

# Spinoza: reasoned indifference as an introduction to adaptation in unusual circumstances

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*Abstract:* The study offers a practical model of Spinoza's behavioral teachings for empowering a person's ability to cope in stressful situations. The concept of different and indifferent exerts significant implications on everyday lives of a person. This model offers philosophical tool for the intellectual control of emotions that weaken a person's power to act. The first part offers Spinoza's metaphysical basis, focusing on the two titular concepts that represent humans and nature. Next is Spinoza's philosophical method of guiding people toward conduct that is associated with and derived from nature's reasoning as values that ameliorate everyday conduct. The practical layer of this study offers a basic model, a philosophical anchor, which can be used for the formulation of empirical research questionnaires on various topic associated with an individual's adaptation to a challenging emotional environment and all it entails (feelings, ability to function etc.). The study also present a sample questionnaire formulated according to the Spinozist model. The study's final part presents several interviews conducted by the author in the model's spirit as an outline for future empirical studies and for the formulation of curricula designed in the spirit of Spinoza's behavioral philosophy.

*Keywords:* adaptation; indifferent; metaphysic; nature; passive-active.

*Abbreviations:* Part in the Ethics: E. (1-5); Appendix: app.; Axiom: ax.; Corollary: c.; Definition: d.; Definition of affects – da. ; Preface: pref.; Proof: pro. ; Proposition: p.; Scholium: s.

## 1. Introduction

The present study seeks to offer an applied model of Spinoza's behavioral teachings. This model has been used for several years in what is called "philosophical therapy" (see Appendix 2) and as such might serve as a practical basis for empowering a person's ability to cope in unfamiliar situations, and in stressful or embarrassing situations in particular. More specifically, I seek to offer an infrastructure for the development of further studies followed by the formulation of applied teaching plans pertaining to adaptations to the aforementioned situations.

The central motive of Spinoza's *Ethics* is the empowerment of a person's abilities, and - by so doing - the promotion of this person's happiness. It is in this spirit that the relation between the concepts of different and indifferent exerts significant implications on the everyday lives of a person as an individual existing within an infinite totality. The methodological basis offered below is meant for guiding humans toward better functioning in cases of emotional ambiguity, nebulosity or a sense of helplessness. In other words, it may be seen as seeking to offer philosophical tools for the intellectual control of emotions that weaken, and occasionally even extinguish, a person's power to act.

Nature, being a totality containing all its individual parts, has no defined objectives, goals, or purposes. It acts according to the rules of its nature (the literal rules of nature) and as such may be referred to as an "active is". In other words, nature's action expresses its substance (what it is as a whole). Seen objectively, therefore, the actions of nature are not carried out for any particular purpose, and it is thus free as a whole and unencumbered by the desires or whims of any factor in the universe as a whole or of a human in particular. Indeed, one of the most powerful supports for Spinoza's identification of God with nature is the distinction between these two concepts. As infinity, nature is in general indifferent and indifferent in particular to our wishes and destiny, an indifference which necessarily follows from nature's freedom of action, from acting without a defined purpose, without coercion and with no meaning or any distinction between good and evil. Spinoza explicitly uses the word "indifferent" in relation to nature-God (E.1: 33, s.2). We, as human beings seeking to continue in existence, make a subjective and utilitarian distinction between good and evil. Spinoza teaches us to mimic nature's characteristic conduct insofar as is possible and to strive to act in accordance with our inner reasoned nature, which forms part of nature in general and which can understand and internalize the regularity of nature given that we are not a realm separate from nature, and not a lone island within it. This understanding imbues us with a sense of freedom in and of itself since it allows us to purify ourselves and dispose of those emotions that drive us toward passivity. This understanding in itself further transforms us into more active subjects acting under the guidance of a wisdom that matches our specific nature as an inseparable part of nature in general.

## 2. *From metaphysics to values*

Spinoza's method is clearly practical since its stated goal is to lead the person, tossed and turned uncontrollably in the tumultuous sea of events, to a safe haven of happiness. As such, and against the background of the connection

between metaphysics, ethics and psychology, it has recognized reason as an ability derived from nature in general since it accords with nature's reasoning and it is nature that makes it possible for reason to follow nature's rules and make use of them in advancing toward that safe haven of happiness (Ben-Shelomo 2012: 155).

According to Spinoza's method, the metaphysical relation between finite and infinite, as well as between part and whole, constitutes a descriptive model for the relation between human beings and nature as a whole. It therefore follows that – from the present study's perspective – the issue of the relation between different (human beings as individuals and a defined part of the natural totality) and indifferent (nature as a whole) enfolds the method's objectives: the indifferent represents the metaphysical component – the totality, while the different represents that the psychophysical and value laden part of the human individual within the method.

It is well known that Spinoza's teachings as a whole (metaphysics, psychology and ethics) are intended as a form of applied idealism rather than a theory meant to remain in an ivory tower bookshelf. The explanatory model presented here is nothing more than the depiction of a practical outline offered by Spinoza for everyday human conduct as is necessitated by the basic logic of human nature common to human beings as whole. "Spinoza's *Ethics* supports a functional connection between the metaphysical discussion concerning the deterministic structure of nature that was discussed in Part 1 and the remaining parts of the method that discuss behavioral and educational aspects" (Mounitz & Berenson 2016).

Insofar as Spinoza and the proposed model is concerned, nature – as a ceaselessly and endlessly active whole – is a rational ideal that is to be internalized and imitated to the best of our ability. To this end, and even at this early point in the discussion, I wish to present an extreme example where Spinoza determines that pity is a negative emotion: "In the man who lives by the guidance of reason, pity in itself is bad and disadvantageous". (E. 4: 50)

Pity gives rise to sadness, and sadness reduces a person's effectiveness in action. Let us consider, for example, a medic, an ambulance driver, a surgeon or an everyman encountering an unpleasant situation (an accident or some other medical event) where she or he is capable and even morally obliged to assist, and pitying the injured person or person lying before her or him. Indeed, I do not believe it is necessary to engage in an extended discussion of the implications of such pity. Similar examples may apply to anger, hatred, jealousy, competitiveness, belittlement, and other kinds of stressful situations.

### 3. *Different and indifferent*

The behavioral model offered herein, has already been tested and proved effective (See examples in Appendix 2) and relies on Spinoza's text, such as Letter 50, which states that any definition expresses a negation and thus constitutes a limitation.

[...], since substance is by nature prior to its affections [all things], (Pr1), disregarding therefore, its affections and considering substance in itself, [...] it cannot be conceived as distinguishable from another substance (E.1: 5, pro.).

In the physical sense, the definition of any object or form, such as a triangle, a plot of land, a house, a lake, etc. distinguishes it from any other thing: differentiated and different = different from anything that it is not. The physical aspect of non-indifference discussed in the metaphysical part of the *Ethics* is described by Bennet (1996) as a delimitation of proximity and thickness. The definition of attached, proximal, or joined bodies is thus contingent on the absence of motion or stagnation, and with any changes requiring their redefinition.

On the other hand, the definition of nature as a whole (substance) proceeds from negation: "Absolutely infinite substance is indivisible" (E.1: 13). In other words, we are concerned with the absence of the ability to compare nature to anything else given that nothing exists outside it and nothing comparable to it exists in any case, which is why it is "Absolutely infinite", i.e. undefined physically or in sense of its spatial expansion. These data lead to the logical derivation of two opposing traits: different and indifferent. God – an object defined negatively – is in fact undefined neither in space or time since it does not relate and is not relatable. Spinoza identifies God with nature (*Deus sive natura*), and so his use of "God" actually means the infinite totality of nature. It should also be noted that the term 'indifferent' formally subsumes the term 'infinite' - that is to say indistinguishable by size or limits, and by so doing completes the descriptive picture of the unlimited spatial definition within Spinoza's metaphysics. Put differently, it may be argued that God's laws are nature's laws rather than the laws of a personality that manages the universe from the outside. We are thus concerned with a necessary order – one aspect of which also includes a person's emotions, thoughts, decisions, and actions as part of her or his reality and as a result of humans singular and unexchangeable place as an individual part of a totality (Rutherford 2010: 143-167; also see Curley 2013).

The text and the background of an interdisciplinary connection between metaphysics, psychology and the method's morality lead us to infer that God's indifference is not merely the lack of a formal definition (due to the impossibil-

ity of forming a reference point) but is rather an inward facing projection relating to anything derived from it and exists within it: “Nature has no fixed goal and that all final causes are but figments of the human imagination”. (E.1, app.).

In the pref. to P.3 Spinoza declares that “I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies”. Spinoza uses the term “indifference” to describe nature’s behavior in the mental sense (E. 1: 33, s.2). The Latin dictionary definition of *indifferensentis* states that it is “neither good nor bad”, “not fussy or particular, indifferent” (Oxford Latin Dictionary 2012). A person, like all methods derived from and defined within the one and only totality, cannot ignore what seems to be good, bad, beneficial or harmful according to her or his view of the benefit or harm reflected unto her or him in the world of phenomena. It is not merely that a human, like any other body, is defined and distinguished spatially from anything external to it, but also that humans require comparisons, and as such are defining, separating, joining and comparing creatures that are not indifferent to the objects of these activities, i.e. that care and do not treat things with the same cold and rational indifference in which nature conducts itself with respect to humans.

This asymmetry between person and whole we have witnessed is more than a mere metaphysical problem derived from a differentiation of means (as part of the multitude of phenomena) within the substance (nature) in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. With respect to the present perspective, Spinoza offers a certain correction, a kind of reasoned remedy, concerned with education in general and the reader’s self-education in particular. According to Zourabichvili (2002), education is a continuous transformation from childhood to adulthood and continuous refinement to achieve the desired goal in the *Ethics*.

The study proceeds the way to adaptation through reason. This key objective paves the way toward grounding the article’s central arguments, viz. (1) nature’s reasoning is indifferent to values from both a metaphysical and a scientific perspective; (2) scientific examination is indifferent to the illusion of discrete time; (3) any reasoned view is bound to be deterministic and as such supports rational indifference as does determinism itself; (4) nature’s indifferent treatment of events - as a model to be emulated – plays a key part in the life experience of the reasoned human being in unconventional situations.

This would also be the place to emphasize the role and implications of geometric formalism in Spinoza’s method. It is well known that the *Ethics*’ geometric structure reconciles the requirement for consistency with the method’s rational content (Steenbakkens 2009; Barbaras 2007). Moreover, it is important to note the indifference projected on the content by Euclidean geometry, i.e. the formal frameworks indifference to its content. According to Delassus (2018), the geometric structure of the *Ethics* as an explanatory tool for man’s

behavior, desires and actions expresses a frame devoid of emotions for the reasoned explanation of what is outside us, and thus Spinoza treats man as an inseparable part of nature (6, 7). In this spirit, I believe that the geometrical framework as an explanatory tool of the *Ethics* carries with it a message of an individuated reference as a starting point for understanding the world (nature) indifferent to our feelings. O'Donnell (2018) states that part of the power of Spinoza's thinking stems from the unconsciousness and alienation we are required to undergo as part of our understanding of our situation (826).

It is through these measures that the study intends to extract a conclusion suggesting that the method's indifferent perspective plays a practical part in decision making and in individual functioning under stressful conditions where a person is required to be of use to others. This reasoned indifference is thus a virtue that allows a balanced view of reality. It is through the lens of a scientific and temporal indifference that it becomes possible to perceive things objectively and to view oneself as part of a complete and determinist worldview. In other words, the meaning of the presence of nature as a whole as a guiding principle is indifferent to its contents is its being an object of striving, understanding, and even imitation and internalization. This presence of a totality that is indifferent to our destiny and our values thus guides the reasonable person toward an embedding of this guiding ideal in her or his consciousness. The results of such conduct are known. For example, such a person could peacefully bear the vicissitudes of faith since "...in so far as we are intelligent beings, we cannot desire anything save that which is necessary, nor yield absolute acquiescence to anything, save to that which is true: wherefore, in so far as we have a right understanding of these things, the endeavour of the better part of ourselves is in harmony with the [indifferent] order of nature as a whole..." (E.4: 32, app.). Spinoza's principles thus offer a practical way of rational conduct in everyday life guided by the metaphysical principles of nature.

It should be emphasized that earlier field studies conducted on the basis of Spinoza's principles proved the existence of a basic common denominator among all humans with respect to the cognitive skills involved in intellectual attention, self-control, and implementation ability. This is why every human has the potential for self-preservation as well as the ability to internalize metaphysical principles insofar as they are understood to have been promoting the objective of self-preservation – i.e. insofar as they are capable of being cognitively applied if necessary (Mounitz & Berenson 2016). Delassus (2014) refers to the *Ethics* as a strategy for dealing with situations of illness.

The model proposed in this study has been used successfully for several years to deal with problems of tension between partners, anger, sadness, jealousy, and desire for revenge, and can therefore serve as a basis for empirical research in

medicine and in situations in which these conditions exist (See Appendix 2).

The term ‘adaptation’, which has featured prominently in behavioral and educational research in the past few decades (Vaillant 1993) is a psychological representation of what Spinoza refers to in the *Ethics* that was not written 350 years ago as a result of empirical research but rather as the result of observing human behavior as well as a result of Spinoza’s self-reflection. I believe that the present study’s proposed model could in turn serve as a baseline for an educational method aiming for a reasoned kind of this so-called ‘adaptation’, i.e. for an adaptation to reasoned balance in an emotionally evocative environment. By so doing, we shall be continuing the work we have begun several years ago, viz. taking philosophy down from ‘ivory tower’ arguments to the ‘factory floor’ of the empirical reality of everyday life in the spirit of the arguments in Golomb (2015).

#### 4. *Metaphysical division: the reasoned indifference of nature-god*

Spinoza’s linking of the metaphysical and psychological-behavioral parts of his philosophy in the *Ethics* is functional in nature. The geometrical method that guides his metaphysical discussion of natural laws is equally employed for the arguments he posits in the psychological part of the *Ethics* (Delassus 2014). Naturalist regularity can thus be understood and applied in everyday life and it is also the factor that determines our position as individuals within this metaphysical totality (LeBuffe 2010: 28-29). According to Spinoza, we cannot know what we are – our limits, our powers, or our “good” – unless we have an understanding of the whole (O’Donnell 2018).

This ability to understand naturalist regularity is common to all human beings and is instilled through the rationales of Euclidean geometry, whose basic logic cannot be opposed by any sentient being.

Some (mistakenly) ascribe God with some dimension of length, breadth and depth that is limited by the surrounding environment. Stating such things about the infinite ‘is’ is, however, entirely false (E.1: 15, s.); or, in Spinoza’s own words: “God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, constrained by none” (E.1: 17).

It therefore follows that (a) there is no external or internal cause that motivates God to action beyond the perfection of his own nature; (b) God is necessarily a free reason that is present and active and that “nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and act in the definite way”. (E.1: 29); (c) a central statement the indifference principle relies on is E.1: 32, which reads: “Will cannot be called free cause, but only a necessary cause”.

In other words, will represent a conscious inclination directed by a sense of judgement that distinguishes between good and evil and always cares (compares, measures and is not indifferent). Spinoza proceeds to argue that “it follows, secondly, that will and intellect, bear the same relationship to God’s nature...” and that “things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case” (E.1: 32, c. 2 and E.1: 33).

Put differently, Spinoza is arguing that nature as a whole necessarily reflects perfection and order, that there is no good and no evil and that there is no volitional purpose to natural actions. Nothing can occur other than what exists and thus it must not be determined that reality is the result of any kind of natural volition.

God or nature as a substance this is the first and only free cause for both the existence as well as the essence of all things including human beings. Humans, like any other things in nature are God’s derivative (*modus*) that is necessarily present in God-nature (Della Rocca 2008: 70). The ascription of any kind of purpose to divine actions negates God’s perfection since it follows that God is yearning for something that he lacks. The projection of human will on the nature of God-nature is thus nothing but a safe haven for unknowability (E.1: 32, c. 2 and E.1: 33). The thing which guides the human non-indifferent view of things is what they perceive as useful or what causes the greatest pleasure. It therefore follows that humans have determined the concepts of good and evil, order and chaos, hot and cold, ugliness and beauty, early and late, etc. because they perceived themselves as possessing a sense of choice. It is as beings possessing a sense of choice, therefore, that they projected their non-indifferent view on God-nature.

##### 5. *A clarifying remark on fatalism*

Indifference, insofar as the term is used by Spinoza, is presently discussed in its positive sense. We are not concerned with disinterest, fatalism or unaware apathy – not at all. Spinoza avoids these senses of the concept explicitly and even instructs us to reject anything that might interrupt our enjoyment of “reasoned life in the manner we consider safest” (E.4, ap. 8).

Positive indifference is a clearly rational product arising from nature as a substance and from which a reasoned person may drink deeply in the service or her or his personal salvation. Indeed, in E.2: 44, Spinoza himself argues that “it is not in the nature of reason to regard things as contingent, but as necessary”.

Spinoza attacks apathy and disinterest and considers both as a kind of helplessness arising from ignorance and stupidity. If reason is the key to self-existence and to the maximization of vital activity, then apathy is its antithesis



and expresses a type of conduct that goes against human nature and as such is referred to as a disease that goes against self-preservation (Green 2016).

Spinoza thus employs this starting point to convey a clear educational message. If nature's conduct serves no purpose, and if it is the reason for all of the phenomena it (and the world) contains, then it follows that anything that happens is necessarily caused by the reality of nature being its own reason without aspiring to any particular purpose. Any view of things as coincidental arises from images of good and evil with respect to the phenomenon, and – as such – is wrong or partial and certainly never fatal. Spinoza rejects fatalism and compares the fatalist to a donkey who is equally hungry and thirsty and who shall die when it reaches green pastures and a spring on account of a lack of ability to decide whether to begin by eating or by drinking (E.2: 49, s.).

Fatalism may lead to suicide (Green 2016) and is nothing but mental fatigue and total submission to external causes. Similarly, compassion expresses an emotion of sadness to the extent of helplessness. On the other hand, reasoned indifference is a clearly active act that removes negative emotional traces and actually evokes action. Medical professionals or any person who is not enslaved to negative emotions will function with greater efficiency when she or he is required to cope with a concrete case brought before her or him due to a deterministic view of the situation. Indifference is thus a reasoned philosophical tool which manifests what psychologists refer to as “adaptation”, as being resigned to the human environment and as indicating the actor's mental maturity (Vaillant 1993).

Spinoza argues that our cooperation with nature increases with the perfection of the acts we engage in since this perfection allows us a greater familiarity with nature which is a triumph of our minds (E.2: 49, s.). He also instructs us on how to behave in the severe eventualities we encounter in our everyday lives: “What attitude we should adopt regarding fortune, or the things that are not in our power, that is, the things that do not follow from our nature; namely, to expect and to endure with patience both faces of fortune. For all things follow from God's eternal decree by the same necessity as it follows from the essence of triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles” (E.2: 49, s.).

In this case, the expression “to endure with patience” refers to a form of emotional expression but also to a clear product of reason, the conscious internalization of the metaphysical context of irregular events we encounter in our everyday lives. We are obviously not concerned with the product of psychotherapy, psychiatric care or the use of chemicals, alcohol, drugs and medications. Spinoza is thus referring to reasoned activism as a tool for “endur[ing] with patience”, and the social benefit thus derived is a side effect of the utility derived by an active person who shifts from passivity (or a low ability to act)

to activity. Kisner (2008) suggests that Spinoza does not view passions and endeavors as negative since they arise from the law of self-preservation which is informed passion (for existence) in and of itself. An endeavor may thus be seen as promoting the human aspiration for self-preservation – for existence – insofar as it is reasoned. Kisner stresses that Spinoza cannot accept the ethicality of apathy and rejects the interpretive tone which associates Spinozan thought with Stoicism that argues that impulses may be completely neutralized through reasoned control. Kisner argues that Spinoza presents impulses as playing a central role in human existence. According to Spinozan thought, therefore, humans may use reason to maximize their awareness of their impulses' existence and to consequently direct these impulses to the functional framework of "intelligent conduct" (759-783).

Reasoned indifference is thus a conscious action and the result of an extremely high degree of self-awareness: "We are active when something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are an adequate cause" (P.3, d.2). In other words, if we are sad as a result of an external impression that affected us, we exist in a state of passivity since this sadness is not necessitated by the fact of our existence but rather by an external influence which exerts a negative effect on our nature that seeks continued existence. Non-indifference is what creates the partition, the border, and the wall between us and the world outside us.

The emotions which explain joy and – conversely – which explain sadness are those which shape the changes in our minds. The mind may accept great changes and move at times to great perfection (as in joy) and at times to a lesser perfection than that which preceded it (in sadness) to the point of helplessness. In E.3: 13, Spinoza states that the consciousness can seize and move away anything that reduces or inhibits a person's force of action. In other words, the mind refuses to picture that which reduces or inhibits a person's bodily and mental strength. Spinoza later defines compassion: "Pity we define as 'pain arising from another's hurt'" (E.4: 22, s.).

Further along, Spinoza expands his discussion of this emotion and states that "pity is pain accompanied by the idea of ill that has happened to another whom we think of as like ourselves" (E.4, da. 18).

He notes that compassion not only arises in us with respect to people we love, but also in relation to people we have never come into contact with. In E.4: 50, c. and s. Spinoza emphasizes faults in compassion and language: "in the man who lives by the guidance of reason, pity is in itself bad and disadvantageous".

He also explains his reasoning:

Pity is a pain and therefore in itself is bad. Now, the good that follows from it (that we endeavor to free from distress one whom we pity) we desire to do solely from the

dictates of reason, and it is only from the dictates of reason that we desire to do something that we certainly know to be good. So, in the man who lives by the guidance of reason, pity is itself bad and disadvantageous

and in Corollary:

hence it follows that the man who lives by the dictates of reason endeavors, as far as he can, not to be touched by pity.

As noted, we are not concerned with fatalism, but rather the opposite, since Spinoza is in favor of mutual aid, but not as a result of pity or superstition but as a result of the governance of reasons: “For Spinoza, when I act out of pity, I am striving to ease my own suffering which involved in that very feeling of pity. In this way, Spinoza would characterize an apparent case of altruism as one that does not involve altruism at all” (Della Roca 1996: 232).

Spinoza instructs us on the manner of avoiding the effect of this emotion: via the reasoned indifference referred to as “the guidance of reason” – or, in other words, by copying nature’s metaphysical indifference. As stated by Spinoza itself:

He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature and happen in accordance with the eternal laws and rules of Nature will surely find nothing deserving of hatred, derision, or contempt, not will he pity anyone. Rather, as far as the virtue of man extends, he will endeavor to do well, as the saying goes, and be glad. Furthermore, he who is easily touched by the emotion of pity and moved by another’s distress or tears often does something which he later regrets, both because from emotion we do nothing that we certainly know to be good and because we are easily deceived by false tears. Now I emphasize that I am here speaking of the man who lives by the guidance of reason. For he who is moved neither by reason nor by pity to render help to others is rightly called inhuman. For (E.3: 27) he seems to be unlike man (E.4: 52, s.).

The comment’s end reinforces Spinoza’s approach in opposing indifference and apathy toward others as discussed above. He only rejects unreasonable acts since they are driven by sadness and since they lead to sadness. His next sentence proceeds to immediately defining favor, which is the opposite of compassion since it can accord with reason, In Spinoza’s terms: “Approbation (favor) is not opposed to reason; it can agree with reason and arise from it” (E.4: 51).

Zahavi (2015) argues that empathy is not sharing or participating but rather a basic kind of sensitivity to and understanding of the other with a view to bettering others’ existence. It is thus not a form of social behavior but rather a kind of precondition for sharing. Zahavi thus views empathy as an intel-

lectual ability to assess another person's condition at a glance. This intuition, in turn, also acts as an initial starting point for interacting with others for their own benefit.

An opposite approach to suggesting that empathic people always mobilize themselves toward helping other people in the wake of their empathy is offered by Bloom (2016), who argues that empathy offers no promise of helping others. According to Bloom, empathy may be accompanied by inhibitions, impediments and conflicts featuring high levels of sadness and pain that identify with others' pain and prevent empathic people from acting on their empathy. Bloom thus suggests that it is only anti-empathy that imbues acting persons with the power to assist the many. Quantitatively speaking, therefore, anti-empathy (i.e. indifference) may be seen as possessing a utilitarian moral advantage.

I will not presently discuss all the questions raised by this debate. In any case, it is difficult to deny the fact that empathy entails a certain degree of sadness, and as such may cause the acting person (such as a doctor) to project passivity – all in accordance with the degree to which this sadness affects the acting person, who may thus be unable to help others. If, however, the sadness is not too severe, helping others is still within the realm of possibility.

Favor, as the opposite of passive compassion, is not necessarily driven by sadness and thus – by virtue of being a reasoned act – reflects activity rather than passivity. It should be emphasized that a sadness guided by compassion contains no element of malice, which is why we seek to resolve the factor which evokes compassion within us. This begs the question of how we are to resolve this factor when sadness harms our ability to act – as we have seen above and in our discussion of E.3: 27, c. 2 – 3. Spinoza's remedy is thus meant for transforming emotional chaos into rational order that would drive sadness away and would permit useful activity. Indeed, indifference as a result of self-awareness and reflection is not apathy, but rather a mental tool that places thought before emotion. In other words, it acts as a kind of internal growth engine driving activities that take up the place of the kind of passive sadness that exerts some degree of suppression on our ability to act.

## 6. *Reasoned activism and implementation*

In E.4: 59 Spinoza proposes the remedy for the emotion of sadness, stating that “In the case of all actions to which we are determined by a passive emotion, we can be determined thereto by reason without that emotion”.

As noted above, this remedy is clearly cognitive and is made up of three stages: (1) critical reflection on the emotion (passive); (2) the conscious correction of the error as the key toward (3) corrective reasoned action (active).

In the case of pity, reasoned indifference emphasizes the two elements that must work together: (1) “to endeavor not to be touched by pity”, referring to indifference; (2) awareness of the reasons for the special case I have to deal with.

Compassion is non-reasoned on account of being a saddening emotion that suppresses a person’s freedom of action. It does not help the giver of compassion or its object. Spinoza takes care to balance our ostensible perception as humans against the need to support and offer assistance in times of needs since it is seemingly inhuman not to feel pity. This is why favor without compassion does not oppose reason so long as it is not carried out as a result of sadness and why it is a reasoned and helpful activity. The person who acts favorably but not as a result of sadness (compassion) is not sad and thus is more helpful than the person who acts as a result of pity. Spinoza’s approach in this respect rests on E.3, d. 8 in the *Ethics* which states that “by virtue and power I mean the same thing. Virtue, as far as it is related to man is man’s very essence, or nature, insofar as he has power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature”. The nature and substance of favor is thus nothing but conduct driven by reasoned activism, which is the high level suitable for actors who seek to maximize themselves and their abilities as part of nature in general and as part of nature’s own reason. This ability is common to all human beings as sentient being due to the common cognitive skills all humans share (Nadler 2007: 218). Gilead (1986) considers overcoming the gap between theory and practice – between knowledge and its practical application alongside the cancellation of the dualism between humans’ and nature’s reasoning – to be the *Ethics*’ highest degree of consciousness (453 – 458). Human beings will thus fail to realize their essence as reasoning beings and will harm their self-realization for as long as this duality between metaphysical (indifferent) knowledge and its practice in everyday life persists. This duality is non-indifference, the high barrier that separates knowledge from its actual application. The higher consciousness offered by Spinoza internalizes the principle of natural indifference and is particularly available – as reasoned thought - to human self-awareness at stressful and distressful times where humans tend toward passivity (wonder). Indeed, such reasoned thought brings down the wall between theory and practice and transforms theoretical knowledge to what Spinoza refers to as “intelligent conduct”.

I believe these abilities can be inculcated by the education system in the form of curricula and self-help training programs. Just as we instruct a child to ignore another child who is bothering him, Spinoza leads us along the paths of *Ethics* to keep away the causes of sadness through reason. In both cases, the correction of ignoring the cause leads us to an adaptation.

## 7. *On the recognition of good and evil*

The relations between good and evil as well as joy and sadness are not objective determinations that accord with nature, that is indifferent to our fates, but rather subjective determinations that relate to a subject's own inclinations.

In the preface to part 4 of the *Ethics*, and as in E.1: 16, Spinoza emphasizes the fact that nature does not act intentionally or purposefully: nature (or god) acts according to its present imperative, i.e. as a result of its own nature as reality. The role of human reason is to internalize this fact and to equalize our subjective wishes and inclinations with the objective conditions of reality. The subject considered what we desire as good. But this is not the case. Spinoza stresses that we must reverse this order and determines that the good which we desire is desired because it is objectively good and not because we desire it or wish for it. We must thus place thought before emotion once more. Indeed, reason dictates that what reduces our ability to act is bad and what empowers it is good since it accords with our substance as thinking beings. In Spinoza's terms: "An emotion toward a thing which we think of as inevitable [*necessaries*] is more intense, other things being equal, than emotion toward a thing possible, or contingent, that is not inevitable" (E.4: 11), as opposed to "desire arising from pleasure is, other things being equal, stronger than desire arising from pain" (E.4: 18) (my emphases).

The equalization of conditions within a person's awareness represents a balancing of consciousness against reality through reasoned cognitive action – in other words, the use of indifference as a basic state of reason equalizes the conditions of our external reality to our internal awareness according to the necessary chain of causation as it occurred – and this represents as a state of adaptation. What we are concerned with is an informed and reasoned cognitive action which gives rise to a basic situation that ignores images which violate the balance between the real situation and the emotions arising from an unreasoned image of reality. As stated by Spinoza in E.4: 27: "we know nothing to be certainly good or evil except what is really conducive to understanding or what can hinder understanding". In other words, and as Elliott (2017) suggests, "[T]he intellect has knowing good and evil insofar as it has knowledge of the *conatus* [the aspiration of self-preservation] particularly as it pertains to one's either becoming more or less like the rational exemplar [of a rational human being as part of nature]" (266).

Another key sentence in E.4 supports the above: "knowledge of evil is inadequate knowledge" (E.4: 64). This is because recognition of evil represents sadness itself, and as such is beyond a lesser perfection that does not match human substance and nature. It therefore follows that it is an emotion that has nothing

to do with adequate ideas and is an uninformed form of awareness. It also has nothing to do with self-awareness and a reflexive critique of knowledge according to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) (Schneider 2014). Bennet (1984) distinguishes between two types of reasoned perceptions in Spinoza's thought. The first type, expressed in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, is a guiding idea that settles for the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), while the second type, expressed in Part 4 of the *Ethics*, is an activist internal factor that can withstand external influences on human impulses (184).

Anything that hinders awareness is bad since it misleads us and diverts us to act in a manner that does not accord with our (reasoned) nature. An inadequate awareness lacking the PSR would lead us to perceiving the event or object in question as coincidental rather than necessary – which would then lead to the emergence of sadness in the form of pity, anger, jealousy, revenge and many other causes of sadness and reduce our capacity for action as discussed in E.3: 11 – 13. The lack of an ability to act properly is, as noted above, the result of a lack of balance between the emotive subject and the objective state of nature and constitutes a distorted perception of reality.

In this respect, Spinoza (1976 [1677]) argues that fictions are confused ideals that form an associative connection between distinct images that lack a mutually coherent, logical, determinist and total affinity, a passive kind of view [...] that does not involve deliberate reasoning but rather a false connection between the various components of the situation experienced by the acting person.

However, a person free of emotions who lives by the dictates of reason should prove indifferent to this kind of negative emotions, and is not even guided by a fear of death – which is something that she or he does not consider at all. Such a person aspires to the good which accords with her/his human nature – to act, to live, and to maintain her/his being. Spinoza summarizes the preface and the course of discussion on the indifferent contexts of good and evil in this part of the *Ethics* in E.4: 68, p. and s.: free people do not visualize – so long as they are free – any concept of good and evil. A person with adequate ideas flows with nature and neutralizes the concept of evil. She or he will avoid any emotion of sadness including pity, anger, jealousy etc. The connection between humans and the general order of nature is thus the ability to internalize the metaphysical principles suggesting that anything which occurred had been inevitable, since it did in fact occur. In other words, we are concerned with a kind of sublimation: a change of state from inadequate knowledge whose sense impressions lead to sadness to adequate knowledge which ascribes events to necessary causation. The recognition that nothing in nature is intended to make things better or worse or to give rise to anger or

sadness increases the knowing actor's capacity for action. This is because it removes that non-indifferent partition between humans, nature, and nature's methods of action. This reasoned sublimation represents a kind of imitation of indifferent nature and it is the kind of state that should guide our perceptions as subjects. When encountering situations where people are capable of helping themselves and others, there is no cause for isolating human nature and separating it from nature in general which acts by necessity. People should rather flow with nature without erecting any kind of emotional barriers. As stated by Spinoza: "the virtue of a free man is seen to be as great in avoiding dangers as in overcoming them" (E.4: 69).

Spinoza's guidance in this respect may be summarized by the following quote:

Human power is very limited and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have absolute power to adapt to our purposes things external to us. However, we shall patiently bear [adaptation] what happens to us that is contrary to what is required by consideration of our own advantage, if we are conscious that we have done our duty and that our power was not extensive enough for us to have avoided the said thing, and that we are a part of a whole of Nature whose order we follow (E.3, app. 32. My emphasis).

The things speak for themselves when Spinoza offers us a direct philosophical remedy to our psycho-physical drawbacks centuries before the adaptation and sublimation psychological mechanism offered by Inhelder & Piaget (2019), Vaillant (2000) and others as a remedy to stressful situations, crises and emotions that make it difficult for us to cope with a changing reality.

This mechanism advances the actor's ability to control her or his environment and imbues her or him with a sense of autonomy in decision making and in everyday conduct to the point of self-satisfaction (Ryff & Singer 1998). While the psychological mechanism's notion of sublimation offers some degree of transition from passivity to activity, especially during times of embarrassment or crisis, the internalization of the model proposed in the present article facilitates an educated way of life that is at the actor's disposal at all times, and that is available during times of stress and embarrassment since its application manifests in an educated way of life as a form of continuous conduct rather than a tool to be used for putting out the occasional fire. The psychological mechanism offers the sublimation of tolerance and repression, the blurring of emotions through avoidance, humor and other means that do not arise from the domain of reason. Spinoza's model, on the other hand, offers a reasoned adaptation and the sublimation of a leap from situations of emotive nebulosity to a lucid and clear reasonability according to the perspective of totality (i.e. according the indifferent perspective of Nature as a whole).



## 8. *Reasoned sublimation in irregular situations*

In the context of education Zourabichvili (2012) uses the term “indifferent” as an expression of the student’s transfer to a personal experience, anonymity, and a sense of a general nature such that this feeling will intensify the activity of self-existence. In this spirit, Zourabichvili supports O’Donnell (2018) in that:

[...] this student self will tend to experience herself increasingly depersonalized and decentered as she comes to feel and understand that she is a part of nature, but this, curiously enough, permits of an intensified experience of existence, an openness, and a sense of one’s singularity beyond visceral habits and clichés of existing. The movement of decentering and depersonalizing strangely moves us not toward anonymity but toward ‘thisness’ or *baecceity*—*this* life (824).

In E.5: 3, Spinoza states that “a passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it”, and proceeds to state that “there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception” (E. 5: 4).

Sublimation is a metaphor – a concept borrowed from the material domain and placed in the spiritual domain. The transition from state A to state C is defined as sublimation – a direct transformation from solid to gas, a “sublimation” that bypasses an intermediate stage. Zourabichvili (2002) and Sévérac (2018) use the term “transformation” with respect to Spinoza’s educational context. The concept expresses a gradual transition from the improvement of physical qualities and the acquisition of knowledge from childhood to adulthood at the peak of which the adult is released from his self-passive prison, which is influenced by external factors and transformed into action by his own activity.

Our human limitations do not permit us to recognize all the particulars of the chain of causation leading to the event that evoked negative emotions within us. However, as sentient beings who have internalized the metaphysical aspects of nature’s determinist causation we do possess the sublimatory ability to perform a reasoned and direct leap from the event as a cause of these negative sublimatory emotions to the cause of causes – the self-cause – nature. Skipping the items of the chain of causation, which forms the intermediate layer between our situation and the cause of causes, becomes irrelevant to our emotional state as soon as we become aware of the initial cause of our situation. This activity is referred to as emotive “refinement”, “devolvement”, or “the purification of materiality”. Reasoned sublimation for the refinement of passive mental states would thus lead us to reasoned adaptation, a basic and profound remedy particularly suitable to us as sentient beings.

## 9. *The model*

The law of self-preservation (*conatus*) is a general natural law like the physical laws of nature. This law states as follows:

- 1) Any object whatsoever, and any person in particular aspires to preserve its existence to the best of its ability, and it is only external factors (accidents, wars, bad neighbors, wild animals, viruses, air pollution, radiation, oxidation, other causes of old age and disease and more that may bring its existence to an end.
- 2) People are finite and delimited beings compared to nature, which is infinite.
- 3) There always are and always will be other factors with superior abilities that may harm or cancel a person's existence.
- 4) Human beings care [are not indifferent to] about what occurs within them and in their environment.

Therefore, human beings determine what is good and what is bad according to what they perceive as things that advance or inhibit their existence. Therefore, if I think of something as good and I desire it since it advances my existence or improves my standard of living, I shall act – insofar as it is within my power – to remove anything which inhibits my existence or harms my standard of living.

Since it is human nature to determine what is good and what is bad according to the aforementioned law of self-preservation, human beings classify good and bad as two poles. The mandate of reason dictates that it is better to be located as close as possible to the pole that advances human existence – which is perceived by reason as being good.

It has thus far been possible to summarize and state that the mandate of reason dictates that:

Anything that empowers my ability to act (the activeness of my being) is good, and anything which restricts my ability to act (the passivity that harms my existence) is bad.

As a thinking and sentient being, humans acting in accordance with the mandate of reason advance themselves toward the good and avoid the bad and thus realize their essence as an existing 'is' in the spirit of the law of self-preservation.

THE GOOD: ACTION	THE BAD: BEING ACTED ON
Self-action	Passivity on account of external factors
Anything that expands or develops my ability to act such as self-fulfillment, happiness, love, sympathy, hope, confidence, cheerfulness, cooperating with others, etc.	Anything that restricts my ability to act such as sadness, depression, jealousy, anger, compassion, shame, apprehension, fear, meekness, etc.

QUESTION: How can I move toward the good side when I am on the bad side (e.g. when I am sad, angry, jealous or depressed)?

ANSWER: By availing yourself of reason, whose role is to internalize the fact that it is only external factors that turn you toward the bad side [the red side]. You can move away from this emotional state (which causes you to be non-indifferent and caring toward the external environment) to an understanding that an indifferent-reasoned state on your part expresses a state of emotional non-submission to the external reasons that suppress the existential activity of your own self. This understanding is kind of an internal activism in and of itself on the part of your own self. When you gaze upon your own self and its ability for action (its activeness), you experience a state of satisfaction that constitutes a kind of self-fulfillment and an increased ability to act on your part which forms the beginning of your movement away from sadness and towards happiness [the blue side].

This movement from the red side to the blue side constitutes an emotional adaptation to the external environment – whatever it may be.

QUESTION: How may feelings of sadness be suppressed, and reasoned thought applied, in order to move from sadness toward feelings of happiness?

ANSWER: This requires the internalization of a number of metaphysical rules that accord with the rationale of all sentient beings (humans). When you are on the red side, these reasoned rules are at your disposal for use as tools for overcoming your sadness and for moving from a passive state toward actual action.

QUESTION: What are these rules?

ANSWER:

- 1) Nature as an infinite totality is certainly its own cause and the primary and necessary cause of anything that takes place in the universe and necessarily the cause of any thing or object as well as the cause of anything that happens to you on account of external factors.
- 2) Anything that happens in the world happens necessarily and not ac-

cidental. There is no coincidence, only our inability to recognize the entire sequence of the chain of causation from proximal cause to event (that may be known) and ultimately to the cause of causes, which is nature as a whole.

- 3) Human beings are part of nature, and not walled islands within nature. Human beings are fed by nature, breathe in nature, exist in nature, and live within the framework of closer and more distant human groups.
- 4) The laws of physics – as the laws of nature – apply to human beings just as they apply to anything else (inanimate objects, plants, and living beings). The same applies to the laws of psychology (emotions, thoughts, and sensations) that derive from the law of self-preservation.
- 5) Nature as a whole is indifferent to human existence and fate as well as to humans' psychological and physical state – whether on the blue or red side – and it conducts itself according to its nature with or without human intervention. The only thing nature cannot control is human reason given that it is a copy of nature's own reasoning.

The role of humans as those who are meant to fulfill the law of self-preservation which is in fact the essence of their existence – mimicking nature and striving to neutralize the effect of external factors on negative emotions, i.e. being emotionally indifferent to anything that inhibits humans' ability to act – given that such inhibition goes against human nature.

QUESTION: How can emotions that suppress the human ability to act and drag them toward sadness and passivity be neutralized?

ANSWER: Once humans understand, know and internalize that the cause of causes, which is god or nature is the primary and necessary cause of human sadness, leading them to skip any attempt to recognize the chain of causation from the saddening event to its primary cause (source) – and thus move from the red side to the blue side (from the heat of emotional fire to the water that douses the emotional flame).

This transition is similar to physical sublimation – the transition from a certain state of matter to another state of matter while skipping all intermediate states. Humans adapt to their environment and flow with the river (the world) and do not attempt to swim against its strong current. Humans adapt to their environment and thus begin to act in a reasoned matter, availing themselves of the current (the conduct of nature) and directing themselves to reasoned conduct – meant for advancing their self-preservation – their existence as part of the world rather than a separate (non-indifferent) part of it.

## 10. *Epilogue*

Reasoned sublimation as a “clear and distinct idea” transitions us from “passive emotion” to a “clear and distinct conception of the situation” without the mediation of an intermediate layer in the form of the chain of causation that led to this situation.

In the context of the present discussion, the sensation of pity ceases to be passive when we frame it as a lucid, clear, and adequate idea, which is what it actually is from the perspective of nature (or god) as a whole. Viewing the adequate idea is a reasoned activity of “condition equalization” between the subjective emotion of sadness as a confused idea and the objective natural state which is indifferent to the object of our sadness. “Condition equalization” thus refers to the “framing” of the emotion in a reasoned-metaphysical framework, its neutralization with respect to the subjective environment, and its perception within the framework of the objective (true) state of nature. In other words, it refers to an understanding that we are concerned with a situation caused by necessity (Delassus 2014). The transition from the imbalanced state of reduced perfection to a balanced state of extensive perfection is a reasoned state of copying or a reasoned imitation of nature’s indifferent conduct. In other words, what we are concerned with is the self-awareness of a person’s place and objective state within an infinite totality. Indeed, Spinoza himself provides an imprimatur for this understanding in E.5: 6: “Insofar as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent it has greater power over emotions, i.e. it is less passive in respect of them”.

This is because nature itself is free of emotions, does not conduct itself according to human concepts of good and evil, does not sense the emotions of either joy or sadness, and does neither love nor hate any human whatsoever (E.5: 17 & 17 c.). And again, in order to move from passive to active, Spinoza guides us, as we instruct a child to ignore a child who is bothering him. An adaptive child is an adult child, an adaptive person is an intelligent person.

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## Appendix 1

### Sample Questionnaire Based on Spinoza's Model

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: Intellectual Capacity.

HIDDEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: The extent of applied control of intellectual knowledge

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: Degree of Adaptability to Stressful Situations (application capacity – the reasoned transition from non-indifferent emotion to indifferent reason).

MEASUREMENT SCALE: (1) – to a very great extent; (2) to a great extent; (3) to a medium extent; (4) to a very limited extent; (5) not at all.

QUESTIONS:

1. To which extent do you believe that whatever occurs in the world occurs necessarily rather than coincidentally?
2. To which extent do you believe that what has taken place in the world thus far is the result of circumstantial conduct that took place with or without you?
3. Do human beings, in your opinion, form part of nature as a whole (the world) or are they a separate 'nature reserve' (an island) within nature as a whole?
4. In your opinion, is nature as a whole (the entire world) indifferent to our fate as human beings?  
No need to continue the questionnaire if question 4 is answered in the negative.
5. To which extent can the recognition of nature's indifference to your predicament in stressful situations make it easier for you to adapt to situations you find unpleasant (stressful situations)?
6. To which extent does this understanding (presented above in questions 1-4) allow you to neutralize negative emotions such as sadness, anger, jealousy, pity, and embarrassment?
7. To which extent do you view the neutralization of the aforementioned emotions as something that might help you act in stressful situations?



8. To which extent do you view the neutralization of negative emotions (detailed in question 7) as an empowerment of your personal capacity to act better in stressful situations?
9. To which extent, in your opinion, shall the aforementioned recognition advance your capacities to help others (such as a traffic accident casualty)?
10. To which extent do you believe that an internalization of the understanding that stressful situations are necessarily caused (i.e. are the result of a chain of causation that takes place with or without you) is a practical activity rather than a form of theoretical thinking?

## Appendix 2

### Interviews

(The names are fictitious)

SILVIO is 53 years old, married and has one daughter who is currently completing her mandatory military service and one son, currently 12 years old. Lives in the city of Akko (Acre). His cognitive situation is excellent, his memory is excellent, and he is in good physical health. He is a computer programmer by training. He experienced a traumatic event three years ago when he discovered his wife sleeping with another man in his [Silvio's] own bed. His wife subsequently had a restraining order issued against him. His mother became ill a year ago and he dedicated most of his time to caring for his mother at the hospital. His mother literally passed away in his arms. His long absences from work led to his termination. He has not been able to work since the event. When I met him, he was completely destitute and alternated between sleeping at friends' houses or at his married sister's house and eating at their expense. His mental situation was poor; he was incapable of taking responsibility for himself, or even carrying out basic tasks that could improve his living circumstances. Searching for a job, for example, seemed to him like an almost impossible task akin to scaling an impossibly high wall. His mental state appeared to indicate a kind of emotional nullity, total desperation and an inability to employ his good cognitive abilities.

I met him once a week for 3-hour sessions for a period of about three weeks as well as conducted twice-weekly phone calls lasting about 30 minutes each. I gradually exposed him to Spinoza's model in the course of our conversations and stressed the indifferent view which he must apply to the reality surrounding him as well as the external causes that neutralize his ability to act and lead him to surrender to his sadness, depression and tendency to view simple tasks as being impossible. Employing the lens of the Spinozan model I presented to him allowed him to successfully evoke cognitive abilities and reflect on his situation. According to him, "I internalized the principle [of indifference], that what happens around me forms part of nature as a whole that is indifferent to my fate and this [understanding]

imbued me with the ability to view myself [reflexively] in relation to the reality in which I exist and the emotional swamp I am trudging through. As we proceeded, I understood that it was only my own power [abilities] that could sustain me and that my reasoned mind should cope with this morass which is essentially a kind of virtual reality". It did not take long for him to find a new job and he is currently functioning well. His adaptation is not only manifested in his words but also in his behavior – he does not feel anger toward or seeks vengeance on his wife, and also accepts his mother's death as a determinist *fait accompli*. According to him "the wall that formerly existed between me and the task of finding a new job suddenly became a thin thread I could easily skip over".

DINA is a 62-year-old married woman with two daughters and 5 grandchildren. Dina has been working as a senior nurse at a Northern Israeli hospital for the past 24 years. At the time of our first interview she served as the head nurse of the internal medicine ward, a position she was assigned to after working in other wards including the emergency medicine ward (the ER). Her physical state is very good, she exercises twice a week and her cognitive state is excellent. She has recently been finding it very difficult to care for a severely ill patient which has been admitted to her ward. She states that she "cannot understand how someone like myself, who has acted properly in difficult cases and cared for injured ER patients, is incapable of caring for her and helping her at present". She proceeded to explain that "this patient has been hospitalized in my ward for a long time, she has a charming personality and a big heart, she doesn't complain and does not groan; she captured my heart and I formed such an emotional connection to her that I identify with her difficult situation and it kills me that I can't care for her myself".

It is quite readily apparent that the high functional barrier that arose between Dina and the professional approach required of a longtime and experienced nurse as well as her emotional and non-indifferent identification with the patient did her a disservice and caused her mental distress to the point of losing the ability to realize her professional capacity. This non-indifference caused by her emotional sympathy led Dina to what Spinoza described as pity, which he brands as a kind of sadness that affects a person's capacity for action.

It was as early as our first meeting that Dina revealed herself as possessing an excellent capacity for reflection and self-criticism that accords with reality and yet also as a person who lacks "emotion-neutralizing" cognitive tools for coping with her situation. Five 90-minute instructional meetings allowed Dina to internalize Spinoza's determinist model such that she could use it in practice. She noted "the reasoning abilities I acquired from the model, and especially the transition from an emotional state to the understanding that anything that has occurred happened necessarily [determinism]. Nature as a whole as well as external causes (the patient's severe prognosis) beyond my control caused me to become passive and unable to realize my professional knowledge in an objective manner and in the patient's favor". It was not long before Dina adapted to her objective situation and began caring for the

patient in a more emotionally robust manner that she acquired by placing reason before emotion and by perceiving the bigger (determinist) picture of reality.

ASHER is a 36-year-old man, married and without children. He is good-looking, solidly built, well-dressed and brimming with calm self-confidence. My first meeting with Asher, who owns a successful Tel Aviv restaurant, took place on the steps of the Tel Aviv Rabbinical Court where he was waiting to be called for another deliberation of the divorce he filed against his wife. I accompanied him on the steps and to the Courtroom door.

Our background discussion of his case revealed an emotional person full of anger and feelings of vengeance. “Let me just finish these divorce proceedings and I’ll make sure that she smells the flowers from six feet under”, he said defiantly in the direction of his wife who was also waiting for the deliberation nearby. This ostensibly appears to be a complex case of a wounded ego that almost got into a fight with strangers whose own deliberations were scheduled before him.

The deliberation with the rabbinical judges ended with no practical solutions. I had since accompanied him alternately for three and a half months including a one-month break. The meeting protocols reveal 13 one to two-hour sessions whose frequency and length was determined by his priorities and by business affairs that required his personal attendance at his restaurant. I spent time observing his walking during the restaurant’s opening hours and conveyed my critical remarks hoping to make him view himself from the outside. It was important to me that he accustomed himself to reflective observation such that he may be able to crack the cover of blindness his ego developed between himself and reality. The first signs of such a crack appeared after he initiated a one-month break in our sessions. Our sessions resumed after this one-month break. At this point in time, he was much softer and more attentive.

The ‘philosophical therapy’ in the spirit of the Spinozan model took place very intensively and was accompanied by guided and attentive reading of key passages in Spinoza’s *Ethics* on his part (as a distrustful person, he had to examine the source to the therapeutic method. This also built up a degree of trust between me and him and convinced him that I was not experimenting on him).

The results exceeded our expectations. Asher stated that “I was reborn. I am a different person. Our reading and your explanation allowed me to view reality with rose-tinted lenses and neutralized a lot of emotions in me. In hindsight, I realize that I was imprisoned by my ego and acted as if the devil was pulling my strings and manipulating my actions. I now know where true power lies. I used the reasoned indifference I internalized to cut the devil’s strings and I view my actions as driven solely by my internal generator and not by any external factor”.

In summary, Asher is no longer angry toward his wife, is no longer jealous, and is completely without feelings of vengeance. He states that he accepts her as she is – as a necessary thing whose character, desires and behavior are not his responsibility.

In Asher's words, "there are reasons for this that not even she recognizes, and I don't blame her for that". His impressive sublimation ability that allowed him to transform from a calm state to an angry, threatening and violent state in a heartbeat was transformed through his internalization of Spinoza's philosophical model into a reasoned kind of sublimation, an adaptation to reality. The same reality that was formerly stormy and tempestuous appears – when viewed reasonably – as something that is not coincidental but rather necessary, as being derived by a chain of causation, and as something that must be accepted calmly since human actions form part of the necessary conduct of nature as a whole. Human beings are thus not a separate realm of nature but rather part of nature as a whole acting according to natural laws. Therefore, anything that occurs was derived from a chain of causation that began with the six days of creation.