



Spinoza and the Radical Enlightenment

Week 5. 16th October 2017

Desire and Emotion



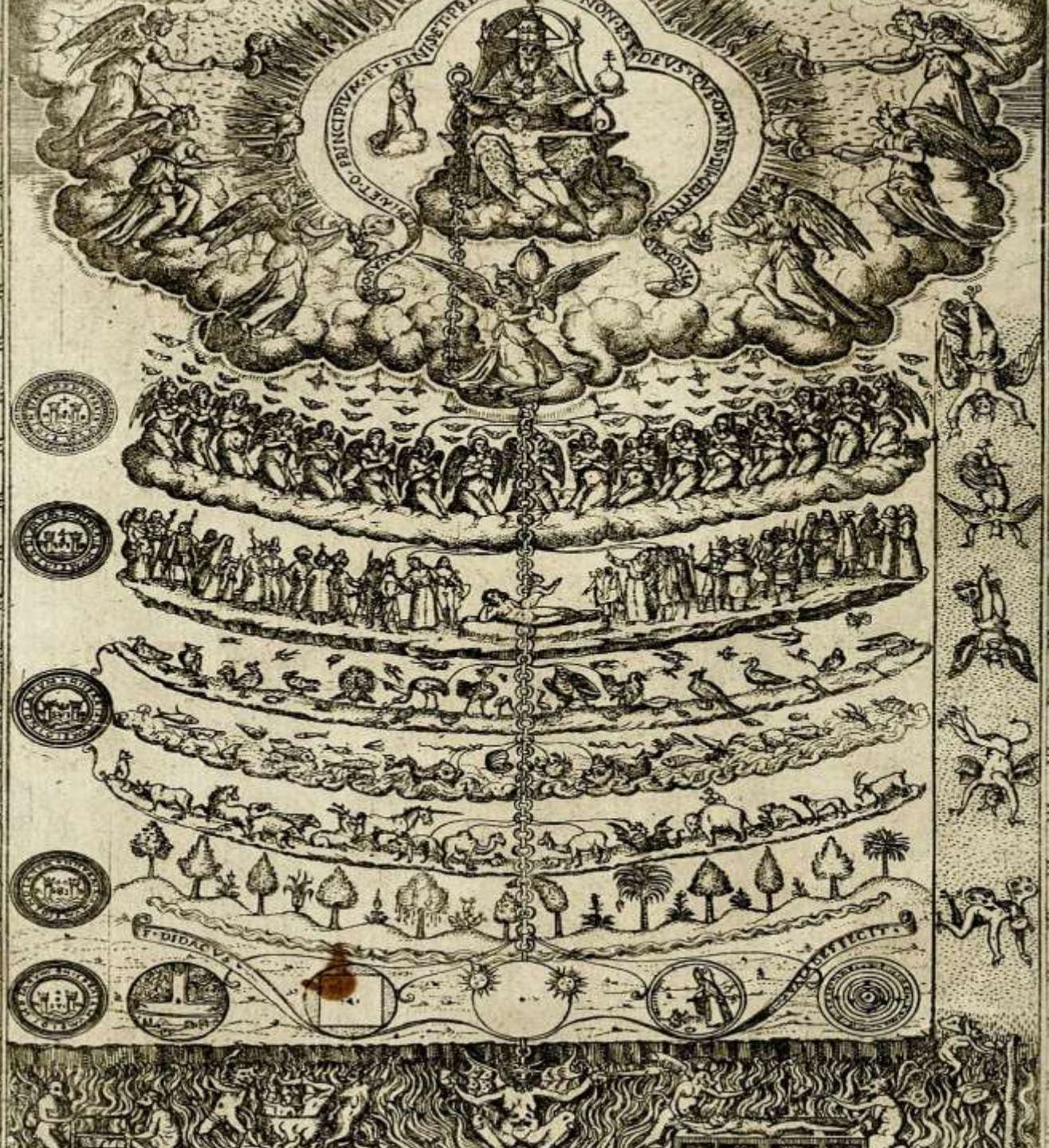


The ethical challenge

- The kind of freedom which human beings often value, free will, is often based on an ignorance of what causes it
- If most of what we believe about the world is often inadequate, how do we find a sure footing for determining how we should live?
- For Spinoza, we need to explore what human beings truly are – beings of nature, driven by emotions and desire

The ethical challenge

- This is made clear in the Preface to Part 3
- *Why is it a mistake to view human beings as a 'kingdom within a kingdom'?*



Not a kingdom within a kingdom

- In the 'Great Chain of Being', God has ordained a natural hierarchy, from God to angels, stars, kings, aristocracy, commoners, animals, trees and the earth
- Spinoza rejects this. Human beings are part of nature, and do not live by special or unusual rules
- Therefore our 'weaknesses' belong not to human nature, but nature itself
- ... Consider 'human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes and bodies'
- So, what are we compelled by nature to do?



‘The human condition would indeed be far happier if it were equally in the power of men to keep silent as to talk. But experience teaches us with abundant examples that nothing is less within men's power than to hold their tongues or control their appetites.’ (E3p2)



Motivation and appetite

- Please turn to Part 3, Proposition 2 (p. 281-2)
- Re-read the extract, and in pairs discuss:

Is there any real difference between motivations and appetites?

What things are said to shape our decisions?

‘So experience tells us no less clearly than reason that it is on this account only that men believe themselves to be free, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined; and it tells us too that mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the varying disposition of the body. For each man's actions are shaped by his emotion; and those who furthermore are a prey to conflicting emotions know not what they want, while those who are free from emotion are driven on to this or that course by a slight impulse’ – E3p2

The Conatus

- One thing defines all things in nature...
- A *conatus*, that is, a fundamental striving to persist in its own being
- Each thing is defined by this striving to remain alive – it is its essence, and is animated by it, independent of time or any other existing thing
- Spinoza's account of the conatus, a rule of self-preservation, is made in E3p4-p9...
- 'Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives [*conatur*] to persist in its own being' (E3p6)



Conatus in context

- Like much of the *Ethics*, Spinoza's novelty is not so much in the concept itself but how he uses it
- Aristotle observed an instinctual force of self-preservation in animals (*horme*), which Cicero translated as *conatus*
- Medieval Christian and Jewish philosophers (Augustine, Aquinas; Gersonides) repeated this
- Descartes first law of nature implies it: 'what is once in motion always continues to move'
- Spinoza mixes classic and modern: each thing's basic striving to remain alive reflects both matter in motion and an inherent power

Desire

- Take a look at Proposition 9, Scholium
- In line with his parallelism, we human beings experience conatus in our bodies as ***appetite***, and in our minds alone, as ***will***
- But when we are conscious of our appetites, there we have ***desire*** – the essence of humanity
- The conatus animates us, and desire is our awareness of it
- Desire reflects what we judge to be good for our self-preservation

Desire

- Take a look at Proposition 9, Scholium
- How does Spinoza distinguish *desire* from *will* and *appetite*?
- What other striking features does his account have?

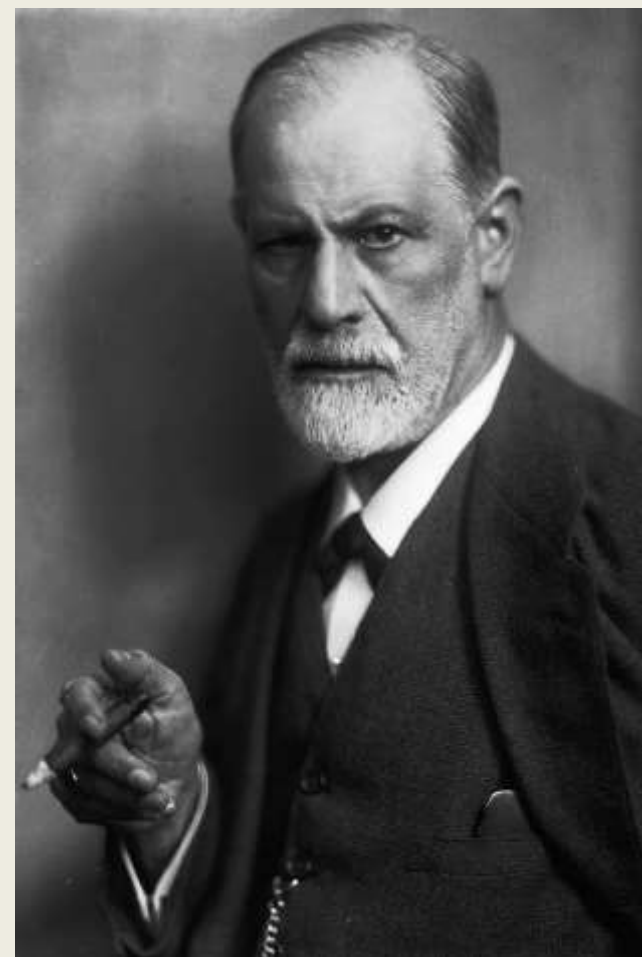
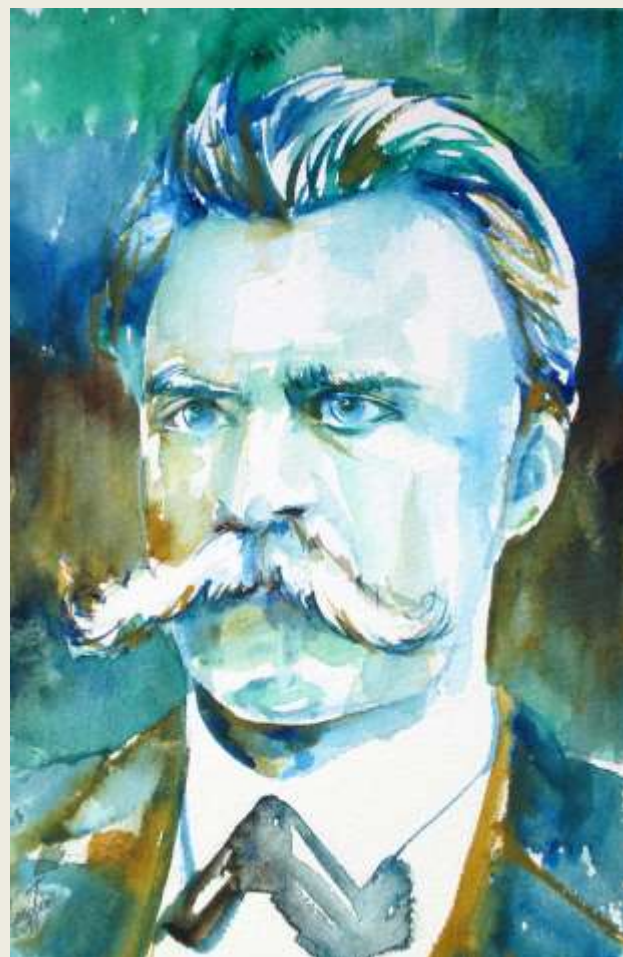
Desire

‘It is clear from the above considerations that we do not strive, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we strive, will, seek after and desire it.’





Bosch, "Gluttony", From *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1500)



Problems for the conatus

- If everything possesses an inherent striving to remain alive, what about things with an in-built capacity for self-destruction e.g. a ticking time-bomb?
- What about suicide?
- And if desire has no morally normative content whatsoever, how can it be used as a guide for the true contentment and development of the human mind, in which our freedom depends?

The Affects

- Spinoza's psychology hinges on the emotions, which are often translated as the 'affects' to capture their inherently dynamic influence
- Of all the different emotions we can feel, Spinoza follows Descartes in distinguishing them into three kinds
- Can you guess what they are...?

Joy, sadness and desire

- The affects are not things we just feel randomly
- We feel joy when we experience a transition to greater power (or 'perfection'), and sadness when we feel less powerful....
- The affects are the mind's ideas of the body's affections (which result from its interactions)
- But the mind also has a degree of agency in how it strives to think of those things that it determines will increase its power of action (3p12)



Love...

- Love: 'joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause' (3p13s)
- Hate: 'sadness accompanied by the idea of an external cause'
- She or he who loves strives 'to have present and preserve the thing they love'
- Indeed, even thinking of the thing loved will make a person feel more alive and powerful
- What we imagine will bring it happiness will bring us joy, and vice-versa



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**END OF HATED WIND
FARMS THAT RUIN
OUR COUNTRYSIDE**

SEE PAGE 7



**WHY OUR
ROYALS JUST
LOVE BEING
TOGETHER**

SEE PAGE 15

WE MUST STOP THE MIGRANT INVASION

Britons want border controls back from EU

VOTERS have made clear their anger at the European Union for curbing Britain's power to limit immigration.

Wresting back control of our borders from Brussels is the public's number one priority with regard to EU membership, a poll showed yesterday.

Almost seven in 10 say it must be at the top of David Cameron's agenda when he renegotiates our

By **Alison Little** Deputy Political Editor

relationship with Europe as promised. The poll comes amid mounting fears that Britain will be hit by a new surge of migrants from Romania and Bulgaria at the end of the year.

The findings, by pollsters Survation, also indicate that most Britons would vote to leave the EU if given an immediate choice. The research is a fresh

TURN TO PAGE 4



Paris Jackson, 15, had sent cryptic Twitter messages

**Michael Jackson's
daughter in hospital
after suicide attempt**

SEE PAGE 3

Hope and fear

- Hope: 'inconstant joy, arising from the image of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in doubt' (3p18)
- Fear: 'inconstant sadness, likewise arising from the image of a thing in doubt'
- When doubt is removed, hope becomes confidence, and fear, despair
- Is hope something we should rely on?

Vacillation

- Just as our bodies receive so many affections, so our minds are struck by so many affects
- To not *feel* affects would be very difficult
- Often we are struck by more than one emotion at the same time, as two forces pull us in different directions, resulting in confusion and vacillation...
- Can you think of any such examples?



Imitative affects

- Lastly, for Spinoza we learn through imitation, and continue to imitate others in how we think and feel throughout lives
- Children will often laugh or cry on seeing others do the same
- Indeed children, above all, indicate for Spinoza the greatest extent of human passivity, being most passive and easily influenced by others

Joy	Love, Inclination, Devotion, Derision, Hope, Confidence, Pleasure, Approbation, Over-esteem, Compassion; Self-contentment, Pride, Honour
Sadness	Hatred, Aversion, Derision, Fear, Despair, Disappointment, Pity, Indignation, Disparagement, Envy; Humility, Repentance, Self-abasement, Shame
Desire	Longing, Emulation, Gratitude, Benevolence, Anger, Revenge, Cruelty, Timidity, Boldness, Cowardice, Consternation, Courtesy, Ambition; Dissipation, Drunkenness, Avarice, Lust.

Why do the affects matter?

- Spinoza has set out to treat human beings as creatures of nature, not a kingdom within a kingdom
- This means understanding what causes our behaviour – our conatus, and desire
- As living creatures we live in a difficult and confusing world, a never-ending struggle to get what we want
- By understanding what our emotions are, and what causes them, we can begin to work out what we can do to secure a lasting, achievable peace and contentment

Next week...

- We will turn to human power and freedom!
- How can we use an understanding of our desires and emotions to live better lives?
- Why is true human freedom and happiness defined by friendship, leisure, learning and cooperation?
- Who is the 'free man'?
- We will focus on Part Four, looking at the preface, propositions 1-18, 34-37, and 67-73