

Spinoza's Ontology and the Meaning of Happiness

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Abstract:

This piece will first investigate Spinoza's speculations concerning God or Nature. Next, explicating his ideas regarding the human mind and body will assist the reader in understanding his views on the human condition, and the influences that distort people's abilities to love God fully. Finally, I will argue that love of God, is also a love of one's self, and therefore, people may claim that God's love is not mandatory for their happiness.

Keywords: Spinoza, meaning of happiness, ontology, God

Introduction:

Throughout the ages, many philosophers have tried to describe happiness and how individuals can achieve it. One philosopher, Spinoza, claimed that contentment is ultimately a product of one's love of God, or Nature.¹ Despite his belief that people can achieve inner peace, Spinoza surprisingly goes on to state that God or Nature can never reciprocate their love.² One question that arises from this imbalance of ardor is how is it possible that people can gain happiness by loving God if God or Nature can never love them?

Spinoza's Understanding of God, or Nature

According to Spinoza, the only self-caused substance whose essence is necessarily and simultaneously equivalent to existence, is God or Nature.³ To Spinoza God is equivalent to Nature because, like it, he/she neither required a begetter for his/her being nor concept for his/her conceivability.⁴ Likewise, he believes that since the natural order is abundant in life and animation, it must have derived from something of its kind, and because God's essence is at the same time existence, it follows that he/she is necessarily equivalent to, and interchangeable with Nature.⁵ Lastly, since all beings can ultimately trace their origins back to God, they bear some similarities to him/her, and therefore, they are not fully distinct from him/her.⁶

¹ B.D. Spinoza. E. Curley, ed., *Ethics* (Princeton: Penguin Books, 1996), 129.

² *Ibid.*, 169-170.

³ *Ibid.*, 1, 9, & 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 9, & 16.

Spinoza begins to justify his monistic views by stating that because only God caused himself/herself, it follows that he/she is necessarily the only substance.⁷ That is, he believes only God meets the criteria of being a substance, because, like it, he/she neither depends on another being nor concept for his/her existence or conceivability.⁸ Also, it is the case that if there were a multiplicity of substances, their unique natures would prevent them from being able to affect one another.⁹ That is, two causes of themselves, or substances, are incompatible since their exclusive natures would necessarily exude unique attributes, and modes, rendering them to be different, or not of the same type.¹⁰ Finally, by being unable to affect one another, a substance cannot cause another substance to come to be indicating that there can only be one; God, or Nature.¹¹

In Spinoza's view, God is necessarily an infinite substance since his/her attributes are infinite in number, and because only things of the same kind are compatible, he/she must be infinite too.¹² Moreover, since God is the only infinite substance, and thus, the only one of his/her kind, nothing can limit his/her nature.¹³ That is, nothing in the natural order can disrupt God, because only he/she is an infinite substance, and since that necessarily leaves all other things to be finite, it follows that they are less powerful than him/her.¹⁴ Lastly, since only God is all-powerful, and because all other things are unable to limit him/her and his/her attributes, there can be no other infinitely attributable substance aside from God, and rather all things are modifications, or modes of his/her existence.¹⁵

Furthermore, Spinoza claims that modes of God come to be by way of his/her infinite attributes, and as particular expressions of him/her they cannot exist before him/her.¹⁶ One reason why he believes this to be so is that modes necessarily exist after God since unlike him/her they cannot cause themselves.¹⁷ That is, modes, by ultimately deriving from God cannot exist before him/her because as their cause he/she must precede them.¹⁸ Moreover, since modes ultimately arise from God, and thus, exists in him/her, it is necessarily impossible for them to exist outside of him/her.¹⁹ That is since God's modes exist after him/her, one would be illogical to reason that they could exist outside of him/her, since for them to follow after him/her, they must reside in him/her.²⁰ Also, modes, by existing posterior to God, necessarily follow the laws of his/her nature because he/she ultimately engendered the guidelines for their inceptions.²¹ Finally, though God causes the laws of existence, he/she is not free in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather uncompelled, and hence, not even he/she can defy his/her nature.²²

To Spinoza God cannot operate outside or against his/her nature.²³ He believes this to be so because God necessarily has an immutable, or fixed being since only he/she can eternally sustain the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 1, 3, & 4-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3, 13-16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

²³ *Ibid.*

continuity of existence.²⁴ That is, God must be unchanging because to ultimately maintain all forms of life he/she has to be continually active, making it impossible for him/her to ever be in a state of inactivity.²⁵ Consequently, since God is always actively maintaining existence, it follows that he/she cannot choose to be inactive, or unlike himself/herself.²⁶

Also, because modes are finite expressions of God they limitedly reflect his/her nature, and since he/she cannot amend that which innately constitutes him/her, they surely cannot alter that which is innately in them.²⁷ Therefore, because there exist absolutes or permanent aspects of God and of all the things he/she ultimately causes, one would be wrong to claim that he/she is malleable since the fixities of those things, necessarily indicates that he/she is immutable.²⁸ Finally, though God is not free in the everyday sense of the word, he/she is still the only being people can justifiably believe to be the free cause of all things.²⁹

Though God cannot go against his/her nature, one should not understand him/her as compelled, but rather as the only free cause of all things.³⁰ One reason for this is that only God is independent of needing another being or concept for the continuity of his/her existence or conceivability, and by being free of that need, it follows that nothing in the natural order can match his/her limitlessness.³¹ Furthermore, by being independent of any limits, one may claim that nothing can compel God since nothing is exactly of his/her kind.³² Therefore, since nothing is equivalent to God's limitless power, only he/she alone is free to express his/her boundless attributes without anything being able to restrain that freedom.³³ Finally, because God unwaveringly unfolds according to his/her nature and since he/she ultimately causes all things, it follows that everything necessarily treks determined paths.³⁴

One reason why Spinoza believes all things follow set paths is that everything ultimately derives from God, and since he/she cannot change his/her nature, neither can anything else.³⁵ Furthermore, because all things have only God as their free cause, and since only he/she has the active abilities to maintain all existence, it follows that all of life relies on him/her.³⁶ That is, because the continuation of all things relies on a necessarily limitless God, people may claim that only his/her nature determines the rules of their existences due to them not having the capabilities to determine themselves.³⁷ Hence, because all things require God's existence for theirs, one may claim that all that exists is less powerful than him/her, since only he/she is limitless, and thus, nothing can compare to the magnitude and scope of his/her abilities.³⁸ Finally, since derivatives of God are determinate and finite, they do not have enough power to handle infinite attributes, and thus, they cannot possess wills, let alone ones that are free.³⁹

²⁴ Ibid., 13, 25.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 6, 13, 16, & 25.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 1, 3.

³² Ibid., 1, 3, 13, & 16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 1-3, 13, & 16.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 3, 13-16.

³⁹ Ibid.

God's Attribute of Thought as Understood by Spinoza

Spinoza continues his metaphysical investigation by claiming that thought is an attribute of God.⁴⁰ He makes this claim since God's modes can think, and one may claim that thought is necessarily an attribute of him/her because people would be unable to express that quality if he/she did not possess it.⁴¹ Furthermore, God necessarily possesses thought because of people's inability to escape from thinking, or from thinking outside of the bounds of his/her fixed essence.⁴² That is, thinking is innate to people because they ultimately follow from God's active essence which sets the parameters of thought, and by being determinate, they cannot choose to change their thinking natures or their limited mental abilities.⁴³ Therefore, since people necessarily follow God's conditions of thought, and because they ultimately derive their thinking abilities from him/her, it follows that it is impossible for God to be void of thought.⁴⁴ Finally, since people can only project their ideas of God within his/her bounds, and because they follow the laws of his/her attribute of thought, he/she necessarily "understands" their ideas including those concerning himself/herself.⁴⁵

Spinoza goes on to state that because people can conceive God as a being who can understand his/her nature, one may claim that he/she necessarily has ideas of himself/herself in him/her.⁴⁶ That is, Spinoza believes there exist common concepts of God's essence that derive from people's abilities to project their ideas of him/her onto him/her.⁴⁷ Moreover, these common concepts exist in God, because like all other ideas, they are necessarily unable to exist outside of him/her.⁴⁸ Consequently, because God encompasses all ideas, and since he/she is ultimately the cause of all thinking beings, one may claim that their ideas of him/her, he/she necessarily possesses.⁴⁹ Therefore, due to God necessarily housing all ideas of himself/herself, he/she must "understand" himself/herself because there is no way that those ideas can be external to him/her.⁵⁰ Consequently, all ideas necessarily flow according to God, not only because they rely on him/her for their conceivability, but also by existing in him/her they are necessarily subject to the rules of his/her essence.⁵¹

According to Spinoza, there is a connection and order that ideas follow. First, God, insofar as he/she is an immaterial thinking thing, necessarily caused the conditions that determined the parameters of people's abilities to think, and thus, all ideas ultimately trace back to him/her.⁵² Furthermore, because God's essence is ceaselessly actual, and since thinking is an activity, and therefore, actual as well, it follows that all ideas resulting from thinking, ultimately reflect his/her activeness.⁵³ Moreover, since God cannot change his/her active essence, it not only follows that people

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 1-3, 10, & 33.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 31-33.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 31-34, 36-37.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31-34, 36-37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 31-33.

⁵¹ Ibid., 10, 31-35.

⁵² Ibid., 10, 16, & 35.

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

cannot change their active abilities, but it also indicates that their essences rely on his/her continuity.⁵⁴ That is, God is necessary for the conceivability of all people because without his/her inextinguishably active essence, their conceivability and powers to think would cease.⁵⁵ Therefore, without God, people are inconceivable, and thus, the principles of thought that he/she exudes they must follow, and those maxims are necessarily orderly because the intelligible world presents itself coherently to them.⁵⁶

God's Attribute of Extension as Understood by Spinoza

To Spinoza, another infinite attribute of God is the attribute of extension.⁵⁷ He makes this claim because, without God's attribute of extension, there would be no place for his/her modes to extend.⁵⁸ In other words, God's attribute of extension ultimately causes the physical aspects of the natural order to come to be, and since modes reside in that order, it follows that their corporeality depends on his/hers.⁵⁹ Also, because extended things are, bodily, or corporeal, and since Nature is concrete and equivalent to God, it follows that he/she is a corporeal substance just as much as he/she is an immaterial one.⁶⁰

Moreover, God's attribute of extension helps to justify that he/she is equivalent to Nature.⁶¹ That is, since God's essence and existence are seamless, it follows that because he/she houses all intelligible aspects of the natural order in him/her, he/she necessarily houses all corporeal things too, making him/her is equivalent to Nature.⁶² Furthermore, one may claim that because God equates to Nature, his essence perfectly matches his existence because the natural order is steadily coherent.⁶³ Thus, since God as a corporeal substance is Nature, and because Nature as a concept is necessarily him/her, and since they perfectly concur, one may claim that people, insofar as they are his/her modes, express that concurrence too.⁶⁴

The Mind Through the Lens of Spinoza

To Spinoza, the mind ultimately derives from God, by way of his/her attribute of thought.⁶⁵ Also, the mind is immaterial, and since only things of the same nature are compatible, it follows that only the intelligibility of ideas matches the mind's essence.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the mind can have three types of ideas, those that are inadequate, adequate, or true.⁶⁷

To Spinoza, inadequate ideas are unclear because people cannot understand them as coming from their minds.⁶⁸ In other words, ideas that are inadequate are ideas that do not arise from people's abilities to think, but rather they are external perceptions that impress upon them.⁶⁹ Conversely,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10, 35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10, 16-17, & 33.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10, 16-17, 33, & 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1, 3, 35, & 44.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 57, 63-70.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

adequate ideas are ones that people can understand as immediately deriving from themselves and thus, they are inherent to them, and are of a greater epistemic value than their inadequate ones.⁷⁰ Finally, a true idea is one in which the concept of a thing perfectly matches the reality, or object of it.⁷¹

Furthermore, Spinoza states that the mind necessarily has an idea of the body or else it would be unable to perceive what can affect it.⁷² At the same time, the mind does not have a full understanding of the body because the body arises from God's attribute of extension, and thus, by not being of the same nature the mind has an inadequate, or unclear idea of the body.⁷³ Consequently, people can never entirely perceive every aspect of their bodies, because their minds derive from a different attribute than them.⁷⁴ Likewise, bodies cannot understand minds because they lack awareness and cannot form ideas.⁷⁵ Therefore, one may claim that only ideas can affect the mind, whereas only bodies can affect other bodies, since both are only compatible with things of their natures.⁷⁶ Though Spinoza believes that the mind cannot affect the body, or that the body can affect the mind, he nevertheless believes that they are in union.⁷⁷

To Spinoza, the mind and body form a union.⁷⁸ By union, one may understand the mind and body as being coherent, or whatever happens in the mind there are necessarily matching physical effects in the body, and whatever occurs in the body, there are necessarily matching intelligible effects in the mind.⁷⁹ Furthermore, as a coherent whole, the mind and body gel in such a way that if the mind existed through the attribute of extension, it would be the body, and if the body existed through the attribute of thought, it would be the mind.⁸⁰ Hence, people may claim that their minds necessarily follow the order of their bodies and that their bodies necessarily follow the order of their minds since, as modes they ultimately derive their coherent natures from God.⁸¹

The Body Through the Lens of Spinoza

To Spinoza, all bodies ultimately derive from God by way of his/her attribute of extension.⁸² Also, because bodies come to be from the same attribute, they can affect one another in many ways.⁸³ Furthermore, Spinoza claims that a defining characteristic of bodies is that they are either at rest or in motion.⁸⁴ That is, bodies are compatible because they come to be by way of the same attribute of God, and since they have motive potentials, they can cause one another to move or come to rest.⁸⁵ Moreover, Spinoza believes that only more powerful bodies can cause less powerful bodies to come to a halt or move, and hence, the degree of force at which a more powerful body collides with a less powerful one determines the speed and the extent of change that that less powerful body undergoes.⁸⁶

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 39-40.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1, 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 38-40, 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 33.

⁸³ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 41-42.

Finally, though Spinoza continues to claim that bodies are discernible by their differing rates of motion, he also paradoxically maintains that their movements cannot cause changes in God.⁸⁷

Spinoza claims that changes in bodies cannot affect God since only he/she is an immutable and infinite substance.⁸⁸ He believes this since God is both an unchanging substance that ensures the continuity of all existence, while at the same time an infinitely limitless, powerful, and uncompelled substance that is totally self-reliant and thus, independent of the effects of finite bodies.⁸⁹ Also, God remains unscathed when bodies undergo change since all things, involve limits to their beings, while only he/she is limitless.⁹⁰ In other words, because God is independent of any determination besides the laws of his/her nature, and since only he/she is self-reliant and self-manifesting, it follows that determinate bodies cannot limit, or affect him/her.⁹¹ Hence, since bodies cannot affect God, whatever changes they undergo, which is ultimately due to them being subject to the laws of his/her nature, cannot alter him/her because only he/she matches the power of those laws.⁹² Lastly, since bodies are subject to the laws of nature, and since those laws express God's coherency as a corporeal substance, it is the case that individual parts of bodies display that concurrence too.⁹³

Also, the body is an aggregate made up of smaller individual bodies operating in unison.⁹⁴ That is, the amalgamated body is coherent, or its particular aspects intertwine in such a way that if something happens to one part of the body, there will necessarily be matching effects on the other particular parts composing it.⁹⁵ At the same time, since the body limitedly reflects God's immutableness, and because it ultimately arises from his/her unchanging laws of nature, there necessarily exists unalterable aspects of it.⁹⁶ In other words, since changes in bodies cannot cause any changes in God, it follows that when they undergo changes their general shapes remain untainted because they ultimately derive from him/her and his/her unfluctuating laws of nature.⁹⁷ Hence, though particular parts of bodies are susceptible to alterations, it follows that they retain their overall shapes because by ultimately arising from God and his/her laws of nature they harbor some of his/her permanence.⁹⁸

Furthermore, Spinoza states that the body is regenerative, or it is of the nature of its individual parts to accommodate for one another when anyone of them undergoes change because they ultimately derive from God's perfectly coherent nature.⁹⁹ That is, the body is self-correcting, and because it accommodates for alterations in its makeup, its general structure must stay intact, since God's coherent nature is inherently in all bodies.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, since all bodies necessarily have concurrent natures and because they cannot be otherwise, it follows that they follow the order and connection of God's laws as a corporeal substance.¹⁰¹ Therefore, because all bodies cannot stray from following God's natural laws, and since they ultimately derive their self-correcting natures from his/her

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 4, 9, & 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2, 10, 25, & 41.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

⁹¹ Ibid., 1-2, 13-14.

⁹² Ibid., 1-2, 10, 13-14,

⁹³ Ibid., 42-43.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 40-43.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 10, 16, & 40-43.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 43-44.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 16, 43-44.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 13-14, 16, & 43-44.

immutableness, it follows that he/she ultimately enables them to exist in, and interact with the natural order in fixed, or determinate ways.¹⁰²

Spinoza continues his investigation into the nature of the body by claiming that people do not adequately know the times of their demises.¹⁰³ One reason why he believes this is that no one's existence was mandatory for God to cause.¹⁰⁴ In other words, since God does not engender anyone directly, it follows that people's knowledge of their lifespans are not absolutely, or innately in them.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, even if bodies did inherently harbor the knowledge of their demises, individuals would still be unable to decipher that data.¹⁰⁶ That is, it would be impossible for people's bodies to convey any ideas to their minds since bodies exist by way of God's attribute of extension and not by way of his/her attribute of thought.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, though people can project their ideas of their lifespans onto God, those ideas will forever be inadequate since bodies are incompatible with minds.¹⁰⁸ Following this argument, Spinoza goes on to address the human condition and the influences that distort one's ability to love God, or Nature entirely.

Spinoza on the Human Condition

According to Spinoza, people are prone to appetites that influence the way in which they conduct their lives.¹⁰⁹ These appetites Spinoza calls affects, and, like anything else, they follow the laws of God, who is their partial cause.¹¹⁰ One reason why Spinoza holds this to be true is that nothing can exist outside of God, and thus, affects must be subject to follow his/her orderly laws of nature since they exist within the domain of those laws.¹¹¹ Moreover, God is only a partial cause of affects because he/she necessarily houses them but cannot immediately cause them, or clearly and distinctly know their effects through himself/herself.¹¹² That is, God cannot be the adequate cause of affects since he/she neither immediately caused them, nor does he/she know their effects, since his/her eternal activeness bars him/her from being compatible with their inadequate natures.¹¹³ Furthermore, one may claim that people are the other partial cause of affects because though they are effectible by them, they cannot have an adequate understanding of them since they cannot clearly know their effects due to them not arising from themselves.¹¹⁴ Finally, though people are the other partial cause of affects, it follows that they can grow to regulate them since, as ideas, they involve less adequacy than their more innate or adequate ones.¹¹⁵

Moreover, though people cannot understand affects in adequate ways, they are nevertheless prone to their influences.¹¹⁶ One reason why affects can act upon people is that individuals can have

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 19, 52-53.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1-3, 34-35.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 68-69.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 118.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 69.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 25, 69.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 71-73, 118.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 118-120.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 70-71

ideas of them since their minds have perceptual awareness.¹¹⁷ In other words, since ideas of affects can act upon people, they are extrinsic to them, and thus, people necessarily have abilities to perceive, or take in those external ideas, or else they would be unable to absorb their effects.¹¹⁸ Also, since people have abilities to perceive ideas, it follows that ideas of affects can act upon them because like all other ideational features of the external world, those ideas are compatible with their natures.¹¹⁹ That is, though people inadequately understand ideas of affects, they are still ideas, and thus, they can interact with their minds due to them being of the same type.¹²⁰ Finally, though people cannot totally know the ideas of affects or perceptions, their minds are still compatible with them, and thus, they can channel those affects to ultimately avoid detriments, and embrace beneficial ways of living.¹²¹

Another claim that Spinoza makes is that as far as people can, they strive to persevere in their beings.¹²² That is, people, as modes of God, are particular expressions of him/her, who cannot defy their set courses, and thus, since God is infinite and eternal, people, as limited reflections of him/her necessarily strive to be continual.¹²³ In other words, because God's essence is continually active, and since people necessarily express that actuality, it is the case that they strive to avoid what they believe can end their activeness.¹²⁴ Also, since people cannot know when they will perish, it follows that they can only strive to live.¹²⁵ That is, by people not innately knowing the exact time of their deaths, it follows that the cause of what will take away their lives is necessarily not within them, making them unable to refuse to want to live.¹²⁶ Hence, because people understand what they can actively conceive, and since their active essences ultimately reflect God's continuity, it is the case that by never knowing the moment of their expiries they can only strive to imitate his/her continualness.¹²⁷

To Spinoza, ideas that can increase or diminish, or aid or restrain people's abilities to think must have matching effects on their physical abilities to act.¹²⁸ He believes this to be the case because the mind and body are coherent and thus, whatever affects the mind necessarily affects the body in similar ways.¹²⁹ That is, people, as God's modes, must follow the coherencies and orderliness of his/her laws of nature, and hence, ideas that can heighten or weaken their intellectual abilities must have the same effects on their physical abilities.¹³⁰ At the same time, since the mind inadequately knows the body and because the body is unaware of the mind, it follows that they are still incompatible.¹³¹ Spinoza resolves this issue by claiming that though the mind inadequately knows the body, it nevertheless can still have perceptions of things that can affect it, which necessarily enables people to know what can amplify or harm their bodies' capabilities.¹³² That is since there exist ideas of what can affect the body, and because the mind can take in those ideas, it follows that it can help to prevent what can harm the body's well-being.¹³³ Therefore, though the mind is still incompatible with the body, their coherent natures

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1, 3, & 74-75.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 67-68.

¹²² Ibid., 75.

¹²³ Ibid. 18, 75.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 75-76.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 75-76.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 67-68, 76-77.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 34-35, 76-77.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 1, 3.

¹³² Ibid., 34-35, 75-77.

¹³³ Ibid., 77-78.

along with the existence of ideas of affects, enables the mind to interpret ideas of what can affect the body.¹³⁴ Following this justification, Spinoza begins to posit his ideas on particular affects, as well as how and why they influence people.¹³⁵

Spinoza on the Nature of Affects

In Spinoza's view, all affects ultimately boil down to types of joys, sorrows, or desires.¹³⁶ To him, joy is a passage from a lesser degree of perfection to a greater one.¹³⁷ That is, people exist in a hierarchy of being, where God alone is equivalent to perfection, which, in turn, makes it possible for them to pass from one state of awareness to another.¹³⁸ Furthermore, because people innately strive to continue to live, it follows that joy, by being an ampler state of awareness, increases their powers to think and act, making it conducive to their well-beings.¹³⁹ In other words, since joyfulness equates to higher states of awareness, it follows that when people feel joy they are necessarily abler to think and act which is beneficial for their survival.¹⁴⁰ Thus, because the mind is more aware when it feels joy than when it does not, one may claim that happiness necessarily assists people, since with a more robust understanding of ideas, they can more easily avoid what poses threats to them.¹⁴¹

Conversely, the affect that causes one to slip from greater degrees of awareness into lesser ones, Spinoza calls sadness.¹⁴² To him, sadness is a deprivation of a greater mindfulness, or joy, which people recollect as being conducive to their longevities, and thus, one may say that sadness restrains or impedes their abilities to survive.¹⁴³ Consequently, Spinoza states that because it is like people to strive to continue to live, and since sadness deters that, it follows that individuals strive to remove sadness from their lives.¹⁴⁴ That is, sadness prevents people from their natural desires to be, and because that disrupts them from their common understandings of themselves, it follows that when saddened, people strive to remove that discomfort.¹⁴⁵ To do so, Spinoza claims that people try not to imagine what causes them sadness, and instead, they try to think of what causes them joy, which, in turn, helps them to oppose sadness since joyful reflection is a way of excluding sorrow from their minds.¹⁴⁶ Finally, Spinoza continues with an analysis of desire, and how it is integral to people's abilities to persevere.

To Spinoza, desire is a defining characteristic of people since it gives rise to their impulses, volitions, and appetites.¹⁴⁷ Also, desires help people to distinguish between what is conducive or detrimental to their natural strivings to be.¹⁴⁸ That is, the desire to live is necessarily a part of people's makeup because, as modes, their existence attempts to reflect God's active and continual essence.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, this desire necessarily translates to an adequate mental awareness of what is promotive or

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 76-77, 104.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 104

¹⁴³ Ibid., 104-105.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 76, 104-105.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 76, 78, & 104-105.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 76, 104.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 57-58, 76, & 104.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 10, 16, 18-19, 57-58, 76, & 104.

deleterious for people's longevities, since that striving expresses itself as an innate desire to embrace what is favorable and to avoid what is harmful.¹⁵⁰ Finally, though people innately desire, it follows that their appetites and inclinations can still vary from one to the next.¹⁵¹

Also, Spinoza believes that desire can cause one person to feel joy due to the effects of one thing, while another to feel sadness due to the effects of that same thing.¹⁵² That is, individuals as modes of God, or as specific minute expressions of him/her, still represent specific aspects of his/her essence.¹⁵³ Consequently, some people can be more of an expression of God's attribute of thought, while others more of an expression of his/her attribute of extension, which, in turn, affects the kind of desires they find to be appealing or not.¹⁵⁴ Hence, due to people varying in desires, and because they are particular expressions of God, it follows that their desires can be somewhat unique to them.¹⁵⁵ Finally, it is worth noting how Spinoza defines love, and how it is a unique type of joy.¹⁵⁶

Love as Understood by Spinoza

To Spinoza, love is an affect that causes people to pass from lesser to greater degrees of awareness, and thus, it is a species of joy.¹⁵⁷ Like joy, love heightens people's abilities to think, as well as their abilities to analyze affects that can act on their bodies.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, Spinoza claims that though love is a form of joy, it is unique because when people genuinely love something they feel joy due to the thing they love and not from love as an affect alone.¹⁵⁹ In other words, love itself is not the sole cause of what people love; rather it is more so the idea of causer of that love that people adore.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, since love relies on the idea of the causer of that feeling, it follows that people not only strive to imagine things they love, but they also will go as far as to make sure that what they love remains safe.¹⁶¹ Spinoza believes this to be so because when people love something, the effects of that thing leaves traces on them that they can recollect, which causes them to strive to preserve and make sure that that thing's well-being stays pristine.¹⁶² Lastly, when people successfully protect the things they love, they rejoice, because it allows them to continue to love those things since they still exist.¹⁶³

Spinoza on Passions and Virtues

Spinoza continues his analysis of affects by defining the human condition as being prone to the influences of virtues and passions.¹⁶⁴ To him, the ability to be virtuous is another defining characteristic of people's essences, since it activates their powers, or abilities to moderate the affects, and thus, they are necessarily conducive to their desires to live.¹⁶⁵ That is, being virtuous is useful, since it is the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 16, 53, & 104.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 86-87, 94-95.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 13-14, 86-87.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 105-106.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 85, 94-95, & 105-106.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 125-129.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

foundation of people's abilities to regulate the intensities of affects that can play on their susceptibilities, and thus being virtuous ultimately keeps individuals from harm.¹⁶⁶

Also, Spinoza claims that because virtuousness helps people to be in control of themselves, it protects them from danger, and thus, one may say that it is good.¹⁶⁷ In other words, because virtuousness can only help people, it follows that it can never cause them to pass into lesser degrees of awareness, and thus, it can never be a form of sadness.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, because virtuousness is good, and since it can never cause or be a form of despair, it follows that it can only cause joy or a greater awareness that enhances people's abilities to live.¹⁶⁹ That is, one may claim that people who can clearly understand and regard themselves as the immediate cause of their well-beings are virtuous, or good, since they are necessarily enhancing their abilities to think and act, by living in ways that are useful for their survival.¹⁷⁰ Finally, because virtuousness is conducive to survival, or useful, or good, it follows that virtuous people, by embracing that way of being, can avoid living according to their passions alone.¹⁷¹

According to Spinoza, passions can be beneficial or detrimental to people's desires to preserve their lives.¹⁷² That is, people have inadequate ideas of passions, because they act upon them, and hence, are extrinsic to them, which renders passions to be inconsistent in their effects.¹⁷³ One reason for this is that people can only adequately know what immediately arises from their natures, and since passions are extrinsic to them, it follows that people only have a foggy understanding of them.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, passions that affect people in negative ways, Spinoza calls evil, since they are only useless and obstructive to people's well-beings.¹⁷⁵ Contrastingly, he calls passions that aid the body's ability to act, and the mind's ability to think, good, since, like joy, love, and virtues, they assist people to persevere in life. Finally, Spinoza goes on to demonstrate how people can overpower affects.¹⁷⁶

Spinoza claims that affects either affirm or deny people's abilities to pass through differing degrees of awareness.¹⁷⁷ That is, affects have abilities to influence people, and they can either promote their abilities by raising them to higher levels of consciousness or impede those abilities by preventing them from reaching those greater mental states.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, though people are susceptible to the influences of affects, they still have abilities to control how they react to them. First, due to people having inadequate ideas of affects, people cannot fully understand them, and thus they cannot initially control them.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, people also have abilities to know ideas that immediately arise from themselves.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, one may claim that people's understandings of their ideas involve more adequacy than their ideas of affects.¹⁸¹ To Spinoza, this imbalance of ideational adequacy surprisingly allows people to master their reactions to affects since their understandings of their self-formed ideas

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 138-139, 147-148.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 86, 138-139, & 147-148.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 147-148.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 100, 102-103, & 130.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 111-113.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

trumps their understanding of affects.¹⁸² In other words, adequate ideas are more in people's abilities to employ against inadequate ones that are detrimental, since unlike affects, adequate ideas affect people's minds in more precise, or clearer ways.¹⁸³ Finally, one may conclude that people's potentials to control their reactions to undesirable affects come from their abilities to overpower those affects by combating them with opposite ideas of equal or greater strength.¹⁸⁴

Furthermore, Spinoza claims that people can use their minds to help assuage the power of affects.¹⁸⁵ One reason why he believes this is that people adequately understand ideas arising from themselves, and thus, they have potentials to learn how to apply those ideas to placate affects.¹⁸⁶ One way that people can use their minds to extinguish the grip that affects can have over them is by recollecting memories of what once enabled them to pass into greater states of awareness, instead of focusing on those ideas that made them slip into lesser ones.¹⁸⁷ That is, people can use their memories of what has caused them joys to defeat their sorrows since those recollections can only make them feel more aware of themselves.¹⁸⁸ Also, when people use their memories to combat ideas of what can ultimately deter them from satisfying their desires to live, there is necessarily a matching effect on their bodies, and thus, how they react to those deterrents.¹⁸⁹ Also, because people have abilities to assess affects and to mentally combat them, it follows that they can grow to moderate how they physically react to them; since their joyful memories must have matching conducive effects on their bodies.¹⁹⁰ Hence, since people can use their minds to exclude thinking of things that are detrimental to their well-beings, one may claim that reason can also play a role in quelling affects.¹⁹¹

To Spinoza, reason facilitates people's abilities to clearly and distinctly understand what can help or prevent them from continuing their lives.¹⁹² That is, reason can never provide people with inadequate ideas since it does not act upon them, but rather it arises from them, and thus, it always adequately provides knowledge of what is conducive for their survivals.¹⁹³ Furthermore, because people can have adequate ideas of what is beneficial for them, they necessarily know what is deleterious for them since they can understand ideas that promote their well-beings more so than confused ideas that can inconsistently affect them in different ways.¹⁹⁴ In other words, because people possess reason it follows that they can use it as a standard to compare, discern, and judge different affects, which, in turn, allows them to avoid what can be potentially harmful to them.¹⁹⁵ Hence, because reason reveals a way for people to avoid discomforting affects, it follows that people who adhere to it are caring for themselves.¹⁹⁶ Finally, Spinoza goes on to describe the greatest knowledge that people can have, or that which enables them to understand themselves to their greatest extents.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 76, 78.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 57-58, 134-135.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 98, 130-131.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 98, 129-130.

¹⁹² Ibid., 58, 98, & 129.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 58, 129, 134-135, & 169-170.

Spinoza on the Knowledge of God

Spinoza claims that reason leads people to know God, or that which can ultimately enable them to have the greatest understandings of themselves.¹⁹⁸ First, because people can have adequate ideas, it follows that when those ideas perfectly match the realities of the objects they concern, they are necessarily true ideas.¹⁹⁹ Next, because God, under the attribute of extension, is Nature, and Nature, under the attribute of thought, is him/her, it follows that when people conceive God, or perceive Nature, they have true ideas of him/her.²⁰⁰ That is, God, who is equivalent to Nature, perfectly coheres as an immaterial and corporeal substance, and thus, people can have true ideas of God, because as expressions of him/her they reflect that coherency.²⁰¹ Furthermore, true ideas of God allow people to understand his/her immanence dwelling within them, which ultimately results in the most robust understanding they can have of themselves, and of their physical abilities to survive.²⁰² In other words, though people are particular expressions of God, who can never match his/her eternal continuousness, they innately attempt to imitate that continuousness, which they can do best when they have knowledge of him/her in their lives.²⁰³ Lastly, Spinoza further addresses how knowledge of God, or Nature affects people's mental and physical abilities.

Knowledge of God has the most beneficial effects on people's minds and bodies.²⁰⁴ That is, people's knowledge of God allows them to think and physically act to their maximum capacities.²⁰⁵ One reason for this is that God's essence is mandatory for everyone's conceivability and thus, he/she enhances their minds by enabling them to conceive others and themselves.²⁰⁶ Next, knowledge of God allows people to interpret ideas, and thus the more they know him/her, the more they know ideas.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, because knowledge of God can only lead people to goodness, or more enhanced states of awareness, it follows that that knowledge can never be inadequate, which, in turn, can assist people to always think adequately.²⁰⁸ Also, knowledge of God necessarily reveals knowledge of Nature, and thus, it also helps people to physically act in the most powerful ways they can.²⁰⁹ That is, God, under the attribute of extension, is Nature, and thus, knowledge of him/her, is knowledge of Nature, which necessarily helps people to preserve their well-beings.²¹⁰ Lastly, Spinoza continues by demonstrating the links between reason, happiness, and ardor for God.²¹¹

Spinoza on Reason, Happiness, and Love of God

To Spinoza, there are intimate links between reason, happiness, and loving God. First, because reason and happiness are conducive to people's well-beings and since God is immanently within all things, it follows that when people love themselves they are ultimately loving God.²¹² That is, love of one's self is

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 53, 58, 129, 134-135, & 169-170.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 53, 129-130.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 57-58, 129-130.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 129-130, 169-170.

²¹² Ibid., 10, 16, 53, 57-58, 129-130, & 169-170.

equivalent to loving God since he/she is not entirely distinct from the natural order, but is rather necessarily inherent to all that he/she engenders.²¹³ Also, because reason and happiness are beneficial for people's well-beings, it follows that when people love themselves they are aligning their essences with God's eternally active essence.²¹⁴ In other words, since God is relentlessly active and since people have active powers to think, it follows that reason and happiness, which amplifies those active abilities, helps them to love themselves, because they are mimicking their ultimate origin's, or God's essence.²¹⁵ Moreover, living by reason is a form of loving God, since reason always helps people to reach higher states of awareness, that are necessarily conducive to their survivals.²¹⁶ That is, reason assists people to love God because it helps them to know what will cause them happiness, which allows them to love themselves, and thus, to necessarily maintain their existences as much as possible.²¹⁷ Finally, though people can love God, Spinoza continues to claim that God can never love any of them in return.²¹⁸

Though people can love God, Spinoza claims that it is impossible for him/her to reciprocate that love.²¹⁹ First, he believes God is without passions, and thus, he/she cannot love. That is, passions can derive from confused, or inadequate ideas, and because God is continually active, it follows that he/she is without inadequacies.²²⁰ Furthermore, since nothing exists outside of God the effects of passions, or external ideas, can never excite, vex, or faze him/her since ideas cannot exist outside of, or act upon him/her.²²¹ Therefore, since passions are in God, and due to their inadequacies not matching his/her essence, it follows that when people love God, those affections do not affect him/her, and he/she cannot return them.²²²

Also, joys, sorrows, and desires cannot act upon God because they are incompatible with his/her nature.²²³ That is, God, who is everlastingly perfect, cannot feel what affects people to move from lesser to greater states of awareness.²²⁴ Hence, because God is immutably flawless, it follows that the effects of affects cannot change his/her nature, and since what can affect people cannot affect him/her, it follows that he/she cannot show favor or love for anyone, since he/she is necessarily void of human emotions.²²⁵

Another reason why Spinoza believes that God cannot love anyone is that he/she cannot defy his/her nature.²²⁶ That is, for God to love something, he/she would have to defy who he/she is to love those who favor him/her.²²⁷ To Spinoza, this would be an absurdity because the continuity of all things depends on God's unchanging stability, and thus if he/she were to change the natural order would be drastically different.²²⁸ Also, if God were to bend his/her nature to love anyone, it would cause him/her sadness because he/she would be defying, or going against that which makes him/her God.²²⁹ In other words, since God cannot pass into lesser degrees of awareness, since that would change his/her

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 10, 16, 25, 53, 57-58, 129-130, & 169-170.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 10, 16, 25, 53, 57-58, 60-61, 77, 104-105, 129-130, & 169-170.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 169-170.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 25, 169-170.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 169.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 3, 25, 104, & 169-170.

²²⁶ Ibid., 13-14, 25-31, & 169-170.

²²⁷ Ibid., 25-31.

²²⁸ Ibid., 13-14, 25-31, & 169-170.

²²⁹ Ibid., 169.

perfection to imperfection, it follows that he/she cannot love anyone because it would cause him/her to feel the effects of sadness which is impossible.²³⁰ Finally, Spinoza describes how people can still find contentment even without God's love since a love of him/her is also a love of themselves.²³¹

Love of God is Love of One's Self

One may infer that in Spinoza's view love of God is also a love of one's self. One reason why one can draw this conclusion is that as modes of God, people, though determinate, finite, and less powerful than him/her, nonetheless have potentials and abilities to perfect themselves.²³² That is, through the use of reason people can change how they react to affects that are deleterious to them, which assists them to love themselves since living rationally necessarily translates to living in ways that avoids pain.²³³ Also, because knowledge or love of God is the greatest asset for survival, people may claim that loving him/her, is loving themselves, since that knowledge is integral to maintaining their desires to continue to live.²³⁴ In other words, because knowledge or love of God can never cause people harm, or that which will cause them sorrows, it follows loving him/her has only empowering effects.²³⁵ Furthermore, since virtuousness is a product of living rationally, it follows that when people live by virtue they ultimately love themselves or God since reason and virtues ultimately derive from him/her.²³⁶ Finally, because people have adequate knowledge of virtues, it follows that living rational lifestyles, or loving God, or themselves, is a way to avoid slipping into lesser states of awareness.²³⁷

Moreover, one may also claim that loving God is equivalent to loving one's self due to that love leading to wisdom, which is necessarily useful for living a peaceful life.²³⁸ To Spinoza, being wise prevents people from living by the ebb and flow of affects since wisdom has much more epistemic value or adequacy than those ideas.²³⁹ Furthermore, because wise people love God, and since they understand their place in the natural order, as one of his/her expressions, it follows that loving themselves is also a form of loving God as Nature.²⁴⁰ That is, wise people know they have potentials to be the best expressions of God that they can be, and since God is interchangeable with Nature, it follows that the wise strive to live for their benefit, or love, of God, or Nature.²⁴¹ Lastly, love of God, or for the self, Spinoza calls blessedness, and he encourages all to strive to be as such.²⁴²

Conclusion

This piece has given a detailed account of Spinoza's ontology, and his views on the mind, body, and the influences that affect people's understandings of themselves, and God. Furthermore, this paper has explicated Spinoza's understanding of loving one's self and how that equates to love of God. Next, by arguing that loving God, is loving one's self, I have intended to show how God's love is not requisite for

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 25, 53, 104, & 169-170.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid. 25, 53, 104, 169-170, & 180-181.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., 180-181.

people's happiness. Finally, I hope that this piece helps to shed new light on the study of Spinoza's philosophy, so that others may contemplate the ideas of this timeless thinker.

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