial soul. Rather, it is simply the succession of appetites, of which the good and bad consequences occur to the mind, until a course of action is either deemed impossible or an appetite proves sovereign

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[45] It is the relation to action and the direction (relative to the object) that I mean to express here with the word 'intention', but it should not (necessarily) be understood as involving representation. Hobbes himself does not use the word; he merely speaks of the 'whither, which way, and what' (L, I.6; Brookes, 42) that form the cognitive content of a volition. Even if Hobbes speaks of a 'thought' preceding voluntary motions, this word should not be read with the burden of Cartesian dualism. But again, Descartes himself allowed the existence of 'passive' thoughts. Furthermore, though my 'intention' and Hobbes' 'whither, which way, and way' involves finalistic language, i.e. explanations involving goals, it can be reduced completely to mechanical language, i.e. explanations involving efficient causes only: what appears as goal only succeeds a prior affect by which a desire (or aversion) is provoked. See also Foisneau 2014, 484; Aikrasinen 2019.

[46] L, I.6; Brookes, 42.

due to its superior appeal over others. The most striking consequence that Hobbes draws, however, is his affirmation that the will is nothing but the final appetite in this deliberation. Thus, he reduces the distinction between desire and volition to nothing.[47]

II.1b Desire precedes value

The psychological views summarized above influence Hobbes' theory of value. The only meaningful way in which we call anything 'good', is by reference to one's desire or love.[48] Now, because desire depends, according to Hobbes, on the constitution of any particular human body, and since this constitution constantly changes, the desire constantly changes too – and with it the valued object or 'good'. Therefore, values are subjective. But in this argument, Hobbes projects forward to the well-known distinction between man's natural conditions and the life in the civil state or Commonwealth that is developed later on:

> For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-wealth;) or, (in a Common-wealth,) from the Person that representeth it; or from an Arbitrator or Judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the Rule thereof.[49]

In principle, values are desire-based and therefore subjective; nothing in the objects themselves proves their value. But precisely to overcome the disagreement about what is valuable that necessarily follows when human beings come together, a representative may be elected that acts as judge, proclaiming a rule that thenceforth serves as foundation for what is objectively

[47] L, I.6; Brookes, 49-50. Volition was also called 'rational appetite' in the Scholastic verbiage. To Hobbes, this was yet another absurdity, unless understood on his own terms.

[48] Desire and love are only distinct on account of whether the object is present (love) or absent (desire).

[49] L, I.6; Brookes, 43.

valuable. Value is then no longer (only) desire-based, but (also) contract-bound and therefore objective.

Two problems, one inherited from Descartes, one new, arise: (1) What is the relation between desire and value? (2) What, if any, are the implications of the transition from natural to cultural conditions? The first problem derives from Descartes, who could still answer it (semi-paradoxically, perhaps) traditionally, though he introduces a framework that allows his followers to formulate new answers: all good and evil in this life is to be found in the realm of the passions,[50] yet the rational soul contains everything it needs in itself.[51] The second is a new problem, at least in the way that Hobbes frames it. Rule is not based on the necessity of submitting unruly individuals to law and order, but on the consent of the ruled on the basis of their own needs, translated to a natural obligation to preserve oneself and make peace with others whenever one can without risking one's life. It is this translation that we ought to investigate further if we are to understand the transition from natural to cultural conditions because in the figure of 'natural obligation', Hobbes finds the principle of political rationality and sovereignty.

The transition reveals just how great the distance is between Hobbes' notion of moral reasoning[52] and that of traditional moralists. In Chapter XI we find Hobbes' own perspective on this distance. To understand what Hobbes is saying here, we ought to remember that for him, there is no difference between desire (or, generally speaking, appetite) and will, and that the good is not some ideal object, abstracted from desires, but that which each man learns is either the object of his desire or a means to satisfy it. If individuals have radically different desires, as

[50] This we read in the final article of the *Passions*, III.212.

[51] Cf. PS, II.148.

[52] Hobbes himself speaks in terms of his own 'moral philosophy', while I am prone to call Hobbes an *amoral political* theorist: the natural obligations or laws that he postulates are nothing but the ideal conditions of procuring civil order, not of justice. See II.2, below.

Hobbes says, then we can hardly imagine how there can be such things as common ideals and agreed-upon norms to achieve them. Therefore, Hobbes' psychology creates the problem of how to forge social relations, or, equivalently, the problem of "living in Peace, and Unity":

> To which end [i.e. living together in Peace and Unity] we are to consider, that the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose Desires are at an end, than he, whose Senses and Imaginations are at a stand. Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, That the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time, but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire.[53]

As said, a common ideal of human endeavour (the *summum bonum*) cannot be presumed to exist. Nor can 'happiness', as the overcoming of desire, be the principle of moral reasoning and the aim of rational living: there is no end to desire except in death.[54] Therefore, desire aims not only at satisfaction but also at its own subsistence or constant rekindling. If happiness ('Felicity') is the aim of moral philosophy, it is only so if properly understood, namely, as the continued fluctuation between satisfaction and the resurgence of desire.[55] Again, desire is not at odds with reason. In fact, desire employs imagination and judgment and is necessary for the development of these. The indifferent man cannot have much of either imagination or judgment,[56] according to Hobbes: "For the Thoughts, are to the Desires, as Scouts, and Spies

[53] L, I.11; Brookes, 79-80.

[54] Cf. L, I.8; Brookes, 60. In traditional moral philosophy, *ataraxia* was held by many to be the supreme end of the good life. Bringing desire to an end, the sage would finally be the master of his fate.

[55] For a more detailed description of the transformation of the theory of happiness, in relation to Aristotle's traditional account, see Foisneau 2014, esp. 486-488.

[56] Respectively, imagination and judgment are the capacity to call up thoughts (measured by swiftness of association), and the capacity to discern objects of thoughts (measured by the attention for detail). Each work in

to range abroad, and find the way to the things Desired: All Stedinesse of the minds motion, and all quicknesse of the same, proceeding from thence."[57] To be rational is just to be able to achieve the ends set for oneself by the passions, and, ultimately, this means to be able to pursue happiness in the aforementioned sense. Rationality is a matter of supplying means to ends set by desire, instead of a matter of considering whether ends are inherently valuable (there being no such ends). If rationality is the acquisition of means for the gratification and rekindling of desire, then what determines one's wit, as Hobbes calls it, is the desire for power. For power is precisely the means that one has in order to obtain some good.[58] The desire for power is, we might say, a second-order desire: it is the desire for the means to gratify other (first-order) desires, such as hunger. The subordination of rationality to the desire for power is the epitome of Hobbes' anti-traditional moral psychology.[59]

II.1c The will to power

With the concept of power, we also find the missing link in the connection between desire and value. If the desiring consciousness is not only aimed at some superficial object, but is also self-corrective in the double sense that it must, first, resurge after gratification and, second, include a sensitivity for the effectivity of means, then value does not coincide with the object or end of the desire itself. Instead, value is also attributed to the *means* for gratifying and rekindling

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tandem to supply the means adequate to the goal set by the passions. To be able to do so well is the benchmark of rationality. L, I.8; Brookes, 56-57.

[57] Cf. L, I.8; Brookes, 60.

[58] L, I.10; Brookes, 70. Incidentally, the bringing into focus of power as the object of desire also explains how utility came to replace virtue as the central moral concept. Cf. Foisneau 2014, 486.

[59] This 'anti-traditional moral psychology' finds its successors not only in Spinoza, but also in Friedrich Nietzsche and, later on, Sigmund Freud, who further deconstruct the bases of psychological and moral confabulations, such as the self-ascription of free will and the conceptual pair of good and evil (as opposed to merely 'good' and 'bad').

desire.[60] In this complex web of relations between desire and value, the concept of power makes it possible to broaden the axiological horizon from end towards means. To focus on power rather than piety or erudition as supreme virtue allows Hobbes to integrate his psychological with his ethical-political theorizing. Power is a limit-concept that blurs the lines between nature and civil society, between psychology and legal theory. Physical strength, knowledge, and having a good reputation are all powers, but differ in degree. Characteristically, Hobbes degrades the worth traditionally ascribed to knowledge per se; hardly anyone is willing to acknowledge the wisdom of another, and science is only valued by those who already understand it to a certain degree.[61] Gaining social recognition in order to invoke the consent of others, who are willing to lend their individual powers to a shared cause, is the greatest power of all.[62] If desire is essentially desire of power because desire is a self-corrective mechanism that seeks the best means for its gratification and rekindling, and power is best served by social recognition, then recognition is the utmost aim of desire. Thus we find the connection between desire and socially recognized values through the concept of power, transcending the initial perspective of mere egoism.[63]

The characterization of desire as deeply social is at odds with our initial exploration of the state of nature. There, it was held that egoism provides the need for strong central government. How, if at all possible, are these perspectives to be harmonized? Though desire may be best served, in the end, by social recognition, it cannot become detached from basic,

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[60] In Chapter XI Hobbes affirms that "a generall inclination of all mankind", is "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death", making the point that one "cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more" (Brookes, 80). Thus, again, since desire requires constant rekindling and is exponential (making the gratification of one desire the instance of another), one cannot settle for what is sufficient.

[61] L, I.10; Brookes, 71.

[62] Cf. L, I.10; Brookes, 70.

[63] The social grounds for true glory (the joy of power-increase) led Gabriella Slomp to conclude that 'the Hobbesian glory-seeker without others' "is, in a deep sense, dead" (2000, 111).

physiological needs. Due to the finitude of natural means to answer these needs, or, in other words, due to scarcity, human beings come into conflict. Moreover, in order to prevent disadvantageous power-imbalances to arise, one must anticipate and seek to subordinate others oneself. Lastly, in order to retain a good standing with others and prevent mutiny from arising within a group out of contempt for its leader (the one who appears most powerful), one must continually seek to gain signs of merit. From this analysis of the social relations in natural conditions can be distilled three occasions for conflict, namely: (1) *competition* over scarce goods, (2) mistrust, or what Hobbes calls *diffidence*, both of peers and rivals who threaten dominance, and (3) the desire for *glory* (also called ambition), which is the joy that accompanies an increase of one's power, which one requires so as to gain and retain the favour of others.[64] No matter if desire is social – it is insufficient to procure civilization by itself.[65]

II.2 The Great Cover-Up: Equality before the Law

From what has been gathered, it may seem as if Hobbes is drawing the same conclusion, namely that there *is* a social impulse to desire but that it is insufficient by itself to found civilization. However, it seems that Hobbes has all but forgotten that desire *has* a social impulse, and that power has its strongest foundation in recognition. For, at this point, Hobbes seems to over-

[64] Cf. L, I.6; Brookes, 47. It is important to stress the *social* significance of the desire for glory. In the preceding paragraphs, I have already shown that the desire of power is rooted, for an important part, in recognition by others. Slomp, too, emphasizes the stress that Hobbes lays on the social significance of glory throughout the latter's oeuvre; Slomp 2000, 34. Moreover, Slomp gives a (speculative) solution to an apparent paradox between the tripartite causation of conflict mentioned above (from scarcity, mistrust, and glory) and the stress on the singular cause of desire for glory in Book I of the second part of *Leviathan*, where Hobbes answers for the dissimilarity between harmoniously living ants and bees and the warlike natural conditions of human beings (Slomp 2000, §5.5, pp. 69-73). While the tripartite causation is a summary of the *proximate* causes of conflict, ambition or desire for glory is the first or *ultimate* cause. Scarcity would best be confronted by cooperation rather than conflict, while mistrust is an effect of the ambition of individuals in a group.

[65] In this paragraph, I have based myself on the initial pages of the central Chapter XIII; cf. Brookes, 100-102.

emphasize the egoism and conflict-conduciveness of the passions in order to justify absolute, sovereign power. Thus he affirms that "Justice, and Injustice are none of the Faculties neither of the Body, nor Mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world, as well as his Senses, and Passions. They are Qualities, that relate to men in Society, not in Solitude."[66] Though Hobbes subsequently affirms that the passions, such as fear of violent death and the desire for comfort are conducive to convening to establish central government, nothing of the naturally social character of desire is acknowledged to be foundational to the political order that emerges afterwards. Passions may be conducive to peace-making, but afterwards, society is wholly based on the consent given to absolute rule, laying claim to no right whatsoever vis-à-vis the sovereign law-giver.

Why is this? In order to challenge the idea that there are natural hierarchies among people, which was typical for the medieval way of thinking, Hobbes needed to suppose that human beings are by nature equal. Though there are, of course, differences among human beings in the state of nature, they are equally liable to and capable of violence – even the weakest may conspire to kill the strongest. To justify the subjection to Law one could no longer point to the existing power relations as if they reflected the natural and divine right to rule. Rather, it had to be grounded on a trade-off that would be in the interest of all. Not an ancient covenant between God and King, or terms of use between lords and vassals, but a *social* contract of each to his fellow became the standard of sovereignty.[67] In this contract, one would alienate all violent intentions on the condition that one's life would be protected. For this, and only this, is the universal, natural condition of right: to use any and all means necessary to protect one's life. If any other rights were conceded, conflict-conducive differences would return, and peace could not be guaranteed. Therefore, the right to which the subject can lay claim is reduced to a

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[66] L, I.13; Brookes, 104-105.

[67] Cf. the overview of the use of 'contracts' in political theory in Simmons 2006, 256-258.

point: the right to resist in the case of an attempt on one's life. No other right of resistance to power is allowed, no limitation to sovereignty conceded.[68] But in this gesture, all differences in wants and needs are effaced and made secondary to the foundation of civil order. Not the variegated desire for glory, but the simple desire for survival is made normative for the constitution of the State. From this point of view, even the anxious will of the vindicated is binding to sovereign power.[69] For whatever the chain of events that lead to civil order, only this matters: that the life of the subjects is preserved.

Thus we see that desire is subordinated to – and, possibly, curbed by[70] – impersonal law, postulating as Hobbes does that freedom is but constricted by the Gospel Law: to do onto others but what one would have done onto oneself.[71] This Law is a result of the *fundamental natural law* to seek peace whenever the situation allows, which for Hobbes means: to establish central government. Formally understood, *natural law* is the prescript of reason, which in its most general form says that one ought to preserve one's life by all means necessary, because the value attached to anyone's life by themselves is implicit in and fundamental to their striving and all that is called 'rational behaviour'. It is therefore also a *natural right* to use any means necessary to survival, only limited by the imposition to follow the fundamental natural law, i.e. to seek peace if the situation allows. The dialectic of using one's unlimited right to means for survival and seeking peace when possible is resolved only when a contract is made or, alternatively, when a steady order has taken shape.[72] This dialectic in legal terms has overtaken the subtle reflections on desire and power that preceded it.

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[68] According to A.J. Simmons, this was a common trait of early modern contract theories; Simmons 2006, 258.

[69] Cf. Simmons 2006, 258.

[70] It is precisely this disjunction between, or even antinomy of, desire and law, which Hobbes seems to make silently that interests us here.

[71] Cf. L, I.14; Brookes, 106-107.

[72] That is, government by institution or by acquisition.

> The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which wee see them live in Common-wealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent (as hath been shewn) to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and observation of [the] Lawes of Nature …[73]

To establish government is to enter into a social contract, by which a mutual transferral of rights is enacted, whereby everyone renounces their natural right to any means necessary to secure survival in the hope of protection by the sovereign. The right of jurisdiction and punishment is transferred to the sovereign, and upon institution, the sovereign therefore gains the absolute right over the means necessary for keeping peace and defending civil order.[74] The subjects have no right vis-à-vis the sovereign, because the sovereign's right is unalienable and indivisible if a return to the state of nature (and hence a collapse into civil war) is to be prevented.[75] Accordingly, the sovereign cannot commit injustice against his subjects – for it is the subjects themselves that transferred the right of jurisdiction and punishment to the sovereign – except insofar as the sovereign is bound by reason or God to observe natural law.[76]

The perspective of natural law, of which God is imagined to be the sovereign law-giver, allows an entry-point for moral philosophy.[77] This, to Hobbes is "nothing else but the Science

[73] L, II.16; Brookes, 136.

[74] For the constitution of a commonwealth, see L, II.16; Brookes, 139-141. The right of jurisdiction and punishment transferred to the sovereign in the civil order are, in the state of nature, aspects of the individual's natural right to be one's own judge in evaluating whether survival is at stake and to use whichever means (including violent ones) necessary for securing it.

[75] L, II.18; Brookes, 148-149.

[76] L, II.21; Brookes, 174.

[77] Cf. L, II.30; Brookes, 275: "The OFFICE of the Soveraign, … consisteth in the end, for which he was trusted with the Soveraign Power, namely the procuration of *the safety of the people*; to which he is obliged by the Law of Nature, and to render an account thereof to God, the Author of that Law, and to none but him."

of what is *Good*, and *Evill*, in the conversation, and Society of mankind", which, having shown that the natural condition is conducive to war, shows that peace is the supreme good, from which the fundamental natural law is derived. From this law, all other laws of nature can in turn be deduced, providing the means requisite for peace in the form of a science – 'the true Doctrine of the Lawes of Nature' or 'the true Morall Philosophie'.[78] It is this perspective that overtakes the earlier psychological reflections entirely.[79] Whether justice ensues depends for Hobbes only on the question of whether the sovereign defends, by any means necessary, the order itself and the lives of his subjects. But in arguing thus, Hobbes effaces important rights and differences among the subjects who, though 'equal before the Law', are given over to the sovereign representation of what is conducive to the wellbeing of the State and the undifferentiated mass called 'the people'.

II.3 Concluding remarks: Hobbes and Spinoza

Perhaps the most striking point of comparison between Hobbes' conception of values and the position we find in Spinoza's *Ethics* is where the latter states that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it".[80] Both Hobbes and

[78] L, I.15; Brookes, 130.

[79] Thus Georg Geismann, who makes a comparison between Spinoza on the one hand, and Hobbes and Rousseau on the other, can conclude that "Hobbes arrives at the juridical necessity of the State through a merely rational analysis of the natural state as a state of natural Right, with the factor of self-preservation in his concept of natural right playing no role in this analysis, and without any special anthropological premises" (Geismann 1991, 47). According to Geismann, the reason for this absence is that "[e]thical principles, which as such serve the regulation of personal purpose conflicts, are completely unsuited to serve also as legal principles for the regulation of action conflicts among different individuals" (Ibid., 49). This is a point of disagreement with Spinoza who thinks that, in principle (though perhaps not in fact), natural harmony is possible without intervention of the State if all were to follow the dictates of reason (see III.4).

[80] E, 3P9; Curley, …

Spinoza finally assimilate the good to a striving after power. Neither believes that desire follows a natural development towards some pre-established goal (teleology). Thus, Hobbes calls life "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death",[81] meaning with power what we would now (after Bentham), approximately, call 'utility'.[82] Spinoza, in turn, defines 'joy' as the passion associated with an increase in one's power, i.e. the passage towards a higher degree of perfection.[83]

The contrary view, that some things are intrinsically good and our knowledge of that good causes us to desire it, presupposes the anthropology that Descartes sought to safeguard from materialistic radicalism. This anthropology, Spinoza says in the Preface to Book III of the *Ethics*,[84] is one that conceives of the human being in nature as 'a dominion within a dominion': not answering to, but rather disturbing the order of nature from outside through the absolute power that man has over his will. But, Spinoza says, nature does not allow any defects to arise; does not allow the gap or outside position required for a will to manifest itself as an absolute ruler over nature – neither God nor man can claim this position. Spinoza echoes Hobbes when he says that we do not desire what is (objectively) good, but that we call 'good' what we (subjectively) desire.[85] This innovation in moral psychology and the related problems in axiology (value theory) was first traced back to the modern destruction of Scholasticism, and then related to Hobbes' and Spinoza's shared reaction to René Descartes' 'conservative'

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[81] L, I.11; Brookes, 80.

[82] Foisneau 2014, 480.

[83] See E, 3P11S.

[84] It is in this same place that Spinoza nuances the idea that Descartes would cling wholly to the premodern conception of human being, allowing that the latter too sought to explain the affects through first causes rather than some weakness of the will. Nonetheless, Spinoza believes, Descartes too defended the absolute power of the will.

[85] But, as we shall see, for Hobbes, the rational appropriation of means to desirable ends is, in some sense, the first and final sense of rationality. For Spinoza, instead, reason has the further and one might say 'nobler' purpose of destroying the passions, at least to the extent that the latter render us passive and enslave us to prejudice.

tendencies. Descartes went very far in his critique of traditional categories, but his theory of mind retains a distinction between the faculties of perception and volition, rendering the will absolutely free (thus treating man, in Spinoza's words, as 'a dominion within a dominion').

But Spinoza will depart from Hobbes on the basis of the latter's distrust in anything but an absolutely sovereign government to limit the affective life of its subjects, and the former's refusal to except such an artificial brake on this life. Hence, Spinoza's insistence on his 'preservation' of natural right even under conditions of civil law. The power of the sovereign can *only* rely on the aggregation of the powers of its subjects; the State is served by the thriving of its subjects. All-in-all, I think Spinoza would agree with Leibniz' evaluation of Hobbes' approach to the foundations of the law:

> Hobbes' fallacy lies in this, that he thinks things that can entail inconvenience should not be borne at all – which is foreign to the nature of human affairs. I would not deny that, when the supreme power is divided, many dissensions can arise; even wars, if everyone holds stubbornly to his own opinion. But experience has shown that men usually hold to some middle road, so as not to commit everything to hazard by their obstinacy. Prominent examples are Poland and the Netherlands.[86]

Seeing that Spinoza was in fact a citizen of the Dutch Republic, his assent to this evaluation of Leibniz should not surprise us.

[86] Leibniz, qtd. from Slomp 2000, 156.

III Baruch Spinoza: The Sovereignty of Nature

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Spinoza challenges both Descartes' construal of the sovereignty of reason around the edges of his theory of the passions, and Hobbes' effort at anchoring ethical objectivity in the mortal god Leviathan by means of the rational principles ('natural laws') upon which civil society is founded. Spinoza thinks of the human being as a true part of Nature, in which there can be no gaps.[87] There can be no absolute dominion of reason over the passions, because the human is wholly integrated in Nature. For the same reason, the transition from the human being's natural conditions to social life is, *contra* Hobbes, continuous rather than disjointed. Both natural and social environments are best understood as complexes of beings that strive for self-perseverance.[88] For human beings this has the additional meaning of forging social bonds and participating so far as imagination or reason allows in civil society. The gist of Spinoza's metaphysical approach is, I argue, a unification of affective, ethical and political life without conceding the change of intellectual registers at the borders between those areas. Such a change of register implies the shifting of a floating signifier (pure reason, sovereignty) that neatly distributes each phenomenon under its proper category only by an appeal to the imagination, not reason. Moral and civil life warrant a constant reimagination of the terms of agreement under which either the affects or subjects of State convene, and a critique of the imaginary symbols such agreements signify.

[87] 3Pref.

[88] I say 'self-perseverance' and not 'self-preservation' for reasons that become obvious, below (III.3). In summary, striving guides a process of the *increase* of power rather than the *maintenance* of a stable level.

III.1 Nature and Truth

Both armed with and burdened by the Cartesian heritage, Spinoza set out to resolve problems that had either been answered insufficiently or completely left open by his predecessors. Central to them is the question of how to understand human excellence within the framework of mechanism. Though human behaviour had already come under the jurisdiction of the new philosophy – as Descartes and others rejected hylomorphism and the Scholastic theory of the rational soul to focus on the potency of physical nature –, no serious attempt had been made to address the repercussions of the new philosophy on our place in the world. Descartes' attempt in the *Passions* was fundamentally conservative, appealing to the apolitical neo-Stoic virtue of generosity. Spinoza reengages this task with his *Ethics* – an apt title for such an undertaking.[89] His answer is, approximately, that we ought to glory in God or Nature's boundless 'effluence'[90]. This metaphysical formulation has rather more practical consequences than it initially suggests. It encompasses the project of radicalizing the already ongoing naturalization of human behaviour (the task that Descartes and Hobbes had taken up) by basing it on a novel understanding of nature itself.

According to Spinoza, Nature (with capital 'N') is neither the totality of beings, each with their own principle of activity as in hylomorphism, nor only the plane of matter in motion, but the sovereign principle of *all* things – bodies and spirits alike. The question of how Nature is this principle, leads us to the metaphysical ruminations of *Ethics* 1. For our purposes, it is sufficient to understand the following:

I. There is one substance: God or Nature.

[89] For an analysis of the origins of this title, and the legitimacy of its use, see Bartuschat (1974).

[90] With the notion of 'effluence' I attempt to capture the sense in which Spinoza conceives of the kind of causation that exists between substance and modes (for definitions of these, see below).

II. Everything beside God or Nature has to be understood, finally, by reference to this substance and is therefore called a *mode* thereof. Nothing 'in' Nature (or God[91]), strictly speaking, has an existence separated from it, and must therefore be understood as Nature 'affected' or 'modified' in a certain way.

III. Since, however, beside God or Nature nothing exists (substantially speaking), this modification can only be produced from God or Nature's own essence.[92]

IV. What expresses the essence of a substance is called an *attribute*; it is the mark by which a substance is known. Though all things (modes) have to be derived from a single substance, they may yet be essentially different, i.e. when a thing cannot be understood as the modification of another kind of thing.

V. Such is the case with ideas and bodies: an idea cannot be derived from any series of physical causes and effects, nor can the existence of a body ever be derived from a series of mental events. Unlike Hobbes, then, Spinoza affirms the irreducibility of mind to matter, but both are modifications of the single substance, yet, expressed differently, or understood under a different aspect, namely: the aspect of thought or the aspect of extension (both being attributes).

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[91] The expression 'in God' or 'modification of God' seems strange. But it only seems strange, according to Spinoza, due to our anthropomorphic image of God. Spinoza rejects this anthropomorphism and insists that God should be understood as the abstract (in the sense of 'not easily imaginable'), supreme causal principle. If the expression 'modification of Nature' seems less strange, it is arguably because the image of 'supreme causal principle' readily conforms to our image of Nature (as *natura naturans* that is, not of *natura naturata*, which we falsely imagine like romantics as rolling green hills and exotic wildlife). Cf. 1P8S2; 1P15S & 1P17C2S.

[92] For an overview of the character of the relation between substance and modes, see Perler 2018, §5.2. Perler argues that Spinoza synthesizes Aristotelean and Cartesian concepts of substances, describing the relation between substance and other things as one of (1) *predication*, i.e. all that is, is *said of* the substance, and is understood by reference to it; (2) inherence, i.e. everything that is, is 'in' substance or is a property of it, and (3) *causation*, i.e. substance is the first cause in or principle of the chain of causes that produces everything else.

How do we understand the relation between ideas and material states of affairs? In its primary signification, an idea is a *concept* of any state of affairs. Since such a state physically depends on its *causes* while its concept depends on the *understanding* of these causes, ideas and material states both depend on the same order.[93] Thus, the idea of the tree outside my attic window, not insofar as I think it, but insofar as it is true, is embedded in the same order or causal nexus as the tree is; only, the tree is embedded in the order of causes that follow upon each other mechanically, the idea is embedded in the order of representations that follow upon each other logically.[94] There is, therefore, a deep parallelism between the order of ideas and the order of facts which secures their co-belonging.[95]

The parallelism in fact allows Spinoza to give a peculiar twist to the theory of truth. It may seem at first that Spinoza champions an ordinary correspondence theory of truth (Cf. 1A6: "A true idea must agree with its object."[96]). Recall, however, the expression I used above: "not insofar as I think it, but insofar as it is true", because an idea – say, of the tree outside my attic window – insofar as I think it is quite different from its true idea or concept. The idea insofar as I have it includes not just the being of the tree, its properties and the history of its formation, but also primarily the way in which I am affected by the tree. This includes the sensations that accompany my seeing it, the personal history I share with it, the knowledge I have acquired

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[93] See: 2P7, including the *scholium*.

[94] That matters of fact are ordered according to a mechanical sequence means that the fact is determined by or necessarily follows the effective causes that jointly produce it. That ideas are ordered according to a logical sequence means that the idea of an effect is included in the ideas of the causes that jointly produce said effect, e.g. the idea of a tree (any tree, in this case, not just the one outside my attic window, which it requires additional ideas to know) is included in the ideas of the mechanics of its growth.

[95] It is also in the context of this co-belonging that Spinoza will place the question of the relation between body and mind, which I elaborate in the next section. It should already be noted that the question of this relation does not pose for Spinoza the type of problem that it posed for Descartes, because it is no longer of two absolutely (or substantially) distinct beings.

[96] Curley, 410.

about trees in general, *etc*.[97] Some of the ideas that inform the idea that I presently have of the tree will overlap with the true idea, and to that extent, my idea is itself true. However, much of what is included in my idea of the tree – indeed, most of it, according to Spinoza[98] – reveals something about me rather than about the tree itself. Summarily, my idea has a different causal history than the true idea of the tree, corresponding to the fact that the tree has a very different causal history than the affection of my body by the tree does. The being of the tree and the being of the idea institute almost completely divergent histories.[99] It is by these means that ideas gain 'a life of their own'. What we see, then, is that Spinoza shifts our attention to the *intrinsic* characteristics of ideas; ideas considered without reference to the objects they represent. That does not mean necessarily that Spinoza focuses on *false* ideas, but that he focuses on the history of ideas insofar as they diverge from or conform to the truth. An idea that has the intrinsic characteristics of a true idea is called *adequate*.[100]

What are the intrinsic characteristics of true ideas? Those aspects that allow a mental grasp over the logical order in which the idea is embedded, and which it implies (in the sense that a consideration of the idea allows deductions of other ideas in the logical order of its appearance). By extension, what matters in this conception of truth is not how beliefs can

[97] Cf. 2P17CS. Here, Spinoza mentions the distinction between the adequate idea of Peter and the idea of Peter that another person, Paul, has. The latter idea, says Spinoza, reveals more about the condition of Paul's body than it does of Peter's nature. Incidentally, the complexity of the idea that I have 'of' external bodies (to speak vulgarly) shows why the language of 'images' is wrong when we speak about ideas. See also 2P48S ("…so that our thought does not fall into pictures") and the explanation of the definition of 'idea' (2D3: "I say concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the Mind.")

[98] 2P16C2.

[99] It is on the basis of this notion that – despite Spinoza's rationalism, i.e. his belief in the (formal) possibility of complete conceptual knowledge – representations are only of relative importance in the *Ethics*. On the level of knowledge, the ideas that human beings have *without* reference to real existents, i.e. their imaginings, are the central reality addressed by politics and the formation of social bonds.

[100] 2D4.

correspond to things, but how truth might be *enabling*, that is, how it might offer rational beings a mental grasp of the logical order of the world. Because this logical order of the world is no other than the sequence of physical events, this mental grasp simultaneously implies physical control or ‘being attuned’ to the physical order in which one is taken up. While the primary signification of truth is in the realm of representation, from the perspective of adequacy truth is signified by *power*, i.e. the capacity to mentally grasp and physically attune to the causal nexus in which one is always embedded. Traditionally, Truth (with a capital ‘T’) is held to be *transcendent* to the order of nature: the question of Truth precedes the question of nature, the essence of which is determined by purely rational means grounded on a supernatural divine order (as it is for Descartes, who derives the geometrical essence of nature from the *cogito* argument and divine benevolence). Spinoza develops another concept of truth (with a small ‘t’) which makes it a matter *immanent* to the order of Nature itself, because it is founded on the (intra-)natural order of power relations.[101]

The causal nexus comes to bear on human beings through ‘affects’ or passions and correlative mental dispositions. The primary power relations that concern us are those between the passions and ‘us’; we seek to submit the passions to rational control. More specifically, what matters is the degree to which the passions either undermine or support our conduct – whether they control us or we them – and the extent to which we mentally grasp our situation in the universal process of Nature’s unfolding or what I call the divine ‘effluence’ (section III.2). In the second place, however, we are involved in what we usually understand by relations of power, namely, the affects that bind us to our fellow human beings (III.3-4) and to the civil order in which we convene (IV). Therefore, the shift towards an *immanent* perspective on truth

[101] It is a matter of discussion whether the traditional concept of Truth nonetheless applies to Spinoza, insofar as he too determines the essence of Nature by purely rational means, even if he collapses the divine and the natural order together. Moreover, if both perspectives apply to Spinoza, it is a question of how these can be combined in a single concept of truth.

in particular allows Spinoza to formulate a theory of the passions that is connected to human striving, both in its natural and civil conditions.

III.2 Knowledge and Freedom

In general, the mind exists only as the thinking of the body, or in other words, the idea that it has of the body at any time.[102] Consequentially, Spinoza affirms *contra* Descartes that the mind *only* knows itself through the ideas of the affections of the body due to the parallelism of ideas and physical states.[103] The mind does not have a privileged understanding of itself, because it knows itself only via the affection of the body. Neither body nor mind are known adequately through the idea of any particular affection, for the body is potentially affected in an infinite number of ways, even if knowledge thereof is always mediated only by particular affections.[104] By extension, the potentiality of the mind is not exhausted by any particular idea it has either, which is always an idea of the body affected in a certain way. In summary, the mind possesses neither of itself, nor of the body, nor of external bodies an adequate idea; its ordinary, empirical knowledge is generally confused.[105] Again, it is likely that Spinoza says 'adequate' instead of 'true' here, because he wants to stress the perspective of the affected body rather than the

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[102] See 2P13 & 2P19. Concerning the expression 'thinking *of* the body' used, the 'of' is primarily read in an *objective genitive* sense (thinking *about* the body), whilst preserving the possibility of a materialist reading of Spinoza (in which case the 'of' could also be read in a *subjective genitive* sense, i.e. reading: the thinking that the body does). This reading could be especially relevant in the context of contemporary philosophy of mind. Indeed, if we take the attribute of thinking to refer merely to the conceptual or logical order of the world and not to spiritual entities called 'minds' or 'souls' at all, we can take mind to be a modification of the body-attribute without necessarily collapsing the two orders (as an eliminativist theory of mind would have it). Nonetheless, this would certainly be a reading of Spinoza *against* Spinoza, in particular his doctrine of the immortality of the soul as it is developed in the course of *Ethics* 5; see especially 5P23.

[103] 2P23.

[104] When in the *scholium* to 3P2 Spinoza says that "no one has yet determined what the Body can do," and that "the Body itself … can do many things which its Mind wonders at", he sounds quite modern. Nothing of the traditional mistrust of the body is to be found here.

[105] Cf. 2P29C.

perspective of things themselves, which belongs to the metaphysics of substance rather than the metaphysics of mind. To measure the quality of an idea he therefore does not expound on models of representation, but focuses instead on the affected body and correlative mental dispositions, as indicated in the previous section.

We must now specify the standards of measurement or intrinsic characteristics of the true idea. The quality of an idea is measured in this regard by the extent of (1) the body's capacity to be affected, or its *complexity* and (2) the body's capacity to distinguish the causes of affects, which depends on the relative dominance of the body over adjacent bodies, and is called its *unity*.[106] While the first of these standards of measurement is straightforward, the second warrants explanation. To give an indication of its meaning, take the case of suffering. In that case, the mind is constantly drawn to the causes of the affections that relate to the pain. Simultaneously, or from another point of view, the body is disintegrated and the unity of the affected body is at risk. Summarily, the mind takes heed of those body parts that inflict unexpected modifications to the body, and due to distraction and overload is less able to register the affections of the body-as-unity in a surrounding world, and thus less able to find out truths about that world.

In general, when the mind is overloaded by the sheer multitude of ideas, it is forced to abstract an image that indiscriminately signifies all of the ideas that gave rise to it. Thus, general concepts such as 'man' and 'dog' are born out of an incapacity to represent all particular ideas associated with those concepts distinctly. When general ideas are formed in the aforementioned ways – from overstimulation of the body and therefore an overload of the cognitive apparatus, when in effect they are substituted by an imaginary sign – these ideas are *abstract*. All ideas abstracted in the aforementioned way are inadequate, and signify the mind's escape route from confusion. In spite of or perhaps precisely due to this fact, abstract ideas have a strong effect

[106] Cf. 2P13S.

on us: they pose as the truth or essence of many things at once. Moreover, abstract ideas have a normative function; they are the standards to which things are compared in order to determine whether those things are aberrant or defective, in short: 'unnatural'.[107] When general concepts are born from comparison and the inference of common functions (called 'discursive reasoning'), however, they are no abstractions but rather adequate ideas that grasp a law, concretely pertaining to modes of a certain kind. Thus inadequacy of ideas derived from the affection of our bodies is limited by *rational* knowledge.[108] By relating modifications of things to an underlying law of Nature, rational knowledge shows precisely that 'unnatural' things do not exist. Only the imagination, based on inadequate ideas, employs this notion in the aforementioned way. I will return to the theme of the power of the imagination in the context of its social (III.3) and political significance, below (IV).

What, then, is the threshold for the adequacy of an idea? Whenever an inadequate idea is produced, it relates (1) to an overstimulation of the body that cannot adapt to the causes of its affection, leading it to disintegrate and (2) the overcharge of the mind that cannot properly distinguish these causes, leading it to take recourse in imagination. In general, an inadequate idea signifies the mind being cut off from the truth on which its capacity to represent its environment coherently relies. Perfectly parallel to this affliction of the mind, the body is cut off from the causal nexus through which it relates to its surroundings. Nonetheless, though it seems like imagination and reason are wholly distinct – that the former is related only to illusion and the perversion of truth, whilst the latter clings to truth and derives its power from it – Spinoza never completely dismisses the imagination and its abstract signs. Not only is the imagination, as mentioned, a survival technique conducive to our self-preservation, the

[107] Cf. 4Pref.

[108] 2P40.

aforementioned 'life of their own' that signs lead beyond their immediate utility are fundamental to our social and political comportment as human beings.

The limit that separates adequate from inadequate ideas marks yet another threshold for Spinoza: that between passion and action. To have a passion is to undergo one's affections, being mentally confused about the causes and physically ill-adapted to their impact. But action, too, is affection. Whenever one distinctly knows the relevant causal factors, one's body is simultaneously attuned to its surroundings. This means that one is able to do just what appeals to him – not as the result of a sovereign decision, but simply as the result of appetite (be it an informed one). To *act* is to be able to point at oneself in explaining the state that one is in; to be the *adequate cause* of one's affections.[109] An adequate cause is a cause that entails its effect, such that, when the cause is known, the effect is known clearly and distinctly as well. If something or someone is an adequate cause, this means that it is through the understanding of the nature of this being that the resulting event is understood. If not – if one is 'overcome' by the passions – one is only the *partial cause* of one's affects. Such a state of affairs is marked by expressions such as: "I only failed the test because I was under stress", or: "He only wears those jeans because they are popular." The explanations given in these sentences necessarily refer to the person, because failing a test and wearing 'those jeans' cannot be derived from the concepts of stress or popularity; some people may achieve their greatest successes under stress, and one may genuinely like a pair of jeans that is, coincidentally, very popular. Nonetheless, they also reveal the influence of passions (in this case, stress) and illusions of the imagination (in this case, fashion).

The capacity to be the adequate cause or to act is all that it means for finite modes in general, and human beings in particular, to be free. Paradoxically, the more one is aware of the underlying causes affecting oneself in the coming together of an intention – thus seeing the

[109] 3D1-2.

extent to which one is not the maker of one's own intentions – the more one can point to oneself as the adequate cause of the intention or act. To go short: the more one grasps the extraneous causes of one's intention, the more one is involved in the causation of that intention. To resolve the paradox one must understand the concept of causation in use here through the metaphor of a conductor, which gathers converging currents so that their combined power may pass through it, not through the metaphor of the magician (to speak profanely), who conjures up effects *ex nihilo*.[110] If one knows the common causes of stress; if one knows the sway of fashion, and the effects they tend to have on oneself, then one is conditioned to relate as freely as one can to those realities; not because one is rid of their influence, but because one responds to that influence in a nuanced way that is informed by a deep and personal understanding rather than a superficial confrontation on the basis of generalities (which mark the abstractions of the imagination).[111]

The idea that action is not distinct from passion *qua* essence marks Spinoza's radicalization of Descartes' project to naturalize our understanding of human behaviour. As Descartes had shown in the *Passions*, the passions dispose us to act without intervention of the soul. Nonetheless, he proceeded to make a distinction between passions and volitions, relying

[110] Spinoza uses the metaphor of the King to indicate the illusion of free will. But this metaphor is double-edged: though the image of the traditional King who rules by divine right is indeed a striking image of free delegation, Spinoza would obviously deny this representation of sovereignty. In fact, we will examine his critique of political sovereignty in Chapter IV. The clearly fictional metaphor of the magician is not double-edged in this way, and therefore helpful to illuminate Spinoza's designation of free will as illusion. See also the main text, below.

[111] In effect, the free relation to stress and fashion implies not their destruction, but harnessing the power implicit in those conditions to one's own benefit and that of the community. I develop the notion of harnessing power in section III.3 below. (On a side note, the image of relating superficially to fashion, responding to the perceived generalities of trends, has the comical effect of the grandparent who, having been indirectly acquainted with a new trend through the influence of a grandchild, mimics the trend in a way that is *just* wrong. Though again, even this differentiation is the result of the effluence of God or Nature, and the evaluation of the grandparent's stylistic appearance as '*just* wrong' or 'unnatural' effaces the need to turn to discursive reasoning again, and to investigate the completely natural and law abiding character of even this appearance. A telling digression, that reveals why the philosopher Gilles Deleuze was so interested in Spinoza …)

on the substantial distinction between body and soul. The soul, even if intimately entwined with the body, retains its own dominion; it is able to suspend judgment vis-à-vis the passionate representation of an object. Spinoza does not go along with this theory. 'The will' is not determined by free assent or dissent. In fact, there is no such thing, at least if we understand it as a distinct faculty of mind. Rather, what we call 'the will' is an illusion produced by the imagination to fathom the repeated experience of the capacity of one's body to act in the desired way. To 'assent' to a representation has no other meaning than to perceive the occasion to act, and is therefore not a separate faculty of the mind. Responding to the notion of suspense of judgment, Spinoza notes that "when we say that someone suspends judgment, we are saying nothing but that he sees that he does not perceive the thing adequately", concluding that "[s]uspension of judgment, therefore, is really a perception, not [an act of] free will."[112] The suspense of judgment is nothing but the conflict arising in the intellect, and whenever someone has an idea that is not contradicted by some other idea, there are no grounds for the suspense of judgment; in fact, it simply does not arise. Therefore, to have an idea, to judge, and to will are all the same; there is only difference qua strength of motivation, which in turn is measured by the adequacy of an idea.[113]

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[112] 2P48S; Curley, 483. In this section, Spinoza supposedly sides with Descartes against Hobbes, defining the will as the capacity to affirm or deny rather than as (the final) appetite. But the alliance is a farce. The supposed 'capacity' is inherent in having ideas, that is: thinking, namely one 'affirms' whenever one has an idea, and 'denies' whenever an inadequate idea is perceived to come into contradiction with another idea.

[113] Consider this example: a spouse is seduced into an affair. In cases like this, Descartes allows an appeal to the will of said spouse, in the form: *though you wanted* to commit infidelity, *you ought to have dissented from it* upon consideration of the vows to your lover. Spinoza, on the other hand, suggests that such an appeal is redundant: seeing that the husband wanted to be disloyal, apparently the idea of his wedding vows was insufficiently powerful to curb the idea that the affair may be good after all, as his passion represented it to him, i.e. the idea of the good was not grasped adequately such that seemingly contradictory ideas could interject themselves (Cf. 4P17S). It should nonetheless be noted that Descartes did not elaborate on moral philosophy much, so it is unclear what his judgment would be. What is at stake here, however, is the psychology: even if Descartes proposed different methods for addressing conflicting passions, it is the very possibility of distinguishing (the consent of) the will from (the judgment implicit in) the appetite that puts him at a divide with Spinoza.

Spinoza introduces his idiosyncratic concept of freedom as early as *Ethics* I.[114] It is introduced in the context of his metaphysics of substance, which for him coincides with the field of rational theology. Unlike human beings, whose wills are guided by the influence of external motivation, no such motivation can occur for God, who is wholly independent of and logically prior to everything else. Thus, not even God is free in the way that we understand ourselves to be free, i.e. as having a 'free will'. In 2P3S., Spinoza famously states: "no one will be able to perceive rightly the things I maintain unless he takes great care not to confuse God's power with the human power or right of Kings." Neither, in fact, do humans (not even Kings) have this power; they merely (and falsely) *think* they do. As noted above, 'the will' is merely the representation of desire in general, and therefore expresses only our passionate and not our rational nature. Nonetheless, God is free in the only sense that matters to Spinoza: God's freedom consists in the fact that everything happens *because of what he is*, and is therefore an effluence of his unlimited power. As Spinoza himself notes, human beings can never be free in the sense that God or Nature is: all events must be traced back to their first causes, and human beings are tightly fitted into a world of other beings by which they are limited.[115] However, while God is *absolutely* free to the extent that he is cause of himself, non-substantial things can be *relatively* free, namely, insofar as they are the adequate causes of some events. It is the meaning and concrete circumstances of this relative freedom that we must investigate in the following.

III.3 Human Striving and Forging Social Bonds

In order to illuminate the transition from the perspective of substance to that of the finite mode that the human is, I have laid excessive stress on the formal requirements of freedom. These

[114] 1D7.

[115] E.g. 1P26, 2P48, and 4P2-4.

requirements were (1) having adequate ideas and (2) being corporally attuned to one's surroundings, which are but two sides of the same coin. The question regarding the concrete circumstances of freedom or the lack thereof is, however, still pending. To answer it requires us to specify Spinoza's account of the passions by an investigation of the principle of their occurrence. To become the adequate cause of one's own modifications, in other words: to become free, cannot be a decision of pure will. Indeed, the concept of 'pure will' is illusory to Spinoza. One always finds oneself immersed in affections, as it is impossible to break out of the chains of cause and effect that is the sovereign effluence of God or Nature.[116]

The formal possibility of freedom additionally requires a principle of self-causation that is not at odds with the immersion in a causal order. Spinoza finds this principle in the concept of *conatus* or striving, which he expresses in 3P6: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being."[117] As the principle of inertia allows us to understand the persistence of bodies in their course along the vector of the force exerted upon them if unhindered by external forces, so the principle of striving allows us to understand the perseverance of modes in being if unhindered by other modes. The comparison only goes so far, however, for two reasons. The first reason is that the model in which we apply the principle of inertia separates static, geometrical entities to which motion is only added as an extraneous factor. According to Spinoza, however, entities are essentially *dynamic*, i.e. they have an internal principle of motion. This dynamism is the result of the effluence of God or Nature, since "whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God" so that

[116] We can go even further and say that the *notion* of 'pure will' *does* signify breaking out of the causal nexus, because as an imagined abstraction it indicates that thinking is cut off from the series of physical causes that discursive thinking traces. However, the imagination is simply immersed in its own causal nexus, as it diverges from the logical order that discursive thinking taps into. It is this perspective that the metaphysics of immanence allows.

[117] Curley, 498. For a technical analysis of the conatus principle and its proof, see Della Rocca (2006).

“[n]othing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.”[118] This makes of Spinoza’s concept of striving a truly *ontological* principle, stating something that applies to all beings insofar as they are finite modes, and not merely a scientific theorem to describe physical motion.[119] The second reason is that striving to persevere in being is accumulative rather than continuous, i.e. striving is towards the increase of power rather than its preservation. This feat, reminiscent of Hobbes’ “perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power”, can be derived from the fact that in order not to be overcome by extraneous influences, one must seek to submit them through understanding and physical attuning.[120] Destruction in order no longer to be threatened, channelling in order to use, cooperation in order to complement – all indicate an increase in one’s power rather than maintaining a stable level of it.[121]

As yet, these alternatives are merely abstract and it is not clear how they are incorporated in nature in general and human existence in particular. Their particular manifestation in human existence depends on the dynamics of the passions, in which both our slavery and freedom are rooted. Therefore, in the following (sub-)sections I proceed to give an account of the passions that characterize human striving. Freedom just is the unhindered natural deployment of striving, or the manner in which Nature unfolds in or by means of our bodies and minds. Slavery consists in the alienation experienced when frustrated in this striving.[122] The general features of striving

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[118] 1P36 & Dem.; Curley, 439.

[119] Cf. Van Buuren 2016, 81. Maarten van Buuren describes the history of the concept of conatus, interpreting Spinoza’s use of it as reverting to texts of the Stoics (in which it too was a universal principle), but from a Cartesian perspective.

[120] This ‘must seek’ is not a normative demand but a physical necessity.

[121] Moreover, Nature is always in a process of unfolding; as Buridan’s donkey shall never starve, so shall we always be immersed in an order of affections.

[122] ‘Alienation’ is the term used by Maarten van Buuren (2018) to describe the condition of being overcome by the passions. It is a fine description, because it expresses well that one is inhibited in the striving that pertains to one’s very essence as one is overcome by passions; Van Buuren 2018, 79-83. The slavery to and freedom from the passions are the topics of, respectively, *Ethics* 4 and 5.

enumerated above pertain to all beings insofar as they are effects of God or Nature's effluence. The particular features of striving, as it is enacted by different modes or entities, vary according to the complexity of the body in question (this feature was mentioned in III.2, above). All beings are *animated* in the double sense of striving and being ensouled, but both features are only as complex as the body's capacity for being affected.[123] For, only insofar as the body is affected is there a question of either resisting the causes of affection or being overcome by them. So, the particular mode of striving in any entity depends on its complexity and is measured by its unity (the other feature mentioned in III.2), i.e. its capacity for resisting and even harnessing adjacent bodies or extraneous forces for the exercise of one's own power. As striving indicates exactly the complexity and measure of unity of an individual entity, it functions as a principle of individuation.[124]

III.3a The modern inversion of moral psychology

In this subsection, I proceed to give Spinoza's account of the basic passions that characterize human striving. By means of that characterization he accomplishes a reversal of moral psychology that is typical for modern psychology, and which we find also in Hobbes.

As we have seen, the threshold between being overcome by and submitting affects is just that between passion and action. The most basic of the passions is appetite (*appetitus*), for it is the sensation of the very striving that is the essential property of all finite beings. As we have already seen, to Spinoza 'the will' is nothing but an illusory hypostatization of the experience of appetites. The tendency to reflect on our appetites and to consign regular patterns in the sequence thereof is conditioned by the awareness that coincides with having appetites.

[123] Cf. 2P13S: "For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate."

[124] Cf. 3P7, where Spinoza identifies striving with the "actual essence of the thing".

This awareness is also a necessary condition of our capacity to communicate our appetites to others. To have appetites and simultaneously to be aware of them is what Spinoza calls desire (*cupiditas*).[125] Since appetites already imply consciousness, to desire – i.e. to be conscious of appetites – implies a second order idea: it is the idea of the appetite-idea. Spinoza determines desire as the essence of human beings in particular.[126] But why would appetites become conspicuous for human beings in particular? The clue seems to lie in the capacity and tendency of human beings to control their environments by means of abstracting regularities. They do so either on account of being overwhelmed by affects or by being drawn into a discursive investigation of the scenery, applying their imagination or reason respectively. Thus one may perceive an animalistic hunger, driving one to go on the hunt for food without necessarily being aware of this condition. But with recurring fits of hunger, it certainly serves the task of acquiring food (the right kind and amount, by the right means) if one were to reflect on the nature of this hunger, to (imaginatively) classify it e.g. as the kind of hunger that requires only a light snack or a massive meal, or to (rationally) index the hunger-perception on the regularities of a feeding schedule.[127]

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[125] 3P9S.

[126] Cf. D1 of the passions.

[127] To be fair, Spinoza does not enter into much detail on this account and nearly identifies appetite and desire. Nonetheless, to account for the different variations of *conatus*, and how it might serve as a principle of individuation is a large theme for Spinoza and his readers. If his metaphysics is to be credible, it must afford reasonable descriptions of psychology that do not fall apart upon the elaboration of examples. The distinction here implied between using either the imagination or discursive reasoning is not up for free choice: one must somehow be appealed to imagine or to investigate discursively. Spinoza does not directly elaborate on the conditions and origins of reasoning discursively. He sometimes appeals to the contingency of some human beings who possess a rational disposition; moreover, he praises the development of mathematical reasoning to challenge teleological reasoning (which is rather a mode of imagination) in the appendix to *Ethics* 1. So, we may conjecture that according to Spinoza, people who do not naturally possess a rational disposition may be brought to reason through education in mathematics (following Plato). Finally, Martin Heidegger's theory in *Being and Time* might have appealed to him: only when the normal course of things is hindered, e.g. when a tool breaks down, do we come into a discursive mode of thinking.

While desire simply marks the (conscious) striving itself, *joy and sadness* in turn indicate the satisfaction or frustration of desire and the accompanying feeling of an increase or decrease of power.[128] Clearly, desire-satisfaction does not guarantee an increase of power in the long run. Nonetheless, even if it is the most basic passion, desire develops into an increasingly complex disposition throughout life; it coincides with human striving itself, and in the right conditions brings human beings to reflect on their animalistic cravings (see above), to form social bonds (III.3b, below) and even to unite in the context of civil society (see Ch. IV). The feeling of joy is indicative of this development: in order to enjoy, one must acquire the means to fulfil appetites, or reflectively transform appetites into manageable desires. Enjoyment implies the adequate representation of circumstances that allowed desire-satisfaction, and is therefore normative for behaviour. As such, joy is the rational passion that accompanies a shift from slavery to freedom, from alienation to autonomy.

Even if desire-satisfaction simpliciter does not guarantee consistent increase of power (and hence continued enjoyment), it is the only standard of measurement that we have. Hence Spinoza's reversal of traditional moral psychology (that he shares with Hobbes), found also in the important *scholium* of 3P9: "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it will it, want it, and desire it". While this statement may initially reveal a rather crude egoism that reduces human dignity, if we take desire to be this complex and ever developing principle, it becomes evident that it encompasses the richness of human life rather than disturbs it. The rudimentary conception of the good determines it as a merely subjective standard guiding the reflection upon appetites. As such, however, it is already included in the development of appetites into informed desires: we may unreflectively treat a mushroom as a good to be obtained, but with the onset of sickness in the wake of its consumption, we are

[128] For the context of the introduction of joy and sadness, see 3P11S.

brought to reflect on the conditions of our behaviour and (minimally) suspend the attribution of goodness to the consumption of the mushroom. In general, as desires become more complex, so does the concept of the good. Eventually, the good as the subject-matter of ethics grows out of these amoral rudiments (that more properly delineate the field of ethology) by means of social interventions that require a constant reconfiguration of appetites and discussion of one's notion of goodness that guides them.

III.3b Social principles

In the unfolding of affective life, the basic passions gain social significance. First of all, passions are not only related to our inner life, but reflect external conditions. When joy is related to an external cause, it is called *love*; when sadness is so related, it is called *hatred*. To love something or someone is to desire unification with it in order to enjoy it, i.e. to harness its power. Love and hatred, along with the basic passions, serve as the affective undercurrent of a number of principles from which social bonds are forged. The first of these principles is the *principle of compassion*, formulated in 3P21: "He who imagines what he loves to be affected with Joy or Sadness will also be affected with Joy or Sadness; and each of those affects will be greater or lesser in the lover as they are greater or lesser in the thing loved."[129] Since the other, whom we love, is conducive to our power, and the sadness that pertains to her is destructive of hers, the sadness that pertains to the other diminishes our power, too. In 3P22, the principle of compassion is widened to include a third person: whoever saddens our loved one(s), provokes the hatred we call *indignation*; whoever pleases them, provokes love or, in other words, receives our *favour*. By means of the extended principle of compassion we arrive at a rudimentary theory of social groups. But this theory is widened to the extent that it encompasses, potentially, all

[129] Curley, 506.

humans (and perhaps even a wider community of beings)[130] only by a further principle. This is the *principle of likeness*, expressed in 3P27: "If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect."[131] If someone like ourselves is affected in a certain way, then we imagine that we might be affected similarly; if, for example, the affect is saddening, we likewise imagine to be saddened – which is saddening in itself, because it reflects our lack of power in similar situations. But what kind of likeness are we talking about? In 3P29, Spinoza implicitly answers this question whilst at the same time introducing what I call the *principle of sociality*: "We shall strive to do also whatever we imagine *men* to look on with Joy, and on the other hand, we shall be averse to doing what we imagine men are averse to."[132] It is, apparently, other human beings that fulfil the likeness principle (but, as I show below, Spinoza does complicate the matter). The desire to do what others like, based on this principle, is called *ambition*. The feeling of joy that accompanies satisfying this desire is called *glory*, the failure to do so or indeed to do what others hate is to feel *shame* (a kind of sadness). If others recognize the things we love as loveable, i.e. when they themselves love it, this invigorates the passion. This is why we also strive to make others love and hate the same things we do.

It is clear from these principles, based on the passionate undercurrent of human existence, that human beings are deeply social. It is clear, too, however, that these principles cannot prevent conflicts from arising. Indeed, glory may paradoxically be mixed with self-deprecation, e.g. when a comedian makes fun of herself, and therefore perceives herself as the cause of the joy of others, even if the jokes themselves reflect a certain incapacity. Ambition

[130] Scholars, such as Hasana Sharp, have imaginatively worked out the idea of 'transindividualism', or the notion that the individual can only be understood in the causal nexus of other individuals that surround it. See Sharp (2011) for a fundamental work in this direction.

[131] Curley, 508-509.

[132] Curley, 501, emphasis DZ.

may be the occasion of self-deception by pride when the idea of the public is inadequate, such that the ambitious person may direct her efforts at a non-existent crowd or falsely perceive praise, while the public actually disdains or hates her actions. Ambition also leads to envy, as anything that is desirable to others becomes desirable to ourselves for that very reason; we therefore seek to prevent that others acquire it instead of us.[133] A more specific cause of conflict is hate by association, that sees a different application of the principle of likeness, namely: to hate those that share class or origination with someone who has grieved us.[134] The greatest cause for conflict, however, is the subject-relative nature of affection. Both interpersonal and intrapersonal judgments vary according to the formation of different associations upon being affected by, hypothetically, the same causes.[135]

Before addressing Spinoza's proposal for the resolution of the arising conflicts, I must address a pertinent problem. It seems as if the social principles mentioned appeal to natural aims, establishing like Aristotle that man is a social animal simply by nature. But the explanation of the human's social nature in these terms would constitute a form of teleological reasoning. But what of Spinoza's strict rejection of this form of reasoning? I propose that we see these social principles merely as external constraints on the mechanics of desire; they are not natural determinants of human behaviour, but which come – whether through trial and error (as in the mushroom example), imaginative classification or discursive reasoning (as in the example of turning fits of hunger into a scientific exercise) – to colonize the affective life of human beings. That is, these social considerations are inserted into the mechanics of desire

[133] 3P32.

[134] 3P46.

[135] The principle of affective relativity is stated in 3P51. Strictly speaking, even to speak of 'subject' here is inadequate, because there are only finite modes in relative degrees of unity, including the body that any human mind represents. The precarious unity of the body depends on the integrity of the parts (i.e. whether they are under a common power, such that the function of the body is distributed over them) and the traces of affections that we call memory.

because they determine success, and only afterward gain the significance of 'natural' aims for the imagination. From birth we are educated in these social considerations, and abstract the rules underlying these considerations as if they never grew out of the mechanics of striving. These unwritten rules form the mores guiding the public imagination, and this imagination in turn affects our conduct: e.g. we experience disgust for transgressions, but also disdain for outdated mores. Again, ideas that initially arise from the causal nexus in which we are inserted go on to live their own life by means of the imagination. Through imagination, humanity seems to detach itself from the course of natural history; in fact, of course, we are never so detached and derive our power from understanding our inherence in the natural order, which we discover through discursive reasoning.

III.4 The Sovereignty of Reason?

How to resolve the conflicts that naturally arise within our affective coexistence with others? Spinoza gives two answers: by reason, or by force of Law. In this section I look at the first option, whereas the second option is reserved for the following chapter. The desire for knowledge is our striving insofar as it relates to the mind which has discovered the possibility of distinguishing causes and submitting them to a law or common concept. And because the affects are thus submitted to a concept, one is thereby empowered – yielding a feeling of joy that could be the occasion of forming a habit of investigation. Rational inquiry yields a common striving for human beings insofar as they are under this habit. To strive 'under the dictate of reason' is the condition of the highest perfection to which human beings can aspire. But what does reason dictate? Formally, to desire those things all rational beings can agree upon are good, because what is thus conjectured expresses what is befitting to human beings insofar as they understand their situation well. Concretely, human beings *themselves* are of the highest value insofar as they live according to the dictate of reason, because they strive for the good of

everyone. Moreover, says Spinoza, it is for everyone the best that each individual seeks his own advantage, because it strengthens one's capacity in general, and therefore the capacity to live according to the dictate of reason. Finally, human beings also share the same supreme good, which is the 'knowledge of God': to know truth, to understand the laws of Nature. For Spinoza, the laws of Nature also have metaphysical significance insofar as they determine the conditions for human striving – much unlike our contemporary, positivistic understanding of the term. Summarily, the rational community of human beings is based upon what we may call the 'glory in the knowledge of God'; to enjoy the appreciation of others (glory) for the knowledge of God, because the knowledge of God is the shared supreme good, and glory presupposes the recognition of others of this good.[136] Thus, a rational community is formed, enabled by 'rejoicing' in God and strengthened by the recognition from rational others. This community is guided by a common will to establish a realm of morals; i.e. to establish rules of conduct for the furtherance of human striving.

All this sounds terribly orthodox, but one ought to remember the reinterpretation of the terms involved, which all have a certain relation to power, or the capacity of human beings to act. Just as Spinoza established a reversal of the traditional principle of moral psychology (desire precedes value instead of the other way around), so he reverses the relation commonly supposed between virtue and happiness (or 'blessedness') in 5P42: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue [the orthodox position, DZ], but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them."[137] Like the social principles guiding the passions, so the rational principle guiding the moral community can only be an extrinsic denomination of a mechanically determined course of action. This is

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[136] I stress this aspect and not the intellectual love of God which is central to *Ethics* 5, because the latter book deals with the metaphysics of the soul and soteriology (the study of salvation). These elements do not allow comparison with Descartes and Hobbes.

[137] Curley, 616.

precisely the problem that Spinoza himself designates for a rationalistic approach to morality: we are talking about human nature *insofar as* it is rational. As a matter of fact, the human condition is haunted by passions that lead into conflict at least as easily as they lead into harmony. So while *contra* Hobbes, Spinoza concludes that "man is a God to man",[138] the philosophers reconvene in terms of practical philosophy. While rational knowledge, of which the *Ethics* is a product, is desirable as a means towards harmony, people have to be disciplined and educated in order to appreciate this fact.[139] For knowledge (in particular knowledge of what is good or useful and their opposites) exercises but a weak force upon us.[140] Thus we come to the second means to procure harmony: sovereign power.[141]

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[138] 4P35C2S; Curley, 563-564.

[139] TTP, 16.3: "…all men are born completely ignorant of everything and before they can learn the true rationale of living and acquire the habit of virtue, a good part of life has elapsed even if they have been well brought up, while, in the meantime, they must live and conserve themselves so far as they can, by the sole impulse of appetite." Compare 'the habit of virtue' mentioned here to my 'habit for investigation' above, in the discussion of the socializing effect of reason.

[140] 4P17 including the *scholium*. Knowledge is particularly weak when it is related to a future contingency, i.e. something of which we do not know whether it will arise or affect us in any way; see also: 4P12C.

[141] What Spinoza says about foundations of the State in *Ethics* is mostly restricted to the second *scholium* of 4P37.

IV The Negotiation of Political Sovereignty

In this chapter, I address both Spinoza's alternative to Hobbes' account of the foundations of civil society (IV.1) and the political consequences of his theory of the imagination (IV.2).

IV.1 The composition of State power

Like Hobbes, Spinoza makes a distinction between civil society and the natural conditions of man. But quite unlike Hobbes, Spinoza identifies the 'right of nature' with whatever lies in the *actual* power of an individual (both human beings and not) to do, unguided by the question of what it is necessary to do in order to survive which for Hobbes forms the basis of natural law.[142] This concept of natural law is meaningless for Spinoza. Whenever he speaks of 'natural law' he means only the flipside of the aforementioned 'right of nature', and is but a reformulation of the ontological principle of conatus, i.e. the way in the laws of Nature unfold.[143] Thus it is right of the bigger fish to eat the smaller; a right of the vengeful to avenge itself, and a right of the sage to live in harmony with others – and, correspondingly, it is a law of Nature that such things happen. Like Hobbes, however, Spinoza agrees that the unlimited power signified by the natural right, which is in fact the power of the passions dragging human individuals into conflict, is only curbed by a stronger passion, i.e. by fear of repercussions (or, at least in Spinoza's case, by hope of a greater good). The State merely embodies the aggregated or *composite* power of

[142] TTP, 16.2: "By the right and order of nature I merely mean the rules determining the nature of each individual thing by which we conceive it is determined naturally to exist and to behave in a certain way."

[143] Ibid.: "…since it is the supreme law of nature that each thing strives to persist in its own state so far as it can, taking no account of another's circumstances but only of its own, it follows that each individual thing has a sovereign right to do this …"; Cf. Geismann 1991, 40: "Reason as seen by Spinoza is not reason as imposing laws (of freedom) but reason as recognizing laws (of nature)." I will consistently refer to 'natural law' in the moral sense in which it is used by Hobbes, while I refer to 'laws of Nature' in the metaphysical sense in which it is used by Spinoza.

individuals that join in agreement to punish dissenters, to evoke fear by means of this same right of punishment, and harvest the expectation of a good life in society.

Unlike for Hobbes, therefore, rights of nature are *not* predicated on the demands of natural law (founded on the duty of self-preservation). Rather, they coincide with human striving, as expressed in individuals or social groups bound by common passions, or by the imagination of a common 'spirit' or mores.[144] Though the authors are seemingly close, the perspectives are already, albeit covertly, drifting apart. Where Hobbes appeals to the ideal conditions of a peaceful society, making a stark break between psychology and moral philosophy (and their objects: natural and civil coexistence), no such break exists in Spinoza. This becomes clear from what Spinoza says about social covenants: "a compact is only made valid by its utility, without which it becomes null and void".[145] Moreover, and this is in direct contrast with Hobbes, Spinoza argues in TTP Ch. 17 that "No one can ever so utterly transfer to another his power and, consequently, his rights, as to cease to be a man; nor can there ever be a power so sovereign that it can carry out every possible wish."[146] What would be given up is *not* an entitlement (as for Hobbes), but the power inherent in the life lived under the sway of the passions in natural conditions. It now becomes undeniably clear that another concept of natural right is at issue, leading political theorist Georg Geismann to conclude that statements like the foregoing show "the entire superfluousness of Spinoza's concept of Right", whether understood as entitlement or as legal restriction.[147] The problem that Spinoza seeks to resolve is *not* to justify State power by an appeal to natural laws – which are the supposed ideal

[144] Cf. Geismann 1991, 47: "For Hobbes the [natural right to everything] is a merely logical consequence of the [natural right to preservation] as a juridical premise, whereas Spinoza's "jus summum … ad omnia, quae potest" results ontologically from the necessity with which the entire "potential" of man is directed towards self-preservation."

[145] TTP, 16; Elwes, 204.

[146] TTP, 17; Elwes, 214.

[147] Geismann 1991, 43. See also n6, Ibid., 36 for Geismann's use of 'Right'.

conditions of peaceful society –, but how the sovereign can (as a matter of *fact* rather than *right*) exercise its power through the complicity of its subjects. The problem is cited most comprehensively in TTP, 17.4:

> That the preservation of a state chiefly depends on the subjects' fidelity and constancy in carrying out the orders they receive, is most clearly taught both by reason and experience; how subjects ought to be guided so as best to preserve their fidelity and virtue is not so obvious.[148]

Sovereign power is served by the complicity of its subjects; otherwise, subjects will always be induced to revolt by passions of hatred and disdain for the State. The problem of instituting sovereign power is just a special problem of forging social bonds (III.3). Ideally, the Law and its institutions should be conducive to individual striving and the development of virtue. However, such ideals can only materialize in rational communities, and these precisely have no need of the Law. The Law is only instituted on the presupposition that human beings do not generally agree in nature, but are led by their passions into conflict. Therefore, it comes into being and is sustained only by the shared imagination of commonality, effacing some conflict-inducing differences of opinion to promote a general agreement. Since the differences obviously persist, conflicts will nonetheless arise in which the Law must intervene if the body politic is to persevere. For if sovereign power (and thus civil order) is to be established, it must behave as a real body, similarly striving for self-preservation – preserving the unity in complexity (the principle of individuation, see section III.2). Just as the imagination ascribed to individuals is the escape-hatch out of the multiplicity of conflicting affections, so the public imagination serves as the cement of civil order. Only by the grace of representations of the People, the national spirit, etc. can the unity of the nation-state be preserved.

[148] Elwes, 216.

Clearly, however, if the State is founded merely on imagination, it not only disregards existing differences but also makes an image (e.g. of 'the People' or of the 'paternal spirit') normative for the conditions of citizenship, thus effectively promoting the superior power (or rights) of some over others. This tendency must be limited by rational knowledge, which relates all differences to the regularity of their production. Of course, this perspective is not readily available, which precisely indicated the need of the public imagination. Nonetheless, we can at least conjecture the limits of the imagination, and restrict appeals to strong normative categories used to dehumanize some to the (supposed) benefit of others. Thus, according to Geismann,

> [i]t is theoretical reason which empirically finds that a certain use of State power and, with it, of State "right" (restricting the freedom of the subjects or obstructing their striving for self-preservation) can lead in the long run to a decrease or even a destruction of this power and this "right".[149]

Again, the use of 'empirical' is warranted here, because the State cannot be organized according to the dictates of reason until the individuals that together constitute its power are disciplined in such a way that they come into the habit of virtue. To do so, institutions of learning (e.g. libraries, Universities) are opened that promote the development of discursive reason. This development allows subjects to understand themselves according to the common notion that binds them, and thus to reconfigure the constitution of civil order according to the needs conducive to their coexistence in general. Since again, the State is only the aggregate of individual powers, the ultimate object of striving is the freedom of its citizens, that is, "to enable them to develope their minds and bodies in security, and to employ their reason unshackled; neither showing hatred, anger, or deceit, nor watched with the eyes of jealousy and injustice".[150]

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[149] Geismann 1991, 46.

[150] TTP, 20; Elwes, 259.

In the following section, I turn to Spinoza's critique of the public imagination.

IV.2 The power of imagination

In section III.2, I developed the difference between imagination and reason in the context of Spinoza's epistemology. One important designation from the section is that the ideas that the imagination abstracts from the multiplicity of affects have a normative function. Subsequent affects are held against the light of those ideas in order to determine whether they are aberrant, or whether the things represented therein are defective. These aberrancies and defects are judged to be 'unnatural'.[151] In the meanwhile, the imagination proceeds by means of using the designated norm as the 'natural' principle according to which the entities ranked under the normative idea behave and develop. When challenging[152] a number of prejudices or illusions that influence human behaviour due to their effect on moral judgment, Spinoza in fact designates the overarching prejudice to be that of teleological reasoning, or the idea that all natural events are purposeful. Two facts about the human condition lie at the origin of this prejudice:

(1) Ignorance of first causes, that is: the lack of rational knowledge and the impossible demand to be guided by reason in every single situation, so that it is necessary to appeal to the imagination;
(2) Human beings consciously strive after ends, in their striving finding in the things of nature either means for or obstacles to their purposes.

[151] Cf. 4Pref.

[152] In the Appendix to *Ethics* I.

This combination of factors leads to a host of secondary illusions. First, the already mentioned illusion of *absolute freedom*: human beings think they are free because they are conscious of their striving, i.e. their decisions and appetites, without however being aware of the causes thereof. Most people count desire – i.e. having conscious appetites – is what most people count as the sufficient condition of their freedom. But, as we have already seen, this condition is clearly insufficient; the additional dual condition of having adequate ideas (involving the causal conditions of one's appetites) and being corporally attuned to the environment is required. Secondly, the aforementioned facts of the human condition lead human beings to affirm a *theological illusion*, i.e. the idea that human-like creatures (the gods) have created the world for the sake of humankind. Again, the cause of this illusion is the fact that human beings find in natural things the means to their ends, but, knowing that they themselves were not the creators of these useful things, affirm the existence of a providential source more powerful than themselves. Here we see how far the teleological prejudice stretches: people rest easy with knowing what the (supposed) purposes are for their understanding of an event, and when such purposes are not immediately found they are pushed back towards a mysterious providential source.

From this account of prejudices, Spinoza draws political consequences. Religious institutions are concocted to appease the gods, that they may take the interests of the faithful as their own. As a result, those who do not follow the norms laid out by the clergy can be held responsible for tragic events – events that can, parenthetically, never be affirmed as tragic but only as a just retribution for some evil. This, the stone falling from the roof killing a man sufficiently shows. Since an explanation in terms of efficient causes does not satisfy the demand for a 'reason' – that is, of course, a *purpose* – one might retrace the occurrence to the mysteries of God or to the sins of the victim. At the same time, this gives the clergy (or whoever else may

profit from this ideology) power both over the believers, who hold the religious creed in awe, and the non-believers, who are alienated or even prosecuted by the community.

Normative concepts such as good and evil, alongside aesthetic categories like beauty, deformity, and order, are all defined with respect to this manner of (non-)thinking. Positive evaluations are reserved for what is useful (whether for direct purposes or for pleasing the gods), rather than for what serves the intellect and, ultimately, human capacity itself – for humanity harbours a power far greater than that which is reserved for those who keep their fellow human beings in check by appealing to fear and hope or greed (appealing to the imagination, that is, not the intellect). Since what is useful, however, is relative to the disposition of our bodies, relativism looms large. Only reason can limit the resulting disagreements, to counterweigh the false unity that religious dogmatism promotes under the guise of divine purpose. The principle of reason is the orderly inference of causes from effects; the imagination takes the effect (an evaluation of utility) and promotes it to the rank of cause (the purpose that is the 'reason' behind an event), thus turning Nature on its head. Those abusing the force of the imagination even make the resulting unintelligibility into the pretext both of God's greatness and their own power of interpreting sacred texts and events as the unfolding of God's plan – in turn validating their own position of power in society.

IV.3 Concluding remarks

Reason can only *limit* the disagreements,[153] by positing, as Spinoza does, the sovereignty of Nature and the suspension of all normative judgments. But reason is not sovereign, it does not have its own dominion; it can only grow naturally through the mechanics of self-corrective desire, when it is led to engage in discursive reasoning. Therefore, the imagination remains a necessary and useful reality, to which an appeal must be made to negotiate sovereign power

[153] Perhaps it is just this limit-intuition that marks *speculative*, or the third kind of knowledge for Spinoza.

and the constitution. Normative concepts form part of that imagination, and so they too are up for negotiation, configured and reconfigured in order to nip emerging forms of dehumanization in the bud. The hypostatization of reason (Descartes) and of sovereign power (Hobbes) are ineffective against, and even in some respects conducive to these dehumanizing effects, when they fail to take difference into account before establishing the abstract universality of Reason, whether moral (as with Descartes) or political (as with Hobbes).

While the unremitting belief in technological rationality has nowadays overtaken the theological prejudice, Spinoza's critique of ideology is useful as ever. We may no longer believe that supernatural beings created the world for us, but we have come to believe that we are the creators of our own happiness, and the mediators of our own salvation. Nonetheless, we take the world to conform to our attempts at scientific and technological mastery (as if it were providentially arranged that way), and forget the material conditions requisite for the idea of technological rationality to take shape.

CONCLUSION

Both in the realms of psychology and the philosophy of nature, René Descartes' theorizing proved to be a watershed. He unintentionally created an important part of the conditions for radicals such as Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza to draw the practical consequences of the new philosophy; interested mainly in mathematical science, Descartes left the realms of political theory and ethics for others to illuminate under the new light. Despite his near silence on these topics, however, Descartes had both implicitly assumed and explicitly argued for certain metaphysical principles that *precluded* him from drawing such consequences. Therefore, he prevented the project of naturalization – which he otherwise wholeheartedly embraced – from reaching its practical ends. These are, as I have argued in I.3 above, the spaces built-in for the soul and God to intervene in the mechanism of nature from outside of it.

While Hobbes *did* draw the consequences of a naturalized psychology for his description of the state of nature, he did so mostly in order to promote the idea that only an outsider's perspective could salvage the human being from his or her natural misery. His justification of State power is such that any rational person would agree, under the conditions presented, with the institution of civil laws that guarantee safety and protect property rights. From the same rationalistic perspective, however, Hobbes would not negotiate the absolute status of the limitations forced on the affective life of citizens; civil order must be protected at all costs for from the perspective of the state of nature, justice cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, he defended the unconditionality of the sovereign's rights over and against its subjects.

Instead, Spinoza willingly transgresses the built-in limitations of both Descartes and Hobbes against the radical naturalism that he himself expounds. These limitations were meant to preserve the possibility of morality (Descartes) or domestic peace (Hobbes). Neither God nor the rational soul can intervene in Nature: God because he *is* Nature, and because his power

coincides with the unalterable course of events; the rational soul because its power is absolutely parallel to that of the body, which is enmeshed in the causal nexus of Nature – in fact, the soul itself is enmeshed in the same causal nexus, be it from the perspective of ideas. Even if the State is an 'artificial' body, it must nonetheless be conceived as a natural product of the composition of individual powers into a public imagination that must be constantly reconsidered and limited by the development of reason through the organization of institutions of learning and education, uncensored by the State. The abstraction of a Power (the Leviathan) that overturns all individual powers – a sovereign right that transforms and finally answers to the natural right to survival – hides the fact that an appeal to the imagination is made. The absolute State thus imagined can never procure the kind of power a free society can: only by negotiating the ebb and flow of the affective life out of which the State is composed can a thriving society come to pass.

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M *Meditations on First Philosophy.*

PP *Principles of Philosophy*.

PS *The Passions of the Soul*.

T *Treatise on Man*.

Works by Hobbes

EP *Elements of Philosophy*.

L *Leviathan*.

Works by Spinoza

E *Ethics*.

TP *Political Treatise.*

TTP *Theological-Political Treatise*.

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