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Desire for Excellence

Reflections on Plato and Spinoza

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Vicdan Mutlu

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The thesis of Vicdan Mutlu

is approved by

Prof. Dr. Stephen Voss (Committee Chairperson)

Stephen Voss

Dr. Chryssi Sidiropoulou

Chryssi Sidiropoulou

Dr. Sun Demirli

Sun Demirli

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ABSTRACT

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The main aim of this thesis is to provide a good understanding of Plato's and Spinoza's desire for excellence and show in what respects their views resemble and differ from each other. To achieve this aim, their notions of 'desire' and 'excellence' have been examined. Some of the questions that have been raised in this thesis are as following: 'What is the nature of our desires?', 'What is excellence?', 'What is the relation between excellence and goodness?', 'Is excellence something subjective or objective?', 'Does everybody desire only the good?', 'Is desire for excellence a unique privilege of philosophers?', 'Is excellence something attainable for man?', 'Who can approximate to excellence?', 'Does excellence lead to happiness?' 'Is excellence an assimilation to God?'

The present study also aims to show the consistencies/inconsistencies of their ideas and the problems in their theses, when necessary, and to come up with a fair interpretation of their work.

In this thesis I argue that Spinoza's notion of excellence is deeply connected to 'the Third Kind of Knowledge', on the other hand, Plato's notion of excellence is connected to 'the Knowledge of the Form of the Good'. I also claim that for both

philosophers the way to excellence lies in wisdom, that is, in being virtuous and living the life of reason. The ultimate excellence, according to them, is beyond our reach, but they have drawn an ideal model of life to be pursued, although even they were not able to attain that model. The nature of this ideal model of life is the subject matter of this thesis. It is also argued that, for both Plato and Spinoza, desire for excellence is a unique privilege of philosophers. Also approximation to excellence can be achieved only by those people who are living the life of reason, i.e. philosophers like Plato and Spinoza.



KISA ÖZET

Mükemmellik Arzusu

Platon ve Spinoza Üzerine Düşünceler

Vicdan Mutlu

Bu tezin temel amacı Platon ve Spinoza'nın mükemmellik arzularını açıklamak ve görüşlerinin hangi açılardan birbirine benzediğini, hangi açılardan birbirinden ayrıldığını ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için, adı geçen filozofların 'arzu' ve 'mükemmellik' anlayışları incelendi. Bu tezde cevapları aranan sorulardan bazıları şunlardır: 'Arzularımızın doğası nasıldır?', 'Mükemmellik nedir?', 'İyilik ve mükemmellik arasında nasıl bir ilişki vardır?', 'Mükemmellik öznel midir yoksa nesnel mi?', 'Herkes sadece iyiyi mi arzar?', 'Mükemmellik arzusu filozofların ayrıcalığında mıdır?', 'Mükemmellik insan için ulaşılabilir bir şey midir?', 'Mükemmelliğe kimler yaklaşabilir?', 'Mükemmellik mutluluğa götürür mü?', 'Mükemmellik Tanrı'ya benzemek midir?'.

Bu çalışma, yeri geldiğinde Spinoza ve Platon'un fikirlerindeki tutarlı ve tutarsız yönleri, tezlerindeki bazı problemleri göstermeyi, ayrıca, adı geçen filozoflara ait çalışmaların adil bir yorumunu yapmayı da hedeflemektedir.

Tez, Spinoza'nın 'mükemmellik' kavramıyla 'Üçüncü Tür Bilgi' arasında, ayrıca Platon'un 'mükemmellik' kavramıyla 'İyi Formunun/İdeasının Bilgisi' arasında

derin bir ilişki olduğunu savunmaktadır. Her iki filozof için de mükemmelliğin bilgelikte, yani erdemli olmakta ve akıl hayatı yaşamakta yattığı öne sürülmektedir. Söz konusu filozoflar mükemmelliğin ulaşılmazlığına inansalar da (hatta bizzat mükemmelliği tecrübe etme şansını yakalayamasalar da) hepimiz için ideal birer hayat modeli önermektedirler. Spinoza ve Platon'un çizdiği bu ideal hayat modelinin doğası tezin temel konusudur. Tezde, ayrıca, mükemmellik arzusunun ve mükemmelliğe yaklaşma başarısının yalnızca akıl hayatını yaşayanların, yani Platon ve Spinoza gibi filozofların ayrıcalığında olduğu iddia edilmektedir.



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INTRODUCTION

Spinoza as well as Plato had an ideal human nature and ideal life in mind, when they have written their works. Both of them desired to attain that nature and life, in other words, both of them desired excellence and tried to show us the way that leads to excellence. Spinoza, in his Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, writes about this ideal human nature that he aims at, as follows:

What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that it is the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole nature.

This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature and to strive that many acquire it with me. [II/8/25]

It is quite likely that Spinoza was influenced by Plato, since their ways of looking at ‘excellence’ have many common points, although they also differ from each other in many respects. One of the aims of this thesis is to show the similarities and differences between their notions of ‘desire’ and ‘excellence’ and to underline the weaknesses and strong points with respect to these notions, when necessary. I also aim at providing a fair interpretation and a good understanding of Plato and Spinoza throughout my examination of their theories and ideas.

Although Spinoza seems to have a theory of desire, Plato did not build a complicated theory about our desires, although obviously he had a notion of desire/appetite. In the first chapter, I will assess Plato’s notion of desire/appetite, which is based on the things we lack, and Spinoza’s theory of desire/appetite, which is based on man’s essence and the difference/non-difference between conscious and unconscious

appetites. I will also try to see whether Plato's and Spinoza's arguments are legitimate and internally consistent.

In the second chapter, I will put Plato's notion of excellence, which is presented in terms of a functional account, into scrutiny. I will also examine Spinoza's understanding of 'excellence'/'perfection' which is identified with reality and attaining the model of human nature that is pictured in his Ethics. I will argue that the way to excellence, for both Plato and Spinoza, lies in wisdom (or temperance), that is in living the life of reason. But wisdom, according to Plato, is attained by the Knowledge of the Form of the Good, but according to Spinoza, by the Third Kind of Knowledge. I will defend the view that Plato's and Spinoza's notions of 'freedom' are quite akin to each other and not independent of their notions of 'excellence'. The reasons that lie behind these claims will be the main concern of this chapter.

Some of the questions that I will deal with in the third and last chapter are as follows: Do we desire only the good (or what we judge to be the good)? Do we desire something because it is good or a thing is good because we desire it? I will compare the perspectives of Plato and Spinoza regarding these questions. I will also try to point out the difference between the notions of 'excellence' and 'good' in their works and will differentiate desire for the good from desire for excellence. I will argue that desire for excellence is a unique privilege of philosophers and approximation to excellence can be achieved only by those who live the life of reason. I will claim that, both for Plato and Spinoza, excellence is a kind of assimilation to God and leads to the highest happiness. But this will not be an easy task, as Spinoza states at the end of his Ethics, since "*all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.*"

CHAPTER I. THE NOTION OF 'DESIRE' IN PLATO'S AND SPINOZA'S WORKS

I.I. Spinoza's Theory of Desire

Desire, for Spinoza, is one of the three primary affects. The other two are joy and sadness. All varieties of affects like love, hate, hope, fear etc. are derived from these three. In his Ethics [3D3], he says: "By affect I understand affections of the Body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the Affect an action, otherwise, a passion". By joy, Spinoza understands an affect by which the mind passes to a greater perfection. Sadness, on the other hand, is an affect by which the mind passes to a lesser perfection [3P11/Schol.]. From adequate ideas there arise actions, and from inadequate ideas arise passions (adequate ideas are those which considered in themselves, without relation to an object, have all the properties or intrinsic denominations of true ideas [2D4]). According to Spinoza [3P57/Dem.] desire is the very nature, or essence of each individual. Therefore the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another as much as the nature, or essence, of the one differs from the essence of the other. "Joy and sadness are the Desire, or Appetite itself insofar as it is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, by external causes" [3P57/Dem./30].

Spinoza holds that [3P9/Dem./Schol.] the essence of the mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas. Thus, it strives to persevere in its being both insofar as it has inadequate ideas and insofar as it has adequate ideas. But since the mind is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the body's affections, the mind is conscious of its striving. When this striving is related only to the mind, it is called will, but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. A desire is an appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite. In other words [3P56/Dem.], desire is the very essence of each man insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever constitution he has, to do something. From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily desires, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil [4P19]. Nobody, unless he is defeated by causes external and contrary to his nature, neglects to seek his own advantage, or to preserve his being [4P20/Schol.]. Besides, "No one can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well, unless at the same time he desires to be, to act, and to live, i.e., to actually exist" [4P21].

Spinoza believes that desires can be excessive. Desires like greed, ambition and lust are excessive by their very nature and they are like diseases. When a greedy man thinks of nothing but money and an ambitious man of esteem, he becomes like a madman. Indeed, according to Spinoza, greed, ambition and lust are species of madness [4P44/Schol.]. He who lives according to the guidance of reason does not have excessive desires. Spinoza believes that in the life of 'passion' men are controlled by passive emotions, so there is nothing to guarantee harmony and agreement in their lives. They will easily be in conflict with others and themselves, i.e. when their passion is directed to an object, joint enjoyment of which is not

possible. People governed by passions will not be capable of control of their lives, which could have been achieved by the adequate knowledge of their true good. When a passion becomes overpowering, the person is like a madman possessed by a fixed idea, as we have previously stated. By virtue and power Spinoza understands the same thing, “i.e. virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone” [4D8]. On the other hand, he defines ‘bondage’ [in 4/Preface] as “man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects” and holds that true virtue is nothing but living according to the guidance of reason, and so lack of power consists only in this, that a man allows himself to be guided by things outside him and to be determined by them to do what the common constitution of external things demands, not what his own nature, considered in itself, demands [4P37/Schol./II/236./25-30]. If the man lets himself be guided by the external forces, these forces may prevent him from achieving what is most advantageous to him and can induce passions –that is, the affects of which the individual is not the adequate cause (as in the case of passive desires).

I.II. On Conscious and Unconscious Appetites

Spinoza [in the Ethics 3/II/190/5-10] holds that “Desire is appetite together with the consciousness of it” and that he recognises “no difference between human appetite and Desire. For whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same.” In the above quotations, although Spinoza claims that there is no difference between appetite and desire, it seems as if, *in a sense*, there *is* a difference between appetites and desires, since from these quotations one can conclude that every desire is an appetite, whereas not every appetite is a desire. In other words, putting consciousness into play and calling conscious appetites desires allows us to talk about a difference, which Spinoza does not willingly accept. The above picture opens room for the following interpretation: Appetites can be conscious or unconscious, whereas desires are always conscious (appetites). So, desires seem to be a subclass of appetites. Obviously, according to Spinoza, there can be unconscious appetites, but how? Suppose that you are in a desert and did not eat anything for a few days. In this situation you are expected to be hungry. But also suppose that you are occupied with other things like trying to find your way to a village. In this case, claiming that you were unaware of your hunger is quite sensible. Here, we are talking about an unconscious appetite for food. But if you were aware of your hunger, we would have talked about your *desire* (or conscious appetite) for food. Would Spinoza claim that in the former case you did not have an idea of your hunger whereas in the latter case you did have? Would he say that, since in the latter case you had an idea of your hunger (appetite for food) and every idea is conscious, you must be conscious of your hunger (appetite for food)?

We need to ask the following two questions to clarify our point and to understand Spinoza's notion of unconscious appetites: (1) Are we necessarily conscious of our ideas? Or if we put the question in a different way: Are there unconscious ideas? (2) Are appetites always accompanied by ideas?

According to 2D3, an idea is "a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing". Also, [in 2P48/Schol./II/130/10] Spinoza says that "...by ideas I understand, not the images formed at the back of the eye (and, if you like, in the middle of the brain), but concepts of Thought". He claims that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or a negation [2P49/Schol./II/132/10]. Since affirmation and negation need a kind of thinking activity and an idea is a concept of thought, one can ask whether one can form a concept of thought without being conscious of this or whether a thinking activity can take place without man's being conscious of this. These are two aspects of the very same question, namely, whether ideas are necessarily conscious or not. In 2P23 Spinoza holds that "The Mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body." This means that when our mind perceives the ideas of the affections of the body, our mind knows itself. This implies that when we have ideas, our mind is self-conscious. Let's look at another passage from the Ethics [3P9/Dem.]: "...since the Mind is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the Body's affections, the Mind is conscious of its striving." The above quotation and arguments suggest that:

(C1): *We are (necessarily) conscious of our ideas (or in other words, there cannot be unconscious ideas).*

Let's look at the passage from the Ethics 3P9/Dem. some of which has previously been quoted:

...the essence of the Mind is constituted by adequate and inadequate ideas. So, it strives to persevere in its being both insofar as it has inadequate ideas and insofar as it has adequate ideas... But since the Mind is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the Body's affections, the Mind is conscious of its striving. [3P/Dem.]

Also, another passage from 5P4/Schol. calls for attention:

All the desires by which we are determined to do something can *arise* as much from adequate ideas as from inadequate ones. [5P4/Schol.]

How are we going to interpret the above quotations? We know that, according to Spinoza [3/II/190/5-10], an appetite is man's very essence and the very striving for self-preservation which is related to both mind and body (defining desires as conscious appetites, commits Spinoza to claim that desires are also man's very essence). But do we have to interpret the above quotations as saying that appetites are *caused by* adequate and/or inadequate ideas, or only as saying that appetites are *accompanied by* adequate and/or inadequate ideas?

Let's examine the former first. According to Spinoza, an 'idea' is its 'ideatum', that is, the thought and its object are in a sense one and the same. Every thought is a single event with two sides, or every body is a single thing with two aspects. The body is at once the body and the thought. Also, the thought is at once the thought and the body. On its thought-side, the thought is causally connected with thoughts, on its

body-side it is causally connected with bodies. Since appetites are related to both mind and body, we have to admit that ideas can cause the ideas of the appetites on the thought-side and these ideas of appetites which are caused by previous ideas may have physical (bodily) counterparts of appetites on the body-side. Suppose, for instance, that, relying on my perceptions, I think that the Moon is 200 feet away from me. In this particular case I have an inadequate idea of the Moon. This inadequate idea may cause an idea of the appetite for going to the Moon, since the Moon looks so near to me. This idea of the appetite for going to the Moon will have a physical counterpart. The causal link will be as below:

I (the Moon) → I (the appetite for going to the Moon)

P (the idea of the Moon) → P (the idea of the appetite for going to the Moon)

Here, I (the Moon) indicates the idea of the Moon and I (the appetite for going to the moon) indicates the idea of the appetite for going to the moon, whereas P (the idea of the Moon) shows the physical counterpart of the idea of the moon and P (the idea of the appetite for going to the Moon) indicates the physical counterpart of the (idea of) the mentioned appetite.

But there cannot be a causal jump from the thought-side to the body-side. That is, the following link is not valid according to Spinoza:

I (the Moon) → P (the idea of the appetite for going to the Moon)

According to our analysis, *appetites cannot be caused by ideas* since this implies a causal jump from the thought-side to the body-side, which is impossible. When Spinoza says [5P4/Schol.] “all the Desires by which we are determined to do something can arise as much from adequate ideas as from inadequate ones” he simply means that the mental counterpart of conscious appetites (desires) can be caused not only by adequate ideas but also by inadequate ones.

On the other hand, I think, we can interpret “the Mind strives to persevere in its being both insofar as it has inadequate ideas and insofar as it has adequate ideas” as ‘appetites may be accompanied by (adequate and/or inadequate) ideas’. Suppose that I perceive the Moon as 200 feet away from me, and hence I have an inadequate idea of the Moon. At the same time I may have an appetite for going to the Moon. But are appetites always accompanied by ideas or only sometimes?

In 3/II/190/10, Spinoza says that “whether a man is conscious of its appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same”. Surely this allows us to think that there can be unconscious appetites, which we have taken for granted so far. In 2P23, on the other hand, Spinoza holds that “the Mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body”. This means that if and only if the mind perceives the ideas of the affections of the body, the mind knows itself. But there can be unconscious appetites, that is, when we have appetites our mind may not know itself. We can conclude from the above argument that, our mind may not perceive the ideas of the affections of the body when we have appetites and this means that our appetites may not be accompanied by ideas. So:

(C2): Our appetites are not always accompanied by ideas.

According to C2, appetites may not be accompanied by ideas, hence *we may be unconscious of our appetites*. This does not contradict C1 where we have claimed that when we have ideas, we are necessarily conscious of our ideas and also does not contradict Spinoza's belief that "the Mind is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the Body's affections" [3P9/Dem.].

However, to say that 'an appetite is conscious' is equivalent to say that 'it is accompanied by an idea/the mind has an idea of it and we are conscious of this idea'. On the other hand, if desires are conscious appetites which are accompanied by ideas and if ideas are concepts of the mind [2D3], these imply that desires are restricted only to humans, since animals have no concepts of things, whereas appetites may belong also to animals.

Spinoza also says that:

men...are ignorant of the causes by which they are determined, that the decisions of the Mind are nothing but the appetites themselves, which therefore vary as the disposition of the Body varies. [3P2/Schol./II/143/30-35]

Just above, we came across another definition of an appetite: An appetite is a decision of the mind. In the very same scholium [II/144/10] he holds that "...there is something else I wish particularly to note here, that we can do nothing from a decision of the Mind unless we recollect it. E.g., we cannot speak a word unless we recollect it. So this only is believed to be in the power of the Mind –that from the

Mind's decision alone we can either be silent about or speak about a thing we recollect." The above passage, I believe, implies that when we have a decision our mind acts on it, so decisions seem to be a subset of appetites since there are also passive appetites in which we are acted upon. The above passage also suggests to me that although the decision itself is an action of mind, it is not the case that every decision leads us to do something, that is, when, for instance, we do not recollect the word we decided to utter, our decision is not followed by the utterance of that word. But even if we accept that we may not recollect a word we decided to utter, this does not mean that we do not recollect our decision, and also I don't think there is any evidence in Spinoza's texts to infer that we may be unconscious of our decisions. Personally I believe that there can be unconscious decisions. For instance, a sleepwalker may decide to walk towards the door but may be unconscious of this.

I.III. Desire as the Essence of Man

Spinoza holds that Extension and Thought are two Attributes which the human intellect perceives as constituting the essential nature of the Substance [1D3: “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed”]. The ultimately real has an extended and a thinking character. Man is a particular thing or a mode of Substance [1D3: “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived”]. Man will tend to persist in his corporeal and mental being, since his essence is constituted by modes of Extension and Thought. An appetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation [3/II/190/5]. A desire, being a conscious appetite, is a striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being [4P18/Dem.].

But does every appetite serve to preserve our being? In 3P9 Spinoza also says that “both insofar as the Mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has.” When this striving is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called appetite. “This appetite... is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation” [3P9/Schol.]. The above quotations suggest that not only when we have active appetites, but also when we have passive ones, we strive to preserve our being and that every appetite is my essence. But let’s remember also another passage

[3/II/190/5]: "...appetite is the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to do what promotes his preservation". Although this quotation, at first glance, seems to imply that only those appetites that help preserve me are my essence, the previous quotations are against this interpretation. To support our reading of Spinoza, let's examine another paragraph from Ethics [3P10/Dem.]: "Whatever can destroy our Body cannot be in it and so the idea of this thing cannot be in God insofar as he has the idea of our Body, i.e. the idea of this thing cannot be in our Mind. On the contrary, since the first thing that constitutes the essence of the Mind is the idea of the actually existing Body, the first and principal [tendency] of the striving of our Mind is to affirm the existence of our Body. And so an idea that denies the existence of our Body is contrary to our Mind." According to this paragraph, the idea of a thing that is against our self-preservation, cannot be in our mind. So, this means that, when we have ideas, whether adequate or inadequate, our mind necessarily strives to preserve our being, which supports our previous claim that not only active appetites but also passive ones are our essence, since "the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing [3P7]. This also comes to mean that every appetite, whether active or passive, helps preserve me and is my essence.

One can bring the following arguments against the above theses of Spinoza:

- 1) Suppose that I have an appetite to go to war as a soldier. I am taking the risk of being injured or even dying. One can hardly claim that this appetite is for my self-preservation. Also, I may have an appetite to play football with my friends or to chew chewing gum or to go to a movie. So, it seems as if not every appetite

serves our self-preservation. In other words, some of our appetites are not (part of) our essence.

- 2) If I have an appetite for going to war as a soldier, then I am not acting from the laws of my own nature, that is, I am completely conquered by external causes contrary to my nature. But this means that I am undergoing a passive appetite. So, when we have passive appetites, we may not strive to preserve our being. In other words, not every passive appetite is for my self-preservation.

Spinoza does not seem to have a defence against the above arguments. But let's examine further Spinoza's notion of the appetite. We have seen that, according to Spinoza [3P9/Schol.], the appetite is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. But also, Spinoza claims that [3P57] *the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another as much as the nature, or essence, of the one differs from the essence of the other.*

Spinoza argues that 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. The affects of animals which are called irrational differ from men's affects as much as their nature differs from human nature. Both the man and the horse are driven by a lust to procreate, but the one is driven by a human lust, the other by an equine lust. According to Spinoza, if and only if the essence of an individual is not same with another individual, then the desire/appetite of an individual is different from the desire/appetite of another individual. Is the appetite of the drunk the same as the appetite of the philosopher, for instance? Are their essences also one and the same?

Let's look at this question from two points of view: (1*) We know that, for Spinoza, the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing. Since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it demands that everyone seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, what will lead him to a greater perfection and that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can [by 4P18/Schol.]. But if so, it seems as if the essence of the drunk is the same as the essence of the philosopher. Both of them have a common essence, namely, striving to persevere in their being, but the former behaves contrary to his nature since he harms himself by alcohol, whereas the latter acts in accordance with his own nature, since reason demands nothing contrary to the nature of man. So, the drunk and the philosopher seem to have the same essence, namely striving to preserve their being, and this striving when related to both Mind and Body together is called appetite. So not only their essences but also their appetites are the same, which is a conclusion Spinoza would gladly accept. But if we claim that striving to preserve our being is the very essence of man, then we have to conclude that every man's appetite is the same. (2*) Spinoza also holds that [3P57] "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". Spinoza clearly states that the gladness by which a drunk is led and the gladness a philosopher possesses are completely different [3/II/187/20]. Here, I think, Spinoza thinks that not only the affects of the drunk and the philosopher are different but also (somehow) their essences. And, according to Spinoza if their essences are different, they will have different appetites, i.e. the drunk may undergo passive appetites like an appetite for alcohol, whereas the philosopher may have an active appetite like the appetite for the life of reason. But the following question may be raised: Can't they both have the same appetite

although their essences are (somehow) different? Can't they both, for instance, have an appetite to have sexual intercourse with the same woman? Spinoza would say that their appetites are different, since one is the appetite of the philosopher and the other the appetite of the drunk. Spinoza would hold, I believe, that the drunk's appetite is more akin to the equine lust, whereas the philosopher's appetite is more humane.

According to (1*) the drunk and the philosopher have the same essence and desire/appetite, whereas in (2*) it is argued that they have different essences and different desires/appetites. It seems as if Spinoza has to choose one not to contradict himself, but he offers no solution to this problem. Maybe we can save the case in the following way: (a) Desire to preserve one's being is the essence of human beings, in other words, all human beings have a common essence which differentiates them from other animals, plants, etc. (b) Whereas, one can also claim that each individual has an essence, which differentiates him from another individual. Spinoza in his Ethics [2D2] says that "to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away, or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing".

So, all these come to mean that (1*) is about the essence of the human species, and (2*) is about the essence of the individual; thus, (1*) and (2*) are compatible and not contradictory.

I.IV. Plato's Notion of Desire

Plato, in the *Philebus* 34e and 35, argues that a desire is a longing for the satisfaction of some deficiency one experiences. For example, thirst is becoming empty and is a desire for replenishment by a drink. When a man becomes empty, he desires the opposite of what he is experiencing. Being emptied, he longs to be filled. All desires have their objects. One who desires, desires something. He does not desire what he is experiencing since he is thirsty and thirst is emptying, but he desires replenishment. There must be something in the nature of a thirsty man that apprehends replenishment. It is the soul that apprehends the replenishment through memory. The effort of every man is opposed to that which his body is experiencing. The fact that impulse leads the man in a direction opposite to his experience proves the existence of a memory of something opposite to that experience. In fact, it is the memory that leads the man to the objects of his desires.

In the *Phaedo* 66, Plato differentiates desires of the body from desires of the soul. According to Plato, since the body fills us with desires and a great deal of nonsense, we don't get an opportunity to think about anything. Battles are due to the body and its desires, because all wars are for the acquisition of wealth and the reason why we have to acquire wealth is the body of which we are slaves. If we obtain leisure from the body's claims, the body intrudes into our investigations, disturbing, distracting and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth. I will quote a passage from the *Phaedo*:

We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself. It seems, to judge from the argument, that the wisdom which we desire and upon which we profess to have set our hearts will be attainable when we are dead, and not in our lifetime. If no pure knowledge is possible in the company of the body, then either it is totally impossible to acquire knowledge, or it is only possible after death, because it is only then the soul will be separate and independent of the body. It seems that so long as we are alive, we shall continue closest to knowledge if we avoid as much as we can all contact and association with the body, except when they are absolutely necessary, and instead of allowing ourselves to become infected with its nature, purify ourselves from it until God himself gives us deliverance. [66d-67a]

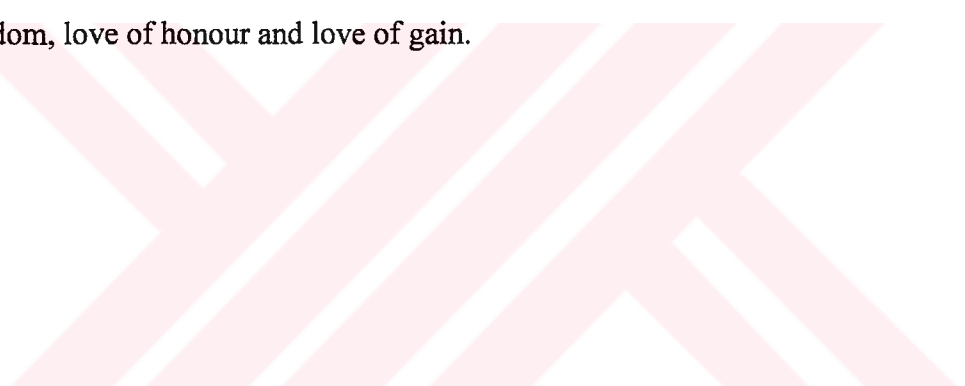
In the Phaedrus [237d-e], Plato points out two sorts of guiding principles that we follow. One is the innate desire for pleasure (which may correspond to the above mentioned bodily desires), the other an acquired judgement that aims at what is best (which seems to correspond to the desires of the soul). Sometimes one may gain the mastery, sometimes the other. When judgement guides us rationally towards what is best and has the mastery, that mastery is called temperance. In other words, being in control of oneself and mastering one's own pleasures and appetites is called temperance. But what is it that every ordinary man desires? The life of pleasure or the life of reason? In the Philebus [20e-22b], Socrates argues that neither the life of pleasure without intelligence, nor the life of reason without pleasure would be desirable for an ordinary man. If a person was without reason, memory, knowledge and true judgement he would not be aware even whether he was enjoying himself as he would lack all intelligence. If a person had no memory he would not even remember that he had been enjoying himself. If the person had no true judgement, he could not judge that he was enjoying himself. Similarly, if he had no power of

calculation, he could not even calculate that he would enjoy himself later on. So, he would be living the life of a sea lung and this would be an undesirable life for man. If a person, on the other hand, chooses to live the life of reason and is in the possession of thought, knowledge and complete memory of everything, but is without pleasure or pain, this life would not be desirable for an ordinary man either. The life of pleasure is subhuman, whereas the life of reason which philosophers aim at is superhuman. This mixed life wins the first prize.

Plato, in the Republic VIII [558e], classifies desires as necessary and unnecessary. Desires that we can not divert or suppress or whose satisfaction is beneficial to us may be called necessary. For instance, the desire to eat for keeping in health is necessary. Our nature compels us to seek the satisfaction of these necessary desires. However, desires from which a man could free himself by discipline from youth up and whose presence in the soul does no good and sometimes harm, are called unnecessary, i.e. desire for excessive food is unnecessary since it is harmful to the body and a hindrance to the soul's attainment of intelligence and sobriety. In the Republic IX [571b], Plato asserts that of our unnecessary desires there are some lawless ones but these desires can be controlled by the laws and the better desires with the help of reason and in some men altogether got rid of with only a few weak ones remaining while in others the remnant is stronger and more numerous. Our lawless desires are those beastly parts of the soul, i.e. desire for wine, for gambols and repelling sleep. But, when a person's condition is healthy and sober, he can arouse his rational part of the soul and attain clear self-consciousness and apprehend the truth. The word 'law' is applied to all order and regularity of the soul and desires. When a man becomes orderly and law-abiding, justice and temperance exist in him.

To restrain a person's soul from excessive desires is to discipline the soul. A temperate soul and desires are good, foolish and undisciplined ones are evil.

Plato, in the Republic IX [580d-581], asserts that just as in the city there are three existing kinds which compose its structure, that is, the producers, the helpers and the counselors, also in the soul there are three parts: the (rational) part with which a man learns, the (high spirited) part with which a man feels anger and the (appetitive) part which is concerned with appetites for food, drink, money etc. So there are three primary classes of men, namely, the philosopher or the lover of wisdom, the lover of victory, and the lover of gain. Also, there are three kinds of desires, namely, love of wisdom, love of honour and love of gain.



I.V. Desiring What We Lack

In this section I will deal with the following question: Do we only desire things that we lack?

Spinoza, in 3P36/Dem., says that "...insofar as he finds that a circumstance is lacking, he imagines something that excludes the existence of this thing. But since, from love, he desires this thing, or circumstance, then insofar as he imagines it to be lacking, he will be saddened." In 3P36/Schol., he calls this sadness 'longing', insofar as it concerns the absence of what we love. Indeed, according to Spinoza, longing is a desire, or appetite [see 3/II/199/20-25].

So, according to Spinoza, when the orphan desires his mother, he imagines that his mother is lacking, thus he becomes saddened by this desire (or longing). In other words, his desire is passive. But what about active desires which bring us Joy? Don't we lack what we desire, when we have active desires? In his Ethics [3P36/Dem.], Spinoza says that "whatever a man sees together with a thing that pleased him will be the accidental cause of Joy. And so, he will desire to possess it all, together with the thing that pleased him, or he will desire to possess the thing with all the same circumstances as when he first was pleased by it." This means that a good memory of something may encourage us to desire that thing since "we strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy..." [3P28]. Would we have desired something if we already possessed that thing? From the above passages it seems as if Spinoza says 'no' to this question.

Let's see Plato's position regarding the above question ('do we only desire things that we lack?').

According to Plato, desire is longing for the satisfaction of some deficiency one experiences. We desire the opposite of what we are experiencing [Philebus 35a]. To understand what he exactly means by the above statement, we need to analyse the word 'opposite'. I will start by quoting a small passage from the Gorgias:

Socrates:...Tell me, do you not think that those who fare well experience the opposite of those who fare ill?

Callicles: I do.

Socrates: Then if these things are opposites, the same must hold true of them as of health and sickness. A man cannot be both in health and sick at the same time, nor be rid of both conditions at the same time. [495e]

From the above passage it seems as if by 'opposite' Plato means 'contradictory'. In the Phaedo [104-105] he says that two and three are not opposites, but odd and even, death and life are. According to Plato's Socrates, 'n is two' and 'n is three' are not 'opposites' but we know that they are contrary statements. So, the word 'opposite' can not mean contrary. In the Protagoras [332], however, Socrates uses the words 'opposite' and 'contrary' interchangeably (in the very same context, he sometimes uses the word 'contrary', sometimes 'opposite'). Let's look at some other examples of opposite things: Using the words 'contrary' and 'opposite' interchangeably, Socrates claims that wisdom is opposite to folly, good is opposite to bad. We have also seen that, according to Socrates, life and death, odd and even are opposites. Although 'life' and 'death' 'odd' and 'even' are contradictory words, other pairs

seem to be examples of contrary terms ('x is good' and 'x is bad' are contrary statements because each statement implies the negation of the other but is not implied by it. 'x is good' implies 'x is not bad' but is not implied by it, since x can be 'mediocre'. Also, 'wisdom' implies 'not being folly' but 'not being folly' does not imply 'wisdom' since everybody who is not a fool need not be wise.) He also says that, for everything that admits of a contrary, there is one contrary and no more [Protogoras 332c]. From this statement, it is clear that he does not use the word 'contrary' as we understand it today, because if he did, his thesis can easily be falsified. For instance, 'x is two' and 'x is three' are contrary statements, but 'x is two' and 'x is five' are also contrary statements. So, for the very same statement there may be more than one contrary statements; hence, Plato's thesis is false, or he uses the word 'contrary' to mean something else. But aren't we rather confused by Plato's Socrates? He first defines something 'opposite' as something 'contradictory' and then he seems to deny that by 'opposite' he means 'contrary', but he uses the word 'contrary' in place of 'opposite' and when he tries to exemplify the 'opposite' things he gives examples of both 'contrary' and 'contradictory' things!

From the above analysis, we ended up with the queer conclusion that either Plato had something different in mind when he used the word 'opposite' but chose wrong examples to show what he meant by this word, or the word 'opposite' means either 'contrary' or 'contradictory' depending on context. I believe the latter is more likely than the former. Let's come back to our main concern now. What does 'we desire the opposite of what we are experiencing' mean? In the Philebus [34e], Socrates says that 'to have a thirst' is to become empty. When a person becomes empty, he desires the opposite of what he is experiencing. Being emptied, he longs to be filled; thus he

longs for replenishment by a drink. So the words 'empty' and 'full' are opposites. 'x is full' and 'x is empty' are contrary statements, since 'x is full' implies that 'x is not empty', but is not implied by it since x can be neither full nor empty, i.e. there may be a drop of water in the glass, which makes the glass neither full nor empty. These arguments are in accord with our analysis of the word 'opposite' (we have admitted that 'opposite' may mean 'contrary'). According to Plato's Socrates, I can't say, for instance, "I desire to be a philosophy student" when I am already a philosophy student. If I happen to say this, I mean that "I desire to continue being a philosophy student", or in other words, "I desire to be a philosophy student in the future". Plato simply seems to be holding that *"if I desire to have x I lack x"*. If 'x' is 'being a philosophy student in the future', one may hold that my 'current experience' is that I lack x. But is all desire for a contrary or contradictory of what one has? Are 'having x' and 'lacking x' contrary expressions or contradictory? They cannot be contrary since 'having x' implies 'not lacking x', but 'not lacking x' also implies 'having x'. Then, are 'having x' and 'lacking x' contradictory? I believe, they are *contradictory*, for 'lacking x' means 'not having x'. Let's look at the following example: having one apple, I desire two apples. 'Having one apple' and 'having two apples' are *contrary*, since 'having one apple' implies 'not having two apples' but 'not having two apples' does not imply 'having one apple' But let's modify the example a bit: lacking two apples, I desire to have two apples. Here, 'lacking two apples' and 'having two apples' are *contradictory*. These two examples come to mean the same thing, but the former is an example of a desire for a contrary of what one has, on the other hand, the latter is an example of a desire for a contradictory of one has! *All these come to mean that all desire is for a contradictory (or for a contrary) of what one has, which is a conclusion totally consistent with Plato's notion of 'desire'.*

We have seen that, according to Spinoza, we would not have desired something we already possess. Plato also seems not to deny this. Remembering this, let's look at Plato's thesis (that desire is longing for the satisfaction of some deficiency one experiences) from another point of view. In Symposium, Plato's Socrates claims that love is a desire [187c] and love is always the love of something and that something is what he lacks [200e]. But do we desire everything we lack? Suppose that I am a philosopher and desire wisdom. But a philosopher is someone neither wise nor ignorant. This means that he does not only lack wisdom but also ignorance. However, it would be highly strange to claim that since he lacks ignorance he would desire it, that is, philosophers are not only lovers of wisdom but also of ignorance. If we take the overall appearance of Plato's works into account, I believe, Plato would hold that we cannot desire (or love) ignorance since (1) it is something bad [by Gorgias 477b] and we cannot desire bad things, (2) ignorance of necessity pertains to that which is not [by Republic V 477b] and it seems as if we cannot desire a thing pertains to that which is not.

Hence *everything that we desire, we lack, but we don't desire everything we lack.*

I.VI. Love as a Desire

According to Plato, love is desire of something we are in want of or we lack. Indeed, in the Symposium [200e] Plato's Socrates holds the following: "...desiring to secure something to oneself forever may be described as loving something which is not yet to hand." In the Symposium, Diotima claims that love is a passion for immortality [208b]. Love (Eros) is the son of Resource and Need, and for this reason he is never altogether in and out of need and stands midway between ignorance and wisdom. He is neither mortal nor immortal, for in the space of a day he will be now alive and blooming, and now dying, to be born again by virtue of his father's nature. Love is neither beautiful nor ugly, neither good nor bad, but he is between beautiful and ugly, good and bad [202b]. Love is the love of beauty and not of ugliness. The lover of the beautiful longs to make the beautiful his own. Since the good and the beautiful are the same, love longs for the good, that is, love is the love of the good. The lover of the good longs for making the good his own forever and he will gain happiness by making the good his own. Since the lover longs for the good to be his own forever, we are bound to long for immortality as for the good. The longing for propagation is a deathless and eternal element in our mortality. Human beings gain immortality by reproduction, that is, by ensuring that there will always be a younger generation to take the place of the old. Human beings cannot, like the divine, be still the same throughout eternity, they can only leave behind new life to fill the vacancy that is left in their species by death.

In the Symposium [189e-191e], Aristophanes gives a speech on the myth of hermaphrodites that descended from the Moon, which partake of both man and woman, that is, who are half woman and half man. Zeus cut the hermaphrodites in half and left each half with a desperate yearning for the other. The man and the woman (each half) asked for nothing better than to be rolled into one. Whenever each half was left alone by the death of its mate, it wandered about questing and clasping in the hope of finding a spare half-woman or half a man. So, love is the desire of the incomplete for completion, in other words, it is striving for wholeness. As Stanley Rosen writes in Plato's Symposium:

By making Eros fundamentally sexual, Aristophanes illustrates two inseparable principles of his teaching. Human striving, whether for truth or fame, is essentially physical: the psyche is defined by and depends on the body. In order to counter the baneful effects of Eros, one must employ some kind of physical satisfaction. The body can be controlled only by the bodily and not by the psychic or mental.... Aristophanes fights fire with water: he teaches us the need to quench our sexual appetites, by a variety of physical or immanent means, in order not to kindle the transsexual Eros. This Eros is just a perverse form of sexuality; if man could have the perfection he desires, it would be physical and tyrannical rather than mental and just.¹

Although the desire of the incomplete for completion has some sexual implications as stated above, I believe it has some other sorts of implications also. Lacking wisdom, goodness and immortality but longing for their attainment, it is in the nature of love to be a desire of the incomplete for completion.

¹ Stanley Rosen, Plato's Symposium, pp. 140-141

Agathon, on the other hand, argues in 195a-196c that love, controlling our lusts and pleasures, may be regarded as temperance itself. According to Agathon, all the gods are blessed, but Love (Eros) is the most blessed of all, for he is the most beautiful and the best, also the youngest of them all. Love is the most beautiful because love and unsightliness will never be at peace and he is the best because the virtues, including temperance, go with love.

In 180c–181d Pausanias states that without Love there could be no such goddess as Aphrodite. Since there are two goddesses of that name, namely, Urania (the heavenly Aphrodite) and Pandemus (the earthly Aphrodite), there must be also two kinds of love. According to Pausanias, love is not of himself either admirable or noble, but only when he moves us to love nobly. The earthly Aphrodite's love governs the passions of the vulgar and concerns the desires of the body rather than of the soul. But the heavenly love is concerned with the desires of the soul and has the attributes more of the male than the female and thus prefers the more vigorous and intellectual bent like the pursuit of wisdom. Love itself, as such, is neither good nor bad, but only in so far as it leads to good or bad behaviour. "It is base to indulge a vicious lover viciously, but noble to gratify a virtuous lover virtuously. Now the vicious lover is the follower of the earthly love who desires the body rather than the soul; his heart is set on what is mutable and must therefore be inconsistent. And as soon as the body he loves begins to pass the first flower of its beauty, he 'spreads his wings and flies away' giving the lie to all his pretty speeches and dishonouring his vows, whereas the lover whose heart is touched by mortal beauties is constant all his life, for he has become one with what will never fade" [183d-e].

Above we have made the following points: (1) Love is a passion for immortality but is neither mortal nor immortal. (2) The longing for propagation stems from our desire for immortality (3) Love stands between wisdom and ignorance (4) Love is neither good (beautiful) nor bad (ugly), but is midway between the two. (5) Love, itself, as such, is neither good nor bad but only in so far as it leads to good or bad behaviour (6) Love is the love of the good (beautiful). (7) Love is the desire of the incomplete for completion. (8) Love is temperance. (9) Love is the most beautiful and the best. (10) Love is of two kinds: the heavenly love, which is concerned with the desires of the soul and earthly love, which is concerned with the desires of the body. The former is noble and admirable whereas the latter is vicious.

In the Symposium these points are made through the speeches of different people. Let's see in what respect they differ from each other and in what respect they agree with each other.

If we define love as a longing for immortality then we can ask whether we are talking about an earthly love or a heavenly one. Diotima makes no such distinction, and a heavenly *love* is a *love* as much as an earthly *love*, so we can think that our longing for immortality may be a heavenly love or an earthly one, depending on the situation. Longing for giving birth to a child can be considered as a love, that is, it is a kind of desire for immortality and in this very situation Plato would hold that it is a heavenly love. However, our desire to have sexual intercourse with our partner can also be considered as a love, that is, a kind of passion for immortality, but it is an earthly love. So (1), (2) and (10) seem to have common points.

With respect to (5), Pausanias brings the following argument [181a-183e]: No action (i.e. talking, drinking, singing, loving) is good or bad by itself but only when we act well or badly. The goodness or badness of an action depends upon how it is performed. Love itself, as such, is neither good nor bad, but only in so far as it leads to good or bad behaviour. That is, love is good, only when he moves us to love well.

But does (5) contradict (4)? Is Diotima's speech a counter argument to (5)? According to Diotima, love is the love of something and that something is what love lacks. So, if love is the love of good, love lacks the good. But, something that is not good need not be bad, it can be neither good nor bad. Diotima claims that love is neither good nor bad but comes between the two. In (5) it is claimed that under certain conditions (i.e. when we love well or badly) love can be good or bad. Since both (5) and (9) attribute goodness to love, (4) seems to contradict (5) and (9). On the other hand, Socrates seems to adopt neither (5) nor (9) but (4).

According to (7) love is a desire of the incomplete for completion. If love is a desire of something that he lacks, love is in a sense incomplete. Love longs for what he lacks, thus love desires completion. Love lacks goodness, wisdom and immortality, but longs for them. As we have previously stated, lacking wisdom, goodness and immortality but longing for their attainment, it is in the nature of love to be a desire of the incomplete for completion. Thus (7) appears to be consistent with (1), (3) and (4). Indeed, Diotima, who is the authority on the philosophy of love, accepts that lovers may be considered as people who are looking for their other halves, but adds "love never longs for either the half or the whole of anything except the good" [205d-e].

(8) claims that love is temperance. But this statement makes no distinction between different types of love and suggests that every love is temperance. But, according to (10) there is not only a heavenly love but also an earthly one and this earthly love is after excessive pleasures and lusts. So clearly the earthly love is not temperance, but heavenly love is. This means that (8) is not totally consistent with (10) and we have to restrict this definition of love ('love is temperance') to the heavenly love.

Socrates seems to believe that Diotima is an authority on love, and therefore he willingly accepts Diotima's arguments and beliefs about love. Thus he obviously agrees with the points Diotima makes, namely, with (1), (2), (3), (4) and (6). I think he would also accept (7), since, according to Socrates, love is a kind of desire and he has a notion of 'desiring what we lack'.

But what is Spinoza's conception of love? Does he take love to be a kind of desire?

In the Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being, he says:

Love is a union with the object that our intellect judges to be good or magnificent; and by that we understand a union such that the lover and the loved come to be one and the same thing, or to form a whole together [I/63/15].

But does this quotation reflect Spinoza's real position about love? There is no reference to desire in the above passage but the passage quoted below, I believe, will help us understand Spinoza's notion of love better:

Love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.

This definition explains the essence of Love clearly enough. But the definition of those authors who define *Love* as *a will of the lover to join himself to thing loved* expresses a property of Love, not its essence. And because these Authors did not see clearly enough the essence of Love, they could not have any clear concept of this property. Hence everyone has judged their definition quite obscure. [3-II/192-20]

The conception of love above objected to goes back as far as Plato's Symposium and Spinoza might have had Aristophanes in mind as his opponent when he argued against the above conception of love.

When Spinoza says it is a property in the lover, that he wills to join himself to the thing loved, he does not understand by will a consent, or a deliberation of the mind, or free decision, for this is a fiction. He also does not understand by will a desire of joining oneself to the thing loved when it is absent or continuing in its presence when it is present. For love, according to Spinoza, can be conceived without either of these desires. By will he understands a satisfaction in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved, by which the lover's joy is strengthened or at least encouraged [3/II/192/25-II/193/5]. So, love for Spinoza, is a joy, rather than a desire.

CHAPTER II. EXCELLENCE

II.I. Plato's Notion of Excellence: A Functional Account

To understand Plato's notion of excellence, we need to examine, first, a passage from the Republic I:

....Tell me then –would you say that a horse has a specific work or function?

I would.

Would you be willing to define the work of a horse or of anything else to be that which one can do only with it or best with it?

I don't understand, he replied.

Well, take it this way. Is there anything else with which you can see except the eyes?

Certainly not.

...

Once more, you could use a dirk to trim vine branches and a knife and many other instruments.

...

But nothing so well, I take it, as a pruning knife fashioned for this purpose.

...

Must we not then assume this to be the work or function of that?

We must.

You will now, then, I fancy, better apprehend the meaning of my question when I asked whether that is not the work of a thing which it only or it better than anything else can perform. [352c-353a]

According to the above quotation, if we define 'function' as 'the work of something, which one can do only with it or best with it', we need to understand the point

Socrates intends to make by this definition. I can see two options that we can consider: (1) The function of something is a work done only by that thing or best by that thing. (2) The function of something is what a person can do only with that thing or best with that thing. If we take (1) as the definition of function, the following problem seems to arise: When we talk about the work of a horse, the word 'work' makes sense since a horse can work, i.e. he can carry some load, but when we talk about the work of a book, for instance, one can claim that it is hard to understand how a book can do some work, that is, how it can spend an effort to an end or 'do' something as an inanimate object. But maybe, as Plato supposes, the inanimate objects also have a potentiality of acting, which can be realised by themselves or by the help of humans. Imagine a dam that produces electricity. One can claim that electricity can be produced best by a dam, thus the function of a dam is to produce electricity. Here, the dam clearly seems to be doing a work, although it is something inanimate, so Plato's notion of 'function' defined in terms of the work of a thing is not against common sense. Also, we can claim, for instance, that trimming vine branches can be done best by a pruning knife and seeing can be done only by eyes, so the function of a pruning knife is to trim vine branches, whereas the function of the eyes is to see. But, if the function of a knife is to trim the vine branches, one can quite rightly ask whether the knife does the work or the person who is using it or both. Also, if the function of eyes is to see, one can ask whether my eyes are doing the work of seeing or whether I who possesses these eyes or both. But what is it that Socrates implies? (1) or (2), or both? In Rep. I [352e], Socrates asks the following question: "Is there anything else with which *you* can see except the eyes?" This question implies that the work of seeing is done by *me* by means of my eyes. Indeed,

what Socrates implies appears to be neither only (1) nor only (2) by itself, but the following:

The function of something is the work of a thing done only by that thing or best by that thing or/and the work of a person done only by use of that thing or best by use of that thing.

Plato's Socrates, in the above quotation, holds that nothing trims vine branches so well as a pruning knife fashioned for the purpose of trimming vine branches. This means that the function of a pruning knife is to trim the vine branches, which is a purpose that it serves best. So it seems as if we need to modify our above definition slightly:

The function of something is the work of a thing done only by that thing or best by that thing for a certain purpose or/and the work of a person done only by use of that thing or best by use of that thing for a certain purpose.

I will quote a long passage from the Republic I:

...Do you not also think that there is a specific virtue or excellence of everything for which a specific work or function is appointed? Let us return to the same examples. The eyes we say have a function?

They have.

Is there also a virtue of the eyes?

There is.

...

Take note now. Could the eyes possibly fulfill their function well if they lacked their own proper excellence and had in its stead the defect?

How could they? He said. For I presume you meant blindness instead of vision.

Whatever, said I, the excellence may be. For I have not yet come to that question, but am only asking whether whatever operates will not do its work well by its own virtue and badly by its own defect.

...

...The soul has a work which you couldn't accomplish with anything else in the world, as for example, management, rule, deliberation and the like? Is there anything else than soul to which you could rightly assign these and say that they were its peculiar work?

Nothing else.

...

Will the soul ever accomplish its own work well if deprived of its own virtue, or is this impossible?

It is impossible.

Of necessity then, a bad soul will govern and manage things badly while the good soul will in all these things do well. [353b-e]

According to Socrates everything seems to have a function. For instance the function of a bee is making honey, since making honey is something a bee does best. But are we always capable of specifying the function of things? If we cannot specify the function of a thing does this mean that that thing has no function? What is the function of a book, for instance? Is it 'to be read', or 'to give information', or 'to entertain the reader' etc.? 'Being read' certainly is not a work of the book but the reader's, but the reader cannot do reading only by a book or best by a book, since a newspaper can also be read, for instance. The same goes for the other two also. Television also may give information and a magazine may entertain the reader, so these are not things only a book can do or things a book can perform best. What is

the function of a pebble at the riverbank, for instance? What is it that one can only do with a pebble or best with a pebble? What is it that a pebble can do best or what is it that only a pebble can do? One can use a pebble in a necklace or a child may create a game with it. But these are not things only a pebble can do or a pebble can do best. Also, these are not things one can do only with pebbles or best with pebbles for a certain purpose. Let's look at some more examples. What is the function of a fly? What is it that only a fly can do or a fly can do best for a certain purpose? Neither flying nor biting nor sucking blood are things only a fly can do or a fly can do best. These examples show that it is not always possible to specify the function of a thing. But surely this does not mean that a thing has no function since I am unable to specify its function. A person who has more knowledge about the nature of that thing may determine that thing's function. But we cannot deny that there may be cases, where no human is capable of specifying the function of a thing. Socrates would claim that even such cases will not falsify his thesis that everything has a function.

Is Socrates interested in the function of individual things or in the function of the species of individuals? If he was interested in the function of individuals, the following questions can be raised against his arguments: (1) can there be things that are the function of an individual, although these are not the things only this individual can do or this individual can do best? (2) Can there be something that an individual can perform best or only this individual can perform, but is not the function of this individual? With respect to (1) it makes sense to talk of things that are my function although these may not be the things I can do best or only I can do, like contributing to the welfare of other people or serving God or bringing up children or being a good wife and mother, but Plato seems to deny this. With respect

to (2) one can think of the following examples: Even if philosophy is something that I can perform better than anyone else, it is hard to claim that my function is to do philosophy. Suppose also that the thing only I can do in the world is to multiply numbers with ten decimals in thirty seconds. This may be a record that can enter into the Guinness Records Book. But, I think, one can hardly claim that it is my function. These examples seem to work against Socrates' definition of function. However, I don't think Socrates would accept the defeat. He would claim that when he talks about the function of something he is concerned about the function of a species (or of a kind) and not of an individual.

Socrates motivates us to ask the following question: What is the function of the human species? What is the thing only a human can do, or only a human can do best? Laughing, for instance, is a thing only humans can do, but common sense tells me that it is strange to claim that the function of humans is laughing. So if the function of humans is not laughing what is it? Socrates claims that a thing can have more than one function. Republic. I [353d] suggests that deliberation, management, rule, life etc. are the things achieved only by the human soul and that they are the function of a human (soul). But then the following question can be raised: On what grounds do we claim that life is peculiar to humans? Do not animals and plants also live? If we claim that life is one thing for humans and something else for animals and plants then human life will be understood as rational functioning. So, deliberation and life will not be distinct concepts. This point of view goes hand in hand with Plato's perspective.

According to the above quotation, *excellence of something is determined by its function*. For instance, the function of ears is hearing and it is the hearing that determines its excellence. If someone is deaf, then his ears lack their own proper excellence and will do their work ill. According to Socrates the excellence of soul, for instance, is justice and its defect injustice, since life is the function of the soul and justice means living well whereas injustice means living ill. *The excellence of a thing is (a matter of) that thing's performing its function well.*

But is there a circularity in the above definition? We have previously defined the function of something in terms of the work of a particular thing, which that thing performs in a *good* way. But does this functional theory have no reference to the Form of the Good? In the middle books of the Republic the relation between forms and sensibles is presented as an ontological dependence and resemblance which has been illustrated by the three great similes, the Sun, the Line and the Cave. Although the forms have no functions (the forms are “at rest”, they don't perform any activities, they don't do anything, and they may not be even in time), all sensibles with functions “have form” in the sense that they resemble or participate in the forms. So, a particular good thing is good because it participates in the Form of the Good. This means that although the function and (consequently) the excellence of something seem to be defined in terms of the Form of the Good, the Form of the Good having no function, can not be defined in terms of ‘function’ or ‘excellence’ and this saves the above definition of ‘excellence’ from circularity.

But what does ‘functioning well’ mean? Maybe what Plato implies by ‘functioning well’ is ‘to perform its function fully’. Blindness, according to Socrates, is a defect of

an eye. A blind eye is not able to perform its function fully, therefore lacks excellence. An eye that can see only partly also lacks excellence, since it does not perform its function fully, but rather partly. Also, we can say that the excellence of the soul is to live fully. But what does it mean to live fully, or partly? 'Living partly' seems to imply some deficiencies in the life. A life that is lived partly lacks some necessary things. There may be other interpretations of '*functioning well*' like '*performing its function without defects*'. If we define excellence as such, then we can say that a blind eye lacks excellence since its sight is defective. Socrates would consider myopia also as a defect of the eyes' function since being nearsighted is a defect in seeing. Maybe our eyes were created to see a certain distance, that is, it is in their nature to see a certain distance and if they don't fit this standard but are nearsighted, we can call their function defective. This will deprive them of excellence. Maybe this is the case, but how will we know that our eyes were created to see that certain distance? Is it because the eyes of most humans see such and such distance? How are we to decide? For instance, the eyes of bats are blind and we cannot claim that the function of their eyes is defective since it is in the nature of bats not to see. So, it seems as if *knowing a thing's nature helps us understand its function*. So if we know that a soul's nature requires a certain kind of deliberation then when it does not deliberate in that way, we can call its function defective. For example if a person is spastic or mad, we can say that his soul's deliberation is defective and this deprives the soul of its excellence. Also, if a person is unjust, then his soul is defective since it is in the nature of his soul to be just. It is evident that the function of a medicine is healing the person and it is in the nature of the medicine to be so. If a medicine does not serve this purpose it does not perform its function without defects.

But two objections may be brought to the claim that *knowing a thing's nature helps us understand its function*: (1) We may know the nature of something but we may be incapable of detecting its function. We know the nature of a cherry: It is edible, it grows on trees, it has such and such vitamins, it has such and such colours etc., but what is it that a cherry does best or only a cherry does? Is a cherry's function to feed humans and birds? But this is neither a thing a cherry does best nor a thing only a cherry can do. So although we know pretty well the nature of a cherry we seem incapable of detecting its real function. (2) We may not know the nature of a thing very well, but we may know its function. For instance, although we don't know the nature of a light very well, we know that the thing only a light can do is to illuminate.

Further, I will quote a passage from the *Meno*:

...First of all, if it is mainly virtue (or excellence) you are after, it is easy to see that virtue of a man consists in managing the city's affairs capably and so that he will help his friends and injure his foes while taking care to come to no harm himself. Or if you want a woman's virtue, that is easily described. She must be a good housewife, careful with her stores and obedient to her husband. Then there is another virtue for a child, male or female and another for an old man, free or slave as you like, and a great many more kinds of virtue (or excellence), so that no one need be at a loss to say what it is. For every act and every time of life, with reference to each separate function, there is a virtue (or excellence) for each one of us, and similarly, I should say, a vice. [71e-72a]

Meno, in the above passage, holds that the excellence of a man, a woman, a child or a slave etc. is determined by the separate function of each of them. But Socrates is not satisfied at all with this discussion, since Meno is incapable of defining

excellence (or virtue) and of finding the common excellence that a man, a woman, a child etc. all share. Socrates claims that temperance and justice are qualities that make both a man and a woman, a child and an old man, a slave and a free man etc. excellent. So here, as we have previously detected, he seems to be looking for the quality that makes the human species excellent. If something's excellence is determined by its function (which Meno does not deny), or in other words, if something's excellence is that thing's performing its function *well* (functioning '*fully*' or '*without defects*'), then justice and temperance require that thing's performing its function *well*'. In the Republic I, [353d-e] Socrates argues that a soul that governs and manages things well is an excellent soul since one of the functions of the soul is to govern and manage things. On the other hand, in the Meno [72a-c] Socrates says that a man cannot direct the city well and a woman cannot direct her household well without temperance and justice, since it is impossible to direct (govern or manage) anything well if not temperately and justly. So the man and the woman, the child and the old man, the slave and the free man need the same qualities, namely, justice and temperance if they are going to be excellent.

II.II. The Way to Excellence by Temperance and Justice

In the Meno [77-78] Meno claims that excellence (virtue) is ‘to rejoice in the fine and have power’, or in other words, to desire fine things and to be able to acquire them. But Socrates objects to this definition of excellence (virtue). If we accept Socrates’ claim that nobody can desire evil, we can no longer claim that desiring good things is excellence (virtue), because this means admitting that everybody is virtuous. However, if “the wish is common to everyone, and in that respect no one is better than his neighbour” then one will be better than another with respect to his power of acquiring good things. Wealth being a good thing, failure to acquire it in circumstances which would have made its acquisition unjust, will be excellence (virtue). This means that to have such goods is no more excellence (virtue) than to lack them. In the Meno (87d,e) Socrates asserts that virtue is something good. And if good, then advantageous, because all good things are advantageous (to the person). So, virtue (excellence) itself must be something advantageous. According to Socrates, virtues like temperance are profitable only in conjunction with wisdom. But is it not reason that governs temperance itself? Then can we say that temperance is identical with wisdom? Are all men living the life of reason wise?

In the Charmides [163-164] Socrates tries to understand whether temperance is ‘doing our own business’ or not. By ‘doing one’s own business’ Critias means things done nobly and usefully. Socrates finds the above definition of temperance significant, maybe because in his republic there will be not only a ranking or hierarchy between people but also a work-division and this is how the harmony will

be established in the Platonic state. If everyone did his own work properly and harmoniously, others may also benefit from this. His state is like a clock in which every gear wheel has a function and all gear wheels interact together. If every gear wheel does his work well and in concord, the clock will work perfectly. So, doing one's own business may count as a virtue (an excellence), because it may not only be useful for the person but also for others. In the Republic IV [433], Socrates defines justice also as doing one's own business and not to be a busybody. He thinks that this is the remaining virtue in the state after his consideration of courage and intelligence, a quality that made it possible for them all to grow up in the body politic and which when they have sprung up preserves them as long as it is present. So, according to Socrates, when a thing that in its contribution to the excellence of a state vies with and rivals its wisdom, its bravery, then we talk about this principle of everyone in it doing his own task. The name one would have to give to the principle that rivals these as conducting to the virtue of the state is justice. The interference with another's business is the greatest injury to a state and most rightly is designed as the thing which chiefly works it harm. In short, the proper functioning of the money-makers, the helpers, and the guardians, each doing his own work in the state, would be justice and would render the city just. But did not Critias define temperance also as 'doing one's own business'? Is justice and temperance one and the same thing? I don't think Plato would claim that temperance means justice, because when he uses these words in a sentence he does not say 'justice' or 'temperance' but rather 'justice' and 'temperance', meaning that they are different things but have a common character because both of them are virtues. Critias also claims that '*doing of good actions*' is temperance and virtue. But let's look at a passage from the Crito [48b]: "The really important thing is not to live, but to live well". "And to live well means

the same thing as to live honourably or rightly (justly)”. So, if doing good actions is to live well, then to be temperate is to live justly, that is, to be just. What is the intersecting point that renders them alike (or almost the same thing)?

... You said that Zeus bestowed on men justice and self-control and holiness and the rest were mentioned as if together they made up one thing, virtue. This is the point I want you to state for me with more precision. Is virtue a single whole, and are justice and self-control and holiness parts of it, or are these latter all names for one and the same thing? That is what I still want to know.

Well, that is easy to answer, said he. Virtue is one, and the qualities you ask about are parts of it.

Do you mean, said I, as the parts of a face are parts –mouth, nose, eyes and ears- or like the parts of a piece of gold, which do not differ from another or from the whole except in size?

In the first way, I should say –that is, in the relation of the parts of a face to the whole.

[Protagoras 329c-e]

According to the above quotation different parts of virtue (excellence) will have a different function. Imagine a doctor and a veterinarian. Both of them use the same skill in healing the subject. However, these skills are applied to different sorts of problems. The veterinarian uses his skill to heal animals, whereas the doctor uses his skill to heal humans. So we do not call a doctor a veterinarian and a veterinarian a doctor. In a sense, a veterinarian is different than a doctor, as it is obvious from their different names and different definitions. But in another sense they are one and the same, since both of them deal with healing. Also veterinary medicine and clinical medicine are, in a sense, one and the same since both of them share the same quality of being a medicine and the same skill is involved in both of them. But in another sense they are different since one of them deals with animals and the other with

humans, so the skill used in both of them have different functions. Similarly, there is a sense in which justice is same with temperance since both of them share the same quality of being a virtue. There is also another sense in which justice is not same as temperance, because although the same skill/knowledge is involved in both of them, it is applied to different kinds of problems and these different applications have different functions. When the problems are about whether one should master his sexual drives or not, for instance, the application of knowledge/wisdom/skill to find the solution is called 'temperance'. When the problems are about whether a person should be punished or not, the application of knowledge/wisdom/skill to find the solution is called 'justice'. According to Socrates, wisdom is common to all virtues and whoever possesses wisdom will possess all virtues.

Indeed, in the Protagoras, Socrates tries to show why temperance is identical with wisdom/knowledge. The argument goes [332d-333a]:

1. Each thing has one opposite.
2. The opposite of temperance is folly.
3. Folly is the opposite of wisdom

Therefore, temperance is identical with wisdom.

As I have argued in section I.V. the word 'opposite' here is quite vague and cannot mean 'contrary' since each thing can have more than one contrary. But maybe it means 'contradictory'? 'Being temperate' and 'not being temperate' are two contradictory terms. Also 'being wise' and 'not being wise' are two contradictory terms. If 'not being temperate' and 'not being wise' are identical and both of them

means to be 'fool' and if every thing has one contradictory thing then 'being temperate' is the same as 'being wise'. I think the dubious premise is that 'not being wise' and 'not being temperate' means (implies) 'being a fool'. Because it makes sense to say that I may be neither wise nor a fool or neither temperate nor a fool.

So Plato's attempt to show that temperance and knowledge are identical does not seem to be very successful. But in the Charmides, when Critias defines temperance as 'doing of good actions' he denies that, in doing good, a person can act wisely and temperately, and be wise and temperate, but not know his own wisdom and temperance, because temperance itself is self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, on the other hand, is to know what you know and what you don't know. The problem becomes acute when we ask whether there is second-order knowledge (the science of science) and whether it is possible for one to know what he knows and what does not know. Indeed, in the Apology [21d] Socrates says when he went to interview a man with a high reputation for wisdom, he realised that he is wiser than this man to a small extent, because that man thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas Socrates does not think that he knows what he does not know. In the Charmides [175b-c], on the other hand, Socrates says "...we admitted that there was a science of science, although the argument said no, and protested against us. And we admitted further that this science knew the works of other sciences –although this too was denied by the argument- because we wanted to show that the wise man had knowledge of what he knew and of what he did not know... According to our admission, he knows that which he does not know –than which nothing, as I think, can be more irrational." Although Socrates has an insight that knowing what one knows and what one does not know can be possible, he admits that all arguments are

against this thesis and he is incapable of proving his insight. So Plato leaves the question open. But if such a self-knowledge is not possible in this life, then either temperance is something other than self-knowledge, or temperance is also something not possible (not attainable) in this life. On the other hand, if we assume that somehow such a self-knowledge is possible, one can ask in what sense temperance is self-knowledge. Plato does not deny that we can be unconscious about our appetites and that we can make misjudgements but be unaware of them. Plato also admits that we can have confused ideas about things and can be unconscious about some ideas. Then why not also be unconscious (ignorant) about our desires? Socrates seems to think that restraining or mastering our desires is the very activity of reason itself (reason reflects upon itself) and thus cannot be unconscious. It is this self-consciousness that leads us to self knowledge.

Next, I will quote a rather long paragraph from the *Gorgias*:

...If the temperate soul is good, then the soul in the opposite condition to the temperate is evil, and this, we saw, was the foolish and undisciplined. Moreover the sound-minded man would do his duty by gods and men, for he would not be sound of mind if he did what was unfitting...And doing his duty by men, he would be acting justly, and doing it by the gods, piously, and the doer of just and pious deeds must be just and pious... And further, he must be brave, for it is not the part of a man of sound mind to pursue or avoid what he should not, but pursue or avoid what he should, whether it be things, or people, or pleasures, or pains, and to stand his ground, where duty bids or remain steadfast. So there is every necessity...that the sound-minded and temperate man, being, as we have demonstrated, just and brave and pious, must be completely good, and the good man must do well and finely whatever he does, and he who does well must be happy and blessed, while the evil man who does ill must be wretched, and he would be the opposite of the temperate man... [507b-c].

The above passage suggests that the sound-minded man is temperate, just, brave and pious. I think by 'sound-minded' Plato implies 'wisdom'. So the above passage approves of what we said before, that is, it approves that wisdom is common to all virtues and whoever possesses wisdom possesses all of the virtues. In the very same passage Socrates claims that the sound-minded/wise man pursues or avoids what he should. He sometimes will need to avoid pleasures, sometimes pains, and sometimes people or things. But how one will decide what he should pursue or avoid? Plato will insist that self-examination will be a guide to us in understanding what is our duty and what is the time to remain steadfast.

We have seen that according to Critias knowledge/wisdom is temperance. We have also stated that temperance is a virtue. Does this imply that virtue is knowledge? In Meno, Socrates inquires into whether virtue is knowledge or not and whether it can be taught or not. According to Socrates, a good man is someone who is profitable or useful (to himself and others). And he will be of some use if he conducts our affairs aright. If someone knows a certain place, he would be a good guide to take the others there. But if a man judges correctly which is the road that will take him to a certain place, although this man did not know the place because he never went there before, he is also a good guide [97b]. Therefore, true opinion is as good a guide as knowledge for the purpose of acting rightly. "That is what we left out just now in our discussion of the nature of virtue, when we said that knowledge is the only guide to the right action. There was also, it seems, true opinion." [97b]. So right opinion is something no less useful than knowledge. Socrates also affirms that the good man is useful (to himself and others). So assuming that there are men good and useful to themselves and to the community, it is not only knowledge that makes them so, but

also right opinion. To be useful and good consists in giving right guidance. True opinion and knowledge are the only things which direct us aright and possession of which makes a man a true guide. At the end of the *Meno*, Socrates affirms that virtue is neither acquired by nature nor by teaching. Whoever has it gets it by divine dispensation without taking thought, unless he is a kind of statesman who can create another like himself [*Meno* 99e-100].

Should there be such a man, he would be among the living practically what Homer said Tiresias was among the dead, when he described him as the only one in the underworld who kept his wits –‘the others are mere flitting shades. Where virtue is concerned such a man would be just like that, a solid reality among shadows. [*Meno* 100a].

We have already mentioned Critias’ attempt to define temperance by ‘doing of good actions’. According to the above discussion not only knowledge but also right opinion may help us to act rightly and well. In a way, true belief helps us be virtuous as much as knowledge helps. If virtue was (ultimate) knowledge/wisdom and to attain ultimate reality, then nobody would be virtuous apart from the dead. According to this perspective nobody is wise in this world, including Socrates; also, wisdom is something divine that cannot be reached but only approximated. We have argued previously that, to be consistent, Plato either should assert the above argument, that is, virtue is knowledge but both of them are beyond our reach in this life, or that virtue is not knowledge since knowledge is not attainable in this life but virtue is. I believe the overall appearance of Plato’s works suggests the former.

II.III. Spinoza's Notion of Excellence

Spinoza in his Ethics prefers to use the word 'perfect' rather than 'excellent'. Since these two words are quite akin to each other, if we understand his notion of perfect, we can understand also his notion of excellence. 'Perfect' (perfectus), with reference to its Latin meaning which corresponds to 'accomplished' (or 'finished'), has been used among people in referring to a thing that fulfills its maker's design. If a thing does not fulfil that design, it is called imperfect. So, to judge something as perfect or imperfect, we should know the mind of the maker (creator).

When men began to form universal ideas, an artefact was called perfect if that artefact agreed with the universal idea of it (or with their own imaginative model). If it fails to realise this ideal, even if it fulfilled the maker's design, then it was called imperfect.

Men did not only form universal ideas of artefacts, but also of natural things. According to most men, Nature has some end, and these imaginative models of things are taken as a pattern set by Nature to which every member of the class should conform. If they don't, then men say Nature has failed or sinned. Thus,

Men are accustomed to call things perfect or imperfect more from prejudice than from true knowledge of things. [4-Preface-II/206-20]

In fact, Nature does not picture an ideal and try to attain to it. There is no purposive activity in Nature. A final cause is simply a human appetite considered as a cause and is, in fact, an efficient cause.

Therefore, perfection and imperfection (also good and evil) are just modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another; but we need these terms in our desperate search of an ideal model of human nature. We call a thing 'perfect' if it approximates that model. But no natural product in and of itself is 'imperfect' or 'faulty'.

I shall understand by good what we certainly know is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model. [4-Preface-II/208,20-25]

Spinoza in his elaboration of this ideal human nature and ideal human life takes this nature to be ideal (or perfect), simply because he thinks that it represents the essential being of man as adequately as possible since [by 2D6] a thing is perfect insofar as it is real, that is, its perfection is its essential being (whether there is an objective idea of perfection and whether there are 'essential' properties of human beings, which ground this idea, will be discussed in section III.I.). Man attains his fullest reality or perfection insofar as man is clearly conscious of himself and all things in their union with God. Man's highest happiness, or, blessedness, lies in this. That is, unless we perfect our intellect, we won't experience blessedness. So, blessedness is nothing but the satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive (the third kind of) knowledge of God [by 4 Appendix II/267/IV). But what exactly is this third kind of knowledge? In his Ethics Spinoza differentiates three different kinds of knowledge:

...it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions:

- I. from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect; for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from random experience;
- II. from signs, e.g., from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, which are like them, and through which we imagine the things. These two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination.
- III. Finally, from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things. This I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge.
- IV. In addition to these two kinds of knowledge, there is another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge. And this kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things. [2P40/Schol 2/II/122/5-15]

Let's examine these three kinds of knowledge one by one:

The First Kind of Knowledge:

The human body is in a causal relation with other bodies and is subject to the actions of these bodies. Every modification produced in such a way is reflected in an idea. But these ideas don't represent any scientific knowledge and thus are inadequate. The knowledge, which depends on sense perception, is inadequate and confused. The first kind of knowledge includes the universal ideas. The universal ideas, which are formed by sense perception, are confused composite images. The ideas that are involved in the first kind of knowledge are not derived by logical deduction from other ideas. Besides, the mind that has such ideas is passive. We form the universal ideas either by the testimony of others or by uncritical induction. The world of imagination may be called, 'the world of representation' –a world which we picture

as a complex of external things acting upon one another and on us. In this kind of knowledge ideas occur in our mind like conclusions disassociated from the premises, that is, not as a coherent whole but in disassociated links.

The Second Kind of Knowledge:

Once we start by one or more adequate ideas, to construct a true system of knowledge by deduction from them on the principles of reason (that is, the order of reality), we pass from the first kind of knowledge to the second. The second kind of knowledge is a scientific knowledge and involves adequate ideas. The man having this knowledge is living with the guidance of reason. The scientific thinker constructs his world in accordance with laws of his own reason. This level is the level of reason. Although scientists and especially mathematicians and physicists make use of this kind of knowledge, it is not only specific to scientists. Everybody can have adequate ideas, although in this kind of knowledge there are some common notions these are different from the universal notions of the first kind of knowledge. In the first kind of knowledge there are some composite images that are obtained by the logically unrelated and confused ideas, but in the second kind of knowledge there are some clear and distinct ideas, which are the foundations of scientific knowledge. So common notions form a common starting point for a universal knowledge. The second kind of knowledge is necessarily true since this kind of knowledge is based on the self-evident axioms and any system of propositions, which are logically derived from self-evident axioms, is necessarily true. However the second kind of knowledge is not the highest level of knowledge that is conceivable, although it is at a higher level than the first kind of knowledge.

The Third Kind of Knowledge:

The third kind of knowledge also involves deduction and aims at attaining an adequate vision of the essences of individual things by perceiving them in their essential relation to God and not as isolated phenomena as in the first kind of knowledge. “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God” [5P24]. Also, according to Spinoza, the greatest satisfaction of the mind arises from the third kind of knowledge [5P27]. The greatest virtue of the mind is to know God or to understand things by the third kind of knowledge. This virtue is greater, the more the mind knows things by the third kind of knowledge. Thus a man passes to the greatest human perfection/excellence and experiences the greatest Joy, accompanied by the idea of himself and his virtue [5P27/Dem]. If joy consists in the passage to a greater perfection/excellence, blessedness must consist in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection/excellence itself. All these come to mean that man exhibits his true nature only insofar as his actions follow from his intelligence or reason –from adequate ideas. The life of virtue is for Spinoza the life of reason and not the life of passion.

Thus, Spinoza, by defining ‘bondage’ in Part 4’s Preface as “man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects”, holds that human beings can lead a life of passion which involves the first kind of knowledge. They are not in control of their lives for they do not possess the rational and adequate knowledge of their true good. They are driven by every desire that excites them momentarily, like lust, ambition and greed. When they learn to master their passions they are on the way to the life of reason.

The man living the life of reason is in the level of the second kind of knowledge and is in the midway of perfect understanding. Surely the third kind of knowledge is what we aim at and the man who has this knowledge will also be living the life of reason, but this level of understanding is purely ideal and not attainable by man.

Surely Spinoza's notion of excellence has no reference to a function of a thing. But it is similar to Plato's notion of excellence, since it is based on the idea that temperance (restraining one's desires or living the life of reason) is what helps us approximate to excellence. The ultimate excellence for both of them are beyond our reach, but both philosophers have drawn an ideal model of life to be pursued, although neither of them attained that model. Spinoza could not reach the level of the third kind of knowledge and Plato could not attain the knowledge of the Good, but both of them tried to show the way to us and for hundreds of years were our guides to an ideal life.

II.IV. The Notion of Freedom in Plato's and Spinoza's Works

I will quote a long passage from the Republic IX to see Socrates' notion of freedom:

In the first place, said I, will you call the state governed by a tyrant free or enslaved, speaking of it as a state?

Utterly enslaved, he said.

And yet you see in it masters and free man.

I see, he said, a small proportion of such, but the entirety, so to speak, and the best part of it, is shamefully and wretchedly enslaved.

If then, I said, the man resembles the state, must not the same proportion obtain in him, and his soul teem with boundless servility and illiberality, the best and reasonable parts of it being enslaved, while a small part, the worst and the most frenzied, plays the despot?

Inevitably, he said.

Then will you say that such a soul is enslaved or free?

Enslaved, I should suppose.

Again, does not the enslaved and tyrannised city least of all do what it really wishes?

Decidedly so.

Then the tyrannised soul –to speak of the soul as a whole- also will least of all do what it wishes, but being always perforce driven and drawn by the gadfly of desire it will be full of confusion and repentance.

Of course.

And must the tyrannised city be rich or poor?

Poor.

Then the tyrant soul also must of necessity always be needy and suffer from unfulfilled desire. [577c-e]

So, according to the above passage the tyrannical state is less free than the other kind of states and the tyrannical type of individual is less free than other types of individuals. This type of individuals does what he wants less than the other type of individuals. The above dialogue also suggests that the philosopher who masters his desires (who is temperate) is freer than the man who is undisciplined and who is almost driven mad by the pursuit of pleasures and bodily desires. When the man is the slave of his passions and appetites he does not act in accordance with reason. For instance, when we are utterly thirsty and we find a poisonous drink, our reason tells us not to drink it. This kind of actions arises from the calculation of reason and is rational [Republic IV 439d]. However, appetites like lust and excessive appetite for food and drink can be considered as *diseases*. Gluttony, drunkenness, lunacy and lechery, for instance, belong to the appetitive part of the soul and are irrational. Since Plato treats these sorts of appetites like diseases, he seems to believe that they are treatable. So people who are the slave of their passions deserve to be pitied but not to be blamed. Indeed, in the Gorgias [469a-b] Socrates claims that the tyrant who unjustly puts to death any man he pleases is pitiable and wretched. Virtue is a kind of health in personality whereas the uncontrolled pursuit of pleasure is a kind of madness or mental disorder. According to Plato, nobody is knowingly 'unjust' or intemperate. The tyrant, for instance, because of his ignorance, fails to achieve some good. In the Laws [731c], Socrates says that "no wrongdoer is so of deliberation". If wrongdoers should not be blamed but pitied, then one can claim that they do not deserve punishment. But Socrates is against this. In the Gorgias [473] Socrates holds that evildoers are the unhappiest of all and that those who are punished are less so. Anyone who is punished justly suffers what is good and is benefited since a just penalty disciplines the person, makes him more just and cures him of evil, which

brings him unhappiness [478d]. The passage quoted below suggests that the person who is engaged with philosophy (like Socrates) will be aware that it is good for the wrongdoer to be punished, whereas the wrongdoer who is engaged with rhetoric will be unaware of this and would do everything to avoid the punishment:

Socrates: For what these have contrived, my good friend, is pretty much as if a man afflicted with the most grievous ailments should contrive not to pay to the doctors the penalty of his sins against his body by submitting to treatment, because he is afraid, like a child, of the pain of cautery or surgery. Do you not agree?

Polus: I do.

Socrates: He is evidently ignorant of the meaning of health and physical fitness. For apparently, as our recent admissions prove, those who escape punishment also act much in the same way, Polus. They see its painfulness but are blind to its benefit and know not how much more miserable than a union with an unhealthy body is a union with a soul that is not healthy but corrupt and impious and evil, and so they leave nothing undone to avoid being punished and liberated from the greatest of ills, providing themselves with money and friends and the highest attainable powers of persuasive rhetoric. [Gorgias 479b-c]

In the Republic IX [571e-572] Socrates holds that if a man's condition is healthy and sober he is most likely to apprehend the truth. As we said before, the man who is the slave of his passions is a tyrannical type of individual. A drunken man, for instance, has something of this tyrannical temper. The man who is the slave of his passions is like a deranged man, who attempts and expects to rule over not only man but also gods. Then a man becomes tyrannical either by nature or by habits or both and resembles a drunken, an erotic, or a maniacal man [573c]. For instance, the man who does not eat to live but lives to eat, that is, the man who is obsessed with food may not be able to think anything apart from food. Thus he may not detect the best life for

himself. Only the virtuous man does what he wants and thus is freer than the man who is not virtuous. The tyrannical type of man suffers from unfulfilled desires. On the other hand, the desires of the man who is ultimately virtuous are satisfied in totality. This is an ideal state, which only the wise man can attain. Since the state of being ultimately virtuous (excellent) and wise can not be attained but only approximated in this life, the satisfaction of all desires is not possible in this life. A virtuous life should meet every individual's desires but what this life is can be specified only by reason and not by passions.

Spinoza also has a notion of freedom and this notion in some respects is quite similar to Plato's notion of freedom. Spinoza calls a person free who is led by reason alone [4P68/Dem.]. A free person has only adequate ideas. But what does it mean to 'be led by reason alone'? Is this the same as living 'the life of reason'? We have given some hints in section II.III on Spinoza's notion of the 'life of reason', but let's dig into it more.

The free man lives the life of pure reason and he is not the slave of his passions. The man who is living the 'life of passion', on the other hand, is driven by the influences which happen to affect him, so he is passive in this sense and does not have a true control over his life. In other words, his lack of power lies in his allowing himself to be guided by things outside him. Since he lacks power, he lacks also virtue, since virtue is power [4D8]. The harmony and agreement in his life is in danger and he can easily become hostile to other people especially when his passions are directed to objects, the joint enjoyment of which is not possible. He lives in a conflict with himself. Especially when he is possessed by an overmastering passion, like sexual

lust and lust for money, he becomes totally insane. "Greed, ambition and lust really are species of madness, even though they are not numbered among the diseases" [4P44/Schol./25-30]. He goes through an imaginative experience, that is, the first kind of knowledge. He is a prisoner in his own personal world constructed for him (but not by him), through chance conjunctions which he cannot truly understand and of which he has no adequate knowledge whatsoever. He lacks the scientific consciousness (the second kind of knowledge) which lies in the substitution of universal principles in the place of arbitrary and personal principles.

On the other hand, the man who has acquired the second kind of knowledge leads the life of reason. The life of virtue is for Spinoza the life of reason. The scientific thinker constructs his world in accordance with laws of his own reason. So he realizes his own nature, seeks his true advantage and manifests his power. "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" [3P7]. So, the ultimate basis of all virtue is this self-preservation. If we desire to be happy, we must first desire to be. We exhibit our power in this endeavor to preserve our being. This man is to some degree free and the end of the free man is the maintenance and development of his intelligence and knowing God. Since his power is increasing, he feels an active emotion of Joy. So he aims at acquiring the third kind of knowledge, that is, acquiring the adequate knowledge of himself and of all things which can come under his intelligence. This third kind of knowledge will be accompanied by the highest and most permanent happiness and most perfect peace of mind. He will be full of the 'intellectual love of God'. The knowledge of God, that is, the adequate knowledge of the eternal and the infinite essence of God, is a 'good', which all humans can enjoy. Men who are

guided by reason agree in nature. Passions are what bring men into conflict. But living the life of reason, he has not yet realized his permanent being. He is neither completely free from the first kind of knowledge, nor passed beyond the second kind. In other words, he did not acquire the concrete truth of the third kind of knowledge, which is the intellectual contemplation of the eternal system of nature and of his own place in it. This man living the life of reason whose end is to acquire this third kind of knowledge, is the man engaged in philosophical activity of deduction of general propositions from adequate ideas, like Spinoza himself.

In Part 4's Appendix Spinoza writes:

In life, therefore, it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, or reason. In this one thing consists man's higher happiness or blessedness. Indeed, blessedness is nothing but the satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God. But perfecting our intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, i.e., the 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 that can fall under his understanding.

So the clear vision of the intimate individuality or the characteristic essence of all things will be attained by means of philosophy. It will be the result of an inference, which starts with the 'adequate idea of certain attributes of God' to an 'adequate knowledge of the essence of things' [by 5P25/Dem].

According to Spinoza, although the man who lives the life of reason aims at something divine, he should not ignore the pleasures of life. The wise man should refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents,

with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another [4P45/Schol.] So,

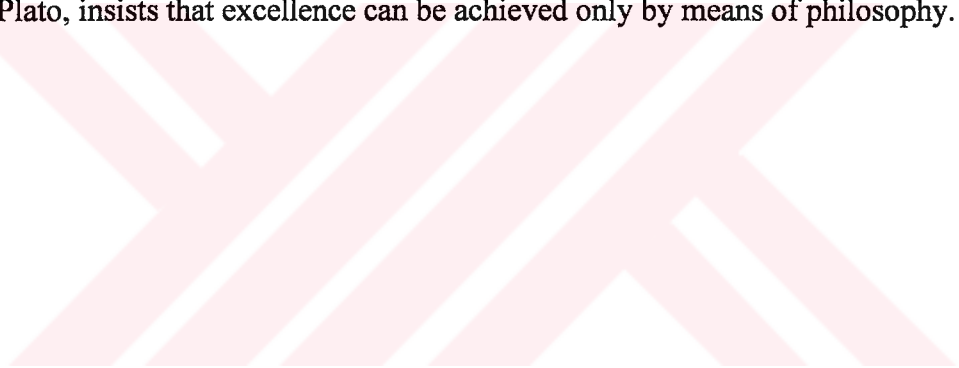
A free man thinks of nothing less than death and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death. [4P67]

On the other hand, Socrates in the *Phaedo* seems to hold that an aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.

This means that Plato's free man meditates on death, whereas Spinoza's free man meditates on life. Although they do not seem to agree on this point, one can ask whether the notion of '*freedom*' (or the '*free man*') is completely different in the works of these philosophers or not.

I think Spinoza's distinction between the life of reason and the life of passion, also the first kind of knowledge and the third kind of knowledge, is similar to Plato's distinction between 'opinion' and 'knowledge'. Plato's allegory of the Cave, prescribing how men move from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, has some kinship to Spinoza's men moving from the first kind of knowledge to the third kind. In the Cave allegory, the liberated prisoner will move from shadows to actual objects, to mathematical objects and finally to a knowledge of the Good. This road takes him from the realm of opinion (where imagining and beliefs are the modes of knowing) to the realm of the intelligible (where thinking and true knowing is achieved). While mind moves from the lower to the higher levels of knowledge, it becomes aware of what it knew and what it must know to attain inner harmony. Through this intellectual ascent one's love for Truth and Goodness is intensified.

Virtue, for Plato, is knowledge. Also for Spinoza the greatest virtue is to have the third kind of knowledge and to be free. Both for Plato and Spinoza, 'the free man' is the man who is virtuous and who leads a life of reason. Both of them agree also that 'freedom' admits of degrees. Spinoza, like Plato thinks that being the slave of passions may yield lust, greed, ambition etc. in the person and these are obstacles to reach the truth. Both Spinoza and Plato think that these can be considered as species of madness or some kinds of diseases. Spinoza thinks that a free man always acts honestly, not deceptively [4P72]. Plato seems to share the same opinion, since he thinks that the wise man (the philosopher) searches for the truth and never tries to deceive people. Plato despises Sophists who deceive people with rhetoric. Spinoza, like Plato, insists that excellence can be achieved only by means of philosophy.



CHAPTER III. DESIRE FOR EXCELLENCE

III.I. Desiring the Good

According to Plato's Socrates we all desire the good. In this section I will dig into this claim. To start with, let's look some passages respectively from the Gorgias and the Meno:

Socrates: Now did we not admit that when we act with some purpose in view, we do not will the act but the purpose of the act?

Polus: Certainly.

Socrates: When we slaughter or banish from the city or deprive of property, we do not thus simply will these acts. But if they are advantageous to us, we will them; if harmful we do not.

For as you say, we will the good, not what is neither good, nor evil, nor what is evil.

[Gorgias 468b-c]

Socrates: Isn't it clear then that this class, who don't recognise evils for what they are, don't desire evil but what they think is good, though in fact it is evil; those who through ignorance mistake bad things for good obviously desire the good?

Meno: For them I suppose that is true.

Socrates: Now as for those whom you speak of as desiring evils in the belief they do harm to their possessor, these presumably know that they will be injured by them.

Meno: They must.

Socrates: And don't they believe that whoever is injured is, in so far as he is injured, unhappy?

...

Socrates: And unfortunate?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: Well, does anybody want to be unhappy and unfortunate?

Meno: I suppose not.

Socrates: Then if not, nobody desires what is evil, for what else is unhappiness but desiring evil things and getting them? [Meno 77e-78a]

The above passage suggests that *we desire something because it is good rather than something is good because we desire it*. In the above quotations Socrates also holds that if something is advantageous to us we will that thing, if harmful we do not. Since we will only *the good*, it follows that what is good is advantageous to us. According to Platonic terminology '*the Good*' is different than particular '*good things*'. The Good is identical with the 'unhypothetical first principle' that is 'the Form of the Good' which is the object of all human strivings and what is really and unqualifiedly good. The Good is objectively good and not relative to anything. As J. Annas points out, Aristotle criticised Plato in the Nicomachean Ethics, saying that it is absurd for the object of people's strivings to be something unattainable in the world of particular actions, a Form separate from particular good things.² But interpreting the statement 'we will only the good' as 'we will only the good things' will save Plato from this criticism. If so, we can claim that *good things (for a person)* are *those which are advantageous to the person*. Then he gives us a list of good things. In the Euthydemus [279a-e], Plato holds that being rich, being healthy, being handsome, good birth, power, honour, being temperate, being upright, being brave and good fortune are all among good things and in fact when wisdom leads them they are greater goods. According to him, [Gorgias 477a-e] wealth, health and justice (also wisdom) are the greatest goods, justice being in a higher place than the other

² Julia Annas, An Introduction to Plato's Republic, p.244

mentioned goods, and poverty, disease and injustice are the greatest evils, injustice being in a lower place than the other two. Things like weakness, sickness and ugliness are bodily evils and things like ignorance and injustice are evil conditions of the soul. Poverty, on the other hand, is the only material evil for human beings. In short, according to Plato's Socrates, goods of the soul are wisdom, justice, courage, temperance and piety and these are greater goods than goods of the body. Goods of the body are health, beauty and strength and these are greater goods than social goods, which are reputation, wealth and honours. We know that goods of the soul are at the highest place of

the ranking. Goods of the body are at the middle, and social goods are at the bottom of the ranking. So far so good. But how are we going to rank the goods of the soul between themselves? The same problem is valid also for the goods of the body and the social goods. To see i.e., whether wealth is a greater good than health, maybe we should assess the advantage they bring in a particular situation and compare that advantage. But this is no solution, since Plato seems to look for a criterion that is valid for all cases. This weakness lies in Plato's being incapable of defining the Good, although he attempts to define good things in terms of the advantage they bring.

In the above quoted passages, Plato claims that when we act with a purpose in view, we do not desire the act, but the purpose of the act. So, if I do x for the sake of y, I desire y and not x. For instance, if we drink medicine for the sake of our health, we desire our health, and not the medicine. Those who act always act for the sake of the good. We do things because we think that they are good (for us), but we can be wrong about what is good (for us) as a means. If a person desires something which

he believes is the best (as a means to his good), he can make errors and when he makes errors, he is not doing what he really wants to, since it is not really best for him. So, according to Plato, what we desire as ultimate end is what is ultimately good (for us), no matter what we desire as ultimate end. We always do what *seems* good (to us), but when we act in this way, it may not be for our real good [Gorgias 468d]. For instance, when a tyrant kills a person because he *thinks* it to be to his advantage, but in fact it proves to be to his harm, he does what seems good (to him). However, when his conduct proves harmful, he is not doing what he *really* wills, because what he wills is, in fact, only the good. In other words, a person may think that it is better for the person himself to do something that is really worse for the person himself, and act accordingly. The person does what he thinks is best, but since it is really worse, he does not do what he desires. In fact, we desire only what is really good (for us) but act in the way we *think* is good (for us). In Gorgias Plato draws a line between belief and knowledge. If I lead an examined life with the help of philosophy, know myself and inspect my desires, I would know what I really desire and what I don't really desire. The tyrant is ignorant in a sense, since he thinks that banishing people will be advantageous to him. But if he knew that banishing people is advantageous only when doing so is just, he would not banish them unjustly. So, what the tyrant really desires is not what he thinks he desires. Sophists by rhetoric deceive people since they make people think that what is really harmful is beneficial for them. They encourage people to pursue pleasures instead of the good. So, these people don't do what they desire to do, since they do what is really harmful to them and desire is only for real advantage. If the tyrant knew, as Socrates did by the help of philosophy, that justice is always advantageous to the person, he would not behave unjustly. But he is seduced by the pleasure rather than the good, as

Sophists bring about, so he does not reflect upon what he really desires. So living an examined life with true philosophy is what we need in our judgement of our real desires.

Similarly, Spinoza holds that [4P17/Schol.] if we have the third kind of knowledge we will know the true essence of things and true essences of ourselves and since desire is the very essence of man we will know our real (true) desires. In other words, if we have the true knowledge of good and evil, we will be aware of our true desires. But according to Spinoza, most of the time, man is moved more by opinion or the first kind of knowledge, than by true reason or the third kind of knowledge. Although from the true knowledge of things there may arise some desires in man, like lust, that may yield disturbances in the mind and although he who increases knowledge may increase sorrow, the man who understands is always better than the fool. This means that from true knowledge of things there may arise desires, which may be unpleasant.

As we have mentioned before, Plato says that [Gorgias 467c] when I drink a medicine with my doctor's orders, I don't really desire to drink it with all its unpleasantness, what I desire is in fact to be healthy. But what if I got cured by this medicine, but because of the side effects of this medicine, there appeared some wounds on my face and I lost my beauty? Then can I say that what I really desired was health? We have previously affirmed that Plato does not tell us whether health is a greater good than beauty or not.

But also suppose that my illness is not as serious as that of the other people in town who suffer from an extreme version of this illness. There is only a limited stock of this medicine in the town's only pharmacy. Since I bought all the medicine in the pharmacy, dozens of patients died. If I didn't buy this medicine, I would recover sooner or later although this would take a longer time without the medicine. But until I discovered this, I was not aware of it. Obviously, what I did was not fair (or just) for other people. In a way, I sent them to death. According to Plato, justice is a greater good than health. Then, was my desire for health genuine? In this particular example, it seems like the consequences of my desire turned out to be bad for others although they were good for me. But Plato would say that injustice is bad for everyone and thus the consequences of my desire were bad also for me. Will I say that "I did not do what I desired. What I really desired was justice not health" if justice is a greater good than health? I knew that I desired justice since I knew that justice is always beneficial for me, but what I did not know was that the consequences of my seeming desire for health will turn out to be unjust. Besides, I was not aware that there is a conflict between my desire for health and my desire for justice. These arguments show that there may be cases where we are not capable of foreseeing the circumstances of our desires and in these cases unless our so-called desire is satisfied, we may not assess rightly whether our desire was genuine or not. In other words, in some cases we may not be capable of judging our desire's genuineness at the very time we experience that desire, because of our weak foresight of the future circumstances. In those kind of situations we would speak only in the past tense, like: "I am aware now that I really *desired* that thing", or "I am aware now that *I did not* really desire that thing". To assess how genuine our desires are, Plato's motto "know yourself" is not always sufficient. Not only living an

examined life by means of philosophy but also good foresight and insight seem necessary for this.

Plato believes that we all desire only good things, but are all desires good? Let's look at a passage from the *Lysis*: "a man who feels thirst, or any similar desire, may feel it in some cases with profit to himself, in other cases with hurt, and in other cases again, with neither one nor the other"[221b]. This means that the very same desire can be good, evil, or neither good nor evil depending on circumstances. For instance, desire for wealth may be good since this will motivate me to get a profession to earn money, but in some other circumstances, like being under too much stress to earn money, may be bad, and in some cases may be neither bad nor evil. So there can be bad, good or neither good nor bad desires of good things. But Plato also says that desires are painful whereas their satisfaction is pleasant (*Gorgias* 496d-e). On the other hand, in the *Gorgias* [499e] Socrates says that some pains are good and some are bad (also some pleasures are good and some are bad). Similarly Spinoza holds that pleasure can be evil whereas pain can be good [4P43]. According to Spinoza, pleasure is a joy which, insofar as it is related to the body, consists in this, that one or several of its parts are affected more than the others. The power of this affect can be so great that it surpasses the other actions of the body, remains stubbornly fixed in the body, and so prevents the body from being affected in a great many other ways. Hence it can be excessive and evil. Pain, on the other hand, which is sadness, cannot be good, considered in itself alone. Since its force and growth are defined by the power of an external cause compared with our own power, we can conceive infinite degrees and modes of the powers of this affect. So, we can conceive it to be such that it can restrain pleasure so that it is not excessive, and thereby prevent the body from

being rendered less capable. To this extent, therefore, it will be good. Like Plato, Spinoza thinks that a desire can be pleasant but evil. Indeed, in 4P44, he clearly states that desire can be excessive and evil. According to him, desire is greater as the affect from which it arises is greater. Hence, as an affect can surpass the rest of man's actions, so, also, the desire which arises from that affect can surpass the rest of his desires. Thus, it can be excessive in the same way pleasure can be. This means that, according to Spinoza, desires like greed, ambition and lust are species of madness and madness can never be good, although it can give momentary pleasures [4P44/Schol./25].

We have seen that according to Plato we desire something because it is good. Plato surely does not claim that something is good because we desire it. But what is Spinoza's position regarding this?

In 4P19 Spinoza holds that "from the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil". The demonstration goes like this: Knowledge of good and evil is itself an affect of joy or sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it and 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. From this it follows that everyone necessarily wants what he judges to be good. And conversely, is repelled by what he judges to be evil. But this appetite is nothing but the very essence of man. Therefore, everyone, from the laws of his own nature, necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil. But he believes that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be

good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it” [3P9/Schol.]. This means that Spinoza’s position is completely different than Plato’s since he claims that we judge something to be good because we desire it. But what are his reasons for making such a claim?

According to Spinoza, ‘good’ and ‘evil’ indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. If we think that something is complete, that is, if someone has decided to make something and has finished it, knowing the purpose of the author of that work, we call that thing perfect. But if we think that something is incomplete, we call it imperfect. We also call things perfect when that very thing agreed with the universal idea we had formed of this kind of thing and imperfect when that thing does not agree with the model we have conceived of this kind of thing. So, something is good because it is more complete according to our idea of what it should be than what we are judging to be evil. In the Appendix of Part 1, Spinoza says [II/81/25]: “After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account, they had to judge that what is most important in each thing is what is most useful to them, and to rate as most excellent all those things by which they were most pleased”. So, in other cases, we call things good because we find them pleasant and we call things evil because we find them unpleasant, and this may differ from person to person. Spinoza believes that men call things perfect, imperfect, good and evil more from prejudice than from true knowledge of these things. But if we knew the true essences of things, we would know that Nature acts for the sake of no end and that what we call a final cause is nothing but a human appetite. Men are conscious of their appetites but are not aware

of the causes by which they are determined to do something [4 Preface II/207/10]. As J. Bennett argues, when common people call things good or bad, they go by how they feel and what they want. Although common men believe that their value judgements are objective, that is, there are objective value properties –the goodness and badness are chief attributes of things, Spinoza thinks they are not. We have also stated above that ordinary men call a thing perfect, when that thing agreed with the universal idea we have formed of this kind of thing and imperfect when that thing does not agree with that model. Spinoza protests that there is no objective basis for selecting universal ideas to serve as models. As Bennett argues, one can say that idea I is a model for judging the perfection of x if and only if Nature intends that x should conform to I. But nature intends nothing! The claim that value judgements are based on models is in accordance with the claim that they are guided by our feelings and desires, since the unifying factor between these two claims is that our feelings and desires guide our value judgements by guiding our selection of models.

So Spinoza offers a new way of looking at ‘good’ and ‘bad’. He offers another thesis: By ‘good’, Spinoza understands *what we certainly know* to be useful to us [4D1] and by ‘evil’, *what we certainly know* prevents us from being masters of some good [4D2]. But these definitions do not seem to save us from speaker-relative value judgements. Speaking of ‘what is useful *to us*’ suggests a notion of collective welfare. According to Bennett’s interpretation Spinoza argues in 4P29 that what is good for one is good for others and *what is useful to us*, is what is useful for me (and consequently what is useful for others). As Bennett holds, Spinoza, by stressing on the words ‘what we certainly know’ he simply seems to be trying to emphasize the contrast between the plain man’s momentary feelings and desires and the Spinozistic

man's prudent, foresighted, informed opinions about what will serve his interests. But in either case value judgements are based on the interests (desires and feelings) of people and this renders them subjective.

Spinoza also revised the notions of 'perfection' and 'imperfection'. In 2D6 he defines perfection as reality. In the background is the notion of value judgements based on models.

I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model. [4 Preface II/208/20].

According to Bennett's interpretation of Spinoza, judgements of perfection are based on taking as a model the notion of being, which pertains to absolutely all individuals. Since everything falls under being, it is not an arbitrarily chosen model. Bennett says: "there could not be an actual thing which was not fit to be related to an idea of being, and so in calling something imperfect by this standard we are not, as it were, treating a duck as a poor specimen of a swan. But Spinoza needs it to be the case that although everything falls under the concept of being, different things fall under it more or less completely".³ Indeed, Spinoza holds that some individuals have more being or reality than others and so we say that some are more perfect than others.

³ Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p.297

Spinoza tried to draw a picture of an ideal model of human nature in his Ethics, but any thesis defining value judgements in terms of some models, renders these value judgements subjective.



III.II. Desire for Excellence and the Road to Happiness

We have previously claimed that ‘goodness’ and ‘excellence’ are two different notions in Plato’s texts. We have also stated that, according to Plato, we desire something because it is good, not that something is good because we desire it. From this it follows that we desire only good things but it does not follow that we desire all the good things. On the other hand, we have seen that Plato defines ‘the good’ as the thing which is advantageous to the person, whereas he defines ‘excellence’ in terms of a function of a thing. But do we all desire excellence, even if ‘the good’ and ‘excellence’ are two separate notions?

Let’s look at a passage from the Meno:

Socrates: First then, is it virtue which makes us good?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: And if good, then advantageous. All good things are advantageous, are they not?

Meno: Yes.

Socrates: So virtue itself must be something advantageous?

Meno: That follows also. [87e]

The above passage implies that virtue (excellence) is something good and thus advantageous. Although everything good is not virtue (excellence), every virtue (excellence) is good. Since we desire only the good but not everything good and virtue (excellence) is a good but not the good itself (that is, not identical with the good) it follows that we need not necessarily desire virtue (excellence). But does this

prohibit us from claiming that everybody desires virtue/excellence? If it does, who desires virtue/excellence?

Socrates: If then virtue is an attribute of the spirit, and one which cannot fail to be beneficial, it must be wisdom, for all spiritual qualities in and by themselves are neither advantageous nor harmful, but become advantageous or harmful by the presence with them of wisdom or folly. If we accept this argument, then virtue, to be something advantageous, must be a sort of wisdom.

....

Socrates: So we may say in general that the goodness of non-spiritual assets depends on our spiritual character, and the goodness of that on wisdom. This argument shows that the advantageous element must be wisdom, and virtue, we agree, is advantageous; so that amounts to saying that virtue, either in whole or in part, is wisdom. [Meno 88d-89a]

One can bring the following argument: If virtue/excellence is wisdom, then those who desire wisdom, desire virtue/excellence. If only philosophers desire wisdom, then only philosophers desire virtue/excellence. But let's also look at the passage quoted below to see whether this is really what Plato defends:

...Then let us consider what remains, I said. Since we all desire to be happy, and we have been shown to be happy by using things and using them right, and rightness and good fortune were provided by knowledge, what seems to be necessary, you see, is that every man in every way shall try to become as wise as possible.

...

...Now, then, since you think...that wisdom alone in the wide world makes a man happy and fortunate, don't you say it is necessary to love wisdom and don't you mean to do it yourself? That I do, Socrates, he said, as hard as ever I can! [Euthydemus 281d-282d].

The above passage suggests that although everybody desires happiness, to attain happiness one must love wisdom, and thus must be a philosopher. However, we cannot infer from the above passage that everybody loves/desires wisdom/excellence since this would be claiming that everybody is a philosopher! Let's also remember that, according to Plato, the excellence of a thing is (a matter of) that thing's performing its function well. As we have previously stated, Plato holds that deliberation, management, rule, life are things achieved only by a human soul; and thus they are the function of a human (soul). We have also stated that deliberation and life are not distinct concepts when humans are concerned, since human life can be understood as rational functioning. So if a person deliberates well or lives well, he can attain excellence/virtue. Since philosophers deliberate better than others, they live better than others and only they can attain excellence, if ever. Even if they cannot attain excellence, which needs a divine reasoning and wisdom, they can approximate to excellence/virtue and happiness. So, *although everyone desires the good (and also happiness), desire for excellence and approximation to the excellence (and to the highest happiness) seem to be a unique privilege of philosophers.*

Please remember that, according to Plato, temperance and justice are two sides of the same coin, that is, of excellence/virtue. We have previously asserted that temperance and justice are profitable only in conjunction with wisdom (indeed, they are inseparable from wisdom) and virtue/excellence is wisdom. We have also claimed above that the happy men are those who are wise. Then happy men must be those who are temperate and just. But let's not take this for granted and try to see Plato's reasons that lie behind this thesis.

In the Symposium Agathon says:

...I may take it, I suppose, for granted that temperance is defined as the power to control our pleasures and our lusts, and that none of these is more powerful than Love. If therefore, they are weaker, they will be overcome by Love, and he will be their master, so that Love, controlling, as I said, our lusts and pleasures, may be regarded as temperance itself. [196c]

In the Symposium [178c] Phaedrus, on the other hand, asserts that love is the source of all our highest good. Neither family, nor privilege, nor wealth, nor anything but love helps man live a better life. Love is the great giver of all goodness and happiness to men [180c]. But is every kind of love temperance and the source of happiness?

Pausanias points out the two kinds of Love [180d-181e]: The earthly Aphrodite's love is an earthly love and governs the passions of the vulgar. One who desires the body rather than the soul, has this sort of love. He is after pleasures even if these pleasures are bad. On the other hand, if a person has heavenly love, he is more vigorous and values the intellectual side of the person rather than his physical side. So one kind of love deals with the body of the person, whereas the other deals with the pursuit of wisdom and other virtues and it is this love that can lead a person to happiness. So, this latter kind of love must be the kind of love which Agathon names as 'temperance'.

In the Gorgias [493b] Callicles argues that we should not curb our appetites, but rather should allow them the fullest possible growth and procure satisfaction for them from whatever source. Callicles claims that those who are in need of nothing

are not rightly called happy, because if this were the case, stones and corpses would be extremely happy. But Socrates does not agree with this. He puts forward the following allegory to support his thesis: The part of the soul in foolish people where desires reside resembles a leaky jar, since one cannot fill it. The unhappiest people in Hades are those who carry water to pour into a perforated jar in a perforated sieve. In this allegory the sieve is parallel to the soul of foolish people, because it is perforated and unable to hold anything, that is, it has desires that grow as much as possible which are in need of satisfaction. In 504-505 Socrates holds that lawfulness and law are applied to all order and regularity of the soul. When men are orderly and law-abiding they are just and temperate. When a body is sick and intemperate, giving it abundant food and most delicious drinks will do it more harm. But when a person is well, doctors let him satisfy his appetites, i.e. allow him to eat as much as he wants when hungry and drink as much as he wants when thirsty. When he is sick, doctors will not let him take his fill of what he craves. Similarly, when the soul is evil, undisciplined, unjust and impious, it should be restrained from its desires. Restraining the soul from desires is to discipline it. Discipline is better for the soul than indiscipline.

This then is the position I take, and affirm it to be true, and if it is true, then the man who wishes to be happy must, it seems, pursue and practice temperance, and each of us must flee from indiscipline with all the speed in his power and contrive, preferably to have no need of being disciplined, but if he or any of his friends, whether individual or city, has need of it, then he must suffer punishment and be disciplined, if he is to be happy. This I consider to be the mark to which a man should look throughout his life, and all his own endeavours and those of his city he should devote to the single purpose of so acting that justice and temperance shall dwell in him who is to be truly blessed. He should not suffer his appetites to be undisciplined and endeavour to satisfy them by leading the life of a brigand –a mischief

without end. For such a man could be dear neither to any other man nor to God. [Gorgias 507c-e]

According to the above quotation, the *temperate and just man is blessed and happy*. But on what grounds is the temperate soul good and happy? Socrates brings the following arguments in the Gorgias [506c-507c]:

1. Goodness of anything is due to order and arrangement.
2. It is the presence in each thing of the order appropriate to it that makes everything good.
3. Then, the soul that has its appropriate order is good.
4. The soul possessed of order is orderly.
5. The orderly is the temperate.

Therefore, the temperate soul is the good.

Further, Socrates argues:

1. The man who has a temperate soul is a good man.
2. The good man does well and finely whatever he does.
3. One who does well is happy and blessed.

Therefore, the temperate man is happy and blessed.

The second premise in the second argument does not seem to be true in every situation. For instance, I may be a good man but the worst musician in the world (i.e. I might be incapable of singing well). Also, can one call me a good man if I am the

best shoe-collector in the world? I don't think this follows. I am simply a good shoe-collector but not necessarily a good man.

The third premise of the second argument, on the other hand, is vague. Who does *what* well is happy and blessed? Am I happy and blessed, if I am the best thief in the world (I steal things very well), for instance? Or, am I happy and blessed if I am good at calculating numbers quickly? It is not necessarily so.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates also asserts that the pleasant is not identical with the good. From this it follows that although temperance (or justice) is always good it need not be always pleasant. So, what is pleasant need not make us happy. Socrates gives the following example [494c]: A person that suffers from the itch and longs to scratch himself, may scratch himself to his heart's content and continue scratching all his life. But we cannot claim that he lives happily but rather pleasantly. Indeed, Socrates believes, for instance that, a person may go through some unpleasant experiences when he is punished for the sake of justice, but his reward will be happiness [507d]. But what does happiness mean? How can we define happiness? Let's look at the following quotation from the *Euthydemus*:

...We agreed, I said, that if we had plenty of good things, we should be happy and do well.

...

Then should we be happy because of the good things we had, if they gave us benefit, or if they did not?

If they gave us benefit, he said.

And would a thing give benefit, if we only had it but did not use it? For example, if we had plenty of food, but ate nothing, and plenty of drink but drank nothing, should we get any benefit?

No, none, he said.

...

Then it is necessary, I said, as it seems, that the one who is to be happy must not only get possession of such good things, but also must use them, or else there is no benefit from having them.

...

Very well then, Clinias, is that enough now to make a man happy, both to possess the good things and to use them?

I think so.

Is that if he uses them aright, or is it the same if he uses them wrongly?

If he uses them right. [280b-e]

Does Socrates define *happiness* above as *the possession of good things and making right use of them*? I believe he holds that possession of good things and using them rightly is what leads to happiness but is not happiness itself. He does not seem to be able to offer a definition of happiness. Surely he has an insight of what happiness is, as we all have, but is unable to define it.

Besides, in the above passage, the expression 'right use' is vague. Socrates holds that [280d] if a man possessed wealth but if he did not use it rightly, he would not be happy. But what is the right use of money (or wealth) which I possess? Would it be a right use of my wealth, if I donate all my money to an orphanage? Or would it be a right use of my wealth if I go to a holiday in Hawaii? Which one would be a use more right than the other? Which one is more profitable? If what determines the right use is the beneficial (profitable) use of that thing, then one can ask whether it is my benefit that counts or the benefit of others, i.e., donating my money to an orphanage will be beneficial to the orphans, whereas my having a holiday in Hawaii is for my

benefit. Whose benefit will have priority? Plato does not seem to provide neat answers to these questions.

But for your sake, Charmides, I am very sorry –that you, having such beauty and such wisdom and temperance of soul, should have no profit nor good in life from your wisdom and temperance. And still more am I grieved about the charm which I learned with so much pain, and to so little profit, from the Thracian in order to produce a thing which is nothing worth. I think indeed that there is a mistake, and that I must be a bad inquirer, for wisdom or temperance I believe to be really a great good, And happy are you Charmides, if you possess it. Wherefore examine yourself, and see whether you have this gift and can do without the charm, for if you can, I would rather advise you to regard me simply as a fool who is never able to reason out anything, and to rest assured that the more wise and temperate you are, the happier you will be. [Charmides 175e-176a]

The above paragraph and our previous arguments suggest that virtues like temperance and justice cannot exist separately from wisdom and we can approximate to happiness only if we possess temperance and justice, because they are good and the right use of them is guaranteed by wisdom. If we could have attained wisdom, which is virtue/excellence, then we could have experienced the highest happiness.

Above we have claimed that, according to Plato, everybody desires the good but only philosophers desire excellence and only they can approximate to excellence even if they cannot attain to it. The highest happiness lies in this excellence and the nearer they become to excellence the happier they become. But does Spinoza's position have anything similar to this discussion?

We have seen, in section III.I, that according to Spinoza, from the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants what he judges to be good or is repelled by what he judges to be evil [by 4P19]. We know that Spinoza's notion of 'good' is different than his notion of 'excellence' as was also the case for Plato. By *good*, Spinoza understands *what we certainly know to be useful to us* [by 4D1], whereas by *perfection* he understands *reality* [by 2D6]. Since these are two distinct concepts, saying that everybody desires the good by no means will imply that everybody desires perfection/excellence. Whether everybody desires excellence or not is a separate question that calls for an answer.

In section II.III and III.I, we have examined Spinoza's notion of excellence (perfection). But is it this excellence that is the road to happiness, according to Spinoza? If we could have attained the ideal human nature, would we be extremely happy? In the remaining parts of this section I will try to find the answers for these questions.

In the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect Spinoza says:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected –whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity. [II/5/10-15]

...By persistent meditation...I came to the conclusion that, if only I could resolve, wholeheartedly, [to change my plan of life], I would be giving up certain evils for a certain

good. For I saw that I was in the greatest danger, and that I was forced to seek a remedy with all my strength, however uncertain it might be –like a man suffering from a fatal illness, who, foreseeing certain death unless he employs a remedy, is forced to seek it, however uncertain, with all his strength. For all his hope lies there. But all these things men ordinarily strive for, not only provide no remedy to preserve our being, but in fact hinder that preservation, often cause the destruction of those who possess them, and always cause the destruction of those who are possessed by them. [II/6/30- II/7/10]

In the above passages Spinoza points out the reasons that lie behind writing his Ethics and drawing a picture of an ideal life and ideal human nature. Spinoza implies above (and in II/5/25-II/6/5) that the ordinary man may strive for (or desire) what he believes to be the highest good, like wealth, honour and sensual pleasure, but in fact he is deceived. Although it seems as if all men want the (highest) good, they search it in different things. In the Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect, he shows the relation between ‘perfection’ and the ‘highest good’ as follows:

...since...man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek means that will lead him to such a perfection. Whatever can be a means to his attaining it is called a true good, but the highest good is to arrive –together with other individuals if possible- at the enjoyment of such a nature. What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that it is the knowledge of the union that mind has with the whole of nature. [II/8/20-30]

So, attaining the perfection is *the highest good* for man and whatever serves him as a means for attaining such a *perfection*, is for his *true good*. If we remember the definition of the ‘good’ and ‘perfection’ in Ethics and combine it with the above perspective, then we can say that attaining reality is what is most useful for man and

whatever serves as a means for attaining such a reality is truly beneficial for the person. But if attaining perfection/excellence is (the highest) good and everybody desires what he judges to be good, then can we conclude that everybody desires perfection?

We have stated above that by perfection in general Spinoza understands reality, i.e. the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration, since no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time [4 Preface II/209]. Let's also remember that joy, for Spinoza, is a man's (or his mind's) passage from lesser to a greater perfection [3P59/II/191] and is good [by 4P41]. If we feel joy, our vitality is increased. Then we are more real, more ourselves or have a greater share in the divine nature. All joy is good. The life of reason is the life of freedom and action. Hence, the basis of all actions of the life of reason is the positive desire for good, and not the negative avoidance of evil.

Above we have stated that a man's passage toward perfection is good. From this it follows that a man's (or his mind's) passage toward perfection is useful for him. But why is it useful? Spinoza says:

In life...it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect or reason. In this one thing consists man's highest happiness, or blessedness. Indeed, blessedness is nothing but the satisfaction of mind that stems from the intuitive knowledge of God. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature. So the ultimate end of the man who is led by reason, i.e., 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 that can fall under his understanding. [4 Appendix II/267]

The above passage suggests that an increase in man's (or his mind's) perfection is useful for man because it leads man to a higher happiness. The above quotation seems to imply that *not all men desire perfection/excellence but only those who live the life of reason, that is, the ones who have the second kind of knowledge, i.e. philosophers like Spinoza himself*. But let's look at another passage to see whether this is what Spinoza really defends:

...the Desire to live blessedly, or well, to act, etc., is the very essence of man, i.e., the striving by which each one strives to preserve his being. [4P21-Dem]

This quotation implies that every man from the laws of his own nature would desire perfection. But if a man does not act in accordance with his own nature, then he will not desire perfection, because he will not judge it as something good. Since only those who are led by reason act in accordance with their own nature, only they have the highest desire for the third kind of knowledge. This supports our previous thesis that, according to Spinoza, *not all men desire perfection/excellence but only those who live the life of reason, that is, the ones who have the second kind of knowledge, i.e. philosophers like Spinoza himself*.

If we could pass from the second to the third kind of knowledge we would experience the highest joy or happiness and the greatest perfection/reality. According to this picture perfection admits of degrees and has a close relation to goodness.

According to Spinoza, virtue and power are one and the same thing, i.e. virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature of man, insofar as he has

the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood by the laws of his nature alone [by 4D8]. Since virtue is nothing but acting from the laws of one's own nature, and no one strives to preserve his being except from the laws of his own nature, it follows that the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being and that happiness consists in man's being able to preserve his being [by 4P18/Schol.]. Besides, nobody can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well, unless at the same time he desires to be, to act and to live, i.e., to actually exist [by 4P21]. So if we desire to be happy and blessed, we must first desire to be, that is, to maintain our life and secure our advantage. This is the expression of our true nature. But acting from inadequate ideas is the expression of what is not ourselves. Then we do not manifest our power and virtue, but the power of external causes. Man manifests his true nature, only when his actions follow from reason, that is, from his adequate ideas. In other words, acting from virtue is acting, living and preserving our being by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage [by 4P24]. So, true virtue is nothing but living according to the guidance of reason, and the lack of power consists only in man's allowing himself to be guided by things outside him. The desire of the man living the life of reason is the expression of his adequate ideas. His 'end' is the maintenance and development of his intelligence. Thus the end of this man is the knowledge of God, the adequate knowledge of himself and of all other things which can come under his intelligence. If he attains this end, he will enjoy the highest and most permanent happiness and most perfect peace of mind of which human nature is capable and he will be filled with the love of God as the author of that happiness. The knowledge of God is a good, which all men can enjoy. Hence, when men are guided by reason, they agree in

their natures. The more a man seeks his own good or advantage, the more useful he will be to the others [4P35/Cor.2].

Surely, for each of Plato and Spinoza 'the good' and 'excellence' are two distinct concepts. Also these two philosophers have a different understanding of the good and excellent. Plato attributes to each of us a desire for what is really good for us, whether or not we judge it as something good for us. Spinoza, on the other hand, holds that we all desire *what we judge to be good* for us. Both of them agree that desire for excellence and approximation to excellence is privileged only to the people who are leading the life of reason, i.e., philosophers like Plato and Spinoza. Also according to both Spinoza and Plato, since living the life of reason is in a sense being wise and temperate, the road to excellence and happiness lies in wisdom and temperance. For Plato, excellence and the highest happiness require the Knowledge of the Form of the Good, whereas for Spinoza, excellence and the highest happiness require the Third Kind of Knowledge.

III.III. Excellence as an Assimilation to God

To start with I will quote a passage from the Theaetetus:

Socrates: Evils, Theodorus, can never be done away with, for the good must always have its contrary; nor have they any place in the divine world, but they must needs haunt this region of our mortal nature. This is why we should make all speed to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine, so far as we can, and that again is to become righteous with the help of wisdom. But it is no such easy matter to convince men that the reasons for avoiding wickedness and seeking after goodness are not those, which the world gives.... In the divine there is no shadow of unrighteousness, only the perfection and righteousness, and nothing more like the divine than any of us who becomes as righteous as possible. It is here that a man shows his true spirit and power or lack of spirit and nothingness. For to know this is wisdom and excellence of the genuine sort, not to know it is to be manifestly blind and base. [176a-c]

According to this paragraph, participation in the divine can be achieved only by wisdom. It is wisdom and righteousness (or in a sense, justice) that makes us resemble the god(s), since these are among the qualities of the god(s). We also know that, for Plato, wisdom is virtue, so becoming like the god(s) is being as virtuous as possible. If we possess wisdom, we possess all the virtues. So the gods possess all the virtues like justice, moderation, wisdom and courage.

In the Laws IV [713e] Plato holds that as long as a community is ruled not by the god but by man, there is no escape from misery and the man of wanton power who thinks that he doesn't need the guidance of the god and the god's justice, will ruin the

community. So the more just a man is the more he resembles the god (participates in the divine) and the more useful to the community. In 716c, the Athenian investigates the line of conduct that is dear to the god and a following of him. According to him, there is but one, and it is summed up in one ancient rule, the rule that 'like' –when it is a thing of due measure- 'loves its like'. For things that have no measure can be loved neither by one another nor by those that have. It is the god who is 'the measure of all things', much more truly than man. He who would be loved by such a being must himself become such to the utmost of his might and thus one who is temperate is loved by the god, for he is like the god, whereas he who is not temperate is unlike the god and at variance with him; the same holds with the unjust.

This, then, must be our conviction about the just man, that whether he fall into poverty or any other supposed evil, for him all these things will finally prove good, both in life and in death. For by the gods assuredly that man will never be neglected who is willing and eager to be righteous, and by the practice of virtue to be likened unto god so far as that is possible for man. [Republic X 613a-b]

According to this quotation, the just (virtuous) man will be rewarded by the gods for his resembling them. So the more a man resembles the gods, the happier he will be.

In the Symposium [207a-208b], Diotima claims that propagation is the deathless and eternal element in our mortality. Since the lover longs for the good to be his own forever, we are bound to long for immortality as well as for the good –which means that Love is a longing for immortality. The mortal does all he can to attain immortality. And he can only achieve this by reproducing, that is, by ensuring that there will always be a younger generation to take the place of the old. This is how

every mortal creature perpetuates itself. It cannot be like the divine, and continue to live throughout eternity; it can only leave behind new life to fill the vacancy that is left in its species by death. This is how the temporal partakes of the eternal. The whole creation, according to Diotima, is inspired by this love, this passion for immortality.

According to the above argument, immortality is something divine and human beings desire to partake of the divine; this is why they desire immortality. But if one desires something, this means that he does not possess the thing desired (he lacks that thing). So since human beings desire immortality they lack immortality. But Plato seems to contradict himself here, since he believes that the human soul is immortal, that is, in some sense, we already partake of immortality. Let's look at a passage from the *Phaedo*:

...When soul and body are both in the same place, nature teaches the one to serve and be subject, the other to rule and govern. In this relation which do you think resembles the divine and which the mortal part? Don't you think that it is the nature of the divine to rule and direct, and that of the mortal to be subject and serve?

I do.

Then which does the soul resemble?

Obviously, Socrates, soul resembles the divine, and body the mortal.

Now, Cebes, he said, see whether this is our conclusion from all that we have said. The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble and never self-consistent. [80a-b]

So, the divine has the following qualities: Being immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, self-consistent and invariable. The more we approximate to these qualities the more godlike we will be.

In the *Timaeus* [90b-c], Plato holds that when a man is occupied with the cravings of desire and ambition, and is desperately striving to satisfy them, all his thoughts must be mortal, and, as far as it is possible to become such, he must be mortal every whit because he has cherished his mortal part. But the man that has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom, and has exercised his intellect more than any other part of him, must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attains truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must be immortal. In other words, according to Plato, the mortal soul must of necessity think mortal thoughts. The soul that loves learning and wisdom should think thoughts immortal and divine and so, in the measure possible to man, become immortal itself. Since he is ever cherishing the divine power and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be happy. This means that the man who desires wisdom is closer to immortality and the divine.

Let's turn to Spinoza. Does excellence reside in assimilation to God, according to Spinoza? What is Spinoza's way of looking at assimilation to God? Does it have anything parallel to what we have discussed so far about Plato's way of looking at excellence?

By God, Spinoza understands a being absolutely infinite, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite

essence [by 1D6] and by mode he understands the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [by 1D5]. Spinoza's philosophy not only deals with that which is in itself, that is, the reality of which is self-dependent but also that which is in something else, whose reality is dependent. Hence, Spinoza calls the former 'Substance' and the latter a 'Mode'.

Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God. [1P15]

So, finite beings are modifications of God. The modes can neither be nor be conceived apart from God. So, in a sense, God *is* the modes and modes are nothing but expressions of God. Separating the modes from God causes the inadequate understanding of the First Kind of Knowledge according to which reality becomes a world of finite things. Not only is God's thinking our mind and God's extension our body, but also God's eternal self-affirmation is our actual being. It is the job of philosophy to attain to the clear vision of the intimate individuality or characteristic essence of all things in God, that is, to have the Third Kind of Knowledge. This can be achieved by an inference that starts with the adequate idea of the real essence of some of God's attributes, and proceeds to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.

The above argument shows that, in some sense and to some degree, by being modes of the substance, we already partake of God. But if we could have attained the Third Kind of Knowledge, we would have realised our oneness with God and could have attained to a kind of eternity, that is, in our adequate consciousness we would be eternal. Thus we would partake more of the divine. The essence of the human mind is intelligence and when we think adequately, God is thinking in us, that is, our mind

is part of the complete intelligence of God. So excellence as the assimilation to God consists in the Third Kind of Knowledge.

We know that only God is completely free but human beings can have a degree of freedom. So, the ideal free man in the third kind of knowledge experiences the highest happiness of which human nature is capable. And this joy accompanied by the idea of God as external cause is the Intellectual Love of God. Since God eternally has the greatest perfection, the free man has a kind of eternal analogue of Joy. Also he is self-caused and his eternal rejoicing has God himself as its true object and has an eternal analogue of Love. If we could attain the Third Kind of Knowledge, we would participate in this eternal analogue of Love, that is, the Intellectual Love of God.

Although Plato's notion of God is different than Spinoza's notion of God, they share the same view that only those who lead the life of reason can be assimilated to God and approximate to excellence. Also they believe that the highest assimilation to God is achieved only by those who are wise (wise men, for Plato, are those who have the Knowledge of the Form of the Good, and for Spinoza, those who have the Third Kind of Knowledge).

CONCLUSION

In the first chapter, I have examined Spinoza's theory of desire and Plato's notion of desire. According to Spinoza, when man's striving to persevere in his being is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. On the other hand, desire is an appetite together with the consciousness of appetite. Desire is the very nature or essence of each man insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever constitution he has, to do something. Although Spinoza claims that there is no difference between appetite and desire since whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not the appetite still remains one and the same, I have argued that in a sense, there is a difference between appetites and desires, since every desire is an appetite, whereas not every appetite is a desire. Appetites can be conscious and unconscious, whereas desires are always conscious (appetites). Spinoza claims that an idea is a concept of the mind that the mind forms because it is a thinking thing. He also holds that the mind strives to persevere in its being both insofar as it has inadequate ideas and insofar as it has adequate ideas. I have claimed that we are necessarily conscious of our ideas (or, in other words, there cannot be unconscious ideas) but our appetites are not always accompanied by ideas, which supports Spinoza's thesis that there may be unconscious appetites. So I have showed that Spinoza's thesis about unconscious appetites is consistent and pretty legitimate. To say that 'an appetite is conscious' is equivalent to saying that 'it is accompanied by an idea and we are conscious of this idea'. I have concluded that if desires are conscious appetites which are accompanied by ideas and if ideas are concepts of mind, then desires are restricted only to humans, since animals have no concepts of

things, whereas appetites may belong also to animals. I have also claimed that one can bring counter arguments to Spinoza's thesis that every appetite serves to preserve our being. In the very same chapter, I have examined Plato's notion of desire, which is based on the thesis that a desire is a longing for the satisfaction of some deficiency one experiences. In other words, according to Plato, we desire only what we lack (we desire the opposite of what we are experiencing). I tried to show the problems of Plato's usage of the word 'opposite', and consequently, his notion of 'desiring the opposite of what we are experiencing'. I have argued that everything that we desire, we lack (which Spinoza does not deny either), but we don't desire everything we lack. I have also maintained that although love is a desire for Plato, it is not a desire for Spinoza.

In the second chapter I have explored and tried to understand Plato's and Spinoza's notions of 'excellence'. Plato's notion of excellence is based on a functional account. In other words, according to Plato, the excellence of a thing is (a matter of) that thing's performing its function well. He defines function, on the other hand, as the work of a thing done only by that thing or best by that thing for a certain purpose or/and the work of a person done only by use of that thing or best by use of that thing for a certain purpose. I have claimed that knowing a thing's nature helps us understand its function but this is open to debate. I have also claimed that Plato is interested in the function of the species rather than the function of individual things. In the light of Plato's arguments, I tried to understand the function of human species and realised that the function of the human species is life or deliberation, which are not distinct concepts, since human life can be understood as rational functioning. I also claimed that there is no circularity in the definition of excellence, that is, in

defining excellence in terms of a thing's performing its function well. On the other hand, when I examined Spinoza's notion of excellence, I realised that excellence for him is deeply connected to what he calls 'the Third Kind of Knowledge' which aims at attaining an adequate vision of the essences of individual things by perceiving them in their essential relation to God. In that chapter I also argued that although Spinoza's notion of excellence has no reference to the function of a thing and differs from Plato's notion of 'excellence' in this respect, for both philosophers the way to excellence lies in wisdom/temperance, that is, in being virtuous and living the life of reason. But we should note that Spinoza's conception of 'being virtuous' and 'living the life of reason' is not exactly same as Plato's conception of 'being virtuous' and 'living the life of reason'. I also discovered that the ultimate excellence for both of them is beyond our reach, but they have drawn an ideal model of life to be pursued, although even they were not able to attain that model. I have claimed that for both philosophers, not being the slave of passions, that is, being led only by reason, is to be a free man. Both of them despised passions like lust, greed, ambition etc. and claimed that they are like diseases and are obstacles to reach the truth.

In the third and last chapter, I have presented Plato's understanding of 'the good' and 'good things' and tried to show in what respects they differ from his conception of 'excellence'. According to Plato we desire only the good. He also seems to be claiming that we desire something because it is good, unlike Spinoza who seems to be claiming that something is good because we desire it. Besides, Plato believes that good things for a person are those which are advantageous for that person. According to my interpretation of Plato, we desire only what is really good for us, but act in the way we *think* is good for us, but when we act in this way, it may not be for our real

good. I have claimed that to assess how genuine our desires are, not only living an examined life by means of philosophy, but also good foresight and insight seem necessary. Although 'the good' is something objective for Plato, 'the good' and 'perfection' are subjective notions for Spinoza and they are relative to people, various interests, models and criteria, since by 'good', he understands what we certainly know to be useful to us and what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves. He also claims that men are more perfect insofar as they approach this model. In this chapter I have asserted that Plato attributes to each of us a desire for what is really good for us, whether or not we judge it as something good for us. Spinoza, on the other hand, holds that we all desire what we judge to be good for us. But both of them agree that desire for excellence and approximation to excellence (and to the highest happiness) are a unique privilege of the people who are leading the life of reason, i.e. philosophers like Spinoza and Plato. Finally I have argued that although Plato's notion of the god is different than Spinoza's notion of the god, they both agree that only those who lead the life of reason can assimilate themselves to the god and approximate to excellence. The highest assimilation to the god will be achieved only by the wise man, but wisdom for Plato is to have the Knowledge of the Form of the Good, whereas for Spinoza it is to attain the Third Kind of Knowledge.

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