



Spinoza and the Radical Enlightenment

Week 7. 30th October 2017

Politics and Freedom

The Power of Reason

- So far Spinoza has described the affects in terms of our lack of power over them
- But from Proposition 18 onwards he turns to how we can gain power and agency
- Please turn to P18 Scholium and in pairs, discuss this question:
- *What are the 'dictates of reason'?*

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.

The Power of Reason

- Joy is a stronger emotional resource, as it involves an image of what increases our power of acting
- We naturally seek to live and maintain our own well-being, and this goal is realised through cooperation and mutual assistance
- The more people acting towards a common goal, the more easily and effectively they can realise it
- Reason therefore strives to understand more, and so increase our power of acting

Suicide and asceticism



‘A man kills himself when he is compelled by another who twists the hand in which he happens to hold a sword and makes him turn the blade against his heart; or when, in obedience to a tyrant's command, he, like Seneca, is compelled to open his veins, that is, he chooses a lesser evil to avoid a greater.’ (4p20s)

The guidance of reason

- ‘the mind ... has certainty of things only insofar as it has adequate ideas, *or* ... insofar as it reasons’ (4p27s)
- *‘Knowledge of God is the Mind’s greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God’* (4p28)
- ‘nothing can be good except insofar as it agrees with our nature. So the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful it is to us, and vice versa.’ (4p31c)
- ‘Insofar as men are subject to passive emotions, to that extent they cannot be said to agree in nature.’ (4p32)
- ‘Insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent only do they always necessarily agree in nature.’ (4p35)



The guidance of reason

- Hobbes viewed nature as a 'war of all against all'
- What, could we begin to say, are the fundamental causes of social conflict?

The guidance of reason

‘It is when every man is most devoted to seeking his own advantage that men are of most advantage to one another. For the more every man seeks his own advantage and endeavours to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue (4p20), or (and this is the same thing (4 Def. 8)) the greater the power with which he is endowed for acting according to the laws of his own nature; that is (3p3), for living by the guidance of reason.’ (4p35)

‘By controlling our interaction with objects that cause emotions we are in effect exerting some control over the life process and leading the organism into greater or lesser harmony, as Spinoza would wish. We are in effect overriding the tyrannical automaticity and mindlessness of the emotional machinery.’

– Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*

The guidance of reason

- Please turn to Proposition 37 scholium now
- In small groups, discuss:
- *Why does reason lead us to assist each other?*
- *How convincing do you find Spinoza's account?*



'The free man thinks of nothing less than death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death'
(4p67)

The Free Man

- Take a look at Propositions 67-73 of Part 4, where Spinoza presents his ideal of the Free Man.
- Discuss in groups:
 - *what are the features of the free man?*
 - *what do you think Spinoza's purpose is with the Free Man?*
 - *Does Spinoza present the free man as an ideal, or a real possibility for human beings?*

The free man

- Our freedom is in living according to reason, wherein we have a true and adequate knowledge of nature as a whole
- As we acquire more knowledge of nature, we necessarily cease to blindly desire, hate or love particular things, or be governed by our passions
- We instead recognise our place in nature and society, and desire common, universal goods
- Motivated not by hope or fear, but the guide of the understanding, *sub specie aeternitatis*

‘the view I have arrived at is this: no deity, nor anyone else, unless he is envious, takes pleasure in my lack of power and my misfortune; nor does he ascribe to virtue our tears, sighs, fear, and other things of that kind, which are signs of a weak mind. On the contrary, the greater the Joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass, i.e., the more we must participate in the divine nature.’ (4p45)



‘It is the part of a wise man, I say, 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 theatre, 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.’ (4p45s)



Where has Spinoza's *Ethics* led?

- Substance monism
- Mind-body parallelism
- Three kinds of knowledge
- Conatus
- The affects
- Sub specie aeternitatis
- Reason and the mind's power in moderating the affects, and understanding what leads to our empowerment
- 'Nothing is more useful to man than man'



'The free man thinks of nothing less than death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death'
(4p67)

Features of the good life

- Founded in learning about nature, and the contemplative pleasures of a garden...
- Utilises and draws on affects of joy and desire
- Involves living, thinking and feeling in ways that increase our well-being, physically and mentally
- Involves friendship, and participation in communities
- ... And also accepting our limitations, and what is determined by nature necessarily and beyond our control

‘But human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have an absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow.’ (4 Appendix)

Next week...

- We will finish the *Ethics*, and explore the lasting good of his philosophy – *blessedness*
- How can we enjoy a happier life, and what be done to reduce the power of sad feelings?
- What does the intellectual love of God mean?
- Does Spinoza's geometrically ordered ethics lead to a satisfactory conclusion?
- We will focus on Part Five, propositions 10-20, 41-42.
- If you can, please aim to read the rest of Part 4