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SPINOZA'S MOTIVATIONAL PLURALISM

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It is a curious fact that although psychological egoism has few philosophical adherents outside of American undergraduate classrooms, careful readers of Benedict Spinoza confidently ascribe this position to him. This is still more curious when one considers the case of one of Spinoza's his most influential predecessors, Thomas Hobbes, who declares that "of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some *Good to himselfe*" (*Leviathan*, Ch. 14 [2014, 202]; cf. *Leviathan*, Ch. 15 [2014, 230]). Hobbes appears by most measures to be a *better* candidate for the label of a psychological egoist than Spinoza. And yet he has more or less ceased to be portrayed as a psychological egoist in the scholarly literature, at least since the appearance of Bernard Gert's 1967 essay "Hobbes and Psychological Egoism."[1] Given that psychological egoism is held in poor philosophical regard and that even Spinoza's apparently more brazenly egoistic predecessor is no longer widely regarded by scholars as a psychological egoist, one might wonder why Spinoza cannot seem to shed the label.

To be sure, the psychological egoist reading of Spinoza is not without critics. One such critic is Michael LeBuffe, who argues that when it comes to the psychology of motivation—which is to say, when it comes to the *objects* of desires,[2] or the guise under which we act—Spinoza is best regarded not as a psychological egoist, but as a kind of psychological hedonist.

In this paper, I argue that with respect to the psychology of mo-

1. Gert argues that Hobbes is a "tautological egoist," or one who thinks that voluntary actions aim at the satisfaction of some desire, and not a psychological egoist, or one who thinks that all voluntary actions are self-interested (Gert 1967 and 2010). For a detailed account of the normative significance of Hobbes's non-egoistic theory of motivation, see Lloyd 2009.
2. "Objects" of desire should be construed broadly to encompass both things and states of affairs.

tivation,[3] Spinoza is neither a hedonist nor an egoist, but is rather a thoroughgoing motivational pluralist, or one who thinks that we can intrinsically desire a disparate range of objects that do not fall under any single guise (i.e., as beneficial to oneself or as joy-promoting). But, while Spinoza is not a psychological egoist or hedonist, there are non-psychological features of his account of motivation—i.e., features of desire that do not figure into the guise under which we act—in virtue of which we can appreciate what is right about egoist and hedonist readings of Spinoza.

My account of Spinoza's theory of motivation also sheds light on other corners of Spinoza's philosophy. It helps to account for the intractability of disputes about his metaethics, since it reveals the sense in which evaluative predicates (e.g., good, bad) are at once desire-dependent *and* desire-independent. And it reveals the explanatory power of Spinoza's theory of action, showing how he preserves the possibility of universal intelligibility without assuming that we always act under a single invariant guise.

The structure of the paper is as follows. I open with a brief presentation of the interpretative landscape (§1), before examining the relationships between striving, desire, and hedonic states (joy, sadness) (§2). This sets the stage for the subsequent critique of the psychological egoism (§3) and psychological hedonism (§4), and for the delineation of a thoroughly pluralistic alternative. In the final section (§5), I examine the *non-psychological* senses in which he is an egoist and a hedonist, revealing the merits of Spinoza's comprehensive (psychological and non-psychological) theory of motivation.

3. In referring to the "psychology of motivation," I, like virtually all other commentators, am relying on terms or concepts that are foreign to Spinoza's texts (consider, for instance, the well-worn labels of "egoism" and "hedonism"). When I use such terms, it is either because they are convenient ways of capturing concepts that *are* in the text (e.g., "hedonic states" for forms of "joy" and "sadness"), or because they help to elucidate features of Spinoza's position that are not easily expressed using his own lexicon.

1. Spinoza and Motivation: The Interpretative Landscape

1.1 The Psychological Egoist Reading

Spinoza is widely read as a psychological egoist. Perhaps the classic articulation of this view in the Anglophone scholarship comes from C.D. Broad's *Five Types of Ethical Theory*:

> Spinoza's psychology is fundamentally and explicitly egoistic. Every emotion, volition, and action of a man is an expression of the Vital Impulse, which is his essence. And this Vital Impulse, like every other conatus, is a striving for *self* maintenance and *self*-preservation *and for nothing else* (1930: 35).[4]

This interpretation has had considerable sticking power. Recent influential scholars like Jonathan Bennett (1984: §§57–58) and Don Garrett (1996: 6–8) have also ascribed to Spinoza such a view. And in his recent book *Think Least of Death: Spinoza on How to Live and How to Die* Steven Nadler presents egoism—both psychological and ethical—as a central pillar of Spinoza's moral philosophy, going so far as to claim that Spinoza's psychological egoism is "unadulterated and exceptionless" (2020: 132; elsewhere, Nadler calls this Spinoza's "universal egoism" [2016: 123]). He writes:

> Spinoza is best understood as a psychological egoist. Everything that every individual in Nature desires and does, whatever they seek to achieve or attain or avoid, is fundamentally motivated by the striving to maintain and increase their *conatus*. We are always and necessarily moved to pursue—that is, we desire—only things that appear (rightly or wrongly) to promote our well-

4. Broad is far from the first person to label Spinoza an egoist. Consider, for instance, Nietzsche's famous postcard to Overbeck from July 30, 1881, in which he declares: "I have a precursor, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just now, was inspired by 'instinct'. . . . in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic, and evil" (Nietzsche 1982: 92).

> being, and we are averse to whatever appears to weaken our condition (2020: 131–132).

Nadler's reading is representative in that it takes Spinoza's psychological egoism to follow directly from his so-called conatus doctrine, according to which "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (3p6).[5]

The conatus doctrine does indeed serve as the foundation of the account of motivation that follows in *Ethics* 3–4, grounding, for instance, the downstream conclusion that: "No one ... unless he is defeated by causes external, and contrary, to his nature, neglects to seek his own advantage, *or* to preserve his being" (4p20s). Given the centrality of the apparently egoistic conatus doctrine for Spinoza's subsequent analysis of human motivation, it is perhaps unsurprising that Spinoza is widely regarded as a psychological egoist.

1.2 *LeBuffe's Unrestricted Object Hedonism*

Michael LeBuffe has advanced philosophical and textual reasons for doubting that Spinoza is a psychological egoist. He is reluctant to attribute this view to Spinoza on philosophical grounds, because "simple introspection" reveals that one intrinsically desires a great many things other than self-preservation (2009: 108). Since psychological egoism is, as LeBuffe sees it, "a patently bad account of human desire" (ibid.), we should not ascribe it to Spinoza unless we have exhausted all other plausible interpretative options.

LeBuffe also claims that there are strong textual reasons for resisting the psychological egoist interpretation, since it "threatens to flatten Spinoza's moral theory in a way that seems implausible, given the complexity and variety of Spinoza's claims" (ibid.). Where Spinoza allows that one might rationally pursue physical, intellectual, and social goods, the psychological egoist reading has it that we always only pursue one thing: self-interest. LeBuffe elsewhere argues that unless it were possible to *fail* to pursue one's own preservation, it would be otiose for Spinoza to claim that we "should strive to preserve his own being" (4p18s) (LeBuffe 2004).

LeBuffe's alternative is to read Spinoza as a kind of psychological hedonist. At first blush, it is not clear how hedonism fares any better than egoism, since psychological hedonism is, on most renderings, a mere species of egoism.[6] However, there are two ways in which LeBuffe's *Unrestricted Object Hedonism* differs from psychological egoism. First, it asserts that what we *consciously* pursue—that is, the end in view or the guise under which we act—is not perseverance or power in general, but *joy* specifically. Hedonism, rather than undifferentiated egoism, is supposed to capture the *psychology* of motivation: we pursue things under the guise or aspect of the pleasurable. Second, as the label indicates, *Unrestricted Object Hedonism* allows that one can pursue a plurality of objects: any object that one associates with joy. On LeBuffe's reading, joy and whatever we associate with joy are "components" of the complex object of desire (2009: 112, 136).

Since the psychological egoist reading turns on the close connection between desires and striving, and since LeBuffe's alternative hinges on the alleged distinctiveness of desire, as a conscious mental state (capturing the guise under which we act), if we are to make progress in understanding Spinoza's account of psychological motivation, it behooves us to examine his concept of desire. In the next section, I will do just that, considering not only how desire relates to striving, but how it relates to the hedonic states (joy, sadness) that are crucial for the hedonist interpretation.

5. Unless otherwise noted, references are to the *Ethics*. I adopt the following abbreviations for the *Ethics*: Numerals refer to parts; 'p' denotes proposition; 'c' denotes corollary; 'd' denotes demonstration; 'D' denotes definition; DA denotes Definition of the Affects; 's' denotes scholium (e.g. 3p59s refers to *Ethics*, part 3, proposition 59, scholium). All translations are from Curley (Spinoza 1985-2016). Citations of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP) and *Tractatus Politicus* (TP) refer to the chapter and section numbers in Spinoza 1985-2016. All references to the Latin are to *Spinoza Opera*, edited by Carl Gebhardt.

6. See Feinberg 2017.

2. Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Desire

2.1 Striving and Desire

As noted above, the egoist interpretation derives much of its support from the close connection between striving and desiring, a connection that is apparent from the passage in which Spinoza introduces the notion of desire:

> When [striving] is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite (*appetitus*). This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man... Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire (*cupiditas*) is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious (*conscii*) of their appetite. So desire can be defined as Appetite together with consciousness (*conscientia*) of the appetite (3p9s).

One might naturally wonder about the significance of the reference to *consciousness* in this construal of desire. Some, like Jonathan Bennett, treat it as relatively unimportant and simply identify striving with desire.[7] There is some support for this view, as Spinoza himself drops the reference to consciousness in a couple of texts, treating desire and striving or appetite as equivalent (3p57d; 3 DA 1).

However, the simple identification of striving and desire cannot be quite right, since striving is one's "actual essence" (3p7), whereas desire is an affect (3p11s), and affects *depend on* essences or natures (see 3p57). If desire were identical with striving, then affects like joy and sadness would be explanatorily posterior to desire, since the affects are explanatorily posterior to one's striving or power of acting. This would conflict with his claim that these three affects—desire, joy, and sadness—are all "primary" or underived (3p11s).[8]

Happily, though, we need not conclude that Spinoza is inconsistent here, since Spinoza typically does not identify desire with one's striving, appetite, or essence *simpliciter*. Rather, he generally construes desire as one's striving, appetite, or essence *insofar as it is modified in some way*. We've already seen one qualification: striving *insofar as one is conscious of it*. Here are two more construals:

> Desire is man's very essence, *insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something*" (3DA1, ii.190).
>
> Desire is the very essence, *or* nature, of each [man] insofar as it is conceived to be *determined, by whatever constitution* [constitutione] *he has, to do something* (3p56d). (emphases added)

At this point, an interpretative problem arises concerning how to reconcile these three formulations: desire as one's essence or striving insofar as one is (a) conscious of it, (b) determined by some *affection* to do something, and (c) determined by one's *constitution* to do something.

Spinoza attempts to establish the extensional equivalence of these formulations in the "Definitions of the Affects" at the end of *Ethics* 3. The reconciliation of (b) and (c) is quite straightforward, since Spinoza claims that "by an affection of the human essence we understand any constitution of that essence" (3DA1, ii.190). The key to establishing the extensional equivalence of (a) and (b) is to be found in 2p23 and its applications. While 2p23 itself only explicitly establishes the *necessity* of affection for self-consciousness ("The mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body"), the second half of the demonstration seeks to establish that affections are *sufficient* for self-consciousness. And elsewhere he invokes 2p23 as having established that affections are sufficient for self-consciousness, as in 3p9d (the very proposition that sets up the definition of desire as "appetite together with consciousness of the appetite"), where he writes: "the mind (by IIP23) is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the body's affections" (cf. 3p30d; 3DA1Exp). And, so as to leave no doubt that he intends the three construals to be coextensive, he draws on 2p23 again in 3DA1Exp in support of the claim that where one's essence or striving is affected, one is conscious of one's striving. We may thus join together the three formulations in the following way:

7. Bennett 1984: §60. Della Rocca 2022: 250.
8. J. Steinberg 2016.

> Desire is one's essence or striving insofar as it is constituted or affected (rendering one conscious of this striving) such that it is determined to do something.[9]

The crucial upshot here is that since desire is not striving *simpliciter*, but striving insofar as it is affected, constituted, or determined in some way, the fact that striving is *for* perseverance or power does not entail on its own that desires are always also *for* perseverance or power.[10] When we desire something, we are consciously pursuing it, and what we consciously pursue need not, as we shall see, include our own perseverance or power. LeBuffe and I agree on this point. Desire, and not striving *simpliciter*, captures the psychology of motivation, the guise under which we act.

To get a better handle on this psychological notion of desire and to set up our subsequent analysis of Spinoza's putative hedonism, it will be helpful to consider how desire relates to the other "primary" affects, the hedonic states of joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*).

2.2 *Desire and Hedonic States*

While desire is one's striving insofar as it is determined by an affection to do something, this should not be taken to mean that any time one is affected in any way one forms a desire. Rather, what it means for one's *striving* to be affected is for one's *power of acting* to be affected, that is, augmented or diminished.[11] Since joy and sadness are precisely affections through which one's power of acting is augmented or diminished (3p11s; 3DA2-3), it is when we are affected with joy or sadness that we come to desire things. Desires are thus determined by the affects of joy and sadness.

Spinoza explicitly writes of desire *arising from* [*oritur*] joy and sadness in several passages (3p37; 4p15d; 4p60). Now, if "arising from" were understood as a causal relationship obtaining between two distinct relata, we would have to conclude that joy and sadness are prior to desire, which would, once again, run contrary to the claim of equiprimordiality of joy, sadness, and desire. Rather than taking this to be a causal relationship, I take it to be one of constitution: joy and sadness give rise to in the sense of *constituting* the desire.

To see what I mean by this, we must get a better handle on what joy and sadness—which we might call "hedonic states" or "emotions"—are, for Spinoza. Under the attribute of thought, they are not just ideas of transitions of power; they are ideas of transitions of power that take an intentional object (2A3), which is the putative cause of the change in one's power of acting (3p56). An emotion is thus a complex representation. It represents a change in one's power of acting, which is experienced in terms of its hedonic valence, as either pleasant/uplifting (representing an increase in one's power) or painful/deflating (representing a decrease in one's power). But it also represents an intentional object (putative cause), a thing towards which the affect is directed.[12]

With this basic account in place, let's consider how an emotion relates to a desire. A hedonic representation (e.g., the joyful idea of coffee) gives rise to a particular determination of one's striving (e.g., desire for coffee) not in the sense of producing a distinct, posterior effect but in the sense that one's striving is given a determinate character. (Compare: a change in the mean kinetic molecular energy of the coffee in my mug determines a change in its temperature not in the sense that the change in temperature is some further fact, or distinct effect; rather, the change in temperature is constituted by the change in molecular energy). The desire for coffee, then, *just is* the hedonic representation insofar as it determines one's striving in a particular way—it

9. There is a lively discussion about how to understand Spinoza's account of consciousness. For a range of views, see Garrett 2008, LeBuffe 2010, Marshall 2013, Marrama 2017, and Renz 2018.
10. For an account of how to conceive of the affect-essence relation in general that is compatible with the account of the desire-striving relation I am advancing here, see Hübner 2017.
11. 3Post1 indicates that not all affections are affects, or changes in one's power of acting.
12. For contemporary accounts that unite the experiential and intentional aspects of emotion in a similar fashion, see Goldie 2000 and Prinz 2004.

is the *conative* aspect of the emotion itself. This explains the covariation of hedonic states and desires described in 3p56d:

> Desire is the very essence, or nature, of each [man] insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever constitution he has, to do something (see P9S). Therefore, as each [man] is affected by external causes with this or that species of joy, sadness, love, hate, and so on, that is, as his nature is constituted in one way or the other, so his desires vary.

Spinoza's comprehensive account of a passion (or passive affect) as "a confused idea, by which the mind affirms of its body, or some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before, which, when it is given, determines the mind to think of this rather than that" (3GDA), is meant to capture both the hedonic aspect (representing and affirming a greater or lesser power of acting) and the desiderative aspect (determining the mind to think this or that) of an affect.[13]

In sum, on my reading, joy and sadness are ways in which one's striving is affected; and desires are these very same affects considered in terms of how they concretely determine one's striving.

3. The Case against Psychological Egoism

With this account of desire in place, we can now effectively examine Spinoza's account of the psychology of motivation.

3.1 Two Forms of Psychological Egoism

Somewhat confusingly, there are two ways of construing psychological egoism that are sometimes run together in the literature. One the one hand, there is a version of psychological egoism according to which the only thing that we *intrinsically* desire, or desire for its own sake, is our own welfare. All other things are desired as instruments to this solitary intrinsic aim. This version of psychological egoism, which might be called monistic psychological egoism, is the target of Joseph Butler's celebrated critique in his sermons and of LeBuffe's critique of the psychological egoist reading of Spinoza.

However, there is a version of psychological egoism that can admit of motivational pluralism. On this account, the claim is not that there is a single object of desire, but a single intended *beneficiary* of all of one's desires, namely, the agent herself. This version can allow that people intrinsically desire a range of things, but it insists that the intrinsic intended beneficiary of all that one desires is oneself. This version of psychological egoism is opposed to altruism.

I will now argue that Spinoza was not a psychological egoist in *either* sense. First, the case for motivational pluralism.

3.2 Spinoza's Motivational Pluralism

Spinoza allows for a rich profusion of desires. There are at least three different dimensions along which he individuates desires. First, and most obviously, desires can be individuated by their underlying emotions. Just as we can experience a variety of emotions, we can be motivated by a variety of corresponding desires, such as pity, envy, pride, timidity, gluttony, devotion, anger, fear, hope, and so forth.

Second, desire-types are consequent to, and dependent on, the nature or essence of the desiring agents: "each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other" (3p57). While in various places, Spinoza appeals to a shared human nature (1p8s2; 3p32s; 4p35d; 4p37s1; TTP3.9; TTP4.18; TP4.5; TP7.27), he nevertheless concludes in the scholium to this passage that "there is no small difference between the gladness by which a drunk is led and the gladness a philosopher possesses" (3p57s), suggesting that the character of desires of roughly the same class can vary considerably even amongst humans.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, desires are individuated by their objects (3p56d).[14] One's love of coffee is distinct from one's love

13. For more on desire as the determination to think, see J. Steinberg 2023.

14. For the relation of affecting object and intentional object, see e.g., 2p17/s as cited in 3p56d.

of German expressionist films, of one's cat, of sunny days, and so forth; and the desires corresponding to these distinct forms of love are likewise distinct. Indeed, Spinoza abandons all hope of enumerating or explicating all types of desire, since "there are as many [species of affects] as there are species of object" (see 3p56s). Indeed, if Spinoza is a thoroughgoing nominalist in the way that he is sometimes understood, talk of species of desires is nothing more than an abstract way of referring to a collection of desires which are themselves, like all things, fundamentally particular.[15]

Admittedly, showing that Spinoza allows for a rich panoply of desires does not, on its own, establish that he was motivational pluralist, since this requires not just any old plurality of desires, but a plurality of *intrinsic desires*, or desires for things for their own sakes. Nevertheless, given the profusion of desire-types, the burden is squarely on the motivational monist to show that, for Spinoza, all of these desires in fact have the agent's own welfare as their intrinsic object. The response of most interpreters has been to argue that desires are forms of striving, and striving has a single object: persevering in one's being. However, given the distinction between striving *simpliciter* and desire (§2.1), one is not entitled, without further argument, to conclude that because *striving* has a single object, *desires* must also.[16]

Moreover, there is clear evidence that Spinoza allowed for a multiplicity of intrinsic desires. For instance, in the opening passages of his early work on method, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE), Spinoza claims that most people seem to build their lives around the pursuit of at least one of the main objects: wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure:

> [A]s far as sensual pleasure is concerned, the mind is so caught up in it… that it is quite prevented from thinking of anything else…… The mind is also distracted not a little by the pursuit of honors and wealth, particularly when the latter is sought only for its own sake [*propter se*], because it is assumed to be the highest good [*summum bonum*]. But the mind is far more distracted by honor. For this is always assumed to be good through itself [*bonum per se*] and the ultimate end [*finis ultimus*] toward which everything is directed (TdIE, §§4-6).

This passage makes clear that Spinoza thinks that people can pursue various things for their own sakes, as goods in themselves (cf.

15. For very helpful discussions of Spinoza on universals, see Hübner 2015 and 2021.

16. Furthermore, it is not obvious that motivational pluralism requires a plurality of objects of *intrinsic* desires. Rather, it requires a plurality of *non-instrumental* desires, including not only intrinsic desires but also realizer desires. A realizer desire is a desire for something as a way of realizing, rather than as a mere instrument to, some more general (multiply realizable) end (See Arpaly and Schroeder [2014] and Schmidtz [1994]). Think of Aristotle's argument that there is some (one) thing that is the ultimate end of all action: *eudaimonia* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1-1.4, 1094a1- 1095a22). Even if one were to grant this claim, because people are motivated to realize this end in vastly different ways, it would be deeply misleading to insist that one who pursues happiness through generosity, kindness, and honesty towards others and one who pursues happiness through exploitation, cruelty, and deception desire the same things. This would be like asserting that vegans and carnivores really have the same diet, namely, nourishing comestibles. The differences in these cases are more significant than the commonalities. And, in fact, acknowledging the motivational variance among human beings is a vital part of Spinoza's normative philosophy, which consists in redirecting our desires, in part by adopting principles that are suited to the particular motivational tendencies of the subjects (See e.g., 5p10s, TP1).

KVII.xxvi, 8; E3DA48). Despite this, he insists that these three things should *not* be pursued "for their own sakes [*propter se*]," but only "as means to some other end" (TdIE, §11), specifically, for the sake of healing and perfecting the intellect.

There is no reason to think that he abandoned this way of classifying human motivations later in his life. On the contrary, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza indicates that while most people are motivated by a range of things, some become transfixed "in consideration of only one object so much that [they] cannot think of others" (4p44s). He proceeds to discuss three obsessive character-types: the lustful (sometimes: gluttonous) person, the ambitious person, and the greedy person (4p44s cf. 3DA48), mirroring the same trio of specious ultimate ends (sensual pleasure, honor, wealth) discussed in the *TdIE*. The resulting picture is that while most people can intrinsically desire a variety of things, some people single-mindedly pursue one particular object. But, crucially, even the single-minded are single-minded in *different* ways, tenaciously pursuing different ends.

And, in fact, one who is truly rational is single-minded in her own way, as she strives for understanding (4p26)—or, what is the same, virtue[17]—for its own sake: "the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all the others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding" (4Cap.4). This is contrary to the "usual conviction" of the "multitude" that "everything related to strength of character [*fortitudo*]. . . [are] burdens, which they hope to put down after dead, when they also hope to receive a reward for their bondage" (5p41d; cf. Ep.43). So, whereas most people desire virtue only when prompted by external sanctions (e.g., divine reward or punishment), one who is rational will, like the wise king Solomon, regard virtue, or wisdom, is its own reward, desiring it for its own sake (TTP4.41-47).

The upshot of all of this is that people intrinsically desire very different things, sometimes building their lives around these distinct ends. Indeed, Spinoza's ethical project is predicated on motivational pluralism, as we learn to abandon the intrinsic pursuit of ephemeral and uncertain goods in favor of true and enduring goods. There is decisive evidence, then, that Spinoza was not a monistic psychological egoist.

3.3 Spinoza and Other-Directed Desires

What about psychological egoism in the sense that is opposed to altruism? Is there any evidence that Spinoza thought that we could pursue things for the sake of other people? Here, too, I think that answer is unequivocally 'yes.'

This is especially apparent in the case of rational desires, which divide into (1) tenacity [*animositas*], or the "desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictates of reason, to preserve his being" and (2) nobility [*generositas*] or the "desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, *to aid other men* and join them to him in friendship" (3p59s, emphasis added). Since these are rational forms of desire, the object the same in either case: knowledge or what leads to knowledge (4p26; 4p36; 4Cap.4-5). The difference consists *only* in the intended beneficiary. The very fact that Spinoza draws this distinction and takes nobility to be a possible class of rational desire looks like clear evidence that he was not a psychological egoist in the single intended beneficiary sense. If Spinoza thought that one ultimately always desires things only for one's own benefit, the central division among rational desires would be idle.

We get a more detailed account of what nobility looks like in *Ethics* 4, where Spinoza claims that insofar as we are rational, we pursue knowledge or understanding, which is "common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally" (4p36). So, he argues, when one rationally recognizes the common humanity of another, one will be motivated to

17. Virtue consists in acting from the laws of one's own nature (4D8; 4p18s), which is to say acting from adequate ideas (4p23-4). Those who act from adequate ideas "want virtue for its own sake" (4p18s) and "cannot conceive anything to be good for itself [*sibi bonum*] except what leads to understanding" (4p26d).

pursue the other's intellectual development as well as one's own: "the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men" (4p37). The intended beneficiary is here is another rather than oneself, which is why it is an example of nobility and not tenacity in nobility's clothing.

To be sure, difficult interpretative questions persist concerning how exactly reason gives rise to nobility or the desire to aid others.[18] We need not settle this vexed matter here since, irrespective of the rational justification of nobility, it is clear that, *as a matter of psychology,* Spinoza thinks that one can pursue the good of another without regarding oneself as the ultimate beneficiary. As if to drive this point home, near the end of *Ethics* 4, Spinoza says that those who are free or fully rational are distinctively thankful to one another, since they do not stand in transactional relations to one another—in other words, they do not treat (the goods of) other humans as mere instruments to their own welfare (4p71).

Moreover, even if rational people pursue the good of others more steadfastly and wholeheartedly than others, and are especially thankful for one another, Spinoza also seems to allow for passionate expressions of psychological altruism. We "imitate" the affects of those we imagine to be "like us" (3p27), so that when we imagine another human suffering, we experience a corresponding sadness or pity. If one only desired one's own welfare, one could diminish this sadness by removing oneself from the eliciting situation. But, in fact, Spinoza thinks that pity often engenders the desire to alleviate the other's suffering. Spinoza calls this desire benevolence (*benevolentia*) which is defined as the "will, *or* appetite to do good, born of our pity for the thing *on which we wish to confer a benefit*" (3p27s; cf. 3DA35).[19]

It certainly seems, then, that on Spinoza's account, as a matter of human psychology, one can be motivated to benefit others for their own sakes, and that such other-directed desires can be either rational or passionate.

3.4 Genetic fallacy, or how not to ground Spinoza's egoism

At this point, the defender of the egoist reading might want to insist that, despite appearing to be other-directed, nobility and benevolence *must be* tacitly self-directed since they arise out of our (self-directed) striving. This is precisely how Nadler argues when he is forced to concede that people can pursue all kinds of things, including the welfare of others, without regard to their own benefit. In support of this position, Nadler cites Don Garrett's claim that Spinoza: "need not deny the *phenomenon* of altruism. He is committed only to the view that the causal *origins* of these phenomena always lie in a singular psychological force, which is the individual's own endeavor for his or her own self-preservation" (Garrett 1996: 302-303; cited in Nadler 2020: 134—emphasis in original). Nadler takes the point that all desires arise out of one's striving as evidence of psychological egoism. In doing so, though, he seems to commit a version of the *genetic fallacy*, inferring from the fact that something arose in such-and-such conditions that it must bear features of those conditions. Without further reasons for supposing that the thing bears features of its origin, such an inference is unwarranted. So, just as it is fallacious to infer that Beethoven's symphonies must be disorderly because they were composed in a messy flat,[20] it is fallacious to conclude, *without further argumentation,* that all desires are *for* perseverance or power simply because they arise out of the striving to persevere or the striving for power.

We will see below (§5) that there is *something* right about the egoist reading.

But as a claim about the psychology of motivation, it is mistaken.

18. See e.g. D. Steinberg 1984; Della Rocca 2004; Kisner 2011, Ch. 7.
19. Contrast this with Hobbes's more "egoistic" analysis of pity in *Elements of Law*, 9.10 and *Leviathan*, Ch. 6 (2014: 90).
20. Example comes from de Waal 2006.

4. The Case against Psychological Hedonism

So far, my analysis aligns well with LeBuffe's. We will recall that one of LeBuffe's central objections to the egoist reading is that it fails to capture the guise under which we act, or the psychology of motivation. We can (and often do) pursue things without an eye to our power or perseverance. However, on LeBuffe's reading of Spinoza, we *do* pursue things with an eye to our joy. As he puts it, "the affects" of joy and sadness are "important components of the ends of striving" (2009: 112). The key passage for his reading is 3p28:

> We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.

LeBuffe takes this to be gloss on *conscious* striving, or desire—that is, it captures the guise under which we act. On his reading, then, "imagining" here introduces an *intensional* context, so that even though joy just *is* an increase in one's power of acting or persevering, we do not consciously pursue an increase of power; rather, we consciously pursue *joy* and whatever object we associate with it (2009: 132, 136). (For convenience, in what follows I will focus on joy and its corresponding desire, while acknowledging that parallel claims could be made about sadness and its corresponding desire, namely the desire to remove the cause of sadness).

While I think that LeBuffe is right to distinguish between the object of striving and the objects of desire and to insist that the latter captures the psychology of motivation, I think he is wrong to think that joy is part of the object of desire.

The first thing that I want to note in response to LeBuffe's hedonist reading is that one need not read "imagining" in 3p28 as introducing an intensional context. Spinoza sometimes treats "imagining" as aspect insensitive. For instance, in his initial gloss of sense perception in *Ethics* 2p16-17, Spinoza claims that an idea of a mode of the body that is caused by some external body, will "involve" or implicate the nature of that affecting body (2p16). And, in virtue of having an idea that involves the nature of the affecting body, one will "regard" it as "actually existing" (2p17; see 2p44s). In the scholium to 2p17, he proceeds to claim that when the mind regards bodies as present because they affect it, we "shall say that it imagines" (2p17s). Margaret Wilson captures the account of representation articulated in these passages in blunt terms: "A mind 'represents' something just in case its body is causally affected by that thing" (1999: 131).[21]

This is not, of course, to say that *imagining* is always aspect insensitive.[22] Still, the fact that Spinoza sometimes uses "imagining" in aspect insensitive ways should give us pause before assuming that imagining in 3p28 introduces an intensional context. That's the first point.

The second point is that the demonstration of 3p28 is derived in part from 3p12, which reads: "The mind as far as it can, strives to *imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting*." In other words, Spinoza himself derives the claim that we strive to imagine, or further the existence of, things that "we imagine will lead to joy" from the fact we strive to imagine things that "increase or aid the body's power of acting" (3p12). Here, Spinoza substitutes extensional equivalents—(a) conducing to joy and (b) aiding the body's power of acting—in what LeBuffe takes to be an intensional context, thereby apparently committing the very same error that LeBuffe accuses egoist interpreters of making. The fact that Spinoza sometimes uses "imagining" in aspect insensitive ways and that he actually substitutes coextensive terms in the content of one's imagining in 3p28dem certainly raises questions about whether what follows "imagines" 3p28 is aspect-sensitive in the way that LeBuffe supposes.

There are also direct problems with LeBuffe's psychological hedonist reading. First, by making joy part of the *object* of desire, LeBuffe seems to saddle Spinoza with an account of the psychology of motiva-

21. See also Radner 1971.
22. He does, after all, allow for non-veridical imaginings. See Garrett 2018, Chs. 14 & 15; see J. Steinberg 2013.

tion that is every bit as implausible as psychological egoism. To invoke LeBuffe's own point, doesn't "simple introspection" and observation reveal that we can act without an eye to our own pleasure or joy?

Moreover, his account seems to leave unexplained *why* imagining something as conducing to joy would generate a present desire. To see the force of this point, it is worth attending to the way that Spinoza's naturalism constrains his account of motivation. He rejects what Thomas Nagel has called "motivational action at a distance" (1970: 27–28), according to which present action could be explained by factors at a spatio-temporal remove from the present intrinsic states of the thing. A future condition (e.g., that a thing will be beneficial) cannot explain a present motivation (see Bennett 1984, §52.2; Della Rocca 2022). Consequently, if we follow LeBuffe in reading 3p28 as including prospective (non-present) joy as part of the object of one's desire, one must explain how the representation of a future joy would move one to act now. Since motivation must arise from a *present* desire, LeBuffe would need to show that for Spinoza the representation of some prospective joy necessarily gives rise to a *present* joy/desire (§2.2).

Michael Della Rocca has advanced just such an account of why, for Spinoza, prospective joy gives rise to present joy (see esp. 2022: 255-6, 262-3) that would seem to help LeBuffe. On his analysis, when we anticipate a future joy, we experience a present joy, which itself moves us to act. I will call this the double affect reading, since it supposes that there is both a *represented* future affect and a present resembling affect. Della Rocca takes this to follow from Spinoza's claim that: "Man is affected with the same affect of joy or sadness from the image of a past or future thing as from the image of a present thing" (3p18). If Della Rocca's reading of 3p18 is right, we have a perfectly naturalistic account of how prospective joy can motivate.

Unfortunately, I do not think that 3p18 supports the double affect reading. Spinoza's point in this passage is not that when one represents a future affect, one undergoes a version of the affect now; rather, it is that when one has an idea about some *thing* that is represented as situated at a temporal remove from the present (past or future), one will have the same kind of affective response that one would have if the thing were (represented as) present. And, whereas Della Rocca himself concedes that the double affect reading leaves one to explain *why* the representation of a future affective state would give rise to a present affect (for Della Rocca's own valiant attempt to reconstruct an account from Spinozistic resources, see 2022: 270-273), my reading of 3p18 avoids this problem, since it simply entails something like this: if you would be happy to see your cat now, then (other things being equal) the idea that you *will* soon see your cat will also make you happy now. 3p18 is not a claim about how one is affected when one represents one's *affects* at a temporal remove; it is a claim about how one is affected when one represents *objects* (e.g., one's cat) at a temporal remove.

Subsequent deployments of 3p18 and its scholia (4D6; 4p9s; 4p12d) reinforce the point that it is a claim about the relationship between affects and prospective—or, more precisely, temporally removed—things, and not a claim about the relationship between prospective and current affects.

So, while I agree with Della Rocca that 3p18 is intended to explain how representations of prospective things motivate, I do not think that it explains why the idea of a future *joy* would give rise to a present motivation. So, if we take 3p28 as claiming that prospective "joy" is part of the object of desire, as LeBuffe does, we are still left without an explanation of why this prospective joy motivates.

Fortunately, there is another way of understanding the passage that avoids this problem and coheres better with Spinoza's account of how prospective states motivate. On this reading, what it means to imagine some thing leading to joy is just to imagine a prospective thing *joyfully*—joy is part of the *manner* in which we represent the object of desire, not part of the object of joy. Rather than reading 3p28, as LeBuffe does, as implying a "complex" object of desire, including some thing, *t*, and one's prospective joy, my adverbial alternative proposal takes 3p28 to posit a single object of desire, *t*, that one imagines *joyfully*.

To imagine *t* conducing to one's power *or* joy, is simply to imagine *t joyfully*.

The adverbial model avoids the problem of motivational action at a distance, since it allows that prospective states motivate in virtue of being accompanied by a present affect (see, once again, 3p18). It also avoids the problem of implausibility, since it does not imply that we always act with a view to our own joy, while still allowing that joy is part of the explanation of desire, since we desire things that we represent *joyfully* (or we desire the exclusion or removal of things that we represent *sadly*).

The adverbial reading also better captures the inference from 3p12 to 3p28, showing how imagining something as empowering leads one to desire it. On this account, to imagine something as empowering just is to imagine it as an object of joy, and to imagine something as an object of joy is just to be *affected* with a joy that is directed at the object.[23] It is to imagine the thing *joyfully*.

This reading also accords with the account of the relationship between hedonic states (forms of joy, sadness) and desires in §2.2. Since hedonic states and desires are one and the same thing considered in different ways, it follows that to imagine something joyfully—or to be affected by a form of joy that is directed at the thing—is just to desire it. The object of the desire is identical to the object of joy. So, for instance, when I think of my dog, I feel a sense of joy—specifically, love (*amor*), which is joy with the idea of external cause (3p13s)—and I have a corresponding desire to posit or promote, or preserve her existence: "one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves" (3p13s). Just as the object of my affection in this case is simply *my dog*, so, too, the desire that is constituted by this joy is simply a desire for (the welfare/preservation of) *my dog*, and *not*, or at least not typically, a desire for (the welfare/preservation of) *my dog* and for *my joy*, as LeBuffe's account would have it.[24] Once again, the hedonic valence (joy, sadness) is part of the manner in which we desire things, it is part of the phenomenal experience of desire, rather than part of *what* we desire.[25]

As see it, then, Spinoza is neither a psychological egoist nor a psychological hedonist. There is no single guise under which we act. Rather, the scope of desire extends to anything that one represents *joyfully* (or *sadly*).

5. The Case for Spinoza as Constitutive Egoist and Explanatory Hedonist

Even if, as I have argued, Spinoza is neither an egoist nor a hedonist when it comes to the psychology of motivation, there are nevertheless *non-psychological* aspects of Spinoza's theory of motivation than are egoistic and hedonistic. Teasing out the non-psychological from the psychological features not only clarifies his account of motivation, it also enables us to appreciate its explanatory power. To see this, let's start with the non-psychological sense in which he is an egoist.

23. One might wonder if this is necessarily or just paradigmatically the case. While it might seem that one could represent something as empowering in some cold, dispassionate respect (e.g., recognize that medicine will make one stronger without being moved by this recognition), it is not apparent that Spinoza admits of such cases. And if he does, they do not figure into the psychology of motivation, which is always mediated by a hedonic state.

24. To be sure, joy *can* be part of what one desires, but even in these cases, the object of desire is one and the same as the object of the emotion. For instance, while enjoying a glass of wine, one might reflect on one's own enjoyment and, as it were, enjoy one's sense of enjoyment (e.g., the state of mild inebriation). Through reflection, the object of one's enjoyment becomes complex, and the object of desire becomes correspondingly complex as well.

25. Desires for prospective states will typically include both anticipatory joy (see 3p18 once again) and a sadness resulting from the fact that the thing is not present and that its acquisition might be thwarted. Put simply, most prospective desires will include a combination of hope and fear (3p18s2), but the hedonic aspect (joy, sadness) is not part of the object of desire. Instead, one desires the hoped for object, the acquisition of which will end the uneasiness. But, once again, the desire is typically not *for* joy or the end of uneasiness; it is for the object that produces anticipatory joy and uneasiness. For a brilliant analysis of the incoherence of the psychological hedonist alternative, see Hutcheson 1742/2002, pp. 14-20.

5.1 Constitutive Egoism

In §3.4, I claimed that it is fallacious to infer from the fact that all desires *originate* in one's striving to persevere in one's being that all desires are *for* persevering in one's being. But even if the inference in support of psychological egoism is fallacious, there is, I think, something right about the egoist interpretation of Spinoza, something that might partially vindicate the divergent treatment of Hobbes and Spinoza in the scholarly literature. This has to do with the status of the conatus doctrine.

Both Spinoza and Hobbes think that desires arise out of one's striving and that desires can be directed at ends that are wholly distinct from one's striving or the preservation of one's vital motions.[26] But whereas for Hobbes the relationship between striving and particular desires is one of mere causal origination, for Spinoza striving is, as we have seen, one's "actual essence" (3P7).[27] What this means is that for Spinoza, and not for Hobbes, striving is expressed in *everything* that we think or do (see e.g., 3p9), and we cannot cease to strive to persevere in our being without ceasing to be (3p10d; 2D2).

A consequence of this view is that, for Spinoza, any particular desire, while not identical to striving *simpliciter*, is nevertheless a determination of this striving (§2.1)—that is, it is a particular way in which one strives to persevere in one's being (3p57d; 3GDA).[28] In a sense, then, the egoist reading is right that we always seek our own advantage, irrespective of the intentional object of desire, that is, irrespective of the guise under which we act. For this reason, I will call Spinoza a constitutive egoist. This leaves us to explain how exactly one's essential striving to persevere is expressed in one's desires, or how what we might call the *non-psychological*[29] or constitutive content of one's desires (namely, persevering in one's being) relates to the psychological content.

One way to understanding the relation is on the model of the distinction between the broad and narrow content of mental states. As is well known, according to content externalism, the meaning of at least some of our ideas or terms is fixed by features of the world (e.g., the objects themselves or facts about socio-linguistic communities) independently of how the thinker/utterer conceives of things.[30] However, human action is not explained by this external, or broad, content, but by the manner in which one conceives of things: the narrow, psychological content. To use a stock example, while "water" might rigidly designate H_2O such that any ideas that I have or utterances that I make about "water" are *about* H_2O, irrespective of whether I know this and irrespective of how I am conceiving of things, when I am parched and reach for the glass in front of me, my behavior is not explained by the fact that the glass is filled with H_2O, but by the way that I represent this object, the psychological guise (i.e., as a relatively tasteless hydrating liquid). Such considerations have led some to distinguish between the broad, externally-fixed content of ideas/terms (non-psychological) and the narrow, causally efficacious content (psychological).

Something akin to the distinction between the broad and narrow—or non-psychological and psychological—content would seem to apply to Spinoza's notion of desire. On the one hand, there is some essential content to desire that is fixed irrespective of the psychology of the

26. For Hobbes, see *Leviathan*, Ch. 8 [2014, 116]; *Man and Citizen* [1972, 48–49]. For Spinoza, see §§2-3 of this paper.
27. By contrast, Hobbes is a thoroughgoing critic of essences. See Paganini 2007. For an account of the many downstream effects of Hobbes's and Spinoza's distinct views about striving, see J. Steinberg 2021.
28. Karolina Hübner and Robert Mátyási have recently argued that expression is an intelligibility relation such that x expresses y just in case y is a condition of x's intelligibility, maintaining further that the thing expressed makes its expression intelligible because the latter inherits the former's properties (see 2022: 630, 643-645). If that is right, and if the desire-striving relationship is, as is plausible, one of expression (where desires express striving), then there is further reason for thinking that desires inherit the property of being *for persevering in one's being*.
29. I say "non-psychological" both because one's striving to persevere is expressed in *all* of one's activities, including the motions or determinations of the body, and because persevering in one's being does not capture the guise under which we pursue things.
30. See Putnam 1979; Burge 1979.

agent. (Unlike the "broad content" of one's ideas, though, the non-psychological content of desires is not fixed externally, but rather by one's very essence.) On the other hand, there is the psychological content of desire, the particular end in view that explains why the agent does what she does. The former, as the essential content, sets the constitutive aim of desire: it is what we essentially and ineluctably strive for whenever we desire things, even when the things that we desire (psychologically) are *contrary* to our striving, our constitutive aim.

My proposal, then, is that Spinoza allows that desires have two different kinds of content: essential (non-psychological) content that effectively fixes desire's constitutive aim; and psychological content, which explains why we do what we do. This dual content view explains (and *partially* vindicates) the enduring appeal of the egoist reading without saddling Spinoza with a wholly implausible account of the psychology of motivation.

It also helps to account for, and defuse, an ongoing debate concerning whether Spinoza's metaethics is best characterized as a form of realism or antirealism.[31] Those who regard him as an antirealist point out that good and evil are not mind-independent features of the world, while those who regard him as a realist point out that what makes a thing good for a particular individual is not dependent on the particular psychological states (beliefs, desires) of the agent. The reason why this debate seems intractable is that both sets of considerations are *right*. What is good or evil depends on the constitutive content of one's desires, and so is mind-dependent, as the antirealist interpretation claims; but good and evil do not depend on the psychological content of one's desires, and so are, in this sense, mind-independent, as the realist interpretation claims.

We see from this that not only is there something right about reading Spinoza as a kind of egoist, but also that, when his egoism is properly understood (as constitutive and non-psychological) and set alongside his psychological account of motivation, we can illuminate other aspects of his moral philosophy.

5.2 Explanatory Hedonism

Just as there is something right about the *egoist* view, there is also something right about the *hedonist* view. While hedonic states (joy, sadness) need not be part of the *object* of desire, they are a necessary part of the desire itself. Indeed, desires themselves are constituted by hedonic states (§2.2). Consequently, one cannot explain the formation of desire without appealing to a hedonic state: desires are just ways of striving that result from representing things joyfully or sadly. Spinoza might thus be said to be an *explanatory hedonist* or one who thinks that hedonic states help to explain the formation of desires, even if he is not an object hedonist, or one who thinks that we always act with our pleasure (or the alleviation of our suffering) in view.

To appreciate the significance and resourcefulness of Spinoza's *explanatory hedonism*, it is helpful to situate it in relation to the following general dispute regarding the character of human motivation. On the one hand, there are those who think that we always act under the guise of the good.[32] Object hedonism, according to which we always act under the guise of the pleasurable, is a variant of this view. One of the central merits of such a position, according to its advocates, is that it makes human action intelligible, since it shows that when we act, there is something about the rationalizing mental states that reveals why the action or object would appear favorable or desirable.[33] G.E.M. Anscombe calls this the "desirability characterisation" (1957: §37-39).

On the other hand, there are notable critics of this account of motivation who argue that guise of the good theories fail to account for

31. For helpful overviews of the debate and the reasons invoked in defense of both realist and antirealist interpretations, see Kisner and Youpa 2014 and Youpa 2020 (Ch. 3-4).

32. See, for instance, See Anscombe 1957, Davidson 2006, Tenenbaum 2007, Orsi 2023. For a discussion of Spinoza's relationship to the guise of the good tradition, see Kisner 2021.

33. See Anscombe 1957: §18; Davidson 2006: 29; Tenenbaum 2007, passim; Railton 2012, 26.

the full range of human motivation, including "perverse" desires, like the desire to do something precisely *because* it is evil or mischievous (see Stocker 1979; Velleman 1992). Those who defend the possibility of perverse motivation, though, are left to explain why representing something as harmful or devious would motivate one to pursue it.[34] It seems that perverse desires lack a "desirability characterisation." We are thus left with an apparent dilemma: either we must deny (contrary to appearances) that there are perverse desires, or we must forsake human intelligibility.

Happily, I think that Spinoza's *explanatory hedonism* and *psychological pluralism* provides a way between the horns of this dilemma. It can account for perverse motivations, since it allows that there are no restrictions on the guises under which we act. We can desire anything that we represent joyfully. And there is nothing incoherent about joyfully representing doing something that one takes to be evil or mischievous. And, by allowing that one who acts under the guise of the bad is representing the object of her desire *joyfully*, Spinoza makes even "evil" or "mischievous" action intelligible: we can understand why someone would want to promote the existence of something that they represent *joyfully*, even if it violates social or ethical norms. Spinoza thus avoids unduly and implausibly restrictive accounts of human motivation—as if there were a single invariant guise under which we act—while granting an explanatory role to hedonic states that makes human desire and action intelligible.

This, then, is the final interpretative scorecard: Spinoza is neither a psychological egoist nor a psychological hedonist. Rather, he is a thoroughgoing psychological pluralist who thinks that we can desire anything that we represent hedonically. He is, however, a *constitutive egoist* and an *explanatory hedonist*. Constitutive egoism together with psychological pluralism helps to account for both the apparently realist *and* the apparently antirealist features of his metaethics. Explanatory hedonism together with psychological pluralism can account for the possibility of "perverse" motivations, and, more generally, action under guises other than goodness (or pleasure), while preserving the intelligibility of desires and human action.[35]

34. To be clear, the issue here not 'what in so-and-so's personal history would lead her to be motivated in this way.' Rather, it is 'what is it about these perverse guises (e.g., harming others) that explains their motivational power in the way that the pleasurable prospect of eating pie explains the desire to eat pie?'

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