

Spinoza on God, Affects, and the Nature of Sorrow

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I. Introduction

Throughout the history of philosophy, many theorists have attempted to explain the meaning and cause of people's sorrows. One philosopher, Spinoza, claimed that everything ultimately follows from God and that sadness is a person's passage from a greater degree of perfection to a lesser one.¹ Contrastingly, Spinoza goes on to state that though everything ultimately derives from God, he/she cannot be the cause of sadness since he/she is perfect.² Despite what appears to be an incongruent argument, can one still find a way to claim that Spinoza is consistent when he states that all things ultimately derive from God's flawlessness, despite the reality of sadness?

II. Spinoza on the Nature of God

As understood by Spinoza, God is the one infinite substance who possesses an infinite number of attributes each expressing an eternal aspect of his/her nature.³ He believes this is so due to the definition of God being equivalent to that of substance, or that which causes itself. By that which causes itself, Spinoza means that God is the only being who does not derive from an external cause for his/her existence or an outside concept for his/her conceivability. Moreover, Spinoza claims that only God can be a substance since the existence of two or more substances with the same essence and attributes would necessarily be identical or incompatible.⁴ That is, Spinoza believes if people were to try to perceive two or more substances of the same essence and attributes they would be unable to do so since there would be no differentiating characteristics between them that anyone can acknowledge as belonging to either one of them exclusively.

Furthermore, if there were two or more substances they would be incompatible because, as causes of themselves, their distinct natures would prevent them from affecting one another. In other words, because only substances are causes of themselves, it follows that only they are unique, and thus, by not being of the same ontological type they are unable to interact. From this, it follows that there can only be one substance in nature, God since the incompatibility of two or more substances would not only stop them from interacting, but also bar them from causing one another to come to be.⁵

Spinoza also states that it is only of the nature of God, or the one substance, to be infinite and eternal.⁶ One reason why he believes God is infinite is that as a substance, he/she is distinct, and nothing has the power to limit him/her because nothing is of his/her kind. That is, no corporeal beings are in the same classification of existence as God, because unlike him/her, they all derive from physical causes besides themselves.⁷ Likewise, no concepts are independent of God since his/hers is the only essence that relies on itself for its conceivability, rendering only him/her to be limitless.⁸ Furthermore, because finitude is a negation of being or a state of reality in which one can cease existing due to the supremacy of another, it follows that God is necessarily infinite because nothing can overpower him/her. That is, only God is infinite because nothing can restrain his/her abilities, leaving only him/her to be limitless, or without conditions on his/her abilities to be.⁹ Moreover, one may claim that because nothing can limit God, he/she is continually active, or has the power to affirm existence eternally. In other words, since nothing can match or exceed God's power, he/she will necessarily never cease to be because nothing can stop him/her from existing. Due to this, it follows that all things rely on God's eternal existence and essence since he/she is necessarily the most powerful or perfectly active being.¹⁰ Hence, because God cannot cease to be, due to everything's existence being dependent on him/her, it follows that he/she perfectly ensures the continuity of existence, since he/she is the only being that people can understand as having to be ceaselessly active.

Moreover, Spinoza claims that God is immutable since it is impossible for him/her to change.¹¹ To Spinoza, God is unchanging since nothing can alter him/her due to only him/her being limitless. That is, only God is an infinite substance, and since that renders all other things to be finite, nothing can cause him/her to change. Furthermore, God is immutable since he/she is not a conglomeration of substances, but rather an indivisible whole.¹² To Spinoza, neither infinite nor finite substances can compose God since it is impossible for either to exist.¹³ First, it is not the case that many infinite substances can exist because if they did that would mean that they would be unique and compatible at the same time, which is nonsensical. Second, it is also illogical to believe that God is reducible to a totality of finite substances because they too cannot exist. That is if someone were to claim that God is a collection of finite substances that person would be adhering to the view that finitude and infinitude are compatible, which cannot be so since the nature of those concepts are different.

Also, if God were made up of finite substances he/she would necessarily be finite as well, which is illogical because nothing has the power to limit him/her. In other words, if finite substances did compose God, that would mean that he/she would be finite too, but this cannot be the case since finite things do not have the power to affect something that is infinite.¹⁴ Finally, Spinoza goes on to describe how nothing has the power to compel God, while at the same time maintaining that he/she cannot defy or go against his/her nature.

Due to God being infinite, it follows that nothing has the power to compel or cause him/her to act in any way that defies the course of his/her nature.¹⁵ That is, God, as the only limitless being, is not subject to the will of another since nothing causes itself except for him/her. Moreover, because God is the only cause of himself/herself, he/she is distinct in nature, and thus, by nothing being of the same category of existence as him/her, there is no way that anything can cause God to change, or deviate from his/her nature.¹⁶ In other words, as the sole cause of itself, nothing can compete with God's infinite nature because all other things derive from causes other than themselves, which renders them to be subject to the conditions that they inherit from their immediate engenderers.¹⁷

Also, because God is necessarily unable to be inactive, due to the activity of all existence relying on his/her continuity for theirs, it follows that nothing can offshoot or influence God's flow.¹⁸ That is, nothing is as active as God is, because the activity of all existence cannot eternally continue if it relies on anything that can be inactive. Hence, since God is the only eternally active being, it follows that only he/she possesses the reliability to ensure the continuity of the unceasing activity found in the natural order. Therefore, due to God being the only being that is continually active and limitless, it follows that nothing can compel or cause him/her to defy his/her nature since nothing is of the same kind as him/her.¹⁹ Finally, though nothing can alter God, he/she is not free as ordinarily understood, but rather uncompelled, or unable to defy himself/herself.

Furthermore, Spinoza believes that God is not free in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather an uncompelled being who cannot defy his/her set nature. That is, to Spinoza, God cannot defy who he/she is since it is not in his/her ability to do so.²⁰ One reason why Spinoza makes this claim is that God is the immanent cause of all things, or it is the case that all things ultimately derive from him/her, and thus because those derivatives cannot change their natures, neither can he/she.²¹ In other words, though God is a distinct being, he/she is still the cause of all things, and because what derives from him cannot change what innately constitutes them, it follows that, as their immanent cause, he/she cannot change himself/herself either.

Moreover, if God were free, as colloquially understood, he/she would be able to choose to cease being active, and thus, the continuity of existence would be in jeopardy since he/she would have the ability to be inactive.²² Spinoza believes that this cannot be so since the continuity of existence can only rely on a being who is eternally active, and thus, all that was, is and will be, cannot fall into nothingness due to God necessarily being that eternally active entity.²³ In other words, God cannot defy his/her nature because by being eternally active all existence ultimately depends on him/her, and since being can never truly fade into nothingness, it follows that God cannot change his/her ceaselessly active nature. Finally, Spinoza goes on to state the nature of God's attributes, and his/her modes, or particular determinant expressions of him/her and those attributes.²⁴

To Spinoza attributes of God or that which one can perceive as being of his/her nature, are eternal and infinite.²⁵ Spinoza makes this claim because God as an eternal and infinite being necessarily has attributes of the same nature, due to only things of the same kind being compatible.²⁶ Furthermore, people can understand attributes as only being eternal and infinite since they arise through themselves, and thus, they are independent of needing one another for the continuity of their existences.²⁷ In other words, each attribute of God can only express one infinite and eternal aspect of him/her, and not many, because attributes are unable to affect one another since they do not rely on one another to exist. Consequently, because attributes are independent of needing one another to exist, they are necessarily eternal because they only depend on God, or the sole eternal being, for their existence and conceivability.²⁸ Moreover, because God's attributes cannot interact, it follows that they cannot cause one another to come to be, and thus, one may claim that nothing can limit them. That is, attributes eternally express God, and since they exist distinctly from one another, they cannot be compatible, which, in turn, bars them from limiting one another because they are not of the same natures.²⁹ Finally, Spinoza continues by addressing the nature of modes or that which ultimately derives from God and his/her attributes.³⁰

Spinoza continues to enunciate that God's modes are particular finite and determinate expressions of his/her nature. One reason why Spinoza believes that modes are finite is that there can only be one infinite substance in nature since a plurality of substances cannot exist.³¹ In other words, because there can be only one infinite substance, all other things have to be finite since, as modes, they are not causes of themselves, but rather, in the end, derivatives of that one infinite substance.³² Consequently, because God is that one infinite substance, and because that makes modes necessarily finite, it follows that there are limits to their existences, and thus, one may claim that that also makes them determinate. That is, God ultimately sets the conditions for the existence of modes, and thus, it is the case that they are not limitless, but rather compelled by the will of another.³³ Moreover, Spinoza states that modes come to be by way of God's attributes, or laws of existence, and thus they are determinate because they do not set their natures. In other words, modes cannot come to be by themselves, and thus, their natures derive from a series of causes that ultimately leads back to the attribute of God from which they arose. Finally, Spinoza explains how it is unlike anything to come before God.³⁴

Furthermore, it is not of the nature of God's modes to precede or exist outside of him/her. Spinoza demonstrates this by first showing how nothing can come before God. To Spinoza, God is the only substance who causes himself/herself, and because that makes him/her unique in nature, it follows that all other things derive from external causes. Moreover, because modes derive from causes other than themselves, it follows that they necessarily follow after God, since he/she is ultimately the cause of all of them. That is, God, who is the cause of himself/herself, is ultimately the cause of all

things because everything necessarily traces back to him/her since he/she does not derive from a cause outside of himself/herself.³⁵ Consequently, because God is first in the series of being, it follows that all modes must follow after him/her because if they did precede him/her, it would mean that they either caused themselves or caused him/her to be, which are both impossibilities.³⁶

In other words, if modes were to precede God, it would mean that they came into being without him/her, which cannot be the case since they are not external to him/her. Further, it would be impossible for modes to come into existence at the same time as God because there can only be one cause-of-itself in nature.³⁷ From this, one may claim that modes cannot exist outside of God because, for something to exist outside of something else, it must precede it. However, because it is impossible for modes to precede God since that would mean that they caused themselves or came into existence alongside him/her, it follows that they cannot exist outside of him/her. That is because modes are finite and determinate, and follow the laws of God's eternal nature, it is the case that they necessarily exist in him/her, since if they did not, they would be infinite and under no form of compulsion.³⁸ Finally, because modes are neither infinite nor free, they necessarily reside in and follow after God, or the one infinite and uncompelled substance.³⁹

Spinoza continues his metaphysical investigation by claiming that thought is an attribute of God.⁴⁰ One reason why Spinoza believes this to be so is that nothing is, or can be conceivable without God. Spinoza makes this claim since everything necessarily exists in God, and since nothing is outside of him/her, it follows that thinking things exist in him/her too.⁴¹ From this, it follows that God necessarily houses all thinking things, since nothing can exist outside of him/her, and thus, they are subject to the laws of thought that his/her essence exudes, which, in turn, allows them to be conceivable.⁴² That is, God is the domain in which all thinking things exist, since all of them are unable to trace their origins to any cause outside of God. Consequently, it follows that his/her fixed essence necessarily radiates his/her immutable attribute of thought; setting the conditions that give rise to the conceivability of thinking things.⁴³ Hence, since God, in the end, determines the conditions of all thinking things, it follows that he/she necessarily possesses the attribute of thought, because without it those thinking things would cease to be conceivable.⁴⁴

Moreover, God must possess the attribute of thought because thinking things necessarily express that attribute, since as modes, they express God's essence.⁴⁵ That is, though thinking things express God in specific and determinate ways, they nevertheless express his/her essence, since as modes it is of their nature to do so, and thus, God must possess thought, since, without it, modes would be unable to express that attribute. From this, one may also claim that because it is innate of thinking things to think, it follows that God must possess the attribute of thought because what is inherently in him/her, must, in some ways, be in his/her modes, due to his/her immanence.⁴⁶ In other words, because all thinking things ultimately derive from God, it follows that he/she bears some

relation to them, and since they express thought by thinking, it follows that God must possess that attribute since if he did not, then they would be unable to convey it. Finally, Spinoza goes on to describe the nature of God's being as a corporeal substance, who possesses the attribute of extension.⁴⁷

According to Spinoza, God is also a corporeal substance who possess the attribute of extension.⁴⁸ By corporeal substance, Spinoza means that God is necessarily equivalent to Nature. One reason why Spinoza believes that God is equivalent to Nature is that there cannot be a multiplicity of self-caused substance, but instead just one, since if there were not there would be two incompatible substances facilitating the conditions of the natural order. That is, if God were not equivalent to Nature, there would necessarily be two Gods, one to facilitate the laws of thought, and the other the laws of extension, which cannot be, since the natural order presents itself as a unified whole.⁴⁹

Furthermore, God is necessarily a corporeal substance since if he/she were not, there would be nowhere for his/her modes to extend. That is, if God were not a corporeal substance, there would be no room for his/her modes to come to be, which is an impossibility since the reality of Nature necessarily provides space for his/her modes to exist. Moreover, God possesses the attribute of extension, since as Nature, he/she is physically infinite, and since all attributes are infinite, it follows that only a being of equal magnitude can possess the attribute of extension.⁵⁰ In other words, because God is infinite and equivalent to Nature, it follows that the infinite attribute of extension is his/hers alone since he/she is the only being in the natural order that is of the same nature as it.⁵¹

III. Spinoza on the Mind

The human mind, as understood by Spinoza, exists by way of God's attribute of thought, and is determinate, and not an amalgamation of attributes, but rather a singular whole.⁵² Spinoza claims that the mind ultimately derives from God, by way of his/her attribute of thought, and innately expresses that attribute.⁵³ In other words, minds innately think, and thus, they must derive from God's attribute of thought since without him/her they would be unable express his/her essence as a thinking thing. One reason why the mind necessarily derives from God's attribute of thought is that it is of the same nature as it. That is, there is a likeness between the immateriality of the mind and the intelligible features of the natural order, which God's attribute of thought gives rise to, and since only things of the same kind are compatible, it follows that minds necessarily arise from that attribute due to them both being immaterial.⁵⁴

Moreover, the mind relies on the continuity of God's attribute of thought, and since that attribute is limitless, or necessarily eternal, it follows that without it minds would cease to perceive and conceive ideas, or be conceivable.⁵⁵ That is, God, who is eternal, necessarily has eternal attributes, and

if he/she ceased, not only would that attribute cease, but so also would minds, their abilities, and their conceivability. Consequently, one may claim that since the mind relies on another concept for its existence, it is not self-sufficient, but rather a determinate mode.⁵⁶ In other words, the mind, which depends on God, and his/her infinite attribute of thought, cannot determine its nature, because it does not cause itself, and thus, it must follow the flow of God's immutable essence since it ultimately derived from his/her fixed essence.⁵⁷

From this, people may also make the claim that their minds are singular wholes, and do not have various attributes, but rather various abilities that limitedly reflect God. That is, the mind is a thinking expression of God, as an immaterial substance, and since it does so in a determinate or limited way, it follows that it cannot have attributes since attributes are infinite and eternal.⁵⁸ Consequently, Spinoza ultimately denies that the mind can possess various attributes, but rather it features active abilities to conceive ideas and passive powers to take them in.⁵⁹

It is also of great importance to address Spinoza's views on the types of ideas that the mind can have, which are inadequate, adequate, or true ideas. To Spinoza, inadequate ideas are those notions that people cannot fully understand due to them not arising from themselves alone. In other words, external ideas that can act upon people, do not directly derive from them, but are compatible with their minds, since, as ideas, they are of the same nature as their immaterial minds. Furthermore, inadequate ideas necessarily reside in God, like all other things, but they do not directly derive from him/her since those ideas are passive whereas he/she is immutably active. Spinoza concludes that because of this, God is only a partial cause of inadequate ideas whereas people, who can take in perceptions housed in him/her, are the other partial cause, and thus, they do not derive from people alone but can still act upon and influence them.

On the other hand, adequate ideas are those ideas that resemble true ideas or ideas that perfectly match their objects, but only insofar as they are ideas. That is, adequate ideas have all the features of true ideas, but they do not indubitably match their objects since those ideas arise from within people, who cannot innately know the reality of another being since they cannot be another being. Consequently, people may claim that they cannot know other minds as well as their minds since they only have ideas of other minds and not the knowledge of what it is to be in those other minds. Lastly, true ideas are those ideas that perfectly match their objects, and thus they give way to common notions that enable people to know inherently what it means to be human as well as God as their ultimate cause.

IV. Spinoza's Analysis of the Body

To Spinoza, the human body exists by way of God's attribute of extension.⁶⁰ By this, Spinoza means that God, as an extended substance, causes the conditions, or the laws of his/her attribute of extension which ultimately enables people's bodies to come to be. Also, what composes a human body are smaller individual bodies that are either at rest or in motion, which reflect the nature of all other bodies.⁶¹ In other words, people's bodies are made up of smaller bodies that are either at rest or in motion just like their bodies.⁶² One reason why Spinoza believes this is that bodies are of the same nature since they derive from the same attribute of God, and thus, it is the case that they all agree or relate in certain ways. Consequently, because bodies come to be through the same attribute of God, are, in fact, compatible, it follows that they are subject to the effects of other bodies in many ways, specifically in how they have abilities to overpower one another by causing one another to move or come to a halt.

Furthermore, Spinoza continues to claim that like all other shapes, bodies retain the effects of what causes them to move or come to rest, and reflect those effects too.⁶³ That is, bodies, like other surfaces, reflect what impacts them, and the remnants of those effects continues on, both in Nature and on those bodies impacted. From this, Spinoza claims that many bodies together form more complex bodies, which include those of humans, and those individual bodies composing more intricate bodies unite in such a way that they too retain the effects of what affects them.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that though Spinoza believes that bodies are subject to change, it follows that there can be no disturbance in respect to the substance housing them. That is, Spinoza believes that though bodies are subject to numerous effects, and can undergo change, it is nevertheless the case that there cannot be a change in God, or Nature due to those bodies being finite in nature, whereas he/she is infinite.⁶⁴ Consequently, because God, as an infinitely extended being, does not match any other body in him/her, it follows that he/she cannot alter when they undergo change.⁶⁵ In other words, God's being as a corporeal substance does not match other bodies since they are finite, and it follows that he/she is incompatible with them since they are not of the same natures.

Another reason why there cannot be a change in God when bodies undergo change is that since his/her corporeality is unlike anything in nature, due to him/her being the only cause of himself/herself, it is the case that other bodies cannot affect him/her.⁶⁶ That is, God is unique in the natural order, since he/she is the only substance, and thus, by not being of the same physical nature as other bodies, he/she is not subject to what can affect them.⁶⁷ From this, one may also claim that because God is the only cause of himself/herself, no bodies can exist outside of him/her, and thus they cannot act upon, or affect him/her. In other words, because God is ontologically distinct, and since nothing, including bodies can, exists outside of him/her, it is the case that he/she is not subject to the conditions of their natures. Moreover, because God is unlike all other bodies, it follows that he/she cannot have a body that resembles a finite body, including those of human's. Hence, because

God is not anthropomorphic, it follows that whatever changes occur in people's bodies cannot change God, or Nature's body, in any way.⁶⁸

Another claim that Spinoza's makes that is central to his ideas on the body is that bodies, though determinate, nevertheless continue indefinitely, or it is not in their nature to refuse to be.⁶⁹ That is, as extended modes of God, it is innate of bodies to strive to continue to exist since they derive from his/her active physicality.⁷⁰ Consequently, due to bodies ultimately deriving from an eternally active corporeal substance, or God, it follows that they innately express that activity as modes, and thus, it is the case that bodies cannot refuse to persevere in their beings.⁷¹ From this one may also claim that because bodies can only strive to continue to exist, the cause of their demises is not in them.⁷² In other words, bodies do not harbor the time of their demises, since if they did it would contradict their inherent abilities as modes to express God's materiality.⁷³ Also, one may claim that even if the body did house the time of its end, people would still be unable to know it, since the body exists through a different attribute of God than the mind, and thus, their incompatibility would prevent the body from conveying any information to the mind.⁷⁴ Lastly, Spinoza continues to describe how the order and connection of ideas follow the same as the order and connection of things.⁷⁵

To Spinoza, the order and connection of ideas necessarily follow the same as the order and connection of things.⁷⁶ By this, Spinoza means that God as an immaterial and corporeal substance, is coherent, and thus, all ideas and things that follow from his/her nature necessarily complement his/her existence as the totality of the natural order.⁷⁷ One way in which the reader can imagine this is if God were both the idea of a shape and the physical object of that shape itself. Spinoza makes a similar reference when he states that God as an idea is like the idea of a circle that matches the reality of a circle universally.⁷⁸ That is, God matches Nature in an eternally perfect way, since God and Nature absolutely, or innately, reflect one another so much so that the idea of Nature or God and the object of God or Nature are one and the same.⁷⁹ Consequently, because God is equivalent to Nature, it follows that whatever occurs in God as an immaterial substance matches what occurs in him/her as a corporeal one. Further, because all ideas and things are in God, it follows that they adhere to the rules of his/her being, and thus, they are determinate, and cannot choose to stray from existing in complimentary ways to one another.⁸⁰ That is, it is innate to the nature of ideas and bodies to follow the same path, and since they exist in God, they cannot refuse to follow his/her fixed nature.⁸¹ Lastly, Spinoza continues his metaphysical speculations by addressing how it is that the mind and body work together in a coherent fashion.⁸²

Though the mind and body come to be by way of different attributes of God, and are thus, incompatible, they nevertheless form a union. By union, Spinoza means that the mind and body are coherent, or it is the case that whatever occurs in people's minds has a matching effect on their bodies. One reason why he believes this to be so is that the natural order displays its coherency to people, due

to their existing only one substance God, or Nature, and thus whatever ultimately flows from him/her as an immaterial substance has a matching effect on him/her as a corporeal one. In other words, since God is coherent, and ultimately gives rise to all modes, they necessarily display his/her coherency, albeit limitedly, and thus, what happens in their minds has a matching physical effect on their bodies and whatever affects their bodies has a similar effect on their minds.

Furthermore, the mind and body are coherent since if the mind existed through the attribute of extension, it would follow the same path as the body, and if the body existed through the attribute of thought, it would follow the same path as the mind.⁸³ That is, the mind and body are coherent, since they ultimately derive from one unified substance, and since that one unified substance immanently causes all things, or is innately in them, it follows that the mind would reduce to the body and the body to the mind if they existed through the right attributes. Finally, Spinoza continues to address the nature of that which can act upon and influence people, which he calls affects.⁸⁴

V. Spinoza on the Affects

To Spinoza, there exist ideas that are external to people that have the ability to act upon or influence them to feel or be aware of themselves in greater or lesser ways than as they normally understand themselves.⁸⁵ Those external ideas Spinoza calls affects and since they do not arise from people's ability to conceive ideas, it follows that they have an inadequate knowledge of them.⁸⁶ At the same time, affects are still ideational, and thus they are compatible with the intelligibility of people's minds.⁸⁷ Furthermore, though people cannot understand affects as arising from themselves alone, it nevertheless follows that they still follow the order and connection of ideas, and thus, the order and connection of things.⁸⁸ That is, though people have inadequate knowledge of external affects it follows that they are still ideas and thus they can determine people to think and physically act in certain ways.⁸⁹ One reason why this is so is that ideas and things necessarily follow the same order since they ultimately derive from God or Nature's coherency.⁹⁰ In other words, because God concurs with himself/herself as a corporeal substance, and since Nature concurs with itself as an immaterial substance or God, it follows that the mind and body cohere as derivatives of God or Nature.⁹¹

From this it follows that affects can either assist people or deter them from their desires to live, or aid or restrain their innate abilities to be.⁹² In other words, people can only desire to affirm or strive to exist because their active essences derive from God's, and thus, what will cause their deaths cannot be in them.⁹³ Rather, those causes are external to people, and since affects are external to them too, it follows that only they have the potential to end their lives. Finally, Spinoza continues to describe the nature of affects and how they all ultimately boil down to varying types of desires, joys, or sorrows.⁹⁴

According to Spinoza, people innately desire or have appetites for that which they find to be agreeable to who they understand themselves to be.⁹⁵ One reason why people desire what they find to be good for themselves is that they naturally strive to continue to exist, and as specific expressions of God, it follows that their desires can, and do, vary from one another's.⁹⁶ That is, people innately express God's eternal actuality by striving to continually exist, and since they are necessarily aware that they are particular and finite expressions of him/her, it follows that they can use that awareness to judge what is conducive or not for their survivals. Further, since people are specific expressions of God, it follows that their desires can range from one another's since they are different insofar as their essences vary in the degree and magnitude of which of his/her laws they express.⁹⁷ In other words, because one person can be more of an expression of God's attribute of thought than his/her attribute of extension, and another more of an expression of his/her attribute of extension than his/her attribute of thought, it follows that individual desires can, and do, vary as well.⁹⁸ Furthermore, though people's desires can differ, Spinoza nevertheless states that those desires that help them to live maximally, or to their fullest capacities, as they understand themselves, are good. Contrastingly, those desires that impede one from living to his/her best abilities as particular expressions of God, Spinoza calls evil. Finally, he states that desires that have good effects increase the mind's ability to think, and thus, the body's ability to act, whereas evil ones diminish those abilities.

Spinoza continues to state that joy is a person's passage from a lesser state of being to a greater one.⁹⁹ That is, joy increases the mind's ability to think and the body's ability to act, and thus, it assists and brings people to a state in which they strive more powerfully in their beings. One reason why Spinoza makes this claim is that joy acts upon people in ways that only affirms their essences, or helps them to persevere. In other words, joy is an external idea that causes people to be at a greater level of activity since it affects the mind by amplifying happiness, which, in turn, necessarily affects the body in a pleasurable way. Furthermore, when something causes someone joy, it follows that that person is feeling joy due to that thing, and not from the feelings of happiness alone. Consequently, Spinoza calls this type of happiness, love, since it not only causes joy, but it also is the state of being in which people can project joy onto what they understand to be the cause of that feeling. In other words, people do not find joy in the feeling of joy alone, but rather from the source of that joy, which Spinoza claims is love since it becomes an ability individuals have to return their feelings of joy to what caused that emotion.

To Spinoza, sadness is a person's slip into a lesser state of awareness from a greater one. That is, sadness disrupts people's abilities to exist because it causes them to be less aware of themselves. Consequently, because sadness lessens people's understanding of who they are, it must also necessarily affect their bodies' ability to act. In other words, because the mind and body concur, it follows that what negatively affects the mind's awareness of itself, must also affect the body's ability to act. Spinoza

calls the state of mind associated with sadness, melancholy, and its matching physical effect, pain. Moreover, Spinoza claims that sadness accompanied with the idea of the external cause of sadness is hate. That is, hate is a type of sorrow that people cannot only feel, but can also project onto that which they believe is the cause of their sadness. Lastly, Spinoza comes to claim that though God ultimately causes all things, he/she is not the cause of sadness, which, in turn, maintains his/her perfection.¹⁰⁰

VI. God as Perfect and Not the Cause of Sadness

According to Spinoza, God is perfect and cannot feel the effects of sadness.¹⁰¹ That is, God, who is an eternally active being, who is equivalent to Nature, cannot feel sadness since he/she is necessarily flawless. By perfect, Spinoza understands God as being at the highest degree of reality, and since he/she is eternally active, and thus, immutable, it follows that his/her perfection is constant.¹⁰² Consequently, because God is constantly perfect, it follows that he/she cannot feel sorrow because that would mean that he/she can slip into a lesser degree of reality, or perfection, which is impossible.¹⁰³ To Spinoza, it is impossible for God to slip into a lesser degree of perfection, not only because he/she is permanently unchanging, but also because he/she is limitless, and thus, what affects his/her limited modes, cannot affect him/her. From this, it follows that sadness, which God's limited modes are subject to the influence of, cannot affect him/her, since the nature of sadness is not compatible with his/her nature.

One may claim that because nothing can exist outside of God, sadness is an affect that is only external to modes, but not to him/her, and thus, it follows that sadness cannot act upon him/her.¹⁰⁴ In other words, sadness exists in God, but cannot act upon him/her, because for that to occur that affect would have to exist outside of him/her, but since nothing can exist in that way, it follows that God is immune to sadness. Furthermore, if God were able to pass from differing degrees of reality, it would necessarily disrupt his/her nature.¹⁰⁵ That is, if God were to change it would affect the natural order, since as Nature, God maintains the existence of all things physical. From this, one may claim that the natural order would be in jeopardy if God changed since he/she would have to bend the laws of nature to do so, which ultimately would give rise to extremely different types of modes unlike those that exists now. Thus, if God were able to slip into lesser degrees of reality, or feel sadness, it follows that Nature would necessarily change since if he/she were to change, there would have to be a matching effect in the natural order since he/she is coherent and equivalent to it.

Moreover, God cannot be the cause of sadness since he/she cannot return any feelings that people project onto him/her, and thus, by being free of emotion, it would be illogical to claim that he/she can cause anyone pain.¹⁰⁶ That is, God cannot feel, because it is not of his/her nature to do so, and since he/she is incompatible with the emotions that people project onto him/her, he/she can

never hate anyone because those emotions cannot affect him/her.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, since God's essence only affirms existence, and since sadness is a lesser state of existence, it follows that he/she is incapable of causing people to feel saddened. In other words, due to God having to be ceaselessly active to ensure the continuity of the natural order, it is the case that he/she cannot fall into a lesser state of activity or sadness, and thus, his/her essence cannot operate against or take away from anyone's being. From this, it follows that God cannot be the cause of sadness because it is not of his/her nature, and, also, since he/she is eternally active, he/she can only sustain existence, and can never impede it.

Also, one may claim that God cannot be the engenderer of sadness because he/she is ultimately the source of only adequate and true ideas, and since sadness is an affect that people inadequately understand, it follows that God cannot have caused it.¹⁰⁸ That is, by being without any inadequacies God cannot cause sadness, because his/her eternal activity can only exude true and adequate ideas. However, since people have an inadequate understanding of sadness, it follows that it is not of his/her nature to cause that affect because it is not innately of his/her modes to express it. Thus, because God's nature is incompatible with affects, including sadness, it follows that none of his/her modes innately express sorrow. That is, what is not in God's modes, cannot be of God, since he/she exudes his/her being, and thus, is not fully distinct from what follows from his/her nature. Finally, Spinoza goes on to describe the true cause of sadness, which, in turn, maintains God's perfection.

As understood by Spinoza, the real cause of sadness is ignorance or people's lack of understanding the causes that have led them to feel sorrow.¹⁰⁹ One reason why Spinoza adheres to this view is that sadness derives from inadequate ideas, which act upon people, and distort their abilities to assess reality correctly because, when saddened, they slip into lesser states of awareness.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, this lack of knowledge leads Spinoza to claim that it can lead people to superstitious beliefs, such as God being the cause of their sorrows, or that God can curse them to feel saddened.¹¹¹ But, to Spinoza, these are absurdities, since God, who is the only being in eternal and immutable activity, cannot cause inadequate ideas since it does not match his/her natural essence.¹¹² That is, God's essence is totally active, at all times, since it is innate of him/her to be so, and thus, inadequate ideas cannot follow from him/her. Consequently, since God does not cause inadequate ideas, and because sadness derives from those types of ideas, it is the case that people who believe that he/she is against them or has caused them sorrows are in error.¹¹³ Rather, sadness derives from people's failure to understand God, human nature, and themselves. One reason why Spinoza believes this is that a person, who is under the influence of inadequate ideas, do not have a clear understanding of how to strive to continue to live, which, in turn, clouds one's view of reality.¹¹⁴

That is, Spinoza believes when people feel saddened they do not strive to live at their full capacities, and because the inadequate ideas associated with that feeling necessarily reinforces patterns of thought associated with sadness, it is the case that sadness distorts their views of reality. Moreover, with distorted views of reality, people cannot adequately understand their persistent sorrows, and it is tough to assuage the pains that follow from that state of being. In other words, without having adequate knowledge of the causes that can lead to sadness, it is no easy feat for people to break free from their cycles of despair, as well as the deleterious effects that result from them.

Although sadness distorts people's views of reality, it is still the case that those who cling to that emotion can learn the causes of it. Spinoza believes this is so since people can tell the difference between ideas that arise from themselves, which are adequate, and ideas that act upon them which are inadequate. Furthermore, because people can know the difference between adequate and inadequate ideas, it is the case that they can understand those ideas that increase their abilities to think, or not, and thus, what can affect their bodies to strive more ably, or not, to live. From this, it follows that sadness, which derives from inadequate ideas and lessens the mind's ability to think and the body's ability to act, is identifiable by people due to those effects.

At the same time, the more people gain adequate knowledge of what has led them to feel saddened, the less sorrow affects them, since it ultimately causes that emotion to cease to be sadness. That is, Spinoza believes that through the application of reason, people can gain knowledge, and by doing so, inadequate ideas cease to influence them, and thus, emotions such as sadness can no longer affect them. Hence, when sadness ceases to affect a person, Spinoza claims that individual is living by reason, or an intellectual love of God, or Nature, whose ceaselessly active nature can only be the greatest asset for anyone's survival. Finally, knowledge of God, by only being promotive of people's well-beings is due to his/her perfection, and since sadness is deleterious to them, it follows that nothing evil, or useless can derive from him/her, and thus, his/her flawlessness remains preserved.

Conclusion

This piece has explained Spinoza's views on the nature of God, his/her attributes, and the modes that ultimately arise from him/her. Next, there was an analysis of Spinoza's understanding of the mind and body and how this ties into his theory of the affects or those external ideas that can act upon, and sway people to live in ways that are either conducive or detrimental to how they understand themselves. Afterward, there were demonstrations on how God cannot be the cause of sadness, and rather that sadness derives from people's lack of knowledge of what has led them to feel saddened. Lastly, by maintaining that God is perfect and that the existence of sadness derives from ignorance,

and not him/her, this essay hoped to argue effectively that God's perfection is still justifiable, despite the realities of sadness.

Notes

¹ Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Penguin Books, 1996), 3p9-12. As is customary, I shall refer to Spinoza's *Ethics* using the following abbreviations: "a" for axiom, "app" for appendix, "d" for definition, "l" for lemma, "p" for proposition, and the first number in the reference refers to the part of the *Ethics*. See also Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: Spinoza*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harvest Books, 1966), 9-25, and Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 569-580.

² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p17.

³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1a1, 1a7, 1p1, 1p3.

⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1p3, 1p6.

⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p6, 1p8.

⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p11-12.

⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a1, 1a7, 1p1, 1p3, 1p11-12.

⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p14, 1p16.

⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p11-12, 1p14, 1p16.

¹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p34, 1p36, 1app.

¹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p16, 1p18.

¹² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p14, 1p16.

¹³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p14-15.

¹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 1p14, 1p16.

¹⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p17-18.

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p16, 1p18.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p29, 1p32.

¹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p17-18, 1p34, 1p36, 1app.

¹⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 1p16, 1p18.

²⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p16-18.

²¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p16, 1p18, 1p18, 1p20.

²² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p12, 1p15, 1p18, 1p20

²³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p21, 1app.

²⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p21.

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- ²⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p22.
- ²⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 1p18, 1p22.
- ²⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p23, 1p28.
- ²⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 1p15-16, 1p18, 1p22-23.
- ²⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d6, 1p16, 1p18, 1p22-23, 1p28.
- ³⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d6, 1p23, 1p30.
- ³¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6.
- ³² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3, 1p6.
- ³³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p23, 1p30.
- ³⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3, 1p6.
- ³⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3, 1p6, 1p18, 1p20.
- ³⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3-1p6, 1p8-1p10, 1p18, 1p20.
- ³⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d5, 1p3, 1p7.
- ³⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p26, 1p29.
- ³⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p29.
- ⁴⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p4, and Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: Spinoza*, 25-31, 37-42.
- ⁴¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p4.
- ⁴² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p15-16, 2p1, 2p4.
- ⁴³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p15-16, 1p18, 1p21, 1app, 2p1, 2p4.
- ⁴⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p15-16, 2p1-4.
- ⁴⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1-6, 1p15-16, 2p1-4.
- ⁴⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p21, 2p1, 2p4.
- ⁴⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p4.
- ⁴⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p6.
- ⁴⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p12, 1p15, 2p1, 2p6.
- ⁵⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3-7, 2p1-6.
- ⁵¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p9, 1p11, 1p18, 1p21, 2p1, 2p6.
- ⁵² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p11, 2p13.
- ⁵³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d6, 1p18, 1p21, 2p11, 2p13.
- ⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p4, 2p8.
- ⁵⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p15-16, 2p4, 2p8.
- ⁵⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p21, 2a1, 2p4, 2p8.
- ⁵⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p14, 1p16, 1p17, 1p19, 2d1, 2d7.
- ⁵⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p21, 2p4, 2p8, 2p10, 2p14.
- ⁵⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2d1, 2d7, 2a1, 2a5, 2p41, 2p45.

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- ⁶⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1-4.
- ⁶¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p4, 2a'1-2, 2l1-2l4.
- ⁶² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2a'1-2, 2l1-2l4.
- ⁶³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2a''1-3, 2l4-7.
- ⁶⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3-6, 2a'1-2, 2l1-4.
- ⁶⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18-21, 2a'1-2, 2l1-4.
- ⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1-4, 2p13, 2a''1-3, 2l4-7.
- ⁶⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3, 1p6, 2p1, 2p4, 2p13, 2a''1-3, 2l4-2l7.
- ⁶⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 1app, 2a''1-3, 2l4-2l7.
- ⁶⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p30, 2p35.
- ⁷⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2a''1-3, 2l4, 2l7, 2p30, 2p35.
- ⁷¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1-8, 1a1-7, 1app, 2a''1-3, 2l4-7, 2p30, 2p35.
- ⁷² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p30, 2p36.
- ⁷³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1a1, 1a7, 1app, 2p30, 2p36.
- ⁷⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p25, 2p35.
- ⁷⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p35, 2p40.
- ⁷⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p35, 2p40, and Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: Spinoza*, 25-31, 37-42, 46-56.
- ⁷⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p7, 2p12.
- ⁷⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p8-9, 2a''1-3, 2l4-7.
- ⁷⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p8-9.
- ⁸⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1a1, 1a7, 1p3, 1p6, 1p18, 1p22, 2d1, 2a1.
- ⁸¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 1d8, 1p16-18, 1p22.
- ⁸² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p12-13.
- ⁸³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p12-13, 2p20, 2p28.
- ⁸⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2app, 3d1-3, and Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: Spinoza*, 46-56, 50-62.
- ⁸⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2app, 3d1-3, 3p1, 3p3.
- ⁸⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3d1-3, 3p1-3.
- ⁸⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p3, 1p6, 2p20, 2p25.
- ⁸⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p7, 2p9.
- ⁸⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p1, 3p6.
- ⁹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p7, 2p9.
- ⁹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p7, 2p9, 2p17, 2p19.
- ⁹² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3d1, 3d3, 3p1, 3p3.
- ⁹³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p4, 3p11.
- ⁹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p12, 3p15.

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- ⁹⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p22, 1p29, 1p32, 3p13, 3p16.
- ⁹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p18, 3p20.
- ⁹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p16, 3p25.
- ⁹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p4, 3p22.
- ⁹⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p14, 3p18.
- ¹⁰⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2d3, 2d7, 5p17-18. See also Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: Spinoza*, 21-25, 56-62, and Richard H. Popkin, ed., *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 329-336, 363-366, 373-382.
- ¹⁰¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2d3, 2d7, 2p32, 2p36, 5p17-18.
- ¹⁰² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p34, 1p36, 5p17-18.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1d1, 5p17-18.
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- ¹⁰⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p16, 1p18, 1p22, 2p40, 2p42.
- ¹⁰⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p17-18.
- ¹¹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p58, 4d8, 4p13, 4p16, 5p17-18.
- ¹¹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p17-18.
- ¹¹² Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p18, 1p22, 1p34, 1p36, 5p17-18.
- ¹¹³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p34, 1p36, 2d1, 2p3, 2p40, 2p45, 5p17-18.
- ¹¹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p34, 1p36, 2d1, 2p3, 3p58, 4d8, 4p13, 4p16, 5p17-18.

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