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Ideas, Affects and Causality

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Spinoza Bibliography: 1990

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Ideas, Affects and Causality

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Abstract

Against many of the standard interpretations I offer two arguments to show that Spinoza could not have ascribed transitive causality to mind. These are followed by three additional considerations: (1) an outline of a hermeneutic for Spinoza's apparently physicalistic treatment of mind; (2) an interpretation of conatus within a non-physicalistic model; and (3) a note on the difficulties regarding the temporal nature of the mind.

Many writers interpret Spinoza's theory of mind as one that ascribes causality to the mind, and especially to the realm of affects. By 'causality' I refer here roughly to the kind of transitive relations which, under the laws of 'motion-and-rest', govern all extended Nature.¹ Thus Wartofsky writes that ". . . not only the bodily affections but those of the mind as well are to be included in the science of mechanism. The continuity of sensory perception, emotion, and thought is to be reaffirmed."² Similarly, Hampshire speaks of states of mind as causally explained by interaction with external things, implying in this connection transitive causality. Only when exercising 'pure thought' is the mind free of transient causes.³ A similar position

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1. E2, Scholium before P14. Cf. also Ep64. Unless otherwise mentioned, quotations are from Curley's translation (E.M. Curley, tr. & ed., *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988). Occasionally the Gebhardt edition of Spinoza's writing is cited (C. Gebhardt, ed., *Spinoza Opera, im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitaetsverlag, 1972). E.g., G1112/7-9, meaning: Gebhardt vol. I, p. 112. lines 7-9. References to the *Ethics* contain an Arabic number for part (e.g., E2) and employ the following abbreviations: AD (Affect Definition), GenDA (General Definition of the Affects), Ax(iom), Def(inition), Schol(ium), Dem(onstration), Exp(planation), Pref(ace), P(roposition), Lem(ma), and Cor(ollary).
 2. Max Wartofsky, "Action and Passion: Spinoza's Construction of Scientific Psychology," in M. Grene, ed., *Spinoza — A Collection of Critical Essays* (Doubleday Anchor, Garden City, 1973), 332.
 3. Stuart Hampshire, "Spinoza's Theory of Human Freedom," *The Monist* 55 (1971), 554 and 563.

with regard to the relations between ideas is held by Yovel and Delahunty.⁴ Last but not least, Bennett interprets Spinoza's parallelism to mean that, if x causes y then the idea of x causes the idea of y .⁵ His whole treatment of the mental field as psychological rather than logical leaves no doubt that the causality he sees in Spinoza's theory of mind is of a transitive nature, rather than, say, the type of causality Spinoza terms 'immanent'. Against all these interpretations of Spinoza's theory of mind, I argue in this paper that Spinoza could not have ascribed transitive causality to ideas. I shall defend this contention in two separate arguments. First, I try to show that Spinoza's mind-body parallelism (and, in fact, thought-extension parallelism generally) runs into grave difficulties if we try to construe the relations between ideas as causal ones, and that these difficulties do not arise if we take these relations to be logical in the sense to be explained below. Second, I claim that the way Spinoza understands transitive causality makes it inapplicable to the mental realm, and that this is clearly evident in his treatment of seemingly causal relations in the mind. In the remainder of the paper I add three further considerations: (a) an outline of a hermeneutic for the mechanistic vocabulary Spinoza uses with regard to the mind; (b) suggestions as to how we should understand conatus, the striving to persevere in existence, within my interpretation; and, finally, (c) a grave difficulty challenging Spinoza's theory of mind as I interpret it.

1. The Nature of Mental Relations

Ideas are purely cognitive entities, which can have only relations of content between them. I am reluctant to describe these relations as logical ones, though in a sense they are; for 'logical' connotes relations of strict implication between them, which is not what I think Spinoza intended to ascribe to them. An example would be appropriate here. Having seen Peter at dawn, I recall dawn upon seeing Peter again.⁶ This does not mean that the idea of Peter in my mind is the cause of my new idea of the dawn.

4. R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985), 197-8; Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Infinite Mode and Natural Laws in Spinoza," in Y. Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, "Spinoza by 2000 — The Jerusalem Conferences," Vol. I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 95 fn7-8.

5. Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 127.

6. Cf. E2P44Schol.

Rather, the idea of Peter and that of dawn form a complex idea in my mind so that my thought of Peter is a thought of someone whom I (once, yesterday, in my dream, etc.) met at dawn, and in that sense my idea of Peter implies my idea of dawn. As we shall see, any specifically causal explanation of this associative relation between ideas is relegated by Spinoza to the attribute of extension, leaving only relations of content on the level of thought. Thus, although pairs of ideas associate with each other in a way that may seem to imply some sort of transitive causality, they in fact form together complex ideas.

Now it must be admitted that the causal interpretation of the mental realm integrates well into Spinoza's thought-extension parallelism, which takes the modal orders under God's attributes to be correlative to each other. Since the order and connection of modes is the same under all attributes [E2P7 & E2P7Schol], and, moreover, each mode is in reality (by E2P7Schol) the unity of its aspects under all the attributes, it may seem plausible to construe the modal order under all attributes as a duplication of their transitive order under the attribute of extension.

Spinoza does indeed use the word 'cause' to denote the relation between ideas, e.g., in E2P9Dem, and in various cases he speaks of the realm of affects in quasi-mechanistic terms. However, this is far from supporting a transitive causal interpretation of the mental realm, for Spinoza's use of the term *causa* may be adaptive, according to the requirements of the various contexts. While some kind of causality is apparently ascribed by Spinoza to the mental realm, this obviously cannot be of the sort that governs modes of extension. There is no doubt as to Spinoza's denial of any physical mechanism to the mental realm. Such mechanism is reducible to the billiard-ball model, whose basic principles Spinoza describes in the physical section following E2P13. He also applies this model to the human body, but its laws of motion-and-rest cannot be implicated to modes of thought. This is the gist of Spinoza's attack on Descartes' pineal gland hypothesis in E5Pref. Adhering to the originally Cartesian doctrine of thought-extension dualism, Spinoza turns its principles against "that most distinguished Man," insisting that the powers of mind and body can in no way be compared, and that motion, which is the central feature of bodily mechanism, is thoroughly incommensurable with will [E5Pref, GII280/13-16].

This still leaves the possibility of attributing a 'softer' kind of transitive causality to the mind. Couldn't it be that a thought of an imminent meeting causes someone to feel joy, in the same manner as the shaking of

hands transmits warmth to his palm? Given Spinoza's parallelism, this seems natural. When pain arouses in its sufferer a feeling of aversion, the pain-aversion relation appears to be a link in a psychological transitive-causal chain, correlative to a similar link in a physiological causal chain in the body, say the body's recoiling caused by a brain's stimulation when the pain is being felt. The causal relation of aversion to pain is correlative, in the attribute of thought, to the causal relation of recoiling to the brain's reaction (in the presence of pain), in the attribute of extension. It should be noted that by this example we have apparently illustrated E2P7: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." An horizontal arrow denotes causation, and a vertical arrow correlation:

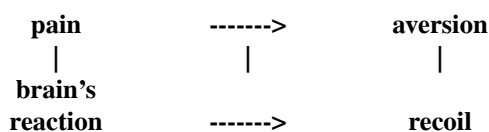


Fig. 1

However, it can be easily shown that Spinoza did not think of the relation between pain, which in its mental aspect he calls 'sadness' [E3P11Schol], and aversion in causal terms. In AD9 he defines aversion as follows:

Aversion — sadness accompanied by the idea of something which is the accidental cause of sadness.

Thus, pain ('sadness') cannot be said to *cause* aversion, in any meaning of causation that can be associated with transitive causality. In transitive causation the cause and the effect are external to each other, whereas here the 'cause' forms part and parcel of the 'effect', which is obviously absurd.

To see, then, what according to Spinoza is the relation between pain, i.e., 'sadness' in its mental aspect, and aversion, let us recall what sadness is. By E3P11Schol sadness is a passion by which the mind passes to a lesser perfection (than before). However, in GenDA and its explanation Spinoza explicates the nature of this passage in the mind to a lesser perfection as simply an idea by which the mind affirms a passage of its body to a lesser force of existing. We thus get the following Spinozistic definition of sadness:

Sadness — an idea, by which the mind affirms a weakening of its body's force of existing.

Substituting the definiens in this definition of 'sadness' in the definition of aversion (AD9 quoted above), we get the following definition of the mental aspect of aversion (to aid the following discussion I mark the two ideas involved in the definition I(1) and I(2)):

Aversion — [sadness, i.e.,] an idea I(1), by which the mind affirms a weakening of its body's force of existing, accompanied by the idea I(2) of something which is the accidental cause of this weakening.

What relation do we have here between aversion and pain (i.e., sadness in its mental aspect)? — it is a relation a complex idea has to one of its ingredients. For aversion is a unity containing two ideas, I(1), i.e., sadness, and I(2). Does this rule out any use of the term 'cause' to denote the relation between sadness and aversion? Not at all. As I said before, Spinoza uses *causa* in a wide range of applications, adapting its meaning to the pertinent context (I give an example below).⁷

Is the relation pattern that we have seen to exist between aversion and sadness paradigmatic to the mental domain? I think the answer is affirmative, and I also believe that this pattern characterizes all relations between ideas (including affects), i.e., between modes of thought. To see that this is so, we need to look at E2P7, which sets up the doctrine that identifies the order and connection of ideas with the order and connection of things, and at its demonstration.

Leaving aside God's attributes of which human beings are ignorant, I take E2P7 to mean, basically, that the ordering of connections between ideas, i.e., modes considered under the attribute of thought, is the same as the ordering of connections between extended things.⁸ Now, E2P7Dem is hardly anything more than a citation of E1Ax4:

Dem.: This is clear from E1Ax4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect.

7. Later I shall deal with Spinoza's ample use of mechanistic terminology in the mental domain.

E1Ax4 reads:

The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.

Note that in E2P7Dem Spinoza substitutes ‘idea of the thing caused’ for ‘knowledge of the effect’. But since E2P7 indeed deals with ideas, and not with knowledge, it would seem natural to similarly replace the second occurrence of ‘knowledge’ by ‘idea’. We would then have E2P7 demonstrated upon the dependence between the idea of effect and the idea of its cause.

I shall not undertake here to try to explain the much discussed demonstration of E2P7. My interest focuses on the kind of *dependence* between ideas spoken of in the demonstration itself. Returning to E1Ax4, from which this dependence is derived, we find it correlative to *involvement*. This is an identity between the order of ‘involvement’ of ideas and the causal order of ‘things’ (or causes),⁹ is illustrated in Figure 2, as follows:

8. Note that, while E2P7 reads, “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” three out of four quotations of it in E2 — E2P9Dem, E2P19Dem, E2P20Dem, but not E2P9CorDem — substitute ‘causes’ for ‘things’. Thus in E2P9Dem we read: “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes.” That ‘the order of idea’ is paralleled in this version with ‘the order of causes’ seems to imply that there are no ‘causes’ in the attribute of thought, for otherwise ‘the order of causes’ would include the order of ideas, hence stating their being parallel to each other would have been pointless. This of course does not prove the interpretation I defend, yet it adduces to its plausibility.

9. See note 8 above.

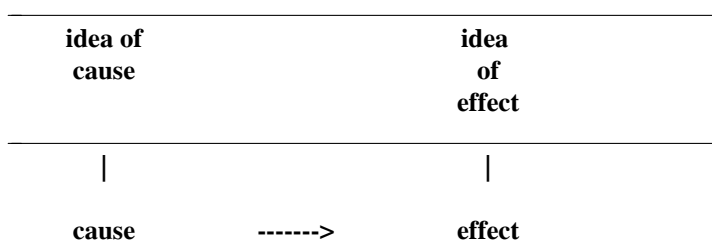


Fig. 2

The sameness of orders of ideas and things stated by E2P7 is thus a correlation between: (a) causal relations linking modes of extension, and (b) relations of involvement that hold between ideas. Applying this correlative structure to the pain-aversion relation we get the following correlation:¹⁰

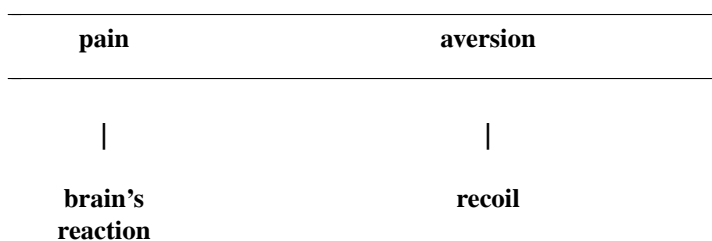


Fig. 3

(Compare this correlation between bodily causal relations and mental relations of involvement with the one shown in Figure 1 above.)

Interestingly, involvement is, logically speaking, a transitive relation. Thus, whatever is involved in our idea of an object by which we are

10. With this interpretation we have slightly deviated from the literal definition Spinoza gives to aversion, according to which aversion is pain (sadness), and not only involves it. Another thing to note is that Spinoza's explicit treatment of aversion ignores the repulsion from the object of aversion, which apparently is what aversion is all about. However, the tendency to avoid (or abolish) the object of aversion is a modification of the averted person's conatus. See E3P28. The way an affect modifies conatus is briefly referred to in fn 20 below.

affected, i.e., an object of emotion, forms in turn part of the content of this affect itself. This fact is responsible for the endless variety of affects, according to the specific nature of their objects.¹¹ Thus we can think of Spinoza's mind-body parallelism as a correlation between two transitive orders: a logically transitive order of involvement between ideas under the attribute of thought, and a physically transitive order of causes governed by the laws of motion-and-rest under the attribute of extension. It should be noted here that this interpretation of the correlation between the order of ideas in the mind and the order of bodily modifications is fruitfully expanded to Spinoza's general doctrine of parallelism. To see this we should look again at the correlative causal chains shown in Figure 1. I duplicate it here, with a slight change made for the sake of simplicity, and ascribe the pain and aversion to a person P:

M:1 = P feels pain

M:2 = P feels aversion

P:1 = P's nervous system is modified 'pain-wise'

P:2 = P recoils

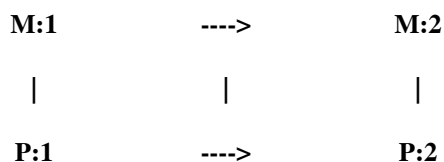


Fig. 4

Now let us try to take one step back in these parallel chains, supposing that the modification of P's nervous system is an effect of Q's hitting him. Given this link in the physical causal chain, what is the transitive link in the mental causal chain? The candidate ready at hand is the mental correlate of the movement of Q's body, i.e, Q's mentally setting about hitting P. We get the following correlation between two causal chains (much simplified, skipping causal steps that are not important for our discussion):

11. E3P56Dem. This however does not require that while having an emotion I should be conscious of all that is involved in my emotional situation.

M:1 = Q mentally sets about hitting Q
 M:2 = P feels pain
 M:3 = P feels aversion
 P:1 = Q hits P
 P:2 = P's nervous system is modified 'pain-wise'
 P:3 = P recoils

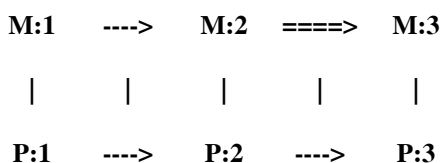


Fig. 5

Note the question mark added at the first mental causal link. Should we admit, in order to save the causal interpretation of mental processes (as it is illustrated in Figures 4 and 5), a causal link between Q's decision, which takes place in Q's mind, and P's pain, which is an occurrence in P's mind? But then it would seem absurd to suppose that when my body is hit by someone, my mind is affected by his thoughts, of which I may know nothing at all.

One might want to make my mental affect of pain an effect of God's idea of hitting. However, if by 'effect' we mean here an effect in a transitive causal chain, that would seem to make of God's idea a link in a psychological causal chain leading from Q's decision to P's pain.¹² While I cannot find any specific principle in the *Ethics* which forbids this weird outcome, it seems to be contrary to the entire picture Spinoza draws of the human mind, whose powers he promises to treat as one treats lines, planes and bodies [E3Pref] — which precludes, first and foremost, linking nonempirical causes with empirical ones.

We avoid this dilemma by construing the linkage between modes of thought as logical relations of involvement. P's pain involves Q's mentally

12. According to E2P9, when God causes an idea, this is due to himself being affected by another idea. Therefore, if we should take this causation to mean transitive, quasi-mechanical causation, modelled upon Humean psychology, this would make of God's ideas links in such chain.

setting about hitting P, just as P's aversion involves P's pain. Moreover, according to AD9 it is this very involvement of the idea 'Q's originating a hit' in P's pain (the pain itself being an idea in P's mind) that, when brought to consciousness, constitutes an affect of aversion (cf. AD9, quoted above).¹³ However, in case P does not know what causes his pain, this does not preclude the involvement of Q's mentally setting about hitting him in his pain, as required by my interpretation. It only means that, in such case, his pain is a mutilated idea, and is only a part of God's complex idea of the causal link between Q's body and P's body. In other words, God's adequate idea of P's pain, or sadness, does involve Q's mentally setting about hitting P, although P does not comprehend this involvement.

This interpretation works well also with affects whose cause is an external non-living object. I may feel sorrow when facing a chimney polluting the air with dark smoke. The bodily aspect of my sorrow is due, causally, to what I perceive — sight, stench etc. — and to my own body's structure (cf. Ax1 after E2P13Lem3), while the mental aspect involves the idea: "here is an ugly chimney polluting the environment with health-damaging smoke." Wouldn't it be odd to construe my sorrow as transitively *caused* by the idea of the chimney? Before I grasp the presence of the chimney, there is nothing in my mind that is the potential cause of sorrow (or should we ignore the idea which I get from seeing the chimney altogether, and look for another transitive cause within my mind?). Once I do know that there's a chimney, this newly acquired idea is not an efficient cause of an occurrence of sorrow in my mind, but rather a constituent of that affect, so it is its content that plays part in my emotional make-up. It would be an unnecessary further complication to let it arouse sorrow through some mysterious causal mechanism.

2. The Transmission Theory

For our post-Humean (or, better, post-Davidsonian) understanding of causality in the mental realm, there is nothing mysterious in the idea that emotions, decisions and other mental events are transitively caused. For Spinoza this must have been, I believe, an unthinkable hypotheses. To see this, we should first recall how Spinoza pictures transitive causal relations, and then analyze his treatment of what, by his own phrasing in the *Ethics*,

13. This does not preclude the possibility that someone's aversion can turn towards an imagined cause of the subject's pain, which is not what really caused his pain.

can seemingly be interpreted as causal relations within the mental realm.

According to Spinoza, for an entity A to cause transitively a change in entity B, A and B must be separate from one another, and some property must be transferred from A to B. Thus, physical causality is based on transmissions of movement between bodies — the laws of motion and rest being ‘pure notions’ by which we explain all physical phenomena.¹⁴ If indeed this is the only way one thing transitively causes a change in another, namely, by transmitting to it a property of its own, one can hardly think of a cause-effect relation in the mental realm, for an idea that ‘causes’ an affect cannot meet the requirements of a transitive cause. This is exemplified in the case of aversion, for the sadness involved is not separate from the aversion that ensues from it (together with the idea of the cause of sadness), and there is nothing it can transmit to it, unless we would think of the content of the idea as the causal agent transmitted from mental cause to mental effect.

Some writers deny that Spinoza endorses the transmission theory of causality. Wilson contends that it can be shown that Spinoza did not hold this theory “in any general form” in the *Ethics*.¹⁵ Similarly, Bennett, who admits that Spinoza did hold this view as early as 1661, as seems to be implied in what he writes at that year in Ep4 to Oldenburg, yet expresses doubt as to whether this Cartesian thesis was at work when he wrote the *Ethics*.¹⁶ It emerges, however, very clearly from a letter which Spinoza wrote to Jelles in September 1669 that at that time he was still thinking along these lines. In that letter he describes an experiment in hydrodynamics, and his scientific locution there seems to make manifest his underlying metaphysical assumptions, derived from a transmission theory of causality. He explains, e.g., that the “water in the long tube M has received [*accepit*] just as much velocity as the gravitational force can give [*communicare*] the higher water, contained in the tube G.”¹⁷ Between these two letters Spinoza was working on the *Ethics*, and we know, from Ep28 written in June 1665,

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14. See Ep6 [GIV28/10-15], in which Spinoza comments on Robert Boyle’s article, “De nitro, fluiditate et firmitate.” His explanations here of experiences in physics illustrate the transmission doctrine of causality, e.g.: “. . . the alkaline particles *receive their motion* from the impulse of particles of Spirit of Niter . . .” [GIV27/2-3; italics mine].
 15. Margaret D. Wilson, “Spinoza’s Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4),” in Y. Yovel, ed., *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Spinoza by 2000 — The Jerusalem Conferences, Vol. I (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 137-138, 157 n. 20.
 16. Bennett, *A Study*, 50.

that as early as that date at least the first three parts of that work were already written. Therefore it is fairly plausible to ascribe the transfer thesis to Spinoza when writing the *Ethics*.

This still leaves the possibility, hinted at by Wilson, that the transfer thesis is pertinent only in the physical realm, and hence the possibility that some other sort of transitive causality exists in the mental realm. The fact is that time and time again Spinoza uses causal terminology to describe what goes on with affects and ideas. This has led most commentators on his psychological theory to ascribe transitive causality to the mental realm.

The first use in the *Ethics* of causal notions with regard to ideas is in E2P9Dem: “the cause of one singular idea is another idea. . .” This sentence, however, can hardly count as evidence to transitive causality between ideas, for the reason Spinoza gives to this claim is that “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes.” Thus in this demonstration he confines one use of ‘cause’ to non-ideas, leaving another use for ideas. For an idea to be a ‘cause’ of another idea may simply mean that it explains it, or is the reason for its being true.

Nevertheless, many other turns of phrase in the *Ethics* apparently leave no choice but to think of the relations between ideas and affects as causal in a quasi-physical fashion. Consider E4P7:

An affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained.

This formulation suggests an image of two mental forces pushing, in a manner similar to physical forces, against each other, and the stronger wins. Closer examination of the demonstration of this proposition, however, reveals that Spinoza here appears to shift the physical model to the bodily correlates of the mental (and apparently causal) interaction whose proof is the object of the demonstration. We can track down the elements of the demonstration stepwise. The first step is a reminder of the nature of

17. Ep41 (GIV206/6-8), in A. Wolf (tr. & ed.), *The Correspondence of Spinoza* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), 238. Similarly: “. . . all the motion which [this force] communicates, it in turn derives [*recipit*] continuously through the action of gravity; and therefore it will continue to communicate this motion to the water in the tube, until, being pushed on, it has acquired [*recipit*] as much speed as the higher water can give [*tribuere*] it gravitational force” (*ibid.*, 238; GIV205/12-206/2).

affects in general:

An affect, insofar as it is related to the mind, is an idea by which the mind affirms of its body a greater or lesser force of existing than before (by the general Definition of the Affects).

On this basis, the whole discussion of the mental-seeming mechanism of causes can be switched to the body:

When, therefore, the mind is troubled by some affect, the body is at the same time affected with an affection by which its power of acting is increased or diminished.

Only at this point does the physical language enter the scene, to be applied properly to the bodily affections:

Next, this affection of the body . . . receives from its cause its force of persevering in its being, and therefore it can neither be restrained nor removed, except by a corporeal cause . . . which affects the body with an affection opposite to it . . . and stronger than it . . .

The causal transaction having been proved as an occurrence in the body, Spinoza can now return to the mental correlate, in which the affects take place as ideas:

And so . . . the mind will be affected with the idea of an affection stronger than, and opposite to, the first affection, i.e., . . . with an affect stronger than, and opposite to, the first affect, which will exclude or take away the existence of the first affect.¹⁸

E4P7 is not the only proposition where causal language is used to describe mental occurrences. E4P15 is another example, but its causal point turns out, in the last sentence of the demonstration, to rest on E4P7. A similar ancestry of causal language can be shown with regard to E4P16 and E4P17. Thus, when demonstrating propositions in which he applies a

18. Here I deviate from Curley's translation.

causal model to the mind, Spinoza as a rule shifts the model to the body. Is this technique a matter of convenience, a shortcut Spinoza takes when proving “in geometric order” causal laws governing the mind just as the body? An examination of the basics of Spinoza’s theory of knowledge in E2 provides evidence to the contrary. From E2P12 forward, all of Spinoza’s propositions that deal with knowledge processes are grounded in physical mechanisms of the body. On the whole it seems that Spinoza’s preference for causal explanations led him to give preference to bodily processes. Whether or not Spinoza adhered to the transmission theory of causality, he seems to have been resolutely opposed to letting causality play a role in the mental realm. This is why the explanations of cognitive processes such as imagining and memorizing (cf. E2P17CorDem and E2P18Schol) are shifted to their bodily correlates, where causal explanations are pertinent. Only extended reality could in principle bear mechanisms involving transitive causality.

3. The Hermeneutics of Physicalism

Spinoza’s discussions of mental facts are replete with physicalistic terminology. This has led to interpretations like Wartofsky’s which claim that the affections of the mind “are to be included in the science of mechanism.”¹⁹ Spinoza speaks, e.g., of the ‘mind’s power’ by explicit analogy with the body’s power [E3P11]. He describes the mind as vacillating when affected by contrary affects: in other words, the mind is acted upon in contrary directions by two emotional forces [E3P17]. Emotions can also coalesce to aid each other’s force upon the mind [E3P44Dem]. Nevertheless, the apparently physicalistic model of emotions is based, at its metaphysical bottom, on a system of content relations between ideas. All the quasi-physical attributes of mental entities and processes are in fact shortenings of logical and semantical entities and relations. Moreover, the vectorial model, so naturally employed in the mental realm by analogy with physics, especially with regard to affects and their efficacy in determining the subject’s actions, is for Spinoza but a formal tool of description, which in fact does not exhaust all the facets of a human’s psychology (or of other animals’ psychology, for that matter). An ample discussion of this hermeneutic lies beyond the scope of this paper. I shall therefore limit myself to two examples.

19. See above, fn 2.

The mind's power is its power of thinking [E3P11], which is its cognitive variability and adaptability, i.e., its ability to be modified according to different objects of knowledge. E.g., we can perceive the difference between a pentagon and an hexagon, but our 'power of thinking' is not sufficient to imagine the difference between a regular polygon of 1005 sides and one of 1006 sides. Yet we can deduce the geometrical properties of, and compare regular polygons, whatever the number of their sides. A dog perceives a larger range of sounds than we do — its mind's power is greater than ours in that respect (which advantage can be explained on the physiological level; cf. E2P13Schol, E2P14, E3P2Schol [G142/33], and E3P11. A mind's power thus includes its being prone to distinctive modifications in cognitive terms. Beyond the imagination, the mind's power of thinking is equal to the level of systematization of images it has achieved, and its resulting ability to incorporate newly acquired data in a coherent world-picture (cf. E2P29Schol).

What about the apparently quasi-physical effect of emotions on each other? When an object is both loved and hated by one person, this is not a clash of emotional 'forces' in the mind, though it may turn out convenient to describe it this way in certain contexts. Rather, the same object is imagined by that person as causing him joy in one respect and as causing him sadness in another respect (cf. Affect Definitions 6,7).²⁰

20. I leave Spinoza's action theory outside the present discussion. It may be noted here, however, that the mutual negation of two affects can also be described in terms of the actions they induce: contrary affects charge our conatus with motivations to contrary activities. Thus, when Agamemnon is asked to sacrifice Iphigenia to Artemis, so that the winds would blow and his ships can sail for Troy, the king's love for his daughter stands in contrast with the hatred towards being unable to set sail. When he finally decides to sacrifice Iphigenia, this is due to the fact that his hatred is greater than his love. But the negation of the affects is not a clash of forces, but rather a conflict between two thoughts, i.e., between two optional ideas about the future (Iphigenia sacrificed and ships sail vs. Iphigenia saved and ships stay) with their respective emotional charges. When decision is taken, this is because Agamemnon is finally motivated by a complex idea of his daughter sacrificed and his ships sailing in full wind — which is the option, all things considered, that he imagines as more joyous or less sad. Note that the balance is between competing compound ideas of joy and sadness, and not between emotional 'forces'.

4. The Mind's Conatus

The last stronghold of the causal interpretation of the affective realm is the striving to persevere in existence. Conatus, it might be contended, is a dynamic element of the mind, a mental 'moment' irreducible to cognitions. Its expressions — desire, appetite and will — are causal efficacies directing the mind to objects and impelling it to decisions and actions. Now, while this view of conatus has the advantage of being close to our everyday intuitions, and of nicely integrating with a parallel causal model of body and mind, it can be proven erroneous in view of textual evidence. For conatus in its mental aspect is an idea of the body's inclination to certain states and activities, and an affirmation of mental states connected therewith. Being an idea, the mind's conatus cannot be governed by causal relations — this at least was the point of the first three parts of this paper.

Spinoza's definitions of the various aspects of conatus readily confirm that in its mental aspect it is an idea, i.e., an affirmative cognition of some facts. This can be shown in four steps, dealing in turn with the three manifestations of the striving to persevere in existence:

1. 'Desire' is defined as "appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite" (3p9s). Since the consciousness of the appetite is, naturally, an idea, we should find out whether 'appetite' itself is a causal factor.

2. 'Appetite' is a specific striving to persevere in existence, considered in both its mental and bodily aspects (*ibid.*). Since the bodily aspect is irrelevant for our present purpose, we should focus on the mental aspect of Appetite, to see whether it is a causally efficacious factor in the mind, or else an idea. Now, in its mental aspect, an Appetite is will (*ibid.*), i.e., this or that act of willing.

3. 'Will', i.e., this or that act of willing, is indistinguishable from intellect, and any act of willing is in the mind nothing but an affirmative idea of some state or action. Spinoza makes this point very clearly in E2P49, E2P49Dem and E2P49CorDem.

4. We are thus left with two mental components of conatus, both of which are ideas: the consciousness of the appetite (1 above) and will (by 2 and 3). Following our former arguments, it can safely be contended, that neither the consciousness of appetite, nor the

affirmative idea called ‘will’ can be, in Spinoza’s eyes, links in a chain of transitive causes.

Thus the causality which would stem from the striving to exist is exclusively a modification of extended modes. In human beings it is as an affect of the body that *conatus* manifests itself causally. Otherwise, it is an affirmation of some fact (i.e., will), or an idea (consciousness) of that affirmation, or of the correlative bodily inclination towards its realization. Both the affirmation and the consciousness thereof are ideas, and as such their relations with other ideas, including affects, are wholly logical, in the sense explained above.

5. Critical Reflections

Any idea (i.e., affirmative cognition) in a human mind is a thought-correlate of a certain modification in that human’s body. As such, an idea in the mind is necessarily temporal. Just as a bodily occurrence starts at a certain moment in time, so does its correlative idea in the mind. Thus within Spinoza’s doctrine of the unity of mind and body — which form together one mode conceived either under the attribute of Thought or under that of Extension²¹ — it is necessary to think of ideas which are human beings’ cognitions as things that exist in time, or, in Spinoza’s terms, as having duration. The durational nature of mental processes is further confirmed by Spinoza’s ascription of duration to the mind as a whole. Thus Spinoza says in *GenDAexp* that when the mind is affected it “passes to a greater or lesser perfection,” heavily connoting a process in time. In *E5P23Dem* he says that we attribute duration to the mind inasmuch as the body endures, basing himself on *E2P8Cor*, which claims the same status to all things.

The temporal or durational character of the affects and other ideas is constitutive of their psychological nature. An idea in the mind is not merely some propositional content, but “a concept of the mind that the mind forms because it is a thinking thing” [*E2Def3*]. The nature of the idea is strongly connected with its being an ongoing process in the mind. An affect, and any other idea, occurs, and not only is, like a platonic idea. An idea is something that requires time for someone to grasp, to

21. The body is “the object of the idea constituting the human mind” [*E2P13*]. As such, the body is united with the mind [*E2P13Schol*], for “a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways” [*E2P7Schol*].

internalize, to connect to other ideas, and to employ in theoretical or practical reasoning. At any point during these processes there may intervene other ideas, e.g., if we meanwhile perceive new relevant data. Ideas combine with each other to make together new ideas, and an idea occurring in someone's mind can bring up other ideas which somehow relate to it. In short, ideas are subject to the psychology of cognition, and cognitive psychology is mediated by time.

This description of the nature of the mental field may seem to oppose head-on the interpretation of ideas and affects as having only relations of content between them. For the events in a person's mind seem to require a causal explanation: why does someone recall something at a specific point in time, and why does he stop thinking of it at another, and why (following Bennett with this example) is my belief in a certain theory strong and persistent, and someone else's weak and intermittent?

This is indeed a strong argument. It is pertinent in regard to a criticism of Spinoza's system in terms of its plausibility as a description of reality. However, we saw that Spinoza took care to relegate all the explanations of seemingly mechanical mental processes to their correlates in the body. The primacy Spinoza gave to causal explanations²² could not but lead to this method of explaining human psychological processes, since he could not have thought of causality as holding for the realm of ideas, including the special ideas he called 'affects'. A physicalistic model of the realm of ideas and affects is left in the *Ethics* merely as a didactic or illustrative tool, or at best a heuristic explanation with no ontological intension.

Against a non-causal interpretation of Spinoza's theory of the mind Bennett also turns Kant's argument that any temporal series presupposes causal order, and, therefore, that any conceivable reality which we could know about must be held together causally.²³ However, Spinoza could not have anticipated this Kantian argument against his construction of the mind as a complex idea, with only content relations (indeed, realized in time) between cognitions and affects. The way he treated relations within the mental realm was the only one open to him given the metaphysical presuppositions he inherited from Descartes. And given these presuppositions, his choice carried enough plausibility for himself and for his contemporary readers.

22. Bennett, *Study*, 126.

23. *Ibid.*, 44.

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