

Chapter 1 : Ethics/On the Improvement of the Understanding by Baruch Spinoza

The text of the "Ethics" in this volume is based on the translation by William Hale White () as revised by Amelia Hutchinson Stirling (,) and the text of the "On the Improvement of the Understanding" is the translation by R.H.M. Elwes ().

No positive quality possessed by a false idea is removed by the presence of what is true in virtue of its being true. We are only passive in so far as we are a part of Nature, which cannot be conceived by itself without other parts. The force whereby a man persists in existing is limited, and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. It is impossible, that man should not be a part of Nature, or that he should be capable of undergoing no changes, save such as can be understood through his nature only as their adequate cause. The power and increase of every passion, and its persistence in existing are not defined by the power, whereby we ourselves endeavour to persist in existing, but by the power of an external cause compared with our own. An emotion can only be controlled or destroyed by another emotion contrary thereto, and with more power for controlling emotion. The knowledge of good and evil is nothing else, but the emotions of pleasure or pain, in so far as we are conscious thereof. An emotion, whereof we conceive the cause to be with us at the present time, is stronger than if we did not conceive the cause to be with us. Towards something future, which we conceive as close at hand, we are affected more intensely, than if we conceive that its time for existence is separated from the present by a longer interval; so too by the remembrance of what we conceive to have not long passed away we are affected more intensely, than if we conceive that it has long passed away. An emotion towards that which we conceive as necessary is, when other conditions are equal, more intense than an emotion towards that which is possible, or contingent, or non-necessary. An emotion towards a thing, which we know not to exist at the present time, and which we conceive is possible, is more intense, other things being equal, than an emotion towards a thing contingent. Emotion towards a thing contingent, which we know not to exist in the present, is, other conditions being equal, fainter than an emotion towards a thing past. A true knowledge of good and evil cannot check any emotion by virtue of being true, but only in so far as it is considered as an emotion. Desire arising from the knowledge of good and evil can be quenched or checked by many other desires arising from the emotions, whereby we are assailed. Desire arising from the knowledge of good and evil, in so far as such knowledge regards what is future, may be more easily controlled or quenched, than the desire for what is agreeable at the present moment. Desire arising from the true knowledge of good and evil, in so far as such knowledge is concerned with what is contingent, can be controlled far more easily still, than desire for things that are at present. Desire arising from pleasure is, other things being equal, stronger than desire arising from pain. Every man, by the laws of his nature, necessarily desires or shrinks from that which he deems to be good or bad. The more every man endeavours and is able to seek what is useful to him, in other words to preserve his own being, the more is he endowed with virtue; on the contrary, in proportion as a man neglects to seek what is useful to him, that is, to preserve his own being, he is wanting in power. No one can rightly desire to be blessed, to act rightly, and to live rightly, without at the same time wishing to be, to act, and to live, in other words, to actually exist. Man, in so far as he is determined to a particular action because he has inadequate ideas, cannot be absolutely said to act in obedience to virtue, he can only be so described, in so far as he is determined for the action, because he understands. No one wishes to preserve his being for the sake of anything else. Whatsoever we endeavour in obedience to reason is nothing further than to understand; neither does the mind, in so far as it makes use of reason, judge anything to be useful to it, save such things as are conducive to understanding. We know nothing to be certainly good or evil, save such things as really conduce to understanding, or such as are able to hinder us from understanding. No individual thing, which is entirely different from our own nature, can help or check our power of activity, and absolutely nothing can do us good or harm, unless it has something in common with our nature. A thing cannot be bad for us through the quality which it has in common with our nature, but it is bad for us, in so far

as it is contrary to our nature. In so far as a thing is in harmony with our nature, it is necessarily good. In so far as men are a prey to passion, they cannot, in that respect, be said to be naturally in harmony. Men can differ in nature, in so far as they are assailed by those emotions, which are passions or passive states; and to this extent one and the same man is variable and inconstant. In so far as men are assailed by emotions which are passions, they can be contrary one to another. In so far only as men live in obedience to reason, do they always necessarily agree in nature. The highest good of those who follow virtue is common to all, and therefore all can equally rejoice therein. Prop. The good, which every man who follows after virtue desires for himself, he will also desire for other men, and so much the more, in proportion as he has a greater knowledge of God. Whatsoever disposes the human body, so as to render it capable of being affected in an increased number of ways, or of affecting external bodies in an increased number of ways, is useful to man; and is so, in proportion as the body is thereby rendered more capable of being affected or of affecting other bodies in an increased number of ways; contrariwise, whatsoever renders the body less capable in this respect is hurtful to man. Whatsoever brings about the preservation of the proportion of motion and rest, which the parts of the human body mutually possess, is good; contrariwise, whatsoever causes a change in such proportion is bad. Pleasure in itself is not bad but good; contrariwise, pain in itself is bad. Mirth cannot be excessive, but is always good; contrariwise, Melancholy is always bad. Stimulation may be excessive and bad; on the other hand, grief may be good, in so far as stimulation or pleasure is bad. Love and desire may be excessive. Hatred can never be good. Emotions of hope and fear cannot be in themselves good. The emotions of over-esteem and disparagement are always bad. Over-esteem is apt to render its object proud. Pity, in a man who lives under the guidance of reason, is in itself bad and useless. Approval is not repugnant to reason, but can agree therewith and arise therefrom. Self-approval may arise from reason, and that which arises from reason is the highest possible. Humility is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason. Repentance is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason, but he who repents of an action is doubly wretched or infirm. Extreme pride or dejection indicates extreme ignorance of self. Extreme pride or dejection indicates extreme infirmity of spirit. The proud man delights in the company of flatterers and parasites, but hates the company of the high-minded. Honour gloria is not repugnant to reason, but may arise therefrom. To all the actions, whereto we are determined by emotions, wherein the mind is passive, we can be determined without emotion by reason. Desire arising from a pleasure or pain, that is, not attributable to the whole body, but only to one or certain parts thereof, is without utility in respect to man as a whole. Desire which springs from reason cannot be excessive. In so far as the mind conceives a thing under the dictate of reason, it is affected equally, whether the idea be of a thing present, past, or future. He who is led by fear, and does good in order to escape evil, is not led by reason. The knowledge of evil is an inadequate knowledge. Under the guidance of reason we should pursue the greater of two goods and the lesser of two evils. We may, under the guidance of reason, seek a greater good in the future in preference to a lesser good in the present, and we may seek a lesser evil in the present in preference to a greater evil in the future. A free man thinks of nothing less than of death; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death, but of life. If men were born free, they would, so long as they remained free, form no conception of good or evil. The virtue of a free man is seen to be as great, when it declines dangers, as when it overcomes them. The free man, who lives among the ignorant, strives, as far as he can, to avoid receiving favours from them. Prop. Only free men are thoroughly grateful, one to another. The free man never acts fraudulently, but always in good faith. The man, who is guided by reason, is more free in a State, where he lives under a general system of law, than in solitude, where he is independent. On the Power of the Understanding, or of Human Freedom. Even as thoughts and the ideas of things are arranged and associated in the mind, so are the modifications of the body, or the images of things precisely in the same way arranged and associated in the body. If we remove a disturbance of the spirit, or emotion, from the thought of an external cause, and unite it to other thoughts, then will the love or hatred towards that external cause, and also the vacillations of spirit, which arise from these emotions, be destroyed. An emotion, which is a passion, ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof. There is no modification of the body, whereof we cannot form

some clear and distinct conception. An emotion towards a thing which we conceive simply, and not as necessary, or as contingent, or as possible, is, other conditions being equal, greater than any other emotion. The mind has greater power over the emotions, and is less subject thereto, in so far as it understands all things as necessary. Emotions, which are aroused or spring from reason, if we take account of time, are stronger than those, which are attributable to particular objects, that we regard as absent. An emotion is stronger in proportion to the number of simultaneous concurrent causes whereby it is aroused. An emotion, which is attributable to many and diverse causes, which the mind regards as simultaneous with the emotion itself, is less hurtful, and we are less subject thereto, and less affected towards each of its causes, than if it were a different and equally powerful emotion, attributable to fewer causes or to a single cause. So long as we are not assailed by emotions contrary to our nature, we have the power of arranging and associating the modifications of our body according to the intellectual order. In proportion as a mental image is referred to more objects, so is it more frequent, or more often vivid, and affects the mind more. The mental images of things are more easily associated Edition: A mental image is more often vivid, in proportion as it is associated with a greater number of other images. The mind can bring it about, that all bodily modifications or images of things may be referred to the idea of God. He, who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions, loves God, and so much the more in proportion as he more understands himself and his emotions. This love towards God must hold the chief place in the mind. God is without passions, neither is he affected by any emotion of pleasure or pain. No one can hate God. He, who loves God, cannot endeavour, that God should love him in return. This love towards God cannot be stained by the emotion of envy or jealousy; contrariwise, it is the more fostered, in proportion as we conceive a greater number of men to be joined to God by the same bond of love. The mind can only imagine anything, or remember what is past, while the body endures. Nevertheless in God there is necessarily an idea, which expresses the essence of this or that human body under the form of eternity. The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something which is eternal. The more we understand particular things, the more do we understand God. The highest endeavour of the mind, and the highest virtue, is to understand things by intuition. In proportion as the mind is more capable of understanding things by intuition, it desires more so to understand things. From intuition arises the highest possible mental acquiescence. The endeavour or desire to know things by intuition cannot arise from opinion, but from reason. Whatsoever the mind understands under the form of eternity, it does not understand by virtue of conceiving the present actual existence of the body, but by virtue of conceiving the essence of the body under the form of eternity. Our mind, in so far as it knows itself and the body under the form of eternity, has to that extent necessarily a knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God, and is conceived through God. Intuition depends on the mind, as its formal cause, in so far as the mind itself is eternal.

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Chapter 2 : WORKS OF SPINOZA: VOL.2 THE ETHICS,ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

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I hate it in philosophy and I really hate it in theology. Spinoza supports absolute causality; even down to human emotions. His trivializing of human and divine nature is so annoying and problematic that it is surprising that he became so influential. While he gets some things right that Descartes got wrong namely, by countering the inane method of Cartesian doubt , he gets so many other things wrong, that I cannot say he was much better than Descartes. I do find it befuddling that often people will cite Descartes and Spinoza as pioneers of modern philosophy. This is a surprising assertion because, firstly, philosophy has never taken a prolonged hiatus since Pythagoras and the Pre-Socratics. It is surprising secondly, because I do not see much that they brought to the table that was new and constructive. I think the people who place them in a unique position in the history of philosophy intend to mean that their output contributed to skepticism and enlightenment notions. Skepticism was already a component of philosophy. If these same people mean to get across that they beget systems that were not overtly religious, than that would not constitute a first either. Certainly, philosophy, even during the Christian centuries, was never bound to only theological matters. It might be that they are considered first in developing particular methods and systems. Spinoza is often called a pantheist; while this is a suitable description to a degree, his pantheism is not consistent and is incredibly problematic. As far as mundane mechanics go, his pantheism works somewhat, although it is simplistic and, in my opinion, silly. He gets into trouble once he discourses on Divine nature. Unity or "pan-ness" is there left at the door and is no longer applicable without issues. This must entail, I suppose, that His attributes and His substance are somehow different from His nature. What we have is a god that is made up of various parts. It seems that at some point, most likely in God, infinite substance becomes finite as thought and extension. He simply removes a multiplicity of substances from one place, namely, from a mundane mechanical universe, and places multiplicity within God Himself. Here he vacillates quite a bit. Love is both a negative and positive emotion for Spinoza. I should enlighten the reader that Spinoza is rather adamant about using his own definitions of words. This is something he tries to get across at the very beginning of the works included here. His definitions are sometimes quite equivocal though, so consistency is a problem for Spinoza; especially in his discussion of emotions. He attempts to make love both an emotion and not an emotion. He more than once claims that good and evil are simply pleasure and pain and nothing more. Spinoza helped foment deistic thought. So I suppose he holds a unique position in that regard. There was a time when I identified with deism. I now see it for what it is. Deism denies God in practice but accepts Him in theory. Atheism denies God in both theory and in practice.

Chapter 3 : On the Improvement of the Understanding: v. 2 (X) by Benedictus de Spinoza

Ethics preceded by On the improvement of the understanding. by Spinoza, Benedictus de, Publication date Topics Ethics.

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Ethics presents a monolithic metaphysical system, derived from axioms and definitions, possessing austere beauty and, it seems, great psychological insight. This is especially found in Spinoza's enumeration of the basic emotions and the elaborations of these, plus his solution to the problems they consistently cause to human beings.

Chapter 8 : Spinoza - On the Improvement of the Understanding - Contents

Ethics ; and, Treatise on the Correction of the Intellect. Benedictus de Spinoza - - C.E. Tuttle. Ethics Preceded by on the Improvement of the Understanding.

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Benedict de Spinoza, The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza, vol. 2 (On Improvement of the Understanding, Ethics, Select Letters) [].