

# “Spinoza’s Early Modern Eudaimonism: Corporeal and Intellectual Flourishing”

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Many scholars read Spinoza as an eudaimonist: a follower of the ancient Greek ethical tradition which considers happiness (*eudaimonia*) the highest good. Notable defenses of this reading are Matthew Kisner’s *Spinoza on Human Freedom* (Ch. 4), Jon Miller’s *Spinoza and the Stoics* (Ch. 5), and Andrew Youpa’s “Rationalist Moral Philosophy.” I myself, in “Spinoza’s Strong Eudaimonism,” argue that Spinoza shares with eudaimonists a conception of happiness as (a) partly grounded in facts about (human) nature, (b) partly grounded in the beliefs/feelings of a subject, (c) structurally stable, and (d) exclusively intrinsically valuable. **Assuming this reading is correct, however, how should we understand Spinoza’s relationship to other eudaimonists (e.g., Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics)?** Three main possibilities present themselves. Firstly, Spinoza is a straightforward disciple of a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, such as an Epicurean or a Stoic. Secondly, Spinoza does not simply follow a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, but instead improves on this philosophy in certain crucial respects as an innovator (making him, e.g., a Neo-Epicurean or Neo-Stoic). Thirdly, Spinoza is neither a disciple nor innovator of a particular eudaimonistic philosophy, but instead offers his own distinctive eudaimonistic account.

In this paper, I argue in favour of the third possibility. Spinoza offers a unique contribution to the eudaimonistic tradition through his Substance Monism (*Ethics* IP14), Inter-Attributes Parallelism (IIP7S), and Conatus Doctrine (IIP6-7), which together entail the ontological and ethical equality of mind and body by virtue of their (non-reductive) identity. This position is distinctive, because ancient eudaimonists consider mind and body unequal ontologically and ethically, with the one always being dependent on, or subordinate to, the other. In particular, the body is always considered ethically inferior to the mind in some crucial respect (e.g., faculties, activities, or pleasures). As a result, all ancient eudaimonists (even ontological materialists like Epicurus and the Stoics) in some sense endorse ethical intellectualism. However, because Spinoza considers mind and body identical, the body is not inferior to the mind. On the contrary, all being is equally extended and thinking in nature, making Spinozistic happiness equally corporeal and intellectual.

In defending this reading, I also address three potential problems for the view that there is ontological and/or ethical equality between mind and body in Spinoza’s philosophical framework. Firstly, by virtue of its unique ability to represent all of reality, the attribute of Thought seems to have greater power than any other attribute. If this is true, Thought is ontologically superior to Extension. Secondly, Spinoza’s arguments about the eternity of the mind seem to indicate that the mind possesses some degree of indestructibility that the body does not, making the mind ontologically superior to the body. Thirdly, Spinoza only describes

happiness in intellectual terms, as intellectual love of God. He never explicitly mentions a corporeal constituent of happiness, possibly because he does not think there is any true internal good with respect to the body. If so, the mind is ethically superior to the body because the former is the sole constituent of happiness.