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Healthy and Happy Natural Being: Spinoza and Epicurus Contra the Stoics

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In this paper I aim to undermine Stoic and Neo-Stoic readings of Benedict de Spinoza by examining the latter's strong agreements with Epicurus (a notable opponent of the Stoics) on the nature and ethical role of pleasure in living a happy life. Ultimately, I show that Spinoza and Epicurus are committed to three central claims which the Stoics reject: (1) pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy natural being, (2) pleasure manifests healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se, and (3) pleasure is by nature good. The Stoics reject these three claims due to their views on pleasant sensations as preferred moral indifferents and passionate pleasures as diseases of the soul, views which Spinoza (due to the above-mentioned commitments) is strongly opposed to, thereby placing him (at least on the subject of pleasure) outside the realm of merely following or improving on Stoic doctrines. From this comparative analysis we also gain deeper insight into both Spinoza's engagement with ancient Greek philosophy and the value of Epicureanism and Spinozism in helping us achieve and maintain happiness in the present day, particularly with respect to the benefits and harms of bodily and mental pleasures.

1. Introduction

Like many of his early modern contemporaries, Benedict de Spinoza was arguably deeply engaged with ancient Greek philosophy.[1] It should be noted, however, that early modern philosophers rarely cited their sources or acknowledged the influences of other historical or early modern philosophers on their thought.

1. For discussion of early modern engagement with ancient Greek philosophy, see Lagrée (2016), the collection of essays in Miller and Inwood (2003), Pereboom (1994), Rutherford (2003; 2013), Wilson (2008), and Youpa (2005).

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They instead preferred what Rutherford (2013: 195) calls a *de novo* approach, where one presents themselves as a seeker of truth first and foremost, with their doctrines justified by appeal to reason alone, instead of philosophical precedent or tradition. Similarly, Miller (2015: 19–20) argues that early modern philosophers were not interested in history of philosophy as we understand it today. They cared less about defending a certain interpretation of a past philosopher's views, and more about how they could use historical figures and texts to discover truth.[2] This methodological point, of course, does not mean that Spinoza and other early modern philosophers were wholly original thinkers with no influences whatsoever, just that they were not often candid about everyone they engaged with.[3] In light of this obscurity, when Spinoza mentions another philosopher, we should take this reference seriously, even if it is only brief, and examine his agreements and disagreements with them. For example, it is a well-established fact that Spinoza was heavily engaged with Descartes in every area of his philosophy, most notably concerning the subjects of substance, judgment, freedom, the relationship between mind and body, and passions.[4] However, he only explicitly references Descartes twice in his *magnum opus* the *Ethics*,[5] namely the prefaces to Parts 3 and 5.[6] In the preface to Part 5, he also explicitly mentions

2. A core motivation for this methodology was to move away from the commentary tradition of late antiquity and the medieval period, where much of philosophy was characterized by explicitly defending and expanding on interpretations of ancient philosophers, in particular Plato and Aristotle (Rutherford 2013: 194; see also the preface to Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* in Descartes 1984: 180–3 and TTP: preface, 391 / G III 9). One primary reason for this shift was the Copernican revolution, and other scientific or intellectual developments, which significantly challenged the ancient and medieval picture of the universe, particularly geocentrism and the use of substantial forms in explaining natural phenomena. With such traditional ideas destabilized, early modern thinkers sought to build new foundations for philosophy that did not rely on Platonic or Aristotelian authority, or the authority of the medieval philosophers who drew influence from them.

3. Wolfson (1934) offers a comprehensive analysis of Spinoza's potential influences based on his references, what texts he possessed in his library at the time of his death, what texts were available in his day, and what texts his contemporaries are known to have read.

4. For discussion of Spinoza's rich philosophical engagement with Descartes, see. e.g., Curley (1988), Jaquet (2018: ch. 2), and Kambouchner (2021).

5. Other explicit areas of engagement with Descartes are, e.g., Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* and *Metaphysical Thoughts*, as well as Letters 2, 6, 13, 15, 21, 26, 30A, 39–40, 43, 58, 81, and 83 of his correspondence.

6. When citing passages from the *Ethics* (E), I use the following abbreviations: ax = Axiom, def = Definition, p = Proposition, d = Demonstration/Proof, s = Scholium, c = Corollary, app = Appendix, post = Postulate, pref = Preface, lem = Lemma, da = Definitions of the Affects/Emotions, and ex = Explication. When referring to a particular passage in a long section of text or making a point about translation, I will also, or instead, cite the Dutch and Latin in Spinoza (Gebhardt [Ed.], 1925), henceforth referred to as 'G.' A list of all title abbreviations is included at the end of the paper.

the ancient Stoics,[7] which raises the question of Spinoza's engagement with this philosophy, as well.[8]

In fact, many early modern and contemporary thinkers have noted striking similarities between Spinoza's philosophy and Stoicism. Both seem to share a pantheistic and deterministic account of the universe,[9] a conception of happiness as virtue and living according to nature,[10] a critique of passions as flawed ethical judgments,[11] a therapeutic approach to combatting harmful passions through the modification of judgment,[12] and finally a distinction between passions and rational emotions.[13] Some scholars, e.g., Leibniz (1989: 282), James (1993), and Pereboom (1994), describe Spinoza as a "New Stoic" or Neo-Stoic who affirms, and in certain respects improves on, various central Stoic doctrines concerning things like God, determinism, and psychotherapy. Other scholars, however, like Armstrong (2013), DeBrabander (2007), Long (2003), and Miller (2015), push against a Stoic reading of Spinoza's philosophy. They note that, contra the Stoics, Spinoza rejects a providential account of the universe (E1app), denies that assent and perception constitute separate mental faculties (E2p49), acknowledges the genuine goodness of passions in certain contexts (E4p41, E4app3), and conceives of virtue (and thus happiness) as more than an intellectual state (E2p7s, E4p38, E4p42).[14]

While I side with those scholars who criticize a Stoic reading of Spinoza, I think more precise work can be done to separate the latter's philosophy from Stoicism, because many of the previously mentioned disagreements only

7. In this passage Spinoza is critiquing Descartes and the Stoics with respect to their similar views on our capacity to have complete control over our passions. For discussion of Descartes, Spinoza, and the Stoics on passions and psychotherapy, see Pereboom (1994).

8. With respect to Stoic sources, at the time of his death, Spinoza had in his library Seneca's *Tragedies* (Van Rooijen 1889: 192) and two editions of his letters (180), as well as Epictetus's *Handbook* (172). The *Handbook* is particularly noteworthy, because in E4app32 Spinoza draws the same sort of distinction between what is and is not up to us that is endorsed in this Epictetan text (HB 1). Other places where Spinoza references the Stoics are TIE 74; TTP chap. 5, 438 / G III 74; TTP chap. 16, 530 / G III 194; and E4p20s.

9. DL VII.134–49; E1p14–8, E1p29–33.

10. DL VII.87–9; E4p18s, E5p42.

11. L&S 61B, 65A, & 65J; E3p3, E4p8.

12. HB 1ff.; L&S 65; E5p1–20.

13. DL VII.110–6; E3def3, E3p58–9.

14. Long (2003: 9–10; 14–6) and Miller (2015: 8–11, 16–23, 207–10) also question whether Spinoza was, in fact, influenced by Stoicism more than any other ancient, medieval, or early modern philosophy. They argue that we cannot rule out the possibility that both simply start from similar foundations (e.g., a commitment to intelligibility, monism, determinism, materialism, etc.), which logically leads them to similar philosophical conclusions. On their reading, Spinoza is not a determinist, for example, because he read the Stoics. He instead arrived at this conclusion on his own. While Long and Miller are right to emphasize the similar foundations between Spinoza and the Stoics, by virtue of the abovementioned discussion I think that Spinoza's explicit references to the Stoics (like Descartes) indicate that they were a notable influence on his thought.

preclude Spinoza from being considered an *orthodox* Stoic – they do not clearly rule out a *Neo-Stoic* reading of Spinoza. Such disagreements could be described as mere *improvements* on Stoic doctrines, rather than absolute departures from these doctrines. For example, although Spinoza rejects providence, he still maintains foundational agreement with the Stoics that the universe is deterministic and that combatting passion ethically requires understanding of this metaphysical fact.[15] Similarly, his views on judgment, passion, and virtue do not change his foundational agreements with the Stoics on the dual nature of emotions, the harmfulness of passions in general, and the constitutive role of virtue in happiness. In this context, what is needed is a Spinozistic position that is so starkly un-Stoic in its conception and reasoning that it could not possibly be considered a mere emendation of a certain Stoic doctrine. One way to find such a position is to see whether Spinoza shares meaningful agreement with an ancient opponent to Stoicism on a subject that the Stoics strongly disagree with this opponent on.

In this paper I intend to show that the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus's views on pleasure provide us with the exact tools we need for undermining Stoic and Neo-Stoic readings of Spinoza. Spinoza explicitly references Epicurus in Letter 56 of his correspondence. Unlike his references to the Stoics (or even Descartes), however, which are typically critical, Spinoza praises Epicurus and his Roman disciple Lucretius.[16] In fact, Spinoza praises Epicurus for a philosophy that promotes scientific understanding of nature, while condemning Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle for promoting supernatural and superstitious thinking (G IV 261). Not only does Spinoza rarely explicitly reference other philosophers, but it is even rarer for him to praise them. This may then indicate that Spinoza recognized some affinity between his own philosophy and Epicureanism.[17] In line with this suggestion, there is compelling scholarship on Spinoza's strong conceptual relationship to Epicureanism to contrast with the literature on his relationship to Stoicism, most notably from Bove (1994), Curley (1988), Guyau (2020), Lagrée (1994),

15. In a similar example, Becker (1999) offers a modern Neo-Stoic account that keeps many of the core ethical doctrines of Stoicism, without reliance on its outdated metaphysics, most notably providence.

16. Spinoza also praises the Presocratic philosopher Democritus, who was a major influence on Epicurus. It should also be noted that, despite the praise, Spinoza, by virtue of his substance monism (E1p14), is not an atomist (like Democritus and Epicurus) or an indeterminist (like Epicurus). As I will explain shortly, though, my intention is not to show that Spinoza is a (Neo) Epicurean, only that he is just as strongly engaged with Epicureanism as he is Stoicism.

17. While there were no Epicurean texts in his library at the time of his death, Spinoza would have had access to sources on Epicureanism like Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (Book X), Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, *Tusculan Disputations*, and *On Moral Ends*, and Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* (Wilson 2008: 2–13).

Leibniz (1989), and Vardoulakis (2020).[18] Such thinkers observe that Epicurus and Spinoza share (i) a rejection of providence, creation, supernatural phenomena, and the immortality of the soul,[19] (ii) a commitment to materialistic explanations of natural phenomena,[20] and (iii) a pleasure-oriented conception of happiness.[21]

Here my focus will be on (iii), because I think that pleasure plays a foundational role in both their philosophies and that previous scholarship does not quite capture the richness and nuance of the agreements and disagreements between them on this subject. Lagrée, Leibniz, and Vardoulakis largely devote their attention to (i) and (ii), neglecting a systematic analysis of the nature and central role of pleasure in Spinoza and Epicurus. These other two themes are important in understanding both philosophers, individually and comparatively, but Epicurus and Spinoza's anti-providential and naturalistic discussions are fundamentally motivated by their shared concern for achieving happiness as a life constituted by certain kinds of pleasures.[22] They emphasize such controversial doctrines (in the context of their respective times) because they believe that it is our ignorance of these truths that hinders so many people from truly flourishing in, and stably enjoying, their lives. *Pace* Lagrée, Leibniz, and Vardoulakis, then, to fully appreciate Spinoza and Epicurus's anti-providentialism and naturalism, we must understand their ontological and ethical accounts of pleasure. Curley and Guyau emphasize the central role of pleasure in Spinoza and Epicurus's respective philosophies, but fail to acknowledge that both seem to have two kinds of pleasure in mind, one transitional and the other non-transitional – happiness being constituted by the latter. Bove acknowledges the foundational importance of pleasure in both systems, and their shared commitment to a dual account of pleasure. However, he does not acknowledge how this account raises problems for both Spinoza and Epicurus, who fail to explain (in their extant works, at least) how this dual account of pleasure is coherent: why should these transitional and non-transitional states both be considered pleasures per se?

My analysis, in contrast, addresses all of these things. I offer a solid foundation for understanding how Spinoza and Epicurus's views on pleasure relate to their anti-providential and naturalistic views. And not only do I explain the potential problems with their dual accounts of pleasure, but I also show that the potential solution to these problems will largely be same for both (namely, conceiving of pleasure foundationally in terms of the promotion of healthy being).

18. Leibniz (1989: 282–3) associates Spinoza's philosophy with both Stoicism and Epicureanism. Much of what Leibniz considers a threat to piety in Spinozism concerns (from his perspective) Spinoza's materialism, pantheism, strong determinism, mortalism, and anti-providentialism.

19. (LH 38–9, 65–81); (L&S, 13D-I, 14F-H); E1p14, E1p19, E1app.

20. L&S 4–15; E1app, E2p2, E2p7, E2p13.

21. LM 127–30; E5p36s, E5p42d.

22. Epicurus, *Letter to Pythocles* 84; LH 83; E2pref, E4app4, E5p36s.

Ultimately, I argue in what follows that Spinoza and Epicurus are committed to three central claims which the Stoics reject: (1) pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy natural being, (2) pleasure manifests healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se, and (3) pleasure is by nature good. The Stoics reject these three claims due to their views on pleasant sensations as preferred moral indifferents and passionate pleasures as diseases of the soul, views which Spinoza (due to the abovementioned commitments) is strongly opposed to, thereby placing him (at least on the subject of pleasure) outside the realm of merely following or improving on Stoic doctrines.

Beyond undermining a Neo-Stoic reading of Spinoza, this comparative analysis serves two larger goals – one historical and the other contemporary. Firstly, it offers us a more thorough account of Spinoza's complex engagement with ancient Greek moral philosophy. In my view, Spinoza's engagement with ancient Greek philosophy is best characterized through his continuance and development of eudaimonism in the early modern period. "Eudaimonism" refers to the ancient Greek ethical tradition which considers happiness (*eudaimonia*) the highest good.[23] The crucial question, however, is whether Spinoza is an advocate/innovator of a particular eudaimonistic account of happiness (e.g., Stoicism or Epicureanism) or an original thinker who makes his own distinctive contributions to this ethical tradition. The following comparative analysis will rule out the possibility that Spinoza is merely an advocate or innovator of Stoicism. Also, despite the strong agreements between them on the subject of pleasure, this analysis will also reveal where Spinoza crucially, but subtly, separates himself from Epicureanism. Through elucidation of Spinoza's agreements and disagreements with Epicurus and the Stoics, we gain greater insight into Spinoza's engagement with his fellow eudaimonists and what he himself meaningfully offers to this ethical tradition as a eudaimonist in his own right.

Secondly, in the context of our world today, we continue to find rich engagement with ancient Greek eudaimonism, in particular with the ideas of Epicureanism and Stoicism.[24] Although significantly different in many ways, both offer valuable lessons in coping with hardship and removing unnecessary suffering, all for the sake of achieving and maintaining a healthy and happy life. As a fellow eudaimonist, and one who is heavily engaged with both approaches to happiness, it is arguable that Spinoza also has many insights to offer. In fact, in Spinoza, we may find an approach to happiness that carries all the strengths of Stoicism

23. For comprehensive eudaimonistic readings of Spinoza, see. e.g., Kisner (2011: chap. 4), Miller (2015: chap. 5), Smith (2023), and Youpa (2005). For eudaimonistic readings of Descartes and Leibniz, see, e.g., Youpa (2005). For criticism of such readings, see, e.g., Rutherford (2003; 2013) and Shapiro (2008).

24. For Epicureanism, see, e.g., Austin (2022) and Wilson (2019). For the Stoics, see, e.g., Becker (1999), Nussbaum (2008; 2009), and Sherman (2005). For critique of the contemporary applicability of ancient Greek moral philosophy and Spinozism, see, e.g., Fraenkel (2020a; 2020b).

and Epicureanism (amongst other eudaimonistic accounts), with none of their potential weaknesses. To come to any concrete conclusions concerning these historical and contemporary matters, however, we must first delve into our analysis of Epicurus, the Stoics, and Spinoza's respective views concerning pleasure.

2. Epicurus

To begin, Epicurus posits two kinds of pleasure: kinetic (*kata kinesin*) and katastematic (*katastematikos*). Kinetic pleasure is linked to "motion and activity" (DL X.136) and described as that which "produces agreeable sensations in us" through the "removal" of desire (OM I.37). Katastematic pleasure, conversely, is associated with a "state of rest," which consists in "peace of mind [*ataraxia*] and freedom from pain [*aponia*]" (DL X.136) or "lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul" (LM 131).

Kinetic pleasure represents a modification in one's state of being which is connected to the satisfaction of desire. The nature of this kind of pleasure is multifaceted, because Epicurus distinguishes between three kinds of desire: natural and *necessary*, natural and *unnecessary*, and *non-natural* and unnecessary (PD XXIX). Natural and necessary desires, when satisfied, promote "the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance" (LM 129; see also PD XXIXn20). While a necessary desire remains unfulfilled, however, one experiences either pain in the body from things like hunger, thirst, and exhaustion (OM I.37; PD XXIXn20), or disturbance in the soul from things like ignorance, anxiety, and fear (PD X-XII; LM 122–7; LH 76–83). Here suffering indicates an impediment to one's natural functioning, pain representing an unhealthy state of the body and disturbance an unhealthy state of the mind.[25] Necessary kinetic pleasure is produced through the process of removing pain or disturbance, thereby restoring the body or mind to a healthy state. Eating and drinking are often pleasant because of the nourishment they provide the body (PD XXIXn20), while learning can be pleasurable in this context (X-XIII, XVIII; Epicurus, Vatican Sayings, 27), insofar as it removes certain troubling beliefs based in ignorance or misunderstanding (e.g., of the gods [LM 123–4; LH 81], natural phenomena [LH 78–80; Epicurus, Letter to Pythocles, 84ff.; PD X-XIII], or death [LM 124–7]).[26]

Unnecessary desires, on the other hand, "do not lead to a feeling of pain if not fulfilled" (PD XXX), but rather, if fulfilled, "provide variations of pleasure" (XXIXn20). The kinetic pleasures that follow from such desires only diversify the

25. I will use "suffering" as a general term for bodily pain or mental disturbance.

26. Not all pleasurable instances of learning may be associated with necessary kinetic pleasures, however. If an instance of learning is pleasurable, but does not remove disturbance, it will be a natural, but unnecessary kinetic pleasure. I discuss this sort of pleasure in the next paragraph.

expression of healthy being – they do not in themselves contribute to it as means or constituents. Natural, unnecessary desires represent preferences for certain objects that can satisfy a natural desire or activities that diversely express general states of prior bodily or mental health (PD XVIII). Steak, for example, can be an object of natural, unnecessary kinetic pleasure because, while it does nourish my body, I do not have to consume steak specifically to be healthy – there are countless other foods which will have the same, if not greater, nutritional effect. Steak simply provides the natural pleasure of nourishment with a preferential qualitative feel. Similarly, the pleasurable activity of reading Aristophanes' *The Clouds* is not necessary for my physical or mental well-being, but when I enjoy this activity, I am expressing the prior healthy states of my eyes (which allows me to physically read) and my mind (which allows me to tranquilly and intellectually engage with the text in terms of learning or critique). Non-natural, unnecessary desires, on the other hand, are associated with objects that are conventionally and extrinsically (i.e., relationally) pleasant, like wealth, marriage, and social approval (PD XVIIIn20, XXIX; Rist 1972: 119). Such things are not direct or inherent pleasures of my bodily or mental nature and they are not at all necessary for my bodily or mental health. Wealth, marriage, and social approval, insofar as they are pleasant, only indirectly and contingently express unimpeded natural functioning, based on whatever physical and mental interactions I have with the world.

Katastematic pleasure is the state of freedom from suffering that kinetic pleasures either produce or express. When my hunger or thirst is quenched, then I experience a pleasant state of satiety. Similarly, when my mind is untroubled by ignorance or fears, I enjoy peace of mind. In both cases my pleasure is derived from the absence of suffering, whether it be pain in the body or disturbance in the mind. This freedom from suffering entails that my body or mind is healthy, and thus unimpeded in its natural functioning. Necessary kinetic pleasures, as restorative processes, produce katastematic pleasure. The pleasures I receive from nourishing my body and mind, in other words, bring about the pleasures of homeostasis and peace of mind, respectively. The kinetic pleasures that follow from unnecessary desires (natural or non-natural), in turn, are diverse expressions of prior bodily or mental katastematic pleasures.

Epicurus consequently has two accounts of pleasure, the first (kinetic pleasure) as a change in state which constitutes either a restorative process or an activity that expresses a prior state of unimpeded natural functioning and the second (katastematic pleasure), as a state of unimpeded natural functioning itself.

This dual account of pleasure, however, presents a potential problem. Cicero questions how these two kinds of pleasure are reducible to the same underlying essence, and denies that freedom from pain is rightly called "pleasure" (OM 2.8–20). Similarly, Annas (1987: 9) argues that "[i]t takes theory . . . to sustain the distinction between these [two] kinds of pleasure, and to connect the condition of

having one's needs pleasantly satisfied with the notions of the natural state and the condition of functioning unimpededly." In other words, we need substantial justification for how kinetic pleasure and katastematic pleasure both constitute the same fundamental thing. Cooper's (2012: 232) solution to this problem is to say that the experience of pleasure is uniform, but there are two kinds of *sources* which can produce this experience, namely a change in state and a state of unimpeded functioning per se.

While I agree with Cooper that kinetic and katastematic pleasures have a shared essence, I am hesitant to say that they consist in the same experience. Cicero makes a valid point that quenching one's thirst and not being thirsty constitute different experiences – they do not *feel* the same, even if we consider both experiences pleasurable (OM 2.17). Moreover, unlike Aristotle (NE VII.12, X.3–4), there is little evidence to suggest that Epicurus ever draws a distinction, explicitly or implicitly, between pleasure as a source and pleasure as an experience.[27] The source and experience of kinetic pleasure is simply a modification, and the source and experience of katastematic pleasure is simply unimpeded functioning. As a result, these two kinds of pleasures represent distinct sources and experiences. How then could they share the same essence?

Unfortunately, because most of Epicurus's written works have not survived, we cannot be sure of his reasoning on this subject. It is also possible, based on Cicero's criticisms, that the Epicureans were never able to offer a clear explanation. What I offer here is a tentative explanation. Based on Epicurus's accounts of kinetic and katastematic pleasures, the essence of pleasure seems to be the promotion of healthy being. Kinetic pleasure represents a health-oriented modification, either through the removal of an impediment to functioning (i.e., suffering) or the diverse expression of healthy being physically and/or mentally. Katastematic pleasure is, in itself, a state of bodily or mental health. Epicurus cannot restrict himself to understanding pleasures as solely kinetic or katastematic, because to do so would be to miss significant aspects of the nature of pleasure as healthy being, which involves restorative processes, natural unimpeded functioning per se, and diverse ways of being physically and intellectually unimpeded in the expression of one's nature. In any case, such details show that Epicurus is committed to claim (1), that pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy natural being, and claim (2), that pleasure manifests healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se.

Ethically, Epicurus declares pleasure "our first innate good . . . our starting point for every choice and avoidance," and the "goal of living blessedly" (LM 128), because it is the first thing that we naturally seek prior to acquiring

27. For defense of the source-experience distinction in Aristotle's account of pleasure, see, e.g., Aufderheide (2011: 200–2) and Owen (1972: 136–8, 151). For criticism of this reading, see. e.g., Pakaluk (2005: 302–6).

any beliefs or employing reason (DL X.137; see also OM I.30). As we have seen, Epicurus intimately connects pleasure with healthy being. The natural standard of goodness, and that which constitutes happiness as the highest good, is in turn pleasure. However, pleasures are not equal in ethical value, nor is happiness constituted by every kind of pleasure. Happiness is specifically identified with "the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance" (LM 128). The happy life is therefore the life of bodily and mental katastematic pleasure, rather than kinetic pleasure. Furthermore, Epicurus clarifies that, while "every pleasure is a good thing" (LM 129) and "[n]o pleasure is a bad thing in itself" (PD VIII), nevertheless "not every [pleasure] is to be chosen" (LM 129); in fact, "certain pleasures bring troubles many times greater than [those] pleasures" considered in themselves (PD VIII). Any given pleasure, by its very nature, is good, because of its necessary connection to the health of one's state of being, whether directly or indirectly. However, some pleasures will be more valuable than others in their relationship to promoting natural functioning and happiness, and some pleasures can lead to suffering when inappropriately valued and cultivated.

Unnecessary kinetic pleasures become harmful, for Epicurus, if they are prioritized over necessary kinetic pleasures and katastematic pleasures. People often pursue praise, fame, or wealth (as unnecessary and non-natural pleasures) to the detriment of their health, physically and psychologically. Similarly, with preferential (i.e., natural, but unnecessary) desires for things like steak and wine, I can enjoy them excessively, thereby neglecting other things (e.g., water, fruit, exercise, education, etc.) that are important for nourishing my body and mind. Furthermore, such conventional goods are not always accessible or easily attainable, which can distract and distress my mind (PD XXVI). Unnecessary pleasures (natural and non-natural) are good per se because they (directly or indirectly) express prior healthy being in terms of necessary kinetic pleasures (i.e., restorative processes) or katastematic pleasures (i.e., states of unimpeded functioning). However, unnecessary kinetic pleasures derive their existence and value from the promotion of happiness as healthy (katastemically pleasant) states of being. Preferential and conventional things cease to be enjoyable if they impede restorative processes or states of bodily and/or mental functioning. If I enjoy steak excessively (as a preference), or prioritize wealth (as a non-natural, relational, and conventional good) over everything else, then I deprive my body and mind of important forms of nourishment, cause myself distress when I cannot eat steak or maintain/increase my wealth, and ultimately create conditions where I can no longer enjoy either kind of pleasure because I am sickly in body and mind. While Epicurus thinks that we often pursue unnecessary kinetic pleasures from "groundless opinion" (PD XXX) and we do not need these things at all to be happy, nevertheless a wise Epicurean can, strictly-speaking, enjoy "times of extravagance" with respect to preferences and conventional goods like praise,

fame, and wealth, because they understand these things as mere variations on prior states of health and happiness, and thus would not pursue these pleasures excessively or prioritize them over other (necessary kinetic and katastematic) pleasures more directly and intimately connected to their well-being (LM 131). Consequently, unnecessary pleasures become harmful and bad only insofar as they are self-defeating through undermining their own health-oriented nature as pleasures. Also, although good per se, these kinetic pleasures are the least valuable pleasures (non-natural pleasures being the lowest in value), because they only diversify the expression of prior healthy being – they neither produce, nor constitute, nor increase this state of being in themselves.

Necessary kinetic pleasures, conversely, are always good because they directly produce healthy states of being. Since happiness consists in the unimpeded natural functioning of the body and mind, necessary kinetic pleasures are the most valuable kind of kinetic pleasure. Epicurus asserts that one "who has learned the limits of life knows that it is easy to provide that which removes the feeling of pain . . . and makes one's whole life perfect. So there is no need for things which involve struggle" (PD XXI). Because meeting our basic natural needs is easy, and what matters most is freedom from suffering, necessary kinetic pleasures only enhance the quality of one's life rather than degrade it. The most valuable kind of pleasure, however, is katastematic pleasure. Katastematic pleasure is healthy being itself and constitutes happiness as the highest good. Everything else derives its value from promoting katastematic pleasure. Necessary kinetic pleasures (i.e., restorative processes) are valuable insofar as they produce katastematic pleasures (i.e., healthy states), and unnecessary pleasures are valuable insofar as they directly or indirectly express restorative processes or katastematic pleasures in distinctive ways.

There also exists a hierarchy between bodily and mental pleasures. Epicurus considers mental pleasure ethically superior to bodily pleasure. This superiority is grounded in the fact that the mind has a greater modal scope than the body.[28] My body can only engage with the present, what is currently affecting me. My mind, on the other hand, can engage with the past, present, and future, through recollection, reflection, and anticipation respectively, each of which is useful for combatting current bodily pains and/or mental disturbances (DL X.137; OM I.55–6). It also seems to be the case that, while both bodily and mental katastematic pleasures are required to achieve happiness, peace of mind is sufficient to maintain happiness moving forward if the body should be subject to serious pain (LM 132; PD IV; Epicurus, Letter Idomeneus; DL X.118).

In any case, Epicurus's ethical conception of pleasure is ultimately structured around healthy functioning. The more essential a pleasure is to healthy

28. For Epicurus's atomistic account of the soul/mind and the body, see LH and L&S 4–15.

functioning the greater the good that it is – katastematic pleasures being the greatest goods because they constitute happiness qua healthy being itself. Despite this hierarchy among pleasures, the fact remains that for Epicurus each kind of pleasure is in itself good, and can only be considered bad if it undermines its own health-oriented nature as a pleasure. These points, in turn, commit Epicurus to claim (3), that pleasure is good by nature.[29]

In sum, Epicurus is committed to three central claims in his account of pleasure. Ontologically, he thinks that pleasure (1) holds a necessary connection to healthy natural being and (2) manifests healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se. Ethically, because of its relationship to healthy being, Epicurus then concludes that pleasure is (3) good by nature and can only be bad insofar as it is self-defeating. In the next section, we will discuss why the Stoics vehemently deny these three claims.

3. The Stoics

The Stoics refer to pleasure in two ways: (1) as a sensation and (2) as an emotion. Pleasant sensation is a form of impression (*phantasia*). An impression is an "imprinting" (DL VII.50) or "affection in the soul" (L&S 39B1). It represents how a subject was affected in a certain way in a given moment.[30] Some impressions are internal, in which case they pertain to affections the mind produces in itself, and others are external, in which case they pertain to affections received through the senses (DL VII.51). Pleasure as a sensation is then more precisely an external impression, which represents how something in the world positively affected one's soul through one of their senses (e.g., the sensation of a gentle, cooling breeze on one's skin). It should be noted, however, that impressions, in themselves, do not involve appraisal of their content, nor do they have motivational power for humans as rational animals.[31] Something more is needed in terms of activity on the part of the mind to constitute a judgment or a motivation (i.e., an "impulse" [*horme*]) to act (L&S 53A5, 53Q, 53S, 65X2; DL VII.51, 86), namely assenting to a certain "sayable" or proposition (*lekton*) concerning that impression (L&S 41, 62K). Simply experiencing a pleasant sensation does not in itself

29. For further discussion of Epicurus's ontological and ethical accounts of pleasure, see, e.g., Cooper (2012: 5.2), Rist (1972: chap. 6 and Appendix D), and Woolf (2009).

30. For a fuller discussion of impressions, see L&S 39 and its accompanying commentary.

31. I specify "rational animals" here, because the Stoics indicate that, in non-rational animals, impulse follows directly from impression (L&S 53A, 53O-Q, 53S-T). Non-rational animals, in other words, are motivated to act from their perceptions alone, without rational appraisal of what is/is not the case or what they should/should not do in a given situation (although their impulses, in themselves, may also contain a certain kind of assent [53O]). As well, humans, prior to developing the faculty of reason, may function like a non-rational animal (39E).

entail any sort of judgment, such as "The pleasure of a gentle breeze is a good [or bad] thing for my well-being." Similarly, the sensation alone will not motivate me to do anything, such as pursuing or avoiding gentle breezes. It is only if my mind actively assents to a proposition concerning this sensation qua impression that I can be said to have made a judgment about, or to have an impulse to pursue/avoid, gentle breezes. Sensual pleasure is therefore a mere impression that I may or may not form judgments about or act on.

Pleasure as an affect or emotion, on the other hand, is comparatively more robust. Firstly, emotions are impulses, so they motivate action (L&S 65A1, X2). Love, anger, and grief are not mere feelings – they influence my actions positively or negatively. Secondly, and more notably, the Stoics claim that emotions involve judgments (DL VII.111; L&S 65K1). Those feelings which influence my actions do not do so blindly or devoid of reason. On the contrary, a necessary component of any emotional state is some sort of assertion that x is y – that is, assenting to a certain proposition concerning an impression. For example, Epictetus says that "[i]t isn't the things themselves that disturb people, but the judgments that they form about them . . . Death, for instance, is nothing terrible . . . it is in the judgment that death is terrible that the terror lies" (HB 5). Death can leave various impressions on me (most notably, the threat of removing me or a loved one from life), but it will only have an emotional impact on me once I have made a judgment about it. This cognitive view of emotion can be contrasted with the traditional Platonic-Aristotelian conception of emotion and reason as distinct aspects of the soul (the former non-rational and the latter rational) that can subsequently be in harmony or conflict with each other (*Republic* 4.439c-443e; NE I.12.1102a26–1103a4).[32] For the Stoics the soul is wholly rational (L&S 65G, 65I4, 61B9), and this rational capacity is simply used well or poorly (61B10–1, 65T-V).[33]

According to the Stoics, there are two kinds of emotions, passions (*pathe*) and good (namely, rational) emotions (*eupatheia*). Emotions are not associated with just any judgments, however, but specifically ethical judgments. A passion is described as an "unnatural movement" (DL VII.110) or "disorder" in the soul (TD IV.vi.11) and an "impulse which is excessive and disobedient to the dictates of reason" (L&S 65A1) by virtue of "erroneous judgement" (61B11; see also 65J). Passions, in other words, involve poorly-reasoned or irrational judgments which lead to behaviours that are contrary to one's natural well-being.[34] The Stoics outline four primary passions: desire (Greek: *epithumia*; Latin: *libido*), fear

32. All references to Plato's texts are from Plato (1997).

33. The Stoic Posidonius seems to endorse this Platonic-Aristotelian conception of the soul (L&S 65I, 65P) and link emotions to the non-rational part(s) of the soul (65K2–3). My concern, however, is with mainstream Stoicism, so I will not discuss heterodox Stoics like Posidonius.

34. Here I draw a distinction between "non-rational" and "irrational." "Non-rational" refers to something that is not itself a part of the rational faculty. Conversely, something is "irrational" if it is part of the rational faculty but manifests reason in a deficient manner.

(Greek: *phobos*; Latin: *metus*), pleasure (Greek: *hedone*; Latin: *laetitia*), and distress (Greek: *lupe*; Latin: *aegritudo*). Desire involves the irrational judgment that something is worth pursuing because it is good, while fear involves the irrational judgment that something is worth avoiding because it is bad. Pleasure involves the irrational judgment that one possesses something that is good, while distress involves the irrational judgment that one possesses something that is bad (DL VII.110; L&S 65B; TD IV.vi.11, IV.vii.14–5.).

Good emotions, in contrast, are "equable and wise" (TD IV.vi.12). They are balanced emotional states involving well-reasoned judgments which lead to behaviours that are harmonious with one's natural well-being. The primary good emotions are wish (Greek: *boulesis*; Latin: *voluntas*), caution (Greek: *eulabeia*; Latin: *cautio*), and joy (Greek: *chara*; Latin: *gaudium*). Wish involves the rational judgment that something is worth pursuing because it is good, while caution involves the rational judgment that something is worth avoiding because it is bad. Finally, joy involves the rational judgment that one possesses something good. For the Stoics there is no rational counterpart to distress, a point which will become clearer once we delve into the ethical dimension of emotions (DL VII.116; TD IV.vi.12–4). At this juncture, however, what matters is that emotional pleasure (in contrast to sensual pleasure) has motivational power and involves cognition in the form of ethical judgments concerning present goods. While pleasure (*hedone*) is specifically referred to as a passion, unlike distress, it has a rational counterpart in the form of joy (*chara*). These two emotions are fundamentally species of an underlying genus of emotional enjoyment, the former being irrational and the latter rational. Emotional pleasure (taken in the general sense) then has both healthy and natural and unhealthy and unnatural forms for the Stoics. We might also say that pleasure as a sensation is predominantly bodily in nature (through its foundation in the senses) and pleasure as an emotion is predominantly mental in nature (through its association with ethical judgments), although the Stoics are not mind-body dualists like Plato (or Descartes).[35]

Let us now move to the ethical roles of sensual and emotional pleasure in living a happy life. For the Stoics happiness consists in virtue as living in agreement with one's rational nature as a human being and the providential order of the universe (DL VII.87–9, VII.139–40; L&S 61B8, 63D), the rational faculty being that which is completely within one's control (HB 1). The ethical value of sensual or emotional pleasures will then ultimately be based on their relation to reason. Sensual pleasure falls under the category of a preferred moral indifferent. Something is morally indifferent if it is outside my *complete* control (HB 1.2–4) and my happiness or unhappiness does not require the presence or absence of this

35. For discussion of Stoic physics, see L&S 43–55. For Plato's dualism, see, e.g., *Phaedo*. For Descartes's dualism, see, e.g., Part I of the *Principles of Philosophy*.

thing (DL VII.104). Morally indifferent things can also be used in both beneficial (good) and harmful (bad) ways, and thus their value is not fixed. Sensual pleasure is argued to possess this feature, because "some pleasures are disgraceful" and thus harmful and bad (DL VII.103). As a result, contra claim (1), the Stoics do not think that pleasant sensation holds a necessary connection to bodily or mental health. It is also important to note here that even things we have some control over are still morally indifferent, because their presence or absence is still partly based on external forces, and thus partly outside our control. The body in general and sensual pleasure in particular are classic examples of moral indifferents (HB 1; DL VII.102). While I obviously have some control over the states of my body, namely my health and any sensual pleasures I experience, I do not have complete control over these things. Despite my best efforts and against my will, external forces can make me sick or deprive me of the opportunity to enjoy some or any pleasant sensations. Because this sort of pleasure is outside my control, the Stoics deny that it is a necessary means to or a constituent of virtue and happiness. In other words, my rationality does not depend on or consist in enjoying pleasant sensations (e.g., a gentle breeze, the scent of flowers, or the taste of fine steak and wine). With that said, the Stoics will concede that sensual pleasure is a "preferred" indifferent (DL VII.102–3, 105–9; OM III.20–2, III.51–61). It is natural for a human being to pursue pleasant sensations, and they should when circumstances permit, but whether one succeeds in this endeavour or not makes no difference to their virtue and happiness. Sensual pleasure is, at best, a potential (but wholly unnecessary) tool for practicing and developing virtuous conduct or expressing the achievement of a virtuous character and a happy life.

Emotional pleasure, conversely, can be good or bad through its relation to virtue and happiness. Passions in general are classified as "disorders" of the soul (TD IV.vi.11) and "vicious" because they represent "uncontrolled reason" through "bad and erroneous judgement" (L&S 61B11). Since virtue/happiness consists in correct reasoning, and passions involve poorly-reasoned ethical judgments, the latter are contrary to reason. A healthy and happy mind is one which uses its rational faculty well. Passions, on the other hand, represent a mind which is unhealthy and unhappy because it judges the ethical value of things incorrectly, and these judgments lead to excessive and irrational behaviour. At the core of passions is ignorance "of things that are good and bad and neutral" (L&S 61H5), which often leads one to erroneously consider those things outside their power (i.e., outside the realm of the mind) necessary for achieving and maintaining happiness and removing or avoiding unhappiness (HB 1, 2, 41). Such judgments cause unhappiness because they promote concern for (and often obsession over) transient and uncontrollable things which distract one from properly caring for their soul in general and their rational faculty in particular. Emotional pleasure as a passion (what we might refer to as "passionate pleasure") is therefore

dangerous and bad in the sense that I am taking pleasure in an external thing as a good which is not in fact good (or bad) at all. Epictetus specifically warns about sensual pleasure as an object of passion, which we can easily be "overcome" by when we consider these sensations important for happiness (HB 34). In such a case, we may be motivated to prioritize pleasant sensations over correct reasoning, when in reality (for the Stoics) only the presence or absence of the latter has any true impact on our happiness (i.e., our mental well-being). At this juncture, we can see that the Stoics also deny that emotional pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy being, since passionate pleasures are by nature disorders of the soul and represent a dysfunctional mind. In the context of both sensation and emotion, then, the Stoics vehemently deny claim (1). Relatedly, because the Stoics do not conceive of pleasures in terms of changes in healthy states of being and healthy states of being per se, they also deny claim (2).

Good emotions, in contrast to passions, are good because they involve correct reasoning, namely correct ethical judgments. For the Stoics this primarily means judging virtue (i.e., rationality) to be the only good, vice (i.e., deficient reasoning) to be the only bad, and everything else to be morally indifferent (L&S 60G, 61N1; DL VII.94–102; OM III.10–14). Wish is primarily the pursuit of virtue, joy the enjoyment of virtue, and caution the avoidance of vice. It is important to clarify, though, that good emotions do not constitute virtue and happiness, but are rather consequents of them through the latter's connection to rational ethical judgments (Seneca, *De Vita Beata,* 15.2). For our purposes, the noteworthy thing here is that pleasure (taken in the general sense) is good insofar as it follows wholly from reason in the form of joy, reason qua virtue being good per se and the only true source of goodness. Recall, however, that the Stoics grant that some moral indifferents are preferred as something natural for a human being to pursue and enjoy, while others are dispreferred as something natural for a human being to avoid. While the virtuous person will understand that things outside the mind do not affect their virtue and happiness, nevertheless they will pursue and enjoy preferred indifferents and avoid dispreferred indifferents in a secondary sense as particular expressions of virtue, because virtue involves "act[ing] with good reason in the selection of what is natural" (DL VII.88; see also TD IV.vi.12–4). Pleasant sensations do not, in themselves, make one virtuous and happy (or vicious and unhappy). But because they are natural objects of pursuit and enjoyment for human beings, the virtuous person will wish for and enjoy pleasant sensations, with the understanding that it is only having the right disposition towards them, and not the outcome or the sensations themselves, which truly matters ethically.

In the Stoic ethical framework only joy as rational emotional pleasure is good. As a result, the Stoics strongly reject claim (3). Firstly, pleasant sensation is neither a necessary means to, nor a constituent of, virtue/happiness as reason, but only a potential and morally indifferent tool for developing or expressing it.

Secondly, emotional pleasure in general is not inherently good, because some emotional pleasures, namely passionate pleasures as irrational impulses, are harmful to virtue and happiness, and are thus bad.

Overall, then, the Stoics place themselves in strong opposition to Epicurus on the ontological and ethical nature of pleasure. Ontologically they deny that pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy being, claim (1), and in turn that pleasure by nature manifests itself through health-oriented changes in one's state of being or healthy states of being per se, claim (2), because pleasant sensations do not entail healthy states of being and some pleasant emotions (namely, passions) represent sickness in the soul. Finally, ethically, they deny that pleasure is good by nature, claim (3), because pleasant sensations are morally indifferent and pleasant emotions can be good (as rational emotions) or bad (as passions). In the final section, we will see how Spinoza places himself in strong opposition to the Stoics, and in strong agreement with Epicurus, on the nature of pleasure by virtue of his commitment to claims (1), (2), and (3).

4. Spinoza

Spinoza describes pleasure (*laetitia*) as an emotion which consists in a "transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection" (E3da2 / G II 191).[36] Perfection pertains to what Spinoza calls a being's *conatus*. The conatus is one's essence as an internal force which expresses and preserves the existence of one's mental and bodily nature through their degree of natural causal power or "power of activity" (E3post1, E3p7, E3p11). The body expresses this essential self-preservative force through physical activities (E4p38–9), while the mind expresses this force through intellectual activities (E2p14, E3p9, E4p26). With respect to the mind and body, it is important to clarify that Spinoza is committed to a non-reductive form of mind-body identity (E2p7s).[37] What this means is that mind and body are merely conceptually distinct aspects of the same underlying

36. Curley (1985: 642) translates *laetitia* as "joy," arguing that this English term "is more suggestive of the overall sense of well-being that … Spinoza has in mind." He applies the term "pleasure" to a subspecies of *laetitia*: *titillatio*. Wolfson, however, points out that *laetitia* is one of many common Latin translations of the Greek term *hedone* (1934: II 206). The translation of "pleasure" is therefore not without precedent. For my own part, while Curley's reasoning has merit, I find that "pleasure" more accurately connotes the primary nature of this emotion than "joy." With that said, I advise the reader to focus more on what Spinoza *means* by the terms he uses, and less on the connotations that we may or may not attach to them. Spinoza himself says his intention is merely to use terms that closely approximate what he has in mind, not to strictly follow the common meanings of terms (E3da20ex). Whether we call it pleasure or joy, what matters is that there is a fundamental emotion of enjoyment which constitutes the promotion of one's natural power.

37. For rich discussion of Spinoza's views on the identity of mind and body, see, e.g., Della Rocca (1996: chap. 7–9) and Hübner (2022).

thing ontologically, in this case the conatus and the various activities that follow from it. In other words, mental activity and bodily activity are not ontologically distinct things; they are instead strictly corresponding expressions of the same underlying activity. I also mention one's "degree" of power here, because Spinoza indicates that the conatus, that is one's intellectual and physical self-affirmative power, can be strengthened or weakened (E3post1, E3p11, E3p57).

An emotion (*affectum*) is this positive or negative change in the perfection or power of one's conatus (E3def3 / G II 139; see also E3p11s). Pleasure is a positive change because it increases my natural, self-affirmative power, while pain is a negative change because it decreases my power (E3da3). Because of the above-mentioned identity between mind and body, mental pleasure and bodily pleasure are also not distinct. Where the mind experiences an increase in power qua pleasure, the body will also, because there is really just one underlying pleasure which is expressed both intellectually and physically. Spinoza divides emotions, and thus pleasures, into two categories, passions and active emotions, which are distinguished from each other causally. Spinoza draws a distinction between being an inadequate cause (passive) and being an adequate cause (active). I am an inadequate cause, and thus passive, insofar as my nature (i.e., my conatus) is a partial, and insufficient, explanation for an effect. In this case, the effect is brought about through a combination of my own causal power through my natural constitution and the causal power of one or more external things that interacted with me. Conversely, I am an adequate cause, and thus active, insofar as my nature is the total or sufficient explanation for an effect (E3def1–2).[38]

Within this causal framework one can be either an inadequate or adequate cause of their emotions as effects. Passions are emotions that I am the partial cause of, meaning the change in power of activity involves external sources (E3def3, E3p56, E4app2). In the case of pleasure, the increase in power is the result of both my own nature and one or more external things which positively impact my degree of natural self-expression and self-preservation. For example, steak and fine wine can be passive pleasures insofar as they promote the well-being of my conatus through the nutrients they provide my body for its natural functioning. I am part of the explanation of the pleasure insofar as the natural constitution of my body makes use of the nutrients from the steak and wine, but the pleasure is passive because my body did not provide the nutritional benefit on its own – it needed the steak and wine as external things to help it bring

38. In this paper I will not concern myself with explaining precisely how mental and bodily causation work in light of Spinoza's identity theory of mind and body, since Spinoza himself does not make it clear. All that matters for our purposes is that everything (e.g., power, causation, pleasure, and healthy being) is equally and coextensively intellectual and physical in nature. For concrete discussion of the relationship between mind and body, see Della Rocca (1996), James (2014), Jaquet (2018), and Miller (2015: 67–70).

about this positive emotion – this increase in my power. Active emotions, in contrast, are emotions which I am the adequate, or sufficient, cause of (E3def3, E3p58–9, E4app2). An active pleasure is an increase in power that my conatus brings about through its own causal power alone. A prime example of this kind of pleasure is rational self-contentment. Self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*) in general is "pleasure arising from [one's] contemplation of [themselves] and [their] power of activity" (E3da25 / G II 196; see also E3p30s) and rational self-contentment is pleasure from true understanding of one's current degree of power (E4p52). This latter pleasure is active because my intellectual nature is the cause of this increase in power through self-understanding of the current scope of my physical and intellectual abilities. In fact, Spinoza argues that the mind is an adequate cause whenever it possesses adequate knowledge, meaning it understands truths with logical certainty through its own intellectual power alone (E2p29s, E2p37–40s2, E2p42–4, E3p1, E5p10, E5p14), and the mind is an inadequate cause when it perceives truths in a "fragmentary [*mutilate*] and confused manner" through sensory experience (E2p40s2 / G II 122; see also E2p29s).

Ethically, Spinoza argues that "[p]leasure is not in itself bad, but good. On the other hand, pain is in itself bad" (E4p41). What promotes the well-being of my conatus is good, while that which impedes its well-being is bad. Pleasure, by nature, is an increase in the conatus's power of activity, and thus it is intrinsically good. Pain, conversely, because it is a decrease in power of activity, is intrinsically bad (E4p8d).

With that said, Spinoza acknowledges that not all pleasures are of equal ethical value. Passive pleasures, as passions, can be good or bad (E4app3). For example, titillation (*titillatio*) is a localized form of pleasure which represents an increase in the power of a certain part of the body, while the rest of the body remains unaltered. Titillation can be excessive and harmful, according to Spinoza, if it empowers one part of my body to such an extent that the rest of my body is disempowered, and thus the overall well-being of my conatus is impeded. In particular, this pleasure can be harmful when I obsessively focus (as a result of inadequate knowledge of my overall natural constitution and its relation to other things in Nature) on constantly deriving pleasure from (i.e., empowering) one part of my body, neglecting the other parts of my body (E4p43–4s / G II 242–3). In itself, titillation qua pleasure is good, because it empowers my body to some degree. However, titillation can become bad when it leads to pain, and thus undermines its empowering nature as a pleasure.

Active pleasure, on the other hand, is always good. Because it follows from the causal power of the conatus alone, and the conatus as an internal self-preservative force cannot in itself bring about harm to the subject, active emotions can only bring about increases in power – never decreases (E3def3, E3p4, E3p6, E4app3). Active pleasures, in other words, can never be excessive and harm

the overall well-being of my mind and body. Examples of active pleasures are intuitive self-contentment (*mentis acquiescentia/animi acquiescentia* [G II 297/G II 308]) and intellectual love of God (*amor dei intellectualis* [G II 300]). Intuitive self-contentment is pleasure derived from adequate knowledge of my physical and intellectual power (E5p27). Intellectual love of God is love derived from adequate intuitive knowledge of God as the cause of my intellectual power to understand. In other words, intuition allows me to adequately understand how the essence and power of my mind and body follow from and express God's own essence and power (E5p32).[39] Spinoza identifies the highest happiness (*summa felicitas*), blessedness (*beatitudo*), with intuitive self-contentment and intellectual love of God, these two pleasures being equivalent (E4app4 / G II 267; see also E5p36s, E5p42).[40] As the constituents of happiness, these pleasures represent the ultimate good, upon which all other goods derive their value.

This conception of blessedness, however, presents us with a potential problem. On the one hand, Spinoza says that "[b]lessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself" (E5p42), and thus it "consist[s] in . . . perfection itself" (E5p33s). On the other hand, he says that "blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God" (E4app4), "blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love towards God [i.e., intellectual love of God]" and "spiritual contentment [i.e., self-contentment]" (5p36s), and "blessedness consists in love towards God (Pr.36, V and Sch.), a love that arises from the third kind of knowledge (Cor. Pr.32, V) . . ." (E5p42d). Blessedness, in other words, seems to be constituted by both intuition as intellectual perfection, power, or virtue (these three being equivalent) and active pleasure as an increase in perfection or power. The issue is that blessedness cannot coherently be both *perfection itself* and an *increase in perfection*. As Miller (2015: 192) notes, Spinoza denies this state of affairs: "[P]leasure is not

39. More precisely, this adequate knowledge involves understanding the non-providential, immanent, and deterministic nature of God as the substance of all being, individuals such as ourselves being contained within God as modes or determinate expressions of Its essence (E1p14–8, E1p29, E1p32–3, E1app, E2p10). Spinoza thinks much suffering comes from believing that God purposefully and benevolently created and structured this world (as an entity separate from Itself) for the sake of humans as beings with undetermined free will. Intellectual love of God and intuitive self-contentment, in contrast, bring tranquility through our recognition of our intrinsic connection to God, the deterministic order of all things, the wholly natural status of humans, the existence of freedom as self-determination, and the distinction between what is/is not in our natural power (E1def7, E2p48, E3pref, E4app32, E5p1–20, E5p32, E5p36, E5p42; see also TTP Ch. 6, 449 / G III 88).

40. Spinoza seems to conceive of happiness here in purely intellectual terms (see, e.g., Miller 2015: 5.5–5.6). However, there is good reason, by virtue of Spinoza's identity theory of mind and body, to think that Spinozistic happiness also has a bodily constituent in terms of pleasure and/or activity (see, e.g., DeBrabander 2007: 60–2; James 2014; Kisner 2011: 78–9), even if Spinoza may not have adequately worked out what this constituent was at the time, due to (from his perspective) the deficiency of scientific understanding of the body in this period (E3p2s; see also Letter 83 of his correspondence).

perfection. If a man were to be born with the perfection to which he passes, he would be in possession of it without the emotion [*affectu*] of pleasure" (E3da3ex / G II 191).

A potential solution to this problem is to say that Spinoza has a different kind of pleasure in mind when describing blessedness. This position is endorsed by Bove (1994: 480), Carlisle (2021: 131, 141–2), Della Rocca (2008: 157), Garrett (2018: 283–4), Miller (2015: 192), Youpa (2020: 119–22), and apparently Spinoza himself: "For in so far as [intellectual love of God] is related to God, it is (Pr. 35, V) pleasure (*if we may still use this term*) accompanied by the idea of himself, and this is also the case in so far as it is related to the [human] mind [as intuitive self-contentment] (Pr. 27, V)" (E5p36s).[41] Spinoza seems to acknowledge that intellectual love of God and intuitive self-contentment are special kinds of pleasure that are shared by God as thinking being and an individual human mind as a particular expression of God's intellectual power.

It is made clear in the *Ethics*, however, that God is absolutely infinite (E1def6, E1p8, E1p11) and immutable (E1p20c2), and as a result, is incapable of passive or active increases or decreases in power (E5p17). If God experiences any sort of pleasure, it cannot be one constituted by a change in power. The pleasure associated with blessedness that both God and an individual mind share must then be non-transitional, which explains Spinoza's comment "if we may still use this term [of 'pleasure']." Bove (1994: 480) and Carlisle (2021: chap. 6) describe this intuitive pleasure as a pleasure of "rest" or "stillness" (i.e., *quies*), in contrast to pleasures of agitation in particular (through passions) or movement (through passion or reason) in general. Such adjectives are indicative of the non-transitional and ultimate nature of blessedness qua pleasure.[42]

Miller (2015: 192–3), however, argues that this non-transitional pleasure, despite what the abovementioned passages may indicate, is not a constituent of blessedness, but rather a consequent of it, citing Aquinas and Seneca as precedent for this sort of view.[43] Miller makes this argument to illustrate Spinoza's

41. Emphasis mine.

42. Schrijvers (1999: 77–8) argues that blessedness is still transitional in nature, otherwise it would not have affective importance. He argues that the transition consists in the acquisition of intuitive ideas. However, he does not explain how this can be reconciled with the fact that God is supposed to share in this kind of pleasure (as self-love or intuitive self-contentment) with us, since God qua infinite and eternal cannot experience transitions in perfection or knowledge. It seems to me that Schrijvers is conflating the non-transitional nature of blessedness per se with either the (prior) active pleasure we experience in the process of achieving some degree of blessedness when we acquire intuitive knowledge or the (subsequent) capacity of blessedness to produce further transitional and non-transitional pleasures through the acquisition of further adequate knowledge (E5p31c, 5p42d).

43. Lebuffe (2009: 199) entertains the possibility of the opposite conclusion, that intuitive knowledge as virtue is not the constituent of blessedness, but rather blessedness as pleasure is the affective consequent of such knowledge. I think this reading is also wrong (i.e., intuition and intellectual love

agreement with the Stoics, specifically. While I will not contradict his reading of Aquinas or Seneca, nevertheless I think that Miller is letting his Stoic comparison unjustifiably influence his reading of Spinoza in this context. I say "unjustifiably" because, unlike Aquinas and Seneca, Miller provides no explicit evidence of Spinoza referring to this special pleasure as a consequent of blessedness, and I do not think such evidence exists. On the contrary, Miller himself provides more than enough evidence from the *Ethics* (namely, E4app4, E4p18s, E5p33s) that Spinoza considers both virtue *and* intellectual love of God (or intuitive self-contentment) constituents of blessedness, including the following passage from the *TTP*: "[Philosophers] place true happiness solely in virtue and peace of mind [*veram felicitatem in sola virtute, & tranquillitate animi constituunt*]" (chap. 6: 449 / G III 88; see also E5p42d). Blessedness is thus a pleasure, albeit one which is non-transitional and coextensive (if not identical) with virtue.[44]

Although there is strong evidence for understanding blessedness as a non-transitional pleasure, is Spinoza's conception of blessedness coherent? Carlisle (2021: 113) describes intuitive self-contentment as "the affective, experiential character of . . . virtue and blessedness," namely what it feels like to be virtuous and blessed. Della Rocca (2008: 157) claims that the non-transitional nature of intuitive self-contentment is "a harmless broadening of Spinoza's account" of pleasure. Garret (2018: 283–4) argues that we should distinguish between emotion in the narrow sense and emotion in the broad sense. In the narrow sense, we have the emotion of pleasure as an increase in power. In the broad sense, however, we have the emotion of blessedness as a "kind of eternal analogue of joy" and an "eternal analogue of love." Finally, both Garrett (2018: 284) and Youpa (2020: 120–2) argue that intuitive knowledge involves two kinds of pleasure, one that follows from our durational existence in time in the infinite causal chain of Nature and the other that follows from our eternal existence insofar as our bodily/mental essence follows from God's essence. The durational pleasure is a normal transitional pleasure, while the eternal pleasure is blessedness as a special non-transitional pleasure.

For my part, I am not convinced that this conception of blessedness is obviously a harmless broadening of Spinoza's overall account of pleasure. On the contrary, I think there is a potential problem that arises from explicit comments that Spinoza makes about pleasure. The core problem lies in E3da3ex, where he explicitly denies that pleasure qua emotion can be perfection itself. Miller (2015) is right to draw our attention to this passage when making sense of happiness.

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of God are equally constitutive of blessedness), but since it conceives of blessedness as a kind of pleasure, Lebuffe's reading does not conflict with my overall intentions in this paper.

44. Wilson (1995: 128) takes the position that intuitive knowledge of God qua virtue and intuitive self-contentment qua active pleasure are "one and the same," which I am inclined to agree with based on the above textual evidence.

Here Spinoza seems to be ruling out the very thing he claims in Part 5 when describing blessedness as two forms of pleasure. On the other hand, contra Miller, Spinoza also seems to acknowledge that he is departing from his original definition of pleasure, but does not explicitly reconcile this move with his assertion in the abovementioned Explication. Excluding this passage, we might also question more generally how Spinoza could posit the existence of two kinds of pleasure, one transitional and the other non-transitional. What reason do we have to describe both as the same underlying thing?[45] As we saw above, Epicurus runs into the same basic problem with his distinction between kinetic and katastematic pleasure.

Since the purpose of this paper is not to evaluate the validity and coherence of Spinoza's system, I will not attempt to definitively resolve this tension. However, I will make a few concluding remarks to flesh out Spinoza's conception of blessedness qua pleasure further. Firstly, at the very least, we see sufficient evidence that Spinoza is inclined to say (coherently or not) that (i) there are two kinds of pleasure: transitional and non-transitional and (ii) the non-transitional kind is a constituent of blessedness. Secondly, E3da3ex says that there cannot be a non-transitional pleasure which is an emotion (*affectus*), that is, a pleasure which represents how one is affected by an internal or external cause—it does not, however, say that *every conceivable instance of pleasure* must be transitional or an emotion. Blessedness could still be coherently referred to as a pleasure then, but in this instance, it would represent a particular kind of *affection* (*affectio*), mode, or feature that God and individuals possess by virtue of the expression of their power (at least in the context of intuition). Emotions are a subspecies of affection, namely affections that represent changes in power. Ultimately, any instance of pleasure will be an affection, but on this potential reading some pleasures will be affections qua expressions of changes in power while others will be affections qua expressions of power per se.[46] We find a similar precedent for this sort of move in Spinoza's descriptions of wonder and nobility. Wonder is a common feeling that he denies is an emotion because it is an isolated thought lacking a "positive cause" to determine the mind, and thus alter the latter's degree of power. Nevertheless, he grants that wonder can lead to emotions like devotion or consternation (E3da4ex, E3da10, E3da42). Concerning nobility, Youpa (2020: 161–2) points out that Spinoza identifies nobility with a certain kind of love. This

45. Considering intelligibility is an important component of his philosophy, by virtue of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (E1ax3, E1p11d2), Spinoza cannot simply posit two kinds of pleasure as a brute fact, which he seems to have done in the latter half of Part V of the *Ethics*.

46. As a result, terminologically I disagree with Garrett (2018) that blessedness is best described as an analogue form of emotion, pleasure, or love. Describing pleasure as a particular kind of affection allows us to retain terminological and conceptual coherence in Spinoza's system, since we are here only expanding on the kinds of affections that can follow from the nature of God and the natures of individuals qua modes of God.

is significant for our purposes because love is formally defined as a species of pleasure (E3da6), while nobility is defined as a species of (active) desire (E3p56s). In equating these two feelings, Spinoza is introducing a new kind of love that departs from his previous definitions. Both wonder and nobility therefore illustrate Spinoza's willingness to acknowledge the existence of certain affections qua feelings that do not cleanly fit into his formal taxonomy of emotions.

Thirdly, we can potentially explain how both transitional pleasure and blessedness are the same underlying thing by describing pleasure fundamentally as an attribute-neutral affection of natural power. Pleasure is attribute-neutral because it is expressed through both Thought and Extension (i.e., intellectual and physical being) simultaneously (E1def4, E2p7s), and is an affection that expresses the power of an individual's nature in two different ways, transitionally and non-transitionally. This solution is largely the same as the one that I offer in Section 2 concerning Epicurus's own dual account of pleasure. Both make it unclear how health-oriented changes in one's natural state of being and healthy natural states of being per se can both be classified as pleasure. In both cases, I argue that the confusion can be resolved by appeal to the fact that both kinds of pleasure are characterized by the promotion of one's natural well-being, health being equated with unimpeded natural functioning in Epicurus and natural power in Spinoza. Consequently, Spinoza's account of blessedness qua pleasure is arguably lacking in important details, but is not necessarily incoherent. In any case, pleasure (in its passive, active, transitional, and non-transitional forms) is intrinsically good in Spinoza's philosophical system, thereby committing him to claim (3), due to its intimate relationship to the promotion of one's natural well-being as intellectual and physical power – the highest happiness being a kind of pleasure which represents the highest expression of this power.

In this outline of Spinoza's account of pleasure then, we find that, like Epicurus, he is committed to claim (1), that pleasure holds a necessary connection to healthy natural being, claim (2), that pleasure manifests healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se, and claim (3), that pleasure is by nature good. Concerning (1) and (2), healthy being for Spinoza is ontologically grounded in the conatus as an essential self-preservative force. Transitional pleasure (as an increase in power) strengthens this force, thereby making one more physically and intellectually empowered and healthy, while the non-transitional pleasure of blessedness (as a state of healthy being per se) expresses the physical and intellectual power of the conatus itself. Moreover, this conception of pleasure presents the same basic problem for both Epicurus and Spinoza, and can potentially be resolved in the same way through pleasure's relationship to promoting healthy being. Finally, Spinoza is ethically committed to (3) because he associates goodness with whatever promotes the well-being of the conatus, and pleasure by its very nature either strengthens or re-affirms the

power of this natural self-preservative force. With this in mind, pleasures are only considered harmful and bad insofar as they undermine their own health-oriented (namely, empowering) nature. Consequently, there is strong agreement between Spinoza and Epicurus, contra the Stoics, concerning the ontological and ethical nature of pleasure.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to undermine Stoic and Neo-Stoic readings of Spinoza by showing his strong agreement with Epicurus concerning the ontological and ethical nature of pleasure. Both Spinoza and Epicurus consider pleasure (1) to hold a necessary connection to healthy being, (2) to manifest healthy being through positive changes in state and states of healthy being per se, and (3) to be good by nature – three claims the Stoics vehemently deny due to their views on sensual pleasure (as a moral indifferent) and emotional pleasure (which is associated with both sickness and health in the soul). From this comparative analysis we can conclude that, despite his agreements with them on other subjects like determinism and psychotherapy, Spinoza's conception of pleasure is fundamentally opposed to that of the Stoics. In other words, on the subject of pleasure, Spinoza is clearly neither a Stoic nor a Neo-Stoic.

My goal here however is not to support an Epicurean or Neo-Epicurean reading of Spinoza, either. As I mentioned in the Introduction, I think Spinoza is best understood as an original thinker in the eudaimonistic tradition. What the above analysis offers instead is a rich account of Spinoza's engagement with two of his fellow eudaimonists. Much like Epicurus and Aristotle share more in common on the subject of external things than Aristotle and the Stoics, because Epicurus and Aristotle (contra the Stoics) grant that some external things are genuine goods and play a necessary and direct role in promoting happiness, Spinoza and Epicurus share more in common on the subject of pleasure than Spinoza and the Stoics. With that said, such strong agreements are also a valuable avenue for detecting subtle, but meaningful, differences between these eudaimonists which characterize their distinct contributions to this ethical tradition. While Epicurus and Aristotle agree on the necessity of external goods, the goods they think are required for happiness differ drastically. Where Epicurus thinks we only need external things to meet our basic health needs (PD XXI), like nutrition and shelter, Aristotle suggests that we need nutrition, shelter, correct upbringing, and a well-functioning state that offers all the resources for developing various moral and intellectual virtues (NE I.8, VII.13, X.7–9). These differences with respect to this fundamental subject of agreement between them does much to reveal the distinctive character of both eudaimonistic accounts.

I wish to conclude this paper by showing how something similar occurs with the discussion of Spinoza and Epicurus on pleasure. Despite their common ground on this subject, there are two central places where they disagree. Firstly, they disagree concerning the nature of happiness as healthy being. For Epicurus, happiness is mere unimpeded natural functioning. Simply being healthy is sufficient to be happy in an Epicurean sense. Activities and external things can only instrumentally bring about, maintain, or diversify the experience of happiness – they cannot increase it. In contrast, for Spinoza happiness is a life of pleasure *and* activity – joyful self-empowerment – and this joyful self-empowerment can be increased by further activities and external things. Spinozistic happiness, in other words, is a life of healthy and joyful *activity*, not mere healthy functioning, with the potential for ever greater happiness as one promotes and expresses their healthy states of being.[47] Consequently, Epicurus offers an account of happiness which carries the advantage of being fairly easy to achieve and maintain, while Spinoza offers an account which carries the advantage of strongly emphasizing the active connotations of be*ing* and liv*ing* well, in order to encourage us to express ourselves as fully as possible physically and intellectually.

Secondly, they disagree about the relationship between mind and body in constituting happiness. Epicurus considers mind and body distinct things, which carries into his discussion of mental and bodily pleasures and the subsequent ethical hierarchy between them. In this account, mental pleasures are greater goods in promoting happiness than bodily pleasures, even though both are considered necessary and constitutive of happiness. Spinoza, conversely, conceives of mind and body as identical, and in turn ethically equal. There is no hierarchy between mental and bodily pleasures, because they are different, but strictly corresponding, aspects of the same underlying pleasures as health-oriented processes and states. In this context, Epicurus offers us an invaluable way to combat inevitable physical suffering through recollective, anticipatory, and reflective pleasures that promote stable peace of mind qua mental health, while Spinoza teaches us that there is no flourishing of the mind without the body and vice versa – that we must cherish bodily and mental health and empowerment equally.

Whether we embrace the Epicurean or Spinozistic conception of pleasure in our approach to happiness, both philosophers help us see the true nature and value of pleasure in living well. Pleasure often leads us astray, but, as we have seen, this harm is the result of our own misunderstanding and misuse of nature's greatest good and not at all the fault of pleasure or our essential desire for it.

47. This emphasis on happiness as activity also places Spinoza in strong agreement with Aristotle, for whom happiness is a life of virtuous activity (NE I.7, X.8–9). In fact, we might say that Spinoza's account of happiness combines the insights of Epicurus concerning pleasure and Aristotle concerning virtue. The Stoics also think that virtue constitutes happiness (DL VII.89, VII.127), but, unlike Spinoza and Aristotle, they say that happiness consists in virtuous *dispositions* and not the activities that follow from those dispositions (VII.89; OM III.22).

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Abbreviations

Aristotle:
NE = *Nicomachean Ethics* in Aristotle (2002)
Epicurus:
LH = *Letter to Herodotus*
LM = *Letter to Menoeceus*
PD = *Principal Doctrines*
All references to Epicurus's texts are from Epicurus (1994).
Stoics:
HB = *Handbook* in Epictetus (2014)
Miscellaneous Ancient Sources:
DL = Diogenes Laertius (1931)
L&S = Long and Sedley (1987)
OM = *On Moral Ends* in Cicero (2004)
TD = *Tusculan Disputations* in Cicero (1945)
Spinoza:
G = Spinoza (Gebhardt [Ed.] 1925)
E = *Ethics*
TIE = *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*
TTP = *Theological-Political Treatise*
All references to Spinoza's texts translated into English are taken from Spinoza (2002).

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