



Spinoza and the Radical Enlightenment

Week 8. 6th November 2017

Blessedness

‘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)

Human Freedom

- Part 5 is titled 'On the power of the intellect, or human freedom'
- In contrast to Part 4, this power is in using reason to moderate the emotions
- But this requires giving up the Stoic and Cartesian idea that the mind (will) can dictate terms to the body
- And instead involves using the mind's understanding of the affects to re-order how we see and feel about the world





Rules for living

- How does such a re-ordering of the affects work?
- For those unmoved by his 'cumbersome geometric method', Spinoza now spells out some of his 'rules for reasonable living'
- Turn to Proposition 10, scholium...
- Identify one of Spinoza's 'maxims for life' that strikes you, and then discuss what it means, in pairs

Re-programming

- Spinoza's re-ordering involves thinking of imaginatively vivid or memorable ideas that we then associate with feelings of 'right' and 'wrong'
- It involves a form of 'letting go' of negative emotions when things do not go our way, from love to poverty
- And an attempt to understand the causes of what results in lasting capability, joy or virtue
- It embraces Spinoza's truly 'active affects': strength of mind, generosity and courage (3p59s)
- *Does this approach remind you of anything?*

Remedies for the affects

- Please turn to Proposition 20, Scholium, for Spinoza's final instructions, in 5 points
- In pairs again, read and discuss:
- *How does the mind gain control of the affects?*
- *Are you persuaded by Spinoza's account?*



‘I believe in Spinoza’s God, who reveals Himself in the lawful harmony of the world, not in a God who concerns Himself with the fate and the doings of mankind...’ – Albert Einstein

The love of God

- Over propositions 14-20 Spinoza identifies the mind's power with the contemplation and love of God
- What might such a *love of God* involve?

The love of God

- Spinoza's famous *amor intellectualis Dei* has resulted in claims of pantheism, and inspired Coleridge et al.
- But for Spinoza, God or Nature is a single system
- 'The more we understand individual things, the more we understand God' (5p24)
- Understanding God or Nature at its highest, intuitive level, involves recognising every individual detail of the natural world within the whole structure of nature
- Finding curiosity and joy in its infinite complexity...

The love of God

- For Spinoza, a property of love is that the lover seeks to unite themselves with the beloved
- So, one who loves God or Nature wishes to unite and identify themselves with it
- But God cannot love us in return (5p19)
- God loves himself with 'infinite intellectual love' (5p35)...



Amor intellectualis Dei

‘The mind’s intellectual Love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by the human mind’s essence, considered under a species of eternity; i.e., the Mind’s intellectual Love of God is part of the infinite Love by which God loves himself.’ (5p36)



The mind's eternity

- 'The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal' (5p23)
- Many commentators have struggled with this!
- But for Spinoza, the eternal is not simply what is everlasting
- To say something is 'eternal' means that no forms of time can in principle be applicable to it
- Thus eternity applies to God, as (for Spinoza) it makes no sense to say God has a beginning or end

The mind's eternity

- The mind's eternity is not as a soul that outlives the body...
- Instead its eternity comes in conceiving things *sub specie aeternitatis*
- Through genuine knowledge that unites us with God or Nature
- The life of reason can offer us these fleeting glimpses into the higher order of existence...



Rembrandt, "Portrait of a Jewish Young Man", 1648

'After experience had taught me the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and I realised that all the things which were the source and object of my anxiety held nothing of good or evil in themselves save insofar as the mind was influenced by them, I resolved at length to enquire whether there existed a true good, one which was capable of communicating itself and could alone affect the mind to the exclusion of all else, whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford me a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity.'

- *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*

Blessedness

- Let's turn to the final two propositions of *Ethics*
- In the penultimate, Spinoza once again criticises the ordinary view of religion reminiscent of Part 1 Appendix
- The good life is its own reward

Against Scripture... (5p41)

‘The usual conviction of the multitude seems to be different. For most people apparently believe that they are free to the extent that they are permitted to yield to their lust, and that they give up their right to the extent that they are bound to live according to the rule of the divine law, Morality, then, and Religion, and absolutely everything related to strength of character, they believe to be burdens, which they hope to put down after death, when they also hope to receive a reward for their bondage, that is, for their Morality and Religion.’

Blessedness (5p41-p42)

- Spinoza's *Ethics* aims to establish a *beatitudo* or 'blessedness' that comes from a more adequate understanding of ourselves and the world
- Such a blessedness is its own reward, and emerges from a life lived according to reason
- This state of 'salvation' for the wise man involves a lasting peace of mind that comes from knowledge of oneself and the world, no longer subject to the sad passions
- 'All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare'



Making sense of Spinoza

- What are your lasting impressions and thoughts of Spinoza's *Ethics*?

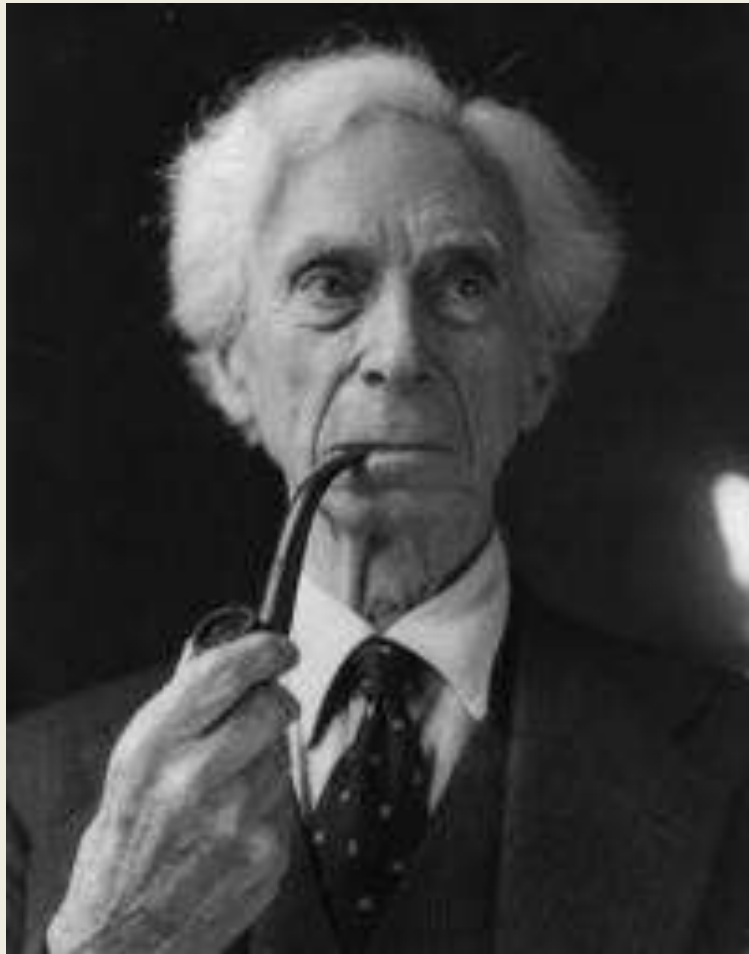




Making sense of Spinoza

‘thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy.’ – Hegel

‘Regarding Spinoza, whom M. Arnauld has called the most impious and most dangerous man of this century, he was truly an Atheist. ... He fell well short of mastering the art of demonstration; he had only a mediocre knowledge of analysis and geometry; what he knew best was to make lenses for microscopes.’ – Leibniz



‘Spinoza is the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers. Intellectually, some others have surpassed him, but ethically he is supreme.’ – Bertrand Russell

‘Time carries him as the river carries
A leaf in the downstream water.
No matter. The enchanted one insists
And shapes God with delicate geometry.
Since his illness, since his birth,
He goes on constructing God with the word.
The mightiest love was granted him
Love that does not expect to be loved.’

- Jorge Luis Borges, “Baruch Spinoza”

Next week...

- We will turn to the *Theological-Political Treatise!*
- Please read the Preface of the TTP
- If you have time, please finish reading the remainder of Part 5 of *Ethics* too
- The TTP is a more conventional but no less controversial book, and I recommend reading about it beforehand
- Some good recommendations are Hampshire, *Spinoza* ch. 5, or Jonathan Israel's 'Introduction' to the TTP