Affects and ideas in Spinoza’s Therapy of Passions

Lilli Alanen
Uppsala University

Spinoza’s ethical project famously aims to free us from the bondage by passions that are fed by the imagination, the lowest level of cognition. Like his predecessors the emancipation and control of passions he proposes in the *Ethics* is based on true knowledge or adequate cognition, yet his account both of passions or passive affects as dynamic states (modes) of mind, defined in terms of confused and inadequate ideas (E3d, E3General Definition of Affects), and of the power of mind or reason to master them are unprecedented. He declares in E5p3 that a passive affect ceases to be passive “as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it”. What, exactly, does the acquiring of distinct ideas of the passions involve? The distinct idea of the passive affect, presumably, replaces the confused one, transforming the formerly passive affect into an active affect or emotion of joy. This does not seem to be supported by ordinary psychological experience. It also leaves us with a mystery concerning the identity of the original affect, which seemed to be contingent on its confusion as a state of mind. Rather than being transformed into activity, the passive affect has ceased to be. Yet the human mind continues to be affected with confused ideas as long as the body that constitutes its object persists in its striving so remains subject to external forces surpassing its own.

This paper examines the resources Spinoza’s account of ideas and cognition can offer for the understanding and moderation of the passive affects. It also reflects more generally on how consistent Spinoza’s naturalist program and rejection of final causes is with his rationalist salvation project and the moral psychology on which it is based. Qua affected we are at the mercy of external causes, yet qua rational we seek truth and knowledge as our highest good. Can Spinoza’s theory overcome these tensions and the dualisms he is fighting and if so, at what price?
Emotion and Reason in Spinoza’s Social Theory
Ericka Tucker
California State Polytechnic University

Spinoza is known by most as a rationalist. Yet, recent scholarship has shown that Spinoza has a systematic theory of the emotions. Curiously, not one of these accounts of Spinoza’s conception of emotion recognize the role of the social in mediating individual emotions or, in Spinoza’s technical terminology (and hereafter), affects. The affects, and the social world in which they are shaped, have enormous power to either help or hinder the individual from what Spinoza calls, ‘the road to reason.’

Without understanding his social theory of affects, and their role in increasing and diminishing individual and collective power, it is nearly impossible to understand the connection between Spinoza’s ethical and metaphysical writings on the one hand, and his political works on the other. Thus, many theorists have argued that there is either complete disunity or an unbridgeable tension between Spinoza’s work in the *Ethics* in particular, and his work in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the Political *Treatise*.

Part of this ‘unbridgeable tension’ is taken to be Spinoza’s conception of the power of reason. In the *Ethics*, reason, and ultimately ‘*scientia intuitiva*’ or perfect knowledge, are taken to be the goals of the individual; while in the political, no such perfection is possible. Many such ‘tension theorists’, I will argue, have misconstrued the notion of ‘reason’ in the *Ethics*, interpreting
Spinoza as closer to a Cartesian and Stoic view of reason as all-powerful. However, Spinoza was acutely aware that there were some affects that were too powerful even for reason. He sought to understand these problematic emotions, and tried to show that both for individuals and communities, there were ways to unseat these powerful emotions, but not through reason alone. His social theory, by showing where the road to reason begins, and what affective obstacles those following it encounter and how to overcome them, provides a bridge between the *Ethics* and the *Political Treatise*, and illuminates the unity of Spinoza’s philosophy.

In this paper, I fill in this gap in the literature, and argue for the unity of Spinoza’s philosophy by providing a systematic understanding of the role of the social in Spinoza’s affect theory.

Spinoza provides an unusually insightful theory of individual and social power, based on his theory of the affects. Spinoza recognizes that we do not emerge from the ground as fully formed rational agents. Rather, for Spinoza, reason is an achievement. We are born and develop in social worlds, where our affects, values and conceptions of the world and ourselves are formed. Starting from his earliest work, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza recognizes the role of the social in shaping individual emotions, values and the prospect that one might be able to follow reason, to increase one’s power, and to become ‘free’. The lone individual seeking reason has only a limited power, and must join with others. By joining with others, one increases one’s power, but is hampered by the norms and practices of the community. Living within a community with imaginative or irrational norms, in order to become ‘free’, the individual must seek to empower the community as a whole. Spinoza treats the empowerment of individuals and the empowerment of communities in a parallel fashion. Becoming rational and free, for Spinoza, means overcoming what he calls ‘passive affects’ and inadequate ideas. Although this is difficult for the individual, it is much more difficult task for a community, since most are
unified by imaginative, inadequate ideas of the world.

Finally, I will show how Spinoza’s theory of emotions and social power brings light to the question of the ‘dissenter’. What happens when one can no longer follow the norms of one’s community? What if one comes to critique some element of their society? Is it better to critique the norm and risk being alienated from one’s social group? These are questions that interested Spinoza philosophically and personally. He understood very well that social power could work both for and against an individual’s empowerment. Spinoza, I will argue, is ultimately a reformer, but one who recognizes the danger of reform both to the community and to the individual seeking change. The social theory Spinoza provides is not just of antiquarian interest, but also one that speaks to problems of social change and individual conscience in our own time. While illuminating the connection between Spinoza’s work, Spinoza’s social theory also provides us unique insights into the force of social norms and the challenge of cultural critique.

The Unity and Coherence of Spinoza's Account of Freedom, Reason and the Affects

Yakir Levin

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Spinoza's metaphysical system includes a sophisticated combined account of freedom, reason and the affects (his preferred term for the more common 17th century term 'passions') which is supposed to be applicable both to an infinite being such as God and to finite beings like us. Indeed, in this account the infinite is a limiting case of the finite. Consisting of three types of theses – a few supposedly equivalent definitions of freedom, a couple of theses that relate aspects of these definitions to Spinoza's conceptions of reason and the affects, and a few implications of these definitions and theses - it is supposed to form a coherent and unified account. But does it really form such an account?
The aim of this paper is to answer this question. To this end I will first outline the three types of theses that constitute Spinoza's account and their inter-connections. I will then delve deeper into the first, definitional type focusing on the question of how Spinoza's notion of freedom is supposed to find expression in the finite case of man. Of what I will consider as the three possible answers to this question only one, I will argue, is a plausible answer that may be ascribed to Spinoza. Moreover, while under all three answers Spinoza's account is coherent with respect to God, under none is it coherent with respect to man. Thus, I will conclude that while in the infinite case of God the answer to the basic question of the paper should be affirmative, in the finite case of man it should be negative – i.e., in the transition from the infinite to the finite Spinoza's account founders.

Intellection and Freedom

Julie R. Klein
Villanova University

Both Descartes and Spinoza follow an ancient theme in identifying genuine freedom with intellectual knowing. Similarly, both identify God as the ultimate intellectual object and hold that knowledge of God produces the highest satisfaction. At first glance, Descartes’ and Spinoza’s positions seem similar, even related. Descartes’ pivotal claim that “a great light in the intellect is followed by a great inclination in the will” (Med 4 AT VII: 59), which explains the proper relation of intellect and will, is preceded and followed by clear statements that genuine freedom involves strong determination. Introducing the concurrence of freedom and knowledge, he writes, “in order to be free, there is no need for me to be capable of moving both ways; on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction…the freer is my choice.” Thus “indifference is the lowest grade of freedom” (Med 4 AT VII: 58). Immediately following the great light/great inclination formula, Descartes notes that “the spontaneity and freedom of my belief [is] all the greater in proportion to my lack of indifference” (Med IV AT VII: 59). The idea dei, as most clear and most true (AT 7:47), is most compelling and hence determinative for the will. Spinoza, for his part, depicts the free man as
constituted more rationally than imaginatively. He argues that “Knowledge of God is the Mind’s greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God” (E4p28). Ethics 5, “Of Human Freedom,” explicitly identifies freedom with the third kind of knowing, which Spinoza also calls amor dei intellectualis.

The agreement, however, is superficial at best, for it founders on fundamental differences in psychology and metaphysics. In my paper, I sketch the metaphysical setting of Spinoza’s treatment of reason, intellection and freedom. I focus on the ethical significance of reason and intellection. Spinoza’s rejection of Cartesian volition and volontas, which reflect Christian metaphysical psychology and are integrally connected to substance dualism, is the decisive factor. After rejecting the Christian metaphysics of divine volition and creation, and the Cartesian doctrine of substance dualism, Spinoza argues at great length in Ethics 1 that traditional conceptions of the divine will and human freedom are profoundly destructive. In Ethics 2, he makes the case the Cartesian will is otiose: ideas are ipso facto affirmative (E2p47s). Charging that Descartes conceives ideas as “mute pictures on a panel” indeed of affirmative judgments, Spinoza reconceives ideas as intrinsically active, that is, as forceful. The Preface to Ethics 5 vividly indicates the ethical implications of the metaphysical and psychological-epistemological shift. Stoicism proposes that we can command the passions absolutely (absolutè imperare posse) through a well-trained will; self-mastery is the goal (Spinoza, Opera II: 277). Descartes contends that “there is no Soul so weak that it cannot—when it is well-directed—acquire an absolute power (potestam absolutam) over its Passions.” According to Descartes, the metaphysical difference between the mind and body enables the mind to move the pineal gland in view of its own wishes, as well as to overcome habitual associations between particular pineal motions and particular thoughts. The Mind, in other words, can generate its own connections and so overcome or transcend subject to external causes. Since Spinoza’s physics and metaphysics preclude either absolute command (E2 “Physical Digression,” E4a1) or the absolute separation of mind and bodies or ideas and affects (E2p7s, E3p2s, E5p1), neither proposal is viable. In their place, Spinoza proposes that the power of the mind, which he identifies with intellection, provides “remedies (remedia)” for the affects. The term is Stoic, and Spinoza’s own discussion of reconfiguring ideas by connecting them to the idea dei retains something of the Cartesian idea of reconnection, but Spinoza regards intellection as intrinsically affective and intrinsically, though not absolutely, powerful.
In Ethics 4 and 5, Spinoza argues that reason provides ethical *ductus* (E4p46) *praecpta* and *dictamina* (E5p10s, p20s). The structures of guidance, maxims or principles, and commands exhibits, I shall argue, both the power and limitations of the second kind of knowing (see e.g. E4p17s, E4). While reason is genuinely a source of freedom from our “enslavement (servitus)” to the instability and violence of the passions, such that the equilibrium of *hilaritas* replaces the *fluctuatio animi* of imaginative experience, reason techniques must nonetheless be repeatedly applied. While we may habituate ourselves to the advice of reason, and so become more and more and able to carry it out, this rational freedom is never fully internalized. Just as the second kind of knowing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for *scientia intuitiva* (E5p28), so, too, rational freedom is a necessary but not sufficient condition for intuitive (properly intellectual) freedom. Precisely insofar as *scientia intuitiva* is an immanent participation in nature—what the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* called “the union of the Mind with the whole of Nature” (¶13) and what Ethics 2 discusses in terms of the human mind as part of the divine mind (E2p11c)—it represents an internalization not of rules or maxims but of the very power (*potentia*) of Nature. Paradoxically, this internalization of nature’s power both constitutes the free intellect and dissolves its separateness from other natural things. In the end, then, my paper will take up the intrinsically powerful character of intuitive knowing as Spinoza depicts it in E5, and I will discuss the sense in which freedom can be understood both actively and affectively. In this latter sense, intuitive freedom is, in a deep way, non-personal.

Self-Experience and the *Imago Dei* Doctrine in Descartes and Spinoza

Noa Naaman-Zauderer

Tel Aviv University

In the final section of Part Five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents his conception of the eternity of the mind, commonly known as the most difficult portion of this book. Especially challenging and enigmatic is his claim that “though it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body … still,
In this paper, I attempt to juxtapose and compare Spinoza’s description of the human experience of eternity with Descartes’ account of the human experience of freedom, viewing them as two different versions of the *Imago Dei* doctrine. Given the vast dissimilarities between the two philosophical systems, the parallels are striking and illuminating. Specifically, I will focus on the following points:

1. Despite Spinoza’s rejection of anthropomorphic notions of deity, the *Imago Dei* doctrine is just as formative in his *Ethics* as it is in Descartes’ later writings, albeit with a different meaning and role.

2. Although both philosophical systems explicitly or implicitly endorse the *Imago Dei* doctrine, neither of them is able, for different reasons, to provide a coherent account of it.

3. In both systems, the *Imago Dei* doctrine assumes the form of an intellectual experience of the highest level: an experience of godlike freedom in Descartes and an experience of eternity in Spinoza. In both cases, I will argue, our sense of godlikeness involves, *mutatis mutandis*, a hybrid experience of unity—a godlike unity between intellect and will in Descartes and a godlike unity between essence and existence in Spinoza.

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**Becoming Like God: Freedom of the Will in Descartes**

Jonathan Fine  
Columbia University

Descartes maintains throughout his works that human beings possess freedom of the will, but it is far from clear what he thinks this means. I have two aims in this paper. The first is to interpret what Descartes believes
freedom of the will consists in. The second is to suggest why Descartes would hold this view of human freedom. The paper proceeds in four stages. §1 presents Descartes’s scalar notion of freedom in the Fourth Meditation. When Descartes explains how the human will is similar to the divine will, he characterizes the human will according to two seemingly different and perhaps conflicting clauses. The first clause attributes to the will the liberty of indifference. That is, the will possesses a two-way power to perform some action, not perform it, or perform some other action instead at some time. The second clause claims that the will performs all of its actions only by itself; that is, the will enjoys the liberty of spontaneity. Whereas indifference constitutes the “lowest grade” of freedom for Descartes, the will is freer to the extent that it is not indifferent and freest when it is impelled by clear and distinct perceptions (CSM 2:40).

§2 considers Descartes’s comparison between human and divine wills in order to clarify what Descartes means by indifference and whether he thinks it is necessary for human freedom. I show that indifference in the Cartesian sense is any motivational state in which the will is not necessitated by clear and distinct perceptions. I argue that, for Descartes, human freedom requires neither that the will is in a state of indifference nor that it can always exercise the two-way power that belongs to it. If this is right, then the essence of the will is the power to determine itself and not be determined by an external force. At its highest grade, Descartes claims, human freedom requires that clear and distinct perceptions necessitate assent. It follows that human freedom for Descartes is compatible with the necessitation of the will by clear and distinct perceptions. §3 attempts to accommodate some passages that appear to suggest the contrary (CSM 1:205; 3:245). I argue that these passages show at most that epistemic responsibility, but not freedom, requires a certain ability to do otherwise. On my reading, Descartes believes that we merit praise and blame for our volitional acts because we have the ability to fix or to withhold attention even on clear and distinct perceptions. The ability to direct attention otherwise requires the use of the will’s two-way power. However,
according to Descartes, we attain the highest grade of freedom precisely when we cannot exercise that two-way power, when clear and distinct perceptions necessitate our assent.

§4 suggests a philosophical motivation for Descartes’s view of human freedom. The suggestion is that pregnant in the *Meditations* is Descartes’s later virtue ethical project to train the will in order to perfect our nature as human beings. To perfect our nature as human beings, I suggest, is to approximate the union of intellect and will that God enjoys. In my view, Descartes holds that we bear a likeness to God in virtue of our will, first, because our experience of the will attests to our highest perfection. We perfect our nature to the extent that the will trains itself to assent only to clear and distinct perceptions and enables the intellect to enjoy those perceptions. The distinction between assent and attention is significant for Descartes, I think, because we enjoy clear and distinct perceptions – and cannot exercise our two-way power – only once the will exercises its two-way power to render our ideas clear and distinct and to direct attention in the correct way. Second, the meditator can perceive her likeness to God because she experiences her will as infinite, insofar as it can freely apply itself to anything that the intellect places before it. This teleological reading of freedom of the will not only helps to unify the *Meditations* and Descartes’s later work, but also explains why Descartes is happy to hold that the essence of human freedom in fact requires necessitation of the will. It is because the cost of not being so compelled is that we do not achieve the intellectual character that perfects our natural constitution and best reflects the image of God in us.

**The Passions: Help or Hindrance to the Good Life?**

John Cottingham

University of Reading

Though Descartes shares with Spinoza a keen awareness of the distorting influence of the passions, and their cognitive inadequacy, he never draws the
Spinozadian conclusion that they should be as far as possible removed or minimized through clear and distinct knowledge. On the contrary, Descartes allows them a legitimate place in a worthwhile human life. The result is that Cartesian ethics looks more human than is possible in the Spinozian scheme of things, though this attractive result is marred by Descartes’s attraction to mechanical techniques for manipulating the passions. This paper will examine the unresolved problems in both Cartesian and Spinozian ethics and ask what lessons can be drawn for present-day conceptions of the good life.

Descartes and Spinoza on the Primitive Passions: Why so Different?
Lisa Shapiro
Simon Fraser University

In Ethics 3P11 Spinoza marks three of the affects as primary \( \text{affectum primarium} \). Most interpreters reflexively note that joy \( \text{laetitia} \), sadness \( \text{tristitiae} \) and desire \( \text{cupiditas} \) are primitive passions for Spinoza, and the shift from 'primary' to 'primitive' does not seem problematic. Nonetheless there are questions. Why these? In what sense are they primary or primitive? How do the other affects enumerated relate to these? These relatively fine grained questions gain force in at least three ways. First, Spinoza's spare list differs from the list of six primitive passions set out by Descartes: wonder \( \text{admiration} \), love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness, but it also differs from the list Spinoza himself initially sets out in the Short Treatise. What drives Spinoza's change of mind about the framework of our affective lives? It is usually thought that Spinoza takes on the Stoic set of primary passions, though he leaves off fear. What about the Stoic account is compelling, if in fact he is appropriating the Stoic account? To address these questions, I suggest, we think of Descartes's and Spinoza's taxonomies of the passions, and in
particular of the primitive passions, not as a basic set of motivations but rather as setting out these thinkers' frameworks for our cognition of the world that causally affects us.

Spinoza on Passions, Reason, and Freedom

Amihud Gilead

University of Haifa

When reading Spinoza’s writings, especially the Ethics, we have to face a problem: according to Spinoza, everything in nature is subject to complete determinism. Nevertheless, Spinoza allows us the capability to be free, namely, being free from passions, though such a freedom can never be complete or absolute as we are finite and dependent creatures. To the extent that we are passive, we are not the adequate causes of many of our states or actions. Thus, at least to some extent, we are determined to be enslaved by passions. The fourth part of the Ethics deals with “human bondage,” namely, with “the powers of the affects,” more precisely, the power of the passive affects, i.e. the passions. In contrast, the fifth part of the Ethics is devoted to the power of the intellect, or, in other words, to human freedom. Our freedom is the state in which we moderate and restrain our passions and “live according to the guidance of reason.” In this state, we are happy, namely, we can redeem ourselves from the slavery of our passions, which are the only grounds for our misery.

The question which I would like to answer in this lecture is: How can the above-mentioned allegedly contrary assertions can be adequate parts of one and the same coherent system?

I would like to answer this question in arguing that:

(1) Each idea, each cognition, is a link in a deterministic total causal chain, i.e. the attribute of thought. Each idea is the essence of a particular or singular thing. Each particular essence has properties.

(2) According to what I called “Spinoza’s cognitivism of emotions,” each emotion (“affect”) is an emotive property of an idea, which is the essence on which this property supervenes. No such property is a distinct link in the causal chain of nature.
(3) The nature of each emotion depends on the epistemic grade of the relevant idea. Thus, passive emotions—passions—are the emotive properties of the first kind (grade) of knowledge—*imaginatio*—the source of all of our errors and mistakes, whereas active emotions pertain to the two kinds (grades) of true knowledge, *ratio* and *scientia intuitiva*. From time to time, Spinoza uses “reason” (*ratio*) to designate these two kinds of knowledge, both of which grasp reality as it truly is and not under temporal and local conditions.

(4) Spinoza’s philosophy allows and extensively uses the part-whole distinction, as long as the parts are simply distinct from each other and from the whole as well but are inseparable, which means that God-Substance is indivisible. Spinoza’s concept of adequacy and truth depends explicitly on this distinction (hence, “all ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true”). Only because of our *imaginatio* do we erroneously or inadequately conceive parts of reality as if they were existing in place and time, contingent, and severed from the other parts of nature.

(5) *Imaginatio* is the inadequate, partial or fragmented part of *ratio*, which is an *adequate* part of *scientia intuitiva*, the absolutely complete and fully concrete view of nature as a whole. As such parts, *imaginatio* and *ratio* are properties of *scientia intuitiva*.

(6) Since *imaginatio* and *ratio* are parts of *scientia intuitiva*, this part-whole relation strictly implies the relation between passions and active emotions. Thus, passions are inadequate parts or properties of active emotions which, in turn, are adequate parts or properties of the intellectual love of God, which functions as the essence of the other kind of emotions, active or passive.

(7) Whenever we realize this part-whole relation truly (concerning [5]), we can correct and complete our cognitions and render them into cognitions in a grade of rational knowledge (*ratio* or, even, *scientia intuitiva*). This cognitive change necessarily entails an emotive one—we thus render our passions into active emotions.

(8) To some extent, each one of us, as a mode-part of substance, participates in the activity and freedom of God. In the attribute of thought this activity implies the capability to form adequate, true ideas and, thus, to experience active emotions.
(9) Spinoza explicitly states that each of our passions can be rendered into an active one, as this is necessary follows from the emendation of our ideas.

(10) The same action, which we are inescapably determined to perform on grounds of our passion, can be carried out on the grounds of an active emotion.

(11) The emendation of our cognitive and emotive state, though inevitable for our happiness, changes nothing in the causal chain of nature.

(12) Being cognitively and emotionally active, we are free as well as happy. As intellect and will are identical, understanding our position as parts of nature entails our happy acceptance of it.

(13) The emotive ground of our supreme happiness is the intellectual love of God, the emotive property of the highest grade of knowledge, scientia intuitiva. All the other emotions are simply emotive parts, whether adequate or inadequate, of this emotion. All of them are manifestations, adequate or inadequate, partial or complete, of this love.

(14) Whether we know it or not, we are determined, to some extent, to be happy and free (yet something in us, not the dominant part, is not entirely exempt from being enslaved by our passions). We can experience our happiness, only if we truly know and understand our state. But this experience is up to us; it is quite independent of the deterministic causal chain and it changes nothing of it. We are entirely free to be happy—as we are free to see our state in nature truly and adequately (as parts of it as a whole), as taking an active part in the deterministic activity of nature as a whole—or not. These cognitive and emotive alternatives are equally open to us.

(15) On the grounds of (1) to (14), my conclusion is that causal determinism, reason, knowledge (in each of its kinds or grades), emotions (whether passive or active), freedom, and happiness are perfectly compatible in Spinoza’s systematic philosophy. The whole-part adequacy is strictly maintained in it.

Each of these steps will be proved and explained in my lecture. I will also explain how I apply some of them to the attribute of extension in general and to our body in particular.
In this paper, I will provide a new interpretation of Spinoza's account of composition his account of the conditions under which several things compose one whole. The topic has subtle connections with many and varied parts of his philosophical system. The reason for this is that Spinoza's Ethics is, at the end of the day, a treatise about how human beings ought to live. For Spinoza, the first question that must be answered before we can determine how human beings ought to live is, what is a human being? And one of Spinoza's answers to that question is that a human being is a highly composite individual.

The composition of one thing from many presents a philosophical problem. My organs compose my body, and these pieces of wood compose the table. Yet my body and the table do not in turn compose any third individual. What is the difference between these two sorts of cases? More generally, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions that several things must satisfy in order to compose something else? This question is what contemporary philosophers call the special composition question, and any candidate account of composition should provide an answer to it. Scholastic and early modern metaphysicians were in general cognizant of this point. In Leibniz's early writings, for example, he provides an answer to the special composition question by appealing to substance: several things compose a single thing if and only if they constitute a substance. So, to use Leibniz's examples, the difference between the unity of the parts of a sheep and the merely apparent unity of the parts of a block of marble is that the former constitute a substance while the latter do not.

Spinoza's views on composition are of particular interest because, unlike so many before and after him, he does not want to account for composition in terms of substance. Spinoza is a substance monist, and he
cannot appeal to the one substance to account for composition in the variety of particular cases with which we are confronted. The organs in my body compose my body, but this cannot be due to their constituting a substance, substance is absolutely infinite, eternal, and mereologically simple, while my body certainly is not.

Spinoza cannot appeal to substance to account for composition, so he appeals to causation instead. I claim that Spinoza's account of composition is:

Composition: Some things compose an individual if and only if they instantiate a pattern [ratio] of causal relations.

Though I will develop it in a novel way, this part of the account should not, on its own, be very controversial among Spinoza scholars. However, there have been few attempts to make clear this notion of a pattern. I will argue that Spinoza holds:

Pattern: Some things instantiate a pattern of causal relations if and only if (i) they instantiate some causal relations and (ii) those causal relations determine some distinct causal power.

The problem of composition might be framed as a question: when do many things compose one? The answer Spinoza gives us is: whenever the causal interactions among the many gives rise to new powers, powers distinct from those of the many.

After developing the reasoning Spinoza offers for this account (§1-2), I will discuss two important consequences his metaphysics of composition has for the rest of his system. First (§3), Spinoza appeals to his account of composition to explain how all human minds, insofar as they are rational, are (type) identical. Second (§4), he uses it to understand the conditions for, and limits to, human freedom. Insofar as a human's parts interact so as to determine her characteristic power of acting, she is free. But since her parts
are themselves independent, composite individuals in their own right, they are never fully dedicated to the continued determination and existence of the whole. In these ways, Spinoza's account of composition sheds light not only upon his understanding of the human body and mind, it also illuminates his conceptions of reason and freedom.

Descartes vs. Kant on Reason and Representation
Tom Vinci
Dalhousie University; Visiting professor at Tel Aviv University

There are three main stages to the argument of this paper. The first, employing a strategy suggested by Henry Allison, is to give a characterization of Kant’s notion of Transcendental Realism, and then propose definitions of Transcendental Idealism using the first notion as a foil. I will argue that Transcendental Realism is equivalent to a doctrine in Descartes (Descartes’s Reality Principle as I will call it) expressed in Principles I, 52 as the doctrine that if one perceives a property then there is a substance that possesses that property. Transcendental Idealism is inconsistent with Descartes’s Reality Principle. The second stage concerns a claim made by Kant in the B-edition “Paralogisms” section of the Critique of Pure reason (CPR hereafter) wherein he claims that if we can prove that there is a simple thinking substance from the fact that I am thinking then this consequence “would put an end to this whole critique.” (GW, 440; B410) Putting an end to this whole critique means defeating Transcendental Idealism and I investigate why Kant might reasonably have made this claim on the basis of this paralogism.

In the final stage of the paper I sketch an account of Descartes’s theory of intentionality, showing that it entails something I call “Descartes’s Containment Principle”
If we understand by “the Cogito Inference” the inference from my thinking to my existence as a thinking substance, we can summarize the relationship between Kant’s theory of reason and representation vs. Descartes’s by means of the following diagram (The broad, downward-facing arrows represent implication.)

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(*The rejection of the Containment Principle then leads Kant to Transcendental Idealism.*)
Descartes distinguishes between moral and metaphysical certainty. *Metaphysical certainty* precludes even “slight and so to speak metaphysical doubt,” and is what we should aspire to when engaged in the pure search for truth as exemplified in the *Meditations*. It comes in two grades: *cognitio* and *scientia*. *Moral certainty*, by contrast, is compatible with doubt but is nonetheless “sufficient for action” and is what we should settle for in ordinary life.

In this paper, I argue that the best way to explicate these notions is in modal terms. Very roughly: you are in doubt about a proposition to the extent that it’s possible for you to be in error about it; you are certain of a proposition to the extent that it’s impossible for you to be in error about it; and the grade of certainty or doubt you have – metaphysical or moral – depends on the grade of possibility in question – metaphysical or moral.

I begin to motivate this approach by asking why Descartes’s pursuit of truth becomes a quest for metaphysical certainty. The answer, in short, is this. Descartes wants to use faculties that reliably produce true beliefs. But it’s not enough for a faculty to be reliable; it has to be infallible, by which I mean it’s *metaphysically impossible* for it to produce beliefs that are false. If a belief is formed in a way that is fallible, then even if it’s highly reliable, there is a chance it is mistaken. If such a belief happens to be true, it will not be, as Descartes puts it, “thanks to the strength of [one’s] perception,” but rather a matter of chance. Descartes insists on infallibility in order to rule out epistemic luck. And the achievement of that aim is what he calls metaphysical certainty:

**M-CERTI**: You have *metaphysical certainty* of \( p \) if and only if you form your belief that \( p \) in a way that makes it metaphysically impossible for it to be false.
Descartes holds that there is only one way to form beliefs infallibly – one way to attain metaphysical certainty – and that is on the basis clear and distinct perception, which comes only through the pure intellect, or reason. This is Descartes’s Rationalism.

The structure of M-CERT1 is echoed in four other key principles, and together they explain all the epistemic transitions that are vital to Descartes’s philosophy:

**M-DOUBT:** When it seems to you that it’s *metaphysically possible* for your beliefs to be false, you fall into *metaphysical doubt.*

Descartes deploys six skeptical weapons in his method of doubt. At each stage, the meditator begins by targeting a set of beliefs according to the “principles” on which they are based – e.g. “beliefs acquired from or through the senses.” He then entertains a consideration which makes it seem that it’s metaphysically possible for such beliefs to be false, and consequently he suffers metaphysical doubt.

**M-CERT2:** When you see that it’s *metaphysically impossible* for your thought that \( p \) to be false, you ascend to the first level of *metaphysical certainty*, *cognitio*, of \( p \).

While M-CERT1 applies to metaphysical certainty in general, M-CERT2 is specifically at work when the meditator acquires knowledge of the existence of a substance for the first time. This applies to all three kinds of substances in Descartes’s ontology: the self (a finite mind), God (the infinite mind), and body.

**M-CERT3:** When you see that it’s *metaphysically impossible* for clear and distinct perceptions to be false (a.k.a. the Truth Rule), you ascend to the highest level of *metaphysical certainty*, *scientia.*
These first four principles – isomorphic to each other and framed in corresponding modal terms – explain the entire sweep of the meditator’s adventure, from the method of doubt in the beginning to the proof of the external world at the end.

The only notion that remains is that of moral certainty, which pertains to action. Here, we see the parallels above recurring at yet another level of Descartes’s epistemology, as moral certainty corresponds to the moral impossibility of error in just the way that metaphysical certainty corresponds to the metaphysical impossibility of error.

**P-CERT:** You have **morally certainty** of $p$ if and only if you form your belief that $p$ in a way that makes it **morally impossible** for it to be false.

This last principle presupposes that Descartes has a notion of “moral (im)possibility,” and by unearthing some of his little known correspondence, we see that indeed he does.

Roughly, to say that it’s morally impossible for a belief to be false is to say that its falsity is so unlikely that it would be unreasonable not to include that belief, where relevant, in practical deliberation.

M-CERT1 and P-CERT are not new with Descartes. I show that Scholastic philosophers employed the same two principles almost *verbatim*. Even so, Descartes makes three crucial innovations, corresponding to each of the three principles concerning with metaphysical certainty. First, though he retains M-CERT1 in letter, his use of it is very different in practice and in spirit: while the Scholastics were Empiricists who attributed at least some infallible perceptions to the senses, Descartes was a Rationalist who reserved infallibility for reason alone. Second, in M-CERT2, Descartes’s method of discovering that something exists – by inferring it from the infallibility of one’s *thought* that it exists – is a novel move. Third, in M-CERT3, Descartes reconceives the traditional distinction between *cognitio* and *scientia* by making
the latter depend on knowledge of the Truth Rule. This emendation, absent in Descartes’s early work, came along with his novel use of skepticism. It secures a niche of infallibility in the face of radical doubt.
Reason, for Descartes, is the faculty of modal cognition. Modal facts (or perceptions thereof) drive reason through all the hills and valleys of the Cartesian journey.

Spinoza’s Causal Theory of Action: Inexplicability in, and of, Action
Michael Della Rocca
Yale University

Agency and Necessity in Spinoza
Ohad Nachtomy
Bar-Ilan University

According to Spinoza, the unique Substance, God or Nature, is an active being whose actions are necessary results of his nature, (Ethics I propositions 16, 17 corollary 2) and “the world is a necessary effect of the nature of God...” (Letter LIV)

The interesting relation between agency and necessity in Spinoza, which evokes the tension I will focus on, is characterized by the following assumptions: (a) the primary agent is God; (b) God and Nature are one; and (c) the best model to exemplify God’s activity is the deductive-like relation between concepts and consequences, similar to the one employed in mathematics and geometry.

Since, for Spinoza, God and Nature are one, the world as a whole is seen as a necessary consequence of God’s active nature – a conclusion that Leibniz would struggle to avoid. Spinoza seems to hold that God’s activity can be described in terms of the logical deduction of properties entailed in God’s concept or essence (e.g., EI, Propositions 16, 19). Spinoza also holds that God is the source of power and motion in the world. At the same time, he makes it
clear that God’s activity cannot be other than what it is (e.g., Ethics I p. 33). Thus, for Spinoza, the world is a necessary result of God’s activity. In other words, the necessary series of events in the world is a result of God’s activity.

This way of conjoining activity and necessity seems to me intriguing. If a given property (x) is logically entailed by the idea of God in a similar way as a property is entailed by the concept of a triangle, why would any activity be needed to deduce it? Why, in other words, must God do something in order that x would be a logical consequence of its concept or essence?

In this paper I try to articulate this question in some more detail. In the first section I examine the relation between activity and necessity against the background of Descartes’ mechanistic view of res extensa. In the second section I examine the relation between activity and necessity in Spinoza by considering the status of derivation-rules, which are supposed to govern the deduction of properties from an essence. In the third section, I outline an interpretative approach according to which, for Spinoza, God’s activity is constitutive of his essence, rather than following from or entailed by it independently of its activity. This approach employs a generative notion of essences and concepts, (common to both Spinoza and Leibniz). I will suggest that the emphasis on generative definitions makes the relation between activity and necessity in Spinoza more intelligible.

I argue that, in Spinoza, the notions of agency and necessity are difficult to reconcile with the model of God’s essence that entails all its necessary consequences in advance of its productive activity. In the alternative model, where activity is constitutive of the agent’s essence, these notions are intrinsically related. If the notion of activity is required for Spinoza’s concept of logical production, it would seem that the rules or laws by which events or thoughts result from God’s essence is not fully captured by either normative or descriptive terminology. Rather, God’s activity is constitutive of these rules and cannot be defined in abstraction of them. For Spinoza, God’s activity is not governed by logical rules nor can it be corrected by them; rather, God’s actual activity, described under the attribute of thought or extension, defines these very rules. This can be seen as an expression of Spinoza’s actualism – viz., his denial of any notion of potentiality and possibility. The consequences of the concept of God are inseparable from God’s activity in the sense that his activity partly determines what they are. It is not the case that God’s actions follow from an already fixed nature; rather, his very nature is to act and this partly defines what it is. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we ought to understand Spinoza’s definition of freedom: “That thing is called ‘free,’
which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and of which the action is determined by itself alone.” (E I 7)

**Freedom, Générosité, and the Cogito: Cartesian Self-Constiution Reconsidered**
Omri Boehm
The New School for Social Research

According to Descartes, the passion of *générosité* consists in the virtuous person “knowing that nothing truly belongs to him but his freedom” (AT 11:446f; CSM I: 384). This definition alters, I argue, Descartes’ Official Doctrine—well known from the second and sixth Meditations—according to which nothing belongs to us but thought. The mature Descartes considers freedom rather than thought * simpliciter*—more precisely: freedom rather than thought qua intellectual representations of ideas—as the essence of the human mind. I offer a reinterpretation of the Cogito drawing on this insight: that the meditator’s will is free, I argue, is the first certainty asserted in the Cartesian philosophy. It is generated by the program of doubt. The meditator’s assertion *sum* follows from—insofar as “nothing truly belongs to us but freedom,” it consists in—the assertion of freedom.

This interpretation breaks apart not only from the traditional reading of Descartes as an intellectualist; it breaks apart also from the more recent (and welcome) reading, according to which freedom, or the will, is the essence of the embodied human subject emerging in the sixth Meditation and the *Passions*—viewed as the counterpart of the second Meditation’s disembodied subject whose essence is thought qua the intellect. Authors maintaining this position interpret the passion of *générosité* as analogous to the theoretical certainty asserted in the Cogito. I propose to view freedom as the essence of
the second Meditation’s subject, and the experience of générosité as the Cogito’s ground.

The paper has two parts. In the first, I focus on the program of doubt. Motivating the first Meditation is not only and not merely an epistemological worry (ensuring against error) but an ethical worry as well—ensuring that the meditator’s thinking is free; ensuring that the meditator’s thought depends exclusively on him. “I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this Meditation,” the meditator insists, “and even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods, so that [atque ita; C’est pourquoi… que] the deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, will be unable to impose [imponere; imposer] on me in the slightest degree” (AT 7:23). If we take Descartes at his word, the ethical worry emerges as—in some sense at least—prior to the epistemological worry: the meditator refrains from assenting to falsehoods in order to ascertain his freedom.

Building on this account of doubt I proceed, in the second part of the paper, to interpret the second Meditation. One of the most pressing questions surrounding the Cogito concerns the grounding relation between doubt—specifically its most radical stage—and the meditator’s certainty in his existence. Descartes is very clear that this certainty does not merely survive doubt but is, somehow, generated by it—the question is how. I suggest addressing this question by accounting for the role played by freedom in the first two meditations. In a well-known letter to Mesland, Descartes writes that one can doubt a “clearly perceived truth” if he considers it “a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of the will by so doing” (AT 4:173f.; CSMK:244f.). In this light, at the radical stage of doubt, confronting the challenge of the evil deceiver, the mediator has demonstrated his freedom. By doubting everything in the first Meditation, the meditator comes to demonstrate that he is “not determined by any external force”; he has discovered that “nothing
belongs to him but freedom”: through doubt, the meditator comes to experience générosité. Here lies the grounding relation between radical doubt and the Cogito. By experiencing freedom, the meditator can assert *sum:* insofar as “nothing truly belongs to us but freedom” — insofar as freedom is our essence — ascertaining through doubt that the meditator is free just is ascertaining that the meditator exists.

**Cartesian Generosity Reconsidered**  
Saja Parvizian  
University of Illinois at Chicago

It is well known that Descartes thinks that ethics, as a philosophical discipline, should be grounded in knowledge of metaphysics and natural philosophy. But does this also imply that being ethical requires such knowledge? According to Lisa Shapiro, it does not. She argues that being ethical – that is, virtuous for Descartes – is actually a condition for one’s arrival at a proper metaphysics (and consequently a proper natural philosophy). Shapiro’s claim rests on her account of Cartesian generosity and how it is acquired. In a series of recent papers, Shapiro has developed the interpretation that the meditator acquires the virtue of generosity in the Fourth Meditation, which enables her to successfully complete the rest of the *Meditations.* In this paper I challenge Shapiro’s claim that “being virtuous contribute[s] to our arriving at the proper metaphysics,” and I offer a novel account of how Cartesian generosity is acquired.

Shapiro’s reading emphasizes the affinities between the events of the Fourth Meditation and Descartes’ definition of generosity. Roughly, generosity consists of two components: (1) knowledge of one’s free will, and (2) the resolution to use one’s will well. The gist of Shapiro’s proposal is that in the Fourth Meditation the meditator obtains both components in virtue of her
reflection on the nature of the will and her newfound resolve to affirm her clear and distinct perceptions. Thus, she claims, “the meditator’s diligence in following the method for avoiding error that he has discovered can be seen as exemplifying this resolve [of generosity].” Moreover, Shapiro suggests that the meditator’s generosity explains the shift in her expression of passion after the Fourth Meditation; as Descartes claims, generosity is “a general remedy for every disorder of the passions.” For example, in the beginning of the Second Meditation the meditator expresses confusion [turbatus] due to the immensity of the doubt she has entertained, but she finishes the Sixth Meditation by laughing off [risu dignae] her earlier skepticism. By regulating the meditator’s passions, then, generosity is directly involved in the completion of the meditator’s metaphysical and epistemological project.

I argue that the Cartesian moral agent cannot acquire generosity until she has obtained a requisite set of metaphysical and scientific beliefs. If we were to situate this process within Descartes’ canon, an agent would not be in a position to acquire generosity until she has successfully completed the Meditations and sufficiently engaged the Principles.

In the first part of the paper, I raise three objections to Shapiro’s interpretation. First, Shapiro reads generosity into the Fourth Meditation due to a misinterpretation of Passions III, article 161. There, Descartes explains that acquiring generosity requires frequent reflection [souvent à considérer] on the nature of the will. Though a metaphysical reflection on the will does occur in the Fourth Meditation, Descartes also specifies that we must consider how other agents use their will – a practical reflection on the will. However, such considerations do not (and cannot) occur in the Fourth Meditation because the meditator is not yet entitled to the existence of other people (mind-body unions). Second, and relatedly, Descartes claims that one of the defining features of the generous agent is her virtuous interaction with other people – generosity is not a trait one can possess in isolation. So how can the meditator
acquire the highest form of virtue, generosity, when she is only knowledgeable of the nature of herself as a thinking thing and the existence of God? Generosity is the culmination of virtue for Descartes, and he has account of the requisite epistemic and moral training one must undergo to acquire this supreme virtue. If Shapiro’s interpretation is correct, we must read the meditator from the First to the Third Meditation as making such progress towards generosity, but the text does not support this. Finally, in regard to generosity and its alleged regulation of the passions, Shapiro has oversimplified this process. Acquiring generosity does not automatically cure the disorders of the passions; rather, it puts one in a position to actively retrain and thus master one’s passions. The meditator, however, does not engage her passions in this way. In sum, Shapiro’s proposal belies the meditator’s project.

In the second part of the paper, I provide an interpretation of Descartes’ general theory of virtue in order to better understand Cartesian generosity. I emphasize that Cartesian virtue is ontologically simple in that it essentially consists in judging well in a variety of moral situations. This means that specific virtues, including generosity, can be reduced to facts about an agent’s good moral judgment. According to Descartes, judging well requires knowledge of the truth, which at the minimum consists of five metaphysical and scientific truths. Though virtue consists in judging well, virtue comes in degrees that are proportional to one’s knowledge of the truth – that is, an increase in knowledge amounts to a refinement in moral judgment, hence a higher degree of virtue. I situate Descartes’ account of how generosity is acquired within this framework, and show that generosity is the supreme virtue because of its higher epistemic demands on the moral agent. Finally, I indicate some benefits of my view, and conclude that Descartes does not maintain that being virtuous is necessary for arriving at a proper metaphysics and natural philosophy; rather knowledge of metaphysics and natural philosophy is necessary for virtue.
Spinoza's *Amor Dei Intellectuals*  
Yitzhak Melamed  
Johns Hopkins University

Again, as Moses clearly teaches that God is jealous and nowhere tells us that God is without passions or emotions, we must evidently conclude that Moses believes this, or at least that he intended to teach this, however strongly we may be convinced that this opinion is contrary to reason (TTP Ch. 7)

In this announcement, taken from Spinoza’s famous (or perhaps, infamous) discussion of the proper method for the interpretation of scripture, Spinoza points to the belief that God has passions as an example of allegedly irrational characterizations of God in scripture. Similarly, toward the middle of part five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza states and argues that,

E5p17: God is without passions, and is not affected with any affect of Joy or Sadness [*Deus expers est passionum, necullo laetitiae auttristitiae affectu afficitur*].

Then, in the corollary to the same proposition, Spinoza seems to somewhat qualify this claim.

*Strictly speaking* God loves no one, and hates no one [*Deus proprie loquendo neminem amat, neque odio habet*]. For God (by P17) is not affected with any affect of Joy or Sadness. Consequently (by Defs. Aff. VI, VII), he also loves no one and hates no one.

Why does Spinoza insert the qualifier “strictly speaking”? Does he insinuate that in some non-strict sense, God may love and hate someone? In this paper I will attempt to explain Spinoza’s delicate notion of Divine Intellectual Love, and the reasons which brought him to introduce this notion which prima facie is inconsistent with his conceptions of God and the affects.
Reason and Beatitute: Self-Love in Humans and in God
Yirmiyahu Yovel
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; The New School for Social Research