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SPINOZAN FREEDOM

Introduction

In this article, Spinoza's approach to freedom is investigated. Can his position convincingly be maintained? In section I, four possible views are presented. Some attention is given to Hobbes and Descartes, not merely on the ground that the influence of both thinkers on Spinoza has been considerable, but also because their positions are quite clear and provide useful contributions to the discussion. In this way, the background for Spinoza's thoughts is presented while his balanced position may be dealt with. Section II focuses on the role necessity plays in Spinoza's philosophy. God serves as the starting-point, and Spinoza manages to devise a remarkable analysis, not eschewing radical conclusions. There doesn't seem to be any room left for freedom, but in sections III and IV, respectively, it is pointed out why God and man are nonetheless free. In the case of God, this is connected with the way he¹ exists. For man, freedom may result from an attitude; it all depends on the way he deals with the necessity with which he is confronted. This intricate approach appears to be inconsistent, however, and an alternative may be required. Section V is concerned with one viable way of thinking.

I. The concepts of freedom

In order to make it clear how Spinoza perceives freedom, a number of possible approaches need to be discerned. Four possibilities will be outlined in this section; the first two, unlike the latter two, are relatively straightforward.

The simplest, first, approach to freedom consists in regarding it as the absence of external impediments. This is Hobbes's position.² Freedom, for man, lies, in his perspective, in having a possibility to follow one's will: »A FREE-MAN, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to doe what he has a will to.«³

Should one leave it at this, stating or supposing that, on this basis, man is also free in a more fundamental sense than this, little is said (this doesn't apply to Hobbes, who, as will be shown, complements this position with a valuable train of thought). It is merely stated that the fact that one may move unhindered is sufficient to ascertain freedom to decide whether one will move in some way.

¹ I do not use a capital here, which is, in my view, in line with Spinoza's conception (a capital is used in ›God‹, in accordance with the orthography in Spinoza's writings [›Deus‹]).

² Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan*, ch. 14, 21, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge 2007) 91, 145.

³ *Ibid.* ch. 21, ed. by R. Tuck, 146.

The most important question in this respect is whether one may determine one's own actions. If this isn't the case, one is guided, or rather determined, by causes one doesn't control. In the context of this first approach – freedom as the absence of external impediments –, both options are still present: a stone, being rolled down the street, e.g., is free, whereas it is not supposed to have caused its own movement. The question whether man is free in another sense than this one cannot, accordingly, be answered on the basis of this approach; someone is already ›free‹ if he isn't chained or contained, in which case the reason why he acts isn't dealt with.

The point, accordingly, is to settle the cause of an action. In the second approach, the will is the crucial element. Whether there are external causes that allow one to complete one's action is not the issue; the will is decisive. Descartes's point of view is clear: »[W]hoever turns out to have created us, and however powerful and however deceitful he may be, in the meantime we nonetheless experience within us the kind of freedom which enables us always to refrain from believing things which are not completely certain and thoroughly examined.«⁴ According to Descartes, it is self-evident that man has a free will.⁵ He finds support for this in the idea that one experiences the freedom to suspend one's judgment.⁶ Descartes claims that one is free, because one may suspend one's judgment. Still, the question remains why one acts thus; what is the *basis* for the suspension of judgment? Does one decide for oneself to do this, or not? The crux of the matter is, in other words, passed over by Descartes.

If one considers the issue in this way, the same problem emerges as in the first approach, freedom being interpreted as freedom of movement: the question lies beyond the level at which one is trying to find an answer. So the question should be: where does the will itself originate? Is the agent its cause, or not? Hobbes appears to point this out by indicating, supplementing his point of view reproduced above, that there is no such thing as ›free will‹: »[F]rom the use of the word *Freewill*, no liberty can be inferred to the will, desire, or inclination, but the Liberty of the man; which consisteth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to doe.«⁷

⁴ »[À] quocunque tandem simus, & quantumvis ille sit potens, quantumvis fallax, hanc nihilominus in nobis libertatem esse experimur, ut semper ab iis credendis, quae non planè certa sunt & explorata, possimus abstinere; atque ita cavere, ne unquam erremus.« René Descartes: *Principia Philosophiae*, I, 6. Œuvres, éd. par Charles Adam et Paul Tannery [=AT], vol. 8 (Paris 1964) 6. *The Philosophical Writings*, ed. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch [=CSM], vol. 1 (Cambridge 1990) 194.

⁵ *Ibid.* I, 39. AT 19. CSM 205, 206. In this case, I have omitted inverted commas around ›free will‹ as Descartes's view, who takes the notion seriously, is represented. The same applies to the passage below (note 9, *infra*), where Spinoza doesn't use inverted commas. In other occurrences, the commas are used.

⁶ *Ibid.* I, 39. AT 20. CSM 206.

⁷ Th. Hobbes: *Leviathan*, ch. 21, ed. by R. Tuck, [see note 2] 146.

Spinoza's perspective agrees with this and so provides, at the same time, a criticism of Descartes's position.⁸ The will always has a cause: »There is no absolute or free will in the mind, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause, which is also determined by another cause, and this again by another, and so to infinity.«⁹

If one claims that there is something like a ›free will‹, one doesn't consider the fact that the agent doesn't determine his own will. Supporters of the ›free will‹ decision realize, of course, that external circumstances are partly decisive for the outcome, but according to them, the ›free will‹ decision is located at a separate level, or exists in some other way. The question then arises to what degree one may determine for oneself how one deals with the objects on which the will is focused. Spinoza denies this to be possible to any degree.

Even God does not act on the basis of a ›free will‹;¹⁰ »If God had another understanding and will in acting, his essence, too, would necessarily be another.«¹¹ If God had acted differently from what is actually the case, the world would be different as well: »From the necessity of the divine nature, infinitely many things must follow in infinite ways (that is, everything which can fall under an object of infinite intellect).«¹²

Spinoza has two reasons for denying the existence of ›free will‹. First, ›the‹ will is merely an abstraction of the particular exercises of will one knows: »Since man has a different will from one moment to the next, he forms a general thing in his soul, which he calls will, just as he forms an idea of man from this and that particular man. Since he doesn't distinguish the immediate beings clearly enough from the conceptual beings, it happens that he characterizes the conceptual beings as things which truly exist in nature, and accordingly presents himself as a cause of some things, just as this frequently happens in the matter we are discussing. For if one should ask anyone why people want this or that, he would answer: because they have a will. Yet, as the will is but an idea of wanting this or that and therefore only a way of thinking, a *conceptual thing* and no *real thing*, nothing can be caused by it. *For nothing comes from nothing*. And so I think, since we have demonstrated that the will is not a thing in na-

⁸ There is some disagreement as to how the passages from Descartes's work referred to above should be interpreted, since his views may be somewhat more balanced, especially when one considers Descartes's other works (cf. John Cottingham: *The Intellect, the Will and the Passions. Spinoza's Critique of Descartes*. In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988) 239–257, esp. 250–254), but this doesn't seem to me to alleviate the criticism of his position.

⁹ »*In Mente nulla est absoluta, sive libera voluntas; sed Mens ad hoc, vel illud volendum determinatur à causa, quae etiam ab aliâ determinata est, & haec iterum ab aliâ, & sic in infinitum.*« *Ethica*, part II, prop. 48. *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg 1925) [=Opera] vol. 2, 129.

¹⁰ *Ethica*, part I, prop. 32, cor. I. *Opera* vol. 2, 73.

¹¹ »[S]i Deus alium intellectum actu habuisset, & aliam voluntatem, ejus etiam essentia alia necessariò esset [...].« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 33, schol. II. *Opera* vol. 2, 75.

¹² »*Ex necessitate divinae naturae, infinita infinitis modis (hoc est, omnia, quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt) sequi debent.*« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 16. *Opera* vol. 2, 60.

ture, but only an imagination, that one need not ask whether the will be free or not.«¹³

Second, according to Spinoza, »the will may not be called a free cause, but only a necessary one.«¹⁴ After all, if one were to speak of a ›free cause‹, one would have to indicate wherein freedom might consist. Here, Spinoza does use the word ›will‹ as a meaningful unit. One may question whether he maintains the conceptualism¹⁵ displayed in his early *KV* (*KV* is, according to some, Spinoza's first piece of writing); in, among other writings, *Ethica*, there are, at any rate, proofs that he clings to a conceptualistic position, such as in the following definition: »To the essence of some thing, that, I say, belongs, the presence of which necessarily brings the thing about and the absence of which necessarily negates it; or that without which the thing, and vice versa that which without the thing doesn't exist, nor may be comprehended.«¹⁶

This doesn't mean that Spinoza lacks a positive position with regard to freedom. This is expressed in the third and fourth approaches. In the third approach, it is stated that the being which determines its own being is free: »The true freedom is nothing else than the first cause.«¹⁷; so »God alone is the

¹³ »[O]mdat de mensch nu deze dan die Wil heeft, zoo maakt hy in syn ziele een algemeene wyze, die hy Wille noemt, gelyk hy ook zoo uyt deze man, en die man, een Idea maakt van mensch: en omdat hy de dadelyke wezens niet genoeg van de wezens van reeden en onderscheid, zoo gebeurt het dat hy de wezens van reeden aanmerkt als dingen die waarlyk in de Natuur zyn, en zoo zig zelfs als een oorzaak stelt van eenige dingen, gelyk in de verhandeling van de zaak waar af wy spreken niet wynig en gebeurt. Want als men iemand vraagt, waarom de mensch dit of dat wil: men antwoordt, omdat zy een Wil hebben: dog aangezien de Wil [...] maar een Idea is van dit of dat te willen, en daarom maar een wyze van denken: een *Ens Rationis* en geen *Ens Reale*, zoo en kan dan van haar niets veroorzaakt worden. *Nam ex nihilo nihil fit*. En zoo meen ik ook als wy getoont hebben, dat de Wille geen zaak is in de Natuur, maar alleen een verzierringe, men niet en behoeft te vraagen of de Wil vry of niet vry is.« Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand [=KV], part II, ch. XVI. Opera vol. 1, 82, 83.

¹⁴ »*Voluntas non potest vocari causa libera, sed tantum necessaria*.« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 32. Opera vol. 2, 72.

¹⁵ I qualify his position as conceptualistic, rather than as nominalistic, which is also possible (cf. e.g. Hubertus Hubbeling: *Spinoza's Methodology* [Assen 1964] 22), and reserve ›nominalism‹ for a radical position such as Roscelin's (cf. for Roscelin's stance Eike-Henner Kluge: Roscelin and the Medieval Problem of Universals. In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (1976) 495–414, esp. 411, 412; cf. for the classification Willard Van Orman Quine: On What There Is. In: id. *From a Logical Point of View* [Cambridge, Mass. 1953] 14, 15). Berkeley's position, e.g., may be qualified as conceptualistic: he argues against the existence of abstract ideas (George Berkeley: *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, introd. §§ 10, 11, 13. The Works [London 1949] vol. 2, 29–32), but clings to general ideas, realized by particular ones serving as models (ibid., introd. § 12 [vol. 2, 31, 32], § 15 [vol. 2, 33, 34]).

¹⁶ »Ad essentiam alicujus rei id pertinere dico, quo dato res necessariò ponitur & quo sublato res necessariò tollitur; vel id, sine quo res, & vice versa quod sine re nec esse, nec concipi potest.« *Ethica*, part II, def. II. Opera vol. 2, 84.

¹⁷ »de waare vryheid is alleen of niet anders als de eerste oorzaak«. *KV*, part I, ch. IV, Opera vol. 1, 37.

only free cause.«¹⁸ »God acts solely from the laws of his nature, forced by no one.«¹⁹

Meanwhile, Spinoza keeps emphasizing necessity: everything necessarily ensues from God's being. To many defenders of freedom, this idea is impossible: necessity is absent where freedom begins and vice versa. In Spinoza's view, however, the notions are reconcilable: »I have in the same way stated that everything follows with an inevitable necessity from God's nature, as everybody states that it follows from God's nature that he understands himself; which surely nobody denies to follow necessarily from the divine nature; and yet nobody takes it that God understands himself forced by some fate; instead, he does so entirely free, albeit necessarily«;²⁰ »As soon as I perceive that the three angles of a triangle are necessarily equal to two right ones, I also deny that it happens coincidentally. Similarly, as soon as I perceive that heat is the necessary consequence of fire, I also deny that it happens coincidentally. That *necessary and free* are two contraries seems no less absurd and conflicting with reason: for nobody may deny that God knows himself and all other things; yet all with one voice concede that God knows himself necessarily.«²¹ This complex train of thought is problematic. I will deal with it more thoroughly than here in section III.

The fourth approach isolates an element which supposedly lies outside the necessarily evolving process. It is taken into consideration that all events take place in a necessary way, but there is still room for freedom. This line of thought is crucial in Spinoza's philosophy. Reason is the decisive element for him. It is not the case that one wouldn't act necessarily; as was pointed out in the discussion of his attitude regarding ›free will‹, one can't evade this necessity and a notion of freedom that doesn't discount this is incorrect. It is, on the contrary, decisive that one realizes to be ›delivered‹ to necessity.²²

¹⁸ »God alleen [is] de eenigste vrye oorzaak«. KV, part I, ch. IV, *ibid.* 38.

¹⁹ »*Deus ex solis suae naturae legibus, & à nemine coactus agit.*« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 17. *Opera* vol. 2, 61.

²⁰ »[E]go eodem modo statui, omnia inevitabili necessitate ex Dei naturâ sequi, ac omnes statuunt, ex Dei naturâ sequi, quòd se ipsum intelligit: quod sanè nemo negat ex divinâ naturâ necessario sequi, & tamen nemo concipit, quòd Deus fato aliquo coactus, sed quòd omninò liberè, tametsi necessariò, seipsum intelligat.« *Letter 43*. *Opera* vol. 4, 221, 222.

²¹ »Quàm primùm animadverto, tres trianguli angulos duobus rectis necessariò aequales esse, nego quoque id casu fieri. Similiter, quàm primùm adverto, calorem necessarium ignis esse effectum, nego quoque id casu accidere. Quòd *Necessarium ac Liberum* duo contraria sunt, non minùs absurdum, & rationi repugnans videtur: nam nemo negare potest, Deum seipsum, & caetera omnia liberè cognoscere; & tamen cuncti communi suffragio concedunt, Deum seipsum necessariò cognoscere.« *Letter 56*. *Opera* vol. 4, 259.

²² *Tractatus Politicus [=TP]* ch. II, § 7. *Opera* vol. 3, 279. This is not, by the way, the right phrase to describe Spinoza's proposition: one is, in his view, just free if one is aware of the necessity which lies at the root of one's actions. In order to indicate the difference between (necessarily) bringing about something oneself and (necessarily) undergoing something, Spinoza presents this nuance: »I say that we act when something within or outside us takes place of which we are the adequate cause, in other words, [...] when something within or outside us follows from

One will gain peace of mind through this insight: »In so far as the mind understands all things as necessary, so far it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them.«²³ The degree to which one succeeds in accomplishing this depends on one's ability to use one's reasoning powers: »The more perfection each being has, the more it acts and the less it is acted on, and, conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is.«²⁴ Freedom consists in the insight that freedom in the sense of ›free will‹ isn't possible.

This section was primarily focused on indicating what ›freedom‹ means for Spinoza. He presents an uncompromising and clear train of thought. There are, however, important problems which must be addressed. I will deal with these in sections III and IV, after having elaborated on the notion of necessity in section II.

II. The all-embracing necessity in nature

According to Spinoza, the only existing thing is the substance,²⁵ which he also designates as God²⁶ or nature.²⁷ He thus, idiosyncratically, only acknowledges a single substance, which has important consequences. Since the world has developed according to God's nature, a necessary process takes place: »All things follow from God's eternal decree with the same necessity as it follows from the essence of the triangle that its three angles are equal to two right ones.«²⁸ After all, God couldn't have acted differently than he has acted.²⁹ This means that nothing exists coincidentally, »but all things are determined to exist and operate in a certain way from the necessity of the divine nature.«³⁰

our nature, which can only be understood clearly and distinctly from that nature. I say, on the other hand, that we are acted on when something within us takes place or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause.« (»Nos tum agere dico, cùm aliquid in nobis, aut extra nos fit, cujus adaequata sumus causa, hoc est [...], cùm ex nostrâ naturâ aliquid in nobis, aut extra nos sequitur, quod per eandem solam potest clarè, & distinctè intelligi. At contrâ nos pati dico, cùm in nobis aliquid fit, vel ex nostrâ naturâ aliquid sequitur, cujus nos non, nisi partialis, sumus causa.« Ethica, part III, def. II. Opera vol. 2, 139. That is why he says that it belongs to the nature of reason to consider things as necessary (Ethica, part II, prop. 44. Opera vol. 2, 125). After all, if one utilizes one's reason, one acts and is aware of the necessity.

²³ »Quatenus Mens res omnes, ut necessarias intelligit, eatenus majorem in affectûs potentiam habet, seu minùs ab iisdem patitur.« Ethica, part V, prop. 6. Opera vol. 2, 284.

²⁴ »Quò unaquaeque res plus perfectionis habet, eò magis agit, & minùs patitur, & contrâ, quò magis agit, eò perfectior est.« Ethica, part V, prop. 40. Opera vol. 2, 306.

²⁵ Ethica, part I, prop. 14, cor. II. Opera vol. 2, 56.

²⁶ Ethica, part I, prop. 11. Opera vol. 2, 52.

²⁷ Ethica, part IV, praef. Opera vol. 2, 206.

²⁸ »[O]mnia ab aeterno Dei decreto eâdem necessitate sequuntur, ac ex essentiâ trianguli sequitur, quòd tres ejus anguli sunt aequales duobus rectis.« Ethica, part II, prop. 49, schol. Opera vol. 2, 136.

²⁹ Ethica, part I, prop. 33. Opera vol. 2, 73.

³⁰ »[S]ed omnia ex [necessitate] divinae naturae determinata sunt ad certo modo existendum, & operandum.« Ethica, part I, prop. 29. Opera vol. 2, 70.

Spinoza discerns, besides this, a positive approach: »I call particular things contingent insofar as we, as long as we only regard their essence, find nothing which necessarily posits their existence or necessarily excludes it.«³¹ This doesn't mean that such things don't necessarily exist; rather, they don't exist as the beings they are. *In this sense*, only one being necessarily exists, namely God. His being involves existence,³² which is not the case for other beings.³³ This position follows from the two kinds of necessity he discerns: »A thing is either said to be necessary because of its essence, or because of its cause. For the existence of some thing either follows necessarily from its essence and definition, or from a given efficient cause.«³⁴

If one considers something as coincidental, in the sense that it would be excluded from the necessary process according to which the world exists, this merely results from a defective knowledge.³⁵ This is an important element in Spinoza's exposition. The point is that these contingent things are determined in their actions: »A thing which has been determined by God to do something cannot render itself undetermined.«³⁶ This becomes clear in particular in connection with the underlying thought that God is the immanent cause of all things.³⁷

At the same time, Spinoza is aware of the opinion many people share, that one may freely decide how one will act. This opinion is insufficient, since one doesn't inquire into the basis of one's actions, a problem with which, as was pointed out, Descartes, for instance, is confronted. One lacks knowledge of the causes of one's actions and consequently considers oneself – mistakenly – to be free.³⁸

In part 2 of *Ethica*, Spinoza complements this with an analysis of »will:« »People are deceived in thinking they are free. This opinion consists entirely in this, that they are conscious of their actions, yet ignorant of the causes by which these are determined. This, therefore, is their idea of freedom: that they don't know any cause of their actions. For what they say, that human actions depend on the will, are words of which they have no idea. No one knows, after all, what a will is and how it would move the body; those who state something else, and

³¹ »Res singulares voco contingentes, quatenus, dum ad earum solam essentiam attendimus, nihil invenimus, quod earum existentiam necessariò ponat, vel quod ipsam necessariò secludat.« *Ethica*, part IV, def. III. Opera vol. 2, 209.

³² *Ethica*, part I, prop. 8, schol. II. Opera vol. 2, 51.

³³ *Ethica*, part I, prop. 24. Opera vol. 2, 67.

³⁴ »Res aliqua necessaria dicitur, vel ratione suae essentiae, vel ratione causae. Rei enim alicujus existentia vel ex ipsius essentiali, & definitione, vel ex datâ causâ efficiente necessariò sequitur.« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 33, schol. I. Opera vol. 2, 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ »Res, quae à Deo ad aliquid operandum determinata est, se ipsam indeterminatam reddere non potest.« *Ethica*, part I, prop. 27. Opera vol. 2, 68.

³⁷ *Ethica*, part I, prop. 18. Opera vol. 2, 63.

³⁸ *Ethica*, part I, appendix. Opera vol. 2, 78; part III, prop. 2, schol., *ibid.* 143; part III, prop. 59, schol., *ibid.* 189.

devise seats and dwelling places for the soul, are wont to give rise to laughter or nausea.«³⁹

This is not the reasoning according to which ›the‹ will doesn't exist and is merely an abstraction (cf. section I), although there may be a parallel here (the more abstract a thing is, the less meaning it has for Spinoza⁴⁰); the issue at hand is that a situation in which a will would interact with a body is unclear. The criticism of Descartes's doctrine, in which the latter resorts to the pineal gland,⁴¹ which would allegedly serve as a sufficient means of explanation, is in line with this consideration.

Spinoza himself evades this problem by stating that body and mind are properties of God,⁴² which he can hold since he doesn't, like Descartes, cling to the idea of a ›free will‹. The will isn't something which exists separately and freely; it is imbedded in the necessary process which emanates from nature, so: »Those who believe that they speak, are silent, or act in whatever way on the basis of a free decision of the mind, dream with open eyes.«⁴³

In *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza puts forth a view that seems, at first sight, to conflict with the ideas set out hitherto. He discusses the presence of the freedom of speech. He praises the Dutch state, in which one has the opportunity to decide one's outlook on life for oneself;⁴⁴ moreover, one has the right to judge freely, a right that extends to matters of religion, since no one can be forced to be happy.⁴⁵

In accordance with his separation of political and religious power, he states: »One is governed in the most violent way where opinions, which are part of anyone's right, are considered criminal.«⁴⁶ Everyone should be granted a free judgment in everything except outward actions.⁴⁷ This ›free judgment‹ seems at odds with the position set out above. It is, however, important what Spinoza means by this judgment. This is made clear in the following: »That government is

³⁹ »Falluntur homines, quòd se liberos esse putant, [...] quae opinio in hoc solo consistit, quòd suarum actionum sint conscii, & ignari causarum, à quibus determinantur. Haec ergo est eorum libertatis idea, quòd suarum actionum nullam cognoscant causam. Nam quòd ajunt, humanas actiones à voluntate pendere, verba sunt, quorum nullam habent ideam. Quid enim voluntas sit, & quomodo moveat Corpus, ignorant omnes, qui aliud jactant, & animae sedes, & habitacula fingunt, vel risum, vel nauseam movere solent.« *Ethica*, part II, prop. 35, schol. *Opera* vol. 2, 117.

⁴⁰ *Ethica*, part II, prop. 40, schol. I. *Opera* vol. 2, 121.

⁴¹ *Ethica*, part V, praef. *Opera* vol. 2, 278–280.

⁴² *Ethica*, part II, prop. 1. *Opera* vol. 2, 86; part II, prop. 2, *ibid.* 86.

⁴³ »Qui [...] credunt, se ex libero Mentis decreto loqui, vel tacere, vel quicquam agere, oculis apertis somniant.« *Ethica*, part III, prop. 2, schol. *Opera* vol. 2, 144.

⁴⁴ *Tractatus theologico-politicus* [=TTHP], praef. *Opera* vol. 3, 7.

⁴⁵ TTHP, ch. VII. *Opera* vol. 3, 117.

⁴⁶ »[I]bi [...] violentissime regnatur, ubi opiniones, quae uniuscujusque juris sunt [...], pro crimine habentur [...].« TTHP, ch. XVIII. *Opera* vol. 3, 225.

⁴⁷ TTHP, ch. XVIII. *Opera* vol. 3, 226.

the most violent in which the freedom to say and teach what one thinks is denied to everyone; on the contrary, that one is moderate, in which that same freedom is granted to everyone.«⁴⁸

It is exactly because of this position that Spinoza is not struck by the accusation that his views would render a contradiction – although he also points to another type of freedom (which will be dealt with in section IV), which *is* problematic –, since now only freedom of speech is involved. This type of freedom may, in my view, be qualified as the first of the four types outlined in section I. Freedom of speech is, in other words, reconcilable with the idea that ›free will‹ isn't involved in the agent's judgment: one is enabled to decide one's opinion, but this situation is no different from the one in which it is allowed that one decide where to buy one's groceries, for example; there are several possibilities, one of which is selected; the reason why this is done is not at stake at this level. The presence of freedom of speech does not, in short, conflict with the absence of ›free will‹.

Spinoza has presented a coherent line of thought; there is no ›free will‹ and everything happens strictly necessarily. He doesn't leave it at this. Some sort of freedom is still possible for both God and man, as was indicated. It is now to be explored whether this reasoning produces convincing results.

III. *The second interpretation of causa sui*

In the treatment of Spinoza's views on freedom, the notion ›*causa sui*‹, ›cause of itself‹, must be granted a pivotal position. It plays a fundamental part in his metaphysics: it lies in the nature of a substance to exist,⁴⁹ a proposition which follows from Definition 1 of part 1 of *Ethica* (›By cause of itself, I understand that, whose essence involves existence; or that, whose nature cannot be conceived, if not as existing.«).⁵⁰

Although Spinoza appears to be critical of the notion in *KV*,⁵¹ it serves as a keynote there,⁵² just as in *Ethica*. The notion of freedom is subsequently connected with it (cf. notes 17, 18, *supra*). The fact that God can't refrain from doing what he does⁵³ is not considered a disadvantage, for everything is to occur ne-

⁴⁸ »[I]llud [...] imperium violentissimum erit, ubi unicuique libertas dicendi, & docendi, quae sentit, negatur, & contra id moderatum, ubi haec eadem libertas unicuique conceditur.« TTHP, ch. XX. Opera vol. 3, 240.

⁴⁹ *Ethica*, part I, prop. 7. Opera vol. 2, 49.

⁵⁰ »Per causam sui intelligo id, cujus essentia involvit existentiam, sive id, cujus natura non potest concipi, nisi existens.« *Ethica*, part I, def. I. Opera vol. 2, 45.

⁵¹ *KV*, part II, ch. XVI. Opera vol. 1, 83; Appendix, axioma 6, *ibid.* 114.

⁵² *KV*, part I, ch. III. Opera vol. 1, 35.

⁵³ *KV*, part I, ch. VI. Opera vol. 1, 40, a position which is also defended in *Ethica* (cf. note 29 *supra*).

cessarily according to God's nature; if God were imperfect, things would be different than they in fact are.⁵⁴

In *Ethica*, the matter is treated more comprehensively and with more nuance than in *KV*. Spinoza defines ›freedom‹ there as follows: »That thing is called free which exists from the mere necessity of its nature and is merely determined to act by itself; that thing, however, is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined to exist and operate in a certain and determinate way by something else.«⁵⁵ Spinoza distinguishes, in this way, ›free‹ from ›necessary‹, but at the same time introduces necessity in his definition of ›free‹. A specific necessity, that of God's own nature, is the issue at hand. This appears to be problematic, as two irreconcilable notions are at stake here.

In order to resolve this problem, he distinguishes between the two kinds of necessity mentioned in section II (note 34, *supra*). Something acts or is acted on⁵⁶ necessarily because of the cause which underlies the situation; that God acts – he can but act; it is impossible that God should be acted on, since God would otherwise only partly be the cause of nature and something besides him would exist, which is impossible – is necessary for another reason, namely that his power is his essence itself.⁵⁷ Since he may unfold his being, he is free; since, nevertheless, this may only happen in one way, this process is characterized as necessary: »God, who exists absolutely freely, understands and works necessarily as well, for he exists, understands and works from the necessity of his nature.«⁵⁸

This quote shows that the notion ›causa sui‹ is important in two respects. In the first place, it points out why God cannot be absent. The problems involved in this reasoning are primarily of interest with regard to metaphysical considerations; I will not discuss these issues here. In the second place, the basis for God's freedom is indicated in this way. This is problematic as well; the difficulty lies in the fact that one is to grasp the unity of freedom and necessity. Spinoza's treatment is, in my view, insufficient to gain certainty about God's freedom.

IV. Human freedom

In Spinoza's view, God is free because he acts according to his own nature. It is difficult to make it clear wherein human freedom might consist. Still, Spinoza thinks man can be free. Unlike God, man isn't free in any case, but he does have

⁵⁴ *KV*, part I, ch. IV. Opera vol. 1, 39.

⁵⁵ »Ea res libera dicitur, quae ex solâ suae naturae necessitate existit, & à se solâ ad agendum determinatur: Necessaria autem, vel potiùs coacta, quae ab alio determinatur ad existendum, & operandum certâ, ac determinatâ ratione.« *Ethica*, part I, def. VII. Opera vol. 2, 46.

⁵⁶ Spinoza's specific interpretation of ›acting‹ is relevant here; cf. notes 22, 24 *supra*.

⁵⁷ *Ethica*, part I, prop. 34. Opera vol. 2, 76.

⁵⁸ »Deus, qui absolutè liber existit, intelligit, & operatur, necessariò etiam, nempe ex suae naturae necessitate existit, intelligit, & operatur.« *TP*, ch. II, § 7. Opera vol. 3, 279.

the possibility to be so at his disposal. In a letter, he compares both types of freedom. Something is free, as was expounded in the previous section, »which exists and acts necessarily from its nature alone. God, for example, exists freely, albeit necessarily, since he exists from the necessity of his nature alone.«⁵⁹

He denies human freedom to be ›free will‹ here, too; human freedom »consists in this alone, that people are aware of their desires, and are ignorant of the causes by which they are determined.«⁶⁰ The point is that one doesn't determine one's actions, but is to have the right attitude with regard to the necessity that guides life. Reason is crucial here: a free man lives solely according to the precept of reason.⁶¹

For Spinoza, there is, just as in the case of God's actions, no contradiction between freedom and necessity: »[...] it is not incompatible to hold that a person is both determined by outside causes and is, at the same time, self-determined, at least in regard to particular actions. What this means is that a person may determine particular actions from his own nature alone, yet still be determined by outside causes.«⁶² Spinoza expresses it as follows: »It is a true freedom to be and remain chained by the lovely chains of God's love.«⁶³

It is part of freedom to love God: »We clearly understand wherein our salvation, happiness or freedom consists, namely in the constant and eternal love towards God, or in God's love towards human beings.«⁶⁴ The following illustrates what Spinoza means by this: »He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly, loves God, and so much the more in proportion as he more understands himself and his emotions.«⁶⁵ It must be noted here that Spinoza defines ›love‹ (›amor‹) as »delight accompanied by the idea of an external cause«,⁶⁶ and that it is ›intuitive knowing‹ (›scientia intuitiva‹), which is the third sort of knowledge that Spinoza discerns,⁶⁷ that leads to the understanding of God.⁶⁸

⁵⁹ »[Q]uae ex solâ suae naturae necessitate existit, & agit [...]. Ex. gr. Deus, tametsi necessariò, liberè tamen existit, quia ex solâ suae naturae necessitate existit.« Letter 58. Opera vol. 4, 265.

⁶⁰ »[H]umana illa libertas [...] in hoc solo consistit, quòd homines sui appetitùs sint conscii, & causarum, à quibus determinantur, ignari.« Letter 58. Opera vol. 4, 266.

⁶¹ Ethica, part IV, prop. 67. Opera vol. 2, 261.

⁶² Joel I. Friedman: An Overview of Spinoza's Ethics. In: Synthese 37 (1978) 67–106, esp. 97.

⁶³ »[H]et [is] een waare vryheid [...], met de liefvelyke ketenen van [Gods] liefde geboeydt te zyn en te blyven.« KV, part II, Ch. XXVI. Opera vol. 1, 109.

⁶⁴ »[C]larè intelligimus, quâ in re nostra salus, seu beatitudo, seu Libertas consistit, nempe in constanti, & aeterno erga Deum Amore, sive in Amore Dei erga homines.« Ethica, part V, prop. 36, schol. Opera vol. 2, p. 303.

⁶⁵ »Qui se, suosque affectûs clarè, & distinctè intelligit, Deum amat, & eò magis, quòd se, suosque affectûs magis intelligit.« Ethica, part V, prop. 15. Opera vol. 2, 290.

⁶⁶ »Amor est Laetitia, concomitante ideâ causae externae.« Ethica, part III, affectuum definitiones, def. 6. Opera vol. 2, 192.

⁶⁷ Ethica, part II, prop. 40, schol. II. Opera vol. 2, 122.

⁶⁸ Ethica, part V, prop. 25. Opera vol. 2, 296.

Indeed, one will realize the necessity of all things if one considers them through reason.⁶⁹ If one doesn't approach things prejudiced and realizes that they were bound to happen, one will accept that they occur. Another positive consequence follows from the insight in this necessity (cf. note 23, *supra*).

This explanation involves two problems. The first problem consists in the difficulty of uniting this defense of an all-embracing necessity with Spinoza's notion of freedom, and especially whether he takes the comprehensiveness of necessity seriously enough himself. A contradiction appears to arise in *KV* when Spinoza wants to illustrate how necessity and freedom are related. He says: »As long as man is a part of nature, he must follow the laws of nature, which is religion; and as long as he does, he partakes of well-being.«⁷⁰ It is crucial what Spinoza understands by ›must‹ here (the original – Dutch – word is ›moet‹). If this means: ›man is part of nature, and must therefore, being part of nature, follow its laws‹, he merely points to the necessity in nature. However, there are two reasons to think this isn't his claim.

First, he states that man partakes of well-being as long as he follows the laws of nature, which implies that it is possible to refrain from doing this and not to partake of well-being. One may also interpret this as: ›man in fact partakes of well-being, as he (necessarily) follows these laws‹, but the fact that it wouldn't then matter what man's attitude would be pleads against this. He wouldn't accomplish his well-being actively by using reason; this would be brought about at any rate. ›As long as he does‹ wouldn't refer to ›as long as he uses reason‹, but to ›as long as he exists‹. However, as Spinoza states that »man, being part of the entire nature, on which he depends, by which he is also governed, can't do anything by himself to achieve salvation and well-being«,⁷¹ the problem doesn't manifest itself here *per se*.

Second, and the interpretation is less ambiguous here, it is important what Spinoza understands by ›the laws of nature‹ in this case. In *Ethica*, this pertains to that which is decisive for nature. In *KV*, Spinoza says, as becomes apparent from the quote (note 70, *supra*), that following the laws of nature is religion. By ›religion‹, he understands the following: «In this [that we dedicate everything to God, and love him merely because he is the most wonderful and perfect being, and we thus sacrifice ourselves completely to him] consists, in fact, both the true religion and our eternal salvation and happiness.«⁷² Spinoza's position on the

⁶⁹ *Ethica*, part II, prop. 44. Opera vol. 2, 125; cf. note 22, *supra*.

⁷⁰ »[D]e mensch, zoo lange hy een deel van de Natuur is, zoo moet hy de wetten van de Natuur volgen, het welk de godsdienst is. En zoo lange hy zulks doet, is hy in zyn welstand.« *KV*, part II, ch. XVIII. Opera vol. 1, 88.

⁷¹ »[D]e mensch als zynde een deel van geheel de Natuur, van welke hy afhangt, van welke hy ook geregeert word, uyt syn zelve niet iets kan doen tot zyn heyl en welstand.« *KV*, part II, ch. XVIII. Opera vol. 1, 86, 87.

⁷² »[H]ier in [dat wy alles aan God toeëigenen, hem alleen beminnen, omdat hy de heerlijkste, en aldervolmaaktste is, en ons zelveen alzo hem geheel opofferen] bestaat eigentlyk, en

love towards God in *Ethica* (cf. note 64, *supra*) agrees with this, but this does presuppose a contribution by man and this time one may not, as in the first instance, suffice with the idea that man is part of nature.

Spinoza is faced with a contradiction. He does, after all, state that »God's laws don't have such a character that they might be infringed upon.«⁷³ It is no wonder that this difficulty emerges, as Spinoza is trying to bring activity and passivity in human actions on a par, which cannot easily, if at all, be made intelligible: »When we say that some things are within our power and others are beyond it, we understand by those which are in our power, the ones that we realize by the order or together with nature, of which we are part.«⁷⁴

In *Ethica*, too, the problem is manifest. From Spinoza's attitude towards affects, it turns out that the ideas are decisive: »An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.«⁷⁵ Since he indicates that the order of ideas is the same as that of things,⁷⁶ the question ensues *where* human freedom is to be located. It is crucial whether one has adequate ideas or not: »Our mind, insofar as it has adequate ideas, necessarily acts, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, is necessarily acted on.«⁷⁷ Are the actions brought about by adequate ideas? Spinoza affirms this: »The actions of the mind originate from adequate ideas alone.«⁷⁸ This entails that one is dependent on ideas in order to be free; on this basis, one *becomes* free.

de waare godsdienst, en ons eeuwig heyl en gelukzaligheid.« KV, part II, ch. XVIII. Opera vol. 1, 88.

⁷³ »Gods wetten [zyn] niet en [...] van zoo een natuur, datze zoude kunnen worden overgetreden.« KV, part II, ch. XXIV. Opera vol. 1, 104.

⁷⁴ »[A]ls wy zeggen dat eenige dingen in, andere buyten onse magt zyn, zoo verstaan wy, door die welke *in onse macht zyn* zulke die wy uytwerken, door ordre of te zamen met de Natuur waar van wy een deel zyn«. KV, part II, ch. V. Opera vol. 1, 64. The last part of this sentence may also be translated thus: »[O]r together with the nature of which we are part.« This remains closer to the actual text, since it contains a definite article and lacks a comma after ›Natuur‹ (›nature‹), but the version without the article and with the amplifying clause (rather than the restrictive clause) seems to me to remain closer to Spinoza's main idea (the alternative would imply the existence of more than one nature).

⁷⁵ »*Affectus, qui passio est, desinit esse passio, simulatque ejus claram, & distinctam formamur ideam.*« *Ethica*, part V, prop. 3. Opera vol. 2, 282. In the translation, I have left out the commas after ›affectus‹ (›affect‹) and the first occurrence of ›passio‹ (›passion‹) as an amplifying clause would otherwise be rendered, which would conflict with the possibility of an affect ceasing to be a passion, as Spinoza argues.

⁷⁶ *Ethica*, part II, prop. 7. Opera vol. 2, 89.

⁷⁷ »*Mens nostra quaedam agit, quaedam verò patitur, nempe quatenus adaequatas habet ideas, eatenus quaedam necessariò agit, & quatenus ideas habet inadaequatas, eatenus necessariò quaedam patitur.*« *Ethica*, part III, prop. 1. Opera vol. 2, 140.

⁷⁸ »*Mentis actiones ex solis ideis adaequatis oriuntur [...]*« *Ethica*, part III, prop. 3. Opera vol. 2, 144. This is, incidentally, not a superfluous addition: in proposition 1 of part III of *Ethica*, Spinoza merely states that the presence of adequate ideas is a sufficient condition in order to act; here, he makes it clear that their presence is a necessary condition as well. If, in other words, there are adequate ideas, one acts and if one acts, adequate ideas are present.

The difficulty with this is that freedom is seen as the *result* of acting in some way. This implies that one is, without contributing anything oneself, led to a situation in which one is, supposedly, free. The notion ›free‹ is insufficient to characterize this situation. If one wants to speak of freedom, this can only consist in acting, not in the situation caused by this, for otherwise it would only be a matter of freedom of movement (the first of the four types of freedom distinguished in section I). This possibility isn't open to Spinoza either, however. If one were to bring the adequate ideas about oneself, on what basis would this take place? Spinoza's own conviction of necessity works against him in this case: some cause that leads to the occurrence of an adequate idea may always be submitted, and if one should acknowledge a ›free‹ individual, this isn't taken into consideration. Hence, the observation that Spinoza's claim that freedom is supposed to lie in insight isn't elaborated enough⁷⁹ appears to be correct.

The second problem is closely connected with this; it is, in fact, a sub-problem to the first. In *TP*, Spinoza says: »Most people believe that the ignorant disturb the order of nature rather than follow it, and conceive human beings in nature like a realm within a realm.«⁸⁰ Spinoza criticizes this conception: it isolates a certain position from necessity, an ›imperium in imperio‹ (›realm within a realm‹) where one is imagined to be free. The formulation ›imperium in imperio‹ is also present in *Ethica*,⁸¹ with the same meaning as in *TP*.⁸² The only person he mentions there by name is Descartes. Elsewhere, he attacks the Stoics on the same issue: »The Stoics thought that the affects depend absolutely on our will, and that we can absolutely govern them.«⁸³ (Of course, matters should not be oversimplified here.⁸⁴)

There seems, indeed, to be a distinction in (early) Stoicism (it is at least attributed to Chrysippus) between ›causae adiuuantes et proximae‹ (›auxiliary and proximate causes‹) and ›causae perfectae et principales‹ (›perfect and primary causes‹), external (or antecedent) causes being complemented by a domain where room is – supposedly – left to (partially) decide an outcome.⁸⁵

Do Spinoza's ideas deviate enough from such a view to make sure that the criticism he directs at (among others) Descartes and the Stoics doesn't strike his

⁷⁹ Rüdiger Bittner: Spinozas Gedanke, daß Einsicht befreit. In: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 42 (1994) 963–971, esp. 970, 971.

⁸⁰ »[P]lerique, ignaros naturae ordinem magis perturbare, quàm sequi, credunt, & homines in naturâ veluti imperium in imperio concipiunt.« *TP*, ch. II, § 6. *Opera* vol. 3, 277.

⁸¹ *Ethica*, part III, praef. *Opera* vol. 2, 137.

⁸² Incidentally, the phrase appears in *TTHP* as well (ch. XVII. *Opera* vol. 3, 220), but it has a different meaning there.

⁸³ »Stoici [...] putârunt [affectûs] a nostrâ voluntate absolutè pendêre, nosque iis absolutè imperare posse.« *Ethica*, part V, praef. *Opera* vol. 2, 277.

⁸⁴ Cf. Herman de Dijn: *Naturalism, Freedom and Ethics in Spinoza*. In: *Studia Leibnitiana* 22 (1990) 138–150, esp. 146.

⁸⁵ M. Tullius Cicero: *De fato* 41–44, ed. by Remo Giomini (Leipzig 1975) 170, 171.

own philosophy as well? He appears to consider reason as a tower of strength, and how is this different from the ›imperium in imperio‹ to which those who Spinoza accuses of being ignorant adhere?

In *Ethica*, he states that one may acquire power over the affects by insight: »The more an affect is known to us, the more it is in our power, and the less the mind is acted on by it.«⁸⁶ This results from the fact that no affect is a passion if one has a clear and distinct idea of it (cf. note 75, *supra*). The pivotal question is: is one free to create this clear and distinct idea *oneself*? If so, Spinoza resorts to a realm within a realm; if not, it is not up to man to relieve himself of the passion. The last proposition in *Ethica* seems to provide clarification. Here, he proclaims: »Because we rejoice in virtue, we are able to restrain our lusts.«⁸⁷ Spinoza uses the word ›coërcere‹ (›restrain‹), which evidences that he sees an active role for man here; the word may also mean: ›keep within the bounds‹, and these bounds appear to serve exactly to mark a realm within a realm, so that the problem in *Ethica* is clear.

In *TP*, conversely, Spinoza takes a strikingly consistent position: »Experience amply demonstrates that it is no more in our power to have a sound mind than to have a sound body.«⁸⁸ It is difficult to assess whether Spinoza really did reconsider the ideas upon which the problematic conclusions in *Ethica* are founded: the presentation of *TP* is quite different from that of *Ethica* and although there are similarities in content, the goals they aim at are far apart. Moreover, *TP* hasn't been completed, so that it doesn't necessarily contain Spinoza's final thoughts, and he proves to cling to a notion of freedom in this writing again.⁸⁹

Be that as it may, the train of thought presented in *TP* is more in line with the general necessity that is described in both writings than the situation in which some freedom is still granted to exist. If one does adhere to the latter possibility, external and internal causes are distinguished, the external being supposed to be outside one's power, the internal to belong to it.

This distinction is untenable and needs to be given up. That Spinoza's method is useful and may lead, as he argues,⁹⁰ to peace of mind, I won't deny. That one may reach this peace of mind in freedom, however, I can't affirm unreservedly.

⁸⁶ »Affectus [...] eò magis in nostrâ potestate est, & Mens ab eo minùs patitur, quò nobis est notior.« *Ethica*, part V, prop. 3, cor. Opera vol. 2, 282.

⁸⁷ »[Q]uia [virtutem] gaudemus, ideò libidines coërcere possumus.« *Ethica*, part V, prop. 42. Opera vol. 2, 307.

⁸⁸ »[E]xperientia satis superque docet, quòd in nostrâ potestate non magis sit, Mentem sanam, quàm Corpus sanum habere.« *TP*, ch. II, §6. Opera vol. 3, 278.

⁸⁹ *TP*, ch. II, §11. Opera vol. 3, 280.

⁹⁰ *Ethica*, part II, prop. 49, schol. Opera vol. 2, 135, 136; part V, prop. 27, *ibid.* 297.

V. *The basic analysis*

In order to ascertain whether freedom of the second and fourth kind, as distinguished in section I, may be defended, it is important on what grounds one acts. Spinoza's treatment of this issue already makes it clear that it is difficult to defend the second kind. In this last section, I will elaborate on this and present a possible approach.

Does one decide for oneself on what basis one will act? It is possible that the world, as a whole, has developed, and keeps developing, on the basis of a necessary process. Such a view agrees with Spinoza's outlook. If this possibility is accepted, the issue is rapidly resolved:⁹¹ man isn't free, since everything takes place within the overall structure within which his actions are necessarily performed necessarily.⁹² The problem is, of course, that this point of view cannot be accepted without a further exposition, such as Spinoza's own metaphysical foundation. I think, for a number of reasons which I can't set out here, that his arguments in that respect don't suffice. One may argue that the process of development was necessary, but alternatives to this view are also possible. I can't decide the issue, since I can't view things from a different perspective than the one I actually have; I only know the process as it presents itself to me, and am therefore unable to assess whether it is necessary or not.

It may, however, be possible to decide whether freedom is possible if one investigates the individual situations, i.e., at the level of the actions. It is difficult to decide whether one is thus determined to act as one does. Of course, as soon as some ground is ascertained to be the basis of an action, this presupposes the occurrence of a factor:⁹³ one may suppose a factor-free realm, but (presumably) can't imagine it. Still, this doesn't entail that acting on another basis than factors is impossible, although I cannot conceive of such a course of events. (By saying that this isn't impossible, I don't want to suggest that I can imagine *how* this might take place, but merely that I can imagine *that* it might be the case.)

The question remains: on what basis does one act? Does one decide one's own actions, or are there merely factors? A domain of freedom seems to present itself; may one not, as soon as one has (or seems to have) chosen something, deviate from the original decision and choose an alternative? This presupposes without justification that the general necessity isn't the case. Besides, it means

⁹¹ Unless one resorts to a compatibilist outlook, which doesn't suffice, for reasons I can't elaborate here. Suffice it to say here that compatibilism presents a balanced account, but is still obliged to explain how ›free will‹ is possible, so that the issue arises here as well, albeit at another point in the exposition than in the case of libertarianism.

⁹² This is not a slip of the pen: the actions are necessarily performed, as they are part of the process, and as such they occur necessarily (and not freely), since there is but one possible outcome.

⁹³ ›Factor‹ originally (in Latin) means ›creator‹, so factors are the things that decide actions if they are the only elements involved.

that another decision is simply given more weight than the previous one and becomes decisive for that reason. The point is that one doesn't grant this weight to the decision oneself if there isn't any other guidance than that resulting from factors.

The problem that hasn't been solved, and which I don't pretend to be able to solve here, is that it has merely been demonstrated that it is difficult to show that something other than factors would lie at the root of actions; the impossibility of this situation isn't given with this. After all, if one doesn't want to commit an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, another basis for actions than factors can't simply be dismissed as impossible, even if it isn't clear wherein this would consist.

Conclusion

Spinoza's contribution to the issue to what degree freedom is possible is admirable. He doesn't shun far-reaching observations and manages to present a number of results which appear to be irrefutable. He demonstrates, with a remarkable clarity, the problems involved with 'free will'. Concerning the all-embracing necessity to which he points, I think one should be cautious to use this as a basic idea. Spinoza doesn't manage to clarify how God's necessity and freedom may be united. The same results are derived with regard to human freedom if one suspends judgment regarding the issue whether everything follows straight from God's nature and simply analyzes the process on the basis of which the actions are performed. The consistency which is characteristic for his philosophy in general is absent here.

One has to make an effort to find the problems in Spinoza's thoughts in this respect. That doesn't take away the fact that those that do emerge need to be brought to attention. The continual element in his defense of the minimal amount of human freedom which is still supposed to exist is reason. Through reason, one may decide how one deals with the fact that everything happens necessarily. This is problematic, for the reasons pointed out in section 4. Spinoza's position, whose interpretation of freedom leaves a small island of inconsistency, seems at odds with his overall analysis of freedom and necessity. That doesn't mean, of course, that everything he says needs to be re-evaluated. The critical remarks I have expressed here seem to me to be necessary – perhaps in more than one sense of the word –, but they don't diminish the value of his thoughts when it comes to the uncompromising way in which the conclusions are reached. His position is, on the whole, clear and generates a number of difficulties for those defending any sort of freedom aside from freedom of movement.