The Ethics of Spinoza’s Physics

Jeffrey Bernstein
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Comments on Bernstein

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A Response to Wim N. A. Klever

Fokke Akkerman

Spinoza Studies in Russia

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Editor’s Note

Steven Barbone
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This tenth volume of the NASS Monograph exemplifies much of what certain founders of NASS had envisioned for its monograph series. The leading piece, by Jeffrey Bernstein, presented at the NASS meeting in Minneapolis in May 2001, is part of a larger project. Lee Rice’s comments follow, and the two papers published here (as well as their being presented for discussion in May 2001) allow for continued dialogue on the topic of Spinoza’s physics and physicalism.

The third piece in this volume is a response by Fokke Akkerman who helped prepare the critical Latin-facing-French edition of the TTP (Spinoza: Œuvres III: Traité théologico-politique, trs. J. Lagrée and P.-F. Moreau, Paris: PUF, 1999) to an article in NASS Monograph #9 by Wim N. A. Klever. Again, one of the purposes of NASS is to promote dialogue and present contemporary findings of interest to Spinoza scholars.

Also in keeping with the desire to keep NASS members aware of work being done outside North America, the final article reviews the efforts of Spinoza scholars in what is now Russia. Many NASS members no doubt have seen the bibliography of Russian works in Studia Spinozana 12 (1996), pages 235-264. What Igor Kaufman presents in this NASS Monograph, however, may be more informative since it reviews the literature in addition to providing a bibliography. NASS members may also find the bibliography here, though briefer, more useful than the longer one in Studia since Kaufman has also transliterated the Cyrillic characters into the western alphabet.

A word of thanks is due to the NASS Board for its help in putting together the present volume: Paul Bagley (president), Douglas Den Uyl (vice president), J. Thomas Cook, Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Charles Huenemann, and S. P. Kashap.
The Ethics of Spinoza’s Physics

Jeffrey Bernstein
College of the Holy Cross

Introduction

If one takes the themes of Newtonian atomism and the Cartesian plenum of extended substance to present a significant conflict in the development of early modern natural philosophy, puzzle arises when one considers the place of Spinoza’s Ethics in this “dichotomy.” At certain moments Spinoza appears to support the Cartesian notion of an extended plenum, while at other points he appears to prefigure Newton’s conceptions of bodies moving though empty space. In E1p15schol, Spinoza — in his discussion concerning the indivisibility of corporeal substance — rejects the notion of a vacuum in nature:

[I]f corporeal substance could be so divided that its parts were really distinct, why, then, could one part not be annihilated, the rest remaining connected with one another as before? And why must they all be so fitted together that there is no vacuum? Truly, of things which are really distinct from one another, one can be, and remain in its condition, without the other. Since, therefore, there is no vacuum in nature [...] but all its parts must so concur that there is no vacuum, it follows also that they cannot be really distinguished, i.e., that corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance, cannot be divided.

This passage appears to agree with Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy.

1. I should like to thank Idit Dobbs-Weinstein for her helpful suggestions during the formation of this paper, and Lee Rice for his insightful commentary which directly succeeds this paper in the present volume.

part 2 article 16, where Descartes holds that the notion of a vacuum is a contradictory supposition. However, in E2, during that remarkable section between E2p13 and E2p14 known as the “physical digression,” Spinoza presents an understanding of motion which bears a striking resemblance to Newton’s first law of motion prior to the publication of Newton’s *Principia*. In the E2p13lem3cor of the physical digression, Spinoza holds that “a body in motion moves until it is determined by another body to rest; and [...] a body at rest also remains at rest until it is determined to motion by another.”


5. The term “physical digression” was coined by David Lachterman in his essay “The Physics of Spinoza’s Ethics,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1977): 71-111; reprinted in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, eds. Robert W. Shahan, and J. I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 71-111. Given the title of the present paper, it goes without saying that this paper is a response to Lachterman’s essay. Where the author differs with Lachterman concerns the relation of “physics” and “ethics” in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. I believe that Lachterman’s text is (for the most part) too reductively materialistic in its approach to the physical digression. It is not until the final paragraph — and even there, under the guise of a “deliciously seductive anachronism” (p. 103) — that Lachterman mentions the possibility of viewing the physical digression as ethical. I wish to show that the “ethics of Spinoza’s physics” is neither an anachronism nor a clever play on Lachterman’s title.
The apparent problem can be expressed as follows: if Newton’s first law of motion is an attempt to explain the interaction of bodies as they move through empty space (therefore constituting a form of physical atomism), and if Descartes’ plenum of extended substance forbids the existence of empty space, how can Spinoza anticipate the disagreement (let alone bring the two positions together)? At first glance, they seem contradictory.

This paper proposes that Spinoza’s physics is, in fact, an alternative both to atomism and to the extended substance plenum of Descartes. In other words, Newton and Descartes are examples of Koyré’s thesis (in From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe). This thesis holds that 17th century conceptions of space common to both Newton and Descartes (atomistic as well as completely matter-filled) share the properties of being infinite (or at least indefinite) and equal (as opposed to the hierarchically organized cosmos of antiquity). If Spinoza’s physics is an alternative, it is an alternative to the characterization of equal “space” held by both Descartes and Newton. Instead, one finds in Spinoza’s Ethics a description of nature as the determinate (yet fluid) expressions of forces (in Spinoza’s language, affects) which — depending on the proportion of forces which come in contact with one another — impact, constitute, and re-configure each other.

What is more, this physics of affects — viewed from another angle — is simultaneously an ethics insofar as it deals with the ways in which humans interact with one another. In what follows, this paper will first discuss...

6. Newton’s formulation (published in 1687) runs as follows: “Every body perseveres in its state of being at rest or of moving [...] except insofar as it is compelled to change its state by forces impressed,” in Isaac Newton, Principia, trans. I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 416. Given that Spinoza was composing the Ethics in the 1660s, this would put his own formulation almost thirty years ahead of Newton’s published formulation.


8. I take my understanding of ‘physics’ from Aristotle — physics is the inquiry which is concerned with things insofar as they exhibit (i.e., contain a principle of) motion (Metaphysics, 1061b28-29 and 1064a31-32). Lee Rice is correct in pointing out that, in the more technical and modern sense, Spinoza does not provide the “empirical laws which would satisfy [the] requirements” of a specialized physics and would (from this perspective) be better understood instead as “physicalistic” (see Rice’s commentary which follows, p. 23).
Spinoza’s conception of physics as an alternative to both Descartes’ plenum of extended substance and Newton’s atomism. Second, Spinoza’s conception of physics will be explicated. Third, this paper will discuss how Spinoza’s conception of physics is also a conception of ethics. This paper, therefore, will assume the following structure:10

1. **Spinoza against atomism: Nature abhors a vacuum** (i.e., Spinoza’s one substance prevents the occurrence of any real, ontological distinctions between things).

2. **Spinoza against the plenum: Nature as forces** (i.e., Spinoza’s one substance is not an underlying “ground” which subsequently gives rise to modes, but is itself the expression of modal forces).

3. **Affects as determinate expressions of forces** (i.e., insofar as forces undergo other forces in differing proportions, they can be said to affect one another. Affects, then, are to be understood as determinate expressions of such forces).

4. **The ethics of Spinoza’s physics** (i.e., Spinoza’s physics of forces/affects can be understood, from a different standpoint, as constitutive of his ethical project).

Before proceeding to the first section of this paper, however, a word must be said as to how the phrase “modal distinctions” is used. Spinoza is here

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9. I take my understanding of ‘ethics’ from David Lachterman who takes ethics in an Aristotelian manner, “as the settled or characteristic ways human beings have of acting in the world or of comporting themselves toward one another or toward themselves” (David Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity* [New York: Routledge, 1989], p. xi).


10. I owe the structure of this paper to the clear structure of Daniel Garber’s *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics*. 
taken to be an advocate of nominalism. On this reading, Spinoza believes that language is unable (due to its inherently abstract nature) to capture fully the movement of nature’s expressions (i.e., modes) because such expressions are always in movement. Given this, Spinoza does not view nature and nature’s modes as really distinct. This view of nature will be addressed more fully during the discussions of E2p13lem7 in parts I and III of this paper.

While this paper focuses primarily on Spinoza’s physical digression, other sections of the Ethics (as well as other texts by Spinoza) will be discussed at appropriate moments.

I. Spinoza against Atomism: Nature Abhors a Vacuum

Spinoza’s rejection of atomism, in the physical digression begins with E2p13lem1 “Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance.” Differently stated, bodies are distinguished from each other in the way (modus) they become expressed — they are modally distinct. Unlike Spinoza’s one substance, which is conceived only through itself (E1def3) and which cannot admit of any internal distinction (E1p29schol-E1p31dem), bodies are distinguished from each other only by virtue of the movements which they undergo in the context of substance/nature. As Spinoza states at 1p15schol: “[M]atter is everywhere the same, and […] parts are distinguished in it only insofar as we conceive matter to be affected in different ways, so that its parts are distinguished only modally, but not really.”

11. The realist/nominalist debate, regarding Spinoza’s philosophy, is far too large a topic to be adequately dealt with in this paper. However, for examples of nominalist readings of Spinoza, see (1) Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951), (2) Yirmiyahu Yovel, Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and (3) Lee Rice and Steve Barbone’s introduction and notes to Spinoza’s Letters.

12. A fuller discussion of nature as natura naturans and nature as natura naturata would far exceed the limits of this paper. In the present context, however, it can be said that natura naturata is substance/nature in/as its indefinite amount of modal expressions. Natura naturans, on the other hand (while admitting of no real, ontological distinction from natura naturata), is nature understood as an irreducible individual. Differently stated, natura naturans is nature “viewed” from a perspective not available to human beings insofar as it involves no predications or parts (such as time, space, body, motion, rest, etc.). E2p13lem1 of the physical digression states, therefore, that bodies (in their modal distinctness from one another) refer to substance as natura naturata.

13. “[U]nde ejus partes modaliter tantum distinguuntur, non autem realiter;”
This idea of being “modally distinct” might suggest that Spinoza’s discussion regarding bodies, movement, rest (and modes in general) is a superficial one. After all, if this discussion doesn’t relate to nature “in itself,” but only as human beings rationally (or worse, imaginatively) conceive it, then of what value is discourse concerning modes (and their manifold parts)? Spinoza, however, gives a nuanced answer to this question — concerning fluidity — in Letter 6 to Oldenburg (concerning Robert Boyle’s *Certain Physiological Essays*):

In my view, notions which derive from popular usage, or which explicate Nature not as it is in itself but as it is related to the human senses, should certainly not be regarded as concepts of the highest generality, nor should they be mixed (not to say confused) with notions that are pure and which explicate Nature as it is in itself. Of the latter kind are motion, rest and their laws; of the former kind are visible, invisible, hot, cold, and to say it at once, also fluid, solid, etc.

At first glance, Spinoza seems to be making a sharp distinction between topics such as “movement and rest” (which express nature “in itself”) and topics such as “fluidity and solidity” (which only express our conventional ways of viewing nature). However, Spinoza does not (and, in fact, cannot) suggest that there is an ontological distinction between the former and latter kind of topic. This means that perception of nature “in itself” only modally distinct from our imaginations about nature. What Spinoza desires, therefore, is that we understand the involvement of movement/rest in fluidity/solidity. Simply put, we need to investigate the causes (Spinoza calls it the “necessity”) of movement/rest with respect to fluidity/solidity. In the language of the TdIE, Spinoza holds that humans, in order to emend their intellects, need to “connect (colligamus) rightly from [nature] the differences, agreements and oppositions of things” [§ 25; brackets mine]. In summary, rather than discount inquiries concerning bodies (and ultimately modes), Spinoza holds that such inquiries must be undertaken if one is to understand that nature is the manifold expressions of bodies, forces, and modes. Indeed, for Spinoza, there is nothing else aside from nature and nature’s modal expressions (E1p6cor, E1p15dem, and E1p28dem). And since there can be only one substance (E1p14cor1) from which modes cannot be distinct, it follows that substance/nature, as stated above, is its modal expressions.

14. Again, it needs to be emphasized that Spinoza is here referring to *natura naturata*. Of the perspective which Spinoza calls *natura naturans*, we can say and know nothing.
We are now in a position to continue our discussion of the physical digression in E2, as it concerns Spinoza’s rejection of atomism. In E2p13lem4, Spinoza explicitly confronts the issue concerning how a body is able to persevere through the many motions which it undergoes:

If, of a body, or of an Individual, which is composed of a number of bodies, some are removed, and at the same time as many others of the same nature take their place, the [...] Individual will retain its nature, as before, without any change of form. 
Dem.: For [...] bodies are not distinguished in respect to substance; what constitutes the form of the Individual consists [...] in the union of the bodies. [...] But this [...] is retained even if a continual change of bodies occurs. Therefore, the Individual will retain its nature, as before, both in respect to substance, and in respect to mode, q.e.d.

In other words, the stability of bodies is due to — in fact our bodies are constituted by — certain proportions of movement and rest (i.e., forces). And in E2p13lem5, Spinoza continues this line of thinking as follows: “If the parts composing an Individual become greater or less, but in such a proportion that they all keep the same ratio of motion and rest to each other as before, then the Individual will likewise retain its nature, as before, without any change of form.”

At this point, we need to remind ourselves of what Spinoza means by “individual” (in fact, this term occurs in E2def7 — i.e., of “singular things”). The definition reads as follows: “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of Individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.” An individual, then, is a singular thing. And a singular thing is a concrete ratio of motion and rest such that it can group together with (or break apart from) other singular things/individuals. Taken with Spinoza’s concept of body in E2p13lem4&5, this suggests that there is no irreducible, fundamental atomistic datum which forms the building blocks of everything else. There is, in sharp contrast, only the forces of movement and rest which form, constitute and deform bodies. As the ratio of forces changes, the formation of these bodies changes.

But Spinoza is not merely referring to (conventionally understood) “physical” bodies when he discusses singular things. This definition refers to all aspects of human beings, as Spinoza suggests in his Short Treatise on
God, Man, and His Well-Being: “If such a body has and preserves its proportion — say of 1 to 3 — the soul and the body will be like ours now are; they will of course, be constantly subject to change, but not to such a great change that it goes beyond the limits of from 1 to 3; and as much as it changes, so also the soul changes each time.”¹⁵ In other words, human beings are determinate proportions of motion and rest. And since, “mind” and “body” (or in the language of Spinoza’s early Short Treatise, “soul”) are only modally distinct,¹⁶ we can say that (for Spinoza) issues of body, movement, and rest apply not just to the (conventionally understood) “physical realm” of existence, but to modal existence as such.

Thus, human finite modes are determinate (yet changeable — i.e., fluid) ratios of force (e.g., movement and rest). Finally, in E2p3lem7, Spinoza brings together his anti-atomistic stance with his conception of substance/nature in an Aristotelian fashion — i.e., nature is constituted by indefinitely many changes of force, but nature itself (as a whole) never changes;¹⁷ “The whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual.”¹⁸ It is this one single forceful individual (substance/nature) constituted by ratios of motion and rest, on the basis of which an anti-atomistic stance (against thinkers such as Newton) can be attributed to Spinoza. Such an individual is also that by which Spinoza levels his anti-plenum criticism (which is directed at Descartes). It is to Spinoza’s second kind of criticism that we shall now turn.

¹⁵. Don Garrett interprets this (in the context of his view of Spinozistic metaphysical individuation) as meaning that human bodies are comprised of “fixed ratios of motion and rest” (Garrett, p. 77; italics mine). However, it is not clear to me just how “fixed” Spinoza views such ratios/proportions to be. Clearly, they are fixed enough that human beings don’t immediately transform into insects. However, humans do go through processes of coming to be and passing away.

¹⁶. For the purpose of this paper, the language and audience of the Short Treatise don’t here appear to be in tension with Spinoza’s other works. Recall E2p13: “The object (objectum) of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or (sive) a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else.”

¹⁷. I have in mind De Gen. et Corr. 2.10 336a15-337a34.

¹⁸. This claim can be understood in two ways: (1) qua natura naturata, nature is constituted by forces, and therefore never (as a whole) changes insofar as there continue to be forces, and (2) qua natura naturans, nature is one irreducible individual which admits of no change insofar as it admits of no parts, predications, or movement (e.g., forces). This is what Spinoza means in E5p17 when he states, “God [natura naturans] is without passions, and is not affected with any affect of Joy or Sadness” [brackets mine].
II. Spinoza against the Plenum: Nature as Forces

But if Spinoza truly is a monist, and if all modes are merely ways in which nature comes to expression, then in what sense can Spinoza reject the notion of a plenum? Put differently, while both Descartes and Spinoza reject the notion of a vacuum, their respective understanding of “vacuum” is radically distinct. Descartes believes that nature is constituted by differing amounts of stable matter thus leaving no room for the existence of empty space. Spinoza, in sharp contrast, believes that nature is constituted by forces which are fluid and continuous motion. There would be no “vacuum,” in Spinoza’s view, because there would be no region of nature which does not amount precisely to this continuous interaction of moving forces. In order to see Spinoza’s alternative, we must begin at E2p13lem3dem (in the physical digression):

Bodies [...] are singular things which [...] are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest; and so [...] each must be determined necessarily to motion or rest by another singular thing, viz., [...] by another body, which [...] either moves or is at rest. But this body also (by the same reasoning) could not move or be at rest if it had not been determined by another to motion or rest, and this again (by the same reasoning) by another, and so on, to infinity.

In other words, bodies (insofar as they are singular things) admit of continuous motion by virtue of their being determined by other bodies. And in E2p13lem3cor, as stated above, Spinoza goes on to derive Newton’s first law of motion: “From this it follows that a body in motion moves until it is determined by another body to rest; and that a body at rest also remains at rest until it is determined to motion by another.” If we understand the process of motion and rest to explain how bodies move through empty spaces in order to cause motion and rest in other bodies, then this part of the physical digression appears to contradict Spinoza’s adherence to Descartes rejection of empty space. How can we understand E2p13lem3dem & cor as being inclusive with, rather than exclusive to, Spinoza’s Cartesian-esque rejection of the vacuum (as, for example, in E1p15schol)?

We get a first glimpse at the Spinozistic alternative in Spinoza’s discussion of composite bodies (at E2p13def in the physical digression):

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of
Different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain and fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

Simply put, change occurs by the composition or decomposition of fluid, determinate bodies; space need not enter into the equation, for Spinoza. The situation is not one of static or distinct bodies which propel each other into motion by virtue of their concurrent mechanistic contact. Instead, bodies (which, insofar as they are singular things admitting only of modal distinctness, includes all aspects of modal existence) conjoin and disjoin with each other to form larger or smaller individuals. This continuous conjoining and disjoining through the alternation between ratios of motion and rest constitutes what Spinoza calls “fluidity.” With his concept of modal distinctness (and its respectively fluid motion), Spinoza is able to deny both the straightforward notion of a plenum and the possibility of real empty space (through which atomistic “things” would interact).

To continue this way of thinking, we must turn to the first postulate of Spinoza’s physical digression: “The human Body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite.” This means that humans are comprised of many forces and undergo many affections. Human composition is due precisely to the proportion of motion and rest (i.e., forces) which, at any given time, constitutes such composition. Spinoza continues this line of thinking in E2p13post3 when he states, “The individuals composing the human Body itself, are affected by external bodies in very many ways.” Unlike certain commentators who wish to suggest that the “mind” and “body” are really (i.e., not merely modally) distinct in Spinoza’s philosophy, we believe (a) given the merely modal difference between “mind” and “body,” for Spinoza, that (b) the claims of the postulates refer not only to “physical” bodies, but rather to all of the individual composite parts which make up modes. This means

19. It is important here to make the distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’. Whereas ‘space’ refers to a static and empty state through which bodies move, ‘place’ refers to that momentary region in which certain forces interact. For Spinoza, bodies/forces/modes all occupy ‘places’ which change as the ratio of motion and rest changes. The interactive, conjoining/disjoining movement by which forces change ‘places’ (despite their not existing in empty ‘space’) is what Spinoza means by “fluidity.”
that human beings (not merely human “physical” bodies) are affected in many ways.

In summary, Spinoza is able to state (with Descartes) that (1) a vacuum does not exist in nature, and (2) that bodies (and by the same token, modes in general) interact with each other in virtue of ratios of motion and rest because he views such interaction as taking place between determinate and fluid modes which forcefully compose and decompose in the context of nature/substance understood as one continuous individual. Differently stated, Spinoza’s monistic substance is constituted by ratios of forces. Spinoza calls such forces “affects.” We are now able to view Spinoza’s conception of “affects” as the concrete, determinate expression of such forces.

III. Affects as Determinate Expressions of Forces

At this point, the following objection might be raised: if Spinoza wishes to speak in a way which doesn’t (at least conventionally) refer to “physical” bodies, why does he use the language of mechanistic causality (i.e., motion and rest)? Conversely, since he uses such language, isn’t it a fair assumption to understand his physical digression as referring primarily to “physical” bodies? Why should we extend such language to other aspects of modes as well?

As stated earlier, understanding the use of Spinoza’s language to refer to modes as such rather than merely to “physical bodies” (as if such a distinction were warranted) is motivated by a specific understanding of what Spinoza means by the phrase “modally distinct.” Since nothing is or can be “outside” of nature, and since nothing “inside” nature admits of real distinction, it follows that Spinoza’s language cannot simply refer to one part of a mode in abstraction from the other parts given that modes are constituted by movement. Differently stated (in the language of E2p13lem7), if the parts of the one individual (called nature/substance) admit of infinite variation, Spinoza cannot refer to one part as if it were a static and distinct atom without abstracting from that which he wants to address — viz., the changes which constitute nature’s expressions. For this reason, we take Spinoza’s pronouncements concerning bodies (insofar as they are singular things) as applying to modes (or rather nature’s constitutive expressions).

20. For a reading of Spinoza which argues that Spinoza had to be referring only to physical things when he employed the language of “motion and rest,” see Gideon Segal’s “Ideas, Affects and Causality,” in the NASS Monograph #6 (1997), pp. 3-21.
Spinoza suggests this wider use of “motion and rest” when (near the end of the Short Treatise), he states the following:

When the degrees of motion and rest are not equal in all parts of our body, but some have more motion than others, there arises a difference of feeling (e.g., from this comes the different kind of pain we feel when we are struck with a little stick in the eyes or on the hands).

When the external causes which bring changes about differ in themselves, and do not all have the same effects, there arises a difference of feeling in one and the same part (e.g., the difference of feeling from a blow with a piece of wood or iron on the same hand).

And again, if the change which happens in a part is a cause of its returning to its original proportion, from this there arises the joy we call peace, pleasurable activity, and cheerfulness (§ 16).21

This passage shows how feelings at least arise from changes of motion and rest in “physical” bodies. More is needed, however, to substantiate our claim that such language, for Spinoza, is not meant in a reductive sense. Even Spinoza’s letter to Oldenberg (Ep32), where Spinoza holds that “every body, insofar as it exists as modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe, and as agreeing with the whole and cohering with the other parts” merely establishes coherence between parts. We have, therefore, moved from extrinsic physical reduction to intrinsic coherence between parts of nature; we now must show how Spinoza views these parts as admitting only of modal distinction. This will occur during Spinoza’s discussions of affects and conatus.

In E3def3, Spinoza defines “affect” in the following way: “By affect (affectum), I understand affections (affectiones) of the Body by which the Body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections” [italics mine]. Here, Spinoza gives us a way to conceive of “body” and “mind” (given their modal distinctness) as substantially “the same.” Affects are not primarily physiological, nor do they provide relations of coherence for two distinct realms (i.e., “mind” and “body”). Instead, affects (as bodily affections) and affects (as the ideas of such affections) are modally distinct. They arise together simultaneously. We are now beyond the realm of mechanistic causality and into what Spinoza calls “involvement” [from E2p49] (i.e.,

21. See also the initial definitions and the definitions of the affects in E3.
that “mind” can neither be nor be conceived without “body,” and “body” can neither be nor be conceived without “mind”). Spinoza continues on the theme of involvement in E3p2schol:

[Does not experience [...] teach that if, on the one hand the Body is inactive, the Mind is at the same time incapable of thinking? For when the Body is at rest in sleep, the Mind at the same time remains senseless with it, nor does it have the power of thinking, as it does when awake [italics mine].

Put slightly differently, the actions of “bodies” and the actions of “minds” happen together in different ways. The distinction, however, is precisely that of the way (modus) in which the action happens. “Mind” and “body,” therefore, are merely modally distinct.22

But even if “mind” and “body” are only modally distinct (i.e., they amount to different ways of viewing modes), how does this connect with affects? Furthermore, how do these modal affects amount to fluid and singular forces (as described in the previous section)?

First, let us address the question of the fluidity and singularity of affects. Regarding the fluidity of affects, Spinoza tells us at E3p51 that “Different men can be affected differently by one and the same object; and one and the same man can be affected differently at different times by one and the same object.” Given the lack of real distinction between humans and other “objects,” this passage says that affects are so fluid in the affections they produce that even the same human can be affected differently (given time, place, respect, circumstance, etc.).23

Concerning the issue of affective singularity, Spinoza has this to say at E3p57: “Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of one from the essence of another.” In other words, each affect is unique both (1) in its difference from another affect, and (2)

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22. I agree with Rice that the modal distinction cannot provide “trans-attribute identification of individuals” (Rice, p. 25). I would go so far as to suggest that, metaphysically speaking, there cannot (for Spinoza) be any strict identity at all. In suggesting that “mind” and “body” are merely modally distinct, I wish only to emphasize Spinoza’s non-dualistic way of conceiving “difference” and “sameness” together.

23. Spinoza inherits this notion of affects from Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction, which states that a thing cannot both be and not be itself at the same time and in the same respect.
in its affecting a human differently at different times and respects.

But some may understand Spinoza’s passage at E3p57 as referring primarily to the term ‘essence’. If ‘essence’ suggests a stable and static feature or quality of a thing, then (again), this understanding of Spinoza as emphasizing fluid forces runs into trouble. Spinoza defines ‘essence’ at E2def2 as “that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” Is this the conventionally stable and unchanging view of ‘essence’ to which many adhere? If Spinoza’s doctrine of conatus (i.e., striving to persevere in one’s being [E3p6]) were not a crucial part of his philosophy, then such a view of ‘essence’ might hold. However, Spinoza connects his understanding of essence directly with his understanding of conatus (in E3p7): “The striving (conatus) by which each thing strives (conatur) to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.”

In other words, essence is nothing other than striving to persevere in being?24 Affects are singular, fluid, and conative in their composing and decomposing (in nature). And if there is anything that constitutes affects — if there is anything which is “essential” to affects — it is their individual striving for such composition, decomposition, and recomposition. In sum, then, affects are the forces which constitute and express nature in its infinite diversity and indeterminate ways. When we return to the physical digression, we see that Spinoza has this conception in mind in E2p13lem7schol: “[W]e see how a composite Individual can be affected in many ways, and still preserve its nature. [...] But if we should now conceive of another, composed of a number of Individuals of a different nature, we shall find that it can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature” [italics mine]. This suggests that the forces which constitute human beings (as well as the whole of nature) are not relegated to the realm of physics, but have a still wider relevance. We can see this wider relevance (concerning the affective forces which constitute humans) when we cite Spinoza’s statement at E3p9schol: “When this striving, is

24. Essence and existence (while not strictly identical) are, substantially, the same. At this point. Rice expresses his concern that my emphasis of the term “fluidity” makes “Spinoza’s notion of the individuation of modes [...] mysterious if not self-contradictory” (Rice, p. 27). However, my claim is that Spinoza’s rejection of dualism ultimately amounts to a rejection of atomic discretion as a property of individuated modes. Differently stated, what it means to be an individuated mode is to continuously undergo motion and change.

related only to the Mind, it is called Will; but when it is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. *This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man*” [italics mine].
IV. The Ethics of Spinoza’s Physics

In the introduction to this paper, we defined “ethics” as “the ways in which humans affect one another.” We are now in a position, given our previous discussion of affects, to show why Spinoza’s *Ethics* (including the physical digression) is not based on physics or metaphysics (contrary to his ironic and mocking statement to Blyenburgh in (Ep27)).

In the E2p13post4 of the physical digression, Spinoza addresses the question as to why human “bodies” need other “bodies” in order to survive: “The human Body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated.” Given that “bodies” are not really distinct from “minds,” we can say that humans need to interact with each other in ways that allow for preservation of existence (or as Spinoza puts it, “regeneration”). This amounts to saying, as Aristotle does in the *Politics* [1253a2], that humans are political animals (i.e., animals who are constituted by their relation to the *polis*). The way, therefore, in which humans become ethical (for Spinoza, like Aristotle) is to practice undergoing (i.e., by being forcefully affected by) habits which are good for society. This is indeed a forceful process, and Spinoza attests to this in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. He finds it quite hard, in the beginning, to change his plan of life. However, “although in the beginning these intervals were rare, and lasted a very short time, nevertheless, after the true good became more and more known to me, the intervals became more and more frequent and longer” [§ 11; italics mine].

The point here is that by allowing himself to be affected in certain ways, the “intervals” (i.e., the forces which Spinoza underwent) took on a longer time and assumed a firmer character. Therefore, while the issue of affects can certainly be used to explain theories of metaphysical individuation concerning humans (as Don Garrett has done),25 or physical characteristics of nature, it can also explain how humans get along with each other in nature and, in fact, how humans get along with other aspects of nature. Spinoza puts it thus in the E3pref: “I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.”26

Conclusion

25. See Don Garrett’s “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individuation.”

In E5, right in the midst of Spinoza’s discussions of eternity, we find a remarkable statement at E5p39schol: “[W]e must note here that we live in continuous change.” In other words, while the one individual substance/nature perseveres eternally, we finite human modes do not. Not only that, but even during a lifetime, we undergo indefinitely many changes due to the fact that our constitutive elements are proportions of fluid affects. This has striking implications for Spinoza’s Ethics insofar as it is a text dealing with ethics. Again, one thinks of certain pronouncements of Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics (here paraphrased): (1) with respect to action, there is no such thing as uniformity [1104a4-5], (2) ethical virtues deal with feelings and actions [1106b24-25], and finally (3) that actions always concern particular instances [1107a23]. To sum up, ethics deals not with universal theorems, but with practical individual cases. It deals not with disembodied rationality, but with affects, appetites, and how humans are (or can be) habituated toward ethical directions.

Ethical nature, therefore, is always changing, subject to laws of motion and rest in the same way that physical nature is. However, we do not have to look as far back as Aristotle to find a sympathetic predecessor to Spinoza’s fluid and dynamic view of human beings. According to Michel de Montaigne, “There is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.” 27 Given the tremendous diversity and change which one finds in Spinoza’s conception of nature, we might suggest that the Ethics was written in a geometric style in order to better reveal the physical, metaphysical and ethical aspects of nature’s expressions. 28


Comments on Jeffrey Bernstein
The Ethics of Spinoza’s Physics

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Professor Bernstein has provided some important insights into the relationship between ethics and physics in Spinoza. I think that, without loss of any of these insights, I would tend to follow Wim Klever in revising the title of Bernstein’s paper to ‘The Physics of Spinoza’s Ethics’; since Bernstein succeeds admirably in showing that the approach which Spinoza takes to ethics (in E5) and morality (in E4) is inherently physicalistic. I have some quarrels with the summary roadmap which he provides from Descartes (really Galileo) to Newton in positioning Spinoza’s own model. These are primarily historical in nature, so I shall get them out of the way first, as a means of underlining the difference between my understanding of Spinoza’s physicalism and Bernstein’s understanding of Spinoza’s physics.

1. From Galileo to Newton: Physics and Physicalism

Professor Bernstein argues for central differences separating the cartesian, spinozian, and newtonian concepts of inertia and mass, and in this he follows a long historical tradition in the history of philosophy of science. More recent scholars have, however, tended to emphasize the similarities and continuity which run from Galileo through Newton. While the truth probably lies somewhere between these two lines, there is much to be said for setting aside the nationalistic debates between the newtonians and the cartesians, separated sometimes more by the English Channel than by any strong conceptual differences, in order to examine the logical structure of their models. In the short digression on physical theory following E2P13, Spinoza’s presentation of the law of inertia is in fact closer to Descartes’s version in the PPH than Spinoza’s summary of the latter in his own PPC. I would also question whether Newton’s own statement of the law requires the movement of bodies through “empty space” (Bernstein, p. 2) for two reasons. First, the general scholium to Newton’s own Principia makes it clear that all space is pervaded with aether, and Newton certainly character-

izes the aether in geometrical terms which would satisfy both Descartes’s and Spinoza’s concept of res extensa. Secondly, the law of inertia (as Descartes and Spinoza clearly note) accounts for rectilinear motion only; and all rectilinear is kinematically relative both in newtonian and cartesian physics (it is only for curvilinear motion that the newtonian concept of a force distinct from inertia plays a role). And since the motion described by the law of inertia is relative, it objectively characterizes not a single body in empty space, but rather a system or field of bodies as a (relatively) isolated kinematic system.

In at least this sense we have a continuous development leading from Galileo through Newton. Galileo introduces inertial motion, but at least toys with the idea of curvilinear inertia as a means of accounting for Kepler’s Laws. Descartes states the rectilinear notion of inertial motion unequivocally, and Spinoza follows him. This leaves Kepler’s Laws as “nomological danglers” for which the cartesian vortices provided an unsuccessful reduction. But while Spinoza certainly emphasizes the dynamical features of extension in the Ethics, Grene and others have argued that cartesian matter is not the purely kinematic “passive lump” as is often read into Descartes’s own remarks concerning God as the “prime mover” who must kickstart a passive extended universe. Indeed, as Grene has so eloquently suggested, the cartesian concept of “rigidity” is roughly equivalent

2. It is to be noted that, while Newton takes the principle of inertia as axiomatic, Spinoza follows Descartes in the Ethics in trying to derive it from the concepts of motion and rest. Spinoza’s proof is in the corollary following E2P13Lemma3Dem. The analogous proof in Descartes is at PPH2,37. Our notes to the Shirley translation of the PPC provide some framework for the inertial principle in Galileo and Descartes, and further historical detail is to be found in Lécrivain 1977 (from which a number of our notes on PPC2 are drawn).

3. The rectilinear nature of inertia follows directly from Spinoza’s Axiom 2 following E2P13. The use of a rigid body in the diagram is an anticipation of the parallelogram law. See also Descartes, PPH2,39, which is the second law of nature.

4. This is the basis of what Bennett calls Spinoza’s “field metaphysics.” It is worth noting that Einstein perceived this as an immediate consequence of Spinoza’s analysis, but saw it as a development from Galileo. See De Dijn 1991 and Balibar 1984.

5. See Axiom2 following E2P13lemma3.

6. Spinoza writes to Tschirnhaus (Ep83) that Descartes’s definition of extension is wrong. There is some anticipation of this in the PPC, where Spinoza, interpreting Descartes, notes (PPC2Def1) that “Extension is that which consists of three dimensions. But by extension we do not understand the act of extending, or anything distinct from quantity.” For Spinoza extension or quantity is precisely an actus extendendi. See Ramond 1998.
to what Kant (following Newton) would later call a “force of resistance.”

Newton’s contribution to this development is, of course, *gravitation*; but Newton himself uses this term to describe the way bodies *behave*, eschewing (at least officially) the notion of a force of gravity underlying the behavior. He thus provides the necessary reductive framework for deducing Kepler’s Laws, but (as Leibniz was quick to argue) leaves the *phenomenon* of gravitation largely unexplained. In his correspondence with Clarke, Leibniz also utterly failed to provide the requisite explanation.

If we now glance back at Spinoza’s remarks following E2P13 we can see, thanks to some of Bernstein’s remarks, what Spinoza wants the resolution or explanation to be. Though the term *conatus* is notably lacking here, the ‘sameness of proportion of motion and rest’ clearly implies the concept of conation — as well it ought, since the concept of *conatus* was widely used in the physics of Spinoza’s time in a manner roughly equivalent to our modern concept of inertial mass. If we read it in that manner, and Bernstein’s analysis certain offers solid reasons for doing so, then E3P7 asserts an important principle, the equivalence of inertial and gravitational mass (or simply “the principle of equivalence,” as Einstein calls it).

Can we then credit Spinoza with anticipating the principle of equivalence? Klever has argued as much in a number of articles on Spinoza as physicist, and Einstein seems to credit Spinoza with such an insight as well. But, alas, Klever’s judgement is rash, and Einstein’s too reverential. The principle of equivalence describes a co-variance which the laws of physics are to meet in the description of inertial or gravitational fields; but, without the actual laws, it is totally empty. These laws, of course, would provide a defi-

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7. See also Tournadre 1982, Garber 1986, Messeri 1984, and Van der Hoeven 1980 for Descartes’s views on the dynamics of matter. Descartes also makes use of the elements of the later concept of conatus in explaining rest as a form of ‘dynamic equilibrium’ (see PPH2.26: “No more action is required for motion than for rest”).

8. The transposition of cartesian rigidity into a ‘force’ of resistance in Newton is elaborated by Vuillemin 1955; but, despite Vuillemin’s eloquent efforts, I doubt that Kant understood its function in Newton.

9. Newton’s counterarguments to Leibniz’s efforts to ‘relativize’ curvilinear motion are the celebrated examples of the bucket and rotating disk. Leibniz was unable to provide any explanation which would account for these: the general principle was first stated by Ernst Mach. See Koyré 1982 and Alexander 1956.

10. It is to be noted that the term *conatus* is not introduced as a special term at the beginning of E3. I suggest that Spinoza does not treat it as a special term for his system because he is using it in the sense in which it was customarily employed in the physics of his time.
nition in use of what counts as matter; but neither Spinoza nor Leibniz could produce any such laws — Leibniz tried and failed, and Spinoza declined even to try.11 The so-called definition of a (material) individual in terms of a “constant ratio of motion and rest,” which Bernstein (pp. 7-8) applauds is in fact quite empty; since it provides no coordinative definition by which such a ratio is to be expressed or quantified.12 In short, Spinoza provides an interesting recipe for a physics as yet unborn, but no physics whatever. Let me rescue him a bit by saying that his system is physicalistic in the modern sense of this term:13 it provides the general logical outline of what physics is supposed to look like, without even attempting to go beyond the logic to the empirical laws which would satisfy such requirements. In this sense Newton’s general concept of matter is not so terribly different from Spinoza’s, but Newton was too good a physicist to let his physicalism get in the way of setting up a real system of laws. And Spinoza’s physicalism has a place for the concept of force (physical dynamics, as opposed to kinematics) no less than Newton’s.14

My other small complaint against Bernstein relates to his treating (pp. 4-5) Spinoza as an ‘anti-atomist’. This seems historically a bit off the mark as well. Except perhaps for Gassendi, atomism in the seventeenth century was not a major player in physics, but rather a component of ‘chymical’ theory; and it is in this sense that Boyle is one of its defenders.15 But the name of

11. One year before his death Spinoza writes to Tschirnhaus (Ep81) that Descartes’s laws are wrong, but does not propose new or better ones. I suggest that he had none to offer.
12. Matheron 1969 attempts to express this ratio in algebraic terms, but the effort is wholly wasted, since no physical referent is provided for the algebraic schemata.
13. The term was developed by Nelson Goodman (see his Structure of Appearance) as part of his logistic categorisation of ontologies. Physicalism is opposed to phenomenalism, nominalism to platonism, concrete to abstract. Spinoza’s system would be described accordingly as a concretistic nominalistic physicalism.
14. I think that Bernstein is mistaken, however, in referring to such forces as ‘affects’ (p. 12), since this term is reserved by Spinoza (see E3Def3) to such changes of state as increase or diminish the body’s control of its environment. An affect may indeed require the presence of a force (as a necessary condition), but the force is present with or without the affect (as E3P8 makes clear), and not all affections (changes of state) are affects in any case. He appears to abandon this identification in what follows, and assume only that such forces account for affects, rather than being identical with them.
15. Ep6 (to Oldenburg, probably written in early 1662) provides Spinoza’s most extensive discussion of Boyle’s corpuscular philosophy, but Spinoza does not offer any critique of atomism, but rather of Boyle’s experimental procedures and hypotheses. For commentary see Hall 1965, Lewis 1984, Rupert & Hall 1964, and Yakira 1988.
the game here is not the construction of fundamental laws of motion (whether galilean or newtonian), but rather the explanation of chemical phenomena. Atomism in this light was an alternative, not to plenum theory (which belonged properly to physics), but rather to paracelsian and aristotelian theories of the elements. The atoms of the new atomism did not have to be indivisible (despite the roots of the Greek term), but in order to act as an explanatory component for chemical interactions they did have to be totally **homogeneous**. And in this sense Spinoza is an atomist, for the *corpora simplicissima* mentioned in the material following E2P13 provide the necessary homogeneity for the chemical elements required by the new atomism.\(^{16}\)

My differences with Bernstein, as I noted in anticipation of their explicitation, may be differences of emphasis. It is certainly fruitful to see Spinoza as contributing original insights which separate him from his contemporaries; but it is no less useful to see him in a more developmental context which emphasizes the continuity of the project for the construction of a new view of nature which begins with Galileo, reaches a culminating point in Newton, but which is subject to further development and adjustment in Einstein.

### 2. Spinoza’s Physicalistic Ethics

Professor Bernstein follows a long, and I believe a correct, interpretative tradition in connecting the core elements of Spinoza’s ethics with the notion of *conatus*.\(^{17}\) And, since, conatus expresses itself affectively in the human subject, this move places affectivity at the centre of ethical theory, and (again as Bernstein underlines) E3 at the centre of Spinoza’s ethical project. Conatus is what Bennett calls a ‘trans-attribute’ term which can be applied to individuals within any attribute: the affects are not just bodily states (as in Descartes), but also the *ideas* which correspond to these under the parallelism (Bernstein p. 15).

There are some puzzles here, however, and metaphysical traps for the unwary. On p. 5 Bernstein adumbrates the ‘modal distinction’ as a means of

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\(^{16}\) Indeed Spinoza can even be interpreted as an ‘epicurean’. See Moreau 1994. The *Archives de Philosophie* #57 has several historical studies devoted to Spinoza and atomism.

\(^{17}\) Other examples are Grosholz 1994, Cremaschi 1981, and Garber 1996. If one can legitimately speak of a ‘cartesian ethics’, then even here some of Spinoza’s development follows directly from Descartes. See Lennon 1994, for example, on the problem of individuation.
distinguishing matter as res extensa (everywhere the same) and matter as a collection of individuals. But on page 16 mind and body are said to be ‘modally distinct’. Now one really can’t have it both ways. If what is to be dubbed a modal distinction is to apply within an attribute to distinguish the totality which the attribute is from the individuals which comprise it, then the same modal distinction cannot be used as a means of trans-attribute identification of individuals. In short, whatever the distinction between mind and body (p. 16), it has to do with identification of individuals across attributes. And, whatever the distinction between matter and its ‘parts’, it has to do with the integration of individuals within a single attribute; and no distinction, modal or otherwise, can handle both chores.18

I have suggested in a recent study19 that identity of individuals across different attributes is itself a referentially opaque relation. I would argue, as a logical consequence of E2P7, that trans-attribute identity of individuals is not even a transitive relation. This is a puzzling feature, but I don’t believe that Bernstein’s attempt to assimilate it under a modal distinction offers much help in clarifying it. Spinoza would also surely object to the consequence which Bernstein attempts to derive from it (p. 15): that mind and body are “substantially the same.”20

The nontransitivity of trans-attribute modal identity is in fact mentioned by Spinoza in Ep66 to Tschirnhaus, who had queried him about the ideas of attributes other than extension. Spinoza’s reply:

...I say that although each thing is expressed in infinite modes in the infinite intellect of God, the infinite ideas in which it is expressed cannot constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but an infinity of minds.

So consider two individuals A and B, the first in the attribute of extension and the second in some third attribute. For each there is an idea of that individual, C the idea of A and D the idea of B; and C and D are both what Spinoza calls ‘minds’. We have the following results via E2P7 and Ep66:

18. Lantin 1994 makes a similar point.
20. Even if ‘substantially’ here is taken in a looser non-spinozistic sense, the mind/body identity must relate to their mapping as modes of distinct attributes, not to the identity of the totality of modes with substance.
A=B, A=C, B=D, C!=D

which provides necessary and sufficient conditions for a nontransitive relation of identity for modes across attributes. Call this ‘weak identity’ as opposed to strong or transitive identity. If the modal distinction applied by Bernstein early in his paper explains the identity of substance and its modes, then it is transitive, and cannot explain trans-modal identity.21

The remarks (pp. 17-18) about the ‘fluidity’ of essence also appear troubling. Fluidity cannot be anything here but a metaphor, since the concept is used by Spinoza only as a property of bodies. We are told, correctly I believe, in the earlier sections on physics, that the constant ratio of motion/rest is what accounts for this or that individual as a distinct thing. If we now say that this ratio, and the conatus associated with it, is ‘fluid’ in even a metaphorical sense, Spinoza’s notion of the individuation of modes becomes mysterious if not self-contradictory.22 Why not say instead that the actual essence of an individual is, as Spinoza notes, an eternal truth — i.e., not fluid but fixed — and that the constant changes to which Bernstein calls our attention (following Spinoza) are due to the interaction of this relatively constant essence with a constantly changing environment? We do not lose sight of the fact that change is an omnipresent part of our lives in so doing, but merely decline to root the change in what Spinoza calls the essence itself. Matson’s suggestion here that the spinozistic notion of essence is quite similar to our concept of a ‘genetic code’ strikes me as quite helpful.23

None of the above threatens Bernstein’s analysis of Spinoza’s physico-ethical framework, so far as I can see, since it merely shifts metaphysically the underpinning of that framework from change as an internal force to change as a product of the interplay of organism and environment.24 And that ap-

21. Two consequences which do not follow from the above are worth noting. First, Spinoza’s claim in Ep66 is not contradictory or mysterious: weaker identities are widely used in model theory. Secondly, it does not follow that the order of individuals in the attribute of thought is ‘higher’ (i.e., of greater cardinality) than the order in other attributes. Nor, alas, does it follow that it is not higher, as I suspect that Spinoza believed that it did (see Rice 1996).


23. See Matson 1977, where the analogy is first presented, and also Matson 1990 for further development of it.

24. Spinoza’s account of the ‘definition’ of an essence or nature at E1P7Schol2 seems to require a fixity rather than fluidity as well.
pears to be the focus which Spinoza provides for his general account of affectivity at the beginning of E3.

There is also a very felicitous consequence of Bernstein’s metaphysical analysis which bears considerable fruit in his insightful summary of the ethical model, and I should like to end my comments by attending to this very positive feature. The analysis which Bernstein presents of the attribute of extension and the modality of bodies as individuals early on in his paper as a reflexion of the material following E2P13 makes it clear that, as he himself notes (p. 6), “. . . substance/nature . . . is its modal expressions” (emphasis mine).

In the closing scholium of the physical digression, Spinoza notes, with respect to the order of composition of more and more complex individuals, that:

> If we thus continue to infinity, we shall conceive the whole of nature as one individual whose parts — that is, all the constituent bodies — vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole.

That individual, the whole of material nature, is god/substance itself, not an infinite mode (whether mediate or immediate) as some commentators would have it. In introducing undergraduates to Spinoza, I have always started them on their journey with the physical digression in E2, since I believe that the infinite individual which ends the digression is just the substance which begins E1, but far less abstractly conceived.

In his paper, Bernstein suggests that, in addition to keeping E2P13seq in mind as we approach the beginning of the Ethics, we retain the model as we move into the “ethics within the Ethics” in E3, E4, and E5. I heartily applaud that interpretative suggestion, since it makes clear that, whether Spinoza is engaged in metaphysical (E1), psychological (E2 and E3), moral (E4), or ethical (E5) systematisation, the physicalistic model remains a dominating and defining feature of his theory. >From this it follows that a deeper analysis of Spinoza’s physical theory is not simply a propaedeutic to his metaphysics, but also a necessary condition for our understanding the roots and consequences of his ethical theory.
Bibliography


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Divine Law and the Right of the State:
Against a Textual Conjecture in the TTP

Fokke Akkerman

In Nass Monograph 9 (2000), Wim Klever proposes to change the transmitted text of the TTP in two passages of chapter 19, for which he refers to the edition of C. H. Bruder of 1846. Since I recently edited the Latin text of Spinoza’s TTP and have also translated it, I feel it is incumbent on me to comment upon this proposal. The passages in question are to be found within the broader context of the numbered paragraphs 10, 11, and 12 of the new edition, beginning with Certum est and ending at semper fuisse (page and line 614.4-616.28; Gebhardt 232.9-233.26).

In reading the Latin text as it stands, Klever feels uneasy, because, on the one hand, it is said that we ought “to practise piety towards all men without exception,” but, on the other hand, that we have to do so within the limits of the Right of the State. Let me quote four crucial phrases in the order in which they occur in the text:

A1: [S]olius [...] summae potestatis officium esse determinare, qua ratione unusquisque debet proximum pietate colere, hoc est, qua ratione unusquisque Deo obedire tenetur (614.22-24; G 232.25-28).

[T]hat it is [...] the duty of the sovereign alone to decide what form piety towards one’s neighbour should take, that is, in what way every man is required to obey God (Shirley 223.9-11).

B1: [Q]uandoquidem ex Dei mandato omnes (nullo excepto) pietate colere tenemur neminique damnum inferre, hinc sequitur nemini licere opem alciui cum alterius, et multo minus cum totius reipublicae, damno ferre (614.29-33; G 232-32-35).

For since we are bound by God’s command to practice [sic] piety towards all men without exception and to harm no man, it follows that no one is permitted to assist anyone to another’s hurt, far less to the detriment of the commonwealth as a whole (S 223.16-20).

A2: [A]deoque neminem posse proximum pietate colere secundum Dei mandatum, nisi pietatem et religionem publicae utilitati accomodet (614.33-616.2; G 232.35-233.1).

So no one can exercise piety towards his neighbour in accordance with God’s command unless his piety and religion conform to the public good (S 223.20-22).


And after Christ saw that they [the Hebrews] would be dispersed throughout the whole world, he taught that they would practise piety to all without exception (S 224.5-7).

Klever proposes to read in fragments B1 and B2, with Bruder, pietatem instead of pietate, with the consequence that in both cases omnes becomes the subject instead of the object of the verbal forms of colere. This is wholly misguided.

To begin with, I have two objections of a literary nature. The first is that Klever finds omnes pietate colere “a curious expression” (p. 20), but the
construction of *colere* with an accusative and an ablative occurs four times in these pages and it lends a firm structure to the whole. The grammar is quite normal and occurs elsewhere too: *Deum vera Religione colere* (TP 3/10); it is also classical. In my view the reading would become less coherent if we were told twice that God orders us to love our neighbour, and then, also twice, alternately, that God (or Christ) orders us to be pious.

I see in the word *omnes* in B1 an explanation of what is meant by *proximum* in A1. The emphatic *nullo excepto* (B1) and *absolute* (B2) would be pointless if we were ordered, all of us, without exception, to be pious as though God would allow some of us to be impious. My second objection is that in fragment B1 the antithetical parallelism (a very common device of good Latin style) of *omnes* [...] *pietate colere* [...] *neminique damnum inferre*, would be destroyed if we were to read *pietatem*. Mark that *omnes* is strongly opposed to *nemini*, and that the rest of the sentence (*hinc sequitur*, etc.) draws the conclusion from the combination of *omnes* [...] *pietate colere* and *nemini* [...] *damnum inferre*.

Moreover, there are two philological difficulties in Klever’s proposal. The first of these is that he assumes that “Either the transcriber of the text who prepared a fair copy or the type-setter must have made an error, which is not so strange since everybody who was educated as a Christian was and is convinced, then and now, that Christ teaches us to love everybody unconditionally, compatriot or not” (pp. 24-25). This is very unlikely. The TTP invites Christian dissent throughout, yet this would be the only instance of textual corruption on that count. Secondly, Bruder is not a reliable guide in this matter. He was the first editor of Spinoza in the nineteenth century to read the original sources carefully, and this gave him the opportunity to correct some mistakes, but, for the same reason, he was also capable of unwarranted interventions. This one seems to have been caused by inattentive reading.

The same can be seen in a number of translations, where in B1 or in B2 or in both the text is translated as if it had *pietatem*. The German translations by Jakob Stern, Gebhardt, and Gawlick translate in B1 *pietatem*, but in

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5. The conjunction *pietatem colere* is possible, of course, and occurs also in the text (616.5; G 233.5, cf. *cultum pietatis* 614.27; G 232.30), but it does not admit of an alternative translation.

6. 1886.


Fokke Akkerman

-37- Response to Klever

B2 pietate, regardless of what they read in the Latin. Of the French versions, Appuhn’s⁹ is in both passages correct, so is Moreau and Lagrée’s (1999), but Francès’¹⁰ just like the German translations, is wrong in B1 and correct in B2. All Spanish translations have the wrong translation in B1, except Domínguez,¹¹ which is correct in both places. His note on the question is quoted by Klever (p. 23). The two Italian translations I have seen, Droetto and Boscherini¹² and Dini¹³ are correct in both fragments, reading pietate. The English translations by Wernham¹⁴ and by Shirley are correct in both passages. So, too, are three complete translations into Dutch: Glazemaker,¹⁵ Meijer,¹⁶ and my own (1997). Klever’s is a strange case. In his paper he boasts: “I myself had never any difficulty in reading this passage of Spinoza’s famous nineteenth TTP chapter. The reason is [...] that I do not use the editions of Van Vloten-Land and Gebhardt, but the [...] Bruder edition” (p. 24). This, however, is not true, for in his own partial translation of 1999 he renders fragment B1 correctly (with pietate) and B2 wrongly (with pietatem).¹⁷

I conclude with two interpretative remarks on two aspects of the text where Klever has gone astray. First, as I said before, Klever is uneasy about the absolute character of the divine command to love one’s neighbour and, on the other hand, the necessity of the political implementation of this command (p. 19). Klever does not measure the distance between the two. He even writes: “The Mosaic prescription to hate one’s enemies [...] is not cancelled by Christ. [...] The phrase in question [i.e., fragment B2],

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however, seems to suggest precisely, that it nonetheless is cancelled and
substituted with the obligation to love all people in the world” (pp. 21-22).
But this is not a matter of substitution. The position of Spinoza is that
Christ’s teaching is of an entirely different order: “Christ [...] was sent not
to preserve the state and to institute laws, but only to teach universal law.
[...] Christ by no means abrogated the law of Moses. [...] His chief concern
was to teach moral doctrines, keeping them distinct from the laws of the
commonwealth” (212.18ff; G 70.33ff; S 61.34ff). On earth, only
“indications (traces, vestigia) of divine justice are to be found where just
men reign” says Spinoza in chapter 19, paragraph 8 (612.19-20; G
231.30-31; S 222.18-19).

Secondly, the law under which the Jews lived is described by Spinoza, in
chapter 19, paragraph 12, in three successive stages: (A) In their
independent state (imperium) they were bound by the Law of Moses; then
and there they adapted the religion that was revealed to them to the needs
of their state, even to the point of “hating their enemies.” (B) In
Babylonian captivity they were obliged, not by religion, but by the
“universal doctrine of reason [...] for the universal religion had not yet
become known through revelation” (chapter 19, paragraph 6), to care for
their own peace and safety, and also (etiam) for that of the city (civitas) of
Babylon. (C) Christ revealed to them, when he saw that they would be
dispersed throughout the whole world (not “to other states” as Klever
claims [p. 21]), the universal religion, in the interests of the whole world.

Klever’s contention about this paragraph, “For all these situations the
same principle has to be applied: piety, that is, observing the laws and
contributing to the well-being of the state of which one is a part” (p. 21) is
wrong. The Jews in Babylon were not part of the state in which they lived.
And in all three phases of their history they had to adapt their religion
(universal or not) or their reason reipublicæ utilitati, “to the good of the
commonwealth” (S 224.9), “à l’intérêt public” (Moreau and Lagrée,
617.29). Respublica is not ‘state’, a modern concept, for which there is no
exact parallel in Spinoza’s Latin.18

My conclusion is that in both passages under discussion (B1 and B2) the
text as it has come down to us, with pietate in the ablative, unquestionably
offers the correct reading. It needs no conjecture.

18. For the precise meaning of the political terms quoted, see the papers by Paolo Cristo-
ofolini and Fokke Akkerman in Spinoziana: Ricerche di terminologia filosofica e critica
Europeo LXXII). Klever renders imperium, civitas, respublica, and even summa potes-
tas or its plural all as ‘state’.
Early Work on Spinoza

The reception and study of Spinoza’s philosophy in Russia can be roughly divided into three stages: the pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. The pre-revolutionary stage (before 1917) can be considered to begin with Feofan Prokopovitsch, adviser to Czar Peter I (eighteenth century), who characterized Spinoza’s philosophy as the most obvious and bold atheism. We also find Spinoza’s friend (and participant in “Spinoza’s circle”), W. E. von Tschirnhaus, mentioned in some Russian university philosophy courses as being a Cartesian.

The dialogue between Vladimir Solovjev and Alexander Vvedensky at the end of the nineteenth century is worth our attention as is the theme of atheism in Spinoza’s philosophy. Vvedensky was the author of widely popular courses — “History of Modern Philosophy” and “History of Contemporary Philosophy” — based on the principles of neo-Kantian critical philosophy. In these courses, Spinoza’s philosophy was assigned a place in the development of Cartesian philosophy along with Descartes, Geulincx, and Malebranche. Vvedensky considered Spinoza to be a materialist and atheist, and he repeated this claim in an article appearing in Issues of Philosophy and Psychology (1897). Vvedensky asserted a traditional point of view that the Spinozistic doctrine of “God” is identical to atheism.

A reply to this interpretation was given by Solovjev in the same journal. Solovjev’s objection consisted in the following: Spinoza constructed the full system of his philosophy on very concept of an all inclusive, absolute God (God as all unity), so his system can’t be defined as any kind of atheism. Rather, it is a type of complete, perfect theism. While the dialogue was interesting in some aspects, all issues and arguments were the traditional and often repeated ones.

The most interesting discussion of Spinoza’s philosophy occurred among Vera Nicolaevna Polovtseva, Sergei Ludvigovitsch Frank and Vladimir
Nicolaevitsch Shilkarskyi. They focused on some issues crucial to any study of Spinoza’s philosophy: which methodology of study to choose; how to define Spinoza’s own methodology, ontology and theory of knowledge; and Spinoza’s own method of system construction.

The discussion began with Frank’s article, “Spinoza’s Theory of the Attributes” which served as a cause of sorts for Polovtseva’s later study. Polovtseva had disagreed with Frank’s interpretation of the status of the attributes. Frank had only an epistemological reading of the attributes, i.e., he took the attributes as forms of perception and knowledge. According to Polovtseva (1913), however, such an interpretation led to a denial of a real and formal existence of attributes.

Polovtseva’s work — “On the Methodology of the Study of Spinoza’s Philosophy” — was published originally in the 1913 volume of Issues of Philosophy and Psychology and also in a reprinted edition. She also made an excellent Russian translation of the TdIE along with detailed commentaries. Polovtseva countered the widespread belief that Spinoza’s method was reducible to a mere geometrical method of proof and explanation. Spinoza’s method had hitherto been considered merely as an application of geometry. According to Polovtseva’s interpretation, Spinoza’s proper and true method can be defined as the analysis of contents and extensions of individual true ideas and also the strict distinction between various contents and parts of knowledge.

Polovtseva gave special attention to the problem of adequate understanding of the content and the meaning and extension of the original Latin terms used by Spinoza. She considered adequate comprehension of these terms as a main premise and condition for correctly understanding Spinoza’s methodology and epistemology. Examples of such both inadequate and incorrect translations of the Spinoza’s terminology was observed by Polovtseva mostly in German translations and in the historico-textual studies that were guided by the Wolfian tradition of interpretation of Spinoza’s terminology.

In her translation of the TdIE, Polovtseva aspired to “Russianize” Spinoza’s Latin terms instead of using Russian philosophical terms already received from the German idealist tradition. These often have some additional connotations which prove to be contrary to Spinoza’s meaning of the same terms. So, for example, Polovtseva didn’t translate such terms as ‘ratio’, ‘perceptio’, ‘ideatum’, ‘conceptus’, or ‘imaginatio’ to their Russian equivalents, because the Russian equivalents convey Kantian and Hegelian connotations. She instead used a Russian transliteration of these terms and respectively got ‘racio’, ‘percepcia’, ‘ideat’, ‘koncept’, and ‘imaginacia’.
Polovtseva also studied Spinoza’s theory of knowledge as the basis for all his philosophy. She criticized the misunderstanding of the meaning of “definition,” a misunderstanding that began with Hegel and Jacobi who both interpreted “definition” (“definitio”) in Spinoza as identical with “negation” (“negatio”) and “delimitation” or “privation” (“privatio”). (This mistaken identity was the cause of Hegel’s disregard for Spinoza and for his demand to overcome Spinozism.) Polovtseva pointed out the difference between definitio (a true, complete definition of an object) and privatio (a partial negation of some qualities of object) and insisted on the correct and exact distinction of these terms, which have completely different meanings in Spinoza’s methodology and theory of knowledge.

Shilkarskyi’s work, “On Spinoza’s Panlogism,” appeared in Issues of Philosophy and Psychology and was reprinted as a separate edition. This work presented a critical consideration of Polovtseva’s method of study. In this article, he repeated Hegel’s point of view according to which Spinoza’s philosophy represented absolute “panlogism.” A “pantheistic” and “panlogistic” definition of substance as an abstract negative unity provided the reason for the reduction of all real and historical processes to logical ones. The consequences of such an interpretation were that Spinoza’s philosophy was seen as not having any dynamic development and thus was considered only as stiffened, motionless, absolute knowledge. This interpretation (and some other ones, e.g., the well known German two volume study of S. Von Dunin-Borkowski) had become the main objects of Polovtseva’s (1910) critiques.

A few authors preferred to interpret Spinoza’s philosophy in terms of a Jewish tradition and thought; M. I. Bazilevski, I. L. Klausner, V. Korzh, S. G. Kovner, and A. Volynsky are examples.

**Spinoza Studies during the Soviet Period**

The period after the Revolution of 1917 as whole is characterized by the considerable attention given to Spinoza’s philosophy. Indeed, so much Spinoza was considered as the precursor of Marx and Marxist philosophy, he was often called “Marx without the beard.” Plechanov, a founder of the Bolshevik-Communist Party and the first Russian Marxist, was in some aspects a “Spinoza-intoxicated” person. The first part of this period of Spinoza studies occurred in the 1920s-1940s. Scholars of this period defined the basic meaning and intent of Spinoza’s philosophy as the complete identification of the God with nature, and this founded a materialist interpretation of knowledge and ontology as well as of religion, society and state. Briefly, they reached the conclusion that Spinoza’s philosophy provided a perfect materialist substantiation and explanation for
the radical changes in social and political power and the scientific revolutions of seventeenth century. These scholars considered Descartes and Bruno as predecessors (in some respects) of Spinoza’s philosophy, but they made no mention of medieval or Jewish materialism. Now we can say that the historical aspect in their studies was presented rather insufficiently. Spinoza was thus presented as unique philosopher.

Intense and various studies of Spinoza’s philosophy were later part of the general discussion between two directions of Marxist Soviet philosophy: the “dialectical” interpretation and the “mechanical” interpretation (“mechanizism” or “mechanistizism”). The dialectical interpretation (led by A. M. Deborin) considered Spinoza’s philosophy as the origin for a dialectical, materialist logic which was contrary to Hegel’s idealistic one. A. V. Lunacharskij, another “Spinoza-intoxicated” philosopher and one of Soviet leaders of that period, inclined to the Lessing-Goethe pantheistic interpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy. Lunacharskij tended to add some elements of dialectics to this interpretation.

The mechanical interpretation (Akselrod, Varjash) examined Spinoza’s philosophy as a perfect form of a merely mechanistic, nondialectical materialism (with some aspects of dualism), and saw it as proof that the scientific interpretation of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton has some special logic (a logic of scientific materialism) which is completely different from a dialectical materialist one. Scholars of this direction considered the Spinozistic paradigm as an “eternally stiffened dualism of thought and extension.” P. Akselrod-Orthodox evaluated substance in Spinoza’s philosophy as an unchangeable law for world-order. According to Akselrod, Spinoza’s dualism leads to affirmation of the “divine quality of matter.” Akselrod considered such “deification” of extension as the legacy of Judaism in Spinoza.

The dialectical interpreters tried to study Spinoza’s philosophy using the Hegelian and Marxist discourse of self-consciousness, subjectivity, historical and social process. The mechanical interpreters inclined to the traditional Hegelian-Schelling thesis about Spinoza’s pantheism, dualism, and the nondialectical character of his system. Both of these interpretations quickly ceased being considered after they were strongly criticized by officially orthodox Stalinist Marxists. For example, V.

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1. Lunacharskij was Minister of the People’s Education in the first Communist government.

2. “Orthodox” was her pseudonym because she was an active participant of the illegal Communist struggle. Some of her papers on Spinoza were published in Germany and she is mentioned sometimes in recent studies as a German author.
Timosko and V. Vandek stressed only Spinoza’s “metaphysical” materialism and atheism. This critique was connected with the political and ideological conflict among three “factions” within the Communist Party — left, right, and orthodox (Stalinist). Most scholars who held the dialectical, mechanical, or other non-orthodox interpretations were repressed during Stalin’s terror in the 1930s.

Spinoza’s philosophy ceased to be a center of study and discussion after the World War II until Stalin’s death because of the political implications of Stalin’s “nationalism.” A new period of research began, however, with the work of the following authors: Vladimir V. Sokolov, Lev S. Vygodskyi (1896-1934),3 and Evald V. Ilyenkov (1924-1979). Sokolov was an historian of philosophy, especially philosophy of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. He interpreted Spinoza’s philosophy to be materialist and atheist; this interpretation was connected with the historical and critical studies on Spinoza’s contemporaries and pre-Spinoza pantheism. He interpreted Spinoza’s pantheism as an inconsistent variant of materialism. He characterized Spinoza’s philosophy as a whole as “metaphysical materialism,” that is, as materialism that counted “substance” as the absolute aim of knowledge and interpreted nature as stiffened substance that included abstraction from any natural changes and processes by means of the eternal order of substance.

There were some occasional publications on Spinoza’s philosophy throughout the 1950s-1970s (D. T. Ahmedli, S. I. Barstock, B. G. Kuznezeov, O. E. Leist, N. B. Pavlinova), but there was no systematical advancement. O. A. Muhamedzhanov’s 1980 article, “B. Spinoza and G. Cantor about Quantity and Infinity,” is an especially interesting study on Spinoza’s philosophy of mathematics.

There were few special studies on Spinoza’s doctrine of the state and law — K. N. Jaros, Spinoza and His Law Doctrine and O. E. Leist’s Spinoza’s Doctrine of Law and the State.

Original conceptions of Spinoza’s philosophy were given by Vygodskyi and Ilyenkov. Though Vygodskyi died in 1934, his works become influential in science (especially in psychology and mind studies) only in the 1960s. He discovered that the fundamental principle Spinoza’s of philosophy and psychology was the “opportunity for strict causal explanation of mental and psychical (mind) phenomena.” The mind’s phenomena (i.e., ideas) as cultural and communicative phenomena should be deduced from the forms of active sign activity aimed toward the

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3. His studies of Spinoza’s philosophy had been developed in the 1930s but were not published until after Stalin’s death.
transformation of natural conditions (without changing their “natural” essence). The genesis of signs (active ideas) is placed in terms of an “intersubjective” context of cultural dialogue. The natural conditions are transformed to a sign by means of emotions and will. Vygodskyi especially referred to the physiological research of W. Kennon, whose results Vygodskyi observed to confirm Spinoza’s idea of “preservation of the existence” as the first affect of the soul.

Ilyenkov, one of most outstanding Soviet Marxist philosophers, was the author of detailed studies on the problem and meaning of thinking in Spinoza from the Marxist position. He interpreted “adequate ideas of the intellect” as a region of “ideal,” but “ideal” without any idealist interpretation and connotation. “Ideal” is an especial “thing” (“organ” or “instrument”), by means of which the nature of all real things can be expressed and known. Furthermore, the “ideal” itself arises, in its genesis, as the form of practical action toward all aspects of an external thing and passes into individual consciousness in the process of “objectification and de-objectification (re-objectification).” Ilyenkov considered Spinoza to anticipate Kant’s view on causality and teleology, but he also counted Spinoza to an even greater degree as a predecessor of Marx. He considered Spinoza’s method of accepting and acquiring clear and distinct true ideas (both singular intuitions and “notiones communes”) as anticipating Marx’s method of movement from abstract to concrete, i.e., the method of formation of singular-general (concrete-general) concepts. (Ilyenkov compared such ideas to Spinoza’s notiones communes.) Ilyenkov objected to the widespread interpretations of Spinoza’s philosophy that considered the meaning of “substance” and “nature” in Spinoza’s philosophy as missing, neglecting and negating the historical process of genesis as the perfect expression of an idea of motionless mechanical nature. According to Ilyenkov, the real genesis of a thing is given through adequate knowledge of substance, attributes and modes. Some of his studies on Spinoza were published posthumously.

**Contemporary Work in Russia**

The present state of research on Spinoza’s philosophy can’t be said to be very satisfactory. With few exceptions, new books on Spinoza’s philosophy haven’t been published in 30 years. I found, however, one mention in the journal, *Issues of Philosophy*, (June, 2000) that a book devoted to Spinoza’s logic and methodology was published in Taganrog (southern Russia) in 1998 (by A. D. Maidanskij), but I could not find it in either of the two largest libraries in St. Petersburg. Though I ordered the book using an inter-library loan system, I have yet to receive it. Nevertheless, I was able to read three articles by this author in *Issues of*
Philosophy (1996-2000) and one in the Bulletin of the State University of Moscow in its Philosophy series. I believe that Maidanskij is an assistant professor at Taganrog University of Technology and Ocean Studies. He focuses on the theory of knowledge and methodology as a foundation for all of Spinoza’s philosophy. According to him, Spinoza developed a special logic of philosophy, “a material logic” (he takes the term from Wim N. A. Klever). The focus of his work is on the contents of single, true ideas, especially reflexive ideas on the idea as an object of another idea, or idea ideæ. He also studies the meaning of mathematical and logical methods of Spinoza and Descartes.

The studies of another scholar, S. B. Dolgopolskij, concentrate on problem of positioning Spinoza in the tradition of rhetoric and hermeneutics. He considers Spinoza’s philosophy as a point of intersection among three traditions of expression theory and passions of the soul: ancient (Aristotle, Boëtius); modern, i.e., seventeenth century (Descartes); and Jewish (Talmud, Gemarah, Maimonideš treatises). Dolgopolskij also uses Lacan’s and Deleuze’s works and methods in interpreting these traditions. He places Spinoza, after Deleuze, in the “anti-rationalist tradition” which is an alternative to the dominant “Hegelian” tradition. The anti-rationalist tradition includes the Neoplatonists, Plotinus, the Stoics, the Talmud and Hemara, Edmond Husserl, Leo Strauss, and Lacan. He especially stresses the Talmudic tradition with regard to Spinoza’s “material” hermeneutics and terminology. This tradition is guided by work in expression and “materiality of truth and text.” In terms and limits of this tradition, Spinoza can be interpreted within the bounds of the fundamental expressionist division of substance, attributes and modes.

One collection of essays was issued in 1999 in Moscow — Spinoza, Eternally Young and Sage (142 pp.). This collection was organized by the Department of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of State Service under the President of the Russian Federation. The central theme was Spinoza’s interpretation of state and society. Some articles are interesting but contain no mention of any contemporary studies on Spinoza. The interpretations are rather traditional, either Hegelian or politically humanist.

About my research: I have defended a thesis at the M.A. level and a doctoral dissertation (Ph.D.) in 2000. These works are devoted to the study of the genesis, structure and content of Spinoza’s system. I have three articles which concentrate on the problems of hermeneutics and text interpretations in Spinoza’s philosophy. I’ve also written one large article as an introduction to a two volume re-edition of Spinoza’s treatises. The themes of this introduction are the historical aspects of Spinoza’s philosophy, pantheism, and the meaning of Spinoza’s system for sciences
and humanities. In recent articles (2000-2001), the central theme is the issue of idea-ideat in perception and the intellect and the problem of the geometrical method and geometrical object. I am now working on an article which will be an introduction to Kuno Fisher’s *Spinoza, seine Leben, Lehre und Werke*. I intend to describe contemporary research on Spinoza's philosophy (it can be considered an important matter because there are few or no contemporary works in St. Petersburg libraries), new approaches to study of Spinoza’s texts, discussions about Spinozism, the Spinozistic tradition in Europe, and on texts probably belonging to Spinoza.

All old translations of Spinoza’s writings are republished, but the level of most translations does not meet today’s requirements. There are no introductions or indexes in many of them. Some editions do have an introduction or preface, but these present only common and old-fashioned information without any sign of knowing any contemporary work done on Spinoza.
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