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Spinoza's Early Modern Eudaimonism: Corporeal and Intellectual Flourishing

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Abstract

This article explores Spinoza's distinctive contribution to the eudaimonistic tradition, which considers happiness (eudaimonia) to be the highest good. Most (if not all) ancient eudaimonists endorse some sort of hierarchy between mind and body, where one is always dependent on, or subordinate to, the other. In particular, many of them endorse ethical intellectualism, where mental things are considered more valuable than bodily ones. I argue that Spinoza, in contrast, considers mind and body ontologically and ethically identical and equal, thereby bringing something new to this ethical tradition.

Résumé

Cet article explore la contribution particulière de Spinoza à la tradition eudaimoniste, qui considère le bonheur (eudaimonia) comme le bien suprême. La plupart (sinon la totalité) des eudémonistes anciens soutiennent une sorte de hiérarchie entre l'esprit et le corps, où l'un dépend toujours de l'autre ou est toujours subordonné à celui-ci. En particulier, beaucoup d'entre eux adoptent l'intellectualisme éthique, où les choses mentales sont considérées comme plus précieuses que les choses corporelles. Je soutiens que Spinoza, en revanche, considère l'esprit et le corps comme identiques et égaux sur le plan ontologique et éthique, apportant ainsi quelque chose de nouveau à cette tradition éthique.

Keywords: Spinoza; eudaimonism; mind; body; intellectualism; materialism; happiness

1. Introduction

Many scholars read Benedict de Spinoza as an eudaimonist, that is, a follower of the ancient Greek ethical tradition that considers happiness (*eudaimonia*) the highest good.¹ Notable defenders of this reading are Matthew Kisner (2011, Chapter 4),

¹ Benedict de Spinoza is not the only early modern thinker meaningfully engaged with eudaimonism. For example, Thomas Hobbes explicitly rejects eudaimonism insofar as he denies that there is a highest good (see *Elements of the Law* I.7.6 and *Leviathan* I.11 in Hobbes (1992)) and René Descartes describes himself as synthesizing Epicureanism and Stoicism in the realm of moral philosophy (Descartes, 1991, pp. 261–262, 325–326). For comparative discussion of Hobbesian and Spinozistic ethics, see, e.g., Justin Steinberg (2022). For a reading of Descartes and G. W. Leibniz as eudaimonists (and how they compare

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Jon Miller (2015, Chapter 5), and Andrew Youpa (2005).² I myself argue for Spinoza's consistent commitment to eudaimonism throughout his corpus, from his early work *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* to the mature presentation of his philosophy in the *Ethics* (Smith, 2023). Assuming this reading is correct, however, how should we understand Spinoza's relationship to other eudaimonists? Three main possibilities present themselves. Firstly, Spinoza is a straightforward disciple of a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, such as an Epicurean or a Stoic. Secondly, Spinoza does not simply follow a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, but instead improves on this philosophy in certain crucial respects as an innovator (as, e.g., a Neo-Epicurean or a Neo-Stoic).³ Thirdly, Spinoza is neither a disciple nor innovator of a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, but instead offers his own distinctive eudaimonistic account.

In this article, I argue in favour of the third possibility. Spinoza offers a unique and important contribution to the eudaimonistic tradition through his Doctrine of Inter-Attributes Parallelism, which considers Thought and Extension, mind and body, non-reductively identical and only conceptually/causally distinct (*E* IIP7S).⁴ By virtue of this doctrine, in conjunction with Spinoza's Substance Monism (IP14) and his commitment to the Conatus Doctrine (IIP6) as the foundation of his ethics (IVP8Dem.), mind and body are ontologically and ethically equal in Spinoza's philosophical system. This position is distinctive because most (if not all) ancient eudaimonists consider mind and body unequal ontologically and ethically, with the one always being dependent on, or subordinate to, the other. In particular, the body is typically considered ethically inferior to the mind in some crucial respect (e.g., faculties, activities, or pleasures). As a result, many ancient eudaimonists (even ontological materialists like Epicurus and the Stoics) in some sense endorse ethical intellectualism, by which I mean that they consider mental things more valuable than bodily ones. However, because Spinoza considers mind and body non-reductively identical, for him the body is not inferior to the mind. On the contrary, all being is equally extended and thinking in nature, making Spinozistic happiness equally corporeal and intellectual.

with each other and with Spinoza), see, e.g., Andrew Youpa (2005). For discussion of why Descartes and Leibniz are not eudaimonists, see, e.g., Donald Rutherford (2003, 2013) and Lisa Shapiro (2008).

² For a dissenting (unqualified moral anti-realist) reading that sees Spinoza as merely phenomenologically, but not metaethically, committed to eudaimonism, see Rutherford (2013, pp. 212–220).

³ For Neo-Epicurean readings of Spinoza, see, e.g., Laurent Bove (1994), Edwin Curley (1988, Chapter 3), Jean-Marie Guyau (2020), Jacqueline Lagrée (1994), Leibniz (1989), and Dmitris Vardoulakis (2020). For Neo-Stoic readings of Spinoza, see, e.g., Susan James (1993) and Derk Pereboom (1994). Curley, Guyau, and Leibniz, notably, think that Spinoza combines both Epicurean and Stoic doctrines. For criticism of the Neo-Stoic reading, see, e.g., Aurelia Armstrong (2013), Firmin DeBrabander (2007), A. A. Long (2003), and Jon Miller (2015).

⁴ All references to Spinoza's *Ethics* (*E*) are taken from Spinoza (1985). When citing passages from the *Ethics*, I use the following abbreviations: Ax. = Axiom, Def. = Definition, P = Proposition, Dem. = Demonstration, S = Scholium, C = Corollary, App. = Appendix, Pref. = Preface, Lem. = Lemma, and Def. Aff. = Definitions of the Affects/Emotions. Roman numerals refer to one of the five Parts of the treatise. When referring to a particular passage in a long section of text or making a point about translation, I will also cite the Dutch and Latin in Spinoza (1925), henceforth referred to as "G."

In defending this argument, I also address three potential problems for my reading of Spinoza's philosophical framework. Firstly, by virtue of its unique ability to represent all of reality, the attribute of Thought seems to have greater power than any other attribute. If this is true, Thought is ontologically superior to Extension. Secondly, Spinoza's argument about the eternal dimension of the mind seems to indicate that the mind possesses some degree of indestructibility that the body does not, making the mind ontologically superior to the body. Thirdly, Spinoza only describes happiness in intellectual terms, namely as intellectual love of God. He never explicitly mentions a corporeal constituent of happiness, possibly because he does not think there is any true internal good with respect to the body. If so, the mind is ethically superior to the body because the former is the sole constituent of happiness.

In Section 2, I will outline the ways in which ancient eudaimonists — namely, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics — endorse ontological and ethical inequality and hierarchy between mind and body — in particular, ethical intellectualism. Section 3 will cover Spinoza's account of mind and body, explaining why (contra his ancient predecessors) he considers them non-reductively identical, and, in turn, ontologically and ethically equal in status. Finally, in Section 4, I will address the three aforementioned problems for my reading, arguing that (a) Spinoza's conceptions of the attribute of Thought and the eternal dimension of the mind do not entail ontological inequality between thinking/mental and corporeal/bodily being, and (b) despite appearances, Spinoza is philosophically committed to happiness having both mental and bodily constituents, making this ultimate good equally intellectual and corporeal in nature.

2. Mind and Body in Ancient Eudaimonism

2.1 Plato and Aristotle

Plato and Aristotle, both ontologically and ethically, consider immaterial qua non-extended being superior to material being, by virtue of their views on God, matter, and form. God is understood to be essentially and eternally self-subsisting, immaterial, intellectual, and active in nature as the ultimate cause of the structure of the material universe, and those beings within it (*Timaeus* 28aff.; *Metaphysics* Λ).⁵ For Plato, God plays a direct causal role as a purposeful designer who structures the universe with respect to a pre-existing model (i.e., Form) of the Good. Conversely, for Aristotle, God plays an indirect and non-purposeful causal role through final causation as an object of desire, in the sense that all other beings (intentionally or non-intentionally) strive to approximate the contemplative and eternal perfection of God.

Pure (prime) matter, while not created by the Platonic or Aristotelian God, is essentially passive as that which is acted on, but cannot in itself act on anything else (*Timaeus* 49a–50e; *Physics* I.8.192a31; *Metaphysics* Z.3.1029a7–26; H.1.1042a27–28; Λ.2–3). The universe is created through the (purposeful or non-purposeful) influence of God, which imposes a determinate structure on matter as the substratum or basic stuff out of which various kinds of beings are brought into

⁵ All references to Plato's works are taken from Plato (1997). All references to Aristotle's works are taken from Aristotle (1984).

existence. Matter, in other words, can be understood as the passive principle in the constitution of the universe and individual things (i.e., natural substances or self-subsisting beings). The active principle, that which (indirectly or directly) acts on matter to give it determinate being, is form. For Plato, Forms are self-subsisting, immaterial, eternal, and perfect ideas (e.g., the Form of Good, the Form of Beauty, the Form of Man, the Form of Table, etc.) which exist outside of matter (*Republic* V–VII; *Symposium* 204a–205a, 210e–211e).⁶ They influence matter indirectly in the sense that material things (in some way) participate in or imitate these perfect ideas, like a photograph or shadow that only superficially captures the nature of an object (*Republic* 514a–517a). For example, all material things that can truly be described as beautiful obtain their beauty from the Form of Beauty, insofar as their constituent matter superficially imitates this Form (*Phaedo* 100c). Matter (as passive being) cannot, in itself, bring into existence or constitute goodness, beauty, men, tables, or any other determinate kinds of being. It requires the active influence of God (intentionally) and Forms (non-intentionally) as immaterial beings. For Aristotle, forms are also immaterial and give determinate being to matter in various ways. However, contra Plato, he argues that forms do not and cannot exist outside of matter. They instead play a direct causal role in the existence of the universe and individual things, giving matter determinate being from within as essences. In other words, individual things are a combination of matter and form, matter being necessary as the recipient of an essence and form being necessary as this essence realized in matter (*Physics* I.7; *Metaphysics* H; Z).⁷ At this juncture, we can see that, despite some differences in the finer details, both Plato and Aristotle ultimately consider immaterial being superior to material being because the former is associated with divinity and activity, while the latter is associated with passivity and is dependent on the former to bring determinate beings into existence.

From this metaphysical foundation, we can now discuss Plato's and Aristotle's respective accounts of the soul/mind and the body, both of which subordinate the latter to the former. For Plato, the soul is an immaterial and immortal being associated with divinity, which is inherently active insofar as it is essentially living (*Phaedo* 105c–106e), self-moving (*Phaedrus* 245c–246e), and/or intelligent (*Phaedo* 70b; *Republic* 439c–d; *Timaeus* 30b, 46d). The body, in contrast, is material, perishable, non-divine, and inherently passive insofar as it is in itself devoid of life and motion. For a body qua material being to be alive or in motion, then, it requires the direct or indirect influence of a soul qua immaterial being — direct when a soul bestows life or motion on a body from within that body and indirect when a body is put in motion by other external bodies whose ultimate source of motion is a soul (there being both

⁶ When discussing Plato, I capitalize the term “Form” to emphasize the nature of Forms as independently existing beings in his metaphysical framework. Because, as we will see, Aristotle conceives of forms differently than Plato, I do not capitalize the term “form” when discussing the former's metaphysical framework.

⁷ Strictly speaking, there are two kinds of forms for Aristotle: substantial and accidental (*Physics* I.7.190a32–37). Substantial forms impose essences onto matter, bringing particular kinds of individual beings qua substances into existence. Accidental forms, in contrast, allow individuals to take on certain non-essential properties. In either case, these forms are in themselves immaterial. In this article, I will not discuss accidental forms. Consequently, when I refer to “form,” I mean “substantial form.”

individual souls and a world soul, the former being contained within the latter; see *Timaeus* 29e–30d, 34b–c). Similarly, for Aristotle, the soul is a special kind of form qua immaterial being which bestows life functions on certain kinds of matter, namely those with the potential to possess such functions. Without a soul qua form, there can be no life in any body qua parcel of matter (*On the Soul* II.1; *Metaphysics* Z.10.1035b14–16). Both thinkers also, in their mature philosophies, draw a distinction between rational (i.e., mental) and non-rational dimensions of the human soul.⁸ Plato divides the soul into (bodily) appetite, spirit (namely, passion), and reason (*Republic* IV). Aristotle splits the soul up into nutrition, sensation, appetite, and reason through deliberation and contemplation (*On the Soul* II.1–2; *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7; VI.5–8). Concerning the soul's immortality, Plato and Aristotle consider the non-rational dimensions of the soul perishable through their dependence on the body and the rational (mental) dimension imperishable and separable from the body (*Republic* 610d–612a; *Timaeus* 41a–46e; *On the Soul* II.1.413a6–7; III.4.429a22–429b4–5, 5.430a18–25; *Metaphysics* Λ.3.1070a22–25). Therefore, for both Plato and Aristotle, the soul/mind qua immaterial being is ontologically superior to the body qua material being because the former is by nature active and imperishable and plays a superordinate role over the body, the latter of which is by nature passive and perishable.

In the realm of ethics, we find the same sort of relationship of inequality and hierarchy between mind and body. For both Plato and Aristotle, the non-rational dimensions of the soul linked to the body should be subordinate to the rational (i.e., mental) dimension of the soul. Happiness as a life of virtue involves reason ruling over appetite and spirit in the Platonic soul (*Republic* IX) and nutrition, sensation, and appetite in the Aristotelian soul (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, 13; II; VI).⁹ For Plato, happiness, to some extent, requires us to distance ourselves from bodily concerns for the sake of intellectual endeavours. He links vice and unhappiness to materialistic obsession qua imprisonment and the subordination of reason to the body (*Phaedo* 80d–83e; 108a–c; *Republic* 611b). Virtue and happiness are conversely found in contemplation of Forms qua immaterial beings, namely the Forms of Good and Beauty, the philosopher qua lover of wisdom moving from intense love for a single beautiful (perishable) body, to love for the beauty of bodies in general, souls, knowledge, and then finally love for the (eternal) Form of Beauty itself (*Republic* V–VII; *Symposium* 204a–205a, 210a–212a). While there is debate about whether the truly virtuous and happy lover has no concern for bodily things whatsoever (e.g., Nussbaum, 1979) or merely a rationally transformed and moderate conception of the value of such things (e.g., Sheffield, 2006), the fact remains that in Plato's ethical framework, bodily goods are inferior to mental ones. Care for the body may be necessary and important, but only for the sake of promoting happiness as intellectual flourishing.

⁸ I say "mature philosophies" with Plato in mind because in the *Phaedo* he seems to endorse a uniform conception of the soul, whereas in a later dialogue, like the *Republic*, he endorses a tripartite conception of the soul.

⁹ Strictly speaking, it is sensation and appetite that can and should obey reason (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.13.1102b13–1103a1). Nutrition cannot directly obey reason, although reason should ultimately dictate what is most conducive to this faculty of the soul.

Similarly, for Aristotle, we care for the body through moral virtue (i.e., contextually balanced dispositions with respect to affections and actions; see *Nicomachean Ethics* II) because we cannot realize our deliberative and contemplative capacities and virtues if the body is ill. Moreover, even though practical wisdom (i.e., excellent deliberation about contingent matters concerning the role of the body, affections, and actions in achieving happiness) is an intellectual virtue and intrinsically valuable (and thus arguably constitutive of some degree of happiness), it is nevertheless also instrumentally pursued for the sake of promoting theoretical wisdom. Theoretical wisdom involves contemplation of eternal truths concerning God, the heavenly bodies, and various genera and species in nature (see, e.g., *Metaphysics*, *On the Heavens*, and *Physics*). Ethically, theoretical wisdom is considered to be exclusively intrinsically valuable, the closest approximation to the activity of God qua immaterial intellectual being, and constitutive of the highest happiness by virtue of its comparative distance to perishable bodily concerns (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5–8, 12–13; X.7–8).

For both philosophers, in other words, happiness is primarily an intellectual condition, the body only having value insofar as it promotes the rational (and most divine) dimension of the soul qua immaterial being. In sum, by virtue of their association of divinity, activity, and rationality with the immaterial and the material with the absence of such things, Plato and Aristotle consider immaterial and mental being ontologically and ethically superior to material and bodily being.

2.2 Epicurus and the Stoics

Epicurus and the Stoics, in contrast, are ontological materialists. For them, everything in reality is fundamentally extended, and anything that has causal power in the sense of being able to act or be acted on must be corporeal. Something incorporeal conversely cannot have causal power because there is no intelligible way in which it could affect or be affected by anything (*Letter to Herodotus* §67; Long & Sedley, 1987, §§45A–C).¹⁰

Epicurus endorses an atomistic account of reality. Fundamentally, there exists void as eternal and infinite empty space qua extended being, and within that space, there exists an infinite number of indivisible bodies (atoms) of various kinds with respect to size, shape, and weight. Atoms are in perpetual motion, and collisions between certain kinds of atoms form fixed relationships which constitute bodily composites, such as the eternal gods, our particular world (which is one among an infinite number of other worlds), celestial bodies, and natural things like rocks, dogs, and humans. Living things, e.g., humans, are constituted by two different kinds of atomic compounds: soul and body. The soul qua atomic compound consists of fine atoms, while the body consists of dense atoms. While they are distinct atomic compounds, the soul and the body nevertheless cannot exist independently of each other. They rely on one another to maintain the fixed relationship between their respective constituent atoms, and there can be no thought, feeling, or action for either compound when they are separated. The human soul and body are therefore mortal (*Letter to Herodotus* §38ff.; *Letter to Pythocles* §88ff; Long & Sedley, 1987, §§4–15).

¹⁰ All references to Epicurus's texts are taken from Epicurus (1994).

For the Stoics, reality consists of void, matter, and God, all three of which are eternal and extended in nature. Within void, the universe is constituted by God as an active body and matter as a passive body. God purposefully and rationally shapes the structure and order of the universe from within matter. Although they are distinct bodies, God does not exist separate from matter. Instead, they are eternally entwined, God being the soul of the universe and matter its body. Because God is a constituent of the universe, all individual things within the universe are part of God's soul and partake in Its rationality to some degree, if only by possessing a determinate essence and structure. In the technical sense, however, only beings with sensation and impulse (i.e., the capacity for self-motion, like God) possess a soul proper. Humans share in God's soul to the greatest degree among things because they also possess reason, and thus the ability to make judgements about how to act. While the Stoics grant the soul the ability to exist after the death of the body, it is not ultimately immortal because the soul is destroyed when the universe is inevitably destroyed (and then remade) by God (Laetius, 1925, VII.132–160; Long & Sedley, 1987, §§43–55). In both metaphysical accounts, then, divinity, activity, the soul, and rationality are associated with corporeal being. Non-extended being has no place in reality, and extended, but incorporeal, being has no causal power. Only bodies play a meaningful and active role in explaining the nature of things. For Epicurus and the Stoics, then, corporeal being is ontologically superior to incorporeal being, and the soul is neither immortal nor incorporeal.

Despite this ontological materialism, however, both Epicurus and the Stoics (like Plato and Aristotle) are ultimately committed to some form of ethical intellectualism, where mental things are superior to bodily ones. Epicurus conceives of happiness as the bodily pleasure of freedom from pain and the mental pleasure of freedom from disturbance (*Letter to Menoeceus* §§128–130). For the gods, this happiness is never-ending, while for humans it must be constantly replenished and it ceases with death (Laetius, 1925, X.121). Epicurus also argues that there can be no pleasure and happiness, bodily or mental, without a body that is healthy or sufficiently unimpeded in its natural functioning (Cicero, 2004, I.55) and that all pleasures, although not equal in value, are nevertheless by nature good insofar as they promote natural functioning (*Letter to Menoeceus* §129; *Principal Doctrines* VIII). From these details, one might think that Epicurus is an ethical materialist. Firstly, we know that the soul/mind and the body are both corporeal qua atomic compounds, and thus happiness as a natural state cannot be ontologically incorporeal. Secondly, Epicurus not only considers bodily pleasures intrinsically good and necessary for happiness, but also considers certain bodily pleasures constituents of happiness.

These features certainly indicate that Epicurus grants greater ethical value to the body than Plato and Aristotle (and, as we will see shortly, the Stoics), but other features show that, ultimately, he (like the others) thinks that the mind is more valuable than the body in the context of happiness. Practical wisdom qua mental virtue, for starters, is necessary for understanding the differing values of various kinds of pleasures with respect to achieving and maintaining happiness. Without the rational capabilities of the soul, the body would be unable to stably enjoy freedom from pain (*Letter to Menoeceus* §§131–132; *Principal Doctrines* V, XVIII, XX–XXX). As well, Epicurus considers mental pleasures more valuable than bodily pleasures

because the former can refer to the past, present, and future, through recollection, reflection, and anticipation respectively, while the latter can only refer to the present. As a result, mental pleasures offer us greater resources in combatting bodily pains and/or mental disturbances than bodily pleasures (Laertius, 1925, X.137; Cicero, 2004, I.55–56). For example, Epicurus on his deathbed was reportedly happy (*Letter to Idomeneus*), despite being in intense bodily pain from gastro-intestinal issues, because he was able to rely on mental pleasures to overcome pain through memories of past good moments with beloved friends and (arguably) the comforting anticipation that this intense pain would come to an end, if only in death (*Principal Doctrines* III–IV). In general, it is said that the Epicurean sage being physically tortured on the rack is happy, despite their physical suffering (Laertius, 1925, X.118). This indicates that, while bodily pleasure is a genuine constituent of happiness, and may be strongly necessary in first achieving this state, bodily pleasure in itself is insufficient to constitute happiness and/or plays a less necessary and impactful role in maintaining happiness moving forward.¹¹ Mental pleasure, conversely, is strongly necessary for achieving and maintaining happiness, and is largely sufficient for maintaining this state of being. Consequently, while Epicurus considers everything, including the mind, corporeal, he nevertheless follows Plato and Aristotle in considering mental goods more valuable than bodily ones. This makes him, at least, a *weak* ethical intellectualist.

The Stoics, in contrast, endorse a strong ethical intellectualism, one stronger in some sense than even Plato's and Aristotle's. For the Stoics, happiness consists in virtue as living according to our rational nature. They consider the only good virtue, where the mind uses its rational faculty well in line with mental health, and vice the only bad, where the mind uses its rational faculty poorly in line with mental illness. Everything else, most notably the body and its various states, is considered morally indifferent in the sense that such things play no necessary, sufficient, or direct role in happiness. At best, morally indifferent things like bodily health, illness, activity, pleasure, and pain can be useful tools in developing or expressing prior states of virtue, but one can be truly happy in their absence and their presence does not add to, or diminish, one's happiness whatsoever (Laertius, 1925, VII.87–131; Long & Sedley, 1987, §§56–67). In other words, while Stoic happiness is in general ontologically corporeal in nature, it is also nevertheless exclusively intellectual in essence. One simply needs to be rational to be happy, with the body (as something neither truly good nor bad) playing an inconsequential ethical role in living well. Despite their materialism, then, the Stoics offer the strongest form of ethical intellectualism, in the sense that goodness is restricted to the realm of the mental.

In sum, all four eudaimonistic philosophies are committed to ontological and ethical inequality and hierarchy between mind and body.¹² On the one hand, Plato and

¹¹ We might think that one's body must be unimpeded in its natural functioning, and thus free from pain, to some degree or in certain crucial parts of one's natural constitution even in these situations, otherwise one would be unable to live or experience anything whatsoever; see, e.g., John Rist (1972, pp. 109–111, 170–172). In light of this point, the body may still play a necessary, albeit lesser, role than the mind in maintaining happiness.

¹² Other ancient thinkers that could be discussed in this context are Socrates, the Cynics, the Cyrenaics, and the Sceptics (both Academic and Pyrrhonic). Both Socrates and the Cynics associate happiness with

Aristotle consider immaterial/mental being superior to material/bodily being by virtue of the former's association with divinity, activity, and rationality in the context of the universe and happiness. Epicurus and the Stoics, on the other hand, ontologically ground divinity, activity, and rationality in corporeal being, rendering the incorporeal inferior to the corporeal. Ethically, however, they both place mental things over bodily ones in the context of happiness. As we will see in the next section, Spinoza places himself in opposition to both materialism and intellectualism in the realms of ontology and ethics. In his eudaimonistic framework, immaterial/mental being and material/bodily being are non-reductively identical and thus equal in status.

3. Mind and Body in Spinoza

Substance lies at the heart of Spinoza's account of reality. Specifically, he describes a substance as that which is ontologically and conceptually independent (*E* IDef.3), which in turn also makes it causally independent or self-caused (IDef.1, IAX.4–5, IP3, IP6, IIP2, IIP6). It relies on absolutely nothing else for its existence, and in understanding the nature of the substance in question, we need not appeal to the concept of anything else. Spinoza defines God as “a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence” (IDef.6), clarifying that “whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence” (Expl.). In other words, God is an eternal and infinite substance that unrestrictedly expresses all possible being in Its essence. An attribute is a fundamental feature that “intellect” understands as a constituent of the essence of a substance (IDef.4), and thus also as infinite and eternal in nature (IP19). Since God essentially expresses all possible being, It possesses every attribute that a substance could possess (IP9).¹³ Spinoza explicitly argues that Thought and Extension are attributes of God (IIP1–2), while clarifying that It also possesses other attributes to which we lack epistemic access (IP9–10S; IIP7S; Ep 9/G IV 44–45; Ep 56/G 261).¹⁴

Spinoza's mention of “intellect” in his definition of attribute, however, has led to rich debate concerning how we should understand the relationship between God qua

wisdom qua virtue, subordinating bodily goods to the intellectual goods of the soul (*Apology* 29d–30b; *Euthydemus* 278d–282d; Laertius, 1925, VI.104; Usher, 2022, pp. 163–165). The Cyrenaics, conversely, argue that bodily pleasures are more valuable than mental ones and reject eudaimonism insofar as they deny that happiness is the highest good (Laertius, 1925, II.87–90). The Sceptics call into question our ability to have certain knowledge about anything, including ethics; however, they will grant that happiness as mental tranquility *appears* to be the highest good and that suspension of judgement *appears* to be conducive to this end (Long & Sedley, 1987, §§1–3, 68–70). Insofar as we consider Socrates, the Cynics, and the Sceptics eudaimonists, then, we find a valuing of the mental over the bodily. Even in the case of the Cyrenaics, as non-eudaimonists, we still find a commitment to ethical inequality and hierarchy between mind and body (except, in this case, ethical materialism). I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to briefly discuss these other thinkers.

¹³ Here I refer to God as “It,” and avoid the traditional masculine pronouns, in light of the impersonal nature of Spinoza's conception of God, as evidenced by passages like *E* IP10, IApp., and VP17.

¹⁴ “EP” refers to Spinoza's correspondence, which can be found in Spinoza (1985, 2016). Here I side with scholars, like Yitzhak Melamed (2017, pp. 96–99), who read the Spinozistic God as possessing infinitely many attributes, instead of merely Thought and Extension as the only possible attributes.

substance and Its attributes. On what we might call a “subjectivist” reading of the attributes, the mention of the intellect indicates that the attributes do not actually belong to God’s essence, but are instead simply how a (finite human) mind cognizes God. Attributes on this reading are then *mind-dependent* features imposed on God, *as if* they constituted Its essence. A classic defender of this view is Harry Austryn Wolfson (1934, Volume I, pp. 146–157). In contrast, on what we might call an “objectivist” reading of the attributes, the attributes are *mind-independent* features that genuinely constitute God’s essence.¹⁵ Some defenders of this view include Michael Della Rocca (1996, Chapter 9), Martin Lin (2019, pp. 81–85, 91–92), Yitzhak Melamed (2017, pp. 90–96), and Noa Shein (2009, pp. 525–531).¹⁶ While I consider the (narrow) objectivist reading more plausible than the subjectivist reading, I will nevertheless explain how both readings in some sense entail equality between mind and body.

Spinoza ultimately argues that God is the only substance (Substance Monism), and that all other beings are modes and immanent (i.e., internal) effects of God (*E* IP14–15, IP18), including human beings (IIP10). A mode is something that is ontologically and conceptually dependent on something else as an affection or property of the latter.¹⁷ A mode, in other words, expresses some aspect of the nature of the being on which it depends. A mode can have its own modes (e.g., my individual mind and body, as modes, can have expressions of their being through affects like pleasure, pain, love, and hate), but since any given mode is in itself a dependent being, all modes are ultimately dependent on a substance. More precisely, they will be dependent on, and express the being of, a substance’s attributes. Consequently, modes are different ways in which the essential features of God’s nature are expressed (IDef.5; IP16Dem., IP25C, IP28S, IP36Dem.).

There are three kinds of modes: *immediate infinite* modes, *mediate infinite* modes, and *finite* modes. Immediate infinite modes follow directly from God’s attributes, mediate infinite modes follow from the immediate infinite modes (IP21–23), and finite modes follow from a combination of mediate infinite modes and finite modes (IP28). Spinoza’s account of the infinite modes of each attribute and their subsequent relationship to finite modes is notoriously sparse, so here I offer only a

¹⁵ The classic debate between subjectivist and objectivist readings involves other considerations, such as whether Spinoza is referring to a finite or infinite intellect, why he uses the language of perception (*percipit*) in *E* IDef.4/G II 45, what he intends *tanquam* to mean in this definition (i.e., “as [really]” vs. “as if [but not really]”), and how we should understand Spinoza’s claim in IP10S/G II 52 that there is a “real distinction” (*realiter distincta*) between the attributes. My concern here is simply whether the attributes truly belong to God’s essence or not, and the implications of either reading in this narrow sense. For comprehensive discussion of more general subjectivist and objectivist readings, see Martin Lin (2019) and Noa Shein (2009). For discussion of why Spinoza uses the language of perception, rather than conception, see Michael Della Rocca (1996, p. 166) and Melamed (2017, p. 95, n. 50).

¹⁶ Lin (2019) and Shein (2009) do not describe their respective readings as objectivist in the classic sense because both consider Spinoza to be committed to some sort of conceptual or rational distinction (*distinctio rationis*) between the attributes, despite their ontological identity. Instead, both see themselves as presenting middle-ground interpretations, which are not subject to the traditional issues of subjectivist and/or objectivist readings.

¹⁷ Curley (1988, pp. 30–48) argues that Spinoza considers modes mere effects of God qua substance, and not properties. Melamed (2013, Chapter 1), in contrast, argues (quite persuasively and comprehensively, in my view) that modes are indeed properties (namely, *propria*) in Spinoza’s metaphysical framework.

general and speculative outline, which will nevertheless be sufficient for understanding the relationship between mind and body.¹⁸ The immediate infinite mode of Thought is absolutely infinite intellect/will, or the idea of God, which consists in God's understanding of all Its attributes and the modes that follow from each of them (IP30, IP32C2; IIP3–4, IIP49; Ep 64/G 278). The immediate infinite mode(s) of Extension is/are motion and rest (*E* IP32C2; Ep 64/G 278).¹⁹ The mediate infinite mode of Extension is the infinite composite body of the universe, which is constituted by a fixed proportion of motion and rest between its constituent material parts (*E* IIP13Lem.1–IIP13L7S; Ep 64/G 278), and in Thought the infinite composite idea or intellect of Nature, which represents in its content the infinite body of Nature, as well as the relevant mediate infinite modes of the other attributes (*E* IIP11). Finite modes of Thought are individual ideas or minds and finite modes of Extension are individual bodies (IIDef.1). The human body is a particular material ratio of motion/rest and the human mind is the idea of the body as this particular material ratio (IIDef.1, IIDef.3; IIP5, IIP11–13). Spinoza does not make it clear how we get from mediate infinite modes to finite modes, but for our purposes we need only note that the human mind is part of God's infinite intellect or the composite intellect of the universe (IIP5–6, IIP9, IIP11C), and the human body is part of the infinite composite body of the universe (IIP13Ax.1–Post.6).²⁰ Roughly speaking, in Spinoza's cosmological framework, we might say that we move from the general being of God's attributes to the infinite modes as progressively more particular beings and natural laws, with finite modes as individual instantiations of these prior beings and laws.

With this general account of reality in mind, we can now discuss the ontological relationship between God's attributes and the modes that follow from them. The central passage on this subject is IIP7S, which outlines what Melamed (2013, p. 142) refers to as "Inter-Attributes Parallelism."²¹ Here, Spinoza argues that "the thinking

¹⁸ For comprehensive discussion of the infinite modes, and their relationship to finite modes, see, e.g., Melamed (2013, Chapter 4), Steven Nadler (2012), and Shein (2018).

¹⁹ Spinoza, like Aristotle (*Physics* IV) and Descartes (1984, II.16), is committed to a plenum, meaning within the realm of Extension there is no void, vacuum, or space devoid of matter (*E* IP15S; Ep 13/G IV 65). Where Spinoza crucially differs from both, however, is in arguing that matter is inherently active and actual because it belongs to God's nature, God being inherently active and actual (IP17S, IP31S). For discussion of Spinoza's critique of Descartes's conception of Extension, see, e.g., Alison Peterman (2015) and Thaddeus S. Robinson (2009). Peterman is noteworthy because she argues that Spinoza also breaks with tradition by denying that length, breadth, and depth constitute the true nature of Extension.

²⁰ Historically, some have read Spinoza as an acosmist, meaning they think that he denies (among other things) the genuine existence of finite modes. For comprehensive discussion of the history of and evidence for the acosmist reading, as well as a refutation of it, see Melamed (2013, Chapter 3.2). See also footnote 18.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze (1990, Chapter 7) and Melamed (2013, Chapter 5) argue that Spinoza also presents an epistemological doctrine in *E* IIP7 concerning the relationship between mind and body, what Melamed (2013, p. 142) refers to as "Ideas-Things Parallelism." This doctrine states that there is a strict representational correspondence between ideas and the things that constitute reality. In terms of the relationship between Inter-Attributes Parallelism and Ideas-Things Parallelism, Deleuze (1990, pp. 126–128) argues that the former follows from the latter. Melamed (2013, pp. 142–146, 189–191), in contrast, argues that these two doctrines are wholly distinct, and thus neither is derived from the other. I will have more to say about Ideas-Things Parallelism shortly, particularly what problems it may raise for my reading of Spinoza.

substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance [*una, eademque est substantia*], which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode [as a mode of Thought] are one and the same thing [*una, eademque est res*], but expressed in two ways” (G II 90). As discussed above, there is only one substance, God, that possesses all possible attributes, of which two are Extension and Thought. As essential features, Extension and Thought equally constitute God’s nature, meaning that God does not express the one kind of being without expressing the other (which applies to all of the other attributes, as well).²² The attributes are ontologically inseparable, and in fact non-reductively identical (“one and the same substance”), being merely conceptually and causally distinct aspects of the same underlying being, that is God.²³ There is then no ontological inequality of priority between Thought and Extension because through the identity of the attributes “God’s [NS: actual] power of thinking is equal [*aequalis*] to his actual power of acting” (E IIP7C/G II 89). On the subjectivist reading of attributes, they are weakly equal, in the sense that neither actually constitutes God’s essence, but God is equally cognized through both. On the objectivist reading, Thought and Extension are strongly equal because they are both genuine constituents of God’s essence. Either reading therefore, in some sense, entails ontological identity and equality between thinking and extended being.

This ontological and conceptual/causal dynamic also applies to the modes of these attributes, since the modes by their very nature depend on the attributes and are expressions of them.²⁴ Infinite will/intellect and motion/rest, the composite intellect of the universe and the composite body of the universe, or my particular mind and body, while being modes of different attributes (the former Thought and the latter Extension) are not ontologically distinct beings, but the same being (i.e., an immediate infinite mode, a mediate infinite mode, and a finite mode, respectively) expressed and understood in two different ways (with there possibly being infinitely many other ways in which this being can be understood relative to the attribute in question).²⁵ More precisely, we can draw a distinction between “neutral” modes (Della Rocca, 1996, pp. 132–140) or “modes of God” (Melamed, 2013, pp. 82–86), which presuppose and are conceived through every attribute, and “modes of attributes,” which are the expression of these neutral modes through each attribute.

In the realm of mind and body, we can take these details even further. The essence, pleasures/pains, and activities of my mind and the essence, pleasures/pains, and

²² God’s power is fully actual, so there is no dimension of Its nature, that is, no possible attribute or mode of an attribute that goes unrealized or unexpressed (E IP17S, IP31S).

²³ Lin (2019) and Melamed (2017) disagree over how this conceptual distinction should be characterized. Lin (2019, pp. 80–81) argues that the distinction is one of “reasoning reason” (*distinctio rationis ratiocinantis*), which allows for the essence of substance to be understood in diverse ways without entailing that the attributes constitute ontologically distinct beings or substance is somehow in itself simultaneously metaphysically plural and unified. Melamed (2017, pp. 101–102), conversely, argues that the distinction is one of “reasoned reason” (*distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*) because it truly captures mind-independent aspects of the essence of substance. I leave it to the reader to decide which distinction better suits what Spinoza has in mind.

²⁴ This means that mind and body do not causally interact because they are the same underlying thing (E IIP2).

²⁵ For rich discussion of how best to characterize the identity of mind and body, see, e.g., Della Rocca (1996, Chapters 7–9) and Karolina Hübner (2022).

activities of my body are not ontologically distinct things — there is simply my essence, my pleasures/pains, and my activities as neutral modes, each of which finds simultaneous expression through Thought and Extension, that is, mind and body as respective modes of these attributes. Spinoza asserts that “the Mind’s striving, or power of thinking, is equal to [*aequalis*] and at one in nature with the Body’s striving, or power of acting” (IIP28Dem./G II 162; see also IVP45S). The power of my body cannot be promoted or impeded without the power of my mind being promoted or impeded, and vice versa (IIP11; see also IIP14; IVP45S, IVApp.27). The mind and the body are thus empowered and disempowered together, again because they are not ontologically distinct or unequal beings, but rather different and equal aspects of the same being.²⁶ Ultimately then there follows from God’s nature one infinite causal order, each thing qua mode in this order finding equal expression through every attribute. This unified account of the mind and body, in turn, indicates that Spinoza is neither a substance dualist, nor a materialist, nor an idealist, because thinking and extended being are equally fundamental aspects of the one substance and they do not exhaust this substance’s scope of being.²⁷ Instead, Spinoza is best understood as a neutral substance monist.²⁸

This ontological commitment to the identity between and equality of the most basic kinds of being, in turn, has important ethical implications. At the heart of Spinoza’s ethics is the Conatus Doctrine, which states that all things possess a natural essential striving (*conatus*) and force (*vis*) to express and preserve their existence (IIP6–7/G II 146; IIP4S/G II 127; see also *E* IVPref., IVP3–4Dem., IVP7Dem., IVP26Dem.). Whenever Spinoza refers to the “striving” (*conatur*) or “power” (*potentia*) of the mind or the body, he is referring to the conatus of the mind or the conatus of the body (IIP7Dem., IIP11, IIP28Dem./G II 146, 148, 162). In light of Inter-Attributes Parallelism (or Equality), however, we know that these two conatuses, these two self-preservative forces, are not ontologically distinct things, but merely conceptually distinct expressions of the same underlying conatus qua self-

²⁶ In light of the fact that Spinoza considers mind and body to be identical, however, some scholars have noted that “parallelism” may be a misleading term for this doctrine, particularly because Spinoza never uses the term himself (Deleuze, 1990, pp. 104–109; Della Rocca, 2008, p. 19; Jaquet, 2018, pp. 12–19; Melamed, 2013, p. 144). Chantal Jaquet (2018, pp. 19–26) argues that this doctrine is better characterized by the term “equality,” since Spinoza explicitly uses “*aequalis*” to describe the relationship between Thought/mind and Extension/body. I am inclined to agree with Jaquet, and thus (pace Melamed) I think that the argument of IIP7S is best described as the “Doctrine of Inter-Attributes Equality,” although for the sake of clarity and consistency, I will continue to describe this doctrine as “Inter-Attributes Parallelism.”

²⁷ With that said, it is important to note that Spinoza thinks bodies are wholly explained through the principles of extended being, with absolutely no appeal to the principles of non-extended or intellectual being. If by “materialism” we simply mean that corporeal being is causally and explanatorily self-sufficient, then in this qualified and non-reductive sense Spinoza may be accurately described as a materialist (as well as an idealist concerning the causal chain of ideas).

²⁸ For discussion of dualism in Spinoza, see, e.g., Jonathan Bennett (1984, Chapter 2.12–13) and Melamed (2013, pp. 196–199). For materialist readings of Spinoza, see, e.g., Curley (1988, pp. 89–93), Stuart Hampshire (2015, pp. 210–231), and Warren Montag (1999). For idealist readings of Spinoza, see, e.g., Della Rocca (2008, 2012) and J. Clark Murray (1896). For further, more nuanced, discussion of why Spinoza is neither a materialist nor an idealist, see Lin (2019, pp. 100–101) and Melamed (2013, Chapter 6.7). Spinoza has also been described as a “neutral monist” or “double-aspect theorist” by Jaegwon Kim (2011, p. 96) and Leopold Stubenberg (2018).

preservative power. Ethically, what is good is what promotes this self-preservative force and what is bad is what impedes this force (IVP8Dem.). Spinoza also grounds virtue in the conatus, equating the former with one's self-preservative essence insofar as this essence is the adequate cause of one's actions. To be an adequate cause, or active, is to be the sufficient explanation of an effect. Conversely, to be an inadequate cause, or passive, is to be merely a partial explanation of an effect. To be virtuous, in other words, is to act solely from one's conatus, or self-preservative nature. One lacks virtue insofar as one relies on external forces to assist one's nature in producing an effect. Happiness, as the highest good, in turn, is said to be constituted by virtue qua adequate causality, making the happy life the life of self-affirmative striving and activity (IIIDef.1–IIIDef.2; IVDef.8; IVP18–IVP22). Now, because mind and body, and their essential striving and power, is identical, and goodness, virtue, and happiness are grounded in this striving and power, goodness, virtue, and happiness are both mental and bodily in nature. The mind and body are therefore ethically equal by virtue of their identity and shared constitutive role (we will discuss Spinoza's precise, concrete descriptions of happiness in the next section).

In sum, in this section, I have shown that Spinoza has a drastically different conception of the ontological and ethical relationship between mind and body than his fellow eudaimonists. Contra Plato and Aristotle, Spinoza does not consider (determinate) corporeal (i.e., extended) beings ontologically dependent on incorporeal or intellectual beings for their essence or existence, nor, contra Epicurus and the Stoics, does he think that intellectual being is dependent on corporeal being. Corporeal being and intellectual qua incorporeal being are instead identical and co-extensive aspects of being qua substance or mode. Ethically, Spinoza places himself in opposition to all four by rejecting ethical intellectualism. Because mind and body are one and the same thing, mental goods (e.g., states, activities, and pleasures) are identical to bodily goods, and thus mental goods cannot be superior to bodily goods. On the contrary, their identity entails their equal ethical value. Spinoza consequently sets himself apart from his fellow eudaimonists, and offers a unique and important contribution to this ethical tradition, through the ways in which he fully unifies mind and body ontologically and ethically.

4. Potential Problems

However, there are certain features of Spinoza's philosophical framework, or the presentation of it, which seem to undermine this equality reading. As I see it, there are three central problems for my reading of Spinoza. Two of them are ontological and concern the nature of the attribute of Thought and the eternity of the mind, respectively. The third problem is ethical, and concerns the fact that Spinoza explicitly offers only an intellectual description of happiness, with no clear reference to a bodily constituent of this highest good. In this section, I will outline the features that motivate each of these problems, and explain how they ultimately do not undermine Spinoza's commitment to the ontological and ethical equality of mind and body.

4.1 *The Absolutely Infinite (Representational) Power of Thought*

The first problem is connected to what Melamed (2013, p. 142) refers to as "Ideas-Things Parallelism." In *E* IIP7, Spinoza argues that "[t]he order and

connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” and in the succeeding corollary he further clarifies that “whatever follows formally [i.e., actually] from the infinite nature of God, all this follows from the idea of God with the same order and connection, as an object of thought in God.” There is, in other words, a strict correspondence between ideas and the things that constitute reality, meaning the idea of God (or the absolutely infinite intellect) qua immediate infinite mode of Thought, and the more particular ideas that are contained within this mode, perfectly mirrors and represents in its content God’s infinitely many attributes (including Thought) and the causal orders of modes that follow from those attributes. In the realm of mind and body, this means that, for any given body, there is necessarily an idea that both corresponds with and essentially represents that body, and for every state of that body, there will be a corresponding idea of it (IIP12–13).²⁹ Melamed (2013, Chapter 6) also argues that (in conjunction with *E* IIP7S, that is, Inter-Attributes Parallelism), within the attribute of Thought, there is an idea of each neutral mode of God that makes up the fundamental causal order of everything, and each of these ideas has infinite aspects that represent the expression of this causal order under each attribute (IP16; IIP4).

Now, why does Ideas-Things Parallelism potentially undermine the previously demonstrated equality between thinking and extended being? The issue, as Spinoza’s friend Tschirnhaus puts it, is that “the Attribute of thought is held to extend itself much more widely than the other attributes” (Ep 70/G IV 302). Spinoza attributes to Thought the power to represent all of reality as it is constituted by God’s attributes and modes, and if Melamed is correct, we can also say that each idea of a neutral mode has infinite aspects which are ideas of how this mode is expressed through each attribute. In fact, Melamed (2013, pp. 183–185) also notes that Spinoza describes the immediate infinite mode of Thought as “absolutely infinite intellect” (Ep 64/G IV 278), meaning that from the idea of God “infinite things [i.e., ideas representing modes of God] follow in infinite ways [i.e., through attribute-relative aspects of these ideas]” (*E* IIP4). God qua substance is the only other thing referred to as “absolutely infinite” (IDef.6). Extension, and the attributes in general, are described as merely infinite in their “own kind,” that is unrestricted in their distinctive expression of being because each does not actually possess all possible being (IDef.6Expl., IP16Dem.). Admittedly, Thought qua attribute is only formally

²⁹ Melamed (2013, pp. 142–145) argues that *E* IIP7 is not making the same claim as IIP7S, that is, Inter-Attributes Parallelism. Ideas-Things Parallelism says only that there is a strict correspondence between the content of ideas and all of reality in terms of attributes and modes. It does not entail a strict correspondence or identity between each of the attributes and the causal order of modes that follow from each of them. It is perfectly compatible with IIP7 that Extension and unknown attributes A or B are not identical and do not share the same causal order for their respective modes. The only attribute that Extension, attribute A, or attribute B must correspond with is Thought insofar as the structure of the idea of God perfectly represents the causal order of each attribute. Ideas-Things Parallelism also does not say that ideas are identical with the things that are necessarily their objects because the idea of God is not identical with God qua thinking substance, but is instead merely a mode of thinking substance. With all this in mind (pace Jaquet, 2018), the term “parallelism” is fitting in this context, since *E* IIP7 merely establishes a correspondence relation. What is traditionally referred to as the “Doctrine of Parallelism” possibly should then be restricted to Ideas-Things Parallelism (IIP7) and Inter-Attributes Parallelism should be referred to as the “Doctrine of Inter-Attributes Equality” (IIP7S).

infinite in its own kind, and not absolutely infinite, but representationally it is absolutely infinite because it can refer to all possible being through its distinctive power of thinking. Extension's distinctive power (and presumably the power of the other hypothetical attributes) does not possess this absolute infinity. As a result, Thought seems to be more powerful, or to express more being, than Extension and possibly any other attribute. In fact, when Spinoza says that "God's [NS: actual] power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting," he is not referring to the power of Extension alone, but instead to the power of all of God's attributes: "I.e., whatever follows formally from God's infinite nature" (IIP7C). In other words, Thought is not equal to Extension alone — Thought is apparently equal in power to all of the attributes together because it represents all of them and their respective modes. Spinoza is not an idealist (in a reductive sense) because Thought does not exist prior to or cause/sustain Extension and the other attributes, but its expression of being appears to be more plentiful than any other attribute, which leads Melamed (2013, Chapter 6.7) to conclude that Thought has "priority" as an attribute and Spinoza is a dualist of "Thought and Being." It would seem, then, that extended being (and any other kind of being) is ontologically inferior to thinking or intellectual being, and thus, contrary to my abovementioned argument, mind and body are not truly equal.

Ultimately, I do not think these features concerning Thought undermine my reading of Spinoza, nor do I think Spinoza is rightly called a "Thought-Being dualist." I caution the reader to be careful not to arbitrarily consider one kind of power superior to another. Just as Thought is not inferior to Extension because the former cannot exist spatially or be real in a tactile sense, so too Extension (or any other attribute) is not inferior to Thought because the former cannot represent things. Spatiality and representation are equally real and fundamental expressions of being (namely, substance). Admittedly, Thought is able to refer to all of reality in a way that no other attribute can, and it does possess a kind of absolute infinity relative to its domain of power. However, it is simply the nature of representation to refer to reality. Spinoza himself cautions us against judging the perfection of things based on features that are not inherent to their respective natures: "the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power" (IApp./G 83; see also IVPref. and Ep 19 and Ep 21). A bird is not ontologically inferior to a human being because the former lacks opposable thumbs. A human is not inferior to a bird because the latter has wings. Someone born blind is not inferior to someone born sighted. In each case, something cannot be less perfect because it lacks some feature foreign to its nature.³⁰ And these are examples of things with much more in common than the attributes of Thought and Extension, the latter of which are wholly conceptually/causally distinct in their expression of being. Based on this passage, we can infer that Spinoza, in principle, would not condone speaking of any attribute as inferior or superior to another, meaning that no attribute is inferior to Thought because the former cannot refer to all of reality — this is a feature only intelligible through the representational power of thinking, which cannot be appropriately compared to the power of Extension or any other attribute.

³⁰ Whether Spinoza allows for any sort of legitimate inequality of perfection between beings, particularly finite modes, I leave for discussion elsewhere.

Even if an argument could be made for legitimately considering Thought ontologically superior to the other attributes, this simply qualifies the ways in which thinking and extended being are equal. The fact remains that *E IIP7S* establishes an equality of identity between Thought, Extension, and all the other attributes. There can be no instance of thinking without an instance of extension, and vice versa. Thought's expression of representational power strictly corresponds with the expression of every other attribute's distinctive power because they are merely different aspects of the same underlying power. Furthermore, the human mind and human body have no conceptual or causal connection to the modes of other attributes, so Thought's representation of all of reality has little impact on our bodies and minds. What is relevant to us ontologically (and, as we have seen, ethically) is the identity of mind and body — the fact that mental power and bodily power strictly exist, flourish, and stagnate together. All the apparent ontological supremacy of Thought entails is that mind and body are not equal in every possible sense, but the qualified equality of identity that they do possess is far from trivial. Consequently, even on a reading of Spinoza as a Thought-Being dualist, Spinoza's commitments to mind-body equality remain true and distinctive in an eudaimonistic context.

4.2 The Eternal Dimension of the Mind

The second potential issue, in the ontological context, is the eternal dimension of the mind. Spinoza specifically argues that a part of the mind (namely, its essence as the idea of a particular material ratio of motion/rest) can survive the death of the body because it is eternally contained within the attribute of Thought (*E VP2–23*). If the mind possesses eternal existence that the body does not, then this would also indicate an ontological inequality between body and mind, with the body being inferior to the mind due to the former's exclusively mortal existence. Wolfson (1934, Volume II, pp. 293–296) takes this view, arguing that the body is only eternal insofar as its essence is an object of thought — making the essence of the body at best representationally, but not ontologically, eternal.³¹

Other scholars (Della Rocca, 2008, pp. 257–258; Garrett, 2018, pp. 244–252; Nadler, 2006, pp. 262–265), however, argue that, by virtue of *E IIP7S*, it makes more sense to say that both body and mind have eternal parts, since they are identical, and thus the eternal part of the mind must have a bodily counterpart. Wolfson's error is failing to appreciate that the essence of the mind receives its eternity from being contained in Thought, and it represents the essence of the body as something eternally contained *within the attribute of Extension* (*E IIP8, IIP45S; VP29S*). Aaron Garrett (2003, pp. 194–197) speculates, I think plausibly, that Spinoza only argues for and emphasizes the eternal dimension of the mind because his traditionally and religiously minded readers were primarily concerned with the immortality of the mind/soul, not the body. Spinoza wants to correct their understanding of what immortality for the mind actually consists in, namely an eternal essence *qua mode*

³¹ And this qualification may only be coherent if we depart from Spinoza's strict definition of "eternity": "existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing" (*E IDef.8*).

devoid of imagination, memory, and personality (*E* VP21). It is thus more consistent with Spinoza's doctrines to consider mind and body equally eternal in the same respect because their essences equally follow from the eternal nature of their respective attributes.³²

4.3 *The Absence of an Explicit Corporeal Counterpart to Intellectual Love of God*

The third problem concerns the fact that Spinoza seemingly never describes virtue and happiness in bodily terms. He only seems to describe them in intellectual terms. Virtue and happiness are equated not only with adequate causality in general, but more specifically and concretely with mental adequate causality in the form of adequate knowledge (IVP23–24). Adequate knowledge is constituted by ideas that are rationally ordered (VP10) by the mind so as to reveal the necessary truth, or certainty, of their content (IIP29S, 40, 44; IIIP1), meaning that the mind is responsible for its own understanding. Conversely, inadequate knowledge is constituted by “confused” and “fragmentary” ideas (IIIP1; VP3) that are constituted by the circumstantial and haphazard ways in which one has interacted with things in the world through sensory experience, meaning such ideas follow partly from the causal power of external things rather than from the intellectual resources of the mind alone (IIP29C–S; 40).³³ With this epistemological framework in mind, Spinoza argues that “we know nothing to be certainly good or evil except what is really conducive to understanding or what can hinder understanding” (IVP27). It would seem that goodness is ultimately grounded, then, in the promotion of mental striving and power, and not both mental and bodily striving/power. In line with this point, Spinoza explicitly describes blessedness (*beatitudo*), the highest good (*summum bonum*), and the highest happiness (*summum felicitas*; see *E* IVP28/G II 228, IVApp.4/G II 267) as “intellectual love of God” (*Amor Dei intellectualis*; see VP32C), thereby equating this state of being with mental power, virtue, and pleasure (VP25–27, VP35–36, VP42). Does this mean that Spinoza considers happiness a purely intellectual good?

Miller's (2015, Chapter 5.6.3) answer to this question is “yes.” He argues that happiness has no bodily counterpart because Spinoza considers all bodily goods external in nature. Every conceivable bodily good, like “food, drink, exercise, [and] health” is external because such things are “not entirely due to us” (Miller, 2015, p. 200). In other words, anything that is beneficial to the body must come from outside of it and hold only circumstantial instrumental value, which is in stark contrast to the internal and intrinsic goodness of intellectual activity qua adequate causality that the mind enjoys with intellectual love of God. Miller concedes that this conception of bodily goods is in tension with Parallelism (*E* IIP7 and IIP7S).³⁴ However, he

³² For fuller discussion of the eternal dimension of the mind, see, e.g., Della Rocca (2008, Chapter 7), Don Garrett (2018, pp. 243–262), Nadler (2006, pp. 259–272), and Harry Austryn Wolfson (1934, Volume II, Chapter XX.III).

³³ Examples of inadequate, and false, ideas are: Nature is providential (*E* IApp.; IVPref.), there are contingent, indeterminate events in Nature (IP29; VP6S), and we can please or displease God through our actions (IApp.; VP17).

³⁴ Miller (2015) does not distinguish between Ideas-Things Parallelism and Inter-Attributes Parallelism.

thinks that a solution can be found in the distinction Spinoza draws between what is in “human power” and what is “outside” of human power, even if Spinoza himself had not quite solidified his thoughts on this matter (IVApp.32; see also IIIDef.2; IVP18S, IVApp.2). What is in human power is reason, which fits with Spinoza’s identification of the highest good with intellectual love of God, the highest intellectual power and pleasure. Conversely, bodily factors are (at least partly) outside of human power, which explains why the body has no intrinsic good. The extrinsic and circumstantial nature of bodily goods is thus the reason that the body is not a constituent of the highest good, according to Miller.

Miller is correct that Spinoza draws an important distinction between what is and is not in our power, as evidenced by the distinction between activity qua adequate causality and passivity qua inadequate causality (IIIDef.2). However, there is little reason for mapping this distinction onto the relationship between mind and body in general or restricting virtue to intellectual power. As Miller himself admits, IIP7S entails a strict correspondence, and in fact identity, between mind and body. One’s essential self-preservative striving, power, and subsequent pleasures and pains are equally mental and bodily in nature. And since virtue just is one’s essential power considered in itself, virtue is also equally mental and bodily in nature (IVP8).

Miller’s point is that, while the mind has a bodily correlate, the body by nature possesses a passivity that the mind does not, which is why all possible bodily goods are external. It is true that Spinoza’s description of the body emphasizes its causal receptivity: “[w]hatever so disposes the human Body that it can be affected in a great many ways” (IVP38). There are two things to note here, however. Firstly, in IVP38, Spinoza also emphasizes the body’s active causal power: “or renders it capable of affecting external Bodies in a great many ways.” In fact, we might say that this description implies that a body’s causal power fundamentally lies in having as much of a causal role (as cause or recipient) in phenomena as possible, similar to the way that God qua substance plays an absolute causal role in everything because It is every cause and is the recipient of every cause (IVP14–15, IVP18). Secondly, this causal dynamic is also not restricted to the body. In IVP18S/G II 223, Spinoza asserts that “our intellect would of course be more imperfect if the Mind were alone and did not understand anything except itself” and in IVApp. 27 he references the “knowledge we acquire from observing [external things] and changing them from one form into another.” In other words, the mind, like the body, can be enriched by external things, and thus possesses external goods of its own. There is also the more fundamental fact that the mind necessarily possesses inadequate ideas, which are representative of its inevitable passivity to some degree (IIIP1). These passages, in turn, indicate that intellectual power also involves receptivity, meaning that the mind is not wholly internal. This makes sense because by virtue of IIP7S the activity and passivity of a being is attribute-neutral — it does not presuppose only one attribute, but all of them (IVApp.; VP40). Any degree of passivity that the body possesses, the mind will necessarily possess, relative to their respective natures. What is in our power is both mental and bodily, and what is not in our power is that which is distinct from our mind and body (IVP45S; VP39).

Moreover, after arguing for the intrinsic goodness of understanding, Spinoza goes on in IVP38Dem. to argue that “what disposes the Body” to affect and be affected “is

necessarily good,” meaning that the body is not neglected in this ethical conversation. Nor is the power and goodness of the one treated as separate from the other: “[A]s the body is more capable of being affected in many ways and of affecting external bodies in many ways, so the mind is more capable of thinking” (IVApp.27; see also IVP45S; VP39). It is also important to remember that mind and body are identical because Thought and Extension are identical constituents of God, and in turn my mental/bodily power is a particular manifestation of God’s thinking/extended power, which is why Spinoza says that the more adequate causal power we have, the more we directly partake in the divine (IIP49S/G II 135; IVP45S). Consequently, pace Miller, by virtue of Spinoza’s commitments to Substance Monism (IP14), the Conatus Doctrine (IIP6) as the foundation of his ethics, and Inter-Attributes Parallelism (IIP7S), the body does indeed possess an ultimate intrinsic good, just like the mind: self-affirmative and adequate causal power/pleasure. We are ultimately talking about the same power, pleasure, and intrinsic good in the context of virtue and happiness — mind and body are simply two conceptually different, but co-extensive, aspects of these underlying things.

Why then does Spinoza consistently mention the mind, but not the body, when discussing virtue and happiness? And, if adequate knowledge and intellectual love of God express the intellectual dimension of virtue and happiness, what precisely expresses the physical dimension of them? One potential explanation to the first question is Spinoza’s comment that “no one has yet come to know the structure of the Body so accurately that he could explain all its functions” (IIP2S; see also Ep 83). Spinoza is obscure about what bodily power and goodness consist in because he believes that the science of his time (and he himself) still has a long way to go in fully explaining the nature of the human body. In fact, Spinoza clarifies that his philosophical project in the *Ethics* is specifically aimed at “the highest blessedness” of the mind (*E* IIPref.). Furthermore, in VPref./G II 276, he says that “it does not pertain to this investigation [in the *Ethics*] to show how the intellect must be perfected, or in what way the Body must be cared for, so that it can perform its function properly. The former is the concern of Logic, and the latter of Medicine.”³⁵ While Spinoza covers a lot of diverse philosophical ground in the *Ethics*, this passage shows that he does not take himself to be offering answers about everything, even in the realm of achieving blessedness. He opts for not getting into the precise and complex details of promoting mental well-being through logic and bodily well-being through medicine. This makes sense particularly in the context of medicine, since Spinoza thinks that far more scientific work must be done to adequately understand the body. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza provides us with metaphysical, physical, epistemological, ethical, and political *foundations*, not a comprehensive account of everything within these domains of knowledge. Spinoza, while likely self-assured about much of his knowledge, is nonetheless not arrogant enough to think that there is nothing more for him or us to know than what he presents in this treatise³⁶ (with his detailed, and potentially evolving, discussions of socio-political matters in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and

³⁵ I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding me about this passage.

³⁶ This would also explain why Spinoza is so sparse about the infinite modes of Thought and Extension. He offers only a general cosmological picture from God qua substance to immediate/mediate infinite modes

the *Political Treatise* being prime examples of further work done in this regard).³⁷ He also does not argue that the highest virtue and highest good consist solely in adequate knowledge or intellectual love of God. What Spinoza actually says is that this form of knowledge/pleasure is the “Mind’s greatest good” (IVP28) and “greatest virtue” (VP25). These points tell us only that his main ethical concern in this text is the *mental* dimension of blessedness, not that there is no bodily dimension to this causal and affective state.³⁸ Admittedly, Spinoza might personally care more about the ethical role of the mind than the body, but, as I have shown above, his actual doctrines do not entail the ontological/ethical priority or superiority of the mind over the body.

Let’s move to the second question: what does the bodily dimension of happiness concretely involve? Kisner (2011, pp. 78–79) identifies this bodily good with brain activity and Susan James (2014, pp. 147–159) identifies it with the ability to physically act in parallel to one’s knowledge. Affectively, Firmin DeBrabander (2007, pp. 60–62) describes cheerfulness as the bodily correlate to intellectual love of God qua mental pleasure (*E* IVP42). Spinoza himself never makes it clear, but all three answers are plausible. In fact, I think that these three interpretations are compatible with each other, brain activity being a central manifestation of the general physical activity that parallels one’s knowledge and cheerfulness being the affective aspect of such physical activity insofar as it pertains to the body as an empowered whole. Even if these potential responses are incorrect or Spinoza had not yet decided what the true good of the body is precisely (with the *Ethics* providing a solid foundation for further inquiry), the fact remains that the identity between mind and body, in conjunction with the conatus as the foundation of Spinoza’s ethics, entails that mental power and bodily power are equally good and equal constituents of happiness, because they are simply two aspects of one ultimate good: self-empowerment.³⁹

Ultimately, then, the representational power of the attribute of Thought, the eternal dimension of the mind, and Spinoza’s description of happiness in intellectual terms are all compatible with his commitment to the ontological and ethical equality of mind and body, when we take into consideration certain key doctrines (namely, Substance Monism, Inter-Attributes Parallelism, and the Conatus Doctrine) within his philosophical framework.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed Spinoza’s distinctive contribution to the ethical tradition of eudaimonism. Most (if not all) ancient eudaimonists argue for some sort of inequality between mind and body. In particular, these thinkers consider mental

to finite modes. From this foundation, further scientific work can be done to precisely understand the natural laws that govern thinking and extended beings, respectively.

³⁷ For analysis of the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, see, e.g., James (2012), Melamed & Michael Rosenthal (2010), Melamed & Hasana Sharp (2018), Andrea Sangiacomo (2019, Chapters 3 and 6), and Steinberg (2018).

³⁸ This may also partly explain why Spinoza only explicitly discusses the eternal dimension of the mind in the *Ethics*.

³⁹ Julie R. Klein (2021) similarly argues against an intellectualist or “arch-rationalist” reading of Spinoza, with an emphasis on the material dimension of freedom.

goods superior to bodily goods, thereby committing themselves to ethical intellectualism to some degree. Plato and Aristotle (as strong intellectualists) establish the ontological and ethical superiority of the mental over the bodily through their association of (i) divinity, determinate being, activity, and rationality with immaterial being, and (ii) the absence of divinity, indeterminate being, passivity, and non-rationality with material being. Epicurus and the Stoics are both ontological materialists who consider everything — including the divine, spiritual, and mental — to be material in nature. Immaterial being has no causal role in either framework. However, ethically both consider bodily things (e.g., states and activities) inferior to mental ones, Epicurus (as a weak intellectualist) because the mind possesses a greater modal scope for experience than the body and the Stoics (as strong intellectualists) because we have greater control over our mental states/activities than we do our bodily states/activities.

Spinoza, in contrast, by virtue of his commitment to Substance Monism, Inter-Attributes Parallelism, and the Conatus Doctrine, considers mind and body equal ontologically and ethically. For Spinoza, mind and body are non-reductively identical, being merely conceptually distinct aspects of the same underlying thing as a neutral mode. As a result, the body is not subordinate to the mind with respect to being and value, and vice versa. Self-affirmative power, pleasure, virtue, and happiness are equally bodily and mental in nature. Spinoza is thus (in a reductive sense) neither an intellectualist nor a materialist in the realms of ontology or ethics. He is instead best classified as a neutral (substance) monist. However, there are potential issues with this reading, considering that the attribute of Thought seems to have a greater scope of expression than Extension (or any other attribute) through its representational power, some dimension of the mind seems to possess an eternity that the body does not, and Spinoza explicitly describes happiness in purely intellectual terms. In response to these concerns, I have argued that (contra Melamed, 2013) representation is unique to Thought and thus cannot be used as a point of ontological comparison between Thought and the other attributes, and there is good reason, by virtue of Inter-Attributes Parallelism, to think that Spinoza allows for both an eternal part of the body (contra Wolfson, 1934) and a corporeal constitutive dimension to happiness (contra Miller, 2015).

Today there is rich interest in the ethical insights of eudaimonists like Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics concerning how to face misfortune, develop virtue, and live the best possible life.⁴⁰ To conclude, what I would like to suggest is that Spinoza, as a fellow eudaimonist, also has many insights to offer.⁴¹ In fact, he might have more to offer in the previously mentioned respects because of the ways in which he takes both the intellectual and physical dimensions of our lives, as actors and reactors, equally seriously. Spinozistic eudaimonism, in other words, more than any other ethical framework within this tradition, captures the richness, unity, and

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Julia Annas (2011), Emily A. Austin (2023), Lawrence C. Becker (1999), Samuel S. Franklin (2009), Pierre Hadot (1995), Edith Hall (2018), William B. Irvine (2009), Martha Nussbaum (2008, 2009), and Catherine Wilson (2019).

⁴¹ For discussion of the contemporary value of Spinoza's moral philosophy, see, e.g., Alexander Douglas (2023), James (2020), Matthew Kisner (2011), Nadler (2020), Michael Strawser (2021), and Vardoulakis (2020).

diversity of human existence and empowerment, which in turn reveals to us that we only truly flourish when we nurture our minds and our bodies in equal measure.

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