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# Spinoza's Dynamic Theory of Mind in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Justin Steinberg\*

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## 1 Methodological Reflection

There are surely many important aspects of Spinoza's thought that remain underexplored in the contemporary scholarship. But rather than focusing my contribution to this volume on scholarly lacunae, I want to call attention to a different kind of neglect, one that results not from the lack of interpretative work, but from the lack of philosophical analysis. Put simply: I think that there are facets of Spinoza's philosophical system that have not received the level of attention that they deserve in contemporary philosophy and that Spinoza scholars bear some responsibility for this. I will discuss below some of the promising features of his moral psychology, recognizing that similar things could be said about other aspects of his work.

While other modern philosophers have left enduring marks on contemporary ethical and political philosophy, even counting prominent contemporary philosophers as adherents, Spinoza is altogether absent from most contemporary surveys and anthologies in the field.<sup>1</sup> What might justify Spinoza's exclusion from the contemporary landscape? Perhaps his views are archaic and untenable on their face. I don't think that is right, for reasons I will spell out below. Perhaps, then, they are not especially distinctive. But I don't think that that is right either. While his moral and political views bear the clear influence of Thomas Hobbes, careful examination reveals he is far more than just a renegade Hobbesian.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 To note just a few prominent examples, one can think of David Gauthier and Gregory Kavka's reconstructions of Hobbes, Robert Nozick's (not uncritical) neo-Lockean theory of rights, Bernard Williams' and Michael Smith's revival of Humean theories of motivation, Simon Blackburn's revival of Humean metaethics, and the proliferation of Kantian constructivism, including many important works by John Rawls, Onora O'Neill, and Christine Korsgaard.
  - 2 S. L. Field, *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on power and popular politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

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Brooklyn College and CUNY Graduate Center; JSteinberg@brooklyn.cuny.edu; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3256-210X>

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Instead of *justifications* for Spinoza's exclusion from contemporary moral and political discourse, perhaps we should look for mere explanations. One partial explanation is just that his normative views are not especially well known. While Spinoza is hardly a marginal figure in the history of philosophy, the forbidding, systematic nature of his philosophy hinders the extent to which his views can be effectively taught in survey courses. And since his moral and political views cannot be adequately understood without first tackling his austere metaphysics, the barrier to entry is quite high. To a certain degree, then, this obstacle is endemic to Spinoza's system.

Still, we scholars can do more to raise Spinoza's profile and lower the barrier to entry. In recent years, several people have written works on Spinoza for a more general readership, which has helped to generate further interest in Spinoza outside of the academy.<sup>3</sup> This is unquestionably a good thing. But more can be done *within philosophy* to make the case to our colleagues that Spinoza is worth taking seriously.

Unfortunately, disciplinary norms somewhat discourage reconstructive or rehabilitative projects these days. Work in history of philosophy has become increasingly sensitive to the ways in which philosophical writings reflect the debates and inquiries of the author's proximate intellectual milieu. By and large this has been a salutary shift, pushing back against the reading of the history of philosophy as a conversation between "great men" who rise above parochial concerns to engage in transhistorical philosophical analysis. But it has also bred a "stay in your own lane" mentality and an outsized fear of anachronism, the great bogeyman of historians of philosophy. This has only further marginalized the history of philosophy *within philosophy*, contributing to the impression that we scholars are antiquarians who are more concerned with historical exactitude than philosophical fruitfulness.

But why can't we be concerned with *both* history and philosophy? To be sure, we cannot assess the truth of a doctrine until we have adequately understood it. But once we have a reasonably good grasp of the view, it seems to me that the natural next step—which perhaps we have been conditioned to suppress—is to ask: is it plausible? Even if the answer is an unequivocal 'no,' it seems that the question should be asked. And yet it is somewhat uncommon these days to find work in history of philosophy directly engaging with the philosophical merits of the view. Perhaps the worry is that if we acknowledge that a view is implausible, we will contribute to consigning the argument, and perhaps the larger text, to the dustbin of history. But this worry is misplaced not only because there is often much to be learned from failed arguments and implausible views, but also because we are hardly saving texts from this dustbin by refusing to engage with the merits of the arguments.

My plea, then, is that once we have done the hard work of interpreting a historical text, we take that natural next step and engage with the philosophy, because if we do not, we can be sure our colleagues will not either. With these prefatory remarks in mind, let me turn now to Spinoza's moral psychology.

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3 See e.g., Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York: Norton, 2006); Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew who gave us Modernity* (New York: Nextbook, Schocken, 2006); Steven Nadler, *Think Least of Death: Spinoza on how to Live and how to Die* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020).

## 2 Spinoza's Dynamic Theory of Mind: A Primer

In the past several decades, psychologists, neuroscientists, and cognitive theorists have disputed the merits of the so-called “Spinozan” theory of belief formation that emerged out of Daniel Gilbert’s pioneering work in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> In contrast with the “Cartesian” procedure, according to which comprehension precedes assessment (see the relative roles of the understanding and will in *Meditation* 4), the “Spinozan” theory claims that (1) to have an idea (that is, to comprehend something) is, initially, to accept it, and (2) rejection and disbelief are temporally posterior to, and more effortful than, acceptance.

Support for the Spinozan or “belief-default” view comes from a wide range of sources. Child psychology confirms what is well-known by experience: small children are hilariously credulous. Psycholinguistic evidence reveals that the ability to negate emerges late ontogenetically, and that processing negatives remains more difficult than processing non-negative information (see!) throughout one’s life.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, doubt, disbelief, and negation are not only late to emerge, they are also quick to recede when burdened or depleted, as work on indoctrination and belief-revision confirm.<sup>6</sup> If, as some researchers postulate, cognitive systems evolved out of perceptual systems, it stands to reason that cognitive representations would initially be ‘taken as true’ just as deliverances of the senses are.<sup>7</sup> There are efficiency advantages to this default.<sup>8</sup>

The Spinozan view also receives direct support from several psychological experiments. Here I will discuss just two sets of studies. The first is a variant on a study by Ross, et al. (1975) in which subjects were asked to distinguish between real and fake suicide notes, given feedback about their abilities to discern the real from the fake, and then partially debriefed, at which point subjects were informed that the feedback was fabricated. The study found that subjects continued to be influenced by the fabricated feedback even after the partial debriefing. Daniel Wegner and colleagues

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- 4 Daniel T. Gilbert, Douglas S. Krull and Patrick S. Malone, “Unbelieving the Unbelievable: Some Problems in the Rejection of False Information,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59 (1990): 601–613. doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.59.4.601](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.4.601); Daniel T. Gilbert, “How Mental Systems Believe,” *American Psychological Association* 46, no. 2 (1991): 107–119. doi: [10.1037/0003-066X.46.2.107](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.2.107); Daniel T. Gilbert, Romin W. Tatarodi and Patrick S. Malone, “You Can’t Not Believe Everything You Read,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 2 (1993): 221–233. doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.65.2.221](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.65.2.221); Andy Egan, “Seeing and Believing: Perception, Belief Formation and the Divided Mind,” *Philosophical Studies* 140, no. 1 (2008): 47–63. doi: [10.1007/s11098-008-9225-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-008-9225-1); Bryce Huebner, “Troubles with Stereotypes for Spinozan Minds,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 39, no. 1 (2009): 63–92. doi: [10.1177/0048393108329363](https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393108329363); Erik Asp and Daniel Tranel, “False Tagging Theory: Toward a Unitary Account of Prefrontal Cortex Function,” in *Principles of Frontal Lobe Function*, eds. Donald T. Stuss and Robert T. Knight (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013<sup>2</sup>); Eric Mandelbaum, “Thinking is Believing,” *Inquiry* 57, no. 1 (2014): 55–96. doi: [10.1080/0020174X.2014.858417](https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2014.858417); Eric Mandelbaum and Jake Quilty-Dunn, “Believing without Reason, or: Why Liberals Shouldn’t Watch Fox News,” *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 22, (2015): 42–52. doi: [10.5840/harvardreview2015226](https://doi.org/10.5840/harvardreview2015226).
- 5 Mandelbaum, “Thinking.”; Gilbert, “Mental Systems.”
- 6 Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (New York: Norton, 1961); Leon Festinger and Nathan Maccoby, “On Resistance to Persuasive Communications,” *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science* 68, no. 4 (1964): 359–366. doi: [10.1037/h0049073](https://doi.org/10.1037/h0049073); Gilbert, “Mental Systems.”
- 7 Ibid.; Mandelbaum, “Thinking.”; Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn, “Believing without Reason.”
- 8 For doubts, see Dan Sperber et al., “Epistemic Vigilance,” *Mind and Language* 25, no. 4 (2010): 359–393. doi: [10.1111/j.1468-0017.2010.01394.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0017.2010.01394.x).

subsequently ran a version of the experiment in which subjects were informed *prior* to receiving the feedback that it would be fabricated, and subjects were *still* inclined to give credence to the feedback, suggesting that simply hearing the feedback—that is, tokening the idea that they were discerning (or undiscerning) judges—produced assent, even though this feedback should have been preempted by the disclaimer.<sup>9</sup>

Another series of studies examined the impact of cognitive load on a subject's ability to process information tagged as true or false. In one of these studies, Gilbert and colleagues had subjects view a monitor on which exacerbating or mitigating information about crimes scrolled across one part of the screen, where information coded in black was to be taken as true and information coded in red was to be taken as false or disregarded. A group of subjects were then put under cognitive load—by being tasked with monitoring scrolling information on another part of the screen—and then asked to mete out prison terms for the crimes based on the information. While the control group (i.e., unburdened subjects) was virtually unaffected by the (to-be-ignored) false information, the burdened subjects recommended twice as much jailtime when the false (to-be-ignored) information was exacerbating than when it was mitigating. Subsequent studies reveal similar results: cognitive depletion disposes us towards belief and disarms our capacity for doubt and disbelief.<sup>10</sup>

We see then that there is, at the very least, some solid empirical support for the “Spinozan” view of belief-formation. In light of this, it falls to those of us who work on Spinoza to answer a couple of crucial questions: (1) to what extent was Spinoza a “Spinozan” about belief? (2) what, if anything, might be gained from returning to Spinoza himself?

With respect to the first question, I think that the answer is a highly qualified ‘yes.’

Something like the belief-default account seems to be expressed in E2p49s, when Spinoza defends his claim that volitions are intrinsic to ideas (and are in fact “one and the same” thing) against objections.<sup>11</sup> In the scholium he replies to the charge that experience shows that “we can suspend our judgment so as not to assent to things we perceive,” by asserting:

[I]f the mind perceived nothing else except [a] winged horse, it would regard it as present to itself, and would not have any cause of doubting its existence...unless either the imagination of the winged horse were joined to an idea which excluded [*tollit*] the existence of the same horse, or the mind perceived that its idea of a winged horse was inadequate. And then either it will necessarily deny the horse's existence, or it will necessarily doubt it (E2p49s/G II 134, lines 32–39).

In other words, Spinoza claims that to comprehend a winged horse *is*, at least in the first instance, to affirm it; doubt and disbelief are posterior to belief.

9 Daniel M. Wegner, Gary F. Coulton, and Richard Wenzlaff, “The Transparency of Denial: Briefing in the Debriefing Paradigm,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 49, no. 2 (1985): 338–346. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.49.2.338. For another variant, see Gilbert, Krull and Malone, “Unbelieving the Unbelievable.”

10 See Gilbert, Tatarodi, and Malone, “You Can’t Not Believe.”

11 While he initially indicates that the volitions intrinsic to ideas are “this and that affirmation, and this and that negation” (E2p49d), the ensuing discussion suggests that, in the first instance, ideas involve *affirmations*.

Importantly, though, Spinoza's own account goes beyond the "Spinozan" view in that it accounts for doubt and disbelief through the formation of *other* (affirmative) ideas: either through an idea that neutralizes the original, leaving one in a state of suspension, or through one that excludes [*tollit*] the existence of the thing (or proposition) conceived (E2p49s). Crucially, as Diane Steinberg has observed, "exclusion" here must not be understood in terms of the symmetrical relation of logical incompatibility.<sup>12</sup> Rather, exclusion occurs when one has an idea that is logically incompatible with *and stronger than* another.<sup>13</sup>

This power-based account of belief underlies Spinoza's analysis of error and the two ideas of the sun in E2p35s, where he maintains that the mere (belief-like) imagining of the sun as close does not result in an erroneous judgment provided that this idea is accompanied by—and presumably overpowered by—an idea of the sun's true distance. He makes the point about power explicit when he maintains that a confused imagination is not removed by the mere presence of the truth, but rather "because there occur [other ideas], *stronger than them [iis fortiores]*, which exclude the present existence of the things we imagine, as we showed in IIP17" (E4p1s—emphasis added). Here, as elsewhere, Spinoza insists ideas are not like "mute" pictures, or inert images (E2p43s; E2p49s), but are rather "action[s] of the mind" (E2def3), modes of thought with an intrinsic force or power.

From this, we see one crucial way in which Spinoza's own account goes beyond what is maintained on the "Spinozan" model: his account of belief-formation is tied to an account of belief-revision, one that could be empirically tested, and which might valuably supplement the "Spinozan" model. Moreover, it is part of a larger framework that we might call his *dynamic theory of the mind*.<sup>14</sup> In light of this, we may turn to the second question: even if something like the Spinozan view is right, what is to be gained from turning back to the progenitor of the view? In what follows, I will provide a partial answer to this question (recognizing that other Spinoza scholars will have more to say here) by showing that other components of Spinoza's dynamic theory of mind—specifically, his theory of affects and motivation—are also somewhat credible, and that Spinoza's account not only systematizes these claims, showing how they hang together, but also helps to explain disparate downstream psychological phenomena. What follows is just a sketch, but it should give one a sense of why I think that Spinoza's dynamic theory of mind merits serious philosophical consideration today.

As we have seen, Spinoza's version of the belief-default view is rooted in his claims about the power of ideas. With respect to doxastic states, we may say that the power of an idea relative to

12 Diane Steinberg, "Belief, Affirmation, and the Doctrine of the *Conatus* in Spinoza," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 1 (2010): 147–158. doi: 10.1111/j.2041-6962.2005.tb01948.x.

13 The question of how we are to understand the strength or power of an idea is enormously difficult. As I see it, Spinoza allows for several different dimensions to an idea's power. As a first pass, we may say that the power of an idea can be understood in terms of its capacity to direct one's thinking.

14 See Michael Della Rocca, "The Power of an Idea: Spinoza's Critique of Pure Will," *Noûs* 37, no. 2 (2003): 200–231. doi: 10.1111/1468-0068.00436; Steinberg, "Belief.:"; Justin Steinberg, "Two Puzzles Concerning Spinoza's Conception of Belief," *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2018): 261–282. doi: 10.1111/ejop.12218; Martin Lenz, "Spinoza on the Interaction of Ideas: Biased Beliefs," in *Spinoza and Relational Autonomy: Being with Others*, eds. Aurelia Armstrong, Keith Green, and Andrea Sangiacomo (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

other ideas determines one's credence or grade of belief.<sup>15</sup> But affirmative power—or doxastic power—is not the only dimension of ideational power. To see this, consider his account of affects. There are three specific features that I want to highlight about Spinoza's notion of affect [*affectus*]. First, under the attribute of Thought,<sup>16</sup> affects are doubly representational: they represent at once the affecting object(s) or cause(s) *and* changes in one's body's power of acting.<sup>17</sup> Second, they are motivating: when we represent something—be it some object or state of affairs—*joyfully*, our striving is directed towards that thing; conversely, when we represent some thing *sadly*, our striving is directed towards the removal of this deflating object (E3p12 and 13, E3p28). Finally, affects are evaluative: to represent something joyfully, and so to desire it (3p37), just *is* to regard it as good. Indeed, on the interpretation that I endorse, not only are affects evaluative, evaluative judgments are reducible to affects and ideas of them (E4p8): to evaluate just is to represent an object affectively.<sup>18</sup>

By conceiving of affects as representations of changes in one's body's power of acting (roughly: changes in one's homeostatic functioning) that take particular objects, constitute appraisals of those objects, and direct one's activity in relation to those objects, Spinoza's account has much in common with contemporary theories of affect like those of Jesse Prinz and Antonio Damasio. Such theories seek to account for the unification of the *embodied, intentional, motivational, and evaluative* components of emotions.<sup>19</sup> In its general contours, Spinoza's account of affects seems to be every bit as much of a live option today as his account of belief-formation is.

And, as with his account of belief, his account of affect and motivations is fundamentally *dynamic*. What we think and do is determined by the *power* of affects. On this point, Spinoza is, in his own way, rejecting the alleged “combat between passion and reason” famously critiqued by Hume (*Treatise* 2.3.3). But while Hume thinks that the combat model does not sufficiently distinguish between cognitive and conative states, which he thinks play fundamentally different roles in our mental economy, Spinoza rejects the assumption that reason and affects (or appetites) constitute distinct motivational streams, claiming instead that reason motivates precisely because it *is* affective (E3p59; E4p19).

To better appreciate how Spinoza understood the relationship between cognitive and conative states, let me say more about how I think that the “doxastic” and “affective” powers of ideas relate

15 Admittedly, Spinoza does not have a fully worked out analysis of credences or degrees of beliefs, though his account of doubt and disbelief could be seen as the start of such an account.

16 When Spinoza defines “affect” [*affectus*] in E3def3, he allows that affects are at once bodily states and ideas of those bodily states. But he sometimes restricts the discussion to “affects of the mind” (E2a3) and “passion[s] of the mind” (E3, general definition of the affects/G II 203, line 29).

17 There is room for debate concerning whether one could experience joy or sadness without an object (its putative triggering cause) (E3p56d). E2a3 implies that “affects of mind” necessarily take an object; but Spinoza does allow that we can separate affects from *external* causes (E5p2), leaving only, it would seem, an objectless feeling of joy or sadness.

18 See Justin Steinberg, “Affect, Desire, and Judgement in Spinoza's Account of Motivation,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (2016): 67–87. doi: 10.1080/09608788.2015.1087837; Justin Steinberg, “Two Puzzles.” Key passages include E3p9s, E3p39s, and E4p8; but also, E4p14, E4p19, E4p64.

19 Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Antonio R. Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), ch. 7. In Damasio's case, the resemblance to Spinoza is not at all coincidental, since he explicitly cites Spinoza as a forerunner.

in his theory. Once again, according to Spinoza, all ideas have a degree of affirmative or doxastic power. Affects are a subset of ideas, and as such affirm some particular intentional object; but they also affirm a change in one's power of acting or striving (E3 general definition of the affects/G II 203–4) and thus have a (positive or negative) valence corresponding to the (perceived) impact on one's striving. The power or intensity of an affect is determined not only by the doxastic power of the idea of the intentional object (e.g., the more steadily and forcefully I affirm that the object of my joy exists or will exist, the stronger the joy will be *ceteris paribus*), but also by the degree to which the change in one's power of acting is (perceived as) augmentative or diminishing. Consequently, moderate confidence about a very exciting opportunity might yield a stronger joy than full confidence in a much less appealing, but still good, prospect.

The power of this affect determines, in turn, how one thinks and acts. So, while philosophers and non-philosophers alike often distinguish between one's emotional responses to something, one's evaluations of the thing, and one's desires or motivations in relation to the thing, Spinoza thinks that affect (or emotion) itself constitutes the evaluation and fixes one's desires.

There are several attractive features to the account of motivation as fixed by the power of one's affects. For one thing, it implies that intentional actions reflect one's strongest desires at the decisive moment, a thesis that has struck many as patently, maybe even trivially, true.<sup>20</sup> Second, by maintaining that evaluative judgments are themselves affects, Spinoza is able to ground another widely-held thesis, namely the view that evaluative judgments are intrinsically motivational (i.e., the thesis of motivational internalism). Third, by maintaining that reason is itself affective, he defuses the problem of how reason motivates in a way that avoids the Scylla of the "combat" model (above), which pits reason against appetite without explaining how these distinct motivational sources interact, and the Charybdis of Humean separatism, which struggles to explain why desires or passions are responsive to reason or cognitive change. And, finally, the claim that reason is affective accords well with neuroscientific research showing that those who suffer from affective deficits suffer from corresponding deficits in practical reason.<sup>21</sup>

From this brief sketch we see that Spinoza's accounts of belief-formation, affect, and motivation each receive some empirical and philosophical support. Moreover, Spinoza *systematizes* these individually credible claims into a general theory of how the mind works. Moreover, in addition to what has already been noted, Spinoza's dynamic theory of mind predicts and explains the following psychological phenomena: (1) merely imagining something ('making believe') can prompt belief-like outputs (e.g., affects, inferences, and behaviors);<sup>22</sup> (2) beliefs—including evaluative judgments—will tend to endure even after they are debunked or even when they conflict with

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20 See Donald Davidson, following G.E.M. Anscombe and Stuart Hampshire, calls the following similar thesis a "natural assumption": "If an agent wants to do x more than he wants to do y and he believes himself free to do either x or y, then he will intentionally do x if he does either x or y intentionally." Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 23.

21 See Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1994) and Shaun Nichols, *Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

22 Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *The Journal of Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (1978); Tamar S. Gendler, "On the Relation Between Pretense and Belief," in *Imagination, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Matthew Kieran and Dominic Lopes (London: Routledge, 2003), 125–141.

perceived evidence;<sup>23</sup> (3) conflicting ideas provoke dissonance, which we seek to reduce;<sup>24</sup> (4) we are epistemically conservative, tending to preserve our antecedent beliefs, making us prone to confirmation bias, identity protection, and intolerance.<sup>25</sup> This is just a very partial list of the phenomena that Spinoza's dynamic theory of the mind could explain.

Let me conclude by pointing to some of the normative implications of this account. Spinoza can be seen as a kind of virtue ethicist who thinks that one's flourishing consists in clarifying or redirecting one's mind. The dynamic theory of mind entails that the project of clarifying or redirecting the mind will be exceedingly difficult. It is not enough to form adequate ideas or to grasp things as they are; these adequate ideas must acquire sufficient *affective* power to direct one's mind and overpower the passions by which we are often led. Coming to appreciate the underlying affective dynamics behind our bondage to the passions is a crucial step in overcoming it (see E4p17s), since only once we have acknowledged that our beliefs and evaluations are fixed by the power of ideas—and not a matter of what we reflectively endorse or what we think that we have reason to believe—will we be able to adopt targeted remedies for dislodging or diminishing the power of wayward beliefs and recalcitrant passions (see the “remedies” described in the first half of *Ethics* 5).

If something like the dynamic theory of mind is right, belief-revision and moral reform can only be achieved through the modification of the relative power of ideas, which itself will typically require a kind of mental reconditioning. And, as Spinoza himself appreciated, overcoming prejudices, misguided beliefs, and stubborn emotions requires more than individualist (meta-cognitive) remedies or strategies: it requires the establishment of socio-political institutions or structures that are liberating, and not merely restrictive or disciplinary, in function.<sup>26</sup> For a first pass at articulating these liberating institutions, one could do worse than look to Spinoza's own political writings, even if there are significant gaps in and deficiencies with his own analysis.<sup>27</sup> How far we should follow Spinoza's own analysis is bound to give rise to debate. But that's a debate that we should have, just as we should debate the merits of his moral psychology.

I've indicated above that I think that Spinoza gives us an intriguing and not-obviously-implausible theory of cognition and motivation that deviates from traditional folk psychology in some appealing ways. Whether or not we should subscribe to something like it depends on how well

23 See E5a1; Gilbert Harman, “Positive Versus Negative Undermining in Belief Revision,” *Noûs* 18, no. 1 (1984); Mandelbaum, “Thinking.”

24 Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Claude M. Steele, “The Psychology of Self-Affirmation: Sustaining the Integrity of the Self,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 21, Social Psychological Studies of the Self: Perspectives and Programs*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz (San Diego: Academic Press, 1988), 261–302. See E5a1 and E3p5.

25 See Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions,” *Political Behavior* 32, no. 2 (2010): 303–330. doi: 10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2; Dan M. Kahan, “Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection,” *Judgement and Decision Making* 8, no. 4 (2013): 407–424; Dan M. Kahan, “Misconceptions, Misinformation, and the Logic of Identity-Protective Cognition,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2017). URL: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2973067](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2973067). For more on Spinoza and the psychology of intolerance, see Justin Steinberg, ““Stop Being So Judgmental!”: A Spinozist Model of Personal Tolerance,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Toleration*, ed. Mitja Sardoc (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1077–1093.

26 For a similar observation, see Huebner, “Troubles.”

27 For my discussion of this, see Justin Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology: The Taming of Fortune and Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chs 6–8.



it holds up to sustained analysis. With the hope of encouraging more work in this direction, I say: Spinozists of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your methodological chains.

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