

Variations on a Theme by Spinoza
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An emotion is a confused idea in that it arises from the mind but believes itself subject to the body. Any idea I have of a body arises not, per Spinoza, from the idea I have of my own body, but that I have of yours. The resulting emotion is no more idea than it is confused. If I remain passive before the emotion that is the memory of your body (and not the body itself) I do so only until such time as that memory is no longer just memory, but the fact of your body like the fact of my own.

When we claim the body exists in a greater or lesser perfection than was previously the case, we do not mean that the mind compares your body to what it was in the past, but that the idea of your body is as of something that contains more or less reality than it did the first time the mind conceived of it. If not for this mechanism, your body would cease to exist.

Should your body or the idea of your body be allowed to cease to exist, all other bodies, or ideas of bodies, would cease to exist.

Anyone wishing for illustration will be disappointed because there is no precedent and no parallel. We are original to this position and no others can follow. You may imagine however the line inside a circle. At the intersection we are the rectangles that are both suggested and separated from one another. The number of such is infinite. But they do not exist except in relation to the circle that contains them. Let two of these infinite lines exist, D and E. The ideas of both exist in terms of the circle and the rectangles that are formed. The ideas are different, are somehow other than the ideas of the other rectangles which are not formed but merely suggested. We are the rectangles and the ideas of the rectangles. But we are not those created by D and E. We have not yet been created.

I wonder out loud if we are really going to spend the next sixty years together, forever reminiscing about the preceding five or ten years and getting under each other's skin like parasitic wasps. But of course I don't have that much time and you have all the time in the world because you don't view time as something that passes. It is something that hangs in the air and rotates so that if you wait around long enough it will come back again to where it was when you first started. This doesn't mean that you are worried overly about what will happen next, but it doesn't mean that you are in denial either. It just means that the worlds we occupy at precisely the same time are merely parallel and analogous.

P22: If another person, in our imagination, provides the beloved with pain then that person provides us with pain and an opportunity to exercise our hatred which is looking for any reason whatsoever to get up off the couch. Spinoza would have it the same applies to pleasure, the left side of the equation being a mirror image of the right side, so that the pleasure applies to both sides. This is of course a blunder, the proposition of a man without attachments. For that which gives the beloved pleasure, assuming that we did not provide it, of necessity provides us with pain. The mirror is broken, usually with our own knuckles. Or an object we grasp and hurl in its direction. **Proof:** Imagine the last time you discovered the machinations of the beloved. Recall how you discovered them. The whispers of those you know. The unguarded messages in a phone.

Corollary to P22: You and I are the exception to rules handed down to others the way a man's genetics hands him a square jaw or a propensity to say one thing and mean another. Whatever pleasure you are afforded, affords me pleasure to a lesser degree so long as someone else has provided the pleasure. In this, if in nothing else, Spinoza is vindicated. You may imagine him grinding lenses and contemplating the future, finding us there with a smile on his face. Or at least a nod of the head before glass bits get, yet again, into the corneas of his eyes. You may not imagine however the intensity of the pleasure provided when I am providing it. Another way of stating this is that pleasure is like the orbit of a planet inasmuch as it slows and lessens the further away it gets from the prime source of gravitation, which is of course the sun. What man, then, does not equate himself with Apollo, with the sun? And what man does not know, somewhere deep inside – this knowledge like a fairly important organ, the spleen, say – that he is deluding himself?

One emotion can not be overcome except by a contrary emotion of equal or greater strength. That which I feel for you is the emotion but it can not be overcome. Therefore it exists prior to and not within or counter to all other emotions. Daring and fear are on the same plane and therefore equal and can be conceived of as cancelling one another out when the man who is free applies the strength of mind necessary to confront the one with the other. As the primary emotion can not be cancelled out in this fashion, it stands to reason that I am not a free man. Or if I am a free man, I am no longer free when confronted with the primary emotion, which is to say when I am confronted with the fact of you. The free man's fleeing danger is the same as his overcoming it through strength. But only as concerns daring or fear. I can neither flee nor overcome the fact of you nor the idea of you which is just as tangible as the fact. Accordingly, if I were a free man I would, under these circumstances, endeavor to make myself a slave.

P18 If two or more bodies have acted upon the human body in the past, the human mind necessarily recalls both bodies when given the chance to imagine one of them. Your body acts upon the mind and allows no recall of two or more bodies acting upon the human body other than itself. In this, the human body is shown to be dependent on your body in the same way the human mind is dependent on its capacity for recall and imagination to forge itself as something called mind rather than something else. Your body acts upon the mind the way two or more bodies act upon the human body, that is to say as a totality.

A single emotion hinders the mind more fully than does two or more working in conjunction, and is therefore to be feared the more. We suffer less from the many than the one, the numerous causes working together to water down the effect. The emotion you evoke is multi-faceted and ought, by Spinoza's reckoning, to be the less detrimental for its variety, but the emotion and the variety do not now communicate. The mind is less passive as concerns that emotion which causes it to regard several different things at once (say, the hair resting on your shoulders and the way you say "Serendipity") than it is with a single emotion which keeps the mind engrossed. All emotion may be masked, however, in a single emotion, and therefore inspire fear equal to that which is inspired by the truly singular emotion.

From your divine nature follow infinite attributes and infinite things. Everything that can come from infinite attributes comes from your divine nature by virtue of it being divine and not something humble or demeaning except inasmuch as these attributes follow from the infinite as well. The proposition should be apparent to anyone who touches your lips with his lips or who studies the lack of certain hues in the sky when you are abroad. The attributes each contain infinite essences having as they do their origins in the infinite things themselves originating in you.

Cor 1 It must follow that you are the first and efficient cause of all things stemming from the sensual intellect.

Cor 2 All causation having its origins in the sensual intellect may well be accidental.

If we consider quantity as an abstract property stemming from the sensual intellect, then we discover its divisibility and assign it parts such as the lips, the sole of the foot and the planks in the deck attached to the back of the house. But if we consider it as something preceding and superior to its abstract property, we recognize it as stemming from the sensual imagination and therefore possessing the qualities of being infinite, indivisible, and single, but not in the way the essence of the universe can be said to be infinite, indivisible, etc. but in the way you can be said to possess these qualities. Which is through an accident of birth, I suppose, or through the intension and will of those who love you. This number too approaches infinite divisibility and finds its antidote in the sensual intellect.

Infinite quantity can not be measured and can not be composed of parts, infinite and indivisible or otherwise.

You are the infinite and indivisible sensual intellect and, consequently, without measure or comparison.

Schol We conceive the body as something existing in eternity though there can be no memory of this. This eternity is the eternity of the body outside of memory. It is an essence of mind but only in reference to your body. Your body exists outside of duration and therefore outside time. Memory of your body is the same thing as eternity and as such that which the mind conceives through the sensual imagination and through memory, which has already been stated.

P24 & Partial Proof evident in Pr 25, 1 the more we understand specific things the more we understand Spinoza's God, who is our God insofar as one is deemed necessary. Eternity, as expressed in the memory and the actuality of the body – your body – serves an identical function.

The mind affirms or posits only its power, its ability to be something other than not-mind the way we affirm or posit ourselves in the power of our bodies to be something other than not-bodies. Or other people's bodies, which we, for the moment anyway, abhor. **P54** The mind affirms only what is mind and what affirms its power to differentiate itself from other things. It can not affirm what it can not do and what it is not. Similarly, our bodies hesitate to find themselves in other bodies, but they have the ability to do so in a pinch.

The pleasure accorded us through object A is different from that accorded us through object B in that each object has its own nature and therefore its own particular brand of pleasure available. The same holds for pain, vacillation, curiosity, bruising, terror, and loping over meadows. We are passive in the acquisition of each emotion or recreational activity only insofar as we hold an incomplete idea of that emotion or activity. As I am affected differently by each particular object A and B, I am conditioned in various ways and so my desire must be of differing kinds. But the desire for you encompasses all desire for objects A, B and etc. as well as all loping and other activities and so can be labeled as a single entity. All others must of necessity be subsumed within it the way all objects must of necessity be subsumed within the idea of God.

The desire arising from pain or pleasure is greater as the emotion is greater, a rule having at its center the belief that pleasure and pain are separate entities and not to be confused with one another, even for a moment. That desire may arise from either one in equal measure is not to be taken as evidence of their being identical any more than is your body and the desire that is born of that body to be taken as evidence that what we call desire and what we call body are one and the same entity or dependent upon one another for their tenuous existence.

Proof P 32 and Cor I What we call will must be understood as something caused and not free of itself the way pine trees are free to bend in the wind or stand perfectly still depending not, as we might assume, on the force of the air moving over them, but on nothing whatsoever. Pure whim. A taste for altering things simply to alter them. According to reason, the chain of causation continues forever in reverse until one reaches that place where will no longer carries its current definition; it breaks itself like china against the wall. Hurlled, no doubt, by someone who has had his heart torn into half a dozen bloody and forever thereafter ineffective pieces. It follows that will and intellect obey similar instructions as do motion and rest and are therefore outside even God's jurisdiction. God does not act freely as concerns his own will. When He conjures up oceans, gouges out mountains with his heel, it is because He too has had his heart broken.

Spinoza upbraids the multitude for equating the pursuit of their various lusts with freedom and the observance of piety and religion with a diminishment of this freedom, something they hope to forego the moment they pass from one world into the next like sailors emerging from a perilous fog into the sunshine of the tropics. Where the ports of call boast prostitutes of every persuasion imaginable and music neither too fast nor too slow. Birds in wire cages and chewing gum free of artificial flavors. **Proof and Schol of P41 (to follow)** My lust for you is a kind of piety and religion. It is that which promises the eternal existence of the mind and the body when all other evidence points in the opposite direction. If we believed our minds and our bodies perished like icicles (or every previous generation of human being), we would, it is true, burden ourselves with traditional forms of piety and wish to be free of them as soon as death beckoned. Why indulge the body when the body is temporary? But your body is eternal, both inside and outside the mind – or the mind’s sphere of influence (which amounts to the same thing) – and so I am all but required to shape my life according to my lust for it. And for you. These things are to be accorded worship just as one must worship and honor the earth and the sky above one’s head even when one can no longer be sure that they are there anymore because one’s eyes are closed.

P41 Even if we didn’t know the mind was eternal we would begin to suspect it because of the way it places our love and our lusts in the premiere position. It accords them primacy of place before even a sense of place such as might result from your growing up and growing old without ever leaving a ten mile radius, passing the same river and levees, the same grocery stores and cemeteries and Lutheran churches until they are pressed into the mind like thumbprints in wax.

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