

The value of benevolence: Spinoza and perfectionism

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Abstract

This thesis examines Spinoza's claim that rational benevolence is crucial to human well-being ('the rational benevolence claim'). According to Spinoza, rational benevolence is rational in two senses. First, it involves using reason to guide benevolent actions. Second, it involves the promotion of the rationality of other people. In order to assess the rational benevolence claim, we need to know what human well-being is. Spinoza holds that well-being consists in the perfection of human nature. Aristotle and the Stoics are the most illustrious proponents of perfectionism. However, their respective accounts have been criticised so severely that many have concluded that perfectionism about well-being is implausible.

This thesis argues that Spinoza's perfectionism avoids the traditional objections to the accounts of Aristotle and the Stoics. Nevertheless, Spinoza's own account, particularly his doctrine of agreement in nature, which underpins his rational benevolence claim, has attracted criticism. The thesis defends the rational benevolence claim in the following ways. First, the thesis shows that Spinoza avoids the traditional objections to perfectionism. Second, the thesis argues that there are available replies to the objections to Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature.

Thesis declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Jason Tillett and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Abbreviations

Spinoza

E	<i>Ethics</i>
TEI	<i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect</i>
GMW	<i>God, Man and his Well-being</i>
MT	<i>Metaphysical Thoughts in Parts I and II of Descartes' 'Principles of philosophy'</i>
PT	<i>Political Treatise</i>
TPT	<i>Theological-Political Treatise</i>
L	<i>Letters</i>

Abbreviations for sections from the *Ethics* of Spinoza

App	appendix
Ax	axiom
C	corollary
Dem	demonstration
D	definition
Lem	lemma
P	proposition
Pref	preface
S	scholium
Post	postulate

Aristotle

NE	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
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The Stoics

De Fin Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*

DL Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

Ep Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*

LS A. A. Long & D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*

Other

ELP Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

Introduction

Why should I be kind to other people? Being kind to others can make your life go more smoothly. Often, people reciprocate kindness. What about people who are rude, offensive or cruel? Should I be kind to them? Other people might take advantage of your kindness. If my goal is to achieve a life that is good for me, and not being kind or being cruel would actually help my life go well for me, it seems that I would be better off being mean and nasty to other people.

There is a school of philosophy that absolutely denies that a human being can achieve well-being without being kind to other people. This school is known as nature-fulfilment theory or human perfectionism ('perfectionism').¹ Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza all belong to this tradition. According to this view, the fulfilment or perfection of human nature constitutes human well-being. Rationality, they usually argue, is an essential property of human nature. The excellent performance of the faculty of reason fulfils human nature and constitutes well-being. To exercise reason well is to act virtuously. Thus, human well-being, on this view, consists in virtue alone (Spinoza and the Stoics) or virtue plus external goods, for example, having friends (Aristotle).

Further, all claim that moral virtue or rational benevolence is reason exercised well in relation to other people. They hold that rationally benefitting others contributes to your own well-being. The problem is that it seems possible to use reason to flourish or succeed without being kind to other people. There seems to be unvirtuous people who flourish or are highly successful in spite of their cruelty. There have been powerful tyrants who could indulge all their desires, were responsible for the slaughter of thousands of people, and yet they enjoyed a life of luxury in their castles, with slaves forced to obey their commands. Conversely, there are those who have tried to live a life of virtue and suffered because of it. Socrates was forced to commit suicide by drinking hemlock. Jesus was tortured and crucified. Spinoza was publicly attacked and excommunicated.

The main question this thesis attempts to answer is whether rational benevolence is needed to have well-being. Since this issue is central to perfectionism, it is appropriate to examine

¹ I take the terms 'nature-fulfillment theory' and 'perfectionism' to refer to the same theory.

this tradition. There are other views of what constitutes well-being. Some claim that the satisfaction of desires increases the welfare of the person to whom the desires belong. Others argue that pleasure or enjoyment is the only constituent of well-being. Another view is that the *possession* of certain things, like health, friends, education, and so on, enhances your well-being. These different kinds of theory have something to say about the way in which benevolence fits into an account of well-being. However, perfectionists argue for this claim most strongly. So it makes sense to examine this tradition independently of the others.

Aristotle's account is the most extensively discussed perfectionist theory in contemporary literature on the philosophy of well-being. By comparison, the Stoics are rarely discussed. This is surprising, since the Stoics developed a systematic account of the good life for a human being. What is less surprising, but is nevertheless an oversight, is that the philosophy of Spinoza, which is ultimately about what constitutes human well-being, is notably neglected in the literature on the philosophy of well-being. Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology have traditionally received more attention than his ethics. An innovation of this thesis is to incorporate the scholarship on Spinoza's philosophy into the literature on the philosophy of well-being.

One of the chief criticisms of Aristotle's view is that it endorses a teleological view of Nature. Spinoza, a scholar of Descartes, agreed with him that there is no room for final causes in Nature. Spinoza was highly critical of the philosophical views of Aristotle, the Stoics and Descartes (just to name a few). Spinoza nevertheless constructed a view of well-being which belongs to the perfectionism tradition. We will discover that several contemporary criticisms of Aristotle and the Stoics were expressed by Spinoza in the 17th century. Spinoza believed he did not make the same errors as Aristotle and the Stoics.

It is important to note that my defence of perfectionism is a secondary aim of the thesis. In order to argue that rational benevolence is crucial to maximizing human well-being, we need to know what well-being is. Since I am arguing that the fulfilment or perfection of human nature constitutes well-being, I need to explain why it is a plausible theory. Many contemporary philosophers (particularly those who associate this theory with Aristotle) think it is completely implausible and unsalvageable. My general approach is to show that

Spinoza either avoids the traditional objections to perfectionism or he has good answers based on his own philosophy.

In relation to Spinoza's own arguments, I offer several original contributions. In chapter one I argue that Spinoza can consistently say that a thing is its essence and distinguishable from its essence. In chapter one and three I argue that Spinoza is committed to the view that things that agree with human nature are instrumentally good, whereas Della Rocca and Kisner argue that agreement in nature itself is intrinsically good. In chapter two I argue that Spinoza intended to, and his account does, reject all teleology in Nature (not every Spinoza scholar agrees with my claim). I also provide a reply on behalf of Spinoza to the objection that a thing can have a self-destructive nature. The rest of the traditional objections, which are directed at Aristotle or the Stoics, receive original replies informed by the philosophy of Spinoza.

The thesis has the following structure. Chapter one explains the ways in which Spinoza differs from Aristotle and the Stoics. The sections dealing with these differences are relevant to the arguments in chapter two. In chapter two I show how Spinoza avoids certain traditional objections to perfectionism. Chapter one also explicates Spinoza's rational benevolence argument. This argument is Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature. The section on the relation between human nature and individual nature and the section on rational benevolence are primarily related to that doctrine and the arguments in the third chapter. In these sections I will not discuss the accounts of Aristotle or the Stoics. In chapter three I maintain that Spinoza, via his doctrine of agreement in nature, plausibly argues that rational benevolence is crucial to a human's well-being.

I am presenting a three part argument. First, Spinoza avoids the traditional objections to perfectionism. Second, Spinoza has plausible replies to the objections that are directed at distinctive features of his own account. My chief claim is that Spinoza plausibly argues that rational benevolence is crucial to achieving the highest degree of well-being possible for a human being.

My overall argument does not cover all the different interpretations of Spinoza, Aristotle and the Stoics. My aim is not to provide the definitive interpretation of the philosophy of

Spinoza, nor deal with all the objections to his philosophy that can be imagined. I am aware that proponents of Aristotelianism and Stoicism have replies to the objections to their respective accounts. There is no space to appropriately cover those replies. Besides, Spinoza's philosophy is the primary focus of the thesis.

Finally, this is, in part, a programmatic thesis. The material on the traditional objections and the way in which Spinoza avoids them is presented mainly to introduce Spinoza to the well-being debate. What I am mostly interested in is whether rational benevolence is needed for well-being. Spinoza thinks it is.

Chapter 1

Perfectionism: Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza

1.1 Introduction

This chapter has two aims. The first aim is to show that Spinoza disagrees with Aristotle and the Stoics about certain perfectionist claims. Spinoza's view of human nature, virtue and perfection is different from those endorsed by Aristotle and the Stoics. Though Spinoza's account of human nature, emotion and perfection is important for understanding his rational benevolence argument, the first aim of the chapter strongly influences the aspects of his account that will be focused on. The second aim is to expound Spinoza's argument for the rational benevolence claim. This argument is his doctrine of agreement in nature. That doctrine is founded on his theory of human nature, rationality, theory of emotion, and perfectionism.

Section 1.4 covers Spinoza's account of human nature and its perfection. This section is followed by a comparison of Spinoza with Aristotle and the Stoics. The differences highlighted in section 1.5 enable Spinoza to avoid or easily overcome the traditional objections to perfectionism, covered in chapter two. Whereas section 1.4 mainly serves the first aim, sections 1.6 and 1.7 primarily serve the second aim. In sections 1.6 and 1.7 I will focus only on Spinoza's account. Sections 1.6 and 1.7 construe Spinoza's account in a way that allows him to reply to criticism covered in chapter three.

It should be noted, however, that the section on the relation between human nature and individual nature (1.6) is relevant to an objection covered in chapter two, namely, that human perfection is not good for every human being (2.4). In section 1.6 I argue that, on Spinoza's view, human nature belongs to an individual human's distinct nature. Nevertheless, the main purpose of section 1.6 is to support my arguments in the rational benevolence section (1.7) and chapter three.

Certain objections to Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature arise from the way in which the individual nature of a human is connected to human nature. According to Spinoza,

when humans act rationally they act in accord with human nature and disagree in nature when they follow the impulses of their own nature unguided by reason. The individual nature section (1.6) helps us understand the relation between human nature and an individual's nature and how it is possible for humans to agree *and* disagree in nature. That is why the individual nature section immediately precedes the rational benevolence section.

1.2 Eudaimonia and well-being

Aristotle identifies *eudaimonia* as the chief good of man.² *Eudaimonia* 'is usually translated "happiness"³ or human flourishing.⁴ Aristotle's understanding of happiness is not merely having positive emotions (though they are present in a happy life).⁵ Sensual pleasure or a satisfied state of mind does not constitute happiness, on Aristotle's view of *eudaimonia*. That view is hedonism. A term that is closer to Aristotle's understanding of *eudaimonia* is human 'well-being' or welfare.⁶ Human well-being is about 'what is ultimately good for any individual.'⁷ The hedonist holds that pleasure constitutes well-being, whereas the perfectionist argues that, ultimately, virtue or the perfection of human nature is good for you.

1.3 Formal conditions of well-being

Aristotle states the formal conditions of well-being. He begins by claiming that '[e]very craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good.'⁸ The good is the end that all things seek.⁹ There are ends that are subordinate to other ends. The ruling end, says Aristotle, is more choiceworthy than the subordinate end because the latter is chosen for the sake of the former end.¹⁰ For example, the end of health is more valuable than the end of taking medicine which aims at promoting our health.

² NE 1097b15-23.

³ ELP, p. 34

⁴ Anscombe (1958, p. 18).

⁵ Irwin (1999a, p. 333).

⁶ ELP, p. 34

⁷ Crisp (2006a, p. 100).

⁸ NE 1094a1.

⁹ NE 1094a4.

¹⁰ NE 1094a15.

Aristotle is not saying that subordinate ends are not choiceworthy. He thinks they are, but they are not as choiceworthy as the end for the sake of which we pursue the subordinate ends.

It follows that the end for the sake of which we do everything else is ‘the best good.’¹¹ We have many different ends which are subordinate to our ultimate good which we strive to achieve. For example, health is an important good or end but it is not our ultimate good or end. Health is an important end which we strive to achieve for the sake of our well-being. Thus, for Aristotle the highest good or well-being must be more valuable than any means that are required to achieve that end. Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza agree that well-being is the highest good for a human being and wanted for its own sake.

1.4 Spinoza’s theory of well-being

1.4.1 Introduction

Spinoza, like Aristotle and the Stoics, holds that the perfection of human nature constitutes well-being. Human perfection is the highest good and wanted for its own sake. Spinoza argues that rational benevolence is necessary to the perfection of human nature. To understand why, we need to know what human nature is and in what its perfection consists. Spinoza’s perfectionism is generally the same as Aristotle’s and the Stoics’. However, there are important differences.

Spinoza’s view of human nature, the nature of the human mind, theory of emotion, the nature of rationality, virtue, perfection and the role of ‘external goods’ significantly departs from the views held by Aristotle and the Stoics. On Spinoza’s view, human nature is not *really* distinctive of a human being; reason is not a deliberative faculty that humans can freely exercise; the emotions, not reason, belong to the essence of a human being; the human mind and body are the same thing, conceived under the attributes of Thought and Extension, respectively; virtue is power and lacks connotations of duty, praise and blame; perfection is defined as reality, not completeness; and there are many things outside of a

¹¹ NE 1094a22.

human being that are necessary to promoting its well-being. Each concept, and the way in which it is connected to the others, will be explained in this section.

1.4.2 *Conatus and human essence*

Spinoza holds that a human being has a human nature ('nature' means the same thing as 'essence')¹² and its own distinctive nature. The *conatus* (a Latin term translated 'striving') of a human being is its distinctive nature. According to Spinoza, the *conatus* of a thing is the 'actual' essence of the thing.¹³ That is, the *conatus* of a thing is the essence of a thing combined with existence. The *conatus* is a thing's essential power ('power') by which it strives to preserve its being. The notion of *conatus* refers to the life, existence, being, actuality or the thing's power by which it strives to preserve its being.

In contrast, the essence of a thing is the true definition or concept of the thing. Spinoza says that a true definition 'explain[s] the inmost essence of [a] thing.'¹⁴ An individual human's nature is her *conatus*, whereas her human nature is a true definition or conception of her. The *conatus* of a human being is the power by which she strives to preserve her being. The definition of human essence delimits the contours of her power and explains what properties belong to her nature.

1.4.3 *Human essence*

According to Spinoza, 'the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes.'¹⁵ Spinoza thinks this is *the* true definition of human nature.¹⁶ The properties of human nature are deduced from this definition. By understanding the relevant modifications of the attributes of God, we can understand human nature.

God is 'a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.'¹⁷ The whole of Nature ('Nature')

¹² E D8, IV.

¹³ E P7, III.

¹⁴ TEI, p. 39 or II/34/30.

¹⁵ E P10C, II.

¹⁶ Section 2.3.2 explains Spinoza's theory of definition.

¹⁷ E D6, I.

has the same definition as God.¹⁸ Thus, God is identified with Nature or God *is* Nature. The attributes of God constitute the essence of God.¹⁹ Extension and Thought are attributes of God.²⁰ Extension is matter.²¹ Moreover, Extension and Thought are conceived through themselves and are self-sufficient. They are therefore infinite and eternal attributes. Thus, they belong to the essence of God. All other things must be understood through, and are modifications of, the attributes of God.²²

There are modes that follow immediately from the attributes of God. They do so because they are infinite and eternal modes which must be understood directly through those attributes. Motion is deduced from the attribute of Extension and Intellect is deduced from the attribute of Thought. Since a human being is a finite thing and cannot be conceived or be (i.e., exist) without these infinite and eternal modes,²³ Motion and Intellect constitute the essence of a human being.²⁴ Thus, Motion and Intellect are the modes Spinoza refers to in his definition of human essence.

The infinite and eternal modes constitute the essence of *all* finite things. That is because finite things can neither be, nor be conceived, without those modes. Motion inheres in all bodies.²⁵ Spinoza defines the actual essence of an individual body as a certain ratio of motion and rest distributed throughout the parts of the body which it strives to maintain.²⁶ As for the Intellect, '[i]ts sole property is to understand everything clearly and distinctly at all times.'²⁷ The clear and distinct ideas of the Intellect are the ideas that constitute the essence of all existing things, which includes the minds and emotions of humans, and the mental states, however rudimentary, of animals and non-biological things.²⁸ All finite things essentially consist of a body in which a certain ratio of motion and rest inheres and the idea of that body.

¹⁸ GMW, p. 152 or I/116/28-32.

¹⁹ E D4, I.

²⁰ E P1-P2, II.

²¹ E P15SV, I or II/59/33.

²² E D5, I.

²³ TEI, p. 41 or II/37/4-5.

²⁴ GMW, pp. 91-92.

²⁵ Israel (2001, p. 251).

²⁶ E P13SLem5-7, II.

²⁷ GMW, p. 92 or I/48/22-23.

²⁸ E A3, II; P13CS, II.

Spinoza holds that the essence of the human mind is an idea united to an actually existing body.²⁹ Spinoza's 'parallelism' explains the connection between the mind and the body, which is expressed in the following proposition. 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.'³⁰ According to parallelism, there is only one causal order in Nature³¹ and it can be conceived under the attribute of Thought or under the attribute of Extension.³² The causal order of the attributes of God parallel each other, but they are conceived independently of each other.³³

Spinoza argues that there can be no causal interaction between the attributes of God. This is because Spinoza is committed to the idea that there is a connection between conceptual explanation and causality. 'Spinoza accepts that causation is just conceptual connection.'³⁴ If A is conceived only through itself and B is conceived only through itself, then there can be no causal interaction between A and B. Thought can be conceived independently of Extension and vice versa. The attribute of Thought is conceptually distinct from the attribute of Extension, so there can be no causal interaction between Thought and Extension.

A human being is a part of the essence of the modes of God, namely, Motion and Intellect, which are infinite and eternal modes of the attributes of God. The essence of a human being can be understood in terms of a mind or a body. The mind and the body of a human being is the same thing, but they are conceived under their respective attributes. Since the essence of God is the same as the power of God,³⁵ the essence of a human being is a part of the power of God. It follows that the power of the mind and the power of the body is the same thing. Whenever the power of the body increases or decreases the power of the mind increases or decreases, and vice versa. So, the power of a human being can be conceived physically or mentally, and yet, essentially, a human being is a mode of God.

²⁹ E P11, II.

³⁰ E P7, II.

³¹ E P14C1, I; P7S, II or II/90/17.

³² E P7CS, II.

³³ E P7S, II.

³⁴ Della Rocca (2008, p. 44).

³⁵ E P34, I.

1.4.4 The distinction between humans, non-human animals, plant-life and inanimate things

Though Spinoza does not think there is a real distinction between humans and other finite things, he acknowledges that there is a difference from the human perspective. Spinoza recognises that to say that human essence is constituted by certain modes of God does not explain the difference between individual things in Nature. What distinguishes one thing from another, for example, a human being from an ant, is the amount of reality or power that belongs to the essence of the thing. A thing that is more powerful than another thing is different in nature to that thing (1.7.4).

To see why a thing can have more power than another thing, we need to keep in mind Spinoza's idea that all individual things, taken together, make up the whole of Nature. The whole of Nature is the same as the whole of Reality. Spinoza identifies reality with perfection. It follows that the power of a thing is a part of the reality or perfection of God or Nature.

Spinoza claims that it is obvious that some ideas and the objects of those ideas are more excellent or contain more reality than others.³⁶ He claims, further, that we need to understand the nature of the human body (for it is the object of the idea which constitutes the human mind) if we are to understand in what way and to what extent it differs from other things in Nature. Spinoza distinguishes individual beings that exist or can exist in Nature in the following way:

[I]n proportion as a Body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we can know the excellence of one mind over the others...³⁷

In Nature there is a spectrum of bodily and mental complexity. Extended Nature consists of an infinite number of bodies that range from the simplest to the most complex. The

³⁶ E P13S, II.

³⁷ Ibid.

complexity of a thing is defined by the number and nature of the individual parts that make up the body, which determines the extent to which it can affect and be affected by other bodies. Individual parts of a body may be removed or added without its nature changing so long as the ratio of motion and rest distributed throughout the various parts of the body is preserved.³⁸ Thus, ‘we see how a composite Individual can be affected in many ways, and still preserve its nature.’³⁹

And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of [N]ature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual.⁴⁰

The more complex the body of a thing is, the more reality or power belongs to the essence of the thing’s body.

We can now see how one physical thing is more perfect or has more reality than another thing. The more a body can perform many actions and affect other things in many ways and be affected in many ways, and the more the actions of the body depend only on that body, the more reality or perfection that belongs to the body of the thing. A thing that has a body composed of few parts can perform fewer actions and be affected by external things in fewer ways, and its actions are more dependent on other things.

For example, the human body is composed of many more and different individual bodies than the body of an ant and can therefore affect and be affected by other things in many more ways.

What distinguishes a person from the lower animals and from so-called inanimate objects is that a person is a more complicated organism liable to be affected by its environment in a greater variety of ways; it is therefore able to reflect more of the order of causes in Nature as a whole.⁴¹

If the human body expressed the order of causes in the whole of extended Nature, the human mind would contain perfect knowledge of reality because the mind is the idea of the body. A human being is a finite thing, so this level of knowledge is impossible. Only an

³⁸ E P13Lem4, II.

³⁹ E P13SLem7S, II.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hampshire (2005, p. 88).

infinite physical being can have perfect knowledge of reality. The more perfect a thing's knowledge, the greater the extent to which its body will be capable of affecting and being affected by its environment.

From his account of the nature of the body, Spinoza deduces several postulates. Since the human body is made up of numerous individual bodies (some fluid, some soft, and some hard) all of which are composite; and since external things affect all these individuals that make up the human body, and the human body itself, in numerous ways, there are many things the body needs in order for it to be preserved; and finally, the human body has the power of movement and can affect external things in many ways.⁴²

There are three important propositions that follow from these postulates. The Mind can perceive many things because it is the idea of a highly complex body.⁴³ The human body is affected in many ways by external things and affects external things in many ways. Further, the human mind perceives all things that happen in the human body. So we can see that the essence of the human mind is not simple, but it is composed of a great many ideas.

Spinoza's account of human nature should not distract us from his fundamental claim that only individual things exist in Nature. Spinoza does not think that the nature of a thing is determined by the natural kind to which it belongs. Spinoza denies that natural kinds exist because he thinks that a genus is not a real thing in Nature. Spinoza holds that things in Nature are distinguished, via a 'being of reason,' only in terms of how much power, reality or perfection belongs to their essence.

The distinction between a real being and a being of reason is important to understanding Spinoza's philosophy. A real being is a being that is clearly and distinctly perceived and necessarily exists or could exist.⁴⁴ According to Spinoza, for example, the idea of God or Nature, an infinite being that necessarily exists, is clear and distinct. Conversely, a being of reason exists only as a thought in the mind. For example, Peter, a living human, is a real being, but the idea of humankind is a being of reason. For outside of the human mind no

⁴² E P13SPost1-4, II.

⁴³ E P14, II.

⁴⁴ MT, p. 299.

natural 'kinds' exist. Only individual beings exist or can exist. Humans have developed general ideas, for example, *man*, *dog* and *cat*, that make it easier for them to distinguish individual things from each other.⁴⁵ Spinoza cautions that confusing beings of reason with real beings hinders a true understanding of natural things. This happens because beings of reason arise directly from real beings.⁴⁶ For example, the idea of 'man' arises directly from the idea of an individual human being. Spinoza says that many mistakes in philosophy arise from failure to observe this distinction.

Speaking imperfectly and using a being of reason, Spinoza says that the actual and 'most general' genus of 'all individuals in Nature' is 'the notion of being, which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature.'⁴⁷ We judge a thing more or less perfect by comparing it to the genus of 'being, or reality.'⁴⁸ The more being or reality a thing has the more perfect it is. If we judge that a thing is less perfect it is because it affects the mind less than those things that we judge more perfect and not because their nature is defective or lacks something. Thus, human nature is not essentially different from the nature of non-human animals or ostensibly inanimate things.⁴⁹ Spinoza distinguishes a human being from other things only in terms of how much power, reality or perfection belongs to the essence of things.

1.4.5 Poisonous spider objection

It might be objected that a poisonous spider can kill a human. Thus, a poisonous spider is more powerful than a human. Admittedly, a poisonous spider could kill a human. Furthermore, a human being is physically weaker than some of the other animals. In a battle between an adult lion and an unaided human, my money would go on the lion.

⁴⁵ However, though a being of reason is not an idea of a real being, it itself has being, that is, it can exist as a thought in a human mind (Ibid, p. 301).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ E Pref, IV or II/207/24-25.

⁴⁸ E Pref, IV or II/207/27.

⁴⁹ Spinoza says that all things are 'animate' to some degree: P13S, II or II/96/28-29. There is no space to examine this controversial claim.

Spinoza acknowledges that an individual human being, considered alone, is vulnerable and ‘infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.’⁵⁰ That is why reason dictates that humans must join forces with other humans, for by doing so their power to preserve themselves is multiplied and constitutes an extremely powerful individual (i.e., a rational state).⁵¹ Moreover, real power is essential power or acting from the laws⁵² of one’s own nature. The more reality that belongs to the thing, the more powerful it is. It is hard to deny that the human body, for example, the human brain, is significantly more complex and can affect and be affected by things in many more ways than that of a poisonous spider (or any other animal that is known to us). Spinoza claims that the more the body of a thing is self-dependent and capable of affecting and being affected by other things the more its mind can understand things distinctly. As we will see below, Spinoza argues that insofar as the human mind acts from adequate or clear and distinct ideas (or reason), its effects can be understood through its nature alone.

1.4.6 Rationality

According to Spinoza, reason is not a deliberative faculty of the human mind. Reason is having or reasoning from adequate ideas.⁵³ He holds that rationality is an important property of human nature, but it does not belong to its true definition.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Spinoza argues that a human being is most powerful or perfects her nature chiefly through reason or adequate ideas. Spinoza’s notion of an ‘adequate idea’ explains his view of the nature of rationality and how it fits into human nature.⁵⁵

God’s Intellect, which is one of the infinite modes that constitute human nature, understands all things clearly and distinctly or consists only of adequate ideas. For example, the idea of Extension in the Intellect of God is clear, that is, it is not confused with the idea of another thing, for example, Thought. The idea of Extension in the Intellect of God is

⁵⁰ E App32, IV.

⁵¹ E P18S, IV or II/223/5-14.

⁵² For example, your striving to preserve your being.

⁵³ E P40S2, II or II/122/14.

⁵⁴ Appendix A.

⁵⁵ On Spinoza’s view, there are three kinds of knowledge: opinion or imagination, reason and intuition (P40S, II or II/122/1-30). Spinoza’s claims about intuitive knowledge are omitted because none of my arguments rely on them.

distinct because it is unique and can be distinguished from the idea of Thought. A clear and distinct idea is virtually the same thing as an adequate idea. An adequate (or clear and distinct) idea, 'insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, *or* intrinsic denominations of a true idea.'⁵⁶ Spinoza says 'intrinsic' as opposed to 'extrinsic' because he maintains that the truth of an idea does not depend on 'the agreement of the idea with its object.'⁵⁷ The difference between a true idea and an adequate idea is 'that the word 'true' has regard only to the agreement of the idea with its object..., whereas the word 'adequate' has regard to the nature of the idea in itself.'⁵⁸ Spinoza concludes that 'there is no real difference between a true and an adequate idea except for this extrinsic relation.'⁵⁹ There is no space to deal with Spinoza's epistemology in detail. For the purposes of my argument, 'clear and distinct ideas,' 'adequate ideas' and 'true ideas' mean the same thing for Spinoza.

Adequate ideas are 'common notions.'⁶⁰ A 'common notion,' which is an idea of a thing that is 'equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.'⁶¹ For example, Extension is a property that is common to all bodies. Extension is equally in a part, for example, the human body, and in the whole, the whole of Extension. The *idea* of Extension is adequate in the human mind because it is common to all bodies.

Conversely, inadequate ideas are confused ideas. All confused ideas belong to what Spinoza calls the human 'imagination.'⁶² According to Spinoza, the imagination is constituted by ideas that represent the impact of the power of external causes on the human body.⁶³ Those ideas are confused (that is, they are unclear and indistinct) because they involve a mixture of the power of the human body *and* the impact on the body by the power

⁵⁶ E D4, II.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ L 60, pp. 912-913.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 913.

⁶⁰ E P40S2III, II.

⁶¹ E P38, II.

⁶² E P40S, II or II/122/11.

⁶³ E P26CDem, II.

of an external thing.⁶⁴ Thus, the human mind consists of adequate and inadequate ideas or reason and imagination.

Now, since the human mind is a part of the Intellect of God, God has an adequate idea of the essence of the human mind. When the essence of the human mind is understood through itself alone, it is understood adequately or clearly and distinctly. Conversely:

when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind, then we say that the human Mind perceives the thing only partially, *or* inadequately.⁶⁵

For example, God has an adequate idea of me and an adequate idea of the sun. When I perceive the sun, I do so confusedly because my idea of the sun ‘involves the essence of the sun insofar as [my] body is affected by the sun.’⁶⁶ We *imagine* that the distance from us to the sun is roughly 200 feet, but in reality the sun is millions of miles away from us. When we imagine, the activity of the mind involves the impact of external causes on the body. Conversely, when the mind acts rationally or reasons from adequate ideas, the activity of the mind can be understood through its own nature alone and the mind conceives things truly.

Thus, reason is a *property* of the human mind. However, we must remember that, for Spinoza, a human being is essentially power. Human power is expressed physically and mentally. Human power can be understood as a complex body in which a certain ratio of motion and rest is communicated to the various parts of the body which it strives to maintain. Insofar as the body preserves its ratio of motion and rest, it fulfils its nature. Human power can also be expressed through the human mind. Insofar as the mind has, or reasons from, adequate ideas, the activity of the mind can be understood through its own nature or power.

Spinoza’s view of reason has a peculiar implication. If reason is having adequate ideas and the idea of Extension is adequate, then a ‘mind’ that contains the idea of Extension has

⁶⁴ E P1Dem, III.

⁶⁵ E P11C, II.

⁶⁶ E P35S, II.

reason. Since an ant has a body, the idea of the body of an ant must contain the idea of Extension. The idea of Extension is a common notion or adequate idea. Thus, an ant has reason. This implication is absurd.

This ‘absurdity’ can be removed by emphasising Spinoza’s point that the power of the body and its ability to do many things determines the power of the mind and its ability to perceive many things. The human body is considerably more powerful and capable of doing many more things than the body of an ant. The human mind, by the doctrine of parallelism, is considerably more powerful and can perceive many more things than the ‘mind’ of an ant. Since the human body can affect and be affected by its environment in considerably more ways than the body of an ant, the human mind ‘is therefore able to reflect more of the order of causes in Nature as a whole.’⁶⁷ Thus, human reason is far more powerful than the ‘reason’ of an ant.

Spinoza says little that is relevant to this issue. He acknowledges ‘that many things are observed in the lower Animals that far surpass human ingenuity.’⁶⁸ On the other hand, he claims that ‘[a]part from men we know no singular thing in [N]ature whose Mind we can enjoy.’⁶⁹ The issues of what things in Nature other than humans can ‘know’ and the nature of their ‘mind’ are beyond the scope of the thesis. The important point is that, on Spinoza’s view, reason is a property of the human mind, not a faculty that is special to human nature, and that the actions of the mind are understood through itself only insofar as it has or reasons from adequate ideas.

1.4.7 *Actual essence*

The above section explained Spinoza’s definition of human essence and the properties deducible from it. The *conatus* of a human being is her *actualised* human essence. The *conatus* of a human being can be understood through the body, the mind, or the mind and body considered together. The *conatus* of the body is the ratio of motion and rest communicated to all the parts of the body which it strives to maintain. The *will* Spinoza

⁶⁷ Hampshire (2005, p. 88).

⁶⁸ E P2S, III or II/142/10.

⁶⁹ E App 26, IV.

defines as the striving of the human mind, when it is considered alone. The will is not a faculty that we manipulate like levers of a vehicle. Spinoza defines the will as ‘a faculty of affirming and denying, and not desire.’⁷⁰ The reference to the idea of a ‘faculty’ of the will should be understood as a being of reason. The will is nothing more than an idea in the human mind. That is, the faculty of will is not an idea of a real thing that exists in the human body. The will is the part of the mind that ‘affirms or denies something true or something false, and not the desire by which the Mind wants a thing or avoids it.’⁷¹ Thus, the mind ‘strives to persevere in its being both insofar as it has inadequate ideas and insofar as it has adequate ideas.’⁷² The nature of the will is more fully explained in the free will section, below (1.4.10).

The striving of a human being is called ‘appetite’ when it refers to the mind and body considered together.⁷³ Spinoza defines ‘desire’ as ‘consciousness of the appetite’ or *conatus*.⁷⁴ Moreover, *appetite*, says Spinoza, (specifically desire and love)⁷⁵ ‘is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow[s] those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things.’⁷⁶ According to Spinoza, desire and love belong to the essence of man because ‘without them we can neither be nor persist.’⁷⁷ Thus, the *actual* essence of a human being consists of the ratio of motion and rest which inheres in the body, the will and desire.

It follows that the ratio of motion and rest inherent in the body, the will and desire express the actualised essential power of a human being. Spinoza maintains that well-being consists in maximizing human power. The emotions express human essential power and the way in which its power is affected. Consequently, Spinoza’s theory of emotion is central to his theory of well-being.

⁷⁰ E P48S, II.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² E P9Dem, III.

⁷³ E P9S, III.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ GMW, p. 118 or 1/77/16-18.

⁷⁶ E P9S, III.

⁷⁷ GMW, p. 118 or 1/77/17.

1.4.8 Rationality and emotion

Spinoza's definition of emotion relies on his distinction between reason and the imagination. The imagination is constituted by ideas that represent the impact of the power of external causes on the human body.⁷⁸ Those ideas are confused (that is, they are unclear and indistinct) because they involve the nature or power of the human body *and* the impact on the body by the power of an external thing.⁷⁹

Conversely, reason is having adequate ideas.⁸⁰ The idea that constitutes the essence of the human mind alone is clear and distinct (that is, it can be distinguished from the essence of other distinct things).⁸¹ The mind is the adequate cause of the effects or ideas that follow from adequate ideas in the human mind.⁸² The mind is *active* insofar as it is the adequate cause of the affections of the mind, otherwise it is *passive*.⁸³ Since human essence is power,⁸⁴ and we act powerfully insofar as the mind has or acts from adequate ideas (reason),⁸⁵ the mind expresses its real power insofar as it is rational.

Next, passive emotions necessarily involve the impact of external causes on the human body. An emotion, says Spinoza, is 'the affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.'⁸⁶ The mind is active insofar as it is the adequate cause of an emotion and passive insofar as it is an inadequate cause. 'The actions of the Mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone.'⁸⁷ For, insofar as the mind has inadequate ideas, it is acted on. On the other hand, insofar as the mind has adequate ideas the affections of the mind can be understood through the affections of the mind alone. Therefore, a human being acts in accord with her nature insofar as she acts rationally.

⁷⁸ E P26CDem, II.

⁷⁹ E P1Dem, III.

⁸⁰ E P40S2III, II.

⁸¹ E P11C, II.

⁸² E D1, III.

⁸³ E D2-D3, III.

⁸⁴ E P7Dem, III.

⁸⁵ E P1, III; D2, III.

⁸⁶ E D3, III.

⁸⁷ E P3, III.

The emotions can be understood in relation to human nature considered alone and in relation to external causes. The primary emotions are desire, joy and sadness. The emotion of desire is the very essence of a human being. The emotion of joy is ‘that *passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection,*’⁸⁸ that is, joy is an increase in power.⁸⁹ The emotion of sadness is ‘that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection,*’⁹⁰ that is, sadness is a decrease in power. All the other emotions are derived from the primary ones. ‘Pleasure and Pain are ascribed to a man when one part of him is affected more than the rest, whereas Cheerfulness and Melancholy are ascribed to him when all are equally affected.’⁹¹ Thus, an emotion is the mind’s affirmation of the level of human essential power or perfection of the human body.

Having considered the emotions in relation to human nature alone, Spinoza explains the nature of the emotions in relation to external causes. Spinoza defines ‘Love’ as ‘*Joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause.*’⁹² For example, if Peter experiences joy accompanied by the idea of Sally, Peter loves Sally. Similarly, Spinoza defines ‘Hate’ as ‘*Sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause.*’⁹³ If Peter experiences sadness accompanied by the idea of Sally, Peter hates Sally. Many of the other emotions, for example, Hope, Fear, Compassion, and Envy, are composed of the relevant primary emotions *and* an external cause.

1.4.9 Rational emotion

Not all emotions are related to a human being insofar as she is passive. There are species of desire and joy that relate to the human mind insofar as she is active. For example, ‘[w]hen the Mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices.’⁹⁴ Since ‘the Mind necessarily considers itself’ and ‘its power of acting’ ‘when it conceives a true, *or* adequate, idea,’ and since ‘the Mind conceives some adequate ideas,’ the mind ‘rejoices insofar as it conceives

⁸⁸ E P11S, III.

⁸⁹ E P57Dem, III or II/186/30-31.

⁹⁰ E P11S, III.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² E P13S, III.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ E P53, III.

adequate ideas, i.e., insofar as it acts.’⁹⁵ Similarly, ‘the Mind strives to persevere in its being, both insofar as it has clear and distinct ideas and insofar as it has confused ideas.’⁹⁶ The emotion of desire is the very essence or striving of a human being. Therefore, ‘Desire also is related to us insofar as we understand,’ or our mind is active.⁹⁷ Since the mind expresses its own nature when it is active and acting in accord with your nature involves rational activity, it follows that those desires and derivatives of Joy that express human activity are rational.

Moreover, only emotions derived from the emotions of desire and joy can relate to a human being insofar as her mind is powerful or active, that is, insofar as she is rational.⁹⁸ The emotion of sadness is an idea of the mind which affirms that its ‘power of acting is diminished or restrained.’⁹⁹ That is, the emotion of sadness indicates the passivity of the mind or the impact of external causes. Therefore, only certain derivatives of the emotions of desire and joy relate to the human mind insofar as it acts or is rational.

1.4.10 Free will

Clearly, Spinoza thinks the mind can act. However, the activity of the mind should not be understood as an act of free will.¹⁰⁰ For Spinoza denies that a human being has free will. The mind acts only in the sense that its thinking can be understood through its nature alone. When my mind originates its thinking from an adequate idea, the mind is the proximate cause of its activity. When the mind’s activity arises from an inadequate idea, the proximate cause of its thinking is an external cause. Still, the thinking of the human mind, whether or not it originates from adequate or inadequate ideas, is not caused by an absolute or free will. Consequently, a human being cannot exercise her free will to increase her rationality and thereby increase her essential power or perfect her nature.

⁹⁵ E P58Dem, III.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ E P59Dem, III.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Appendix C provides additional explanation of Spinoza’s view of freedom.

So what is the cause of human action, according to Spinoza? The motion of an external body is the cause of the human action (or motion) and the motion of that body is caused by the motion of another body and so on *ad infinitum*.¹⁰¹ Similarly, all particular acts of will or volition are the product of a cause, and this cause the result of another cause and so on *ad infinitum*.¹⁰² The mind perceives all the affections of the body or the mind is the body, for the mind is a human being considered under the attribute of Thought and the body is a human being considered under the attribute of Extension. In other words, the actions of a human being, considered mentally or physically, are determined to exist and produce an effect by another finite cause, and that cause by another, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹⁰³ The existence and actions of all finite modes are causally determined by antecedent causes to act or produce an effect in a particular way.

Spinoza's other reason for concluding that humans lack free will is that the mind cannot cause actions of the body and vice versa.¹⁰⁴ Spinoza's parallelism forbids the interaction between the attribute of Thought and the attribute of Extension. According to Spinoza, conception implies causality. All modes of thinking have God as their cause insofar as he is a thinking thing, that is, insofar as they are conceived through the attribute of Thought. The mind is not explained through some other attribute, for example, Extension. The mind's ideas are determined by other modes of Thought that are themselves determined to exist and produce effects by other modes of Thought.

Similarly, the motion and rest of an individual body must arise from another body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another, and so on. Only modes of Extension can affect other modes of Extension and only modes of Thought can affect other modes of Thought. The states of the human mind and the body constitute the same thing, but they are conceived under their respective attributes. This is why it seems that we take control of our bodies through our mental states. Intentions mirror the states of our body, but there is no causal interaction between our mental states and our bodily states. By the principle that conception implies causality, there is no causal interaction between the mind and the body.

¹⁰¹ E P13SLem3, II.

¹⁰² E P48, II.

¹⁰³ E P28, I.

¹⁰⁴ E P2, III

I suspect that there will be many who will reject Spinoza's parallelism. Some think that the world is entirely physical and that the mind is the brain, which is a physical thing. However, there is reason to believe that not all things in Nature can be physically explained.¹⁰⁵ The causal relation between human intention and action continues to puzzle contemporary philosophers and scientists.¹⁰⁶ Spinoza would be unsurprised. Over three centuries ago, Spinoza observed that human beings 'are conscious of their own actions, and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined.'¹⁰⁷ He complains that humans do not yet 'know the structure of the Body so accurately that [they] could explain all its functions.'¹⁰⁸

Moreover:

Again, no one knows how, or by what means, the Mind moves the body, nor how many degrees of motion it can give the body, nor with what speed it can move it. So it follows that when men say that this or that action of the Body arises from the mind, which has dominion over the Body, they do not know what they are saying, and they do nothing but confess, in fine-sounding words, that they are ignorant of the true cause of that action, and that they do not wonder at it.¹⁰⁹

Spinoza explains, further, that people:

say, of course, that human actions depend on the will, but these are only words for which they have no idea. For all are ignorant of what the will is, and how it moves the body.¹¹⁰

Today, we cannot indisputably explain in detail how conscious intention causes human action. Admittedly, there are contemporary philosophers who have devised theories of free will.¹¹¹ However, none can indubitably claim to have explained what the will is and the way in which it is free.

1.4.11 Virtue and perfection

Even though Spinoza holds that virtue constitutes well-being, he denies that virtuous activity is the result of free will. Spinoza's definition of virtue can help us understand why

¹⁰⁵ Chalmers (1996).

¹⁰⁶ Kim (1998, Ch. 2).

¹⁰⁷ E P2S, III or II/143/30.

¹⁰⁸ E P2S, III or II/142/9.

¹⁰⁹ E P2S, III or II/142/15.

¹¹⁰ E P35S, II or II/117/16-18.

¹¹¹ For example, Korsgaard (2009).

he denies this claim. He defines virtue as power.¹¹² The *conatus* or ‘actual essence’ of a human being is ‘the power, *or* striving by which it strives to persevere in its being.’¹¹³ We are virtuous insofar as we strive to preserve our being or power. Thus, self-preservation is the foundation of virtue.¹¹⁴ The more a human ‘strives, and is able,’ ‘to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue.’¹¹⁵ Virtue is its own reward, says Spinoza, because virtue constitutes real power, and we want that for its own sake.¹¹⁶ As for perfection, Spinoza defines it as reality.¹¹⁷ Since human perfection is our aim, and virtue is its own reward, virtue and perfection are intimately connected. Ultimately, Spinoza identifies perfection, reality, virtue, power and the actual essence of a thing.¹¹⁸

The Free Man is Spinoza’s ‘model’¹¹⁹ (or ideal) of human nature,¹²⁰ a perfected human being. The Free Man fully expresses his power, virtue, reality or perfection. Since a thing is free insofar as it acts through its nature alone, independently of the power of external things,¹²¹ the ideal human is free, to the extent possible for a finite human being. We can see, then, that true human freedom, as understood by Spinoza, is the same thing as human perfection, power, virtue or acting through the laws of a human being’s own nature.

Spinoza’s definition of perfection as reality undermines the idea that imperfection means that a thing is defective or lacks something. Since only God exists, the power of each individual thing combined makes up the whole of God’s power.¹²² Spinoza argues that when we compare things in Nature we do so correctly only when we compare them on the basis of being or reality.¹²³ Things in Nature are incorrectly compared in terms of distinctive capacities. From the human perspective, we can correctly say that the more reality or being a thing has the more perfect it is compared to other things in Nature. Things

¹¹² E D8, IV. Wolfson (1934, p. 226, II) and Allison (1987, p. 143) note that Spinoza gives the term ‘virtue’ its ‘original meaning’, that is, virtue is power.

¹¹³ E P7, III.

¹¹⁴ E P22C, IV.

¹¹⁵ E P20, IV.

¹¹⁶ E P49IVA, II or II/136/5-6; P42, V.

¹¹⁷ E D6, II.

¹¹⁸ E Pref, IV or II/208/25-II/209/1 and D8, IV.

¹¹⁹ Spinoza uses the term ‘model.’

¹²⁰ There are Spinoza scholars who deny this claim: Youpa (2010, pp. 61-62).

¹²¹ E D7, I.

¹²² TPT, p. 527. This is also Stoic doctrine (DL 7.87).

¹²³ E Pref, IV or II/207/25-28.

with more being or reality affect our mind more than those things with less being or reality.¹²⁴ Things are not judged imperfect because they lack something or because Nature has erred.¹²⁵ Nature does not err, because all things follow necessarily and perfectly from the infinite and eternal essence of God.¹²⁶ Spinoza adds, however, that even though the terms ‘perfect,’ ‘imperfect,’ ‘good’ and ‘evil’ do not refer to real things, we need to retain them for they can be used to label and distinguish those things that will lead us closer to the model of the Free Man from those that will lead us astray.¹²⁷

According to Spinoza, humans ‘are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model.’¹²⁸ Consequently, Spinoza’s account allows for degrees of well-being. However, Spinoza is not saying that a human being is more perfect if she attains a superior essence, for example, that of a super smart alien. Perfection and imperfection relate to the increase or decrease of a human’s ‘power of acting.’¹²⁹ Thus, human perfection, virtue, power and freedom are identified with human well-being.

A human being is most virtuous when her mind’s activity follows from reason.¹³⁰ For a human being acts from her nature alone only insofar as she acts rationally. The rational human judges good only those things that conduce to true understanding. Since the mind can be certain only when it has adequate ideas, ‘[w]e know nothing to be certainly good, except what really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding.’¹³¹ Self-preservation is the foundation of virtue, but knowing God is the highest virtue. The greatest thing in Nature that we can understand is God. Since only that which conduces to understanding is certainly good, the knowledge of God is our highest good. The greatest virtue is knowledge of God or having adequate ideas. Insofar as the mind has or reasons

¹²⁴ E Pref, IV or II/208/1-7.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ E Pref, IV or II/208/15. The model of human nature is a ‘*being of reason*’ (GMW, p. 103 or I/60/20; E Pref, IV or II/207/19). The model is artificial in the sense that it is not the idea of a real being. However, the model or ideal is informed by what Spinoza argues are true conclusions pertaining to human nature and human well-being (GMW, pp. 103-104 or I/61/2-5). The model of human nature represents the true way to achieve well-being (GMW, p.103 or I/60/28-29).

¹²⁸ E Pref, IV or II/208/22-23.

¹²⁹ E Pref, IV or II/208/28.

¹³⁰ E P23-P24, IV.

¹³¹ E P27, IV.

from adequate ideas, its activity can be understood through its own power. Therefore, virtue or the knowledge of God maximises human power or well-being.

1.4.12 Virtue and good

A correct understanding of the relation between ‘virtue’ and what is ‘good’ is important to understanding Spinoza’s view of well-being. We must not confuse virtue with what is good. Spinoza defines virtue as power and good as that which we know is certainly useful to us.¹³² The highest *good* is knowledge of God and the highest *virtue* is to know God. Therefore, the knowledge of God is good or useful, that is, it is the source of real power, whereas *possessing* the knowledge of God *is* power or well-being. Consequently, the knowledge of God is crucial to maximising human well-being. In other words, virtue is power or well-being, whereas whatever is good conduces to virtue, power or well-being.

1.4.13 Good emotions

The idea that a thing is good if it conduces to virtue or power helps us to understand Spinoza’s account of good emotions. Spinoza argues that the emotions of joy, pleasure, cheerfulness and self-esteem are essential to human wellbeing. These emotions relate to human essential power. The emotion of joy is a passage to a greater perfection or power. Pleasure is joy in relation to a particular part of the body that is affected more than its other parts. Cheerfulness is joy that affects all the parts of the body equally. Self-esteem is joy that arises because a human being ‘considers himself and his own power of acting.’¹³³ Self-esteem that arises from reason is the highest kind of self-esteem because it involves consciousness of real power. All of these emotions are good unless they can lead to sadness.

Good emotions can lead to sadness insofar as they relate to the striving of only a part or parts of the body without regard for the whole body. According to Spinoza, each individual part of the body has its own *conatus* which is connected to the *conatus* of the whole human being. The *conatus* of individual parts of the body can conflict with each other.¹³⁴ My

¹³² See Appendix D for further discussion of Spinoza’s conception of ‘good.’

¹³³ E Definitions of the Affects 25, III.

¹³⁴ E P60, IV.

stomach has its own *conatus*, but if this is over-indulged, the *conatus* of the whole body will be disrupted and weakened, whereas well-being (from the perspective of the body) for a human consists in making the body ‘equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things.’¹³⁵ The emotions of desire, joy and their derivatives are good for you because they involve the increase of the body’s power of acting. Since virtue is power, those emotions that involve the increase of the power of the body are virtuous or a part of well-being.

1.4.14 Bad emotions

Bad emotions are passions. The passions are always bad for you because they necessarily (according to Spinoza’s definition of a passion)¹³⁶ involve an external cause reducing the power of a human being. The emotion or passion of hate, for example, is bad for you because it is a species of sadness caused by an external thing. The emotion of sadness involves passivity and a decrease in the power of the body. Whatever diminishes human power is bad for you. Hence, passivity and all species of sadness are bad for you. For example, envy, mockery, disdain, anger, indignation, vengeance, and fear are passions that involve the reduction of a human’s power by an external cause.

Bad emotions express our subjection to external causes. For example, if, as a result of being insulted by Paul, Peter experiences the emotion of sadness accompanied by the idea of Paul, Peter hates Paul. Spinoza maintains that we are slaves insofar as our actions and emotions are caused by things external to us. We are free only insofar as we act rationally and only those emotions that constitute an affirmation of the power of the body are in accord with reason or virtue.

1.4.15 External goods

Even though there are many external things that diminish human power, Spinoza holds that there are external things that aid and strengthen human power. The best external good for a

¹³⁵ E P45S, IV.

¹³⁶ E D3, III.

human being is other rational people. The way in which this external good contributes to well-being is covered below in the section on rational benevolence (1.7). Spinoza's account of how things outside the individual human (other than rational people) increase bodily power will be covered here.

A human being acts virtuously insofar as he rationally strives to preserve his own being.¹³⁷ Spinoza holds that 'the human Body requires a great many other bodies' to preserve itself.¹³⁸ Those things are good which preserve the body.¹³⁹ Moreover, the wise man needs:

to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human Body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole Body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things.¹⁴⁰

Spinoza's parallelism explains why wise satisfaction of bodily needs is good for a person. The human mind and the human body is the same being, conceived under different attributes: the mind under the attribute of Thought, the body under the attribute of Extension.¹⁴¹ A human's power of thinking is the same as his power of acting.¹⁴² If the power of the mind increases, so does the power of the body. Virtue is power and something is good if it really does help preserve or increase human power. Since the ingestion of a bodily good, for example, nutritious food, increases the power of the body, nutritious food contributes to human virtue or power, in which human well-being entirely consists. Thus, Spinoza can simultaneously claim that virtue constitutes the whole of well-being and that external goods contribute to well-being.

¹³⁷ E P24, IV.

¹³⁸ E P39Dem, IV.

¹³⁹ E P39, IV.

¹⁴⁰ E P45C1, IV or II/244/27-II/245/1.

¹⁴¹ E P2S, III.

¹⁴² E P7C, II.

1.5 Spinoza, Aristotle and the Stoics

1.5.1 Introduction

The above elucidation of Spinoza's theory of well-being will help us understand why he disagrees with Aristotle and the Stoics. I will not focus on the debate between Spinoza, Aristotle and the Stoics.¹⁴³ One of the aims of the thesis is to show that Spinoza avoids the traditional objections to perfectionism. In this section I will focus only on claims that have attracted the traditional objections.

1.5.2 Human nature

Aristotle and the Stoics claim that the human function¹⁴⁴ or essence is 'special' to a human being.¹⁴⁵ That is, human nature is distinguished from the nature of nonhuman animals and plant-life via a property that belongs only to human nature. They agree that rationality is special to a human being.¹⁴⁶ Spinoza denies both claims. According to Spinoza, 'the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes' (1.4.3).¹⁴⁷ This definition applies to all finite things. Spinoza does not think that the human function is special to human beings because all things, not only plant-life and the other animals, but also 'inanimate' things, belong to the most general genus, namely, being, reality or the power of God (1.4.4). Thus, on Spinoza's view, human essence is not special to a human being and man should not be defined as a rational animal (2.9).¹⁴⁸

1.5.3 Rationality

Aristotle and the Stoics claim that the human mind possesses a faculty of deliberation and decision, or assent,¹⁴⁹ both of which we control voluntarily.¹⁵⁰ According to Aristotle and the Stoics, we have the ability to deliberate about what we should do and to decide to act on

¹⁴³ Appendix A explains why Spinoza rejects Aristotle and the Stoics' definition of human nature.

¹⁴⁴ A thing's function 'is connected with its essence' (Irwin 1999a, p. 331).

¹⁴⁵ NE 1098a1; Ep 76.10.

¹⁴⁶ NE 1098a8; Ep 76.10.

¹⁴⁷ E P10C, II.

¹⁴⁸ Appendix A.

¹⁴⁹ 'Assent' is a Stoic term.

¹⁵⁰ Irwin (2007, pp. 307-8).

the conclusions of our deliberations. In contrast, Spinoza denies that a human being has an absolute faculty of reason or will (1.4.6-7). On Spinoza's view, deliberation is an illusion (1.4.10; 2.6), for the mind consists only of ideas that either follow from the nature of a person or from the impact of external causes. Unlike Aristotle and the Stoics,¹⁵¹ Spinoza does not hold the view that the mind has a faculty of reason which is itself the source of rational desires (2.6; 2.8).

1.5.4 *The composition of the mind*

Spinoza agrees with Aristotle that the human mind has non-rational emotions (1.4.8).¹⁵² He rejects the Stoics' view that the mind is thoroughly rational (2.12).¹⁵³ On Spinoza's view, the essence of the human mind is constituted by the idea of an actually existing human body. The mind perceives all affections of the body. Spinoza defines the emotions as 'the affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.'¹⁵⁴ Since the human body is a part of human nature and the emotions are affections of the body, it follows that the emotions are a part of human nature, on Spinoza's view.

1.5.5 *Pleasure*

Though Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza say that virtue constitutes human well-being, they all claim that pleasure or good emotions are relevant to well-being. However, Spinoza disagrees with Aristotle and the Stoics about the nature of joy or pleasure (2.5). Spinoza says that joy (which is equivalent to Aristotle's good 'pleasure' and Stoic 'joy') is an increase in power (1.4.7). According to Spinoza, 'joy...[is] Desire, or Appetite, itself insofar as it is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, by external causes.'¹⁵⁵ That is, joy, which is greater desire or striving—which 'is the very nature of each [individual]'—is the power of the individual increased to a higher degree.¹⁵⁶ Conversely, Aristotle and the

¹⁵¹ (Cooper 1999b, p. 240)

¹⁵² NE 1102a29; NE 1102b18-25.

¹⁵³ Gould (1970, pp. 132-133).

¹⁵⁴ E D3, III.

¹⁵⁵ E P57Dem, III.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Stoics hold that a human being *is* her understanding or reason.¹⁵⁷ Aristotle and the Stoics say that a human being is her reason, whereas Spinoza argues that a human being is her desire (1.4.7).¹⁵⁸

Whereas Aristotle says that pleasure supervenes on activity,¹⁵⁹ and the Stoics say that pleasure is a by-product of natural activity (that is, pleasure is necessarily intertwined with what is appropriate to human nature, so that when we have an attractive impression we tend to judge it good and a pleasant impulse directed at the object follows),¹⁶⁰ Spinoza argues that the emotions of desire and joy (including all their derivatives), belong to the very essence or being of an individual human (1.4.7).¹⁶¹ For ‘without them we can neither be nor persist.’¹⁶² According to Spinoza, the emotion of joy and its derivatives belong to the very essence of a human being.

1.5.6 *Virtue*

Spinoza, like Aristotle and the Stoics, holds that virtue perfects human nature.¹⁶³ He agrees that virtue involves acting in accord with reason.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Spinoza’s view of virtue differs from the other two. Aristotle and the Stoics define virtue as correct or right reason,¹⁶⁵ whereas Spinoza defines virtue as power (1.4.11). Spinoza argues that neither virtue nor vice can be exercised voluntarily (1.4.10).¹⁶⁶ Aristotle and the Stoics disagree and say that virtue is praiseworthy and vice is blameworthy if those actions are voluntary.¹⁶⁷

What this shows is that Spinoza’s notion of virtue, even though it involves rationality, is stripped of the moral connotations connected to the views of Aristotle and the Stoics (2.8). On Spinoza’s view, virtue just is human power. A human maximises her power if she acts

¹⁵⁷ NE 1178a3; DL 7.86-89, Ep 76.10; LS, pp. 319, 374, 413.

¹⁵⁸ E P9S, III.

¹⁵⁹ NE 1175a7.

¹⁶⁰ DL 7.86.

¹⁶¹ GMW, p. 118 or I/77/16-18.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ E P49SIVA, II or II/135/34-II/136/6.

¹⁶⁴ E, PP. 23-24, IV.

¹⁶⁵ NE 1138b19-25, 1144b24-30; Ep 66.11.

¹⁶⁶ L 78, p. 952.

¹⁶⁷ NE 1109b30-32; Ep 66.16-17; Irwin (2007, pp. 307-309).

completely rationally. Therefore, a human being is *most* powerful or virtuous insofar as she is rational.

Moreover, Spinoza maintains that virtue cannot be the product of free will. All actions and events in Nature are necessary. Thus, we do not praise a person's virtue or blame their vice because the person exercised their free will to perform a certain action. However, Spinoza would say that praise is good because it is a species of joy (1.4.13), whereas blame is bad insofar as it is a species of sadness (1.4.14). Since the emotion of joy (and its derivatives) is an idea of the affection of the body that involves greater power, virtue involves the power of the body. Aristotle and the Stoics think that without rational activity a human cannot be virtuous, but Spinoza connects virtue to the mind *and* the body (2.10; 2.11).¹⁶⁸

1.5.7 Human perfection

Spinoza agrees with Aristotle and the Stoics that the human mind is perfected by bringing it under the command of reason.¹⁶⁹ However, his account radically departs from Aristotle's and the Stoics' in two ways. Unlike Aristotle and the Stoics, Spinoza's definition of perfection is non-teleological (2.2). Spinoza defines perfection as reality (1.4.11),¹⁷⁰ whereas the other two define it as completeness.¹⁷¹ Second, Aristotle and the Stoics hold that human nature can be completed, whereas Spinoza argues that the improvement of human nature is a never ending process. Here we will see why Spinoza disagrees with the conception of perfection endorsed by Aristotle and the Stoics.

Aristotle's basic assumption is that the *telos* or end of a human life is well-being.¹⁷² This end is achieved by fulfilling or completing the human function. The human function is completed by virtue (actions in accord with reason), or 'the best and most complete virtue' (i.e., the contemplation of truth)¹⁷³ 'if there are more virtues than one.'¹⁷⁴ A complete life is

¹⁶⁸ A human acts *absolutely* from virtue by *rationaly* promoting her *conatus* (P23-P24, IV), whereas preservation of the body involves virtue (E P20, P20S, P38-P39, and P45S, IV).

¹⁶⁹ E Pref, V or II/277/9-10.

¹⁷⁰ E D6, II.

¹⁷¹ NE 1098a16-19, Irwin (1999a, p. 320); Ep 124.7.

¹⁷² NE 1094a18-22.

¹⁷³ NE 1177a13-18.

¹⁷⁴ NE 1098a18.

needed to complete the human function and thereby complete the ultimate end, that is, achieve well-being.¹⁷⁵ A human being has achieved well-being once she has completed her function or perfected her nature. Virtuous or rational activity over the course of a complete life completes or perfects human nature. Thus, on Aristotle's view, a human being achieves well-being if she has had a stable virtuous character throughout her life.¹⁷⁶

The Stoics accept Aristotle's claim that a person who completes or perfects her nature achieves well-being.¹⁷⁷ The Stoics say that only the divine is perfect.¹⁷⁸ The divine is the reason that governs the whole of Nature (or, like Spinoza's account, God is Nature). The divine reason is the completely consistent and harmonious rational order of the universe.¹⁷⁹ Living in accord with Nature is to partake in the divine nature or that which is perfect or complete.¹⁸⁰ Only God is perfect and God is perfect reason. Human reason is at first imperfect, but perfect reason or virtue completes the end of human nature. It follows, on the Stoics' view, that complete rationality perfects human nature and constitutes human well-being. Thus, complete reason completes or perfects human nature.

There is an important difference between Aristotle and the Stoics. The Stoics hold that virtue is sufficient for well-being, since only perfect reason perfects human nature, whereas Aristotle argues that external goods are needed for well-being. On the Stoics' view, virtue is having a consistent rational disposition or complete knowledge of practical wisdom.¹⁸¹ Either you have a completely consistent knowledge of practical wisdom or you do not. Thus, either you have Stoic well-being or you do not. There are no gradations of well-being, according to the Stoics.

Spinoza rejects Aristotle's and the Stoics' accounts. He identifies perfection with reality. Thus, he rejects the definition of perfection as completeness (2.11). The idea that perfection is the completion of the end of something is contrary to the necessity of the divine

¹⁷⁵ NE 1098a19.

¹⁷⁶ NE 1100b19.

¹⁷⁷ Gould (1970, p. 162).

¹⁷⁸ Ep 124.14.

¹⁷⁹ DL 7.88.

¹⁸⁰ Ep 124.7

¹⁸¹ Ep 33.5.

Nature.¹⁸² This idea arises because people ‘form universal ideas of natural things’ and ‘regard these universal ideas as models of things, and believe that [N]ature (which they think does nothing except for the sake of some end) looks to them, and sets them before itself as models.’¹⁸³ If a thing is contrary to their model of that kind of thing, they judge the thing imperfect. Since, on Spinoza’s view, the reason or cause of God’s existence and actions is his perfection, there can be no end for the sake of which God would act. Therefore, the idea that the essence of a thing can be completed is contrary to the essence of God.

Unlike the Stoics, Spinoza’s account allows for degrees of well-being (2.11). Spinoza says that humans ‘are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model [of human nature].’¹⁸⁴ Human perfection is not an end in the sense that it completes or fulfils human nature. According to Spinoza, perfection involves *continually* preserving and trying to increase human essential power insofar as possible for a human being.

We can see, then, that Spinoza’s view of human perfection is very different from Aristotle’s and the Stoics’. In principle, the power of a human being is limited because it is a finite thing. But a human being, as all individuals in Nature do, will always strive to preserve its being. So the ‘end’ of a human being, self-preservation,¹⁸⁵ is not something that can ever be completed (2.11). Self-preservation is an ongoing activity. Moreover, Spinoza says that we should not take pride in the achievement of progress in human perfection.

Such pride causes us—when we think ourselves to be something great already, and to not require anything further—to stand still. So it is directly contrary to our perfection, which consists in this, that we must always strive to attain more and more.¹⁸⁶

Hence, we must strive to increase our understanding of God and preserve and perfect the functions of the body continually and as much as possible. Therefore, unlike Aristotle and

¹⁸² E Pref, IV or II/206/20-25.

¹⁸³ E Pref, IV or II/206/12-16 .

¹⁸⁴ E Pref, IV or II/208/22-23.

¹⁸⁵ E, P25, IV.

¹⁸⁶ GMW, p. 128 or I/87/18-21.

the Stoics who hold that virtue involves completing the human function or nature, Spinoza argues that human virtue, and the perfection of human nature, is an unending activity.

1.5.8 External goods

There is a debate in the perfectionism tradition about whether virtue alone is well-being or external goods are needed, too. External goods are supposedly those goods that can benefit us which exist outside of the human soul (or mind).¹⁸⁷ It seems that external things like wealth, friends and good fortune are good for a human being. Aristotle argues that virtue is necessary,¹⁸⁸ but not sufficient,¹⁸⁹ for well-being. He thinks that, in addition to virtue, external goods are a necessary part of human well-being.¹⁹⁰ The Stoics thought otherwise and proudly declared that virtue constitutes the whole of human welfare.¹⁹¹

Spinoza reconciles the claim that virtue is well-being with the claim that external goods contribute to well-being (1.4.15). Virtue is power, on Spinoza's view. According to Spinoza, self-preservation is the foundation of virtue.¹⁹² The more a human strives and is able to preserve his being, 'the more he is endowed with virtue.'¹⁹³

Moreover, on Spinoza's account, a human being is an embodied mind.¹⁹⁴ The way in which each part (the mind and the body) preserves itself will be determined by the nature of that part.¹⁹⁵ The mind, a mode of Thought, preserves itself, or is powerful, insofar as it is active, that is, insofar as its activity arises from adequate ideas or reason.¹⁹⁶ A human being acts virtuously or powerfully insofar as he acts in accord with reason because when he acts rationally he acts in accord with the laws of his own nature, which is to strive to preserve its own being.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, the essence of the human body is the ratio of motion and

¹⁸⁷ NE 1098b13-14.

¹⁸⁸ NE 1098a16; 1099a5.

¹⁸⁹ NE 1095b31-1096a2; 1098b32-1099a5.

¹⁹⁰ NE 1099b1-5; 1100b25-27.

¹⁹¹ DL 7.101, 127-128; De Fin 3.26.

¹⁹² E P22C, IV.

¹⁹³ E P20Dem, IV.

¹⁹⁴ E P13 and P13C, II.

¹⁹⁵ E P6, II.

¹⁹⁶ E P23, IV.

¹⁹⁷ E P24, IV.

rest that is communicated to all its various parts which the body strives to maintain.¹⁹⁸ A human being acts virtuously or powerfully insofar as she maintains the ratio of her whole body. Since external things like nutritious food and medicine contribute to the preservation of the human body, they are good for you or contribute to the power or well-being of the body. Thus, Spinoza's account explains why virtue is well-being and why external goods contribute to well-being (2.10).

1.6 Individual nature

1.6.1 Introduction

The explication of Spinoza's philosophy in this section is primarily relevant to Spinoza's rational benevolence argument. Moreover, space constraints necessitate an exclusive focus on the philosophy of Spinoza in this section.

This section has two aims. The first aim is to show that Spinoza can consistently claim that a thing is its nature, a thing can be distinguished from its actual nature, and that a human has a human nature that is shared with other human beings. Clarification of the relation between the individual nature of a human being and human nature will enable me to reply to certain criticisms of Spinoza's agreement in nature doctrine which underpins his rational benevolence claim. Those objections are covered in chapter three.

The second aim of this section is to show that, on Spinoza's view, human nature belongs to the individual nature of a human being. The perfection of a person's human nature is simultaneously the perfection of her own distinctive nature. The relation between human nature and the individual nature of a human being is also relevant to the objection that human perfection is not good for every human being (2.4).

¹⁹⁸ E P13SLem5, II.

1.6.2 *The distinction between a thing and its conatus*

Spinoza claims that a thing can be distinguished from its *conatus*.¹⁹⁹ Bidney alleges that this distinction contradicts ‘his principle that the conatus of a thing and its essence are identical.’²⁰⁰ Bidney says:

If the conatus is the active essence of a thing, then it is identical with the life of the thing. That is to say, life is not separable from its actual essence.²⁰¹

Bidney is correct. Spinoza says that a thing’s life is its *conatus* or actual essence.²⁰² He is wrong, however, to accuse Spinoza of making contradictory claims. This complaint can be dealt with by observing Spinoza’s distinction between a thing’s definition and its existence. The definition *or* essence of a thing is ‘the manner in which created things are comprehended in the attributes of God.’²⁰³ The essence of a thing is the true concept of the thing or its real definition.²⁰⁴ The life or existence of a thing is the essence of a thing outside the Intellect, that is, in corporal Nature.²⁰⁵ The essence of a finite thing *exists* after it has been created by God.²⁰⁶ That is why Spinoza says that the *conatus* is the *actual* essence of the thing (3.2).²⁰⁷

The distinction between the essence of God and the essence of created or finite modes is crucial to understanding the distinction between the *conatus* of a thing and its essence. Existence belongs to the essence of God.²⁰⁸ Thus, God is self-caused. It follows that God necessarily exists. By contrast, the essence of created things can be conceived without existence.²⁰⁹ We can conceive the human essence (or true definition) without any human existing because existence does not belong to its definition. If it did, humans would necessarily exist.

¹⁹⁹ MT, p. 326 or I/260/15-20.

²⁰⁰ Bidney (1962, p. 97).

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² MT, p. 326 or I/260/16; E P7, III.

²⁰³ MT, p. 304 or I/238/10-11.

²⁰⁴ A real definition explains the cause or causes by which the thing can be produced: Curley (1988, p. 111).

²⁰⁵ MT, p. 304 or I/238/15.

²⁰⁶ MT, p. 304 or I/238/16.

²⁰⁷ E P7, III.

²⁰⁸ E P11, I.

²⁰⁹ E P10Dem, II.

God creates not in the sense of acting from absolute freedom of its will for the benefit of its creation.²¹⁰ By created things, Spinoza means those things that necessarily follow from, or are a part of, the essence, perfection or power of God.²¹¹ The *conatus* of a thing was caused to exist by the *conatus* of another thing in accord with the actually existing laws of Nature. God or Nature is the cause of the essence *and* the existence of created things.²¹²

Next, Spinoza distinguishes Intellect from the causal order of corporeal Nature.²¹³ The true concept of a thing in God's Intellect is distinguished from its existence in corporeal Nature. Spinoza gives the example of the 'sculptor or woodcarver' who conceives a statute which he has not yet created to show that essence is distinguished from existence in created things.²¹⁴ For example, Frank Gehry conceived in a certain order the Guggenheim Museum, which lacked existence until he made it. Gehry's conception of the Guggenheim Museum is its essence. Once the Museum was built or caused to exist, its definition or essence was combined with existence.

Similarly, we can conceive human essence without a human existing. Whereas the architect of the Guggenheim Museum was human, the 'architect' of human essence is divine. Human essence can be conceived through the Intellect of God without any particular humans existing. God creates a human being when the causal order of Nature gives rise to the causal circumstances necessary for a human being to exist. For example, my father impregnates my mother and my mother gives birth to me. My parents were the external causes of my existence. My birth resulted from the combination of my human essence with my life. Before and after my life, my human essence is conceivable. Human essence, like the essence of all things, is an eternal truth.²¹⁵ An existing finite thing is identified with its *conatus*, but its *conatus* is distinguished from its definition or essence (3.2). Thus, Spinoza is consistent.

²¹⁰ E P32C1, I.

²¹¹ E P11S, I or II/53/7-10.

²¹² E P25, I.

²¹³ E P4Dem, I; GMW, pp. 91-92.

²¹⁴ MT, p. 305 or I/239/30.

²¹⁵ MT, p. 305 or I/239/4.

1.6.3 *The relation between human nature and individual human nature*

Spinoza's distinction between the definition of a thing and its actual essence can help us understand the relation between human essence and individual human nature. Spinoza's definition of the essence of a thing suggests that the essence of a thing is unique.

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.²¹⁶

If the essence of Paul is P, then Paul = P. If P is given, that is, P is caused to exist, then Paul is necessarily given. If P is taken away, that is, ceases to exist, then Paul is taken away. Spinoza's definition seems to claim that every individual thing, for example, each individual human being, has its own unique essence.

In another part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza says 'that the true definition of each thing neither involves nor expresses anything except the nature of the thing defined.'²¹⁷ Spinoza appears to be talking about the definition or essence of a *particular* thing. Then, perhaps confusingly, he says that the true definition of a thing does not contain a certain number of individuals:

since [a true definition] expresses nothing other than the nature of the thing defined. E.g., the definition of the triangle expresses nothing but the simple nature of the triangle, but not any fixed number of triangles.²¹⁸

Evidently, Spinoza's notion of essence relates to a certain 'kind' to which certain individuals belong.²¹⁹ We might apply the type/token distinction to help clarify Spinoza's view of a thing, its essence and *conatus*. According to this distinction, the definition of a triangle denotes a 'type' of thing. An instance of the definition of the triangle is a 'token' of that type of thing. The former involves the conception of the thing and the latter involves

²¹⁶ E D2, II.

²¹⁷ E P8S2, I or II/50/23.

²¹⁸ E P8S2, I or II/50/26-27.

²¹⁹ Nevertheless, Spinoza would say that in this context a natural 'kind' is a being of reason (1.4.4).

the existence of the thing. The definition of the thing just *is* the thing conceived through the Intellect. The *conatus* of a thing just *is* the thing combined with its life or existence.

The suggestion that Spinoza could not explain what essential properties might belong to a particular individual human or the formula by which the particular individual could be constructed is based on a misunderstanding of Spinoza's theory of essence (2.3.2).²²⁰ Spinoza clearly does not think that the definition or essence of a particular individual, for example, Spinoza, could be given. The human mind is too weak to comprehend the infinite causal order to which finite things belong and the 'infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence.'²²¹ Spinoza argues that only the definition of certain individual things, for example, God and the eternal modes, can be known clearly and distinctly.²²² The definition of finite particular things must be understood through the infinite and eternal modes and the laws inscribed in them.²²³ The eternal modes can be, albeit improperly, like universals or genera because they are infinite and are always present throughout the whole of Nature.²²⁴ Spinoza maintains, however, that his definition of human nature, which he deduces from God's essence, is true because without Intellect and Motion a human being could neither be, nor be conceived. This is why Spinoza defines human essence as 'certain modifications of God's attributes.'²²⁵

According to Spinoza, it is the perfection of a person's human nature, not her accidental properties, that contributes to her well-being. By perfecting or acting in accord with human nature, we increase our agreement in nature with other humans. Humans can be contrary to each other, but they have the potential to entirely agree in nature. All humans potentially can express, promote and enjoy the same level of essential power or perfected human nature. However, humans are attacked from all sides by external causes, so few act entirely in accord with human nature.²²⁶ To act in accord with (or perfect) human nature, human

²²⁰ Curley (1988, p. 112).

²²¹ TEI, p. 41 or II/36/26-27.

²²² TEI, p. 42 or II/37/28-30.

²²³ TEI, p. 41 or II/37/1-9.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ E P10C, II.

²²⁶ E P3-P5, IV.

beings must promote their own human power. This is achieved only by acting in accord with reason, for only then can it be said that human activity can be understood through human nature alone (or at least to the extent it is possible for a finite thing like a human being to do so). So even though human beings can actively promote each other's power, the amount of power one has, or the extent to which a human acts in accord with human nature varies, and so individual humans can, and usually do, differ in nature or power.

Individual humans ultimately differ in terms of existence. This claim can be understood in two ways. First, the human body, to which is a united a mind, comes to exist only through motion and rest.²²⁷ For example, my existence or the ratio of motion and rest of my body was caused by external causes, namely, my parents. Next, one body differs from another only in terms of its ratio of motion and rest.²²⁸ For example, the ratio of my body is different than my brother's. Thus, individual things are distinguished in terms of the ratio of motion and rest in their whole body.

Second, the real definition of human nature applies to all humans, but the *conatus* of each human is necessarily unique. Spinoza explains that:

*what is caused differs from its cause precisely in what it has from the cause[,] for that reason it is called the effect of such a cause. E.g., a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for the latter is an eternal truth. Hence, they can agree entirely according to their essence. But in existing they must differ. And for that reason, if the existence of one perishes, the other's existence will not thereby perish. But if the essence of one could be destroyed, and become false, the other's essence would also be destroyed and become false.*²²⁹ (My italics)

Spinoza's rationalism can help us understand why he thinks this is true. According to Spinoza:

From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow.²³⁰

²²⁷ GMW, p. 95 or I/52/4-6.

²²⁸ GMW, p. 95 or I/52/7-9.

²²⁹ E P17C2S, I.

²³⁰ E Ax3, I.

From this axiom it can be inferred that a given determinate cause and an effect that follows from it are necessarily two different things: the cause is a different thing from the effect that follows from it. However, an effect depends on its cause ‘in such a way that without it, the effect can neither exist nor be understood.’²³¹ ‘Moreover, the effect is also so united with the cause that together they form a whole.’²³² So the cause and its effect are two different things which form a necessary whole. This helps us to see why Spinoza’s claim that the effect differs from its cause precisely in what it has from its cause is consistent with his axiom that there is a necessary connection between a certain and determinate cause and its effect, because the effect must have something in common with its cause for it to be understood through it or the concept of the effect must involve the concept of its cause.²³³

Spinoza is not saying that what an effect has from its cause is what distinguishes it from its cause,²³⁴ he is saying that what it has from its cause establishes the necessary connection between it and its cause and presupposes that the cause is a being that is necessarily distinct from another being deduced from its nature. Consider Man A and Man X. Man A is the cause of the effect, Man X. A and X are necessarily different because A is the cause and X is the effect of the cause A. Now what X has from A is existence, life or motion. If we want to understand the cause of the existence or motion of A, we have to look for a certain and determinate cause that is conceivable through the concept of Motion. So X and A are explained through the same concept, Motion, and it is Motion which establishes the causal connection between them. Since A is the cause of X, A is necessarily a different thing from X. So in terms of existence or life, humans necessarily differ. For example, Peter is the father of Paul. The *conatus* of Peter is different from the *conatus* of Paul because Peter is the cause of Paul, and a cause is necessarily different from the effect which follows from it. Peter imparts power to Paul, that is, he is the cause of the striving (life or certain proportion of motion and rest) which constitutes the *conatus* of Paul’s body.

Each human has its own *conatus*, but every human shares the same definition or essence. The following analogy will help us to understand this claim. Imagine two, side-by-side,

²³¹ GMW, p. 148 or I/110/32-33.

²³² GMW, p. 148 or I/111/1-2.

²³³ E Ax5, I.

²³⁴ Curley (1985, n. 51, p. 427).

perfectly drawn circles. The circle on the left was drawn with a blue pen and its diameter is 6 centimetres. The other circle was drawn with a red pen and its diameter is 12 centimetres. The true definition or essence of a circle ‘is the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable.’²³⁵ Circle L and circle R have exactly the same essence. Yet, there are two circles on the page. External causes produced each circle (for example, the hand of Peter and a blue pen caused L to exist; Paul and a red pen caused R to exist). L and R are tokens of the type, circle. From the essence of the circle ‘we clearly infer that all the lines drawn from the [centre] to the circumference are equal.’²³⁶ Both L and R necessarily have this essential property by virtue of the fact that they both have the essence of a circle. However, the actual diameter of L and R and the colour of the line which represents the respective circles are accidental properties: the 6 centimetre diameter and blue line do not belong to the essential nature of L.

We can apply this analysis to human nature. Spinoza’s definition of human essence is certain modes (Motion and Intellect) of the attributes (Extension and Thought) of God. A human has a highly composite mind (made up of adequate and inadequate ideas) united to a highly composite body. The human body can affect and be affected in many ways and the mind perceives all the affections of its body. Reason, or having adequate ideas, and imagination, or having inadequate ideas, are properties deduced from the essential nature of humans. The affections of the body that involve its passage to a greater or lesser power and the ideas of these affections are the emotions. The emotions affirm the level of power or striving of a human being. Joy is increased striving and sadness is decreased striving. All other emotions are derived from these primary emotions. A human acts through his own nature (i.e., strives powerfully) insofar as he has or acts from adequate ideas (reason), and insofar as he is acted on by external things he has inadequate ideas (imagination). Spinoza argues that this definition of human essence and the properties deduced from it applies to every human, just as all circles have the same definition (2.4).

What about the properties that we usually believe are distinctive of a particular person? Imagine a particular human, Paul. Paul’s parents are Tim and Julia. He grew up in Bedford

²³⁵ TEI, p. 40 or II/35/16.

²³⁶ TEI, p. 40 or II/35/20.

Park, South Australia. Paul has blonde hair and blue eyes. He is six feet tall. He is a professor of theoretical physics. He loves mathematics and studying theoretical physics. He is afraid of heights. He experiences intense anxiety whenever he has to exercise responsibility. He has a cheerful disposition and loves going to the cinema. Paul has many other properties. According to Spinoza, all of the properties listed are not essential to the nature of Paul. They are all accidental properties that have arisen through Paul being affected by, and him affecting, external things. Paul's father Tim, an external cause, was a professor of theoretical physics and socially inept. Perhaps if Paul had have been born to another set of parents (i.e., external causes that affected his body) he would have taken up a different career and either had different kinds of anxieties or few, if any, at all.

What is certain, according to Spinoza, is that Paul strives to live or preserve his being. His *conatus* is his actual nature and the definition of human nature explains the kind of being he is and what properties belong to his essential nature. Paul has a powerful brain and mind (which is considerably more powerful than the brains of the other animals that we know of). The mind of Paul is constituted by emotional states such as desire, joy, sadness, love and hate. He has the capacity to understand and the faculty of imagination. All of the latter properties belong to all human beings, whereas the first set (the accidental properties of Paul) may or may not belong to any other particular human. On Spinoza's view, life or the impact of external causes gives rise to the accidental properties of an individual human being, which provides inessential differences between humans. As Spinoza says, humans essentially differ in terms of existence, but they have essentially the same nature and have the potential to entirely agree in nature.

1.6.4 Conclusion

Human nature belongs to the actual essence of an individual human being (2.4). All humans share the same essence or true definition. The *conatus* of a human being is human essence combined with existence. However, the *conatus* of one person, the actual power by which she strives to preserve her being, is different from the *conatus* of all other individuals in Nature. When human beings act in accord with human nature, they are most powerful and good for each other. The next section will explain why Spinoza holds this view.

1.7 Rational benevolence

1.7.1 Introduction

Spinoza's rational benevolence claim principally depends on his doctrine of agreement in nature.²³⁷ According to the doctrine, humans agree in nature insofar as they share a nature that is common to each human being. Human nature is the nature that is common to each human being. The previous section concluded that human nature belongs to the *conatus* of a particular human being. Insofar as individual human beings act in accord with human nature they agree in nature.

Some commentators believe Spinoza holds that rational benevolence is intrinsically good. On this view, rational benevolence by itself constitutes agreement in nature and agreement in nature is intrinsically good. Thus, rational benevolence is intrinsically good. This reading is based on the assumption that agreement in nature is wanted for its own sake.

The main aim of this section is to explicate Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature. The secondary aim is to show that agreement in nature is principally an instrumental good, on Spinoza's view. My argument is brief here, but it is fully covered in chapter three (3.3).

1.7.2 Good and evil

According to Spinoza, '[i]nsofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good.'²³⁸ This is the key proposition of his doctrine of agreement in nature. The first step in the proof of the proposition is to show that a thing that has the same nature as us cannot be evil for us:

No thing can be evil through what it has in common with our nature; but insofar as it is evil for us, it is contrary to us.²³⁹

Spinoza defines the term *good* as that which 'we certainly know to be useful to us'²⁴⁰ and the term *evil* as that which 'we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some

²³⁷ Spinoza gives an alternative argument for his rational benevolence claim. The alternative appeals to his imitation of affects doctrine (E P37Alt Dem, IV). Since I argue that his principal argument is successful, and given I have limited space, I will omit the alternative argument, which can be found in Appendix B.

²³⁸ E P31, IV.

²³⁹ E P30, IV.

good.²⁴¹ Sadness is evil because it involves a decrease in human power.²⁴² If a thing could be evil to us through what it has in common with us, then it could diminish what it has in common with us, namely, our essential power. This is absurd, argues Spinoza, because the essential power of a thing contains nothing in it which can destroy the thing (2.3).²⁴³ Thus, if a thing can be evil to us or cause sadness in us, it is contrary to our essential nature.

1.7.3 Agreement in nature is ‘necessarily’ good

The next step is to explain why a thing that agrees with us in nature is ‘necessarily’ good for us.²⁴⁴ If a thing agrees with your nature, it cannot be bad for you or indifferent to you (this means that it is neither bad nor good for you).²⁴⁵ This follows from Spinoza’s propositions that there is nothing in the nature of a thing that can destroy it²⁴⁶ and the power of God, which is something positive, belongs to the essence of the thing.²⁴⁷ Since, according to Spinoza, insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it cannot be evil (1.7.2), it must be good or indifferent. It cannot be indifferent for the essential power of a thing only includes causes that preserve the thing. Thus, insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good.

1.7.4 Disagreement in nature

We can disagree in nature with other things in two ways. Human nature is different from the nature of other finite things, for example, nonhuman animals.²⁴⁸ Humans can also disagree in nature with each other.²⁴⁹ Humans disagree in nature with nonhuman animals because they are considerably more powerful than them and they cannot actively serve human advantage.²⁵⁰ Since the other animals that we know of are not as powerful as humans, be it physically (whether we like it or not, man has the power to decide whether

²⁴⁰ E D1, IV.

²⁴¹ E D2, IV.

²⁴² E P30Dem, IV.

²⁴³ E P4, III.

²⁴⁴ E P31, IV.

²⁴⁵ E P31Dem, IV; Kisner (2011, p. 138).

²⁴⁶ E P4, III.

²⁴⁷ E P6, III.

²⁴⁸ E P57S, III or II/187/9.

²⁴⁹ E P32-P34, IV.

²⁵⁰ E P37S1, IV or II/237/5-9.

the other animals live or die, it is not the other way round) or mentally (man can have conscious knowledge of the laws of Nature and communicate this to each other, the animals that we know of cannot do this), and since the other animals cannot, strictly speaking, cooperate with and be friends with human beings, animals and human beings cannot, properly speaking, agree in nature.

On the other hand, the idea that humans can disagree in nature with each other might seem strange. To make this claim sound less strange, we need to remember that a human being has a *conatus* and a human nature. The *conatus* of a human being, when related to the mind *and* body, is desire. The desire of a human being is her very essence. The emotion of joy involves greater striving or desire and sadness involves lesser striving or desire. The idea that the essence of a human being is her desire and that her emotions relate to her essential power is the key to understanding Spinoza's claim that humans can disagree in nature.

Insofar as we are passive we are contrary to each other or disagree in nature.²⁵¹ This is because things 'agree in power,' not in respect of their weakness or negation, and consequently, not in respect of passive emotions.²⁵² The essential power of an individual human can vary. Humans are continuously impacted on by external causes. That means most human behaviour is passive or the result of the impact of the power of external causes, rather than an expression of a human being's power. As we will see below (1.7.5), passive humans can threaten each other's power or well-being. Thus, an individual human being can disagree in nature with other humans.

1.7.5 *Imitation of emotion*

Spinoza's doctrine of the imitation of affects (i.e., emotions) more clearly explains why humans can disagree in nature and so be contrary to each other. According to this doctrine, human beings have the ability to imitate each other's emotions. Spinoza explains this ability in the following way. The mental images of things are affections of the human body, the ideas of which set before us external bodies as present.²⁵³ The ideas of these affections

²⁵¹ E P33-P34, IV.

²⁵² E P32Dem, IV.

²⁵³ E P27Dem, III.

(or emotions) involve the nature of our own body and simultaneously the nature of the external body as present. If the nature of the external body is similar to the nature of our own body, then the idea of the external body in our mind will involve an affection of our own body similar to the affection of the external body. Consequently, if we imagine someone like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, this thought will express an affection of our own body similar to that emotion.²⁵⁴

When we imagine that another person enjoys something, by the doctrine of the imitation of affects, ‘we shall love that thing and desire to enjoy it.’²⁵⁵ If another person’s enjoyment of the object impedes our own Joy because he alone possesses something we love, we will ‘strive that he not possess it’²⁵⁶ because we strive to preserve what we imagine will bring about our own joy, and strive to remove or destroy whatever we imagine will be the cause of our own sadness.²⁵⁷ Thus, human beings can be contrary to each other in the sense that one of them imagines the other as being a threat to their own striving and strives to imagine that which will lead to the other person’s removal or destruction.

For example, Paul loves Sophia, but Sophia is the wife of Peter. Since Paul imagines that Peter is an obstacle to the possession of Sophia and therefore an obstacle to his own Joy, he will strive to remove or destroy Peter. If Peter imagines that Paul hates him for no good reason, he will, by the theory of imitation of affects, hate Paul.²⁵⁸ Thus, Peter and Paul will ‘strive to harm one another,’ and so they are contrary to one another.²⁵⁹ Since Sadness is a passion—for it is a passive decrease in a human’s power (or the body is under the influence of the power of external causes),²⁶⁰—it follows that human beings that ‘are torn by affects which are passions, can be contrary to one another.’²⁶¹ Thus, humans disagree in nature or are contrary to each other insofar as their individual nature is understood through passive emotions.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ E P32Dem, III.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ E P28, III.

²⁵⁸ E P40, III.

²⁵⁹ E P34Dem, IV.

²⁶⁰ E P59Dem, III.

²⁶¹ E P34Dem, IV.

1.7.6 *Competitive and non-competitive goods*

Humans avoid disagreement in nature by avoiding ‘competitive goods’ which are contrasted with what Spinoza calls a ‘common’ good.²⁶² Competitive goods are things that usually require competition between people to attain them. This kind of good is good for the person who possesses it, but not for those who do not, or worse, would suffer as a consequence of being deprived of that good. For example, the more I possess limited resources like money, social status and oil, the less is available for other people. When one person possesses one of these goods he will feel sadness whenever he thinks of losing them.²⁶³ He will also feel sadness if he sees someone else in possession of competitive goods if he desires them. Sadness is evil and the mind’s affirmation of the weakness of the body, which is far from the ideal of human nature.²⁶⁴ If Peter has the emotion of joy accompanied by the idea of possessing a lot of money and Paul experiences sadness accompanied by the idea of Peter enjoying his fortune, then Paul envies Peter, and so Peter and Paul disagree in nature because one is defined by joy or power, whereas the other is defined by envy, a species of sadness, which is lack of power.²⁶⁵

Conversely, competitive or goods of the body are a part of the rational life if they can be used without harming other people.²⁶⁶ The problem is that many people excessively pursue competitive goods which lead to avarice, envy, hate, war and so on, which are all bad for a human being and impede the promotion of cooperation and friendship.

Spinoza argues that a rational person prefers non-competitive goods.²⁶⁷ A human’s highest good, according to reason, is non-competitive or a common good, for all can access and enjoy an adequate knowledge of God.²⁶⁸ Thus, according to Spinoza, the knowledge of God is a good that all people can share without fear of its depletion. Spinoza argues that the

²⁶² E P36-P37, IV.

²⁶³ E P34, IV or II/232/23.

²⁶⁴ E P41, IV; Pref, IV or II/208/21-22.

²⁶⁵ E P34S, IV.

²⁶⁶ E P45S, IV or II/244/30.

²⁶⁷ E P36, IV.

²⁶⁸ E P36Dem, IV.

knowledge of God is the highest good because it provides us with the highest possible joy and cannot be the cause of sadness.²⁶⁹

1.7.7 Rationality and agreement in nature

The highest good is knowledge of God and rational people want this for each other.²⁷⁰ Humans are most useful insofar as they agree in nature and they agree in nature insofar as they express and promote human power. A human is powerful insofar as she is rational. Since humans multiply their power by uniting their power, rational humans strive to promote the rationality of others. Since a greater knowledge of God entails a greater power to preserve our being, and other rational people are the best means to knowledge of God, the more a human knows God or acts rationally, the more he wants other people to have and enjoy the knowledge of God.²⁷¹ This means that humans agree in nature in two ways: they share the same definition and essential properties and they can actively express or promote human essential power (1.6.3). All humans are modes of God and possess a complex mind united to complex body. And all humans can express and promote human power and do so insofar as they act in accord with reason.

Spinoza's Free Man understands that the obstacles to knowledge of God, namely, the bad emotions, need to be removed from his own and other people's lives.²⁷² The Free Man strives to promote the rationality of others because it promotes agreement in nature and doing that is in accord with reason, compliance with which constitutes human freedom or well-being. Since rational humans are most useful to each other, and since humans necessarily want what they judge to be good, and since this desire is the very essence or nature of a human being,²⁷³ every rational human being will strive to increase the rationality of his fellow humans.

It might be doubted that rational benevolence will always be reciprocated. I might try to impart the knowledge of God to someone and be ignored or attacked for doing so. Spinoza

²⁶⁹ E P28, IV; P36, IV; P18Dem, V.

²⁷⁰ E P28, IV; P37, IV

²⁷¹ E P37, IV.

²⁷² E P73S, IV or II/265/28-30.

²⁷³ E P9S, III.

would agree that those kinds of reactions are possible. However, those kinds of reactions are to be expected from irrational people. Spinoza notes that ‘all men are born in a state of complete ignorance...[of] the true way of life and’ many lack virtue because ‘even if they have been well brought up, a great part of their life has gone by.’²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, every person strives to further whatever *they* perceive is advantageous or conducive to the promotion of their *conatus* and remove or destroy what *they* perceive is disadvantageous or contrary to their *conatus*. Spinoza asserts that this is ‘the supreme law of Nature.’²⁷⁵ So if a person perceives that my rational benevolence is disadvantageous to them, then that person will strive to remove me from the path to whatever it is that they perceive is their true advantage. They might repay my rational benevolence with hate and cruelty.

Conversely, a rational person knows what her true advantage is and desires that other people enjoy the good that she wants for herself. The rational person will strive to do those things that will benefit other people. For example, the rational person will teach people the knowledge of God. If the student is rational, he will necessarily want other people to enjoy what he perceives to be good, namely, the knowledge of God. So, the rational student will strive to promote the rationality of other people. On the other hand, if the student who receives an education from a rational person is himself irrational, he might or might not want to be rationally benevolent to others. Insofar as he is irrational, he is unlikely to want to reciprocate the rational benevolence. What is certain, on Spinoza’s view, is that the student will strive to further what *he* perceives to be good or advantageous. If he is rational, he will strive to promote the rationality of other people because he *knows* that they are good for him and because he wants them to enjoy the good that he wants for himself, namely, the knowledge of God.

1.7.8 *Rational benevolence is instrumentally good*

Spinoza should be understood as arguing that rational benevolence is *instrumentally* good. This is obvious from his definition of ‘good.’ Things that are good are *useful*.²⁷⁶ Things that agree in nature are necessarily good for each other. Rational humans agree in nature.

²⁷⁴ TPT, p. 527.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ E D1, IV.

Therefore, rational humans are necessarily good *or* useful for each other. In fact, there is nothing more useful for a person than other rational people because there is nothing that agrees more with his own nature.²⁷⁷ Since rational benevolence produces more rational people, a rational person maximises her well-being by promoting the rationality of others, which furthers her own true advantage.²⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Spinoza implicitly argues that rational benevolence is intrinsically valuable. He does so in the following way. Rational benevolence is rational activity. A human being is virtuous insofar as she acts rationally. Virtue is human well-being. Therefore, rational benevolence is well-being. This argument is available to Spinoza, but he does not rely on it to support his rational benevolence claim.

Evidently we can attribute to Spinoza the view that rational benevolence is intrinsically good for you. Notwithstanding, rational benevolence itself cannot lead to the highest level of virtue or power (that is, well-being) possible for a human. Individual humans must unite their power in order to maximally promote each individual's *conatus*. Rational benevolence is crucial to achieving *maximum* human well-being. Rational benevolence is intrinsically valuable and increases virtue to some extent, but its value is principally instrumental, for the greatest virtue, possession of the knowledge of God, cannot be attained without the assistance of other rational people. Moreover, Spinoza's emphasis on the weakness of a single human being, unaided by external things, strongly suggests that Spinoza mostly wants to argue that human beings must unite their power in order to mutually benefit each other. My claim that Spinoza is principally arguing for the instrumental value of rational benevolence is fully defended in chapter three (3.3).

1.7.9 Nobility and ordinary benevolence

As I argued above (1.7.7), the Free Man strives to promote the rationality of other people. He does this because he knows that rational people are necessarily good for him and he wants other people to enjoy the benefit of true wisdom. He knows that it is only by joining forces with other beings who entirely agree with his nature (i.e., other rational people) that

²⁷⁷ E P35C1, IV.

²⁷⁸ E P37 and P37S1, IV.

he can achieve the greatest virtue or striving. Thus, the Free Man desires to promote the rationality of other people.

As for the person who only wants other people to be rationally benevolent to him and to not reciprocate their rational benevolence, Spinoza answers that this kind of ‘ingratitude... indicates that the man is affected with too much Hate, Anger, Pride or Greed, etc.’²⁷⁹ These emotions are species of sadness and sadness is bad for a human being. What about a person who dispassionately accepts rational benevolence and refuses to reciprocate it? On Spinoza’s view, emotion belongs to the very essence of a human being (1.4.7). Thus, a human being cannot be dispassionate (2.8). Also, humans imitate each other’s emotions and cannot avoid being affected by other humans. A rational human loves rationality and rational benevolence and strives to be rationally benevolent the more he sees other people love rationality and rational benevolence. Therefore, a *rational* human being wants or strives to be rationally benevolent to other people.

It is clear, then, that the agreement in nature doctrine, which underpins Spinoza’s connection between rational benevolence and well-being, if it succeeds, gives us a reason, grounded in our own welfare, to rationally promote the well-being of other people. This is why Spinoza says that a wise human being is also a noble human being. Nobility, according to Spinoza, is ‘*the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and to join them to him in friendship.*’²⁸⁰ This definition of nobility shows that Spinoza endorses what I have called rational benevolence. A rational person wants to be kind to others by promoting their rationality.

Spinoza’s understanding of rational benevolence is different from the ordinary understanding. The latter involves pity. Pity gives rise to the desire to act benevolently so as to relieve another’s suffering.²⁸¹ This is bad because pity is a species of sadness, that is,

²⁷⁹ E P71S, IV.

²⁸⁰ E P59S, III.

²⁸¹ E P27S, III.

the person who pities feels the sadness of the person whom he pities.²⁸² On Spinoza's account, any kind of sadness is bad or a decrease in power.²⁸³

Furthermore, acting in accord with reason means that the Free Man promotes his true advantage.²⁸⁴ Having the emotion of sadness is bad for a human being, so the Free Man is never motivated by an emotion of sadness to do something. Thus, the Free Man is never motivated by pity, compassion or ordinary benevolence, for all are species of sadness.²⁸⁵ That does not mean, however, that the Free Man will not try to help relieve the suffering of other people. The Free Man will do what he can to free the distress of another person because to do so is in accord with reason and his action will arise from an emotion of desire, joy, or love and his rational commitment to the promotion of their welfare.²⁸⁶

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained why Spinoza rejects Aristotle and the Stoics' definition of human nature, account of the human mind, their understanding of virtue, teleology and their view of human perfection. I have argued that Spinoza can coherently and consistently maintain that a human being has a human nature and is his or her own unique nature. By perfecting my human nature I maximise my striving to preserve my being. I elucidated Spinoza's argument for his rational benevolence claim and I have argued that Spinoza primarily understands rational benevolence to be instrumentally valuable. In the next chapter I will argue that the differences between Aristotle and the Stoics on the one hand, and Spinoza on the other, enables the latter to avoid the traditional objections to the respective accounts of the former two.

²⁸² E P50Dem, IV.

²⁸³ E P41, IV.

²⁸⁴ E P24, IV.

²⁸⁵ E P27S, III.

²⁸⁶ E P37, P46, P71Dem, IV.

Chapter 2

Traditional objections to perfectionism

2.1 Introduction

The idea that the perfection of human nature constitutes human well-being has been attacked for many reasons. The chief aim of this chapter, which is also the subsidiary aim of the thesis, is to show that Spinoza's form of perfectionism avoids what I have called the traditional objections to the perfectionist accounts of Aristotle and the Stoics. This chapter deals with eleven objections. Each objection is dealt with separately.

The teleology objection and the self-destructive nature objection demand a lengthier discussion. According to the teleology objection, perfectionists claim that human well-being consists in fulfilling the end of human nature. The objection states that there are no ends or purposes in Nature. Thus, perfectionism is false. The self-destructive nature objection claims that the purported existence of self-destructive natures contradicts the perfectionist view that the good of a thing always consists in acting in accord with the thing's nature. Some contemporary scholars argue that Spinoza is committed to some form of teleological explanation and his claim that a thing cannot destroy itself has attracted the self-destructive nature objection. Thus, the sections relating to these objections will require a *defence* of Spinoza, rather than a simple explanation of why Spinoza avoids the objection, which is my approach to the other objections covered in this chapter.

As for the other objections, I acknowledge that there are replies available to Aristotle or the Stoics. The focus of the thesis is not whether the accounts of Aristotle or the Stoics can be construed in a way that enables them to avoid the traditional objections. Even so, references to replies available to Aristotle or the Stoics are included in the footnotes of this chapter.

Once I have shown that Spinoza's account avoids the traditional objections, we will be ready to assess his doctrine of agreement in nature, which underpins his claim that rational benevolence is crucial to human well-being, the topic of chapter three.

2.2 Teleology objection

2.2.1 Introduction

Aristotle's function argument has been criticised because it implies teleology in Nature.²⁸⁷ On Aristotle's view, for example, the function of flying explains why birds have wings, that is, birds have wings for the sake of flying.²⁸⁸ This is a teleological explanation. The idea that a thing is perfected by completing or performing its function well implies teleology. The trouble with Aristotle's view is that Darwinism leaves no room for teleology.

According to Darwin, all living things have evolved via the process of natural selection. The reason for the existence and faculties of any living thing is that its fitness or superior adaptability to its environment increases the likelihood that it will produce offspring. This is different from the idea that each living thing has a function the excellent fulfilment of which is the good at which it aims. Williams counsels that:

The first and hardest lesson of Darwinism, that there is no such teleology at all, and that there is no orchestral score provided from anywhere according to which human beings have a special part to play, still has to find its way fully into ethical thought.²⁸⁹

This objection applies to the Stoics, too. If we reject the Stoic idea that all actions and events contribute to the good of the whole universe, then key Stoic claims are dubious. Scholars who defend Stoicism, like Long, have declared that if we reject Stoic determinism and providence, then there is:

no reason to agree with the Stoics that the world is a structure well ordered for human beings, and that the possibility of happiness is uniformly offered to everyone within the limits of the way things are.²⁹⁰

The Stoics, like Aristotle, invite the teleology objection.

Spinoza agrees with Williams. Spinoza aims to 'show [the] falsity' of the claim 'that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end.'²⁹¹ Humans, explains Spinoza, confuse

²⁸⁷ Korsgaard (2008a, pp. 134-141) defends Aristotle.

²⁸⁸ Leunissen (2010, p. 200).

²⁸⁹ Williams (1995, p. 110)

²⁹⁰ Long (1996b, p. 197).

their irrational view of their own behaviour with the actual laws of Nature. Humans believe there is purpose in Nature because many things are a means to human advantage, ‘eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish’ and so on.²⁹² Spinoza denies that final causes exist in Nature (or God) because all things necessarily follow from God’s perfection.

Not everyone agrees that Spinoza rejects all teleology. Some argue that he permits thoughtful teleology,²⁹³ and others maintain that he is also committed to Aristotelian or unthoughtful teleology.²⁹⁴ The literature distinguishes between divine teleology, unthoughtful teleology and thoughtful teleology. Divine teleology involves explaining things in Nature in terms of the purpose or ends of God. For example, God made the world for man. Unthoughtful teleology explains certain natural things in terms of the function of a thing, the fulfilment of which completes the function. For example, the function of the eye is to see and perfect sight completes its function. Thoughtful teleology explains actions in terms of thoughts about the future. For example, I raise my arm (present action) because of my thought (deflect a stone thrown at me). The general consensus is that Spinoza rejects divine teleology, may have permitted unthoughtful teleology, and accepts thoughtful teleology. I argue that Spinoza rejects all three kinds of teleological explanation.²⁹⁵

2.2.2 *Teleology and freedom*

According to Bennett, Spinoza mistakenly connects human belief in divine purpose with human belief in free will. He argues ‘there is no reason why something which is done with a purpose or end in view should not be fully efficiently caused.’²⁹⁶ Spinoza is not guilty of this error. According to Spinoza, humans think there is divine purpose because they project their irrational understanding of their own behaviour on to Nature. Humans have discovered that many things in Nature suit their own ends (for example, eyes for seeing and teeth for chewing) and cannot believe those things made themselves. Humans conclude that

²⁹¹ E App, I or II/78/2-9.

²⁹² E App, I or II/78/31-32.

²⁹³ Bennett (1990); Curley (1990); Garrett (1999).

²⁹⁴ Garrett (1999, p. 327).

²⁹⁵ Greetis (2010) also argues that Spinoza consistently rejects all teleology.

²⁹⁶ Bennett (1984, p. 216).

some powerful being purposefully created them, but they do this only because they are *ignorant of the causes of things*.

Similarly, humans think they are free because they are *ignorant of the causes of things*. Spinoza is not saying that belief in divine purpose allows belief in human free will or the denial of determinism forbids teleology. Spinoza is not connecting teleology with freedom. Bennett seems to have overlooked Spinoza's foundational principle 'that all men are born *ignorant of the causes of things*, and that they all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite' (my italics).²⁹⁷

Spinoza emphasises human ignorance of the true causes of things in relation to their false belief in free will²⁹⁸ and at least once in relation to teleological explanation of human action.²⁹⁹ Spinoza argues that if humans understood that God or Nature is the efficient cause of itself and all individual things conceivable through its essence, then they would understand that the notions of free will and final causes are superfluous (and an impediment) to true understanding. The necessity and perfection of the essence of God fully explains all natural things, expelling the notion of free will and final causes from a rational understanding of Nature.

2.2.3 *Divine teleology*

Spinoza claims 'that all final causes are nothing but human fictions.'³⁰⁰ Curley objects that it is misleading to cite the text '*all final causes are nothing but human fictions*' because:

The immediately preceding clause ['Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it'], after all, proclaims that Spinoza's object is to show that *Nature* has no end set before it. So I would read the italicised clause as saying that *all final causes we are apt to ascribe to (God or) Nature are nothing but human fictions*. And I would note that the propositions and corollaries Spinoza goes on to cite, as having already established this, all have to do with divine causality.³⁰¹ (Curley's emphasis).

²⁹⁷ E App, I or II/78/15.

²⁹⁸ E P2S, III or II/142/19-20; II/143/31-32; L 58, p. 909.

²⁹⁹ E Pref, IV or II/207/12-14.

³⁰⁰ E App, I or II/80/4.

³⁰¹ Curley (1990, p. 40).

If Spinoza did not mean all final causes, why did he *not* say God or Nature has no end before it, without making the reference to *all* things in Nature? Curley believes the claim only applies to God or Nature, but that is a single thing. Spinoza's use of 'all' indicates he meant nothing *in* Nature (since that is all that exists) has a final cause. Since I argue that Spinoza's theory of human motivation is non-teleological, it is unnecessary to interpret this section in a way that makes it compatible with a teleological view of human motivation.³⁰²

As for Curley's claim that 'the propositions and corollaries' only pertain to 'divine causality,' Curley exploits an ambiguity in Spinoza's terminology. Spinoza's God *is* Nature. So his conclusions about God are also about Nature. Spinoza is arguing that from the essence of God *or* Nature, all things follow necessarily and perfectly.

Curley cites the following passage, which he thinks 'makes it quite clear that Spinoza does not deny purposive action to man':

men commonly suppose that all natural things act *as they themselves do*, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end; for they say that God has made all things on account of man, and has made man that he might worship him [i.e., has made man to worship God].³⁰³ (Curley's emphasis)

Spinoza does not always express himself through what he describes as his 'cumbersome Geometric order.'³⁰⁴ Spinoza is human and is writing for other humans. Humans are fallible and Spinoza should be forgiven for not always expressing his views with geometric or philosophical rigour. In addition, in certain places, particularly in his appendixes, prefaces and introductions, Spinoza employs a more conversational style, which probably should be read as directed to the casual or ordinary understanding of a person, which serves as a precursor and preparation for the rigorous philosophy to follow. More importantly, the philosophy of Spinoza, specifically his propositions and conclusions deduced from his definitions and axioms, ought to be what guides us to his actual conclusions, not any

³⁰² Curley (1990, p. 40) assumes that Spinoza offers a teleological account of human motivation. By offering his interpretation of the claim that final causes are fictions, he thinks he renders Spinoza's account more consistent.

³⁰³ Curley (1990, pp. 40-41).

³⁰⁴ E P18S, IV or II/222/15.

experiential examples he provides.³⁰⁵ Curley has confused Spinoza's description of human supposition and prejudice with what Spinoza argues is the correct 'standard of truth,' namely, 'Mathematics which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures.'³⁰⁶ Spinoza's philosophy, which he believes deduces the properties of a human being from its true definition or essence, 'is not concerned with ends.'³⁰⁷

2.2.4 *Thoughtful teleology*

Spinoza holds that we must observe the correct order of philosophising in order to correctly replicate the order of Nature in our intellects.³⁰⁸ We must begin with the essence of God and then proceed to the modes that immediately follow from the essence of God, and so on. Spinoza repeatedly complains that people violate this fundamental principle.³⁰⁹ Bennett correctly says Spinoza is critical of teleological explanations because they reverse the order of Nature.³¹⁰ Bennett violates this principle when he cites the following example:

A stone is thrown at me, and I raise my hand in time to deflect it: the event Raise causes the event Deflect. But if we purport to explain Raise by saying that it was performed 'so as to deflect the stone', we are using Deflect to explain Raise. Spinoza protests: 'This doctrine concerning the end turns Nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely. What by nature comes before it puts after'. (1 Appendix at 80/10). He thinks that one cannot explain an event by reference to a later event, because one cannot explain an item by reference to something which it causes.³¹¹

Spinoza is not arguing the trivial point that Deflect explains Raise.³¹² The contentious point is whether Spinoza is arguing that the *thought* about a future action Deflect causes the action Raise, turns Nature upside down.³¹³

³⁰⁵ Spinoza recognises this distinction: TPT, p. 441.

³⁰⁶ E App, I or II/79/32-34.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ TEI pp. 21, 33, 38, 41; E App, I or II/80/10-14; E P10S, II or II/93/30-35.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Bennett (1984, pp. 216-217).

³¹¹ Bennett (1984, p. 216).

³¹² Curley (1990, pp. 45-46).

³¹³ Curley (1990, p. 46).

According to Spinoza's parallelism (1.4.3), there can be no causal interaction between the attributes of Extension and Thought. The mind cannot cause the body to act and vice versa. The *thought* Deflect cannot cause *action* Raise. But, argues Bennett, it seems possible to have a bodily state the idea of which is the thought Deflect, which causes the action Raise or the thought Deflect which is united, via parallelism, to Raise.³¹⁴ Bennett says Spinoza has no good objection to these examples because they do not violate his parallelism.

Spinoza would complain that Bennett has confused 'imagination' with 'intellection.'
Spinoza explains that:

we think that the things we more easily imagine are clearer to us, and think we understand what we imagine. Hence, what should be put later [i.e., ideas of the imagination] we put first, and so the true order of making progress is overturned, and no conclusion is arrived at legitimately.³¹⁵

The event Deflect/Raise is an idea of the imagination. Bennett is mistakenly trying to understand an event through the imagination. Any inference drawn from this example, according to Spinoza, must be confused and therefore incorrect (though not entirely, given his view that ideas of the imagination are never completely false).³¹⁶ To really understand some natural event or thing we need to understand its efficient cause. The efficient cause of the events in the Deflect/Raise example is the eternal modes (particularly Motion, since Deflect/Raise involves human bodily motion) and the laws inscribed in them, not finite events.³¹⁷ Moreover, Bennett overlooked Spinoza's caution that:

it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things, not only because there are innumerable many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence.³¹⁸

Spinoza would advise me to not engage in speculation about this example. I will take his advice.

³¹⁴ Bennett (1984, p. 218).

³¹⁵ TEL, p. 38 or II/33/27-31.

³¹⁶ E P33, II.

³¹⁷ TEL, p. 41 or II/37/1-5.

³¹⁸ TEL, p. 41 or II/36/23-27.

Next, Spinoza provides non-teleological definitions of desire, appetite and end. ‘By the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite.’³¹⁹ This definition of appetite and end lacks thought about the future. As Bennett explains, “‘appetite for x’ is to be analysed in terms of “intrinsic state which causes one to move towards x.”³²⁰ The intrinsic state of a person or her appetite itself explains why she moves towards something without having to appeal to a representation about the future. However, Bennett and Curley cite text that suggests Spinoza understands appetite in terms of thoughtful teleology. Spinoza says that a final cause, from the human perspective, is really:

a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, *or* primary cause, of some thing. For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites. For as I have often said before, they are conscious of their actions and appetites, but not aware of the causes by which they are determined to want something.³²¹

According to Bennett, ‘[i]f the “from” is causal and the imagining points forward’ Spinoza is committed to teleological explanation of human action.³²² Bennett is mistaken. Spinoza is using the term ‘imagine’ in its technical sense. The technical meaning of ‘imagine’ is that the mind forms an idea of an affection of its body caused by an external thing, which ‘present external bodies as present to us.’³²³ The ideas of the imagination involve both the nature of my body and the nature of the body of the external thing that affects my body.³²⁴ ‘Imagine,’ in Spinoza’s sense, is not *thought* as we ordinarily understand it (that is, deliberating about what we should do or how to get what we want and forming plans to achieve those goals or ends). For example, you decide that you want to build your own house because you have the idea of raising your family in it. Your thought about a future state, raising your family in your own home, motivates you to build your own house. That

³¹⁹ E D7, IV.

³²⁰ Bennett (1984, p. 222).

³²¹ E Pref, IV or II/207/4-14.

³²² Bennett (1984, p. 224).

³²³ E P17S, II or II/106/7.

³²⁴ E P16, II.

is why you are building your house. Spinoza corrects this thinking by explaining that the appetite itself explains the building of the house, and the image of habitation is a remnant of the impact of an external cause on you. It is the appetite, not the image of habitation to which it is connected, that moves you to build the house. This will become clearer in a moment.

There are supposedly three reasons for thinking Spinoza provides a teleological account of human motivation. The first is that the notion of *conatus*, which is usually translated³²⁵ try, strive or endeavour is *prima facie* evidence, for it implies that a thing aims at its self-preservation.³²⁶ The second is the phrase ‘as far as it can’ seems applicable only to teleological explanation or prediction of human action.³²⁷ The third reason is that Spinoza makes general statements that appear to permit the explanation of human actions in terms of aims, goals or ends.³²⁸

Curley explains that the term *conatus*, though he translates it as striving, can be translated as having a ‘tendency’ to do x.³²⁹ Descartes uses the technical term *conatus ad motum* to denote ‘a tendency of bodies to persist either in a state of rest or, if they were in motion, in uniform motion in a straight line, unless acted on by external bodies.’³³⁰ From the perspective of Cartesian physical theory, the *conatus* of a body has no thought about where it is going and no desire to arrive there. Curley notes that ‘[b]oth Descartes and Spinoza use *conatus* in that context *in spite of*, rather than because of, its psychological connotations.’³³¹

Garrett seems to think that a thing *exerts* its power to preserve its being, which throws doubt on the idea that the *conatus* only refers to the tendency of a thing to persist.³³² But for Spinoza, the power by which a thing strives to preserve its being is not exerted; its striving or actual essence is its power and in finite things it is caused by an external thing.³³³ For

³²⁵ Curley (1988, p. 107).

³²⁶ Bennett (1984, p. 245).

³²⁷ Bennett (1984, p. 245); Curley (1988, p. 164, n. 25).

³²⁸ Bennett (1984, p. 245).

³²⁹ Curley (1990, p. 48), (1988, p. 107).

³³⁰ Curley (1990, p. 48).

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Garrett (1999, p. 313).

³³³ E P34, I; P7Dem, III; P 48, II; L 58, p. 909.

example, an external cause imparts motion to a body.³³⁴ The motion is not a capacity that the body exercises. The motion (or power) of the body will maintain itself until it is acted on by an external cause. The *conatus* or motion of the stone tends to maintain itself; it is not aiming at the end of self-preservation or a capacity that can be exercised.

Similarly, the phrase ‘as far as it can’ in propositions like ‘[t]he Mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body’s power of acting’³³⁵ supposedly is incompatible with the view that *conatus* only means ‘tendency.’³³⁶ Bennett argues that the phrase cannot be applied to a non-teleological act of self-preservation:

“If it would help him, he will do it as far as he can” makes perfectly good sense, but “If he does it, it will help him” has no plausible hook onto which “as far as he can” can be hung.³³⁷

Curley agrees with Bennett,³³⁸ which is surprising, given his reference to Cartesian physical theory noted above.

According to Greetis, ‘Bennett’s argument is misleading, as it seems to focus on grammar rather than meaning.’³³⁹ I agree. The correct meaning is derivable from Cartesian physical theory. Descartes uses the phrase ‘as far as it can’ in relation to the laws of motion. He claims that ‘each and every thing, in so far as it can, always continues in the same state; and thus what is once in motion always continues to move.’³⁴⁰ Descartes does not think that things in motion have any idea about where they are heading. What could ‘as far as it can’ mean in the context of Cartesian physics? In my view, it should be understood as referring to the *amount* of motion which constitutes the *conatus* of the body and that it will maintain this amount unless it is acted on by an external body. If the amount of motion is 10 m/s, then unless the thing is acted on by external causes, it will continue in motion 10 m/s. We should read ‘can’ as the extent of the body’s essential power, or the amount of motion imparted to a body. That power, as noted above, is always active. So ‘as far as it can’ appears to mean by the amount of power a thing has gained from an external cause. By

³³⁴ My example was inspired by L 58.

³³⁵ E P12, III.

³³⁶ Bennett (1984, p. 245); Curley (1988, p. 164, n. 25).

³³⁷ Bennett (1984, p. 245).

³³⁸ Curley (1988, p. 164, n. 25).

³³⁹ Greetis (2010, p. 33).

³⁴⁰ Descartes (1985, p. 240).

adding the phrase ‘as far as it can’ by its own motion (or power), and with my interpretation of that phrase, we are barred from asking why a thing moving at 10 m/s will not reduce to 9 m/s and so on. This reinforces my claim that, on Spinoza’s view, the power by which a thing preserves itself is not a capacity that can be exercised. Thus, our actualised essential power is not something we exercise in the pursuit of our ends. Our actualised essential power is what keeps us in existence. Once it is inactive, we cease to be.

Thus, a human being is not in control of her *conatus*. External causes are responsible for creating, maintaining and destroying finite things, like human beings.³⁴¹ Spinoza’s emphasis on the impact of external causes on humans has been misunderstood by most scholars who have debated whether Spinoza allows for teleological explanations of human action.³⁴² This is evident in Bennett’s claim that Spinoza switches from a non-teleological view of human motivation to a teleological view. Bennett makes the absurd claim ‘[t]hat this switch... is beyond dispute.’³⁴³ Credit is due to Bennett for recognising that there is a switch, but he deserves severe criticism for misrepresenting what the switch was to.

Prior to P12 of part three of the *Ethics*, Spinoza discusses only the primary affects (emotions) which relate to the actual essence of an individual human being, considered in itself. For example, joy is ‘that *passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection*.’³⁴⁴ From P12 onwards, most of the emotions are related to external causes. For example, love is defined as ‘*Joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause*.’³⁴⁵ Spinoza’s intention, from P12 onwards, is to explain the way in which the human body is moved by external causes and its connection to the vacillations of the mind, not what motivates a person or what she will do. That is why Spinoza concludes his account of emotion with the following statement:

And with this I think I have explained and shown through their first causes the main affects and vacillations of mind which arise from the composition of the three primitive affects, viz. Desire, Joy, and Sadness. From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external

³⁴¹ L 58, p. 909; E App6, IV.

³⁴² Greetis (2010) may be an exception.

³⁴³ Bennett (1990, p. 56).

³⁴⁴ E P11S, III.

³⁴⁵ E P13S, III.

causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate.³⁴⁶

Spinoza claims that the impact on us by external causes, not our beliefs and desires, explain most of what we do.³⁴⁷ On the other hand, he does say that appetite is the efficient cause of a person's actions.³⁴⁸ Nevertheless, appetite is the *conatus* of the mind *and* body (which is its ratio of motion and rest) considered together.³⁴⁹ Clearly, the ratio explains the *present* motion of the body. However, it is a mistake to consider a finite individual thing in isolation when explaining its actions. We have to consider the whole of corporal Nature when we want to explain actions of a finite thing. 'For every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way.'³⁵⁰ The motion of my body which constitutes my *conatus*, though it explains my present activity, was imparted to my body by an external cause. Spinoza provides the following illustration:

A stone receives from the impulsion of an external cause a fixed quantity of motion whereby it will necessarily continue to move when the impulsion of the external cause has ceased. The stone's continuance in motion is constrained, not because it is necessary, but because it must be defined by the impulsion received from the external cause. What here applies to the stone must be understood of every individual thing, however complex its structure and various its functions. For every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way.

Furthermore, conceive, if you please, that while continuing in motion the stone thinks, and knows that it is [striving], as far as in it lies, to continue in motion. Now this stone, since it is conscious only of its [striving] and is not at all indifferent, will surely think it is completely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wishes.³⁵¹

Even though Spinoza uses this example to explain why humans incorrectly believe they have free will, it is likely that he would use this example to also explain why humans incorrectly think they act for the sake of goals or ends. No future state or consequence

³⁴⁶ E P59S, III or II/189/1-7.

³⁴⁷ Lin (2006, p. 341) misrepresents Spinoza by attributing to him the view that passions motivate human behavior. The external cause represented in a passion is not a source of power; it is an imposition of power. Manning (2002, p. 202) commits the same error.

³⁴⁸ E Pref, IV or II/207/10-11.

³⁴⁹ E P9S, III; P13SLem5, II.

³⁵⁰ L 58, p. 909.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

explains the action of the stone, for its striving is completely explained by the motion it received from an external cause. The stone will strive, as far as it can by its own motion, to continue in motion. But the stone is conscious of its striving and is ignorant of the causes of its striving. The consequence, namely, the satisfaction of the desire (which, in reality, is the motion), does not explain the motion of the stone. The motion of the external cause imparted to it, and the motion of the external thing that imparted motion to that external thing, and so on *ad infinitum*, explains the motion (or action) of the stone.³⁵²

In the case of humans, since the ratio of motion and rest of the body is its *conatus*, and appetite is the *conatus* of the body and mind considered together, the motion imparted to the body by an external cause will be represented by appetite and consciousness of the appetite. Now when Spinoza says that ‘[t]he Mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body’s power of acting’ we have to keep in mind that he is using ‘imagine’ in its technical sense.³⁵³ To say that we further what we ‘imagine’ will lead to something we want ordinarily means that the image of the thing we want is of some future thing which explain our efforts to attain that thing. However, the technical meaning of the concept of ‘imagine’ is that the mind imagines when it has an idea of the affections of the body caused by the *impact* of an external thing. When we imagine, the object of our image is not a future thing, it is of something *present*, namely, the affection of our body caused by an external thing, and the idea of the affection is the image in our mind. So what moves the body to a particular action is an external cause, the idea of which *affirms the present state of the body*. Spinoza does not think that the mind, when it imagines, aims at something; the image is an affirmation of the *present* state of the essential power of the thing.

In their discussion of Spinoza’s account of human motivation, Bennett and Curley tend to focus on the image and neglect the affection of the body to which the idea which constitutes the image is connected. They assume that ‘*strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy*’ means that the image is a mental state about

³⁵² E P13SLem3, II.

³⁵³ E P12, III.

consequences which motivates human action.³⁵⁴ On my reading of Spinoza, the image itself is not doing any causal work in relation to human action. It is the *affection* of the body caused by an external thing, the idea of which constitutes the image formed by the mind that explains the action. The *affection* of the body caused by an external thing does not involve any thought about the future at all. For the affection is really, from the perspective of Motion, the imparting of motion to the body by an external thing. The affection caused by the external thing imparts or reduces the motion of the body. Either way, the subsequent bodily state is not connected to a thought about the future.

2.2.5 *Unthoughtful teleology*

Spinoza holds that the idea that a thing is perfect if it completes the end of the thing is not in accord with Nature.³⁵⁵ He explains that humans have formed universal ideas of things (for example, Aristotle) and judged whether a thing is perfect or imperfect if a thing agrees with the universal idea. But this is contrary to God (Nature), which has no ends. God exists from the necessity and *perfection* of its nature. Hence, God and all things that follow from its essence do not lack anything.³⁵⁶ Having an end implies lack. Thus, God and its modes do not have ends. The cause of an action or event is God's perfection; no end explains the activity of God or its modes.³⁵⁷ Moreover, Spinoza understands perfection as reality,³⁵⁸ not completeness (1.5.7).³⁵⁹ Thus, Spinoza rejects the kind of unthoughtful teleology endorsed by Aristotle. Since Spinoza's account forbids purpose in Nature, he avoids the teleology objection.

³⁵⁴ E P28, III.

³⁵⁵ E Pref, IV or II/205/16-23, II/206/20-26.

³⁵⁶ E Pref IV or II/208/1-7.

³⁵⁷ McDonough (2011, pp. 191-192) argues that this is the primary basis of Spinoza's rejection of traditional teleology. I agree.

³⁵⁸ E D6, II.

³⁵⁹ E Pref, IV or II/205/16-23, II/206/20-26.

2.3 Self-destructive nature objection

2.3.1 Introduction

Spinoza holds that well-being consists in the perfection of human nature. But is it true that perfecting your nature *must* be good for you? It seems possible to have a self-destructive nature. The bee usually dies when it stings something. Stinging appears to be part of a bee's nature. It seems to be the nature of lemmings to throw themselves off a cliff and kill themselves. In each case it appears that a property of the thing's nature results in self-destruction. Spinoza denies that a thing can have a self-destructive nature.

2.3.2 Definition and essence

According to Spinoza, '*[n]o thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.*'³⁶⁰ This proposition is peculiar because it seems unconnected to prior 'propositions, axioms and definitions.'³⁶¹ Spinoza claims that this proposition is self-evident.³⁶² Yet, Spinoza argues that:

the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, *or* it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away. So while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it.³⁶³

In order to understand this proposition we need to observe Spinoza's distinction between 'nominal' and 'real' definitions.³⁶⁴ The former kind refers to arbitrary statements about the intended meaning of a term which can have greater or lesser clarity. By contrast, a real definition is true because it 'explicates a thing as it exists outside the intellect.'³⁶⁵ A real definition defines a thing that exists or can exist outside of the intellect.

³⁶⁰ E P4, III.

³⁶¹ Curley (1988, p. 108).

³⁶² E P4Dem, III.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Allison (1987, pp. 40-1).

³⁶⁵ L 9, p. 781.

A true definition must be affirmative or the ‘best conclusion’ is ‘drawn from a particular affirmative essence.’³⁶⁶ Spinoza distinguishes verbal affirmation from intellectual affirmation. The former refers to mere words that positively or negatively state clearly the nature of a thing, whereas the latter refers to a conceptual truth from which the properties of a thing can be deduced.³⁶⁷

A definition is true or represents an affirmative essence if it can be used to construct the thing defined.³⁶⁸ Spinoza applies this distinction to a circle. A circle defined nominally is the ‘figure in which the lines drawn from the [centre] to the circumference are equal.’³⁶⁹ Spinoza says that this does not define the essence of a circle, but only a property of it. A real definition of a circle ‘is the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable.’³⁷⁰ A real definition must contain the *proximate cause* of a created thing, which the preceding sentence does in the case of the circle; and all properties of the thing must be deducible from the definition if it is to be a real definition, which Spinoza says is illustrated by the real definition of a circle ‘[f]or from it we clearly infer that all the lines drawn from the [centre] to the circumference are equal.’³⁷¹ The definition of a thing supplies a formula for creating the thing defined in the sense that it identifies the conditions that must be fulfilled if that kind of thing is to be realised.³⁷² Since the formula describes only the causes for a thing’s existence (i.e., conditions necessary to create the thing) it is impossible to discover anything in it that would prevent the thing from existing.

Curley suggests that the formula hypothesis applies to the definition of *kinds* of thing, rather than individual things. This hypothesis must apply to individual things for it to be legitimately applied to proposition four, part three of the *Ethics*. Such a definition:

describes a process by which that very thing might be produced, a definition which will enable us to account for all the properties which that thing must have in order to be that thing.³⁷³

³⁶⁶ TEI, p. 40 or II/36/3-4.

³⁶⁷ TEI, P. 40 or II/35/18-19.

³⁶⁸ Aristotle ‘Metaphysics’ (1984, 1039b20) has a similar view.

³⁶⁹ TEI, p. 39 or II/35/1-3.

³⁷⁰ TEI, p. 40 or II/35/14-16.

³⁷¹ TEI, p. 40 or II/35/20-21.

³⁷² Curley (1988, p. 111).

³⁷³ Curley (1988, p. 112).

Curley doubts Spinoza could explain which properties belong to ‘any particular individual possessing an interesting degree of complexity, what those properties might be, or what the process which produced them would be,’³⁷⁴ as if Spinoza might think this himself. Spinoza denies that we can have knowledge of particular finite individuals (1.6.3; 2.3.6). The best we can do, Spinoza advises, is to understand their proximate cause, namely, the universal modes (Motion and Intellect) and the laws inscribed therein.

2.3.3 *Essence and conatus*

On Spinoza’s account, neither the essence of a thing nor the *conatus* of a thing contains self-destructive properties. Since finite things like bees and lemmings are modes, they must be conceived through the essence of God, for only God exists. If it is true that the essence of a thing can be self-destructive, then its proximate cause must contain self-destructive properties. The proximate cause of the essence of finite things is Motion and Intellect.³⁷⁵ The proximate cause cannot contain self-destructive properties because the immediate modes of God are *eternal*.³⁷⁶

We are mistaken if we think that the nature of the lemming or the bee destroys itself, because the essence of finite and changeable things is constituted by:

the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered. Indeed these singular, changeable things depend so intimately, and (so to speak) essentially, on the fixed things that they can neither be nor be conceived without them.³⁷⁷

Since the eternal modes belong to the nature of finite things, the nature of a finite thing is indestructible.³⁷⁸ Spinoza has three more reasons for why a thing’s nature cannot be self-destructive. In relation to the *conatus* of a thing, the ratio of motion and rest constitutes the

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ GMW, pp. 91-92.

³⁷⁶ E D8, I; P21-P23, I; GMW, pp. 91-92.

³⁷⁷ TEL, p. 41 or II/37/1-5.

³⁷⁸ There is no space to provide a detailed explanation of Spinoza’s view of the relation between the eternal and finite modes. Wolfson (1934, pp. 397-398, I) offers a convincing explanation of the relation. In any case, my aim in this section is only to show that Spinoza’s account can explain why self-destructive natures cannot exist.

essence of the thing's body. Since the motion imparted to the body of the thing is its *conatus*, and the motion of a body will not cease on its own accord, the actual essence of a thing cannot destroy itself. Next, the essence of a thing is eternal because it is conceivable through God's Intellect independently of whether the thing exists (1.6.2). Finally, the definition or essence of a thing is affirmative or constructive. Thus, on Spinoza's view, the nature or essence of a thing, whether it is actual or non-actual, cannot destroy itself.

2.3.4 Modality

Spinoza would distinguish genetically inherited self-destructive properties from essential properties. For example, certain species of bee die when they sting something because their stinger (a genetically inherited property) is attached to their abdomen. When they sting a thing the bee's stinger hooks into its victim. As the bee tries to fly away, part of its abdomen is torn, and consequently, the bee dies. On Spinoza's account, Motion and Intellect, not the stinger, constitute the essence of a bee. Moreover, we could surgically or perhaps genetically remove the stinger without changing the ratio of motion and rest communicated to all the parts of its body and so the bee will 'retain its nature.'³⁷⁹ As for suicidal lemmings, this is a myth.³⁸⁰ When lemmings migrate, masses of them plunge into deep and wide rivers. They strive to get across, but the chaos of numerous lemmings fighting to navigate the river, and competition with the other lemmings (the river and other lemmings being *external causes*) defeat many, which explains why they perish. In fact, lemmings' behaviour indicates that they 'live to thrive and strive.'³⁸¹

It might be objected that it is only contingently true that there could not be creatures like the mythical lemmings. That is, the truth of this claim is contingent on the actual world. Thus, this modal claim, for example, a claim about what is contingently or necessarily true, is false. If there is no possible world in which a self-destructive nature could exist, then it is necessarily true that such natures cannot exist. Since we can *imagine* a possible world in which self-destructive beings do exist, it is not true that in every possible world self-

³⁷⁹ E P13SLem4-5, II.

³⁸⁰ Kruszelnicki (2004).

³⁸¹ Ibid.

destructive natures could not exist. Thus, it is not necessarily true that a thing cannot have a self-destructive nature.

This objection relies on the supposed plausibility of possible world theory. The distinction between a contingently true claim and a necessarily true claim depends on the postulation of worlds other than the actual world. And the idea of possible worlds relies on the belief that things could have been otherwise. Lewis claims that ‘things might have been different, in ever so many ways.’³⁸² The idea of possible worlds just is the idea that things might have been different.³⁸³ This is the basis of possible world theory, which is applied to modal claims.

My reply on behalf of Spinoza has three parts. First, I will show that Spinoza endorses the doctrine that all things are necessary.³⁸⁴ Second, Spinoza can explain why possible world theory is mistaken. This undermines modal claims that rely on the plausibility of possible world theory. Third, Spinoza’s claims that there cannot be a self-destructive nature and that this is the only possible world have not been disproven. I will address each part in turn.

2.3.5 *Necessity*

According to Spinoza, this is necessarily the only possible world, all truths are necessarily true and things could not have been otherwise than they are. Spinoza argues that only God, an infinite and eternal being, exists. All things follow from the essence of God and nothing can be conceived without God.³⁸⁵ Since Spinoza identifies God with Nature, and we think of corporal Nature as the actual world, Spinoza would conclude that this is the only possible world. Next, all true or adequate ideas belong to the Intellect of God, which is necessarily a part of the absolute nature of God. So, all truths are necessarily true.

Spinoza argues that:

³⁸² Lewis (1986, p. 1).

³⁸³ Lewis (1979, p. 182).

³⁸⁴ Not everyone agrees with me, for example, Curley and Walski (1999).

³⁸⁵ E P15, I.

*[i]n [N]ature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.*³⁸⁶

Since existence belongs to the essence of God, he necessarily exists. Everything necessarily follows from the essence of God and must be conceived through God. That is, without God, no thing can be or be conceived. Next, the infinite and eternal modes follow necessarily from the infinite and eternal attributes of God, whereas finite things are caused to exist and produce an effect by another finite cause, and that cause by another, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Further, ‘*[t]hings could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.*’³⁸⁷ Spinoza says that the order of Nature could be different only if things could have belonged to a different nature or might have been determined to cause an effect differently. This would require God to have a nature different than the one it possesses and ‘that [other nature] would also have had to exist, and consequently, there could have been two or more Gods, which is absurd.’³⁸⁸ This is because there cannot be more than one absolutely infinite being. Thus, God necessarily exists and all things follow *necessarily* from the essence of God.

2.3.6 Possible worlds are ‘beings of reason’

Clearly, Spinoza holds that things could not have been otherwise than they are. The problem for humans is that they are born ignorant of the causes of things and try to understand Nature through the ideas that are derived from human imagination. Ideas of the imagination contain only a confused understanding of the causes of things (1.4.6). Moreover, Spinoza says ‘a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge.’³⁸⁹ The human imagination lacks the power to perceive the infinite number of causes that make up corporeal Nature. Thus, human knowledge of finite things will always be confused or imperfect. In addition to human ignorance of the causes of things, humans

³⁸⁶ E P29, I.

³⁸⁷ E P33, I.

³⁸⁸ E P33Dem, I.

³⁸⁹ E P33S1, I or II/74/12.

confuse ideas of the imagination with true knowledge of the causes of things. If humans possessed true knowledge, they would understand that all things are necessary.³⁹⁰

To understand why all things are necessary we must first define what Nature is and then see what follows from its essence. According to Spinoza, Nature is a necessarily existing and absolutely infinite being. Conversely, possible world theorists, for example, Lewis, appeal to sensory objects in their descriptions. For example, a world includes ‘[e]very stick and every stone...you and I...planet Earth, the solar system, the entire Milky Way...ancient Romans...pterodactyls...’ and so on.³⁹¹ Lewis says a person ‘knows what sort of thing our actual world is’ and ‘that other worlds are more things of *that* sort.’³⁹² Spinoza would deny that an ordinary person understands the nature of the world and he would complain that this kind of description does not explain the essence of Nature. Spinoza would explain that this kind of description is derived from ideas of the imagination or a confused understanding, whereas only conclusions drawn from a true definition of Nature (or God) are true.

On Spinoza’s view, true philosophy must begin with the most real being. The most real or infinite being is God or Nature. We can only truly know those things that are deducible from this most real being. We deduce the eternal and fixed beings from the attributes of God, for example, Motion and Intellect. From these universal modes we deduce the laws that are inscribed in these modes, for example the principle of inertia in Motion and the law of association of ideas in Intellect.³⁹³ This is the correct order of deducing true conclusions. However, we cannot understand the order and connection of the essences of particular finite things because they are numerous and affected in countless ways within and without the individual ‘any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence. For their existence has no connection with their essence, *or...is not an eternal truth.*’³⁹⁴ This means we can only have an inadequate knowledge of particular finite things.

When we try to understand the essence of a thing through possible world theory, we do so through the imagination. Ideas that are derived from the imagination or the senses are

³⁹⁰ E P44, II.

³⁹¹ Lewis (1986, p. 1).

³⁹² Lewis (1979, p. 184).

³⁹³ TPT, p. 426; Della Rocca (2008, p. 73).

³⁹⁴ TEI, p. 41 or II/36/23-29.

inadequate because they represent the disposition of the body and the way in which it has been affected by external things rather than the true causal sequence of the interaction of the body with external things. An important kind of idea derived from this kind of knowledge is the *universal idea*. Examples of the *universal idea* include ‘Man, Horse, [and] Dog.’³⁹⁵

A *universal idea* arises because the body lacks the power to imagine all the slight differences between each individual thing ‘and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body.’³⁹⁶ The perception of self-destructive natures and possible worlds, Spinoza would argue, are universal ideas derived from the imagination. These ideas are confused. That is, the essences of distinct things are undistinguished. For example, the human mind forms the universal idea ‘lemming’ because it is impossible to imagine the characteristic that belong to every individual lemming.

Nevertheless, the human mind can form the ideas of a *lemming* and *destruction* and connect them. The human mind does not understand how the lemming destroys itself, but it has the power to connect these two ideas. Spinoza would explain that the association of these ideas is due to the order of the imagination, rather than to the intellect, that is, true conclusions deduced from clear and distinct ideas.

Similarly, the possible world theorist perceives sticks, stones, planets and galaxies, et cetera and forms a general idea — ‘the world’— that refers to these things because it is impossible to perceive all those things distinctly. Then the mind forms an idea of the general idea that relates to ideas of real things, namely, the idea of other possible worlds. He treats this ‘being of reason’ as a real thing (1.4.4). That is, he has failed to observe Spinoza’s warning that beings of reason are ideas that ‘arise from the ideas of real beings so immediately that they are quite easily confused with them by those who do not pay very close attention.’³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ E P40S1, II or II/121/13.

³⁹⁶ E P40S1, II or II/121/19-20.

³⁹⁷ MT, p. 301.

Lewis does this when he says ‘other worlds are more things of *that* sort.’³⁹⁸ Moreover, even though Lewis argues that possible worlds are real things, those who merely use it as a conceptual tool are guilty of confusing ideas of the imagination with reality. And this kind of utility relates not to reality, but human fictional activities, that is, activities that do not relate to real beings outside of the human mind. Thus, the possible world theorist mistakes beings of reason for real beings. Only real beings are capable of destruction. The idea of a self-destructive nature, Spinoza would argue, is a being of reason and so it represents nothing that exists in Nature or Reality.

2.3.7 *Stalemate*

We might doubt Spinoza’s argument for at least two reasons. Some Spinoza scholars maintain that his argument for the existence of God is problematic.³⁹⁹ Spinoza seems to infer the existence of God from God’s definition, but the existence of something cannot be inferred from its definition. On the other hand, many contemporary philosophers and scientists claim that the universe is finite, destructible and did not always exist. However, whereas Spinoza provides a definition of Nature, an infinite and eternal being, contemporary philosophers and scientists have not clearly and uncontroversially defined Nature. If we say that Nature consists of the laws of Nature, which is consistent with Spinoza’s definition,⁴⁰⁰ then we cannot know the nature of Nature until we fully understand the fundamental laws of Nature. Our knowledge of those laws, and their relation to each other, is fragmentary, incomplete and to a large extent, speculative. It might turn out that it is the nature of Nature to exist. Thus, the proposition that Nature necessarily exists cannot be indubitably denied.

Further, if existence belongs to the nature of Nature, then we can infer from the nature of Nature that it ‘necessarily exists, that [it] is one alone, immutable, infinite, etc.’⁴⁰¹ If these properties belong to the nature of Nature, then this is the only possible world and all things are a part of Nature. Moreover, since a finite thing cannot exist through its own essence, its

³⁹⁸ Lewis (1979, p. 184).

³⁹⁹ For example, Earle (1951) and Garrett (1979).

⁴⁰⁰ PT, p. 683.

⁴⁰¹ L 83, p. 958.

existence and actions or behaviour had to be caused by an external cause and that by another external cause, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Thus, if this view is true, then all things follow necessarily from the infinite nature of Nature. Since, moreover, the essence of Nature is indestructible, and every thing is a part of the essence of Nature, it follows that no thing can destroy itself. Until we certainly know that it is not of the nature of Nature to exist, we cannot reject Spinoza's account.

Ultimately, Spinoza can shift the burden of proof to those who claim that things can have a self-destructive nature. They must explain exactly how these things destroy themselves in reality or in another possible world. Spinoza, I am sure, would rest content in the knowledge that they will never be able to identify a self-destructive cause or explain non-dogmatically how a nature can be self-destructive, 'because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing,'⁴⁰² and simply because, according to Spinoza, no such thing could exist. The person who insists that self-destructive natures exist does not know what he is saying because he has not explained the essence of a thing and how it is self-destructive. All Spinoza's opponents can say with any degree of confidence is that it *seems* that self-destructive natures exist. They are yet to explain exactly how they destroy themselves. At worse it is a stalemate, which means Spinoza's claim that a thing cannot destroy itself has not been falsified.

2.4 Human perfection is not good for everyone ('the conflation objection')

Some philosophers object that perfectionism *conflates* human perfection with well-being.⁴⁰³ This objection has the following structure. Perfection involves a thing being a good specimen of its kind. Well-being concerns what is good for a particular person and relates to her subjectivity, for example, her desires, feelings, goals and preferences. However, being a perfect human might not be good for a person because her desires, preferences or

⁴⁰² TEI, p. 41 or II/36/25-26.

⁴⁰³ Sumner (1998, pp. 21-3).

plans might remain unsatisfied. The critic concludes that the inference from perfectionist value to well-being is fallacious.⁴⁰⁴

Griffin argues that Aristotelian perfectionist accounts of well-being must fail because any human ideal 'would be too insensitive to variations between persons to be the basis of a measure of each individual's well-being.'⁴⁰⁵ A person might value impulsive decision-making because she likes to be surprised by life.⁴⁰⁶ The laborious task of cultivating virtue and acting in accord with reason seems incompatible with her subjectivity. Thus, she might be miserable if she cultivated the capacities characteristic of human beings, but her well-being would increase if she acted on her whim.

There have been a number of notable replies to the conflation objection on behalf of Aristotelianism and Stoicism.⁴⁰⁷ I will focus only on the way in which Spinoza avoids this objection.

Spinoza says that the perfection of your human nature, which is connected to your *conatus*, constitutes your well-being (1.5.7; 1.6.3-4).⁴⁰⁸ Desire is consciousness of your *conatus*.⁴⁰⁹ Spinoza's perfectionism, then, is concerned with a person's desires. A person's desires involve either greater or lesser striving. The latter are bad for you and the former are good for you.⁴¹⁰ Desires that arise from joy or reason are good for you because these kinds of desire relate to a human being insofar as she expresses her essential power or acts through her own nature (1.4.9, 13).⁴¹¹ For example, the joy or greater striving (desire) that arises from possessing knowledge of God. Bad desires either involve sadness (e.g., desire, arising from pity, to benefit someone) or are excessive because they do not benefit the whole person (e.g., indulgence of sexual lust at the expense of the needs of the other parts of the body) (1.4.13).

⁴⁰⁴ Glassen (1957, p. 319).

⁴⁰⁵ Griffin (1986, pp. 59).

⁴⁰⁶ Dostoyevsky (1962, p. 371) has caprice, as opposed to reason, high on his list of values.

⁴⁰⁷ Wilkes (1978) and Korsgaard (2008a, p. 149) defend Aristotle. For a view sympathetic to Stoicism, see Long (2002). Toner (2006) offers a reply to Sumner.

⁴⁰⁸ E Pref, IV or II/208/16-23, P20-P28, IV.

⁴⁰⁹ E P9S, III.

⁴¹⁰ E App3, IV.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

According to Spinoza, the Free Man fully expresses human power (1.4.11). All humans have the same potential power.⁴¹² The emotions are the affections of the body by which its power of acting is increased or decreased and the ideas of those affections.⁴¹³ Spinoza says that ‘men’s natural passions are everywhere the same.’⁴¹⁴ All humans have desires, experience joy, sadness, love, hate and so on (1.6.3).

Though all humans have the same kinds of emotions, there are differences between particular humans.⁴¹⁵ Spinoza distinguishes the emotions of one person or thing from another in the following way. Since every individual thing has its own unique *conatus*, each thing must have unique desires and associated emotions.⁴¹⁶ However, the amount of power or reality that defines the essence of a thing determines the nature of that thing’s emotions.⁴¹⁷ For example, equine lust to procreate will be different than man’s lust to procreate.⁴¹⁸ Conceptually, Peter’s emotions will be the same as Paul’s, but in reality, the *conatus* and hence the desire of Peter must be different from the desire or *conatus* of Paul. Peter and Paul can share the same definition and agree in nature or power, but they must differ in terms of existence or striving (1.6.3).⁴¹⁹ Moreover, Peter and Paul will have *human* desires (for food, sexual partners and needs of the human body and mind),⁴²⁰ but their desires will have different content which is due to the impact on them by external causes. Peter desires to marry Elizabeth and Paul desires to marry Mary. Peter and Paul have the same kind of human desire, but their actual desires are different from each other.

Evidently, the subjective states of a person are at the centre of Spinoza’s account of human well-being. The emotions necessarily belong to a human’s *conatus*. Thus, Spinoza’s account deals with a person’s subjectivity. Moreover, the perfection of human nature, on Spinoza’s view, does *not* involve the realisation of *distinctive* human capacities (1.4.11). It involves the maximisation of a thing’s power and power constitutes the essence of all

⁴¹² GMW, p. 94 or I/53/4; E P32Dem, IV.

⁴¹³ E D3, III.

⁴¹⁴ PT, p. 699.

⁴¹⁵ E P57S, III.

⁴¹⁶ E P57Dem, III.

⁴¹⁷ E P57S, III; P13S, II or II/97/1-13.

⁴¹⁸ E P57S, III or II/187/5-12.

⁴¹⁹ E P17SI, I or II/63/20; P32Dem and P35, IV; GMW, p. 94 or I/53/4.

⁴²⁰ E P57S, III or II/187/11.

things. A human being, like all other things in Nature, is a part of the reality or power of God. Perfection is reality. So, a thing (or a human) is perfect insofar as it expresses its reality or perfection.

The emotions of joy and desire relate to a human being insofar as she expresses her essential power, reality or perfection. Thus, the subjective experience of a person is fundamental to Spinoza's perfectionism. Consequently, Spinoza's theory can be used to measure the well-being of any person. Insofar that a person has bad emotions they are deficient in well-being. Insofar as the person has good emotions the person is well off. Human perfection, on Spinoza's view, is concerned with the subjectivity of a person. Thus, Spinoza avoids the conflation objection.

2.5 Perfection and pleasure

A life without pleasure or enjoyment lacks well-being. A theory that fails to explain the value of pleasure or enjoyment is implausible. Some people think enjoyment constitutes the whole of well-being.⁴²¹ Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza deny that pleasure constitutes human well-being.⁴²² They distinguish sensual from virtuous pleasure. The former is connected to pleasures of the flesh, for example, food, drink and sex. The latter is connected to virtuous activity. All three claim that sensual pleasure is only an apparent good and the only kind of pleasure that is good for you is virtuous pleasure.⁴²³

Haybron denies that Aristotelian perfectionism can explain the value of pleasure in terms of its derivation 'from its connection with virtuous activity.'⁴²⁴ He offers several reasons for his denial.⁴²⁵ There is only one reason Haybron attacks that I will focus on. The perfectionist idea of pleasure Haybron rejects is that its 'importance consists in its role as

⁴²¹ For example, Roger Crisp (2006) and (2006a, chapter 4).

⁴²² NE 1174a5-9; DL VII 102-4; TEI, pp. 7-8 or II/6/1-6. My focus is Spinoza's theory of emotion. For an Aristotelian account, see Cooper (1999a). For a neo-Stoic account, see Nussbaum (2001).

⁴²³ However, Spinoza thinks sensual pleasure is good as long as it is not excessive (E P43, IV) and Aristotle thinks that sensual pleasure is *a* good, but not *the* good (1174a10-12). The Stoics think sensual pleasure is either an indifferent (LS, p. 421), or most 'likely it is a vice' (Ep. 59.1; 123.15-16).

⁴²⁴ Haybron (2008, p.165).

⁴²⁵ Ibid pp. 165-166.

an indicator of value.⁴²⁶ This is close to Spinoza's idea of the value of pleasure (or joy). And even though this view can be attributed to Spinoza imprecisely, Haybron's criticism is wide enough to include Spinoza's account. For Spinoza endorses perfectionism and he holds that the value of pleasure is connected to virtuous activity and, in some sense, it is an indicator of value. So if Haybron is right, then Spinoza's perfectionism must be mistaken.

Haybron acknowledges that there might be some truth in the idea that pleasure is an indicator of value, 'but as [a] complete [account] of pleasure and its value [it is], for obvious reasons, wildly implausible.'⁴²⁷ He refers to Hurka who gives an example of pleasure as an indicator of value. Hurka suggests that the perfectionist could explain that 'pleasure and pain can appear to be mere biological signals of good and poor functioning.'⁴²⁸ According to Haybron, this is an inadequate explanation of the value of pleasure. Haybron apparently holds that the 'indicator' of value view can be applied to an explanation of the goodness of pain. That is, because pain is an indicator of value, its function as a indicator makes it good, and so it is hard to see why pleasure is better than pain.

On Spinoza's account, joy is indicative in the sense that it affirms the power of the body (1.5.5). But joy is not something different than the power that is affirmed of the body. The mind and body are identical. The power of a human being can be understood through the attribute of Thought or through the attribute of Extension. When the mind and body are considered together, desire just *is* the *conatus* of a human being, joy just *is* an increase in power and sadness just *is* a decrease in power. So in some sense joy is 'indicative' of 'value,' but its value does not consist in it being an indicator of value; rather, joy just *is* an increase in power. Since joy *is* an increase in power and we want power for its own sake, joy is good for you. Sadness *is* a decrease in power, which is the opposite of what we want for its own sake. Thus, sadness is bad for you.

Next, Haybron is wrong to claim that a perfectionist cannot explain, in accord 'with a reasonable account of virtue' that the suffering of a leukaemia patient is 'a bad thing, or at

⁴²⁶ Ibid p. 165.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Hurka (1993, p. 190) cited in Haybron (2007, p. 13, n 23).

least something to be alleviated, *because of how it feels to the child*.⁴²⁹ Spinoza can explain why the suffering of a leukaemia patient is bad for her. Spinoza defines an emotion as ‘affections of the Body by which the Body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the *ideas* of these affections’ (my italics).⁴³⁰ The ‘ideas’ of the affections, translated into contemporary language, is an *awareness* of the affections of the human body. The mind’s *awareness* of the increase of bodily power, according to Spinoza, is a *necessary* part of an emotion. The ‘feeling’ just *is* the emotion, on Spinoza’s view.⁴³¹

Moreover, according to Spinoza, virtue is power (1.4.11). Real power involves acting in accord with your nature, and you do that by acting rationally. The *rational* leukaemia patient does whatever helps preserve her being, for example, having chemotherapy. However, she also exercises certain virtues. For example, ‘[a] free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death.’⁴³² The rational leukaemia patient promotes her *conatus* and is not influenced by fear of death. Fear is not related to human power or activity, so it cannot be related to reason (1.4.8-9; 1.4.13-14).⁴³³ Only joy and desire relate to her insofar as she is powerful or active.⁴³⁴ If the Leukaemia patient allows fear to influence her, she is unvirtuous, that is, she acts irrationally. But if she focuses on living and preserving her being, that is, she desires her own well-being, she will meditate on life, not death. In doing so, she acts rationally, that is, she acts in accord with her own nature, power or virtue.

Empirical evidence supports Spinoza’s theory of emotion. Damasio cites empirical evidence that a specific feeling, for example, happiness, sadness, fear or anger are

⁴²⁹ Haybron (2008, pp. 167).

⁴³⁰ E D3, III.

⁴³¹ Damasio (2003, p. 30) claims that the emotions are distinguishable from feelings and that emotions are more basic than feelings. This is different from Spinoza’s view. There is no space to satisfactorily defend my claim. However, I can say that Spinoza is committed to the view that the emotions such as joy, pleasure and love involve the essential power of a human being. Spinoza does not refer to the notion of ‘feelings’ in his definition or account of these emotions. So we either accuse Spinoza of neglecting a crucial property of the human mind or we hold that Spinoza did not distinguish emotions from feelings. I endorse the latter approach and I suggest that Spinoza would hold that the notion of ‘feelings’ is a being of reason.

⁴³² E P67, IV.

⁴³³ E P63, IV.

⁴³⁴ E P58-P59, III.

associated with changes in brain activity in specific parts of the brain (for example, the insula and the cingulate cortex).⁴³⁵ He explains that positive emotions:

are organism states in which the regulation of life processes becomes efficient, or even optimal, free-flowing and easy. This is a well-established physiological fact. It is not a hypothesis.⁴³⁶

Damasio concludes:

We can agree with Spinoza when he said that joy... was associated with a transition of the organism to a state of greater perfection. That is greater perfection in the sense of greater functional harmony, no doubt, and greater perfection in the sense that the power and freedom to act are increased.⁴³⁷

Apparently, this is not always true. The feeling of joy, as an 'indicator' of greater functional harmony, can be falsified by the injection of drugs or hormones.⁴³⁸ According to Damasio, the feeling of joy caused by the drug:

may reflect a transient improvement of organism functions. Ultimately, however, the improvement is biologically untenable and is a prelude to a worsening of function.⁴³⁹

For example, the joy or pleasure caused by the drug ecstasy reflects the effect of ecstasy on the body and not its actual overall state. If the 'function' of joy is to signify the power of the body, and this function can be corrupted by the injection of drugs (or hormones), then it is not true that joy is necessarily connected to, and always an affirmation of, the body's power. That is, joy is not always a true reflection of the power of the body. Damasio suggests that joy does not always reflect the transition to greater power of the body, for even though it may do so initially, the 'improvement' cannot be sustained because it upsets the overall functioning of the body. Thus, joy does not always 'indicate' that the whole body has increased its power to preserve its being.

Spinoza's distinctions between joy, pleasure and cheerfulness enable him to reply to this objection (1.4.13). Joy is the primary emotion, pleasure is joy in relation one or several parts of the body, and cheerfulness is related to all parts of the body. That is, joy generally

⁴³⁵ Damasio (2003, pp. 96-101).

⁴³⁶ Ibid, p. 131.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 138.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, pp. 138, 119-124.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p. 138.

involves the transition of the body to greater power, pleasure involves the transition to greater power of only a certain part (or parts) of the body, and cheerfulness involves the transition to greater power of all parts, or the whole, of the body. Each individual part of the body, for example, the heart, lungs, and bladder, have their own *conatus*. That means that the *conatus* of each part strives to preserve its own being.

*A Desire arising from either a Joy or a Sadness related to one, or several, but not to all parts of the Body, has no regard for the advantage of the whole man.*⁴⁴⁰

For example, the striving of the serotonin system, on which the drug ecstasy acts, will strive to preserve its power without regard to the *conatus* of each of the other parts of the body. The ratio of motion and rest of the part of the body that constitute the serotonin system is increased, but the other parts of the body retain the ratio of the whole. The increased striving of the serotonin system disagrees in nature or is in discord with the ratio which constitutes the whole individual human body and is communicated to its various parts.

Spinoza would explain that the joy caused by ecstasy relates to certain parts of the body, which is in accord with the empirical evidence cited by Damasio. Further, the increased striving or joy of certain parts, which occur to the neglect of other parts of the body, correspond to the body in that ‘the degrees of motion and rest are not equal in all parts of our body,’ and since ‘some have more motion and rest than others, there arises a difference of feeling.’⁴⁴¹ Conversely, ‘if the change which happens in a part is a cause of its returning to its original proportion, from this there arises the joy we call peace...and cheerfulness.’⁴⁴² The pain that follows the joy is the difference between the ratios of different parts, and the pain diminishes insofar as the affected parts return to the ratio of the whole body. Thus, Spinoza can explain why sadness or pain follows the joy caused by the injection of drugs. Spinoza can explain the relation between the emotions and the power of the human body.

⁴⁴⁰ E P60, IV.

⁴⁴¹ GMW, p. 155 or I/120/30-32.

⁴⁴² GMW, p. 156 or I/121/5-7. I left the words ‘pleasurable activity’ out of the quote because their inclusion might lead to its confusion with Spinoza’s definition of pleasure. Here Spinoza is talking about joy in relation to the whole of the body, which is his definition of cheerfulness in the *Ethics*.

Spinoza's view that joy is connected to power generates a puzzle. LeBuffe asks 'whether it is one or both of these things [joy or power] that hold value.'⁴⁴³ Spinoza does not think that joy and power are different things. LeBuffe has failed to observe Spinoza's distinction between a real thing and a being of reason. The power of a human being is a real thing. The power of a human being just *is* the human being. The increase of human power is a real thing or event, for it is a modification of human power. Nature is power and all natural things are bits of power. But, like the words 'good' and 'evil' we must retain the words 'virtue' and 'vice' to help us label and distinguish powerful from non-powerful actions. Thus, the idea of 'virtue' arises directly from the idea of power. The idea of virtue is a being of reason, whereas the idea of human power is an idea of a real thing.

Moreover, power can be understood through Thought or Extension. A human's power can be understood from the perspective of the body alone, the mind alone and the mind and body considered together. The emotion of desire *is* the essential power of a human being when the mind and body are considered together. The emotion of joy *is* the passing of the mind to greater power and an affirmation of a greater power in the body than before. Further, we can understand the passage to a greater power from the perspective of the human body considered alone. Under the attribute of Extension, increase in human power is understood as the ratio of motion and rest of a particular part (or parts) of the body conforming to the ratio of the whole which the body strives to maintain. In addition, we want power for its own sake. Joy *is* (an increase in) power. Therefore, we want joy for its own sake. Thus, Spinoza avoids the problem raised by LeBuffe.

Spinoza plausibly explains why pleasure is good for you and sadness is bad for you. Further, considerable empirical evidence supports his theory. Haybron declared that probably *no* account of perfection which works with a theory of virtue can work as a 'fundamental part of well-being: perfectionism is false.'⁴⁴⁴ Haybron should have read Spinoza's *Ethics* before making such a sweeping claim.

⁴⁴³ LeBuffe (2010, p. 145)

⁴⁴⁴ Haybron (2008, p. 158).

2.6 Rationality can be a tool for evil purposes

Aristotle, the Stoics and Spinoza claim that rationality necessarily contributes to human well-being. However, Williams notes ‘the moral *ambiguity* of distinctive human characteristics.’⁴⁴⁵ He says:

For if it is a mark of a man to employ intelligence and tools in modifying his environment, it is equally a mark of him to employ intelligence in getting his own way and tools in destroying others.⁴⁴⁶

Spinoza would agree that a certain kind of knowledge can be used for evil purposes. A person can learn how to make a bomb and devise a plan to plant the bomb somewhere that will maximise human destruction. However, he would explain that this kind of knowledge is acquired via the imagination or ‘random experience’ (1.4.6).⁴⁴⁷ The terrorist learns how to make the bomb from a book or an expert bomb-maker. This kind of knowledge is derived from the imagination, that is, from ideas of the body that involve the impact of external causes.⁴⁴⁸

Spinoza would say that Williams is right to think that certain kinds of knowledge can be used to destroy other people, but he is wrong to claim that actions in accord with reason can be used for evil purposes. Reason is having or reasoning from adequate ideas⁴⁴⁹ or a true understanding of human nature and well-being.⁴⁵⁰ Reason is not a deliberative faculty that produces rational desires (1.5.3). According to Spinoza, a rational person will assist, not harm, other humans because other humans help preserve the human body and increase human understanding, which are necessary to maximising a human’s own well-being.⁴⁵¹

However, it might be objected that this view of virtue commits Spinoza to the claim that using others as a means to one’s own well-being without benefitting them is virtuous and contributes to one’s own welfare. Similarly, Garrett objects that there cannot be ‘a *complete*

⁴⁴⁵ Williams (1972, p. 73).

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁴⁷ E P40S2, II or II/122/3-6; TEI, pp. 12-13 or II/10/11-15.

⁴⁴⁸ E P17S, II or II/106/10; P26C & Dem, II; P40S2II, II or II/122/11.

⁴⁴⁹ E P40S2III, II or II/122/14.

⁴⁵⁰ E P18S, IV.

⁴⁵¹ E P18S, IV or II/222/33-II/223/4.

coincidence of human interests.⁴⁵² There can be circumstances where humans compete for limited resources, for example, food needed for their own physical survival.

Spinoza would reply that *rational* people understand that they ‘will always persevere in existing by the same force by which’ they began to exist, for duration does not follow from the essence of things, and so ‘no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time.’⁴⁵³ The rational human wants to perfect his nature. Human perfection involves acting from the laws of human nature and not under the influence of external things (for example, limited resources and competitive humans). Since living longer does not by itself contribute to human perfection, the interests of rational people will not conflict in the case of limited resources.⁴⁵⁴

Nevertheless, a human is a finite and vulnerable being. Infinite external things are more powerful and capable of destroying a human.⁴⁵⁵ A human needs many things outside itself to help preserve his being or express his nature.⁴⁵⁶ Other rational humans are the most useful external things that can help a human preserve his own being.⁴⁵⁷ Thus, promotion of the rationality of other humans is self-beneficial.

This is why Spinoza argues that a rational person will try to be kind to his enemies. The rational person repays hate with love, as far as he can.⁴⁵⁸ Hate is evil because it involves sadness, which is a decrease in power.⁴⁵⁹ The rational person strives as far as possible to avoid hating anyone. Moreover, he will strive as far as he can to ensure that others do not suffer from the emotion of hate, for he aims to increase their power, not decrease it.⁴⁶⁰ The rational person strives to repay another person’s hate with love, which is joy accompanied by an idea of an external cause, and nobility, which is the rational desire ‘*to aid other men*

⁴⁵² Garrett (1996, p. 304).

⁴⁵³ E Pref, IV or II/209/4-6.

⁴⁵⁴ Kisner (2009, p. 563) makes a similar point. However, the plausibility of this reply depends on Spinoza’s account of the eternal nature of the human mind. There is no space to examine this part of Spinoza’s account.

⁴⁵⁵ E A1, IV; P3-P4, IV.

⁴⁵⁶ E P13SPost4, II.

⁴⁵⁷ E P35C1, IV.

⁴⁵⁸ E P46, IV.

⁴⁵⁹ E P13S, III; P41Dem, P45-P46, IV.

⁴⁶⁰ E P37, P46Dem, IV.

*and join them to him in friendship.*⁴⁶¹ Thus, rational actions can only benefit humans, according to Spinoza.

2.7 Evolutionary biology is hostile to human well-being

Williams argues that the welfare of an individual living thing is not the most basic principle of biological life.

The important point is that evolutionary biology is not at all directly concerned with the well-being of the individual, but with fitness, which is the likelihood of that individual's leaving offspring.⁴⁶²

In Nature, according to Williams, what matters is that you survive long enough to pass on your genes to your offspring. If your life was miserable throughout, but you managed to produce offspring, then from the perspective of Nature, as conceived by evolutionary biology, you are successful. So, we cannot appeal to perfecting your nature as the correct account of human well-being. This is supposedly another reason for believing perfectionism is implausible.

Spinoza's account is consistent with evolutionary biology.⁴⁶³ Unlike the Stoics, Spinoza says that Nature as a whole is indifferent to the well-being of individual things.⁴⁶⁴ However, an individual thing's own actual nature, which is a part of the whole of Nature, is always directed at preserving the thing itself,⁴⁶⁵ which forms the basis of the thing's welfare (for a thing must desire to exist in order to desire 'to live well') (1.4.11).⁴⁶⁶ A thing's actual nature is its power by which it strives to preserve its being. The more a thing's power increases, the greater its power of self-preservation, which is the foundation of well-being (1.4.11).

Spinoza can agree that fitness and the chances of producing offspring are biological facts about living things. However, Spinoza denies that fitness and ability to produce offspring

⁴⁶¹ E P59S, III or II/188/28.

⁴⁶² ELP, p. 44

⁴⁶³ For a neo-Aristotelian reply, see Nussbaum (1995) and Hursthouse (1999); for a neo-Stoic reply, see Sherman (2005).

⁴⁶⁴ E P17C, V.

⁴⁶⁵ E P6-P7, III.

⁴⁶⁶ E P21, IV.

belong to the actual essence of an organism. The actual nature of a thing is its *conatus*.⁴⁶⁷ Spinoza can agree that a bodily feature like a long neck enables a certain kind of animal to adapt to the environment and thereby keep it in existence. Those features explain why the certain species that it belongs to exist and that at this level of explanation individual welfare is irrelevant. But those features do not explain why living things, such as human beings, exist in the first place.

Moreover, humans do not drop dead once they have reproduced or ceased having the capacity to reproduce.⁴⁶⁸ Living things still desire food and water and continually do so as long as they live and flee any kind of danger to their existence. The instinct to self-preservation continues to occur after the living thing can no longer reproduce. If we switched off the capacity to reproduce, humans and the other animals would still try to get resources, or in Spinoza's language, strive to preserve their being. Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine, which is the basis of his account of human well-being, is consistent with evolutionary biology.

2.8 Psychological health

The claim that moral virtue is necessary for human welfare is supposedly undermined by the following counterexamples. According to Williams, there are some people 'who are not horrible, and who try hard to be generous and to accommodate others' interests,' but 'are miserable, and from their ethical state.'⁴⁶⁹ Worse, he observes that:

[t]here is also the figure, [rare]..., but real, who is horrible enough and not miserable at all but, by any ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing. For those who want to ground the ethical life in psychological health, it is something of a problem that there can be such people at all.⁴⁷⁰

Spinoza would deny that a person can be virtuous and miserable or evil and flourish. The miserable ethical person is not really virtuous and the successful evil person must have

⁴⁶⁷ E P7, III.

⁴⁶⁸ Hursthouse (1999, p. 258) makes a similar point from a neo-Aristotelian perspective.

⁴⁶⁹ ELP, p. 45

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 46.

little well-being, for not just any kind of ‘rational’ flourishing or success amounts to human perfection.

Spinoza would explain that the person who tries hard to be generous and accommodate the interests of others is under the influence of external causes, for he is responding to the disposition of the other individual,⁴⁷¹ and therefore, his emotions will be dependent more on the behaviour of that person, whereas the Free Man acts under the guidance of reason and so is active and not under the sway of the emotions of the other individual (1.4.6, 8; 1.5.3). The Free Man wants to be good to other people, not according to what their emotions demand, but according to what reason advises.⁴⁷² The Free Man acts rationally, which involves acting in accord with his nature, independently of external things (including other people).⁴⁷³ That is, he acts powerfully. The ‘ethical’ people Williams describes are not acting virtuously or powerfully and are instead acting under the influence of external causes. Williams’ ethical people are not really morally virtuous,⁴⁷⁴ which is why they are miserable.

One might wonder if there can be a dispassionately bad person. Spinoza would deny such a person could exist because emotions belong to ‘the very essence of’ a human being (1.7.9).⁴⁷⁵ The bad person *desires* to cause harm or destroy others. If he has no desire, he will neither be, nor act.⁴⁷⁶ Moreover, the successful bad person must experience bad emotions, for example, fear, hope, hate, and envy because his success depends on the outcome of competition with things outside of himself, namely, other ambitious and powerful people. So the evil person might habitually wear a smile and have a sparkle in his eye, but his mind will be twisted this way and that like waves tossed about by strong winds.⁴⁷⁷ The horrible flourishing person pursues competing goods (wealth, status, and social power) and so he will inspire hate and envy in people he has treated horribly.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷¹ E App13, IV.

⁴⁷² E P70Dem, IV.

⁴⁷³ E P23Dem, IV.

⁴⁷⁴ Morality, on Spinoza’s view, is the desire to be good to others in accord with reason: E P37S1, IV or II/236/21.

⁴⁷⁵ E P9S, III; GMW, p. 118 or I/77/16-18.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ E P59S, III or II/189/5-7.

⁴⁷⁸ E P34Dem, P45C IV.

Since other humans can be cunning,⁴⁷⁹ are equal in essential power,⁴⁸⁰ or can unite their power (making them twice as powerful or more than a single human),⁴⁸¹ the successful bad person will always be worried that others will try to take his power away, and so he will suffer from fear, suspicion and paranoia.⁴⁸² Spinoza plausibly explains why Williams' dangerously flourishing person would be severely deficient in well-being.⁴⁸³

2.9 Arbitrary function objection

According to Aristotle, the function of a human being is special to it.⁴⁸⁴ He also claims 'that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason.'⁴⁸⁵

Williams objects that there are many characteristic activities that are special to humans such as:

making fire; or developing peculiarly human physical characteristics; or having sexual intercourse without regard to season; or despoiling the environment and upsetting the balance of nature; or killing things for fun.⁴⁸⁶

Nozick asks the following question: '[i]f man turned out to be unique only in having a sense of humo[u]r, would it follow that he should concentrate his energies on inventing and telling jokes?'⁴⁸⁷ Aristotle's claim that human well-being consists in fulfilling the special function or characteristic activity of man is problematic.

Spinoza avoids the arbitrary function objection because he does not appeal to some special function of man to identify what is good for a human being (1.5.7).⁴⁸⁸ All individual things in Nature, says Spinoza, are referred 'to one genus, which is called the most general, i.e., to

⁴⁷⁹ PT, p. 686.

⁴⁸⁰ GMW, p. 94 or I/53/4.

⁴⁸¹ E P18S, IV or II/223/6-8.

⁴⁸² PT, p. 686.

⁴⁸³ Haybron (2008, pp. 159-160) thinks Genghis Khan is an example of a dangerously flourishing human being. Spinoza can explain why Haybron, like Williams, is wrong.

⁴⁸⁴ NE 1098a1.

⁴⁸⁵ NE 1098a8.

⁴⁸⁶ Williams (1972, p. 73).

⁴⁸⁷ Nozick (1981, p. 516).

⁴⁸⁸ Korsgaard (2008a, p. 143) argues Aristotle can avoid this objection.

the notion of being, which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature.⁴⁸⁹ Spinoza does not distinguish human nature from the nature of other things, for example, plant-life and the other animals, on the basis of some special function or characteristic activity (1.5.2).⁴⁹⁰ All finite individuals in Nature have essentially the same nature. All finite things are parts of God's power or modes of Motion and Intellect.

Humans, says Spinoza, can be distinguished from inanimate things, plant-life, the other animals, alien life (if there is any) and God, using a being of reason, in terms of being or reality (1.4.4). Since Spinoza identifies perfection with reality,⁴⁹¹ the more reality or being a thing has, that is, the more a thing can affect things and be affected by them, the more reality or perfection belongs to the essence of that thing.⁴⁹² Since a human body is made up of many more individual bodies than the body of a flea, the human body has more reality or is more perfect than that of the flea. The idea of the body, or the mind, perceives all of the affections of the body,⁴⁹³ and is thereby affected and capable of perceiving many things.⁴⁹⁴ That means the human mind is more perfect than the 'mind' of a flea, not because the flea lacks something in its nature, but because it has less power to affect and be affected by other things.⁴⁹⁵ Finite things are not essentially different, but they do differ in terms of how much being, power, reality or perfection belongs to their essence.

Even though the terms 'perfection' and 'imperfection' do not refer to anything real,⁴⁹⁶ we need to retain them. For we want to conceive a model⁴⁹⁷ (or ideal) of human nature to use as a guide to improve ourselves. This model is the Free Man. Whatever helps us get closer to the ideal of the Free Man, explains Spinoza, is good and whatever impedes our approaching nearer to the ideal is bad.⁴⁹⁸ He further says that humans 'are more perfect or

⁴⁸⁹ E Pref, IV or II/207/23-25.

⁴⁹⁰ Wolfson (II, p. 236) also notes this opposition between Aristotle and Spinoza.

⁴⁹¹ E D6, II.

⁴⁹² E P13S, II or II/97/8-14; Pref, IV or II/207/27-28.

⁴⁹³ E P12, II.

⁴⁹⁴ E P14, II.

⁴⁹⁵ E Pref, IV or II/208/1-4.

⁴⁹⁶ E Pref IV or II/207/19.

⁴⁹⁷ The model of the Free Man is a being of reason (GMW, p. 103 or I/60/20-21).

⁴⁹⁸ Spinoza thinks that the ideas of 'good' and 'bad' do not refer to any real thing in Nature (E Pref, IV or II/208/7-11). He thinks they are relative terms. 'For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is

imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to' the ideal of the Free Man.⁴⁹⁹ This ideal is derived from Spinoza's basic idea that we have well-being insofar as we act from the laws of our own nature, which also means that we strive powerfully or we are free, as far as possible, of the power of external things. Spinoza says that 'more perfect' means increased essential power.⁵⁰⁰ Conversely, 'more imperfect' means diminished essential power. Since a human being expresses her power insofar as she acts in accord with reason, a human being increases her level of perfection insofar as she is rational.

By contrast, Aristotle and the Stoics seem to have presupposed that rational activity is the good life for man and subsequently sought arguments to support their desired conclusion. Surely Spinoza is guilty of the same mistake, the reader might object. However, Spinoza does not assume that rationality is distinctive of a human being. He actually denies that a human being is correctly defined as a rational animal (1.5.2).⁵⁰¹ Spinoza defines reason as having adequate ideas. According to Spinoza, we are powerful or act from the laws of our own nature insofar as our mind can be understood through itself. A mind is understood through itself alone insofar as it acts from adequate ideas.⁵⁰² We know that we (humans) can be conscious of having true or adequate knowledge and reason in accord with it. However, Spinoza should emphasise that all things have adequate ideas, for example, a stone has the adequate idea of Extension, but we do not know any other thing in Nature that has consciousness and a similar power to humans to think (1.4.6).⁵⁰³ Nevertheless, Spinoza says that rationality is a property of man,⁵⁰⁴ but it does not belong to a true definition of human nature.⁵⁰⁵ Since Spinoza does not appeal to a special function or characteristic activity to help explain his view of human well-being, he avoids the arbitrary function objection.

mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf' (E Pref, IV or II/208/11-14). Spinoza retains the words 'good' and 'evil' to help us identify what we should seek or avoid relative to the ideal of the Free Man. See also Appendix D.

⁴⁹⁹ E Pref, IV or II/208/22-23.

⁵⁰⁰ E Pref, IV or II/208/28-29.

⁵⁰¹ Appendix A.

⁵⁰² E P3, III.

⁵⁰³ E App26, IV.

⁵⁰⁴ E P40S2III, II or II/122/14.

⁵⁰⁵ MT, p. 301 or I/235/20-21; Appendix A.

2.10 The ‘trying and succeeding’ objection

Spinoza and the Stoics agree that the rational guidance of your *conatus* is good for you.⁵⁰⁶ However, their views about the relation between virtue and well-being diverge. On the Stoics’ view, only perfect reason is good because it constitutes the whole order of Nature (or God), which aims at its own overall good.⁵⁰⁷ A human being is a rational animal and its reason is a part of the divine reason.⁵⁰⁸ Whatever is in accord with a human’s rational nature is virtuous or good for a human being.⁵⁰⁹ Things that are appropriate to human nature, for example, nutritious food and society, are not good, but their rational selection is.⁵¹⁰ If I have cancer, the selection of medical treatment is rational because self-preservation is appropriate to human nature and selecting things appropriate to human nature is rational.⁵¹¹ However, it seems the Stoics must insist that the medical treatment itself is not good for me, only its rational selection is.⁵¹² So if I do not actually receive the treatment or it is ineffective, then I am still better off because I rationally selected it. But this is false, for getting rid of my cancer increases my well-being.

Spinoza avoids the Stoics’ conclusion (1.5.6 and 1.5.8).⁵¹³ A true good is whatever we certainly know helps us achieve human perfection.⁵¹⁴ Reason dictates that a human achieves its good by rationally promoting its *conatus*.⁵¹⁵ A human *is* her *conatus*, that is, the power by which she strives to preserve her being.⁵¹⁶ Self-preservation involves the preservation of both the mind and the body. This is because the mind and the body of a human being constitute the same thing, conceived under the relevant different attributes.⁵¹⁷ For the first thing that constitutes the essence of the mind, argues Spinoza, is the idea of an

⁵⁰⁶ E P24, IV; DL 7.86.

⁵⁰⁷ DL 7.136-137, 147; Ep 124.14

⁵⁰⁸ DL 7.86; Ep. 41.8.

⁵⁰⁹ DL 7.86-88; Ep. 41.8-9.

⁵¹⁰ DL 7.101-7; Frede 1986, pp. 109-110.

⁵¹¹ De Fin 3.17.

⁵¹² Antipater of Tarsus, a Stoic, was an exception. He argues that ‘the attainment of natural advantages’ is a part of well-being (Long 1974, p. 196).

⁵¹³ According to Striker (1986), the Stoics can avoid this conclusion.

⁵¹⁴ E D1, IV; Pref, IV or II/208/19-20.

⁵¹⁵ E P24, IV.

⁵¹⁶ E P7Dem, III.

⁵¹⁷ E P2S, III or II/141/24-26.

actually existing body to which it is united.⁵¹⁸ Whereas the Stoics thought that humans are essentially rational (1.5.2), Spinoza holds that humans are essentially power or finite bodies to which a mind is united (1.4.3).

According to Spinoza's parallelism (1.4.3), the power of the mind is equal and connected to the power of the body.⁵¹⁹ If the body increases in power, the mind's power also increases, and vice versa. If the body suffers a decrease in power, so does the mind. Further, Spinoza says that certain bodily things make the body more powerful and so are useful or good (for example, nutritious food),⁵²⁰ whereas having or acting in accord with adequate ideas or reason increase the mind's power or freedom.⁵²¹ Spinoza would agree with the Stoics that it is rational to seek medical treatment for your cancer. However, since chemotherapy is very likely to help someone with cancer preserve their body and (indirectly their) mind, Spinoza would say that actually receiving effective treatment it is good for them. Spinoza avoids the 'trying and succeeding' objection.

2.11 Unattainability of well-being objection

The Stoics say that a person's action that is the same as the Sage's is 'fitting' or 'appropriate,' but only the Sage is capable of executing 'correct action.'⁵²² Since virtue is its own reward, and only the Sage is virtuous, only the Sage has well-being. The Stoics arrive at this view via the following chain of reasoning. Since only that which is perfect is good, and only the reason that pervades all of Nature is perfect, then only perfect reason is good.⁵²³ This is why virtue is defined as 'right reason,'⁵²⁴ '[a] true and never-swerving judgment,'⁵²⁵ a 'harmonious'⁵²⁶ or a 'consistent'⁵²⁷ rational disposition. Moreover,

⁵¹⁸ E P11, II.

⁵¹⁹ E P7C, II.

⁵²⁰ E P13Post4, II; P45S, IV or II/244/27-30. DeBrabander (2007, p. 23) is wrong to claim that, for Spinoza, '[e]xternal goods do not really matter.'

⁵²¹ E P20S, V or II/293/30-34.

⁵²² Sharples (1996, p. 105).

⁵²³ Plutarch (1976, 1035C-D); Ep 124.13-14.

⁵²⁴ Ep 66.11.

⁵²⁵ Ep 71.32-33

⁵²⁶ DL 7.89.

⁵²⁷ Inwood and Donini (1999, p. 715).

‘[r]ational consistency is either perfect or non-existent.’⁵²⁸ A single false proposition renders the body of virtuous knowledge, as a whole, inconsistent or imperfect. The Stoics conclude that either you have perfect reason, and so you have virtue and well-being, or you entirely lack virtue, and so you lack well-being.

This is why the Stoics say “just as in the sea the man a cubit from the surface is drowning no less than the one who has sunk 500 fathoms, so neither are they any the less in vice who are approaching virtue than they who are a long way from it.”⁵²⁹ But, it may be objected that murder is worse than going above the speed limit. Also, there seems to be a difference between the person who is habitually bad and the person who is occasionally bad.⁵³⁰ A further implication is that a person who has excellent bodily health, cheerfulness, many friends, outstanding professional success and extensive knowledge of the good life for a human being is miserable, if her reason is imperfect. These implications render the Stoic theory of well-being implausible.⁵³¹

Spinoza does not think that rational consistency constitutes the whole of well-being (1.5.6; 1.5.7). For, on Spinoza’s view, it is impossible.⁵³² Adequate ideas relate to our nature, whereas inadequate ideas relate to the impact of external causes on us.⁵³³ Since we cannot be completely free of external causes,⁵³⁴ the human mind must always have inadequate or confused ideas. This means that a human being can never possess absolute rational consistency or perfect reason.

⁵²⁸ Inwood & Donini (1999, p. 715).

⁵²⁹ Plutarch (1976, 1063A); De Fin. 3.48.

⁵³⁰ Sharples (1996, p. 106).

⁵³¹ There is a worry that the point in the ‘trying and succeeding objection’ is in conflict with the main point of the ‘unattainability of well-being’ objection. The former is saying that trying to be a Sage is sufficient for success and the latter is claiming that trying hard to be a Sage is insufficient to be one and that ultimately no one succeeds. The issue here can be resolved by saying that no one ‘is really trying as the Stoic Sage would’ (Garrett Cullity).

⁵³² An adherent of Stoicism might reply that their account can be modified in a way that allows for a graduated view of virtue. I agree. The Stoic Epictetus thought that we improve as we free ourselves from faulty reasoning (1928, 4.12.19). Long (2002, pp. 32-3) explains how Epictetus could permit gradations of virtue. Inwood and Donini (1999, pp. 726-731) say that the doctrine of the ‘degrees of nearness to virtue’ was endorsed by the Stoics, which did not treat all non-virtuous people as equally bad. However, my answer to this question is that Spinoza’s account is modified Stoicism, that is, Spinoza reconciles Stoicism with 17th century science and philosophy. James (1993) and DeBrabander (2007) examine the relation between Spinoza and the Stoics.

⁵³³ E P3 & Dem, III.

⁵³⁴ E P4, IV.

Further, Spinoza argues that, since acting in accord with our nature constitutes human well-being, and the more adequate ideas that constitute the mind the more we act in accord with our nature independently of external things,⁵³⁵ it follows that the more adequate knowledge or rationality we have, the higher the degree of our well-being. What this shows is that Spinoza explicitly allows for gradations of virtue and well-being (1.5.7).⁵³⁶ As we increase our self-knowledge, that is, adequate knowledge of our affects or emotions, and order them according to reason and connect them to the idea of God,⁵³⁷ we will have greater essential power or striving and mental satisfaction.⁵³⁸ Therefore, all human beings, in principle, could increase their well-being at any given moment, on Spinoza's view.⁵³⁹

2.12 Coldness objection

The Stoic Sage is seemingly a cold-blooded human being. Picture a situation in which a child is in a house on fire.⁵⁴⁰ The Sage would try to rescue the child because this is the correct action to take in the circumstances.⁵⁴¹ He does not try to save the child because he compassionately cares about her. He cares principally about acting virtuously, and less about the preservation of the child's life. The Sage is invulnerable to regret if his efforts prove futile. He can hold this attitude because: (i) taking the right action is virtuous and the Sage's well-being consists in this alone;⁵⁴² actually saving the child was beyond the Sage's power, but he was capable of *trying* to rescue the child, that is, he executed virtuous action, which was within his power;⁵⁴³ (ii) death is an 'unpreferred indifferent'⁵⁴⁴—it is not some

⁵³⁵ E P20S, V or II/293/31-34.

⁵³⁶ E Pref, IV or II/208/22-23.

⁵³⁷ E P1-P14, V.

⁵³⁸ E P25, P27, & P36S, V.

⁵³⁹ However, Spinoza would say that increasing well-being greatly would demand commensurate time, for example, a long period of study in order to understand God or Nature: TPT, p. 527.

⁵⁴⁰ Long (1974, p. 197).

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Sharples (1997, p.107); De Fin. 3.26.

⁵⁴³ Sharples (1997, p.107); Epictetus (1925. 1. 1. 7).

⁵⁴⁴ According to the Stoics, an *unpreferred indifferent* (a thing that is contrary to human nature) cannot affect human well-being because only the exercise of the will or reason can be good or bad for you: Epictetus (1890, pp. 12-13).

kind of evil;⁵⁴⁵ and (iii) everything in Nature happens for the best in accordance with Destiny.⁵⁴⁶ Most people would accuse the Sage of inhumanity.⁵⁴⁷

Spinoza, like the Stoics, holds that pity and compassion are evil and irrational (1.7.9).⁵⁴⁸ Pity involves feeling another's pain and pain is bad. Reason dictates that we promote human perfection.⁵⁴⁹ Pain is contrary to human power. Thus, pity and compassion violate the demands of reason. However, unlike the Stoics who think that pity is evil, period, Spinoza's account has room to give limited value to pity and compassion.

Human nature is essentially rational, on the Stoics' view (1.5.2). Non-rational emotions, argue the Stoics, are not a part of fully matured human nature at all. Since only right reason is good, non-rational emotions like pity and compassion must be bad. In contrast, the emotions and the faculty of imitation are a part of human nature—whether fully matured or not—on Spinoza's view (1.5.4).⁵⁵⁰

Spinoza would say that it would be better to have been rationally motivated to try to rescue the child from the burning house than non-rationally. But, being motivated by pity or compassion is better than not being motivated at all. 'For one who is moved to aid others neither by reason nor by pity is rightly called inhuman. For he seems to be unlike a man.'⁵⁵¹ Spinoza agrees with the Stoics that pity is irrational, but he rejects their conclusion that it is entirely bad or not a property of human nature.

A comparison of the Stoics, Spinoza and Kant will help us understand Spinoza's position on the value of compassion. All three accounts hold that compassion is irrational. However, Kant and Spinoza qualify this strong claim. Kant says that it is 'an insulting kind of beneficence.'⁵⁵² According to Kant, the presence of emotions in a person in the situation

⁵⁴⁵ Sharples (1997, p.107); Marcus Aurelius (2006, 2.11.4).

⁵⁴⁶ Sharples (1997, p.107); DL 7.149.

⁵⁴⁷ Sharples (1997, p.107); Nussbaum (1994, pp. 428-429, n 38 & 496).

⁵⁴⁸ E P50 & P50C, IV.

⁵⁴⁹ E P18S, IV or II/222/18-20.

⁵⁵⁰ E P27, III . Cooper (1999b, pp. 247-8) says that, because Aristotle holds that non-rational emotions are a part of a perfected human nature, the virtuous person will feel appropriate grief and compassion in certain circumstances, for example, when there is a loss of a child.

⁵⁵¹ E P50S, IV.

⁵⁵² Kant (1996, 6: 457).

where the child is trapped in a building that is on fire is appropriate and natural.⁵⁵³ We have, Kant maintains, an indirect duty to cultivate our natural compassion for our fellow humans.⁵⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Kant claims that only benevolent actions motivated from duty, that is, from reason, have full moral worth.⁵⁵⁵ For example, Kant would say that, to be truly worthy of the esteem granted to moral actions, you must want and try to save the child because your reason recommends the action to you and not because you compassionately feel like rescuing the child. Thus, Kant, like Spinoza, agrees with the Stoics that only actions motivated by reason have full moral worth, but he denies that compassionate actions lack any value whatsoever.

There are three fundamental differences between Kant and Spinoza, though. First, sometimes, says Kant, compliance with reason or the moral law may result in diminished well-being.⁵⁵⁶ Spinoza clearly rejects Kant's view, for he claims that your well-being must be enhanced, not diminished, whenever you act in accord with reason.⁵⁵⁷ Second, Kant argues that you have an indirect duty to cultivate compassion in yourself, but Spinoza denies that because, on his view, compassion involves pity and pity involves feeling another's pain, which is a decrease in one's own power and a decrease in one's own power is bad for you. Spinoza would approve of trying to save the child from the burning house if the action was motivated by rational *desire* or *love* for the child, but not by pity or compassion.⁵⁵⁸ For desire and love, which is a species of joy, involves human power, which is in accord with reason, whereas compassion, a species of Sadness, indicates human want of power, which is contrary to reason. Third, Kant believes in free will; Spinoza absolutely rejects it. The key point, in the context of this section, is that the comparison of Spinoza with Kant helps explain why Spinoza avoids the coldness objection. Compassion is a valuable human faculty that enables us, through our imagination, to care about the well-

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Kant (1948, pp. 65-66).

⁵⁵⁶ Kant (1948, p. 62).

⁵⁵⁷ E P18S, IV or II/222/18-22.

⁵⁵⁸ Korsgaard (2008b, pp. 196-199) notes that, according to Kant, true benevolence is motivated by reason, but it is also appropriate 'to take pleasure in virtuous action.' Unlike Spinoza, however, Kant holds that emotions are never good in themselves. Kant says that only a good will is good, whereas, on Spinoza's view, whatever increases joy or power is good.

being of others.⁵⁵⁹ Spinoza, like Kant, gives reason supreme moral value, and simultaneously acknowledges that compassion has some value.

2.13 Conclusion

The above discussion has argued that Spinoza avoids, or can plausibly answer, all of the objections to perfectionism covered in this chapter. In the next chapter I will discuss objections to Spinoza's agreement in nature argument for his rational benevolence claim.

⁵⁵⁹ E P27, III. The faculty of imitation is another important source of promoting the rationality and well-being of other people, on Spinoza's view (P37Alt Dem, IV; Appendix B).

Chapter 3

Rational benevolence

3.1 Introduction

So far I have argued that Spinoza's perfectionism succeeds where Aristotle's and the Stoics' accounts do not. In this chapter I will focus exclusively on the objections to Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature which he uses to support his rational benevolence claim.

Spinoza argues that insofar as a thing agrees with human nature it is necessarily good for a human being. According to Della Rocca, Spinoza's agreement in nature argument fails because it relies on the conflation of a thing with its nature *and* the idea that two different things can have the same nature.⁵⁶⁰ Spinoza's supposed conflation of a thing with its essence is inconsistent with his claim that two different things can have the same nature.

In addition to the supposed inconsistency, it is objected that his doctrine of agreement in nature has a wildly implausible implication, namely, that when I act rationally I benefit all rational people no matter where they are in space and time and that by preserving myself I preserve those who share my nature.⁵⁶¹ This seems to follow from the idea that a human is her nature (first conflation) and possesses the same nature as other humans (second conflation) and that whenever she benefits her nature she benefits all other humans.

The first part of this chapter will show that Spinoza is consistent. Following that is an extensive discussion of the second objection, which I name the automatic benefit objection. An instrumental interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine of agreement in nature helps Spinoza avoid these objections. If we attribute an instrumental view to Spinoza, then there is no reason to understand the notion of agreement in nature as meaning that two (or more) things possess (or are identical to) the same nature. Consequently, Spinoza avoids the implication that rational activity must automatically benefit all human beings. On an

⁵⁶⁰ Della Rocca (2004, p. 132).

⁵⁶¹ Della Rocca (2008, p. 197); Bennett (1984, p. 301).

instrumental reading, Spinoza's agreement in nature argument withstands the objections to it.

3.2 Inconsistency objection

According to Della Rocca, Spinoza cannot simultaneously hold that a thing is its nature and that two different things can have the same nature.⁵⁶² Spinoza claims that each individual thing is its essence:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is also necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily also taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.⁵⁶³

When the essence of a thing is granted, the thing itself is granted. Thus, a thing *is* its essence. Garber accuses Spinoza of conflating a thing (or its being) with its essence.⁵⁶⁴ Spinoza also claims that individual humans 'can agree entirely according to their essence.'⁵⁶⁵ If two humans fully agree in nature, presumably they must have exactly the same nature. Consequently, Spinoza seems to conflate the nature of two different things. According to the objection, if the essence of an individual human is unique, then that essence cannot be shared with other humans. Therefore, Spinoza's idea that a thing is its nature seems inconsistent with his agreement in nature doctrine.

The alleged conflation of a thing with its essence is unproblematic.⁵⁶⁶ The *conatus* of a thing is the thing's distinctive nature (1.4.2).⁵⁶⁷ The *conatus* or nature of a thing, under the attribute of Extension, is the specific ratio of motion and rest communicated to all the

⁵⁶² Della Rocca (2004, p. 132).

⁵⁶³ E D2, II.

⁵⁶⁴ Garber (2004, p. 189).

⁵⁶⁵ E P17S, I or II/63/20.

⁵⁶⁶ Kisner (2011, p. 139).

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

parts of its body which its body strives to maintain.⁵⁶⁸ So, the preservation of the thing's being involves the preservation of the thing's nature.⁵⁶⁹

However, it is important to note that the *conatus* of a thing is the thing's essence combined with existence or its *actual* or *realised* essence (1.4.2; 1.4.7).⁵⁷⁰ The distinction between the definition or essence of a thing and the *conatus* of a thing, which is central to Spinoza's theory of essence, will more precisely help us understand that the inconsistency objection is inapplicable to Spinoza (1.6.2; 2.3.2-3). The definition of a thing is a true conception of the thing. According to Spinoza, the definition or true concept of human nature is that it is constituted by certain modes of God's attributes, namely, Motion and Intellect. The *actual* essence of an individual human is human nature combined with her existence, *conatus* or striving to preserve her being.

When a thing preserves the ratio of motion and rest distributed throughout its body, it simultaneously preserves its *conatus* or *actual* essence and its own existence or body. That is, the thing preserves its being or *actual* nature. So, Garber betrays his misunderstanding of Spinoza when he claims that 'what is preserved is *being*, not *nature*.'⁵⁷¹ Even so, the important point is that the ratio *is* the *actual* essence of the thing. Thus, Spinoza can legitimately identify the actual essence of a thing with the thing itself.

Next, Spinoza allegedly conflates the nature of two different things. Kisner argues that the objection relies on a misreading of the term *agreement in nature*. According to Kisner, the term 'asserts not that two things have identical natures, but rather that they have distinct natures with common properties.'⁵⁷² Kisner suggests that rationality is the common property shared by humans,⁵⁷³ whereas 'some essential properties will not be shared, for instance, one's fingerprints.'⁵⁷⁴ Thus, according to Kisner, Spinoza can say that two or more things can share an essential property and simultaneously possess their own distinctive essential properties.

⁵⁶⁸ E P13, Lem5, II.

⁵⁶⁹ Kisner (2011, p. 139).

⁵⁷⁰ Garrett (2002, p. 137) discusses the notion of realised essence.

⁵⁷¹ Garber (2004, p. 189).

⁵⁷² Kisner (2011, p. 139).

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 137.

Kisner's construal of Spinoza is mistaken. On Spinoza's view, your *conatus*, not properties like your fingerprints, constitutes your distinct nature (1.4.2, 7; 1.6.3). Also, Spinoza denies that rationality is an *essential* property of a human being (1.5.2).⁵⁷⁵ Humans share a common nature, namely, certain modes of God's attributes. The definition of human nature applies to all humans. The definition of human nature, combined with Spinoza's account of the nature of the human body and mind, explains the extent of human power. This means that humans have the potential to agree in terms of *power* (1.7.4, 7). The amount of power a human being has varies. External causes are constantly affecting the body of a human being. That is why humans often disagree in nature. Humans agree in nature insofar as they express or promote human power. Rational humans express human power and only do things that promote human power. That is why rational humans agree in nature and are necessarily good for each other.

However, humans cannot have the same *conatus*. The *conatus* of a thing is its essence combined with existence and it is necessarily different from the *conatus* of other individual things. For the body of an individual human being is distinguished by reason of the fixed ratio of motion and rest that is communicated to the various parts that make up its body (1.6.3). Further, a human being is the cause of the existence (or ratio of motion and rest) of another human being. Since one human being is the cause of the existence of another, and the other is the effect of that cause, those two human beings are necessarily distinct from each other (1.6.3). Every human being has a distinct *conatus*, but all can express or promote *human* power (1.4.4).

In summary, Spinoza is consistent. He identifies a human *being* with her *conatus* or actual nature and he says that rational humans agree in nature in the sense that they share the same definition, are equally powerful and only do those things that express and promote human power (1.4.4).

⁵⁷⁵ Appendix A.

3.3 Automatic benefit objection

According to the automatic benefit objection, Spinoza is making the mysterious claim that whenever a person acts rationally he increases his agreement in nature with all other rational people and thereby promotes their striving or welfare, irrespective of their spatio-temporal position.⁵⁷⁶ A person's rational action in the United States instantly benefits a person in Australia. Marcus Aurelius's rational actions benefited people who exist here and now and the rational actions of people in the present will benefit people who live many centuries beyond the one in which they currently live. This supposed implication is 'very implausible.'⁵⁷⁷

I shall argue that the objection applies to Spinoza only if he is committed to saying that agreement in nature involves the identification of all humans with human nature ('the identity claim') and that it is *only* non-instrumentally valuable.

According to Kisner and Della Rocca, Spinoza is committed to the view that rational benevolence is intrinsically valuable.⁵⁷⁸ On this view, rational benevolence, or the promotion of rationality, is valuable simply because it *is* an increase in agreement in nature between humans, which is necessarily good for each human, and not because other people will be motivated to be kind to those who have benefitted them. Kisner admits that it is hard to find an example where agreement in nature or 'shared rationality benefits [all] people independently of the consequences of rational behavior.'⁵⁷⁹ It is hard because the idea is absurd and does not follow from Spinoza's actual argument.

Kisner and Della Rocca are dealing with a straw man, for they attribute to Spinoza the occult view that agreement in nature or shared rationality *by itself* benefits people. According to Della Rocca, 'Spinoza seems to be saying that whatever a rational person does for his own benefit will, *merely by virtue of the overlap in essence*, also be to the

⁵⁷⁶ Della Rocca (2008, p. 197).

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 198.

⁵⁷⁸ Kisner (2011, p. 142); Della Rocca (2008, pp. 197). I agree with Allison's claim that, on Spinoza's view, rational benevolence is instrumentally valuable: Allison (1987, p. 152).

⁵⁷⁹ Kisner (2011, p. 144, n. 25).

benefit of other human beings' (my italics).⁵⁸⁰ Similarly, Kisner thinks 'that we benefit from [rational] benevolence, independently of its consequences, *simply because [rational] benevolence amounts to agreement in nature*' (my italics).⁵⁸¹ Della Rocca and Kisner presuppose that Spinoza holds a non-instrumental view of rational benevolence.

The automatic benefit objection, as formulated by Della Rocca, also relies on the idea that two different individuals possess exactly the same nature. Put simply, if A and B have the same nature, then A = B. That is, A and B are indistinguishable. If A = B, when A benefits A, B benefits, too, and vice versa. Here is Della Rocca's construal of Spinoza's view:

To the extent that you and I agree in nature, we have the same nature, your nature is my nature. And to that extent, acting on the basis of your nature is acting on the basis of my nature. Since acting on the basis of my nature benefits me, acting on the basis of your nature—which just is to some extent...acting on the basis of my nature—benefits me.⁵⁸²

In the previous section I showed that it is possible to distinguish two individual humans that have the same nature. The identity claim is the main source of the wild implication that all rational people are benefited whenever I act rationally. Since it is possible to interpret Spinoza in a way that allows that things that agree in nature are not identical, the attraction of the non-instrumental view is diminished and the wild implication vanishes.

This is a good thing, for Spinoza never endorsed the identity claim that Della Rocca attributes to him. Moreover, Spinoza holds that agreement in nature or shared rationality is primarily instrumentally valuable. The basic idea of the argument is that things that agree in nature are necessarily *good* for each other in the sense that things that agree in nature are really *useful* or the best means to the perfection of one another's nature. Spinoza says that things agree in terms of power⁵⁸³ and that my power is doubled when it

⁵⁸⁰ Della Rocca (2004, p. 131); see also Della Rocca (2008, p. 196).

⁵⁸¹ Kisner (2011, p. 144).

⁵⁸² Della Rocca (2008, p. 194).

⁵⁸³ E P32Dem, IV.

is united with an individual who shares my nature.⁵⁸⁴ Thus, rational humans are useful for power.

On my reading of Spinoza, other rational people are the means to your successful striving and the obtainment of the knowledge of God. The textual evidence for an instrumental view of rational benevolence is overwhelming. Throughout the *Ethics* Spinoza employs instrumental language. Spinoza says that a thing that agrees with a thing's nature 'aids the preservation of the nature of the thing itself.'⁵⁸⁵ Spinoza is saying that a thing that agrees with my nature *aids* the preservation of my nature and my 'pursuit of wisdom.'⁵⁸⁶ Moreover, 'it follows that the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful, *or* better, it is for us, and conversely, the more a thing is useful to us, the more it agrees with our nature.'⁵⁸⁷ Spinoza is not claiming that agreement in nature *by itself* preserves my nature and another who has the same nature.

Spinoza's definition of 'good' is very important for my instrumental interpretation. Spinoza says that '[he] shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves.'⁵⁸⁸ Spinoza defines 'good' as 'what we certainly know to be *useful* to us'⁵⁸⁹ (my italics) not that which benefits simply because it is good or good simply because it is rational.

Spinoza argues for the conclusion that, in Nature, rational humans are the most *useful* things available to a human being.⁵⁹⁰ Spinoza uses his agreement in nature doctrine to support this conclusion. We are not supposed to infer from the doctrine that agreement in nature by itself benefits humans. The correct inference is that things that agree in nature with us must be useful. The idea that shared rationality constitutes agreement in nature misses the point of Spinoza's argument. The main point is that the thing that is most

⁵⁸⁴ E P18S, IV or II/223/6-8.

⁵⁸⁵ E P31Dem, IV.

⁵⁸⁶ Allison (1987, p. 152).

⁵⁸⁷ E P31C, IV.

⁵⁸⁸ E Pref, IV or II/208/19-21.

⁵⁸⁹ E D1, IV.

⁵⁹⁰ E P35C, IV.

useful for the promotion of a human's *conatus* is other rational people. That is, good things *produce powerful striving*.

Outside of a human being there are good (useful) and bad (harmful) things. Spinoza holds that humans cannot live a life removed from external things and will always need things beyond themselves to aid their self-preservation:

[I]t follows that we can never bring it about that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being, nor that we live without having dealings with things outside us. Moreover, if we consider our Mind, our intellect would of course be more imperfect if the Mind were alone and did not understand anything except itself. There are, therefore, many things *outside us* which are *useful* to us, and on that account to be sought.

Of these, we can think of none more excellent than those that agree entirely with our nature. For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature *are joined* to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one.⁵⁹¹ (My italics)

This passage, and in particular the parts that are italicised, show most clearly that the automatic benefit objection to the agreement in nature argument is faulty. The idea that two humans who have the same nature are indistinguishable fails to make sense of Spinoza's claim that things that entirely agree with our nature can be outside us. Similarly, it does not make sense to say that two beings of exactly the same nature 'are joined' if they are already indistinguishable.

Moreover, the above text states that there is nothing more *useful* outside us than things that entirely agree with our nature. This means that rational people, beings that entirely agree in nature with other rational people, are a means to successful human striving and perfection. The solitary mind is less perfect because its understanding is limited to its own ideas and efforts to acquire knowledge of God. The things that are external to us that are most advantageous and excellent (in terms of helping us to increase our understanding of God and thereby increase our power to preserve ourselves or act in accord with our nature) are other rational humans; for when rational people cooperate their powers are combined. The combining of the power of rational people increases the likelihood of each individual

⁵⁹¹ E P18S, IV or II/222/33-II/223/8.

human achieving success in understanding God and striving powerfully. That is why Spinoza asserts that:

To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the Minds and Bodies of all would compose, as it were, one Mind and one Body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason—i.e., men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage—want nothing for themselves that they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and hono[u]rable.⁵⁹²

The ‘as it were’ in this quote indicates that Spinoza is speaking in a figurative sense. What he has in mind is all humans uniting to form a society of rationally cooperative people. Individual humans ‘are more powerful when they join together and make up a single individual such as the civil state’ that acts under the guidance of reason.⁵⁹³

Further, Spinoza uses the term ‘good,’ not ‘virtue,’ when he claims things that agree in nature are necessarily good for each other. On Spinoza’s view, virtue is constitutive of welfare, whereas a good is a *means* to virtue (1.4.12). Rational people, then, are a means to my powerful striving or my highest good, namely, knowledge of God. Della Rocca and Kisner suggest that agreement in nature is an end itself, that is, shared rationality by itself benefits. But that is not Spinoza’s view. Only virtue benefits you, argues Spinoza, and things that agree with your nature, that is, other rational people, are necessarily *good* or a means to the life of virtue.

We can now see why Spinoza argues that it is rational to promote the rationality of other people. Since the highest good is knowledge of God, and since rational people are the best *means* to the knowledge of God, it follows that we need to promote the rationality of other people in order to attain our own highest good. It should be noted, however, that Spinoza is committed to the claim that rational benevolence is intrinsically valuable *and* instrumentally valuable (1.7.8). Kisner correctly claims that, in accord with Spinoza’s account, ‘merely promoting the rationality of others, regardless of whether we succeed,

⁵⁹² E P18S, IV or II/223/8-18.

⁵⁹³ Jaquet (2011, p. 293).

benefits us, since doing so is rational.⁵⁹⁴ On Spinoza's view, acting rationally is virtuous and virtue is constitutive of welfare.⁵⁹⁵

The reader might still be sceptical about the claim that Spinoza thinks things that agree in nature are instrumentally good. There are important passages that I think should be read as Spinoza saying that agreement in nature is instrumentally good, not intrinsically good. For example:

It is impossible for man not to be a part of nature and not to follow the common order of nature. But if he lives among such individuals as agree with his nature, his power of acting will thereby be aided and encouraged. On the other hand, if he is among such as do not agree at all with his nature, he will hardly be able to accommodate himself to them without greatly changing himself.⁵⁹⁶

The language of this quote indicates that it is *interaction* between those who share our nature that matters, not simply the fact that they share our nature. This suggests that rational people are *potentially* good for you. The water in the cup has the potential to quench my thirst. But I have to drink the water to quench my thirst. Similarly, the rationality in another *present* person has the potential to strengthen my power or striving. But I have to take in their rationality (i.e., actively learn from them the knowledge of God) to increase my power or striving. The idea that rational action benefits all rational people regardless of their location is incompatible with the text quoted here.

There is direct textual support for my claim that Spinoza himself thinks that rational people are necessarily good because they are an essential *means* to the achievement of human power or knowledge of God:

The formation of a society is advantageous, even absolutely essential, not merely for security against enemies but for the efficient organisation of an economy. If men did not afford one another mutual aid, they would lack both the skill and the time to support and preserve themselves to the greatest possible extent. And men are not equally suited to all activities, and no single person would be capable of supplying all his own needs. Each would find strength and time fail him if he alone had to plough, sow, reap, grind, cook, weave, stitch and perform all the other numerous tasks

⁵⁹⁴ Kisner (2011, p. 144).

⁵⁹⁵ E P24, IV.

⁵⁹⁶ E App7, IV.

to support life, not to mention *the arts and sciences which are also indispensable for the perfection of human nature and its blessedness* (my italics).⁵⁹⁷

Spinoza clearly believes that the advantages of society are instrumentally valuable. Our welfare consists in human perfection. If we are left to our own resources and capabilities to perfect ourselves, we could only achieve a meagre amount of power or perfection. The more important point is that a purely non-instrumental view fails to make sense of this and the other passages cited in favour of the instrumental interpretation of the doctrine of agreement in nature.

Garber claims that the argument in the last passage quoted ‘depends not at all on the formal machinery of the *Ethics*.’⁵⁹⁸ According to Garber, this argument concludes that:

we need others to supply our own lacks of strength and ability, and to help us do the things that we need to have done in order to sustain our lives.⁵⁹⁹

Garber distinguishes the passage quoted above from Spinoza’s doctrine of agreement in nature. He presupposes that the doctrine, which does rely on the formal machinery of the *Ethics*, implies that rational benevolence is intrinsically valuable or necessarily preserves the nature of all humans.⁶⁰⁰ According to Garber, the doctrine of agreement in nature fails, but the above argument succeeds.⁶⁰¹

As I have been arguing, Spinoza believes that other rational people are a *means* to the perfection of our own human nature. Part of the perfection of our human nature involves increasing our power or striving to preserve ourselves. That means other rational people, beings that agree with my nature, are useful in that together we are stronger and more capable of preserving each other. This *is* in accord with the *conatus* doctrine (which *is* a part of the formal machinery of the *Ethics*).

The *conatus* doctrine underpins the doctrine of agreement in nature. Garber has failed to realise that the passage cited above is more of an example—rather than an argument that

⁵⁹⁷ TPT, p. 438.

⁵⁹⁸ Garber (2004, p. 190).

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 188-9.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 189-190.

Spinoza relies on—that when humans pursue their true advantage they are most useful to each other.⁶⁰² Spinoza states that ‘we can never bring it about that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being,’⁶⁰³ which follows from the following postulate:

The human Body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated.⁶⁰⁴

Mutual aid is needed to supply many other bodies by which the human body is continually regenerated and thus, aids self-preservation. Without society, individual humans ‘would lack both the skill and the time to support and *preserve* themselves to the greatest possible extent’ (my italics).⁶⁰⁵ Thus, a society, which consists of rational humans, that is, individuals that agree in nature, is instrumentally valuable to the preservation of each individual human being and the life of reason. The instrumental value of society and the doctrine of agreement in nature *are* connected to the formal machinery of the *Ethics*.

It might be objected that there will be circumstances in which rational people will not cooperate in the pursuit of the common good (2.6). Spinoza will deny that. He will say that it is the nature of the rational person to love rationality and will desire that as many people as possible live the life of reason.⁶⁰⁶ Spinoza holds that our love for a thing is fostered when we see others love the same thing.⁶⁰⁷ Being surrounded by rational people who love rationality will foster the forming of friendships with other rational people and the love of rationality.⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, the nature of human reason gives rise to the principle of rational benevolence. The dictates of reason, or the principles by which we live the life of reason, are derived from the laws of Nature (that is, Spinoza’s deductions from what he thinks are true definitions, postulates and axioms).⁶⁰⁹ Insofar as we act rationally we act in accord with our own nature. Our own nature demands that we seek the means to our

⁶⁰² E P35C2, IV.

⁶⁰³ E P18S, IV or II/222/33-35.

⁶⁰⁴ E P13SPost4, II.

⁶⁰⁵ TPT, p. 438.

⁶⁰⁶ E P37, IV.

⁶⁰⁷ E P31, III.

⁶⁰⁸ Nadler (2006, pp. 241-2).

⁶⁰⁹ E P18S, IV or II/222/12-22.

perfection and the best means to our perfection is humans who live in accord with reason. Therefore, *rational* people will always strive to benefit each other.⁶¹⁰

3.4 Conclusion

Spinoza can consistently hold that a human being is her *conatus* or actual nature and can entirely agree in nature with other humans. A human agrees in nature with other humans insofar as each expresses human power or perform actions that promote human power. Insofar as a human is rational, she expresses her power and does whatever is instrumentally good for human nature, and hence, every human being. It follows that the more rational people are, the more powerful they are or the more they agree in nature. Since there is nothing more useful for the promotion of your *conatus* than a rational human, the more rational people there are in the world, the greater the number of good or useful external things that will be available to help promote your *conatus*. Insofar as a human is rational, she will promote the rationality of other people. Thus, rational benevolence, which promotes agreement in nature between humans, is necessarily (principally instrumentally, but also intrinsically) good for any human being.

⁶¹⁰ Rational people, on Spinoza's view, do not deliberate from a set of practical principles to decide what to do. A rational person deduces from his knowledge of the laws of his own nature that rational benevolence serves his own welfare. On this point, see: Rutherford (2008, pp. 491, 495).

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that Spinoza's argument for the rational benevolence claim resists the main objections to it. His doctrine of agreement in nature, which underlies his rational benevolence claim, is consistent and it does not absurdly imply that rational activity automatically benefits all humans. Rational benevolence is itself beneficial, but it is its instrumental value that makes it so important to human well-being.

I also argued that Spinoza's account avoids many of the traditional objections to perfectionism. For example, he rejects teleology in Nature and he can explain why the perfection of human nature is good for every human being. However, parts of his account require further examination. His view that all actions or events in Nature are necessitated by antecedent actions or events is controversial. His claim that the mind cannot cause the body to move has not been disproved, but most people are reluctant to agree with Spinoza. His theory of emotion is plausible and cognitive scientists like Damasio argue that Spinoza's view is consistent with empirical evidence. Spinoza's remedies for bad emotions, which are based on his theory of emotion, deserve more attention. Finally, it would be worthwhile to examine the extent to which Spinoza's notions of an adequate knowledge of the essence of God (Nature), 'agreement in nature' and essential power can be reconciled with contemporary science and philosophy. Spinoza's theory of well-being deserves more attention than it has received thus far.

Appendix A

The definition of human nature

Spinoza agrees with Aristotle and the Stoics that our good consists in the fulfilment of human nature, but he disagrees with their definition of human nature and their claim that the human good depends on the special function of a human being. Spinoza holds that the good of all things ultimately consists in self-preservation. Spinoza is committed to the idea that humans, animals, plant-life and non-biological objects (for example, rocks and specks of dust), have the same essential nature. According to Spinoza, ‘the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God’s attributes.’⁶¹¹ Spinoza notes that this definition applies to all finite things.⁶¹²

Spinoza rejects Aristotle’s and the Stoics’ definition of a human being as a rational animal.⁶¹³ The property of rationality is merely ‘*[p]ropria*, which indeed belong to a thing, but never explain what it is.’⁶¹⁴ He denies, in opposition to Aristotle, that ‘*a legitimate definition must be by genus and difference.*’⁶¹⁵ We cannot know the highest genus, which is supposed to ultimately explain every genus below it on the explanatory scale.

Now if the highest genus, which is the cause of the knowledge of all other things, is not known, the other things which are explained by that genus are much less known or understood.⁶¹⁶

Spinoza implies that Aristotle and the Stoics’ definition of human essence is ultimately incomprehensible and all inferences drawn from it must be incorrect.

According to Spinoza, there are two correct kinds of definition.⁶¹⁷ There is the definition of a self-existing or uncreated thing. The attributes of a being whose essence involves existence *must* exist and be understood through themselves. Reference to a genus in order to more clearly understand those attributes is unnecessary. The other kind of definition

⁶¹¹ E P10C, II.

⁶¹² E P13S, II or II/96/26-32.

⁶¹³ MT, p. 301 or I/235/20.

⁶¹⁴ GMW, p. 89 or I/45/14-15.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid or I/46/10.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 89-90 or I/46/17-21.

⁶¹⁷ GMW, p. 90; TEI, pp. 39-40. Spinoza thinks his definitions are true (Curley 1969, p. 111).

applies to created or existence-dependent things. Those things whose essence does not involve existence are modes of the attributes upon which they depend for their existence and without which they cannot be understood. The genus of created things or modes is the attributes of a self-existing being. Since a self-existing being must exist and be understood through itself, and not through some higher genus, the more we understand the attributes of the self-existing being, the more we understand its essence.

Wolfson objects that Spinoza's theory of definition implies that Substance⁶¹⁸ (God or Nature) –a being that exists and is conceived through itself –is 'inconceivable, and its essence undefinable and hence unknowable.'⁶¹⁹ He argues that 'conceived through itself' is 'really a negation' and only means that there is no other thing through which it can be conceived.⁶²⁰ Thus, Spinoza, argues Wolfson, is open to his own objection to Aristotle. Curley observes, however, that:

Spinoza's God is not—though Wolfson says he is—inconceivable. His essence is not undefinable and unknowable. For quite apart from the fact Spinoza gives us a definition of God (E ID6), he also proves, as a theorem, that "the human mind possesses an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God" (E IIP47).⁶²¹

The attribute of Extension is a constituent part of the essence of God. The human body, to which the human mind is united, is a mode of Extension. The human mind perceives all the affections of its object, that is, the human body. In the human mind is an idea of Extension because the body is an extended thing, an idea of which must exist in the human mind. The idea of Extension in the human mind is a common notion (or adequate idea), for it is an idea of a thing that is equally in the part (the human body) and in the whole (the whole of extended Nature). Therefore, the human mind has, to some extent, adequate or perfect knowledge of the essence of God. This does not mean that the mind has infinite knowledge of God. It only means that the human mind can have clear and distinct, adequate, true or perfect ideas (all these terms virtually mean the same thing). In other words, the essence of God and the essence of certain modifications of God's attributes are conceivable and

⁶¹⁸ Hume (1888, p. 16) thinks we have 'no [true] idea of substance'.

⁶¹⁹ Wolfson (1934 I, p. 76).

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Curley (1969, p. 36).

knowable, on Spinoza's view. It follows that Spinoza's definition of man, which is deduced from his definition of God, is knowable. Since Spinoza believes his definition of God is true, he believes that his definition of human essence, which he deduces from his definition of God, is also true.

Appendix B

Spinoza's alternative argument for the rational benevolence claim

Another way in which Spinoza thinks promoting rationality in others is good for you is through the imitation of affects *or* emotions. This is his 'imitation of affects argument.' Spinoza's support for the imitation of affects argument is contained in the following passage:

The good which man wants for himself and loves, he will love more constantly if he sees that others love it. So, he will strive to have the others love the same thing. And because this good is common to all, and all can enjoy it, he will therefore (by the same reason) strive that all may enjoy it. And this striving will be the greater, the more he enjoys this good.⁶²²

According to Spinoza's imitation of affects argument, we imitate the affects or emotions of other people who love the good that we ourselves love. Since a rational person loves rationality, rational people will imitate the rational affects or emotions of other rational people. A rational person who imitates the rational affects or emotions of other rational people will become more rational. It follows that a rational person who promotes rationality in other people will imitate the rational affects or emotions in those other people. Therefore, by promoting the rationality of other people you promote the welfare of other people and generate rational affects or emotions in them which you will imitate and thereby become more rational, which advances your own well-being.

Why do we come to be affected by an emotion similar to the emotion by which a thing we imagine to be like ourselves is affected? We need to understand Spinoza's theory of the imitation of the affects before we can see how the imitation of rational emotions of other people promotes our own rationality and well-being. Here is Spinoza's theory of imitation:

If...the nature of the external body is like the nature of our Body, then the idea of the external body we imagine will involve an affection of our Body like the affection of the external body.

⁶²² E P37Alt Dem, IV.

Consequently, if we imagine someone like us to be affected with some affect, this imagination will express an affection of our Body like this affect.⁶²³

Spinoza's theory can be explained in the following way. The images of things in the mind are affections of the human body, the ideas of which set before us external bodies as present. The ideas of these affections involve the nature of our own body and simultaneously the nature of the external body (which impacted our body) as present. If the nature of the external body is similar to the nature of our own body, then the idea of the external body in our thinking will involve an affection of our own body similar to the affection of the external body. Consequently, if we imagine someone like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, this thought will express an affection of our own body similar to that emotion.

It seems intuitively plausible that human beings imitate each other's emotions. In fact, there is considerable empirical evidence that supports this claim.⁶²⁴ However, Della Rocca objects that '[i]t is not the case that by perceiving your red hair—a way in which you are affected—I thereby come to have red hair.'⁶²⁵ Della Rocca is attacking a straw man, for Spinoza is talking about the emotions or essential power when he talks about the 'affects,' whereas there are inessential affections or modifications of a thing which pertain only to the body of the thing. Spinoza gives his own examples: 'trembling, paleness, sobbing, laughter.'⁶²⁶ Red hair is the same kind of 'affection' or modification of the body which does not relate to the actual essence of a human being. Thus, Della Rocca's objection is based on a misunderstanding of Spinoza's theory.

⁶²³ E P27Dem, III.

⁶²⁴ Rizzolatti (2005).

⁶²⁵ Della Rocca (2008, p. 166).

⁶²⁶ E P59S, III or II/189/29.

Appendix C

Human freedom

Spinoza endorses hard determinism. There is absolutely no room for free will on Spinoza's view.⁶²⁷ However, Spinoza says that the highest good is ultimately freedom.⁶²⁸ Nevertheless, he endorses determinism.⁶²⁹ We might assume that Spinoza is a compatibilist. This assumption is true or false, depending on the idea of freedom you attribute to Spinoza. There is freedom in the sense that I can freely choose one or another thing from a range of options. Coffee and tea are the options available to me and I exercise my free will by selecting coffee, my will being a kind of autonomous cause. That is, my exercise of my free will causes me to buy the coffee. There is also freedom in the sense that I am unrestrained. There is no person or thing, for example, handcuffs or a prison, which restrict my movement. Then there is Spinoza's definition of freedom: a 'thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone.'⁶³⁰ Now if the assumption is based on the third definition of freedom, then it is correct, otherwise it is false. Since most people think that a compatibilist is one who holds that freedom in the first sense is compatible with determinism,⁶³¹ it would be more accurate to say that Spinoza is an incompatibilist.⁶³²

⁶²⁷ E P48, II.

⁶²⁸ E Pref, V.

⁶²⁹ E PP16, 28-29,32, 32C, I.

⁶³⁰ E D7, I.

⁶³¹ The Stoics hold that the first sense of freedom is compatible with determinism: LS (pp. 392-394); Irwin (2007, pp. 303-309).

⁶³² E App, I. Della Rocca (2008, pp. 189-190) and Kisner (2011, pp. 69-70) are likely to disagree with me.

Appendix D

Good and evil

Spinoza's view of good and evil has three aspects. First, good and evil are not real things. Spinoza says that:

good and evil are nothing but relations [and so they should] be regarded as *beings of reason*. For one never says that something is good except in respect to something else that is not so good, or not so useful to us as something else. So one says that a man is bad only in respect to one who is better, or that an apple is bad only in respect to another that is good, or better. None of this could possibly be said if there were not something better, or good, in respect to which [the bad] is so called.⁶³³

Spinoza provides an alternative argument:

All things which exist in Nature are either things or actions.

Now good and evil are neither things nor actions

Therefore, good and evil do not exist in Nature.⁶³⁴

Spinoza argues that there is no definition of good and evil independent of the essence of a human being.⁶³⁵ The essence of a human being exists in Nature, but if that essence did not exist, good and evil would be indefinable. The notions of good and evil can only be explained in relation to a human being or a similar kind of being.

Second, Spinoza's explains that the ordinary person's view of good and evil is nothing but the emotions of desire and joy or sadness and the ideas connected to them.⁶³⁶ For example, I think murder is wrong because in my mind the idea of murder is accompanied by the emotion of sadness and I desire the opposite of sadness, namely, ideas of things that are accompanied by the emotion of joy, for example, being kind to other people. Since sadness *is* lesser power or striving, the ideas connected to this emotion I judge contrary to my striving or advantage, that is, I judge them evil. Joy *is* greater power or striving and I

⁶³³ GMW, p. 92 or I/49/10-20.

⁶³⁴ GMW, p. 93 or I/49/30.

⁶³⁵ GMW, p. 93 or I/50/1.

⁶³⁶ E P9S, III.

perceive⁶³⁷ that the ideas connected to this emotion promote my striving or advantage, that is, I judge them good.

Third, there is what Spinoza thinks is the correct view of good and evil. Ultimately, the ideas of good and evil are beings of reason.⁶³⁸ However, they are useful for distinguishing what promotes human well-being from what does not.⁶³⁹ Spinoza holds that whatever contributes to the perfection of human nature is good and its contrary is evil.⁶⁴⁰ The difference between the ordinary person and the Free Man is that the latter does not project goodness or evilness on to things and knows what is truly good or useful, as dictated by reason, whereas ordinary people's conception is determined by external things or chance and they have only a confused knowledge of good and evil, which is their emotions and the ideas connected to them which were caused by the impact on the body by external things. In other words, the Free Man's notion of good and evil is based on human reason, whereas the ordinary person's notion of good and evil is determined by things external to it, for example, the cultural practices of other humans.

⁶³⁷ Spinoza does not think that this perception is the result of a deliberate, reflective or conscious activity. He holds that the perception follows from the nature of the human mind, which forms images that are united to the affections of the body caused by the nature or power of an external thing.

⁶³⁸ E Pref, IV or II/208/8-11.

⁶³⁹ E Pref, IV or II/208/17.

⁶⁴⁰ E Pref, IV or II/208/19-22.

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