

Freedom and Bondage in Spinoza's *Ethics*

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Alexander M. Pitts has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Philosophy.

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Part I: Freedom in *Ethics*

1.1 –Freedom “Worth Wanting”

Baruch Spinoza’s magnum opus, *Ethics*, essentially concerns “the power of the mind over the emotions and concerning the freedom of the mind”. This thesis investigates Spinoza’s conception of freedom, arguably his focus throughout *Ethics*. Freedom is important in an ordinary sense: we wish to connect action to ourselves. This connection to ourselves asks ‘to what extent this or that action is mine or not?’ Freedom is practically important –I want my actions to be my own in a significant way, so I must know what qualifies as *my* action. Moreover, freedom is morally important; to say that this or that action is mine means that I am responsible for it –it came directly from me. Further, for an action to be one’s own, it must feel as though one chooses it freely. What both of these features mean is addressed later, but the guiding concept remains: freedom is action from oneself, for which one is responsible. Freedom must mean something for the ordinary, lived experience of humans taking action. Freedom must work in a practical sense; its consequences are felt in our daily lives. These features are present in any compelling account of freedom, they make it ‘worth wanting’ in the sense that its implications matter outside of confined metaphysical discourse.

Freedom in Spinoza’s *Ethics* satisfies these conditions of ethical responsibility and phenomenology of choice. This project seeks to establish the robust, metaphysically viable account of human freedom presented in *Ethics*. This freedom is worth wanting in its application to common experience by satisfying the conditions that any account must address. Spinoza shows the means to self-improvement as well as the blessedness that a

truly free individual enjoys. This freedom accounts for an ethically interesting sense of responsibility. Spinoza's free person is the author of her own actions –any action that she ought to carry out falls under the kind of actions for which she can be held responsible. In addition, views of freedom worth wanting address the way that we feel as though we deliberate. When I am free, I have an experience of freely choosing between alternatives. In short, *Ethics* develops a theory of freedom that accounts for the central features in any account of freedom.

While his ideas cohere with any freedom worth wanting, Spinoza's philosophical views elicit controversy regarding human freedom because he argues for both 'determinism' and 'monism'. While more complicated than some views, these concepts both aptly describe Spinoza's thought and provide a freedom worth wanting in the same ways as competing frameworks. Specifically, two characteristics define this desirable freedom: ethical responsibility and phenomenology of choice.¹ Both of these concepts serve as metrics for how well we might apply Spinoza's esoteric metaphysics to the practical experience of any kind of freedom. First, the metaphysical concepts of 'substance monism', 'substance dualism', and 'substance pluralism' historically situate Spinoza's work alongside that of René Descartes. Additionally, these ideas illustrate the key metaphysical differences between *Ethics* and other accounts of freedom. Spinoza's substance monism creates difficulty for theorizing freedom in that dualist and pluralist views of substance easily provide both responsibility and phenomenology of choice through a substantial subject. This description of monism lays the groundwork for

¹ 'Ethical responsibility' means that one may take ownership of activity to the extent that she or he may be held accountable for her or his actions. 'Phenomenology of choice' means that an actor feels as though she or he is choosing between alternatives.

reading the second set of metaphysical concepts at hand. Both ‘libertarian freedom’ and ‘determinism’ centrally characterize the ways in which we discuss freedom. While Descartes’ substantial agent allows for libertarian freedom easily, Spinoza’s concept of determinism takes more explanation. In the end, though, his determinism provides both features of a freedom worth wanting, despite others’ objections.

1.2 –Syllogism

Overall, this paper accomplishes three things. First, it establishes how ‘determinism’ and ‘monism’ may provide ethical responsibility and phenomenology of choice to free actors. To do this, it defines freedom as ‘acting solely from one’s essence’. However, from this definition of a freedom viable in determinism and monism, there remains a different complication: human finitude does not provide the right conditions to attain freedom.

Part I develops two theses. First, Spinoza has a coherent account of freedom worth wanting. This is the way in which the freedom in *Ethics* is unhindered by the illusory burdens of monism and determinism. Spinoza’s freedom is a compatibilist account in that he attributes everything worth wanting in a theory to determinism. Second, Spinoza provides a practical orientation toward freedom; humans want to act freely and *Ethics* gives a specific orientation toward that goal in clear, practical terms. Part I addresses these features by defining what freedom actually entails in *Ethics*, demonstrating that the conditions for its existence lead to a way of improving one’s life. More concretely, the project is structured according to the following syllogism:

(1) freedom means acting solely from one’s essence;

(2) acting solely from one’s essence means checking the influence of external things’ essences;

(3) to check external things perfectly requires knowing their causes perfectly;

(4) therefore, freedom requires knowing external things' causes perfectly.

Corollary:

(5) freedom in ordinary life is impossible due to the epistemic capabilities of humans

The first three propositions address how Spinoza's freedom is worthwhile. Proposition (4) addresses the way that we may perfect ourselves and become freer.

Part II picks up on the conclusion in (4) and complicates it with the features of human epistemic ability. This corollary ends with a small space for practical, rather than philosophical, freedom in human resignation to bondage. In this way, Part I establishes the philosophically viable freedom within Spinoza's monism and determinism. Part II then renders the *human* attainment of this freedom impossible. Thankfully, there is at least a freer way to remain bound in practical resignation to finitude. Herein, I read *Ethics* through the frame of this syllogism, developing the textual and interpretative case for the validity of each of these propositions.

1.3 –Substance

Spinoza's substance monism departs from other early-modern theories of substance, without changing what defines the concept itself. Generally, substance is a "particular kind of basic entity" that underlies other metaphysical claims.² This underlying nature characterizes the issue in that substance is what is most irreducible in the universe. Spinoza defines substance as "that which is in itself and conceived through

² *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* "Substance"

itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has formed”.³ More plainly, this means that substance is *everything*, before it subdivides into conceptually distinct parts. For example, things like people and teacups divide from the totality of substance. While they are distinct from each other, each cannot remain intelligible without the underlying concept of substance itself as most basic to all beings. Importantly, Spinoza’s substance departs from other notions of substance in its singularity. That is, he theorizes a single substance with infinite modes and attributes.⁴ This singularity means that substance is the totality of the universe before we understand it in different ways. Attributes constitute what the kinds of distinctions Descartes’ tradition calls extended substance and mental substance. For Spinoza though, these distinctions come as further conceptualizations of substance.

Substance has infinite attributes, or ways “which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence”.⁵ However, due to our limitations as extended things, humans may only know two of these attributes: extension and thought. These attributes allow Spinoza to maintain a single substance with different, nearly-basic concepts. By extension, Spinoza means that which takes up space. For example, things like people and chairs have volume and therefore are extended. By thought, Spinoza means the attribute concerned ideas of an extended things or other ideas. For example, a chair in extension is the idea of the same chair in the attribute of thought. Importantly, there is no need for a *thinker* of these thoughts; every mode may be expressed in both attributes conceivable to humans. These attributes that describe all particulars, or modes,

³ E1d3

⁴ C.f. E1d4; E1d5

⁵ E1d4

in the universe need substance in order to make sense. Substance is conceptually intrinsic to all things. That is, unlike the contrasting Cartesian view, substance is conceptually prior to thought and extension; discrete modes are expressed in these two ways from a whole of the universe.

Descartes offers a contrasting view of substance in his ‘dualism’ and ‘pluralism’. These formulations easily account for a freedom worth wanting. Additionally, they discord usefully with Spinoza’s monism, showing the distinctiveness of his monism as well as the supposed difficulty in establishing freedom from it. In *Meditations on Philosophy*, Descartes forwards two types of basic metaphysical entities: mental substance and extended substance. This is his dualism. Extended substance is everything physical. For example, one knows that a teacup is physical because it takes up space, a feature intrinsic to all physical things. Mental substances are irreducible non-physical things. For example, a soul is mental substance in that it is basic and non-physical.⁶ Descartes links the two kinds of substance to each other via the pineal gland in humans, establishing that individuals are conceived through both physical and mental means, while privileging the mental substance’s individuating role.⁷ ‘Substance pluralism’ showcases how Descartes’ two kinds of substances easily account for ethically responsible individuals. By making one’s soul what essentially composes an actor, Descartes makes ethical responsibility a matter of having a soul. For example, to understand responsibility, one needs only look at which soul determined which body to act to find the responsible individual. In the same way, this view of substance accounts

⁶ Descartes writes that “the human mind is not made up of any accidents...but is pure substance” (*Meditations* 14).

⁷ *Meditations* 86

for phenomenology of choice as well. When an actor tries to make sense of how he felt in control of his choices, the soul provides ample justification. That is, by understanding that his body is moved by his soul, the actor confidently feels as though *he* choose to do this or that. Both of these illustrate how easily Cartesian substances account for freedom.

In addition, this Cartesian metaphysics allows for an agent causal view of freedom. As substance, this or that individual acts from a will uncaused by outside influences. In this way, one has the phenomenology of freely choosing by associating my mental life with an uncaused will. For example, one may deliberate whether or not to violate the law, knowing that her or his will to act is uncaused⁸. By directly connecting this feeling of free choice to mental substance, freedom neatly combines with the concept of substance. Ethical responsibility follows just as easily. When having a soul constitutes individuals, and acting freely is acting from substance, all individuals become ethical subjects when they act. For example, my soul ties my body, and its actions, to what it means to be *me* –a concept intelligible without any other concepts due to mental substance. That is, Descartes’ substance pluralism provides for libertarian freedom through the concept of a substantial, uncaused will. Descartes thinks of the will as a mental substance, and, as such, the will may be free. It is most basic as substance.⁹ Therefore, one is easily held responsible for her body’s actions as her soul determines whether or not they transpire.

Because Spinoza argues for substance monism, he cannot account for

⁸ This is not to say that I may will to do the right things and, by circumstance, perform the wrong ones – libertarians would still grant that these are free actions. For example, if I choose to stop before hitting a pedestrian, but my brakes were cut unbeknownst to me, I freely chose to do the right thing, despite the consequences of circumstantial determinations. That is, the phenomenology of freedom is preserved in this example –I feel as though I could have done otherwise in my willing.

⁹ *Meditations* 14

phenomenology of choice and ethical responsibility through substantial individuals. Instead, Spinoza needs to account for another kind of individuation in order to attain ethically and phenomenologically coherent individuals. This section set up one problem addressed in section two: how are individuals capable of freedom created in substance monism? However, before that, Spinoza's determinism warrants attention.

1.4 –Determinism

Spinoza's determinism also *seems* to pose issues for a freedom worth wanting. Contemporary thinkers describe determinism as the "idea that every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions together with the laws of nature".¹⁰ Or, each event in the universe is caused by something prior affecting it. For example, a teacup is caused by a manufacturer transforming raw materials into a useful product. For individuals, this means that action is caused by previous things. In contrast, libertarian freedom is "a power of acting or of not acting, according to the determination of the will".¹¹ The possibility of inaction or action describes the deliberation that this kind of freedom entails. For example, a libertarian would claim that she chooses between alternative possibilities. When she deliberates like this, there is an indeterminate nature of what may happen next, followed by a determination of action from the soul. This determination of the will is key to libertarian freedom; the will is the sole determination of my action. Descartes' freedom resembles this in the way that mental substance solely determines action. Descartes claims that one is "conscious of a will so extended as to be subject to no limits" through "the power of the will which I have received from God".¹² Additionally,

¹⁰ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* "Causal Determinism". cf. Edwards, "Hard and Soft Determinism"; Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will*.

¹¹ Hume via *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* "Free Will"

¹² *Meditations IV*

the choice between alternatives does not make the will any freer; if humans' understanding were as perfect as God's, then the proper choice would present itself clearly at each and every decision.

Spinoza's sense of determinism *seems* to threaten freedom. Like Descartes, he attributes all action to substance. For Spinoza, this is nearly a vacuous statement though; if all action is determined by substance then 'everything is caused by the essence of everything', in effect. This means that individual actors are subject to causal determination from many different forces. For example, when considered a soulless mode of substance, one cannot instantly attain individuation and responsibility by substance's primacy alone. Without the substantial agent causation in Descartes' theory, determination from substance is problematic insofar as individuals are not substance. That is, without mental substance, the particular actor is complicated. Further, as a mode, one cannot be free in the sense of substantial agent causation. Without a soul, there is no solely determinate will –everything one does and desires to do must be conceived alongside exterior concepts. Lastly, as a mode, one is determined by substance insofar as “[substance] is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things”; from the nature of substance itself, all things must follow.¹³

To make matters worse, finite modes are also determined from other particular, finite modes. Spinoza finds this intrinsic to the nature of a *proportion of motion and rest* in that one's body “could not have been in motion or rest unless it had been determined to motion and rest by another body, and this body again –by the same reasoning –by another body, and so on, ad infinitum”.¹⁴ Further, “every individual thing, i.e. anything whatever

¹³ EI p18

¹⁴ EI p13 Lemma 3p

which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and act by another cause which is also finite”¹⁵; all finite things must causally relate to other finite things in order to exist and act.¹⁵ Together, both of these features track with the aforementioned definition of determinism. In *Ethics*, every event is necessitated by antecedent events in the way that all finite modes come from other finite modes. Additionally, these events’ coherence with the laws of nature stems from substance as the cause of everything.

In this light, there seems little room for freedom left in Spinoza’s thought. A freedom worth wanting needs both phenomenology of freedom and ethical responsibility for an action. This phenomenology must make actions ‘one’s own’ in a sense that implies activity rather than passivity; each actor must feel as though she chooses solely by herself when she acts. Further, individuals must be held ethically responsible for activity as coherent subjects across time; one must have actions attributed to herself insofar as she is their sole author. However, the problem is this: given his determinism, Spinoza’s account of freedom cannot attribute responsibility to an uncaused will; both when my actions are caused by a substance other than myself and when each particular event is the result of a casual chain that precedes me, it seems as though actions are not mine and I am not responsible for them. Given his monism, Spinoza’s freedom cannot attribute agent causation and individuate a person with a single mental substance. The rest of this paper responds to these problems, showing that Spinoza has a clear notion of freedom worth wanting unthreatened by the problems typically associated with monism and determinism. While his freedom has a significant practical caveat, it is, in *principle*, a

¹⁵ E1p28

viable freedom worth wanting. Spinoza's freedom has these two features, despite the seemingly negative implications of monism and determinism. This first section set up the problem with phenomenology of choice and ethical responsibility in Spinoza's thought. The next section addresses how these features are present in an individual defined by *conatus*, through a guiding definition of freedom for *Ethics*.

2.1 –Freedom and *Conatus*

In order to attain both features of a freedom worth wanting, this paper defines freedom as 'acting solely from one's essence'. This definition of freedom adequately secures both a phenomenology of choice and ethical responsibility through the notion of *conatus*. That is, by tying responsibility and phenomenology of freedom to a particular essence, this definition regards individuals. There are two ways that Spinoza individuates particulars according to their essences. Both of these senses of an individual secure an 'I' that may be held responsibility and freely choose in substance monism. Then, this paper addresses how individuals are determined to act, so as to show action stemming solely from one's essence in Spinoza's determinism. This shows the nature of 'acting solely' from an essence. Section [2] ends by making the case for the viability of this framework; there is a coherent sense in which Spinoza's concepts map onto everyday experience, despite the seemingly problematic and esoteric metaphysics of monism and determinism.

2.2 –Freedom Worth Wanting in Monism and Determinism

Acting solely from one's essence accounts for phenomenology of choice insofar as one's essence, rather than some external thing, directly causes action. That an action comes directly from a single actor is only half of the phenomenology though; when a person *chooses* to do something, through her experience she can acknowledge her own

authority in acting upon various options. That is, when she feels that an action is free, she feels that it is entirely her own. Likewise, when she acts solely from her essence, that action is entirely her own in its causal attribution to her essence. Even before we define Spinoza's essences, this tracks well with the views of many on freedom. When I act from 'what makes me *myself*,' my action may be wholly intelligible through a phenomenology of freedom. When faced with tough decisions, I choose according to something internal to my experience; I deliberate and choose between alternatives. This sense of acting from one's essence accounts for phenomenology without making substance essential to beings –acting solely from my essence attributes deliberative action to myself in the same way as mental substance. As such, this conceptualization does not implicate an uncaused mental substance like the aforementioned Cartesian framework. Rather, when I act solely from my essence, the conditions for doing that –such as my existence and the external bodies that my action affects –remain circumstantial. Even though my will is not *uncaused*, it can still be caused by *me*.

Thus, acting from one's essence constitutes a freedom worth wanting, but can Spinoza make sense of it through his determinism? Determinism seems a threat to freedom worth wanting. More specifically, a common attack on determinism regards the *over-determination* of an action's causes. The problem seems so: when someone commits violence, or other ethically dubious behavior, we must hold him accountable, since we value ethical responsibility in a coherent view of freedom. However, under determinism, one claims that every action is, in some part, contingent on all the prior events *ad infinitum*; it seems when I assault another person, I choose this course of action due to all the prior states of the world that fatally lead to this point. Here, the problem emerges, for

if freedom wants to hold subjects ethically responsible, it must defer to a *sole* sufficient cause of their action. To do otherwise is absurd, for if one claims that multiple factors sufficiently attribute an action to a subject, he demonstrates that none are truly *sufficient*; any of the many causes may take its place as the responsible one. Over-determination attributes contingent causes *ad infinitum* to a sense of deterministic authorship. This characterizes the problem as a subject committing an act *because* they were born and determined in various ways outside of their control.¹⁶ As such, the grounds for responsibility need a different foundation.

This over-determination problem is mitigated by relying on the guiding definition with regards to one's essence. In effect, this proposition lays claim to the locus of all ethical responsibility: the essence of a subject. This gets rid of over-determination by establishing a sole sufficient cause of action that may be tested in practical situations. For example, if I were to claim that I cheated on an exam *because* I was born from my mother, then no responsibility can be attributed without a discussion of what about *me* was necessary for responsibility. If causal links to my existence ground responsibility, then there is a problem with the lack of an availability for an action to not belong to me. Surely, this is false. Rather, if I cheated on the exam because *I*—as opposed to anyone else—were born from my mother, then there are the grounds for responsibility. With essence grounding responsibility, actions for which one is responsible are grounded by what centrally defines the actor. It still stands that one may or may be responsible for actions such as this, but under this definition of freedom there is a coherent means for

¹⁶ We differentiate between negligence of things outside our control and determinations such as being born in most legal/ethical senses. To claim that a murderer is not guilty because it is her mother and father's act of conception that started the causal train going is absurd.

responsibility.

Like before, this is distinct from the uncaused will in its revision of what justification is needed for attribution of action to a subject. Determinism ceases to cause problems in this view. Under this freedom, it does not matter whether or not one is caused in various ways, so long as the actions he performs may link to his own essence. One *must* be determined to exist by other modes' essences, but when an action is determined from one's essence alone, it is free. That is, by knowing who an individual is, one knows many aspects of what they will do, regardless of other knowledge about particular causes that brought the actor to the present. In this way, all actions are in part determined by one's essence, and in part circumstantially determined by antecedent factors. Together, these features show that freedom in human life is intelligible in the same terms as Spinoza's freedom. That is, any way the problem is set, ethical responsibility and phenomenology of freedom must account for the ways that free actions are wholly *mine*, in an essential or significant sense. If freedom is 'acting from one's essence', it is compatible with Spinoza's monism and determinism.

2.3 –Individuation

The next step in justifying this definition addresses the 'I' that acts, or, the way Spinoza distinguishes between personal identities. He links action and essence through individuated things within a singular substance. That is, by conceptualizing different parts of a totality as *things*, we may have the basis for actors and their actions. The problem with individual essences is this: Spinoza's substance monism does not readily provide for clear essential individuation like Descartes' view of substance does. Descartes' vision of mental substances allows one to recognize God's image in this or

that person and simultaneously recognize her or him as a free individual. That is, as mental substances, each person would be essentially differentiated by their souls. Spinoza has no such immediate resource to think individuals. Rather, he must complicate the account of a single substance in order to talk about individuals with distinct essences.

Spinoza develops individuals in a way that makes this first proposition intelligible. Instead of a mentally substantial soul, Spinoza utilizes two senses of ‘essence’ that differentiate individuals: the *proportion of motion and rest* and the *conatus*. In one sense, Spinoza’s concept of a *proportion of motion and rest* regards things’ form and material nature as a defining part of them. He writes that “bodies are individual things (EIIId1) which are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest”.¹⁷ What Spinoza means by *proportion of motion and rest* here is that different particulars separate from one another in their formal nature across time. This formal essence is a proportion because, clearly, things like humans change shape across time; the proportion allows for an attribution of identity to a person across their life in that the total number of compositional bodies at motion and rest within them stays consistent as a whole system. This works well to separate things from each other in one sense. For example, my particular form and proportion differs in many ways from this or that other human. Likewise, the proportion of composite bodies in a teacup vary greatly from any human. Both of these examples use the nature of extension itself to distinguish between bodies, no matter how simple or complex. In this way, the *proportion of motion and rest* provides part of a freedom worth wanting. As a formal division of extension, each person has an essential tie to the actions they participate in. For example, when I see a person acting

¹⁷ Lemma 1 (EIIp13L3p)

one day, and recognize their exactly similar proportion of form the day after, I may establish an ethical subject through what collection of matter acts across time.¹⁸ I may also experience my form across time as a self that chooses to act in various ways –the proportion grounds my phenomenological sense of self.¹⁹ This solves the problem of determination by the nature of substance; substance determines particular events because it determines *my essence* to exist and act. Only insofar as substance determines *me* does it determine the actions I undertake by providing the conditions for my essence’s durational expression.

In another sense however, this formulation of an individual only grants *qualitative identity* to a body.²⁰ Taking identity as a matter of physical arrangement does not establish a particular actor from others exactly similar to it. For example, qualitative identity cannot distinguish between two exactly similar carbon atoms in that both would have exactly similar composition of protons, electrons and neutrons, while remaining separate bodies in each of their extended natures. If this were the only essence of a particular, then these two exactly similar bodies would remain in-differentiable. Similarly, qualitative identification alone cannot account for the phenomenology of freedom and ethical responsibility a freedom worth wanting needs. The *proportion of motion and rest* can only roughly establish an ethical, phenomenological subject across time for the same reason as the two exactly similar carbon atoms: two formally

¹⁸ *Proportion of Motion and Rest* works across time not to say that one thing must be the same shape throughout its life, but that in all the changes it undergoes it stays in a recognizable form. For example, a child and his adult-self have exactly similar *proportions of motion and rest* in that through all the different changes to his form across time a relation between all the compositional bodies within him stays the same.

¹⁹ This proportion surely is not a *literal* proportion, for that would introduce problems with day to day fluctuations of any degree as well as incidentally identical proportions. Because of this, Spinoza’s formal essence does not really hold up in rigorous interpretations, but that is fine because it establishes a foundation for the more important and secure *conatus*.

²⁰ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* “Identity”

indistinguishable bodies have each of their own additional essential unity. For example, when identical twins have exactly similar proportions of motion and rest, an essence is needed that may consider them as separate subjects. Clearly, each twin experiences the world differently and each may be held accountable for her actions. As such, freedom needs an essence that can individuate in an additional way; in order to have authorship and responsibility we need a way to establish *quantitative* identity.

Spinoza develops *quantitative identity* capable of providing freedom worth wanting in his second individuating claim. This second formulation, the *conatus*, is that “with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being”.²¹ This simply means action which keeps this or that body around as long as possible. Simply put, it is one’s self-interest. Spinoza’s *conatus* usefully relates to freedom for two reasons. First, the *conatus* adheres to the definition of freedom as acting from one’s essence: “the *conatus*...is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself”.²² That means that the *conatus* provides something to measure one’s action with when talking about freedom—if I act in such a way that accords with my “endeavor to persist in [my] own being”, then I act in accordance with my essence. Additionally, this essential character of *conatus* holds true for the other formulation of an individual; it is a thing’s nature to have this or that proportion of motion and rest as well. Here is the second important aspect of *conatus*: it differentiates with both kinds of identity, instead of merely *qualitative* identity. A *proportion of motion and rest* provides qualitative identity alone by claiming that two like-formed things are essentially indistinguishable. The two carbon atoms are identical in this sense. However, when thought in terms of their respective *conatuses*, these carbon

²¹ E3p7

²² E3p7

atoms have distinct essences. That is, a practical, essential difference between Carbon Atom_a and Carbon Atom_b lies in their endeavors to persist.

Quantitative identity established by the *conatus* is ethically meaningful in the sense that one may attribute action to a specific subject instead of a formal kind of being. Freedom needs to regard individuals in an ethically meaningful sense, so the project needs to know about individuals, not just specific classes of things. The difference between the two atoms is useful in demonstrating the principle of the matter because the two are exactly similar in terms of form. However, for human subjects, the distinction is still crucial. Central to ethical responsibility and phenomenology is the ‘I’ that responds to ‘What ought I do?’ If people are, in principle, capable of being rendered indistinguishable from another with qualitative identification, then founding freedom on the grounds of one’s essence does not provide for the responsibility and phenomenology of a freedom worth wanting. As such, Spinoza needs *both* formulations to understand how a body may persist across time in both form and action. However, freedom uses *conatus* for the ethical implications and phenomenology that freedom worth wanting demands. That is, when treating a person as ethically responsible, one must use that which is unique to the actor *alone*, not merely something that a clone or twin would share. In one way, the *conatus* provides for ethical responsibility through an attribution of action to a particular essence. In another way, it provides for phenomenology by creating a self through the drive to persist.

2.4 –Action & Freedom

When distinguished through separate conatuses, individuals are essentially active. The *conatus* concerns action more directly than a *proportion of motion and rest* through a

matter of physics. That we *do* something really means that we affect other bodies in the extended attribute of substance. This sounds strange but is wholly consonant with how most envision action. For example, when I take a bite of a sandwich, I affect the external body of the sandwich. I weaken its persistence as a collection of bodies from which we may understand it to be a thing, when I enjoy it. This relationship between affecting and affected body is central to all actions in *Ethics* in that action is the confrontation between bodies in motion. That is, when bodies exist, they exist in space with others. As they compete for this space, they may collide, repel, enter into consonance with one another, etc. Additionally, conceptualizing action as a matter of physics for Spinoza allows for a rejection of the aforementioned uncaused will. That is, when I *act*, I am really reacting in a causally determined way. For example, the precondition for any of my actions is the joining of my parents' sperm and egg cells; that, among other events, begets my existence causally. This birth into existence begins a chain of reactions to impositions and promotions of one's essence.

Conceiving of action as affecting external bodies establishes the conceptual link between the two essential formulations of an individual. This works through the necessary motivation for any action, the *conatus*. That is, to act means to orient one's body toward the world in the best possible way to persist in the proportion she maintains. For a midday sandwich this tracks perfectly –I do not enjoy this or that sandwich from a place of fancy, but rather from necessity.²³ One needs sustenance to persist as the same collection of cells, tissues, and organs as before. Even pleasures that seem to counter

²³ While pleasure surely only comes from a promotion of one's *conatus*, both our inadequate knowledge of causes and orders of a pleasure's cause confuse this example of the necessary sandwich. Many would say that a fair amount of pleasure comes from resolutely *unnecessary* activities. Without addressing such examples, I note that this issue requires much more attention than this section leaves room for.

one's being must be *thought* to enable it instead. In effect, Spinoza believes that this drive of the *conatus* is what motivates all action, albeit mediated by our recognition of what best provides for the *conatus*. This mediation is crucial to the whole project, but will come later.

2.5 –Proposition

Acting from one's essence works as a coherent version of freedom worth wanting. That is, when talking about freedom and ethical action, we already talk about the same features as Spinoza's theory provides; his picture accounts for the same important practices in life as any. The aim of this renders 'Freedom is acting solely from one's essence' as a meaningful sense of freedom consistent with Spinoza's monism and determinism. Metaphysical systems of determinism and monism *seem* esoteric and unhelpful in our project of explaining human agency, but in this case they accord as well as any way of thinking the world. When one is free, she acts solely from her essence, but what about the rest of her life? What about when we are bound to our mistaken views on external things' influence on us? Spinoza's theory sets up freedom as a worthy end in mind, but it takes work to cast aside what binds us. The next section sets up what these external influences look like, in order to turn to the practice of checking them.

3.1 –Affects: Good, Bad; Promotion, Limitation

This argument's second proposition is as follows: 'acting solely from one's essence requires checking external things' influence on action'. As such, this section accounts for the rest of the world in Spinoza's philosophy; how do actors exist in this world? I make both a psychological claim about how we think things as 'good' and 'bad' as well as a prescriptive claim about maximizing the good and minimizing the bad.

Psychologically, we experience things internal and external to us; finite actors are influenced by things unproduced by themselves.²⁴ As such, their actions are subject to the nature of these external things, as well as their own. However, some of these externals aid the perfection of one's essence. This complicates the picture of *checking* outside influence insofar as perfection of our essence is our object here. Prescriptively, I raise the stakes –we ought to promote those externals that aid our essence, calling them 'good', in order to be free. Conversely, we ought to limit those that annul our essence, deeming them 'bad'. Finally, I structure how this prescription functions in making true the premise of this section in the egoistic value theory Spinoza offers. These evaluative claims pertain to freedom worth wanting insofar as we need to check external influences in order to act more and more from our essence, in order to have such a freedom.

3.2 –External Things' Influence

When we act from our essence, we act in our *conatus*' best interest, but clearly we do not carry this out perfectly. Despite a mortal existence as humans, we may more greatly move toward perfecting our essence. It seems as though we act in detrimental ways to our best being, but in fact, Spinoza claims that anything counter to oneself must come from outside.²⁵ Therefore, behaviors counter to our *conatuses* are not actions but *passions* –ways that external things change me. However, we may have ethical responsibility and a phenomenology of choice through checking these influences in that checking externals moves us toward freedom as acting solely from one's essence.

Bodies are changed both through what Spinoza calls affects and affections. Both

²⁴ I say 'finite' here, because to think that an infinite actor such as God were affected by finite things is absurd, especially given Spinoza's formulation of God *as* substance.

²⁵ Spinoza writes that "No thing can be destroyed except by an external cause...for the definition of anything affirms, and does not negate, the thing's essence" (EIIIp4).

are ways of conceptualizing external things' influence on this or that body through the metaphysical parallelism in *Ethics*. Both concepts address the situation as such: our essence strives to persist in its form. Since this striving holds for all bodies, a competition occurs between different particular things in their striving. Affections are the changes an external body impresses on this or that subject's body; affects are these same changes in the attribute of thought.²⁶ When the body that I call myself— through a *conatus* and *proportion of motion and rest*—exists in space, it exists in competition with other bodies. Competition has twofold significance here. First, it shows the ways in which bodies must interact, producing affections in each other. When two bodies attempt to inhabit the same physical space, they compete and must react to one another in various different physical ways. Simply put, these are affections. The second utility of conceptualizing physics as competition will remain useful for later, for it demonstrates a competition between these or those *conatuses* in their respective preservation of beings. I mean here that this second form of competition raises the stakes for Spinoza's theory—it is not *just* happenstance that bodies collide in various ways, but it also comes from each body's drive to maintain its own proportion of motion and rest across time. Additionally, this physics links to the active, rather than passionate, behavior in a mode; when two bodies interact both act

²⁶ Returning to the parallelism briefly mentioned in [I, 2.3] yields important work for understanding the ways external things impress upon us. Spinoza's single substance is thought in infinite attributes. That is, there are infinite ways substance is expressed. Of this infinitude, we only have access to two: extension and thought. This is due to our nature as beings in extension and thought, for we could not understand the other attributes without having them expressed in our modality.²⁶ As individuals, we are first and foremost formations of bodies that persist in their formation. This is how we are extended. Spinoza's parallelism concerns thought too though, so we are also beings in the attribute of thought. In the way that "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body", we are both physical and mental things²⁶. Importantly, this is different from Cartesian dualism in that our mental component is not substance, and as such, cannot factor into an account of freedom. Affects and affections work in a parallel fashion that mirrors the relation between mind and body in *Ethics*. That is, when I feel hungry, something in my body has changed in such a way to produce the specific feeling of hunger. This hunger is the correlate affect to a change such as a drop of insulin in that hunger simply *is* the physical relation of bodies internal and external to me.

insofar as they move from their essence, but both also react to the activity of the other. In every relation between my own body and another, I am both active in movement from my *conatus*, but passive in my reaction to movement from another mode's *conatus*. In one way, affects are wholly unimportant; I am concerned with the best preservation of my body's striving to persist. In another, however, they are the only way to understand external things' influence.

3.3 –Good and Bad; Active and Passive

The second concept needed to understand *checking* external things' influence on acting from my essence comes in the variety of affections' consequences. That is, some external causes make me act *more so* from my essence. For example, eating something nutritious at breakfast allows me to act from my essence more perfectly in its sustenance, while drinking coffee instead reduces my ability to act from my essence due to its addictive quality. This works through the nature of all affections and their correlate affects coming in kinds discernible through Spinoza's concepts of good, bad, active and passive. While different from each other, good/active and bad/passive are intimately linked in thinking about external influence on our essences. I first approach the good and bad affects/affections, moving to show how passivity and activity factor into our thinking of each influence as such.

If affects are changes to this or that body in the attribute of thought, then good affects signify a change in this or that body that both increases its power of activity and promotes its essence's perfection. Spinoza's definition of the term claims that "By *good* I mean that which we certainly know to be useful to us".²⁷ Utility here means actions

²⁷ EIVd1

pertinent to our persistence. For example, most people call a glass of water's influence on them 'good' when they are thirsty. Since water is necessary to persist, this clearly shows the relationship between good and *conatus*. Leaving knowledge of this utility aside for the time being, Spinoza has developed a sense in which things may have value to us. Further, he makes good consequential to us when he links this value judgement to the ontological status of our *conatuses*.

For example, when I eat something nutritious, I feel satiated and in this affective response to the external body of the food I deem it a promotion of my *conatus*. I stress again here that affects are the way we sense whether or not an external body does our essence ill or benefit in the sense of making it easier or harder for that essence to persist in existence. So while we are moved this way or that in various ways, we must think this a direct continuation of the bodies coming into connection with our own body. To take another example, I may feel joy somewhat randomly or 'out of the blue', with no apparent cause to this affect. However, for Spinoza, this surely is not the case; *something* must cause any given affect within a particular thing. Affects are the bodies that come into contact with us in a different attribute, to feel joyous is to have something promote one's *conatus*. I will return to examples like these in discussing activity and passivity later.

This factors into freedom through our proposition of acting solely from our essences in that good things promote our essence. In this way, we ought to welcome all positive affections and good affects for they help us act more freely. That is, when I am impaired by my thirst and am not influenced by the external body of a glass of water, I am less free than when my thirst is quenched. This may seem counter to the idea that

freedom is action from one's essence, but instead it accords with it. For example, a thirsty person is less free than one who is not thirsty because that thirst both weakens the body's ability to act and influences them to act according to a cause that is not their own.

Further, when action comes from the nature of water in one's thirst for it, something external determines action, which, in turn, denotes bondage. Just like many of us joke that we 'are not ourselves' when we are too hungry, Spinoza is trying to demonstrate that we need the good external influences in order to act solely from our own nature.

Bad affects are just the opposite from good ones, they signify a change in our body that diminishes our power of activity and weakens our *conatus*. Again, Spinoza claims that "By *bad* I understand that which we certainly know to be an obstacle to our attainment of some good".²⁸ We showed that attaining good is a matter of serving our essence, for all it means for something to be good to us is for it to benefit our essence. From here, we can position bad as prompted by external things that change our body counter to its best striving to persist. For example, when my body comes into relation with a flu virus, I may understand the change in myself as 'bad' because my symptoms diminish my ability to persist in many ways.

Freedom worth wanting needs checking influence of externals according to whether each is good or bad. I say 'checking' because good affects ought to be preserved in that they note an increase of one's power of activity. As such, I want to promote these good affects for the benefit of a more perfect *conatus* from which I may act solely and therefore freely. In addition, I want to check bad affects due to their limiting of my power of activity. External things that force me to react instead of act from my essence must not

²⁸ EIVd2

impose upon the things I do if I can truly act freely. This all connects as such: we want freedom for the possibility of ethics and the coherence of our phenomenology. To get these, we must act solely from our *conatus*. To act solely from our *conatus*, we cannot react passionately to bad affects. Therefore, we need to pursue the good and avoid the bad in order to secure freedom.

There is a problem here that will tie activity of an affect to the epistemic aspects of freedom I turn to next: how do I know *which* single affection of my body prompted the good or bad affect produced. If acting freely in the phenomenological and responsible sense means checking the influence of other things in order to act from my essence, then I need to know what affects to deal with. This will develop into the practical problem with degrees of freedom in [II, 1.3], but I introduce it here because there is a concept that limits this practical problem: the distinction between *active* and *passive* helps us first approach the practice of checking influence by ruling out some affects to begin with.

In addition to distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, Spinoza utilizes the notions of ‘active’ and ‘passive’. Thinking affects as not just good and bad, but active and passive allows us to understand freedom better through an authorship of this or that body’s action. Further, activity and passivity aid us in proving that acting from one’s essence grants us the ethical responsibility that we need. Spinoza thinks of something as active when it is understandable internal to the nature of the thing producing it. For affects, this means ideas in our minds that come from something solely internal to our nature as bodies. The easiest example here is mathematics. Geometry may be thought solely from considering the nature of extension itself. That is, when I think about myself as an extended body, I have the requisite concepts for knowing geometry in my own

extension; I deduce from resources internal to me rather than understanding through things that seem external to me.

Another way to view active affects is through the notion of our body's power of activity. Spinoza writes that "we are active when something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause; that is, . . . when from our nature there follows in us or eternally to us something which can be clearly and distinctly understood through our nature alone"²⁹ Adequate causes are those known through the nature of a thing itself. In the case of human freedom, we look to whether or not a cause is intrinsic to the nature of ourselves. For example, we may know that the interior angles of a triangle sum to 180 degrees internal to the nature of extension. Likewise, when something happens to our body of which we know the cause adequately, that it stems from a something internal to itself, we may pronounce it active. Insofar as we may have this kinds of affects come from ourselves, we have a power of activity. Further, when external things allow us this power of activity to flourish, they must be good.

One may struggle for examples of these active affects, but their number is plenty. Understanding that through one's essence they may know many things that increase their ability to act brings these examples to light. For example, from the quantitative distinction of a *conatus* as a concept intrinsic to myself, I may be affected by mathematics and certain kinds of physics. That is, I know what a number is adequately because I am a single thing via my *conatus*. Insofar as these concepts are adequately true, they affirm that we may act in accordance with our essence, which affirms our power of activity; when we accomplish actions that may be known internal to ourselves, we are

²⁹ EIIIId2

most free. Things like math are internal to our nature in that we do not need any particular things external to us in order to know them adequately. In a way similar to Plato's recollection in *Meno*, Spinoza argues that knowing math and geometry is intrinsic to our essence.³⁰ Recognizing this shows that we act solely from our essence which elicits pleasure and goodness from our own nature alone.

Conversely, passive affects come from something that is understood external to a single thing's nature. This describes most scenarios this or that body encounters. When I enjoy a glass of water on a hot day, that feeling of satiation is good. That is, because I need water to persist, its relation to me is positive in promoting my persistence. However, this affection cannot be understood internally to the concept of my body itself. To understand the feeling of satiation, we must understand multiple concepts to attribute its affect to a physical cause. I say that most affects are passive insofar as we come into contact with many more feelings through our relation to the world around us, than things internal to the concept of ourselves. Spinoza defines passivity through a notion of 'partial cause'. He writes that "we are passive when something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause".³¹ When my body is affected by the water and the pleasurable affect of satiation occurs, I am, of course, strengthened in my ability to persist. However, insofar as this positive affection came from without, I am passive. Thus, active affects are free ones in that they come from one's essence alone, while passive show the bondage of a mode to the essence of an external thing.

Nonetheless, there are good passive affects insofar as they provide conditions for an

³⁰ EIIp38: "Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole, can be conceived only adequately...it follows that there are certain ideas or notions common to all men"

³¹ EIII d2

individual's increased power of activity.

3.4 –Checking Influence: Promotion and Limitation

With a background understanding of affects' influence on individuals, we can approach the object of this section's proposition head on: action that is solely *mine* needs external things checked. We developed that these external things come to each person through the affect given to them when their body undergoes a physical change. These changes are good or bad depending on their relation to this or that *conatus*' perfection and power of activity. So, we want those good affections and affects insofar as a more perfect *conatus* and power of activity constitutes the freedom we are talking about.

From this we need to talk about checking influence in a few different ways. For bad affects, we must limit their influence by understanding the way that they are caused to both recognize what physical thing produces them and to act upon that thing and destroy it. For good affects, we must promote their influence by the same means; knowing the physical bodies that produce good affects while ensuring they continue to promote our freedom. Activity and passivity also determine how we ought to approach checking affects. Since active affects are always good, we must promote their influence in a drastically different way by attending to passive things that allow the promotion of active ones. However, most of the affects discussed in 'good' and 'bad' situations are passive. As such, we need to attend to things external to our nature in order to perfect our nature and act freely. Limiting affects is a matter of knowing their causes in order to stop the means of their existence in you. That is, when I know that the flu caused the bad affect in me, I know to act in service of the flu's destruction. We aim to do just this in our efforts to develop vaccines and practice medicine. Similarly, when we know that

nutritious food is the cause of an increase in our power of activity, we foster these affections by seeking out more nutritious things to eat.

As shown, freedom means acting solely from one's essence and acting solely from one's essence means checking the influence of external things. This address of externals deals with this or that affect by locating its affection and destroying the means of its influence on us. This proposition aides acting solely from one's essence by showing how the values of 'good' and 'bad' are predicated through reference to the perfection of this or that essence. Further, addressing external things' influence, promoting the good and limiting the bad, increases one's power of activity, a necessarily good thing given its role as action internal to one's essence. This, in turn, allows us to act in a way that holds us more responsible to our body's actions. As a condition for a freedom worth wanting, our second proposition shows us how we are robustly free in determinism. However, as previously mentioned, this limitation and promotion needs an epistemic grounding. That is, we need to understand the connection between affects and their correlate affections *correctly*.

4.1 -- Adequate Knowledge

The last proposition in the syllogism states that 'to check outside influence perfectly requires knowing their causes perfectly'. To take our previous section into consideration, I take 'check' to mean both maximize that which perfects our essence while minimizing that which annuls our essence. In addition, 'outside influence' means passive affects in that active affects promote the right kind of action from one's essence. To form ourselves in this way requires that we know this or that affect's cause—to know external influences' causes is to lay the groundwork for acting in such a way as to better

perfect ourselves. Knowing causes of things means understanding how they come to be in that something's existence accounts for how it may react in the physical universe after being brought into existence. For example, if I rightfully diagnose the cause of my illness, I am better informed to act in such a way to destroy the affecting body that produces sickness. In service of this epistemic project I turn to Spinoza's conception of *adequate knowledge*. Here, I show that adequate knowledge of causes is the kind of knowledge needed to perfect one's essence.

More simply put, the problem this proposition addresses is so: my body is affected in various ways by things external to it. Through the parallel connection of my mind as an idea of my body, I may know these affections as mental affects; a change happens to me physically as well as mentally. I clearly want the best for my essence, my *conatus*, so I ought to act in accordance with the good and active affects and not the bad, passive ones. The problem is how I know that this or that affect corresponds to this or that affection, for surely a body is affected in many different ways constantly. How are we to know which physical cause determines this or that positive affect which we seek? This question illustrates the *prima facie* reason for focusing on adequate knowledge in that we need justification for what effects an external thing has on us. For example, when I eat food that has been poisoned against my knowledge, I am ignorant to some of the bodies entering into relation with my own. When I get sick from the food, I attribute the negative affection of sickness to the food instead of its actual cause in the poison. This misattribution is what we want to solve for in our project of approaching external influence on our free actions.

4.2 –Ignorance and Passions

Before answering this, I first sketch Spinoza's thinking of how we *imperfectly* know this or that thing. Our ignorance consists in only directly knowing the changes in each of our own bodies. Remember, for Spinoza, these are the same modes in different attributes. For example, the feeling of satiation simply *is* the change in my body that the sandwich produced. This feeling is pleasant insofar as the change produced is a promotion of my body's essence. In one way, this raises the stakes for knowing things at all –we are always working with a great number of physical relations between ourselves and the outside world. In another way, it makes the in principle possibility of knowing an affects' cause valid; there is a one-to-one relation between each thought and its mode in extension. This principle is how freedom may operate with certain epistemic conditions. That is, if I were able to figure all of the affects' correlate affections I could orient my action toward greater states of perfection. In this sense, I would know what I must do to be free.

Ignorance, or inadequate knowledge, comes through attributing causal links to things that must be known through more than one concept. In Spinoza's words, inadequate ideas are those "whose effect cannot be understood through the cause alone".³² This describes most interactions with externals in the way that we understand their influence on us through the nature of both the external thing as well as ourselves. For example, when I have something good to eat, I understand the increase in my power as stemming from both my nature as a thing that needs sustenance, as well as the affecting body that provides it. Acting on the basis of understandings such as this is acting passively insofar as the action cannot be attributed to intrinsic parts of my nature.

³² EIIIId1

Insofar as this action is passive, it is ignorant or passionate for Spinoza; we ought to act from a place of adequate or reasoned knowledge of how I may improve myself in order to carry out my being to its fullest.

Counter to this, adequate knowledge in *Ethics* is knowledge that is true internal to itself. Spinoza defines it as that whose “effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause”.³³ This tracks with the way that we described activity in [3] in that adequate knowledge justifies itself on the same conceptual internality that active affects do. As in, if I may know something via the intrinsic parts of my being, I may know it adequately. As such, attaining adequate knowledge is both good and active for Spinoza in that it increases my power of activity, which in turn increases the perfection of my essence. As previously framed, this perfection of my essence is exactly what movements towards freedom look like.

I may have many kinds of adequate knowledge somewhat easily. For example, extension is an attribute of substance internal to my nature as a *proportion of motion and rest*. As such, through reason alone, I may adequately know many geometrical claims. Further, since reason is intrinsic to my being as a mode in the attribute of thought, I may know certain logical claims adequately solely on the basis of my nature. Adequate knowledge of this sort demonstrates that we may adequately know things, but it is different in kind that adequately knowing particulars.

4.3 –Adequate Knowledge of Affects’ Causes in Principle; Proposition

To act perfectly from our essence requires that we maximize the good and negate the bad. Further, we know which bodies cause which affects in varying degrees of

³³ EIIIId1

certainty –we know some changes through our nature alone, while we remain wholly ignorant to others. We need to know all of the causes adequately in order to act most freely. This means a life void of ignorance or passions insofar as those ideas mislead our free action.

This knowledge is imperfect due to the plurality of affecting bodies that impress upon me at any given moment, as well as a plurality of causes when an action comes from both my nature and another mode's nature. Whenever I am affected, I may know that an external body has produced an affection upon my body. I feel *good* or *bad* insofar as each of these bodies is external to myself and either aides or annuls my being. However, many different bodies impress upon me simultaneously at every moment of my existence. In this way, I may act out of confusion in my attempts to promote or check each of their influences. This confusion is the way that we are bound to passive affects – in my inadequate appraisal of my duty to perfect my being, I may err and act counter to my being through the influence of things external to me. Even if an affect is good, when we remain ignorant to its causes, we only act in a confused and passive way. When we act from a confused notion of external things we do not act solely from ourselves; we are bound to affects. However, we want freedom not bondage. To move from one to the other we need only reorient ourselves toward adequately knowing which affections produce which affects. With adequate knowledge, our pursuit of external things would be free in the sense that the pursuit is understandable solely through one's essence; instead of pursuing things based on another mode's essence, one would act freely by guiding her actions through knowledge internal to her essence. For the time being, it is enough to know that freedom requires adequate knowledge of affects in order to develop the

methods to attaining greater states of freedom.

Thus, not only does Spinoza articulate a freedom worth wanting, he shows how adequate knowledge of what can affect us is necessary for that freedom. In the ways that we want ‘to check outside influence perfectly’, we are driven to adequate knowledge in the way that it accounts for ‘knowing their causes perfectly’. As such, we have the means to attain freedom through an egotistic, intellectual ethics of greater understanding. Once carried out to perfection, we may attain a wholly free life acting solely from our essence with the ethical responsibility and phenomenology of choice that freedom demands.

We will remain responsible insofar as we will not be bound to bad external things, allowed to act freely from our essence alone. As in, when our behavior is passive, we are only partially responsible for it in that part of the consequence stems from our essence, and part from other things’ essences. Alternatively, when one acts from active knowledge, she is wholly responsible for the action insofar as it originates directly from her essence. Similarly, our phenomenology of choice with regard to passive choices is partially illusory; one feels a partial choice because the actor’s essence was one of many causes. However, when acting solely from our essence, we will have phenomenology of choice insofar as we may adequately know that our decision stems solely from ourselves, unclouded by passions. Our desires will accord to our knowledge of good and bad, driving our decisions toward the best choices with perfect accuracy.

Freedom and Adequate Knowledge: A Conclusion

In the conclusion of the syllogism the first and last propositions are linked: ‘Therefore, freedom requires knowing external things’ causes perfectly’. This conclusion accurately portrays Spinoza’s conception of freedom, insofar as each step in the process

leads to the next. Further, this formulation of freedom is a freedom worth wanting in every meaningful sense. We may experience freedom and hold each other ethically responsible in Spinoza's metaphysics of monism and determinism.

Adequate knowledge of affects secures phenomenology of freedom by ensuring that free action feels solely *mine*. When I adequately know an affect's cause, I know it through my nature alone. This links action to a self that acts in that knowing something adequately regards only one's inner experience. In addition, adequate knowledge of affects secures ethical responsibility by giving a metric of whether an action comes from oneself or the outside world. Holding one responsible for her actions is simple if there is a way to justify whether or not an action came from her. In addition, this adequate knowledge directs us toward becoming freer in our everyday lives; insofar as we establish more and more adequate knowledge, we increase our activity and therefore our freedom.

This view of freedom justified through adequate knowledge works compatibly with monism in that it does not need a substantial subject to consider acting solely from oneself. Through a mode's essence, we can see if an action is understood solely by its author. Since Spinoza argues that modes have essences of a formal proportion and a *conatus*, monism does not interfere with thinking about freedom; instead of needing a substantial soul to create ethical subjects, an insubstantial essence suffices. Additionally, freedom based in adequate knowledge works compatibly with determinism in that it shows which behaviors are subject to our experience of ethical deliberation and which behaviors are not sufficiently our own enough to be ethically and phenomenologically relevant. When we know that an action proceeds from a single essence alone, we escape

the problems with over-determination. Instead, we have a way to pin down what it means to both lack an uncaused will, as well as remain free ethical subjects.

Each step of the syllogism presented tracks with the kind of freedom worth wanting despite the issues with determinism and monism professed by some. Each pseudo-problem with Spinoza's metaphysics disappears with a picture of freedom wherein subjects act solely from each of their essences. Monism presents a problem with substantial agent-causation and Cartesian freedom of the will, but the *conatus* provides an essential individuation just a capable of freedom. Moreover, phenomenology of choice comes easily with a Cartesian mental substance, but the *conatus* delivers this as well insofar as ideas conceived through a subject itself may authentically be called its own. That is, there is a concrete sense in which a decision can feel as though it is 'mine', or not, through the two individuating formulations of the *conatus* and *proportion of motion and rest*.

Herein, I sought to show how Spinoza's account of freedom is coherent, possible and a freedom worth wanting. When a mode acts solely from its essence, it acts in such a way that ethical responsibility and a phenomenology of freedom is attained. Acting solely from one's essence requires an intellectual egoism of promoting good affects and negating bad ones. This ethics requires an epistemic framework of attaining more and more adequate knowledge to replace passionate knowledge of one's affects. In this sense, freedom simply is a matter of adequate knowledge and action oriented around that adequate knowledge. Further, it's coherent and possible for a finite mode to freely act in this very way. As such, Part I ends here; Spinoza's *Ethics* provides a freedom worth wanting compatible with his monism and determinism.

Part II: Bondage and Finitude

This section addresses two main points. First, it shows that the syllogism laid out in Part I, combined with other features of Spinoza's view, implies that human freedom is philosophically impossible. Second, it argues that while certain readers of Spinoza argue wrongfully for truncated philosophical freedom, humans may have a kind of truncated freedom in their resignation to bondage. To the first point, the guiding syllogism argues that freedom is a matter of 'acting solely from one's essence'. This definition shows that neither monism nor determinism preclude freedom. Rather, there is a coherent conception of freedom alongside the seemingly incompatible metaphysics of *Ethics*. However, this part adds a corollary to the definition of freedom that renders it unattainable; insofar as freedom necessitates adequate knowledge of all of one's affects' causes, humans are not free due to their finite nature. This impossibility is formulated in two ways. Humans are both *in practice* and *in principle* limited to this bondage because of their finitude. This definition of freedom, and resulting impossibility differs from the logic of many 'hard determinists'; there is a coherent definition of freedom in the world, but humans are simply epistemically unfit to attain it.

To the second aim, [II, 2] refutes others' reading of human finitude with regards to freedom. Commentators such as Steven Nadler and S. Paul Kashap argue that humans may have a truncated kind of freedom. However, due to humans' epistemic abilities, this freedom does not resemble the philosophically rigorous account of Spinoza's 'Free-Person'. Reconciling these readings leads to a distinction between *philosophical* and *practical* conceptions of freedom in *Ethics*. That is, practical freedom attempts to secure the same ends as philosophical freedom, but acknowledges the resignation to an

imperfect method as the only moment of freedom in itself. This distinction allows critique of Nadler and Kashap's views on freedom, while simultaneously demonstrating where such interpretations fit into the available responses from finite actors in their free resignation.

1.1 –Corollary

This section introduces a corollary to the guiding syllogism from Part I. This corollary is as follows:

(5); 'freedom in ordinary life is impossible due to the epistemic capabilities of humans'. The epistemic issue at hand is one of adequate knowledge *of* particulars, *by* particulars (as in, humans). This section first shows which kinds of adequate knowledge may and may not be known by finite beings in order to illustrate the difference in kind between adequate knowledge of particulars and adequate knowledge of universals. Next, it introduces two formulations of the problem with adequate knowledge of one's affects' causes. There is both an *in practice* problem with knowledge of causes infinite in number, as well as an *in principle* problem with finite things. That is, humans are unfit for true freedom due to two different implications of their finitude. In both of these ways, humans lack the ability to attain knowledge required for freedom; to act solely from one's essence is an impossible order due to the finitude of humans as well as the nature of adequacy and particular external things.

1.2 –Human Epistemic Limits

As in [I, 4.3], Spinoza's conception of freedom depends on adequate knowledge of one's affects' causes. In short, actors need to know their affects' causes in order to judge both whether an affect is positive or negative, as well as whether it is active or

passive. After correctly judging which cause produces which individual affect, each agent then ought to seek only the causes that, along with their body's nature, produce positive affects. Positive affects are positive insofar as they increase the power of activity within an individual. Additionally, active affects are those which have an individual actor as their adequate cause.³⁴ These are most free insofar as they are caused by one's essence. By increasing one's power, positive affects promote the freedom inherent in actions of which an individual is the adequate cause.

In addition, individuals must pinpoint the causes of negative/passive affects and annul these causes that produce weaker changes in the body. To carry this all out perfectly is to act freely insofar as all external things accord with or enable an individual's acting from their essence alone. As such, individuals must promote these affects' causes in order to attain greater freedom. For example, when I feel elated learning a new proof, the increase in my power of activity due to the proof produces a positive affect which is also active. This elation is active in that it is caused by my nature alone as an extended thing. As such, I ought to promote such increases by continuing my studies and learning more logically demonstrable knowledge so I may become more powerful and therefore freer. In another way, individuals may have passive, positive affects produced by increases to their power that come from without. That is, if an affect's cause is due to both one's nature and the nature of another thing it must remain passive. If this affection is a change that makes one stronger it is positive, only insofar as it leads to more activity. For example, sustenance produces a good, passive affect insofar as it promotes the *conatus*, but only as a means to other actions which are active. That is,

³⁴ "If we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by [affect] I understand activity, otherwise passivity" EIIIId3

it is good to eat because it enables the body to persist in carrying out more activity.

Conversely, the negative/passive affects detract from one's freedom in that they bind one's body to the nature of outside things. For example, when I get the flu, I become ill and feel terrible. This affect signals that my body's power has diminished due to the nature of a virus in relation to my body's nature. This weakening of my body binds me to the nature of the flu; I am less free because the change produced in me influences what I do, like coughing, sleeping more than usual and so on. All of this is to say that we ought to act in accordance with how we perceive and then judge affects to arise; each affect's external cause may be either annulled or promoted in service of an individual's increased freedom.

These external causes of each affect are important due to the relation of bodies to thoughts in Spinoza's parallelism. Spinoza writes that "the human mind has no knowledge of the body, nor does it know it to exist, except through ideas of the affections by which the body is affected".³⁵ This reinforces the parallelism of extension and thought, while firmly establishing that affections of the body constitute the affects changing the mind. That is, when we have ideas of things, it is because of their physical interface with us. Even ideas of ideas are a matter of the body insofar as they regard changes within the body to a state previously affected within the body; remembering what one ate for dinner is a change in the body in the same way that eating the meal in the first place changed the body. With regards to actions and freedom, this also shows how we may or may not act from our essence alone as a cause. Agents need to both understand the influence of externals over each of themselves, as well as appropriately

³⁵ EIIp19

place the cause of each affect to its proper external body. This leads us to truth and adequacy in order to justify the location of each affect's origin.

The difference between adequate and inadequate knowledge comes in perfectly knowing an idea's reference. Spinoza defines ideas both in terms of their 'truth' and 'adequacy'. Technically, an idea is a mode in the attribute of thought that signifies a body or another idea; "a conception of the mind which the conception forms because it is a thinking thing".³⁶ This includes thoughts from the imagination, as well as impressions of bodies that come into relation with the individual.³⁷ Affirming this reference of external bodies interacting with the individual's body grants 'truth' to ideas. For an idea to be true it must "agree with that of which it is the idea".³⁸ This means that truth regards the reference of "conceptions of the mind" and their correlate objects in the attribute of extension. In this way, Spinoza's truth resonates with notions of correspondence; truth is a matter of accurate reference. For example, I may have ideas of flying pigs and unicorns, but neither is true because there is no mode in extension that agrees with either idea. Untrue thoughts do not *agree* with parallel bodies outside of the individual. However, since ideas are changes to bodies in the attribute of thought, they must relate to *a* body or bodies somehow.³⁹ This develops the problem that adequacy accounts for in that some other body produces the ideas of fantasy creatures, as well as any affects that accompany that change in my body and corresponding change in my mind.⁴⁰ As a matter of

³⁶ EIIId3

³⁷ Imagined things for Spinoza are accounted for as states of a thinker's body; "rather, it is a state of my body, viz., the motions in my brain correlate to the imaginative idea in my mind" (Nadler, 162)

³⁸ EId6

³⁹ Ideas may also hold other ideas as their object.

⁴⁰ In fact, for Spinoza, *any* sensory impression of an external is as confused in its correspondence as the idea of a unicorn; ideas are only the change produced in an individual's body when it relates to another body. Insofar as both an apple and a unicorn are inadequate ideas, this change's cause cannot be known.

correspondence, truth is unknowable to humans given our lack of a perspective that could compare a claim to its referent. Thankfully, Spinoza utilizes a notion of adequacy that makes humans capable of some sort of truth through the reference of an idea to an individual's body.

Adequacy lays claim to the surety of true ideas. Spinoza writes that “by an adequate idea [he means] an idea which, in so far as it is considered in itself without relation to its object, has all the properties –that is, intrinsic characteristics –of a true idea”.⁴¹ If truth is a matter of reference between an idea and what that idea is about, then adequate ones have their reference established perfectly intrinsic to the idea itself. For example, when I have an idea of an apple, the idea references a body that may or may not produce the relation with my body that gives me ‘apple’. It is the extrinsic reference of the idea ‘apple’ to a body that forms the idea in me. More importantly, nothing internal to the idea of the apple shows that it must exist and may interact with my body. This is a significant problem insofar as regarding an existing apple as the reference for the idea of apple will influence how one promotes and limits external things’ influence in pursuit of freedom. This is a problem of verification: claims about the apple rely on confused combinations of disparate sources for verification.

Alternatively, when I consider the Pythagorean Theorem, there is nothing extrinsic referenced. Rather, it is the nature of all bodies, of extension itself that allows me to think such an idea –its truth is intrinsic to the idea insofar as it regards all bodies, including my own. However, this is easily misunderstood. When Spinoza says ‘intrinsic’ it is defined “so as to exclude the extrinsic characteristic –to wit, the agreement of the

⁴¹ EIIId4

idea with that of which it is an idea”.⁴² This means that instead of referencing a body, or possible arrangement of bodies, the adequate idea only references itself as an idea of a body; it clearly and distinctly regards a single thing as its cause. Easy examples of adequate ideas are axiomatic logical and mathematical ideas. For example, I adequately know that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line given the nature of extension and its intrinsic truth.⁴³

Universals such as this are easily known adequately by humans. ‘Easily’ may seem like the wrong term given the difficulty of mathematics for many, but this knowledge is easily attained adequately in that it stems from an individual’s nature alone. First, is the analytic nature of such knowledge. The claim needs nothing other than the nature of extension itself to cohere; it follows from the definition of two points that a curved line will always be a longer connection than a straight one. In this way, there is only one principle that must be known adequately in order to secure such geometric knowledge adequately.

Additionally, when one adequately knows that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, it is analytic to the nature of an individual as an extended thing. It so happens that humans are also extended things, and may know that they are so through the nature of what it means to be a human. That is, insofar as ideas are changes to a body expressed in thought, humans necessarily have bodies since they have ideas. This necessary corporeal parallel secures extension as something that follows from each human’s essence. As such, adequate knowledge that only needs the nature of extension as one of its foundation terms –such as the geometrical theses in discussion –follow from

⁴² EIIId4e

⁴³ EIIP43

the nature of any extended thing. Therefore, humans may adequately know geometry. More generally, other logical and mathematical principles may be known adequately through extension, but none of these concepts are particular, all are universals.

Particulars present a different challenge for adequate knowledge, while also comprising much more of human life than universals. Humans are clearly free when they carry out mathematics due to the internal basis of that knowledge. The affect produced by the Pythagorean Theorem is positive and active because it comes solely from the nature of the individual through its attribute of extension. However, much more of a human life is spent in more sensuous activity amongst external, particular things. In fact, as durational beings, humans *need* externals in order to persist in their existence; things like sustenance and shelter are crucial for human survival against a myriad of external ills. This is what draws us toward the more difficult realm of particulars; we cannot only consider mathematics and survive to study more mathematics. Finite actors need particular goods.

In order to determine whether one is free when in relation with these ideas and bodies, one must rely on perception, judgment through affects, and appropriate response in order to promote only the good and annul only the bad in service of acting freely. Perception is first independent of passion, in a motivational sense. When one perceives, one encounters external bodies. That is, given Spinoza's parallelism, each idea or sensation of a particular thing is just a change of the body produced by an external body interacting with the individual's body. Then, the character of these ideas produced by the change, the affect, gives way to judgement of the external thing. That is, when a good affect is produced in an individual by a particular thing, it must have a cause. When an

affect is produced synchronously with the perception of an external thing, individuals may attribute the feeling to the change caused by that body. However, there is room for great error here. Because each affect is produced in part due to one's own nature and in part due to the nature of an external thing, This relational character of affects is key to the problem of freedom in that free-people only act in accordance with their own nature; when external things' natures determine action then an individual is bound to the nature of things other than themselves. The central problem lies in reliably verifying which affects come from which causes, in order to increase ones freedom by checking outside influence. This verification leads us to the two formulations of the problem at hand.

1.3 –In Practice Problem

In order to secure freedom, an individual needs to know *all* of the causes of their affections in order to seek only active affects, and secure the good externals that allow a body to persist in this seeking. Knowing all of the affects' causes means one needs to know every cause of his affects due to the innumerable bodies he encounters at every moment, as well as the causal relation between those affecting bodies and bodies that affected these externals. Knowing the whole causal system is crucial; one cannot simply attend to the most important causes at a given moment because such attention may overlook possible determinations of one's body through the causal nexus of the universe.

To know adequately is to know perfectly, which requires all causes impacting a body. This produces a practical problem: if there are infinite causes to know, we surely can never know all of them simply because they are infinite.⁴⁴ Humans cannot live in total freedom due to the *in practice* problem of our temporal finitude. Each affect as the

⁴⁴ EIp28

change to one's body in the attribute of thought is either due solely to the nature of one's body, or due to the nature of one's body and external things. That is, some changes in one's body come from her nature alone, others in tandem with external things and her nature. Additionally, the infinite causal chain in the universe for each cause of a body's state change makes the problem harder to solve.⁴⁵ Even if one could grasp all of the influences upon its body at a given time, the chain leading to each cause factors into adequately knowing a body's affection. For example, upon examination of the negative affect a bullet produces with my body, I surely need to know the causal relation of the gun that sets bullets in motion, as well as the agent that pulls the trigger; to say that the bullet is solely responsible for its affect upon my body is false; knowing *only* that the bullet does me harm does not allow me to address the contingent factors that bring it into relation with my body.

To make things even worse, human durational existence remains finite. One's body inevitably succumbs to mortal compromise from external forces. Because of this, humans are *practically* barred from adequate knowledge of all their affects' causes; with infinite causes to verify adequately and finite time existing, one necessarily may not be free. Simply put, if there are infinite causes and I need to know them all, I will never have time to gain all of the knowledge I need to verify which affects truly reference their objects, so I may promote or annul their influence. This is a practical problem because it does not regard one's ability to secure adequate knowledge; it does not matter how easy or difficult it is to adequately know affects' causes because humans will run out of time to pursue this indefinitely. If this indefinite amount of time needed to acquire knowledge

⁴⁵ Elp28

were not dire enough of a setback, there also stands the amount of time needed to implement this knowledge of which affects cohere with which objects in the form of annulment and promotion of said causes. In all cases, this is practically impossible.

For example, I decide to eat an apple when I am hungry. As per the syllogism, when I act freely, I must know that externals only produce greater power of activity within me. In this case, I must determine whether my desire for the apple is caused entirely by my nature as a body that requires other bodies to persist, or if the apple's body determined me to desire it. Additionally, I need to verify whether it is the apple's nature alone that affected me from without, so I know that the apple is the sole object of this affection; it may be the case that some other body's nature (like an advertisement for apple juice), as well as the apple's nature affected me so in relation with my own nature, and so on. Additionally, there remains the question of whether or not the apple is adequately good for promoting my power of activity. It could even be the case that the cause of the apple's good or bad affect comes from the advertisement, or any number of other bodies. These problems would carry on forever with the causal chain leading to the apple's interaction with myself, as well as infinitely for every other body that I come into contact with at the same time as the apple. Worse still, I would need to carry out this near-impossible process each time *any* external thing came into relation with my body. The scale of these judgements form the practical issue with adequate knowledge of particulars –there are infinite things for a finite actor to know.

I return to the temptation of understanding this infinite regress as over-determining for the same reason as in [I, 2.2]. Everything must exist in a causal web of relations extending infinitely. When an external body affects me, that external was

brought into existence from many causes in addition to its own nature, and those causes were caused ad infinitum. However, in each of these cases there are two factors at play in the determination of each external: the external body's nature and the nature of everything that affected it. This is the reason that we are interested in the infinite causes of the universe as agents aspiring to freedom; for each affect produced in us, we must know the cause in order to promote or annul its influence upon us. The complication comes with the nature of each of these affects; to what extent is the nature of the particular external body affecting us, and to what extent is the nature of one of its causes affecting us?

Over-determination is only a problem when an individual forgets this potential for shared responsibility between an external and its former causes. To claim that the causes of an affecting body are what determine one's affections is wrong because it neglects the nature of the external itself; to claim that the external body's nature alone causes an affection forecloses the possibility of another body's influence on the affecting body's nature. Avoiding this over-determinative logic justifies the task of a free-person in adequately knowing all of her causes. When one acknowledges the influence of external bodies' causes as potentially responsible, in part, for the affect under consideration, the infinite causal chain of each external body becomes justifiably relevant. All of this serves to reiterate the practical problem with securing adequate knowledge of the affects' causes. If each actor truly needs knowledge of every cause in the universe in order to adequately account for the responsibility of each action, then this is infeasible. As such, freedom is impossible for humans.

1.4 –In Principle Problem

Despite the impossibility of freedom due to this practical limitation, there is a bigger problem: humans cannot be free *in principle* due to the nature of adequate knowledge of particulars. As previously developed, adequate knowledge of particulars is requisite for Spinoza's freedom in that freedom simply means acting so that only one's essence is the cause of an action. Particulars drive humans hither and thither, and, as such, a free person must know whether or not an external promotes acting from her essence, or weakens this ability to act freely.

This accounts for the need for us to know particulars, but adequacy is necessary as well. Reiterating again, this knowledge of an action's causes must be adequate because many actions seem to come from our essence, but we cannot say with certainty that this or that action is ours without a perfect idea of the system of interacting forces. For example, when I choose to eat salad instead of pizza at the cafeteria, a choice that better increases my power of activity, I have the potential to do so from my own essential privileging of the *conatus*. Acting in accordance with this essential feature would allow me to adequately choose to sustain my durational existence through food; I may adequately know that I require certain external things to perfect my existence, albeit I can never know *which* particulars. To this end of knowing which particulars are good, this choice may also be driven by external forces. Instead of acting solely upon the principle of my essence, the pizza's body may impact my decision to choose it. Additionally, acting upon inadequate knowledge of the pizza's good is passive insofar as the knowledge does not depend on one's essence, but rather the pizza's. This is a problem because nothing in the nature of myself can give adequate knowledge to know whether the pizza promotes further activity or not; the only knowledge of such claims remains

inadequate. That is, even if the pizza is one of many right choices to promote one's power of activity, it is always based in bondage instead of freedom.

Even without regarding the infinity of such situations presented before this, there is a fundamental problem with a human's adequate knowledge of particulars: it will never be intrinsic to the idea. This intrinsic character is impossible by definition because each affect is produced by the nature of the affecting body as well as the affected body. While there are better and worse responses to such bondage, it stands that these two determining forces cannot be separated from each other in judging each particular affect. In this way, humans are incapable of adequate knowledge of particulars at all. It does not matter that there are limitations to the feasibility of this project due to scale –it is a mismatch of kind to know a particular adequately in Spinoza's metaphysics. Because adequate knowledge requires one's essence as its referent, and the particular features of particulars are under consideration, one necessarily cannot have adequate knowledge of particular things.

Given Part I, we know humans do not cohere with indeterminist freedom or the freedom attributed to a substantial soul. Additionally, given the influence of particular things, we cannot have the freedom of *always* acting solely from our essence as we are determined in various different ways. But there remained hope that, through adequate knowledge of particular affects, we could at least have a freedom worth wanting, the freedom of checking the influence of negative particulars and promoting positive ones that allow greater activity. But now, it turns out we can't even have that due to the practical and principled problems with knowing an infinite number of particulars adequately; adequate knowledge of particulars is impossible and infinite instances of such knowledge is impractical. Finally, I turn to Nadler and Kashap in hopes of

recuperating a partial freedom in an actor's resignation to bondage.

2.1 –Truncated Freedom

The issues with human epistemology have not deterred other readers of *Ethics* from arguing for a truncated human freedom. That is, despite the impossibility of adequate knowledge of all particulars, both Nadler and Kashap argue for a philosophically viable partial human freedom. This does not work. I first reject the offerings of both readers on the grounds that they cannot cohere with the rigor of Spinoza's metaphysics; both authors present theories that aim to reconcile adequate knowledge of particulars on the terms of *Ethics*, but both fail to do so. However, by drawing a distinction between a philosophical reading and a practical reading of freedom, I seek to secure a partial freedom both in the resignation to bondage as well as the inadequate promotion of positive affects' causes through probable goods.

2.2 –Philosophical Failure

Given the centrality of knowledge of particulars for freedom, the key to saving some notion of freedom *philosophically* is an account of how we can adequately know some particulars. Both authors attempt this partial adequate knowledge of particulars, but both fail.⁴⁶ This is surprising, given that they begin approaching the adequate knowledge of particulars in a coherent manner.

In Nadler's overview of *Ethics*, he sets forth the difficulty of human adequate knowledge very clearly. He agrees that "an idea can fail to agree properly with its object in a number of ways. First, every idea in the mind will indeed necessarily have a corresponding extended mode...but that does not mean that the extended mode that

⁴⁶ 'Partial' does not undermine the completeness of adequacy, rather, I use the term to describe having adequate knowledge of certain particulars, rather than the totality of particulars.

corresponds to the idea will be the object that the idea purports to represent.”⁴⁷ That is, Nadler has already acknowledged the basis for the practical problem in [II, 1.3]; of the innumerable causes that affect an individual at any given moment, there are infinite potentials for mistaking the wrong body to be the cause of a particular affect. Given this frame, Nadler seems to agree with the argument presented herein: there is ample room for humans to fail at attaining adequate knowledge, both practically in the infinity of entities needed for freedom, and principally in the adequacy of things based on the nature of separate particulars. However, he attempts to render a philosophical sound partial freedom from this.

The key mistake in Nadler’s approach is to argue for degrees of adequacy. I highlight these claims to degrees of freedom as a way to show that his theory fails because it attempts to compromise within Spinoza’s philosophical system, instead of admitting to a practical significance within human finitude. He begins this inquiry with a reading of the free-person:

“According to Spinoza, a person’s ultimate well-being is contingent upon his level of knowledge and understanding. In particular, it is dependent upon his increasing the number of true and adequate ideas in his mind and thus **moving closer** to having an intellect that **more closely resembles** the infinite intellect, that is, God’s (Nature’s) infinite and eternal collection of adequate ideas”⁴⁸

In part, this frame accurately describes the project of *Ethics*; freedom is absolutely “dependent upon [one] increasing the number of true and adequate ideas in his mind” insofar as such ideas are the components of “God’s (Nature’s) infinite and eternal collection of adequate ideas”.⁴⁹ However, Nadler fails to cohere with Spinoza’s project

⁴⁷ Nadler 162

⁴⁸ Nadler 161 (my emphasis)

⁴⁹ Ibid

when he frames these philosophically coherent features with the qualification of “moving closer” and “more closely resembles” the perfection of a free-person or God. This is incompatible with *Ethics* in that it first disregards the need for complete adequate knowledge of one’s affects’ causes; when the “ultimate well-being” is measured in degrees, it lacks the availability of a perfect *conatus* insofar as degrees cannot be perfect.

All the worse for Nadler’s approach is the treatment of adequate knowledge of particulars itself; Nadler’s sympathetic ordering of an individual mind disregards the impossibility of attaining such ideas. This ordering comes when he expands the intellect that “more closely resembles God’s”. He writes:

The human mind, as a finite mode of Thought, cannot possibly encompass an infinite series of ideas and causes. However, this does not mean that the human mind is doomed to a lifetime of only inadequate knowledge. Adequate knowledge of an abbreviated sort is available to human beings. It is all a matter of how ideas are ordered in a person’s mind. One’s partial knowledge of a thing can still be adequate, as long as the idea of the thing is properly situated in its causal/logical nexuses, however incomplete our grasp of those nexuses may be... To have that partial knowledge is, in fact, to have the ideas in my mind represent a properly ordered subset of the ideas in the infinite intellect.⁵⁰

Nadler’s account of partial adequate knowledge ignores both the in principle and in practice problems described herein. With respect to practice, this directly disagrees with the necessity of knowing the totality of external things in order to adequately know that an affect is produced by this or that particular. That is, given the causal nexus Nadler invokes, partial understanding of particular things’ influence is not sufficient because it is not perfect; if we are to be free humans, we need adequate knowledge of each part of the nexus in order to establish necessary reference between idea and body.⁵¹ With respect to

⁵⁰ Nadler, 165

⁵¹ I return to the treatment of EI_p28 in [1.2]

the in principle problem, Nadler's "adequate knowledge of an abbreviated sort" is not actually active because it is neither perfect nor solely attributed to an individual essence. By arguing for this partial knowledge grounded in the relevant causes surrounding an actor, Nadler leaves room for human error. This error, no matter how small, means that Spinoza's freedom is impossible –if anything other than an individual's essence determines them, then their power of activity is not perfected and are not free.

Nadler's theory hinges on the degrees of freedom for humans. When he claims that "we can approximate the nature of the free person to a greater or lesser degree... depending upon the extent to which he approaches or falls short of the ideal free condition" it is a claim that bolsters the bondage of humans to the passions as a kind of partial freedom.⁵² This formulation fails due to its dissonance with the terms of freedom as acting solely from one's essence. In short, Nadler makes a philosophical claim inconsistent with the terms of the problem; the solution cannot follow from the propositions.

Kashap's truncated freedom works in a similar manner of degrees. He uses much of the same logic as Nadler insofar as he admits fully that humans may not know all their affects' causes adequately and that this does not preclude all freedom. This invocation of a partial freedom falls prey to the same critique of ignoring the infinite number of possible determining factors from without. However, he adds a problematic partial freedom when discussing the role of failing to attain all adequate knowledge. He writes:

Since the power to attain true knowledge is partially granted to all human beings, we are ourselves responsible for the failure to exercise this power, and hence have no but ourselves to blame for remaining in slavery rather than living in freedom⁵³

⁵² Nadler 237

⁵³ Kashap 183

The problem with this passage lies in the consequences of failing to exercise the power of attaining adequate knowledge. Kashap claims that agents have none “but ourselves to blame” for remaining in bondage, but this is misleading. In one sense, it has nothing to do with responsibility in the way most would describe it; it’s not as though I may choose to gain adequate knowledge of particulars but may happen not to, or disregard the serious consequences of such a decision. In another sense, Kashap’s language is deceptively correct. It is correct insofar as we *do* have “no one but ourselves to blame” for our finitude. This is because we can only blame our nature as particular modes and not infinite ones for such consequences; it is not a matter of fancy, but a matter of essential category. That is, we have the ability to consider certain eternal adequately, and ought to do so insofar as they promote our power of activity. But certainly we may not choose to know particulars adequately, for they are practically and principally impossible to know as such.

In that this self-blame may turn to acknowledging our limits and allowing us to resign ourselves to our finitude, Kashap’s theory allows for a practical sense of partial freedom in the same way as Nadler’s. Different from Nadler though, is the sense in which we ought to seek out what is most probable to promoting our power. That is, since resignation to choosing the most probable goods is itself active, we ought to carry this out in our decision making

2.3 –Practical Benefit: Free Resignation

Both readers present incoherent positions given Spinoza’s metaphysics. That is, freedom is impossible given the analysis of individuals in *Ethics*, and both readers attempt to present a viable freedom within Spinoza’s doctrine unsuccessfully. Despite

failing to cohere with the metaphysics of *Ethics*, there remains a kind of freedom in the failure; insofar as acknowledging human bondage may be known adequately, humans ought to resign themselves as such as a means to increasing their power of activity. That is, in response to our finitude, both resignation to bondage and deference to probable goods are available freedoms for finite beings; both admissions are themselves free through the nature of humans themselves.

Insofar as knowledge of finitude follows from humans' nature, it is active; insofar as resignation to our finitude is active, it is free. That is, while we try and fail to seek what is good and true adequately, there is room for a recognition of our own finitude that is itself a viable partial freedom. Spinoza addresses this recognition late in the *Ethics* as a practical response to the pessimistic failure of human ability. He writes:

...human power is very limited and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have absolute power to adapt to our purposes things external to us. However, we shall patiently bear whatever happens to us that is contrary to what is required by consideration of our own advantage, if we are conscious that we have done our duty and that our power was not extensive enough for us to have avoided the said things, and that we are a part of the whole of Nature whose order we follow. If we clearly and distinctly understand this, that part of us which is defined by the understanding... will be fully resigned and will endeavor to persevere in that resignation... And, so insofar as we rightly understand these matters, the endeavor of the better part of us is in harmony with the order of the whole of nature⁵⁴

Important here is Spinoza's language of "that part of us which is defined by the understanding... will be fully resigned and will endeavor to persevere in that resignation", as an available active knowledge for finite minds such as our own.

When seen through this frame, the impossibility of human freedom is *less* pessimistic than it first appears insofar as understanding our bondage is a freedom itself.

⁵⁴ EIV Appendix 32

Given this available freedom in resignation, Spinoza implores finite modes such as ourselves to “persevere in that resignation” for the activity understanding human limits provides. In this recognition, we have to accept that many of the outcomes in our lives are a product “patiently [bearing] whatever happens to us that is contrary to what is required by consideration of our own advantage” and that, as such, we will perish in the same impotent finitude as always. In other words, freedom’s impossibility is not entirely pessimistic; we can *surely* know that we cannot perfect our freedom.

Spinoza’s second offering is a practical invocation of seeking the probable goods. This form of resignation to bondage is a worse partial freedom than the previous example. But, through the active knowledge that finite things need other finite things to persist, Spinoza urges humans to resist the paralysis of our impotent intellect in favor of social norms. In a correspondence, he writes:

It is true that in the world we often act on conjecture; but it is false that our reflections are based upon conjecture. In ordinary life we must follow what is most probable, but in philosophical speculation, the truth. Man would perish of thirst and hunger if he would not eat or drink until he had obtained a perfect proof that food and drink would do him good. But in contemplation this has no place. On the contrary, we must be cautious not to admit as true something which is merely probable. For when we admit one falsity, countless others follow.⁵⁵

Here, Spinoza acknowledges something obvious. While he theorizes the interconnection between ethics, epistemology and determinism, there remains the rest of the world pushing onward with their daily lives. That is, Spinoza knows the difficulty of the task at hand in securing human freedom and the blessed life and prioritizes the ‘common sense’ notions of ignorantly thinking that food and water produce good affects in a thinker; we cannot know for certain that the consumption of water leads to further promotion of

⁵⁵ Spinoza *Epistolae*, 56 (via Kashap 154)

activity, but Spinoza rightfully points out that many who do not consume water die of thirst.

This seeking of probable good allows for a Kashap introduces this analysis in the conclusion of his reading, forwarding that laws and legal responsibility are products of such contingent circumstances that seem like a probable, historically situated good. He writes:

Within the context, therefore, of laws formulated by human beings to govern their lives more peacefully, 'it is necessary to consider things as contingent'; human beings must be said to have freedom to do or not to do things in obedience to such laws, according to their wishes. If this is what is meant by 'freedom of the will', then Spinoza neither meant to deny, nor would it be philosophically consistent for him to deny it. He would add, however, that such freedom will never give us the peace of mind and blessedness which accompany freedom from passions, since that comes only from having one's desires and will conform to true knowledge.⁵⁶

This passage does much the same work as Spinoza's previous one in that there is benefit to following what can only ever be inadequately known. This benefit has no authoritative metric of value for each individual insofar as it is confused, but so long as it allows one to persist and resign herself to finitude and bondage, it leads to the only partial freedom available.

This resignation is even more useful for practical life though, in that it adequately foregrounds that humans ought to follow what would most probably increase their power. That is, we may adequately know that we must seek what seems to benefit us best in that we adequately know that absolute claims to our benefit are impossible. If resigning ourselves to bondage provides this necessary drive towards probable goods, then we ought to attain the activity of resignation. This acknowledgement of finitude and resignation to bondage is the key to reading the practical side of Spinoza's freedom;

⁵⁶ Kashap 182

when one sees that a vast amount of actions are determined by outside influence, that knowledge itself is a philosophically viable freedom. That is, the understanding that human finitude cannot cohere with Spinoza's freedom is itself a free action. Insofar as understanding that one is bound constitutes a free moment, we ought to resign ourselves to bondage in a similar way. In this resignation, we ought to seek probable goods, and follow contingent human laws insofar as we adequately know some external things are necessary for survival and the common agreement of such probable decisions is as good or bad as any inadequate metric of value.

Conclusion

As a whole, this second section shows that, given the syllogism from the first section, freedom is impossible. This is a contentious claim regarding Spinoza's philosophical project. That is, while the premises of this syllogism stand on their own within *Ethics*, other readers do not take such a stance on freedom's impossibility. Additionally, I respond to disagreements with this reading, namely, Nadler and Kashap's accounts of truncated freedom. Both authors argue for a practical interpretation of freedom within *Ethics*, but neither adequately nor successfully argues for a *philosophically* coherent freedom within Spinoza's framework. Nadler's freedom does not fit within the strictness of Spinoza's finite individuals and the requisite adequate knowledge for a truly *free-person*; no matter the degree to which the mind may be ordered correctly, it remains imperfect and therefore bound in part to passions. Similarly, Kashap's reading evades the philosophical issue of freedom's impossibility in favor of a practical assessment of what limiting bad and passive affects secures.

To close, the philosophical impossibility of freedom is a feature of Spinoza's

project. In disparate places he references the impossibility of adequately controlling external influence, attesting to the infinitely more powerful intellect and bodies of God, or, all things; “The force (vis) whereby a man persists in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (IVp3). That is, freedom is impossible and rightly so; there are better and worse ways to limit the improper influence of external things upon oneself, but ultimately, many aspects of one’s life are based on contingencies outside of human control, for practical and principled reasons due to our finitude. Despite the pessimistic foreclosure of complete freedom, there remains the freedom in resignation to bondage. This is the optimistic take-away from the project. Humans are, unfortunately, incapable of knowing particulars adequately. As such, we cannot act solely from our essence at all times. However, insofar as acknowledging this finitude needs only the nature of a particular actor, the resignation to bondage itself is free. Therefore, to increase our power, humans ought to secure what little adequate knowledge they can in logic, mathematics and resignation.

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