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**Suicide of Rationality, Rationality of Suicide –  
Spinoza on Self-Destruction**

**Abstract**

*This article examines the metaphysical and moral foundations of Spinoza's account of suicide. Spinoza's treatment of suicide is brought into question by his conatus doctrine, which posits the striving to preserve one's own being as the very essence of existence. Accordingly, suicide, or the termination of life, as the destruction of one's own being, represents the exhaustion of this striving. The analysis of the causes that lead to self-destruction has sparked significant debate in Spinoza's literature, raising the question of whether suicide is a passive and irrational decision or a free and rational choice. This article, which engages with prominent scholars of this literature, notably Matson, Bennett, LeBuffe and Nadler, aims to alleviate this controversy by offering alternative readings and arguments. It concludes that free and rational suicide does not exist in Spinoza's thought; instead, the "suicide of reason or rationality" forms the basis for bodily suicide.*

**Keywords**

Spinoza, rationality of suicide, ethics, metaphysics, *conatus*, destruction

**Introduction**

**Strategy**

The road-map of my article, which consists of three parts including an introduction, is as follows: this introductory part addresses Spinoza's doctrine of *conatus*, the nature of bodies, and how death comes into question in his philosophy. The first part examines the nature of suicide, clarifying that it is caused by external factors and is impossible for an unperverted human nature. In this sense, it reveals that suicide is contrary to reason and justifies that suicides are primarily based on the fact that suicidal people first lose their ability to understand, act with a completely confused imagination and memory, and succumb to the destructive pressure of passive affects. In this part, examples given by Spinoza as three types of suicide are analyzed. It is revealed that not all these examples are types of suicide; the first one is a type of murder, the third one is not a specific suicide, but I claim it as the "main principle" that is the cause of all suicides, and only the second example is a type of suicide. I focus on the third example, which is the principle of all suicides, and for which, I propose the concept of "suicide of reason/rationality". In this part, I conclude that a man with a perverted nature commits suicide in terms of reason/rationality before committing physical suicide; that is, he causes his bodily destruction after losing the ability to think rationally.

When Spinoza's views on suicide are examined, there are clear statements that suicide is an irrational act, which is never compatible with reason. However, some Spinoza's scholars, unlike this view, put forward different

ideas and arguments that a rational idea of suicide can and should be inferred from Spinoza's system. The most notably of these scholars are W. Matson, J. Bennett, M. LeBuffe, and S. Nadler. In the second part of this article, the views of these four scholars are introduced and criticized with different arguments. The conclusion of this part, in which alternative reading suggestions and opposing justifications are presented, is that the possibility of a rational suicide cannot be inferred from Spinoza's system.

### ***Doctrine of Conatus and the Nature of Bodies***

For Spinoza,<sup>1</sup> the human body is a complex “individual” composed of many different bodies (EIIPost.I, 462). What constitutes the nature of the body, is its internal structure that unites it in a certain ratio, are large-small, singular-composed parts, which are themselves bodies at the same time (EIIDef. after P13, 460). The fact that each part performs its own function in harmony with the others and that each part is beneficial to the others consists in the integrity of this structure and makes it healthy. A diseased state is a change in the ratio of one or more of these parts that make up the body in a certain way and losing its harmony with other parts to a certain extent. The health of a body means the preservation of the ratios and balances of dryness, wetness, coldness and temperature, which are the most basic parts of its constituent parts (EIIPost. II–IV, 462). Death, on the other hand, is the loss or deterioration of the ratios of the parts that make up the body, which they transmit to each other, not to a certain degree, but completely, in a way that they can never form that unity again (EIVP39S, 569).

From the harmony of singular-composed bodies that make up our body, Spinoza states, “an idea that excludes the existence of our Body cannot be in our Mind, but is contrary to it” (EIIP10, 500). The essence of the human mind is ideas about the actually existing, living body (EIIP10Dem., 500; EVP21Dem., 607). Therefore, if the body as a whole is in a structure consisting of parts in harmony, balance and ratio, meaning there is no part in the body that harms another or anything else that destroys it completely, then it is quite understandable that such an idea does not exist in the mind, which represents the affections of both the whole of the body and its parts as an idea. In addition, since the essence of the mind is ideas that represent this harmony and ratio of the body, the presence of something harmful or destructive in the body would also be reflected as an idea in the mind, which is in parallel, and this would be contrary to the essence or nature of the mind. Because the first and most basic striving of our mind, whose essence is ideas of our body, is (by its nature) to affirm the existence of our own body (EIIP10Dem., 500).

If the human mind does not have an idea of anything in the body that would destroy it, how can it then form ideas about the harming or destruction of the body, i.e., suicide? In EIIP10Dem., Spinoza states that the idea in question does not exist in our minds, implying that it cannot be an “adequate idea”. It is evident that the human mind can conceive of ideas that are either “adequate” or “inadequate”. An idea that ultimately results in destruction, however, cannot be considered an “adequate”, and thus must be deemed “inadequate idea”. Therefore, suicide, or any act that leads to the destruction of the body, arises from “confused” or “inadequate ideas” that are obstacles to the mind's activity of understanding.

Spinoza states that not only human being but also all other beings do not have anything in their nature that would lead to their destruction. Because everything that exists has a structure and ratio that preserves and maintains its own existence by its nature (EIVP39S, 568–9). Therefore, it is not possible for anything to have two contrary aspects in its nature, one of which destroys the other (EIIP5, 498). According to the doctrine of *conatus*, “each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persevere in its being” (Spinoza, 2011: 105).<sup>2</sup> The emphasis “in so far as it is in itself” is important. To be “in itself” means to be “in its own nature”. If something is in itself, then there cannot be anything in its nature to destroy or harm it. The human body, like other things/bodies, is in a constant striving/endeavor to persevere its own nature and existence with all its parts and elements. If this striving is interrupted for a moment, it means that the harmony and balance between the parts of the body is interrupted. Hence, “the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing” (EIIP7, 499). That is, everything, with all its parts, strives to preserve and maintain its existence, or actually survives, in its essence.

How is it that all beings in Nature, including human beings, are subject to harm, destruction, and death, even though they exist according to their own nature? Spinoza, in EIIP4, asserts that “No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” (EIIP4, 498), and demonstrates it as follows:

“This proposition is evident through itself. For the definition of anything affirms, and does not deny, the thing’s essence, or it posits the thing’s essence, and does not take it away. So while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it.” (EIIP4Dem., 498)

Spinoza states here that the proposition is “self-evident” and does not say anything very explanatory about the demonstration. Therefore, IIP4 seems to be insufficiently proved and put forward as an axiom, a postulate, or a definition without explanation, and as such, it has been the target of criticism. Indeed, while IIP4Dem. is consistent with Spinoza’s theory of definition, more explanatory statements are required to provide it as a robust foundation for addressing the issue of suicide.

However, regardless of its demonstration, when EIIP4 is accepted as a “principle”, only then can something be said. Accordingly, as long as something is in itself, it necessarily tries to persevere its own existence, but when an external cause effects that thing, it’s striven to maintain its existence is interrupted or completely exhausted. Thus, the destruction or death suffered by every actual existing individual nature is due to external things and the effects they produce. This includes normal death by natural means. Therefore, something

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To refer to Spinoza’s texts, I use the following abbreviations: “E” *Ethics* (followed by the part number; “P” proposition; “Dem.” demonstration; “S” scholium; “C” corollary; “L” lemma; “Post.” postulate; “Def.” definition; “Ax” axiom; “Apx.” appendix; “Pref.” preface; “Def.Aff.” definition of an affect; “Exp.” Explanation); “TIE” *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; “Ep” *Letters*; “TTP” *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. All English quotations are from Curley’s translation 1985–2016 (*The Collected Works of*

*Spinoza I-II*). Latin version of *Ethics* is from Spruit – Totaro edition 2011 (*The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza’s Ethics*). I use same *Ethics* abbreviations for the Latin text, with the phrase “Lat”.

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I took this proposition from White’s translation of *Ethics*. Because Curley does not prefer the emphasis on “in so far as it is in itself” and translates the same phrase as “as far as it can by its own power”.

that is not exposed to external things always continues to exist and survive. Spinoza repeats the same remarks in EIVP20S:

“No one, therefore, unless he is defeated by causes external, and contrary, to his nature, neglects to seek his own advantage, or to preserve his being. No one, I say, avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature.” (EIVP20S, 557)

Of course, it is not possible for a human being to survive independently without interacting with external things. Although the causes that destroy the body are external, still “it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause” (EIVP4, 548). A human body constantly needs other things/bodies to preserve itself, and therefore, it interacts with them. In addition, something is constantly entering or leaving the human body, so that the individual can experience these effects more closely. For instance, the foods one eats and drinks, sexual intercourse, the things that the body excretes through the excretory system, a drug injected into the body, a hair plucked from the body, etc. Some of the external bodies with which the human body interacts are beneficial and others harmful. The beneficial ones are the things that preserve the balance of the body, the ratio of motion-rest in which the parts transmit to each other, and thus preserve the form of the body. Harmful bodies, on the other hand, are things that change the balance and form of body and cause the body to deteriorate according to the degree of their effects, and after a certain point it render the body unable to interact with anything else.

In this sense, for Spinoza, “death” is the complete deterioration and disintegration of the ratio and balance between the parts that make up the body, due to external things (EIVP39Dem., 568–9). With death, the actual existence of the body, that is, existence that requires duration and is limited by time, comes to an end (EVP23Dem., 607). When the body becomes a corpse or otherwise death occurs in the body, there is also death in the mind. The imagination and memory powers of the mind, which are attached to the body, disappear with the disappearance of the body. Thus, an idea cannot be found in the mind anymore to affirm the actual existence of the body (EIIIP11S, 500–1). With the death of the body, the body-affirming part of the mind also dies; but the rest of the mind continues to exist as part of the infinite intellect of God (EVP23, 607).

## 1. Suicide of Rationality

Spinoza views suicide, which is a form of death, as caused by external causes. Moreover, in this case, the pressure or force of external causes is stronger and more destructive than natural death. Spinoza states, “those who kill themselves are weak-minded and completely conquered by external causes contrary to their nature” (EIVP18S, 556).

What makes a mind weak or strong is the quality of the ideas it possesses. In the human mind, “adequate ideas” occur when the intellect/reason is active, and “inadequate ideas” occur when the imagination and memory are dominant. “Adequate ideas” are formed when the mind knows what is happening in its own body and becomes aware of other external bodies through its own body. This means that the mind knows its own body with an adequate understanding and cognizance of internal causes. In contrast, the mind has

“inadequate ideas” and in this state, the mind perceives its own body in fragments due to the effect of external causes. These two forms of cognition also determine the character of human actions. The mind, which is internally determined by adequate causes thanks to “adequate ideas”, is active and leads one to take actions that benefit oneself, which indicates that it is “under the guidance/dictates of reason”<sup>3</sup> and performs “free” and “rational actions”. However, the mind, determined by external causes, is passive and often leads one to self-harming actions, indicating that one is under the determination of imagination and memory, that one’s actions are irrational and one is a “slave” (EIIIP29S, 471; EIVP66S, 584). In line with these explanations, “suicide” is initially presented as irrational and incompatible with human freedom as a result of the passive determination of the mind.<sup>4</sup>

Human being’s striving to maintain their being and perfect it is a force that increases or decreases according to the degree to which they act under the guidance of reason (EIVP18S, 555). However, it is not as easy as it may seem for human beings to constantly act in accordance with the dictates of reason and strive to maintain their existence without being subjected to external causes. Moreover, the power of external things is often at a level that suppresses our power, and the power of man to maintain his existence is limited (EIVP3, 548). The human mind has affects based on the content of ideas it receives from the affections of its body (EIIIDef.3, 493). If the mind has adequate ideas, affects of “desire” and “joy” arise. As man experiences affects of joy through reason, he becomes more perfect, strives to live his life more confidently, and enjoys life with confidence (EIVApX.XXXI, 593). Just like the affects of joy, desires that are guided by reason are always beneficial to us and fulfill our striving for being.

Desires that stem directly from our nature and can be understood through it alone are those related to the Mind insofar as it consists of adequate ideas. The remaining desires are related to the Mind only insofar as it conceives things inadequately. Their force and development are determined not by human power, but by the power of external factors. The former, therefore, are rightly called actions, while the latter are rightly called passions. For the former always indicate our power, whereas the latter indicate our lack of power and mutilated knowledge (EIVApX.II, 588).

But if the human mind has inadequate ideas, then, one has slide into passions and affects of “sadness” that are contrary to one’s *conatus* (EIIIP37Dem., 515) and opposed to one’s essence (EIVP64Dem., 583). Whatever harms and destroys man arise from affects of sadness and sometimes passive forms of joy and desires. The degree of intensity of sadness is directly proportional to the degree to which human’s strive to being is suppressed by external things. Moreover, sadness can completely enslave the man and reduce his degree of competence to a minimum or completely exhaust his *conatus*. In such a state, one is completely overcome by external causes and may not even have an adequate idea of one’s own body. For he is so exposed to passive affects and

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For a detailed study of the term “dictates of reason” see (Rutherford, 2008).

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Gabhart makes an interesting point that leads to the same conclusion but follows a different

route. For him, Spinoza’s collapsing of the distinction between will and reason in EIIIP49 and his reference here to suicide portends his final conclusion that suicide is never freely desired by an agent (Gabhart, 1999: 623).

strong passions that this transformation removes all adequate representational bonds between his mind and body (EIVP20S, 557).

At the core of suicide are inadequate ideas, passive affects (each of which is a form of sadness), and a person's defeat by external causes. For "all those things of which man is the efficient cause must be good, nothing evil can happen to a man except by external causes" (EIVApX.VI, 589). The greatest evil that can befall a human being due to the pressure of external causes is suicide. In such a situation, the human tendency to end one's own life is not an active or genuine desire, but rather an unintended consequence of factors that are not easily understood. The individual has become so dominated by external influences – mental and physical – that the inclination toward self-harm or suicide is not a voluntary decision. Instead, it is the result of intense pressures from external causes. When sadness overwhelms both the body and mind, it diminishes and depletes their *conatus*. Thus, there is not even a low degree of awareness of the difference between being and non-being. For "the force and growth of any passion, and its perseverance in existing, are defined by the power of an external cause compared with our own. And so it can surpass the other actions, or power, of a man" (EIVP6+Dem., 550).

Reason/intellect enables man to understand external causes, to transform passivity into activity, and to recognize the causes of sadness. However, if one does not reflect on these external causes with adequate ideas, these causes will completely influence both mind and body. Increasingly, passive effects, which are too numerous, further oppress the reason and render it incapable of thinking at all. Eventually, it becomes inevitable that the coercive domination of powerful external causes and the maximum destruction caused by extreme affects of sadness will lead a person to suicide. Accordingly, Spinoza mentions three types of suicide and considers each of them as a strong effect arising from external causes:

"No one, I say, avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature. Those who do such things are compelled by external causes, which can happen in many ways. Someone may kill himself because he is compelled by another, who twists his right hand (which happened to hold a sword) and forces him to direct the sword against his heart; or because he is forced by the command of a Tyrant (as Seneca was) to open his veins, i.e., he desires to avoid a greater evil by [submitting to] a lesser; or finally because hidden external causes so dispose his imagination, and so affect his Body, that it takes on another nature, contrary to the former, a nature of which there cannot be an idea in the Mind." (EIVP20S, 557)

There have been various interpretations in the literature regarding these examples, which Spinoza refers to as the three types of suicide. I will elaborate on the prominent interpretations in the second part; however, here I will present my own interpretation consistent with the argument I have developed above, namely that suicide cannot be rational.

In this passage, Spinoza mentions three types of dying. However, it seems problematic to consider first example as a suicide.<sup>5</sup> It is not the choice or orientation of the person holding the sword (X) to thrust it into himself. On the contrary, the force that drives the hand holding the sword into the body to which it belongs is exerted from outside, that is, by someone else (Y). If, taking into account the principle in EIIP4 that "nothing can be destroyed without an external cause", the person Y exerting the force in question is regarded as an external cause of X's death, then murder and suicide would be indistinguishable, and every murder would be called suicide. Murder is not only an external cause for the victim, but also the action of another agent that

the victim may not be able to avoid. For suicide, on the other hand, even if the reasons that lead the person to act are external, the possibility that the action may not be realized can still be in the hands of that person, since it is the same person who is acting upon themselves.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when adapted to Spinoza's example, X's death is not a suicide, but rather a murder committed by Y. Y carries out the murder by using X's body and mind (his hand, the weakness of his body to resist and the inadequate ideas of weakness reflected in the mind). Therefore, for X, Y is much more than an external cause.

Spinoza's second example is Seneca, who, after being implicated in the assassination plot against Nero and sentenced to death, chose to end his own life by opening his veins. In this well-known case, Seneca had to either endure a brutal execution by Nero's soldiers or perhaps more painfully cause his own death by his own hand. In the latter case, it is evident that Seneca was driven or subjected to this action by many passive affects such as fear of execution, anxiety about being disgraced, shame, and perhaps regret and anger.

The notion that Seneca was being driven towards one of two extremes (a cruel execution or a painful suicide) can be interpreted in conjunction with the "follow[ing] the lesser of two evils" expressed in EIVP65. However, it can be argued that a decision made under pressure will be different from one made in a calm state of mind. Furthermore, the evaluation of which option is less bad requires substantiation. In the final analysis, no one who has not had the opportunity to experience both and then reflect on these experiences can know which is the lesser evil and destructive, and therefore the preferable alternative between "being cruelly executed" and "painfully committing suicide".<sup>7</sup> Anyone who does not know this because they have not had this

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There is a consensus with which I agree that Spinoza's first example is a murder rather than a suicide. See (Bennett, 1984: 238); (Gabhart, 1999: 624); (Nadler, 2016: 269).

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Gabhart emphasizes that the distinction between Spinoza's examples of suicide and other forms of death is hazy, since all deaths express the changes that occur in the nature of human being, both mentally and physically. (Gabhart 1999: 625). Nadler, on the other hand, argues against those who think that suicide is not free because it is the result of passions overcoming reason. According to him, even under the domination of passions, a person ends his life willingly. In this case, desire and will are still at the basis of self-destructive act, even though they originate from passion, not reason. While Nadler admits that it cannot be a completely free and rational action in this context, he says that willingness is still possible even if it is in the determination of passion, so suicide and other types of death can be distinguished according to the willingness case (Nadler 2016: 270). In reply to Gabhart, I argue: there is a fundamental difference between natural death and suicide. In the former, the final destruction occurs at the end of a certain process, except in the case of a sudden

heart attack or accident, whereas in the latter, the destruction occurs as a result of a sudden and radical determination. For example, death by old age is the result of the dissolution of the existing ratio between the parts of the body, which has been exposed to external causes for a long time. But a suicide by opening the veins involves interrupting the balance of the ongoing ratio between the parts of the body with a sudden intervention. On the other hand, Nadler also needs to answer my questions: is willingness acting in accordance with the guidance of reason/intellect, or is it driven in a certain direction under the determination of passions? If willingness is also in question in the second case, then would the willingness of the free man be the same as that of a person enslaved by passions?

7

Spinoza's assessment of suicide is completely different from the Stoic understanding of suicide, which is considered always possible, and in some cases, morally preferable and defensible. See, (Lloyd, 1996: 94); (Miller, 2015: 110). However, Nadler attempts to draw a closer connection between the suicidal views of Spinoza and the Stoics (Nadler, 2016: 275).

experience has no reason to say that Seneca “made a rational choice” when he was pushed towards one of the two passivities. One of the two cases, “better” or “less bad”, is nothing but a kind of coincidence, which is expressed in EIVApX.III. Even if one were to think the opposite, that Seneca had done a good act simply because he feared that something bad would happen to him, it would still indicate that he was acting contrary to reason. Since “he who is guided by Fear, and does good to avoid evil, is not guided by reason” (EIVP63, 582).

Considering Spinoza’s third example, it becomes apparent that the person loses all power of his intellect; external causes completely affect and take over his body, and his imagination is activated with all its possible inadequacies. Such a human nature is completely deprived of any possibility (or reason) to have an adequate idea of any affection, it receives from its body.<sup>8</sup> Hence, a person who undergoes a completely different nature may no longer have a single plausible reason for not destroying or harming themselves in various ways. I argue that this case, which illustrates a radical change in human nature, should not be seen as an isolated example, but as the fundamental cause of all suicides. Because this example does not represent a form of suicide, but the fundamental transformation undergone by a nature inclined to commit suicide. When such a nature is determined to commit suicide in one way or another, only then can a specific type or instance of suicide arise.

Even if the three examples (except second one) in EIVP20S are not all types of suicide, Spinoza’s aim with these examples is to clearly illustrate the impossibility for a human being to change his form or strive to cease to exist by the necessity of his own nature. For this reason, he equates such an attempt with something an absurd or ontological impossibility of ‘the creation of something from nothing’ (*creatio ex nihilo*) (EIVP20S, 557).

There is no sign of reason in a mind that reflects the effects of a body determined entirely by external causes through the images of the imagination, and the human being has experienced a transformation that has lost almost all identity associated with their previous nature. I term this the “suicide of reason-or-rationality”. Such a radically transformed human nature may lead to its own suicide. This is because of the complete loss of reason, that is, the total corruption of all rational thinking ability. This represents the most fundamental cause for the ruin or destruction of a nature. Therefore, the “suicide of reason” opens the door to all possibilities for the body’s suicide. Even if the body continues to live, the “suicide of reason” in a human being is essentially the personal suicide of that one. For within the Spinozist system, even if the signs of life of the body continue, the change or deterioration of the elements that ensure the continuity and identity of human nature is also a kind of death (EIVP39S, 569).<sup>9</sup>

Spinoza states that those who commit suicide have a “perverted human nature”. The perversion here is the loss of reason. Therefore, the “suicide of reason” is the corruption of human nature, which has mind-body unity even if the body continues to live. For example, when two situations are compared, such as “going to the gallows tree [suicide table] to hang oneself” and “sitting at a normal table”, for a human nature that is completely incapable of using its rational powers, i.e., whose reason has committed suicide, going to a suicide table and hanging oneself is no different from sitting at a normal table (continuing to live). Therefore, having such a nature can make knavery seem more important than virtue (Ep. 23, 390). For such a nature, it is not clear where



life begins, what it develops and feeds on, how it becomes good, and where it ends. Thus, suicide, in whatever form it takes, is an act that is utterly contrary to human nature, power, virtue, and reason.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in this part, I conclude that not all of Spinoza's examples of the three types of suicide are genuine examples of suicide. Only Seneca's case is a true suicide, the first example is a murder, and what is expressed in the third example is the main principle of all suicides, which I refer to as the "suicide of reason".

## 2. Rationality of Suicide

Although in the previous part I argued and justified that a free and rational idea of suicide is not possible for Spinoza, I must address the interpretations of scholars who oppose this claim and argue that a rational idea of suicide can be deduced from Spinoza. In the following, I will offer a critique of the arguments arising from the scholars' interpretations, which have caused controversy, and propose alternative reading suggestions.

Examining Matson's ideas as one side of this controversy seems more historically prioritized than the others. In his famous article, Matson argues that Spinoza's EIIP4 is an "axiom" rather than a "proposition", but not a principle of universal validity. According to him, Spinoza was led to such a principle by a false understanding of physics. He suggests that it is possible for things to destroy themselves. For example, he argues that when it is thought that the sun will burn itself, consume its nuclear energy and destroy itself by exhausting its gravitational energy, there is nothing external involved, instead, the sun, which has a "definition" and "essence", will cause its own destruction (Matson, 1977: 407–408). In this context, Matson recalls Spinoza's example of the "burning candle":

"Let us suppose that this burning candle is not now burning or let us suppose that it is burning in some imaginary space, or where there are no bodies." [...] For in the first case I have done nothing but recall to memory another candle that was not burning (or I have conceived this candle without the flame), and what I think about that candle, I understand concerning this one, so long as I do not attend to the flame." (TIE, 26)

For Matson, this conclusion is erroneous. According to him, a flame is always accompanied by the burning of something. That is, the flame requires fuel to continue burning, and it is the fuel that sustains the flame's existence. When Spinoza states that both the candle and the flame continue to exist, he assumes that the flame continues to exist without consuming the candle. Otherwise, it

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For a study, including commentators' discussions, on Spinoza's "model of human nature", see (Youpa, 2010).

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In another of my works, using the example of Spinoza's Spanish poet, I discuss the radical changes that the mind undergoes together with the body, even if the body continues to live, and how this drags man into another nature and causes him to lose his personal-identity. See (Dağ, 2022).

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Lloyd argues, similarly, that in Spinoza's assessment of suicide, there is no possibility of free and rational suicide. According to her, a supposedly rational suicide for Spinoza must be something in which the power in man become stronger by merging with other power, enhancing his being and putting him into a state of increasing activity, joy, and in doing all this he destroys himself. Therefore, rational suicide would increase one's powers while at the same time destroying them. For Lloyd, it is similar absurdity as supposing begin to exist from nothing (Lloyd 1996: 94).

would not be possible for both to exist simultaneously. For Matson, Spinoza must have thought as follows: the flame is matter in motion, and according to the law of inertia, unimpeded motion continues forever. This is because the only thing that can prevent motion is the opposite motion of other bodies. Therefore, if there are no other bodies, the motion (flame) must continue forever. However, according to Matson, since Spinoza generalized the “law of inertia” for all bodies, he either made this mistake himself or was led into this error by a physics authority he trusted (Matson, 1977: 408).

With these ideas, Matson raises the possibility of a rational suicide in Spinoza’s philosophy. On the one hand, he argues that Spinoza’s “eternity of the mind” expressed in EVP23 is impersonal, and on the other hand, he argues that death is a liberation from imagination and memory, which are bodily powers, allowing human beings to continue their eternity with infinite ideas of the second and third kind of knowledge. Thus, Matson opens the door to rational suicide by suggesting that suicide is the shortest way to get rid of or escape from inadequate ideas arising from the bodily powers (Matson, 1977: 414, 415).

However, there are contradictory points in Matson’s ideas. The “eternity of the mind” that Spinoza expresses in EVP23 is personal and experienced in the “here and now”. Since human being is not a mind without a body or *vice versa*, and minds cannot remember anything without bodies (EVP21, 607). Just as death removes a “human body”, it also removes a “human mind”. With the death of the body, the remaining “eternal part” of the human mind is no longer that one’s own mind, but merely a part of the infinite divine thinking power. One can experience eternity “here and now” to the best of one’s ability through the combination of mind and body that makes one “that person” and not something else.<sup>11</sup> This can be experienced by the mind through its knowledge of its own body and other interacting bodies through adequate ideas, that is, intuitively. The more the mind is able to do this, the more part of it is able to grasp the infinite. When death removes the body, no matter how much the part of the mind that grasps the infinite was while it with the body, it is no longer the human mind, but only a part of God’s infinite intellect. So, neither suicide nor natural death brings that person to the eternal with the end of the being that makes a person that person. On the contrary, the cessation of life is the loss forever of the eternity that one has the possibility of experiencing “here and now” as “that human being”. Therefore, a suicide undertaken with the idea of getting rid of corporeal contents (imagination-memory, etc.) and reaching the eternal through infinite adequate ideas would never be rational, but rather a form of madness, or what I called above the “suicide of reason”.

E. Curley, similar to Matson, raises concern about the status of EIIP4 and argues that while it is open to counter-examples, it is still a valid basis for considering suicide. According to him, EIIP4 is the basis for the view that suicide in EIVP20S is often the result of human beings “defeated by causes external and contrary to nature”. However, since defeating external forces contrary to one’s nature implies passivity, in this case EIIP4 cannot constitute a “rational ground for suicide” (Curley, 1988: 109–110).

What Curley calls counter-example to EIIP4 is “burning candle” example. Curley argues that Matson speaks for Spinoza and Spinoza gives the “candle” example to show that suppositions cannot be made for impossible situations. Moreover, Curley, recalling what Spinoza states in (Ep. 6, 176), rightly points out that the idea of a “flame without fuel” is not possible. For Curley, a burning candle has already been set in motion by being burned from an external

cause, and its self-destruction is the continuation of the effect of this external cause (Curley, 1988: 110, 165). So, the external cause ignites the flame, which then burns the candle. Once the candle is consumed, the flame will also extinguish. In this way, both the candle and the flame will self-destruct as a result of the external cause.

However, Curley tries to give a solid validity to EIIP4. In contrast, Curley focuses more on Spinoza's theory of definition, the elements that constitute definition, and so on. But his attempt does not advance beyond a digression and does not seem to change anything about the status of EIIP4. Curley's interpretation, nevertheless, is an important response to Matson's first thesis, which is based on the "burning candle" example.

J. Bennett, in his interpretation, initially criticized EIIP4 for its lack of clarity. Despite subjecting it to various analyses, he was ultimately unable to prove its invalidity. For Bennett, the essence of individual X is part of X's nature. If X has the ability to self-destruct on its own, then there is something in its nature that does not accept, i.e., ignores, its own essence. Self-destruction is therefore incompatible with X's nature, because such a nature would be contrary to X's essence. Therefore, if something can self-destruct, then the nature of that thing must contain as many conditions causally sufficient for its non-existence as it contains sufficient conditions for its existence. This means that it is logically impossible for anything to destroy itself unaided (Bennett, 1984: 234–235).

However, Bennett thinks that the Seneca example falsifies EIIP4. He asserts that if he had come to such a conclusion, Spinoza would probably disagree with him and say that he has misunderstood the concept of "Seneca's nature" and that his conclusion is therefore invalid. Bennett continues the discussion with an imaginary Spinoza and adds the following: if no one kills themselves "unless he is defeated by causes contrary to his nature", then Seneca's causing his own death by opening his veins is due to his own nature. But Spinoza would not accept this as incompatible with EIIP4. In this case, Bennett would like to ask: if Seneca's case is compatible with EIIP4, then does not Seneca's nature contain all the intrinsic facts about himself at the time? Is Spinoza using this "nature" for only a subset of the facts about Seneca? For Bennett, Spinoza leaves these questions unanswered.

11

Human being feels and knows that they are eternal when they have the entirety of mind and body, but they cannot know the duration of it (EVP23S, 608). Because eternity cannot be explained by "duration" (EVP29Dem., 609) and human being cannot know how long will they live because they are subject to duration (EIIDef.5, 447; EIIP30Dem., 471). Moreover, the duration of our body's existence is not dependent on its own essence, nor does it depend on the absolute nature of the eternal God (EIIP30Dem., 471). Therefore, the end of the body's existence as that body does not cause a deficiency in God's thought and extension. Because when the body dies, the elements that make up it pass to another ratio of motion and rest and continue to exist in Nature, the mind also continues to exist in

God's infinite intellect as its eternal part. But this mind is no longer the human mind, nor the body that exists in any other proportion is the human body. Because the essence of human includes neither his existence nor his duration of existence. Therefore, the eternity of human's essence includes neither his actual existence nor how long he will continue to exist (EIP24C, 431). The idea of eternity of human's essence always found in God's infinite intellect, whether human exists or not. For the human to realize this eternity, they must have a body capable of a great many things (EVP39, 614), without losing the ratio that make them human; and equipping their mind with "adequate ideas" as much as possible in the "now" and "here" (EIIP40, 475; EVP25Dem. 608).

Here, I propose the following answer to these questions that Bennett thinks Spinoza leaves unanswered: there are many examples of suicide in pre-Spinoza history, and Spinoza was probably aware of them. However, it is significant that Spinoza refers to Seneca's suicide as an example rather than someone else's. This is because Seneca was a Stoic philosopher whose ideas Spinoza was also aware of. A philosopher is a person whose rational faculties are well-developed and whose understanding, with Spinoza's words, is not hindered by inadequate ideas arising from imagination and memory, and who continues to think clearly. However, even if a person is a philosopher, just before committing suicide, their ability to understand can be completely impaired, and their nature can be entirely dominated by their circumstances, causing them to assume a different form. I have previously justified how Seneca's nature undergoes a radical transformation. Therefore, Seneca's nature does not retain all the intrinsic elements relevant to it at that time. Reason or intellect is not a subset of Seneca's nature but rather its most fundamental aspect. However, Seneca's suicide is not, for Bennett, an external cause imposed by Nero. He asserts:

“Suppose that you are so built that you prefer an apple to an orange, and an orange to anything else. If I eat our only apple, have I forced you to select an orange?” (Bennett 1984: 237)

Bennett answers ‘no’ and adds that Nero did not force Seneca to commit suicide.

When Bennett's apple-orange scenario is applied to the case of Seneca, the apple would represent the announcement of Seneca's execution and the orange would represent Seneca's suicide. However, there is a flaw in this scenario, namely the third option, i.e., there is no possibility of preferring the orange to “something else”. The announcement of Seneca's execution (eating the apple) does not necessitate Seneca to kill himself (eating the orange). Moreover, if the execution is cancelled (the apple is not eaten), then the suicide will not take place (the orange will not be eaten). However, as long as the death warrant is in effect, the possibility of suicide remains. That is, as long as it is known that the apple will be eaten, it is always possible to eat the orange. Therefore, this example cannot be applied to Seneca, because the orange cannot be preferred to anything else, since there is no other possibility. So, either the apple or the orange must be eaten. The eating of the orange rather than the apple, which is announced to be eaten, is Seneca's necessary determination between two passivities. If eating of the apple is a greater evil and orange a lesser, then the apple would be a compelling external cause for the eating of the orange. Moreover, it is unclear which of the two constitutes the greater evil or coercive force, as the evaluation of these causes only occurs after the outcome is experienced. Once an outcome such as suicide occurs, it is impossible to retrospectively evaluate the causes leading to that outcome. Therefore, Bennett's scenario appears to be unworkable.

However, Bennett argues that the possibility of a rational suicide cannot be found in Spinoza's thought, that Spinoza failed to put forward such an idea, though surprisingly, such an idea should have been in his system. Bennett asserts that a man living in bad conditions may think that if he continues to live, he will be exposed to more evil than death, so he may choose suicide as a salvation from more evil. However, according to him, Spinoza did not realize this possibility. Therefore, since Spinoza could not see this blind spot, he failed to justify a rational possibility of suicide (Bennett 1984: 240). Bennett sees the principle of “preferring the lesser of two evils” as the criterion for the

rationality of suicide. However, what Bennett fails to see is that there is nothing rational about being determined by one of the two passivities and that this determination is not a choice. I will address this point further in the Nadler section below.

Another scholar, M. LeBuffe, shares Bennett's views on this issue. For him, the morally best action is that which reflects our self-control. Such actions are those of a free and rational human being. According to different views of virtue that Spinoza affirms, a human being prefers the lesser evil that they can attain to the greater good that they cannot attain. Moreover, according to LeBuffe, there are certain situations in which lying and suicide reflect more self-control than in alternatives. Thus, LeBuffe argues that in some unfortunate circumstances, suicide may be understood in Spinoza's framework as the best course of action. In such a case, a person shows that he cares more about his causal activity than anything else by performing the action (suicide) that he estimates to do best in the circumstances (LeBuffe, 2010: 191–192). Thus, LeBuffe interprets suicide as a free and rational action among available alternatives.

What I do not understand is the following: when a person chooses between two alternatives, especially when they do so rationally and freely, the alternative they ultimately choose must be for their own good and benefit. When a person chooses between two alternatives, the process typically involves:

- i) discarding one or more of the alternatives;
- ii) selecting the alternative that is believed to bring happiness or benefit;
- iii) evaluating the outcome of the choice made.

However, if suicide is considered as a choice among alternatives, then only the first of these premises is realized, and no clear positive or negative idea about the other two premises can be reached. This is because the person who commits suicide has, hypothetically, chosen one of the alternatives, but has not had the opportunity to see whether this alternative makes them happy or not. That is, the suicidal person dies, and a deceased individual is not in a position to evaluate alternatives. So even if LeBuffe claims that suicide is an action over which we have control, he does not-or-cannot say that we are at a stage where we can evaluate whether this action makes us happy in the end. For these reasons, LeBuffe's idea of suicide as a rational alternative, which he puts forward but fails to justify, does not seem sound.

Perhaps the most striking interpretation of Spinoza's thoughts on suicide comes from S. Nadler, who attempts to justify the possibility of a rational suicide<sup>12</sup>. Nadler puts forward three reasons to justify his argument. I will first outline these justifications and then offer my own criticisms.

12

There is an article in the literature, written in direct response to Nadler, which argues that no conclusion can be drawn from Spinoza's system that rational suicide is possible: (Grey, 2017). In this article, Grey argues that the reason's leading one to suicide cannot be compatible with the conatus of the mind. The point that follows from the thesis stated in IIP10 that there cannot be an adequate idea in the mind that "excludes the existence of the body", the article argues that in order

for the intellect/reason to lead a person to suicide, there must be an adequate idea in that person's mind that represents his or her own death. However, since the presence of such an idea in the mind would be contrary to the conatus of the mind, the article argues that Spinoza's system eliminates the possibility of rational suicide. Based on this thesis, it is seen that Grey's opposition to Nadler is justified and appropriate.

Nadler's first justification based on EIVPref. is as follows:

"Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration. For no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time." (EIVPref., 546)

For Nadler, *conatus* is something other than a mundane life and breathing. If there is anything more important than striving to live, it is striving for a "best", higher quality life. *Conatus* is a striving for power, and power is identical with reality and perfection. Therefore, *conatus* is the striving for reality and perfection. Human striving for perfection is striving for knowing and understanding. According to EIVP26, the things most beneficial to a person are those that they understand through their intellect. Additionally, as stated in EIVP27, what is considered "good" is what aids in understanding, while what is "bad" is what obstructs it. Therefore, the more one understands, the more one will know what is beneficial and "good" for oneself, the more one's level of perfection increases, the more one maintains the highest level of activity. The life of a perfect person will thus be a life of joy, free from passivity. On this basis, Nadler tries to emphasize that for Spinoza, a more active, higher quality, more perfect and real human life is more preferable than a longer life that is subject to duration, and eventually end (Nadler, 2016: 266, 267).

Nadler's second justification is based on the "honesty" thesis in (EIVP72, 586): "A free man always acts honestly, not deceptively". In the demonstration of the proposition, Spinoza briefly states the following: a free person acts according to the guidance of reason. If such a person resorts to deception, they do so based on rational judgment. If deception were considered a virtue endorsed by reason, then reason – being universal – would advocate the same virtue (deception) for everyone as a means to preserve their existence. Finding this situation absurd and contradictory, Spinoza argues that deceit cannot be the virtue of the free man (EIVP72Dem., 586). In the scholium Spinoza makes the following statements, which are more striking and favorable to Nadler:

"Suppose someone now asks: what if a man could save himself from the present danger of death by treachery? Would not the principle of preserving his own being recommend, without qualification, that he be treacherous? The reply to this is the same. If reason should recommend that, it would recommend it to all men. And so, reason would recommend, without qualification, that men make agreements, join forces, and have common rights only by deception – i.e., that really they have no common rights. This is absurd." (EIVP72S., 587)

Nadler sees Spinoza's statements that humans should never resort to deception, even if it is about preserving their own lives, as a possibility for the rationality of suicide. Accordingly, if everyone resorts to deception under the guidance of reason, then deception becomes a universal recommendation to all agents. In this case, the feeling of trust between people is completely eroded. Thus, deception, which seems to be a virtue, actually turns into a vice that separates people and removes the common ground. But a free and rational man's *conatus* leads them to friendships and agreements with others (EIVP35–37, 563–8). Because "the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful, or better, it is for us, and conversely, the more a thing is useful to us, the more it agrees with our nature" (EIVP31C, 561). Therefore, Nadler argues that deception is not preferable under any circumstances, even if it is to preserve one's own life. To avoid deception, a person might even choose to cause their own death. Nadler contends that this analysis of "honesty", which

is the opposite of deception, demonstrates that suicide could be a rational choice for an individual within Spinoza's framework. Therefore, Nadler interprets EIVP72S as meaning that, akin to the Stoics, a man can end his life with his own hands through a free and rational decision and commit suicide by having the virtue of honesty, rather than resorting to deception and continuing his life without virtue (Nadler, 2016: 265–268).

Nadler's third justification is based on the "desire to avoid a greater evil by submitting to a lesser" (EIVP20S, 557), which is emphasized in the case of Seneca, and IVP65, "a lesser evil is really a good, so from the guidance of reason we want, or follow, only the greater good and the lesser evil" (EIVP65Dem., 583). Nadler argues that Seneca's decision to choose a more peaceful death by his own hand, rather than facing a violent execution by Nero's soldiers, reflects his clear rational perspective. According to Nadler, Seneca, from his rational viewpoint, opted to confront a lesser evil to avoid a greater one. His vision or rational view emerged from the self-evident principle of reason, which Spinoza puts forward as a proposition in EIV65 (Nadler, 2016: 274).

Nadler's three justifications for the possibility of rational suicide can be summarized as follows:

- i) The important thing is not to live longer, but to live more perfectly. If there is no other way but to live perfectly, then reason can lead a person to their own death.
- ii) A free person never acts deceptively and always acts honestly. If a person saves their own life by deception, they must give up and, in the name of honesty, end their own life.
- iii) If, in one's circumstances, committing suicide is choosing the lesser of two evils, then it is sanest to choose suicide, guided by reason.

For Nadler's first argument, I would say the following: the only passage where Spinoza considers a perfect life more important than a long life is in EIVPref., and this statement is not a proposition that is justified or demonstrated. Of course, Spinoza prefers a perfect life, active, virtuous and endowed with rationality, to a long life of sorrow and misery. But this does not mean that suicide is the only way out of a life of sorrow, misery, and even total ignorance. Because no matter how bad and difficult one's circumstances are, there is always the possibility of turning them in one's favor. As long as life continues, the strive to exist subject to duration (*conatus*) is maintained under all circumstances, and there is always the possibility of perfection. *Conatus* is both the strive to "live" and "live well", true; but the latter always depends on the former, so if there is no "life", there can never be a "good-or-perfect life". When suicide is a case of choosing the lesser of two evils, to perish is not only to get rid of misery, ignorance and sorrow, but also to eliminate all good human endeavors, all human pursuits to be knowledgeable and happy, and all possibilities.

The dictates of reason, the natural power of virtue, the remedies for treating affects in EIVP20S, etc., all the possibilities that Spinoza puts forward are precisely for those who have lost their way, who have been overcome by sadness, and who have not yet reached the standard of a good-or-perfect life. Otherwise, what can Spinoza's philosophy say to a virtuous, powerful, active man who organizes his life entirely according to the guidance of reason? Nothing! Because guidance is for the perplexed, those who have lost

their way, are confused, and cannot easily find the right path. For those who are on the right path, guidance means nothing. Moreover, the desire to live perfectly arises from the essence of man, and the essence of man is to strive to preserve his own existence (EIVP21Dem., 558). “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing” (EIIIP7, 499). Therefore, the essence of man leads him to actions that contribute to his survival (EIIIDef.Aff.IExp., 531). As man preserves his existence through these actions, he finds the opportunity to attain perfection. Moreover, “the duration of things cannot be determined from their essence, since the essence of things involves no certain and determinate time of existing” (EIVPref., 546). Therefore, since the essence of human beings, which drives them to constantly do things, does not determine how long they will live, there is always a way or a different perspective of perfection, activity, and rationality. So, if there is duration, there is always the possibility of perfection. For this reason, Spinoza states, “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” (EIVP21, 557). This means that “being blessed” (reaching a highest happiness)<sup>13</sup> and “acting well”, i.e., “living well”, is based on “living” itself, i.e., “actually existing”, which means maintaining existence. Although Nadler sees the actual striving for existence, which he expresses as mundane existence, as a necessary condition for striving for perfection, he does not go beyond a narrow reading of EIVP21. According to him, if there is no hope for striving for perfection, then reason will not suggest maintaining actual existence or the continuation of life (Nadler, 2016: 267–271). If Nadler is right, then he should answer these questions: to what extent is there hope? When exactly is it decided that hope is over? Should all individuals who fail to live up to the standards of a perfect life be compelled to take their own lives?

Nadler’s second justification based on EIVP72 also appears inconsistent in its inferences about the rationality of suicide. However, I accept that there is a tension between EIVP72 (the free man will not deceive even when it comes to maintaining his own life) and EIIIP7 (the *conatus* doctrine). Nadler assumes that he alleviates the tension by stating that *conatus* expresses both the strive to maintain existence and to be perfect. According to him, EIVP72 also offers us honesty as a form of perfection, so we can give up preserving our own lives rather than resorting to deception just to keep our perfection intact. However, if we can read *conatus* as two strivings, then the dimension of *conatus* that is “striv[ing] to preserve life” should be likened to the foundation of the building, so to speak, and the dimension that is “striv[ing] for perfection”, should be likened to the floors built on this foundation. Taking EIVP72 into account, Nadler seems to be asserting that we can demolish the foundation of the building just to avoid damaging the floors, thus acting honestly rather than resorting to deceit. Unfortunately, this suggestion does not seem to make any sense. Because a total rejection of life to maintain perfection is not logical or reasonable.

So, how can the contradiction between EIVP72 and EIIIP7 be resolved? Nadler’s suggestion for a solution is important, but unfortunately, it cannot solve the problem distinctly. Strictly speaking, we do not have strong textual evidence to resolve this tension in a snap. EIVP72S is not based on any previous proposition, definition, axiom, etc. Therefore, we do not have many statements that would directly accept what is said, nor do we have strong



explanations that would lead us to claim otherwise. However, although they are not very strong, I can make two suggestions to alleviate the tension, with two textual and one historical evidence:

My first suggestion is that the tension can be alleviated by an alternative reading of EIVP65C and EIVP66. A careful reading of these passages leads to the following conclusion: the priority for human beings is not to obtain the “good”, but to eliminate the “evil”. If one is to be faithful to the statements in EIVP72S, then when it comes to preserving one’s existence in the face of the danger of death, it would be “evil” to get rid of this danger by cheating, and “good” to be vulnerable to this danger by being honest. However, when the statements in EIVP72S are read in conjunction with the inference drawn from EIVP65C and EIVP66, in the face of a life-threatening danger, the priority of man is not to achieve what is “good”, i.e., the virtue of “honesty”, but rather to eliminate what is “evil”, i.e., the danger. In this case, if there is no better way for a man to avoid the “evil”, he has to eliminate the “evil” in a bad way (by cheating). It is a principle inculcated by reason that one should not try to obtain what is “good” firstly, but rather to drive away what is “evil”. Since what is “evil” is always a threat, harmful, and can lead to the destruction of human beings, while what is “good” is to improve or perfect the conditions in which human beings exist. Therefore, the strive to preserve being, even at a minimum level, takes precedence over the strive to bring it to better or more perfect conditions. Indeed, in such a case, the “good” may not be achieved, but not removing the “evil” will necessarily have negative consequences. Also, as Spinoza implies in (EIVP69, 585) avoiding an evil danger – such as the threat of death – rather than surrendering to or overcoming it, is a virtue of a free man.

My second suggestion is based on a careful reading of IVApX.8, which is an ignored passage by scholars:

It is permissible for us to avert, in the way that seems safest, whatever there is in nature that we judge to be evil, or able to prevent us from being able to exist and enjoy a rational life. On the other hand, we may take for our own use, and use in any way, whatever there is that we judge to be good, or useful for preserving our being and enjoying a rational life. And absolutely, it is permissible for everyone to do, by the highest right of nature, what he judges will contribute to his advantage (EIVApX.VIII, 589).

In these expressions, the obstacles to maintaining existence and living a rational life are identified with the “bad”, the things that preserve being and enable living a rational life are identified with the “good”. There are two important points here. The first is to state that obstacles to maintaining existence and living a rational life can be avoided using the “safest way” (*quae securior via*), and the things that preserve existence and living a rational life can be used “in any way” (*quocunque modo*). The second is to present both the “safe way” in eliminating the “bad” and “any way” in obtaining the “good” as “permissible” (*licet*) (Lat.EIVApX.8, 285). The word “permissible” is used twice here and includes an important emphasis.<sup>14</sup> When this emphasis, which is not found in the previous statements about *conatus*, is considered together with EIVP72S, when it comes to maintaining existence and being preserved from

13

For a study examining Spinoza’s concept of “blessedness” in relation to the affect of “self-esteem”, “intellectual love of God” and “peace of mind”, cf. (Dağ, 2023).

14

For an emphasis on the meaning of the word “permission” in Spinoza’s ethical language, see (Garrett 1996: 285–286).

“bad” things that prevent a rational life, if “deception” is the safest way and it is possible to get rid of the danger, then it is “permissible” to choose this way. When it is the other way around, that is, if there is something that will contribute to the maintenance of existence and thus provide access to the “good”, in this case, “deception” can still be seen as a way to be resorted to. Because in the first case, “deception” is the “safest way”, and in the second case, it is just one of the “any way” to reach the goal, i.e. “better”. In this case, when it comes to *conatus* and living in accordance with reason, both ways are acceptable and permissible. Therefore, the statements about *conatus* in EIVAp<sub>x</sub>.8, which were put forward after EIVP72S, seem to be suitable for further alleviating tension in question.

My third suggestion, which I have expressed as historical evidence, is as follows: although Spinoza’s philosophy reveals individual human nature in detail, it is ultimately an ethical project that builds on metaphysics and offers a life proposal for social life. If the social unrest that Spinoza witnessed during his lifetime is considered, the importance of Spinoza’s life proposal for coexisting and establishing friendships will be understood more clearly. It seems quite natural and reasonable for Spinoza to emphasize “honesty” in such a life proposal in the name of social peace and coexistence. “Deception” is the opposite of honesty and comes in many forms. The least harmful of these forms is when it involves one’s own life. If Spinoza had endorsed this within his philosophy, there would be numerous justifications for preserving life through deceit. People would constantly resort to deception just to preserve their own lives, leading to endless conflict and disintegration. Therefore, Spinoza’s assertion that deception should not be used, even in its most innocuous form, to preserve one’s existence, seems to reflect a social duty. However, his biography reveals that the knife attack on Spinoza had a lasting impact on him, and he kept his coat, pierced with a knife, as a constant reminder. Indeed, if Spinoza had been able to at that time, wouldn’t he have wanted to get rid of this knife attack that put his life in danger with a trick? The answer to this question does not seem to be open to discussion. Therefore, it seems quite reasonable that deception should not be recommended in a philosophy that offers a social life or moral framework, even if the issue is maintaining one’s life. But individual experience shows that people will try all possible means – both rational and irrational, honest and deceitful – to preserve and maintain their existence. It is likely that Spinoza, being human himself, was also aware of this reality.<sup>15</sup>

Nadler’s third justification can be criticized as follows: Spinoza’s statements in EIVP65 are correct and understandable. However, Spinoza does not say that suicide is “more” or “less good” than “two goods” or “less bad” than “two bads”, so it is a preferable alternative. Because the end of continuation of being, i.e., the extinction of *conatus*, is the greatest evil that a man can experience. Suicide is not something that can be preferred to anything else, because every rational choice, by its very nature, should provide a benefit to individuals. However, if there is no existence that can evaluate this benefit, then it should not be considered as a choice. In the case of Seneca, as stated above, there is complete helplessness. Under the pressure of the passive effects that pervade his mind and body, Seneca’s action cannot be attributed to a rational decision-making process. Instead, it represents a necessary determination and inescapable aspect of his passive orientation.

When the above ideas put forward by Spinoza scholars on the possibility of “rational suicide” are considered together with their criticisms, it is clear that such a possibility cannot be inferred from Spinoza’s system.

## Conclusion

In Spinoza’s philosophy, suicide is presented as a determination to terminate life resulting from external causes. A person who ends their life is seen as being mentally too weak to preserve their being and, therefore, succumbs to external forces that are contrary to their nature. When the structure of the human body and the doctrine of *conatus* are analyzed, it is seen that without external causes, human beings cannot suffer any harm or destruction, and therefore suicide is impossible for a non-perverted human nature.

I concluded that of the examples Spinoza presents in EIVP20S, only the second one (Seneca’s case), could be a type of suicide. Accordingly, I identified that the first example refers to a murder rather than a suicide, while the third one reveals the main principle of all suicides rather than an independent cause of suicide. I proposed the concept of “suicide of reason” for this principle and argued that it is the basis of bodily suicide.

In the second part, where the views of Spinoza’s scholars are presented and criticized, I conclude that the idea of “rational suicide” cannot be inferred from Spinoza’s system. The reasons for this conclusion are as follows:

- I) EIVP65 cannot be adapted to Seneca’s case. This is because EIVP65 expresses a dictate of reason, whereas in Seneca’s case it is not the guidance of reason, but the affect of the imagination.
- II) Spinoza’s emphasis in EIVPref on “living perfectly” rather than “living for a long time” as the important thing is never conducive to an inference that “one should resort to suicide when the hope of living perfectly is exhausted”. Such an inference is clearly in contradiction with EIVP21, which states that self-preservation is intrinsic to the essence of the individual and that the individual is constantly acting for this purpose.
- III) There is no sound basis for alleviating the tension between EIVP72 and EIIP7 by reading *conatus* as two strivings (preserving life and perfect life), since perfection is one of the highest forms of *conatus*,

15

This historical evidence is also supported by a textual evidence based on Spinoza’s distinction between “deception with good intent” (*dolus bonus*) and “deception with bad intent” (*dolus malus*) (TTP, XVI, ADN. XXXII, 285). Accordingly, by the supreme law of nature “each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself” (TTP, XVI, 282–283). The emphasis here on “not account of anything else, but only of itself” is important. For when one’s own life and advantage are at stake, the deception will be good-intentioned. If a robber is forces you to promise him that you will give him your goods when he wishes, then your natural right, determined by your power, may allow

you to get away this robber by deceptively promising him whatever he wishes. Similarly, you can make a foolish promise to someone that for twenty days you won’t taste food, or any nourishment at all. Afterward, when you realize what a wrong and harmful decision this was, you can break this contract and consider the promise never made, thanks to your natural right, which bound you to choose the lesser of two evils (TTP, XVI, 285–286). Therefore, Spinoza sees it as one’s natural right to avoid from the worst thing by striving in every way. It can be said that ‘deception with good intent’ is a natural right of the individual. In contrast, if there is a case of bad cunning, then there is malicious deception, and this cannot be said to coincide with one’s natural right.

not one that destroys it. Here, I offer three proposals for alleviating aforementioned tension. The first of these is based on an alternative reading of EIV65C and EIVP66, while the second is founded upon a meticulous analysis of EIVAp.8. The third proposal is supported by historical evidence drawn from Spinoza's biography and TTP.

It seems that, within Spinoza's framework, there are not two distinct processes – one irrational and the other rational – that lead a person to suicide. Instead, all suicides stem from irrational processes, passive affections, and the overpowering influence of imagination and memory. Consequently, Spinoza's philosophy presents only one notion of suicide: first, the "suicide of reason", and then the physical act of suicide through various means. This notion of suicide is only possible for a "perverted human nature"; otherwise, suicide is not a feasible outcome for a healthy human nature.

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Enes Dağ

### Samoubojstvo racionalnosti, racionalnost samoubojstva – Spinoza o samouništenju

#### Sažetak

U članku se razmatraju metafizičke i moralne osnove Spinozina ogleđa o samoubojstvu. Spinozino razmatranje samoubojstva dovodi se u pitanje putem njegove doktrine *conatusa*, koja tvrdi da je težnja samoočuvanju bit opostojanja. Sukladno tome, samoubojstvo odnosno prekid života, kao uništenje vlastitoga bića, predstavlja iscrpljivanje te težnje. Analiza uzroka koji vode do samouništenja prouzročila je važnu raspravu u literaturi o Spinozi, pokrećući pitanje o tome je li samoubojstvo pasivna i iracionalna odluka ili slobodna i racionalna odluka. Ovaj članak, koji se dotiče prominentnih istraživača ove literature, prije svega, Matsona, Bennetta, LeBuffea i Nadlera, cilja ublažiti ovu kontroverzu nudeći alternativno čitanje i argumente. Zaključuje se da slobodno i racionalno samoubojstvo ne postoji u Spinozinoj misli. Umjesto toga, »samoubojstvo razuma ili racionalnosti« čini temelj tjelesnoga samoubojstva.

#### Ključne riječi

Spinoza, racionalnost samoubojstva, etika, metafizika, *conatus*, uništenje

Enes Dağ

### Selbstmord der Rationalität, Rationalität des Selbstmords – Spinoza über die Selbstzerstörung

#### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel untersucht die metaphysischen und moralischen Fundamente von Spinozas Darlegung des Selbstmords. Spinozas Umgang mit der Selbstentleibung wird durch seine *Conatus-Doktrin* infrage gestellt, die das Streben nach Selbsterhaltung als die eigentliche Essenz der Existenz erachtet. Dementsprechend stellt der Suizid oder die Beendigung des Lebens als Zerstörung des eigenen Wesens die Entkräftung dieses Strebens dar. Die Analyse der Ursachen, die zur Selbstzerstörung führen, hat in Spinozas Literatur erhebliche Debatten angefangen und die Frage aufgeworfen, ob Selbstmord eine passive und irrationale Entscheidung oder eine freie und rationale Wahl ist. Dieser Artikel, der sich mit prominenten Gelehrten dieser Literatur, zuvörderst mit Matson, Bennett, LeBuffe und Nadler, auseinandersetzt, zielt darauf ab, diese Kontroverse zu entschärfen, indem er alternative Lesarten und Argumente offeriert. Man kommt zu dem Schluss, in Spinozas Gedanken gebe es keinen freien und rationalen Selbstmord; stattdessen bilde der „Selbstmord der Vernunft oder Rationalität“ die Grundlage für den körperlichen Selbstmord.

#### Schlüsselwörter

Spinoza, Rationalität des Selbstmords, Ethik, Metaphysik, *Conatus*, Zerstörung

**Enes Dağ**

**Suicide de la rationalité, la rationalité du suicide –  
Spinoza sur l'autodestruction**

**Résumé**

*Cet article examine les fondements métaphysiques et moraux du traitement du suicide par Spinoza. L'approche de Spinoza sur le suicide est remise en question par sa doctrine du *conatus*, qui postule que la préservation de son propre être constitue l'essence même de l'existence. En conséquence, le suicide, ou la cessation de la vie, en tant que destruction de son propre être, représente l'épuisement de cet effort. L'analyse des causes qui mènent à l'autodestruction a suscité un débat significatif dans la littérature spinoziste, soulevant la question de savoir si le suicide est une décision passive et irrationnelle ou un choix libre et rationnel. Cet article, qui dialogue avec des chercheurs éminents de cette littérature, notamment Matson, Bennett, LeBuffe et Nadler, vise à apaiser cette controverse en proposant des alternatives aux interprétations et arguments présentées. Il conclut que le suicide libre et rationnel n'existe pas dans la pensée de Spinoza ; à la place, le « suicide de la raison ou de la rationalité » constitue la base du suicide corporel.*

**Mots-clés**

Spinoza, rationalité du suicide, éthique, métaphysique, *conatus*, destruction