PULMONOLOGY

The Identity of Self: A Neurophilosophical and Cognitive Science Analysis Bridging Spinoza, Weil, and Wittgenstein

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Introduction[1]

In the 1980s, Peter Winch gave several seminars and lectures on Spinoza's philosophical system, in which he not only tried to encourage his students to engage seriously with the complex thought and system of Spinoza, but also tried to connect it to his own interests and viewpoints as well as to aspects of the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Simone Weil. But what motivated Winch to bring together such seemingly widely different philosophical systems and what was the importance he saw in Spinoza's system?

Talking about Winch and his relation to figures that now are most frequently taken to belong to the history of philosophy is not an easy task. It might even be said that Winch himself by now belongs to the history of philosophy and that our interest should also be a historical one. If that were the approach taken in this paper, then it might serve to clarify both what the purpose of engaging in the history of philosophy in general could be and the approach Winch takes towards his subject matter. But instead of approaching the topic at hand in such a traditional manner, discussing interpretative stances on Spinoza and considering legitimate uses of the history of philosophy, we might take here Winch's lead and follow him in an endeavour that was for him clearly as important as the analysis and reconstruction of historical texts, an attitude evidenced in the way he expresses his own relationship with Wittgenstein and his philosophy: "[M]y attitude to Wittgenstein's work has always been one of gratitude for the help it has given me in seeing what are the important questions, and what kinds of questions they are, rather than that of an aspiring exegete." (Winch 1987:1) The philosophies of Spinoza and Wittgenstein, and to a lesser extent those of Winch and Weil, - even when we confine ourselves to a narrow and rather specific area of philosophical interest - have already received much discussion and even just recapitulating them would be an impossible task for

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such a short paper. The emphasis in this paper is therefore not predominantly a historical one, but, rather, to gain an understanding as to what were the important issues Winch discovered in Spinoza's system and why it was this early modern philosopher - rather than any of the others such as Descartes, Leibniz, Locke or Hume – whose thought was of particular interest for him throughout his philosophical career. Asking the question this way makes it clear that our interest here is, like Winch's in Wittgenstein, not one of exegesis or reconstruction, but rather to find those questions that are still of particular relevance to us today. I will aim to show that in his reading of Spinoza Winch's chief interest is the sense of the irreducible and irreplaceable character and perspective of the human individual as it features in epistemological as well as in ethical situations.

Since Winch's lectures are currently unpublished, I will quote extensively from them, so that the reader can get a more accurate picture of the view Winch offers in them than a summary would otherwise provide.[2] Given the nature of Spinoza's philosophical system, it will be required, in the first part, to follow Winch's analysis of its metaphysical and epistemological aspects, before turning to the ethical individual in the second part.

1. Winch's Approach to Spinoza: Understanding Ourselves and the World

Before we can turn to Winch's reconstruction of Spinoza's *Ethics* in order to see what he found of particular interest in it, let me say a few preliminary words about the book itself, its structure and its content. Its full title is *Ethics demonstrated in geometrical order* (*Ethica, ordine geometrico demonstrata*)[3], which has often been taken to require that the work is best understood as "one geometrical demonstration that begins from definitions and axioms arranged in a geometrical order in Spinoza's sense, which at least appear to be essential definitions of basic metaphysical concepts and laws, and then adds more and more definitions and axioms [...]." (Garrett 2018: 32)[4] According to this reading, the starting point are the basic definitions and axioms of metaphysics, such as those of 'God', 'substance', 'mode', etc. and its propositions (Part I), followed by an analysis of mind, body, knowledge (Part II), the affects, activity and passivity (Part III), of 'human bondage', i.e. of man's lack of control over the affects (Part IV), and of what freedom amounts to in a deterministic Spinozistic system in terms of human knowledge and blessedness (Part V).

[2] The version I will quote from is derived from transcriptions of Peter Winch's seminars, supplemented by his unpublished lecture notes. See Peter Winch (2019). *Lectures on Spinoza: Ethics and Understanding*. Ed. by Michael Campbell and Sarah Tropper (Unpublished manuscript). For the original material, see the Peter Winch Collection at King's College London Archives, Reference Code GB 0100 KCLCA K/PP171.

[3] Abbreviations for the *Ethics* (=E) in the following are p=proposition, s=scholium, pref=preface (hence EIIp43s is *Ethics*, Part 2, Proposition 43, Scholium).

[4] For an overview of interpretations concerning the import of the 'geometrical order', see Steenbakkers 2009.

For Winch, on the other hand, the explanatory priority in reading and understanding Spinoza should be placed elsewhere. Criticising Jonathan Bennett for his dismissal of discussions in later parts of the *Ethics*, passages which lay out, as Winch calls it, Spinoza's "ethical vision", he says:

> For unless we see the life Spinoza attempts to describe in Parts 4 and 5 as the culmination towards which the metaphysics of the earlier Parts is directed from the start, I believe we shall miss some important aspects of the metaphysics. (Winch 1986: 141)

It is, therefore, maybe of little surprise that Winch does not adhere strictly to the order of the *Ethics* in his own lectures on Spinoza's philosophy. Most notably, Winch plays around with the order of Parts I and II, thereby taking the answer to the question as to what knowledge is and how the mind comes to know (Part II) as fundamental for questions of metaphysics (Part I). He, thus, does not follow Spinoza's reasoning that appears to lead him from definitions of substance, mode and God (among other important concepts) via a proof for substance monism (there is only one substance, that is 'God or Nature') and the claim that all finite things are nothing but modifications of that one substance, to the theory of the human mind and of knowledge. But it would be too simplistic to view this procedure as being nothing other than Winch putting epistemology before metaphysics (and both of them before ethics). In fact, both of these areas are for Winch's Spinoza intimately connected: The main question of the *Ethics*, Winch claims, is a metaphysico-epistemological-cum-ethical one: What is it to judge and how must the world be constituted in order for any judgement to be possible? This entails, according to Winch, the further question as to how the individual, not only as an epistemological but also as an ethical subject, is constituted.

This becomes clear in the beginning of the lectures, where Winch sets out with a comparison between Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (in the following: TIE), one of his earlier works, and Descartes's *Discourse of Method*. His aim is to establish in the first instance that there is a fundamental difference between Spinoza's and Descartes's views as to what belongs to the core of a philosophical system. The former, according to Winch, regards theoretical and practical concerns as deeply interwoven, while the latter abandons practical concerns in favour of theoretical ones. On this reading, the aim of both the TIE and the *Ethics* is a clarification of the notion of the true good and blessedness, i.e. they both aim at the clarification of ideas relevant to practice and concerning questions as to how to lead one's life rather than having justification of knowledge at their hearts. But because, at the same time, 'good' and 'bad' are, according to Spinoza, relative to man, any clarification of these notions requires an understanding of the nature of man, which in turn requires an understanding of the relation of man to his surroundings: "So the enquiry broadens into a general metaphysical one: into the nature of the 'world' and of man's 'place' in it." (Winch 2019)

But Winch does not stop at claiming that there is an intimate connection between various philosophical sub-disciplines in Spinoza. He, rather, diagnoses a single foundational principle that grounds the unification of the various parts of the *Ethics*: The driving force, for his Spinoza, is understanding[5]. We must understand the relevant relationships of man to his surroundings and therefore we must understand the relevant *relata*. But in order to improve our understanding of these issues, we must further understand the mechanisms and workings of understanding itself. At this point, the contrast between Spinoza and Descartes – that for Spinoza there are no purely theoretical concerns, since such concerns are always dependent or essentially related to practical concerns – becomes the clearest:

> Generalising, we can say that Spinoza's enquiry has ethical, metaphysical and epistemological aspects, all internally related. Ethics presupposes both metaphysics and epistemology; the former, because the good life for men is something that requires understanding and the latter, because the nature of man and of the world and of the relation between them has to be understood. And metaphysics presupposes epistemology because we have to enquire what sort of understanding man is capable of and what sort of understanding it is possible to have of these particular kinds of questions. But epistemology presupposes metaphysics too, since understanding is itself a relation of man to the world and to himself, and we need to grasp the nature of the terms of this relation. (Winch 2019)

Having identified understanding as the starting point for his approach to the *Ethics*, Winch naturally focuses on the notion of 'idea' as employed by Spinoza. In contrast to other early modern conceptions, on Winch's reading, an idea is an act of the understanding, which makes a claim for truth independently of its particular content.[6] In other words, an idea has the character of a judgement or proposition; it is a judgement in which something is asserted to be true of something else. Fundamentally, for Winch's Spinoza "an idea points beyond itself" (Winch 2019) at some object or situation other than itself. And, Winch thinks, there are good grounds to accept this view. If it is accepted, so Winch, it undercuts a certain (Cartesian) brand of scepticism regarding the existence or the accessibility of the external world. If the content of an idea is given by reference to

[5] This driving notion of 'understanding' in Winch might be best contrasted with Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza's system as a "rationalism on steroids": According to Della Rocca, everything is for Spinoza in principle understandable *because of* his adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the uniformity of laws according to which all things behave, which is itself connected to that principle. On this reading, our understanding of the world is itself a consequence of another principle rather than the driving principle. (Della Rocca 2008: 4-6). Closer to Winch's approach seems to be Ursula Renz's, who summarizes her general claim regarding Spinoza's system as follows: "subjective experience is explainable, and its successful explanation is of ethical relevance because it makes us wiser, freer, and happier." (Renz 2018: 1)

[6] Winch invokes EIIp43s in support of this reading: "For no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the highest certainty. For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way. And of course no one can doubt this unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, viz. the very [act of] understanding. And I ask, who can know that he understands some thing unless he first understands it? I.e., who can know that he is certain about some thing unless he is first certain about it? What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false." (Spinoza 1985: 479)

some situation or some way the world is, then to doubt the existence of the world is not to render the ideas false or unjustified, but to undercut that on which the intelligibility of language rests:

> But the essential point is that, as it were, in its original primitive appearance, the idea is a representation of another situation. And this has to be accepted if anything is to be said at all. We can't use language to cast doubt on the possibility of language. There can't be 'doubt concerning the possibility of language', for that would have to be expressed in language. As Spinoza says, the only way such a doubt could express itself would be silence[7]. (Winch 2019)

Or, as he says later on in the lectures, if hyperbolic doubt were be exercised, it would not yield a first secure truth, because this doubt "will equally undermine confidence in the intelligibility of our attempts to express the *cogito*. On Descartes's argument we couldn't even be sure we were expressing anything intelligible when we made those sounds." (Winch 2019) Winch's Spinoza, thus, does not follow the Cartesian path that leads to the question as to whether there is anything that corresponds to our ideas, since to form this question in a meaningful way already requires us to presuppose that there is something concerning which the question is being asked. The important aspect for Winch's Spinoza is not, therefore, whether the things represented exist, but whether our ideas adequately represent their objects: "I may have a distorted idea of what the world is like, but it cannot be that there is no world corresponding to my ideas; the existence of the world is a presupposition of my having any ideas." (Winch 2019) That means that the problem of the existence of the world is a non-starter: the world is given with ideas, since ideas are ideas of a world. Here Winch insinuates an analogy to Wittgenstein's reasoning in the *Tractatus* that "if there were a logic, even if there were no world, how then could there be a logic, since there is a world?" (TLP 5.5521):

> The "experience" which we need to understand logic is not that such and such is the case, but that something *is*; but that is *no* experience.
>
> Logic *precedes* every experience—that something is *so*.
>
> It is before the How, not before the What. (TLP 5.552)

Spinoza's point, according to Winch, is that the fact that we are thinking already guarantees that there is a world. But as much as there is no place for universal doubt, this means at the same time that there are constraints exercised on our thoughts by their objects, the world. Doubt cannot be mandated as a universal approach to our ideas (as Descartes would have it in order to secure absolutely certain knowledge), because doubt arises from the ideas themselves, not from an additional judgement that is added to the idea. In addition, we do not have free reign over the content of our thought. All human thought is essentially constrained by the world and, given the relation of ideas and their objects, the ideas belong to a system of judgements as much as their

[7] Winch has here probably Spinoza's comments on skeptics in *Treatise on the Emendation on the Intellect* in mind (see Spinoza 1985: 22).

objects belong to a system of physical causes. Therefore, "[t]he conditions which make it possible for me to think at all also constrain me to think certain things and prevent me from thinking other things." (Winch 2019). What allows one to think at all and prohibits universal doubt at the same time constrains one to think certain things rather than others. Error is thus not, and cannot be, a complete absence of correspondence with reality, since the relation to reality is what determines thinking with respect to certain things (rather than others) in the first place. For Spinoza, there is not an idea and something independent (an external object), but it is ideas that represent a corresponding reality more or less adequately. Thus 'true ideas' represent adequately, while error is due to 'false ideas', which represent more or less inadequately. Adequacy is to be understood as the clarity and distinctness with which the relations of a given thought to other thoughts in the system are perceived. Hence ideas cannot be imagistic but must involve truth claims or are *qua* ideas also assertions: They claim that something is the case or, as Winch stresses, they are the 'putting together' of a subject and a predicate in the form of a judgement. In such a system, where judgement and ideas fall together, doubt and error have the same basis, namely inadequate ideas, while the difference lies in the fact that in the case of doubt, the idea makes it clear that the data is insufficient for assertion while false ideas lack the clarity that the thing that is affirmed should not in fact be affirmed and they have thus the appearance of constraining in the sense of demanding affirmation. Error is, then, having an idea or act of understanding that demands affirmation as true without being of a sufficiently adequate character. In this sense, falsity is a privation of truth and requires a relation to truth: "I can't be wrong about everything. [Because, in that case, w]hat would I be wrong 'about'?" (Winch 2019)

The impossibility of hyperbolic doubt because of the nature of ideas also impacts the question of the right method for seeking the truth: According to Winch's Spinoza, there cannot be a question as to how to conduct an inquiry that is independent of the inquiry itself (TIE, Spinoza 1985: 16-17). We have an inbuilt capacity or a 'true idea' on which any kind of method must be based (EIIp43s). And a progressive increase in understanding of the original inquiry, which we are always already undertaking, is at the same time an increase in knowledge and a path towards wisdom.

> Spinoza is insisting (rightly, it seems to me) that the connection between subject and predicate in a judgement presupposes the form of enquiry to which the judgement belongs. He is also insisting (and this is more questionable) that a form of enquiry presupposes the possibility of giving definite answers to the questions it raises; and also (even more questionably) that there are no fundamental logical differences between different forms of enquiry involving different relations between the procedures for seeking answers and the giving of such answers.[8] (Winch 2019)

[8] To see what motivates this assessment, see Winch 1958.

The claim that we are always already having a 'true idea' and are always already undertaking our own inquiries into the truth of things ties in with Spinoza's claim about the relative nature of good and bad as individual perspectives on things (TIE, Spinoza 1985: 10; EIVpref, Spinoza 1985: 545): Any inquiry into the true good has to begin from the individual's relative perspective on the world and the ideas available to that individual. There is, for inquiry, no godlike perspective to be taken - a point that Winch finds reflected in Wittgenstein's remark that "[a] curious analogy could be based on the fact that the eye-piece of even the hugest telescope cannot be bigger than our eye." (CV 25) We see here how certain of Winch's views on Spinoza's underlying reasoning and motivation for his metaphysics come together with the importance of the concrete individual and the constraints that the world puts on its ideas:

> The aspect of Cartesianism that is under criticism is the supposition that our ideas might have no truth in them – the supposition, I mean, not merely that we might be mistaken about something, but that we might be mistaken about everything. It's a sort of attempt to prise away, to consider our ideas in complete distinction from any truth that they might have in them. Spinoza attempts to show that a supposition that our ideas are radically dissociated from any world will land us into confusion which there is no way out of. Such a supposition can't provide the basis for any search for truth. (Winch 2019)

To summarize Winch's take on Spinoza's account of ideas and their essential perspectival character: An idea is not an image, but has the character of an assertion and thus has a claim to truth. An idea is not an isolated occurrence and entails not only something asserted, but in addition also a connection with ideas of other things. Therefore, ideas not only intrinsically involve a claim to truth, but they are also not completely arbitrary and are constrained in important respects (TIE, Spinoza 1985: 28, EIIp43s), because they are the 'very act of understanding' (EIIp43s) and involve a relation with ideas of other things, i.e. are embedded in and imply various ideas of a greater causal nexus (TIE, Spinoza 1985: 28). For Spinoza, therefore, the mere having of an idea is already and necessarily a judgement that something is the case, that there is at least some truth in it, that what is the case constrains the judgement, and that the judgement's object is an integral and real mental constituent of it. He puts these considerations more clearly in his review of Bennett's *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*:

> Now, it is true that we cannot as it were identify a given idea except by saying what is its object [...]. However, we must not forget that corresponding to the fact that we cannot identify a given idea except by reference to its object is the fact that we cannot identify a given physical thing, situation or event except by forming an idea of it. If, for instance, I report that Paul reached out his hand and switched on the light, then the *physical* movements and processes which I am referring to are those which answer to my *understanding* of what switching on a light is. There is only a reference to a physical event where there is an intelligible thought that that event takes place. (Winch 1986: 146-47)

Hence it is not the case that everything that has the grammatical form of a judgement and might be put forward as if it were an assertion is in fact a genuine judgement and thus a genuine idea. It is not the outward form of the utterance that can assure us that the utterer is communicating a genuine idea. To use Winch's example:

> 'l shall defeat Wellington at Waterloo tomorrow.' Uttered (or 'thought') by Napoleon the day before the battle, that may express Napoleon's judgment. Uttered (or 'thought') by me now it certainly does not. It does not make sense to suppose that I, now, could make that judgment. Why not? It can have no intelligible relation to my present situation; and that situation includes what I know about myself, my surroundings and Wellington. (Winch 2019)

Any isolated items of 'knowledge' (such as the Cartesian *cogito* or any arbitrary composition of terms with the outward form a grammatically correct sentence) lack connections to other judgements and to the world as it presents itself to the individual in question, and would therefore not be considered to be genuine ideas. While the tight connection between subject and predicate might seem more obvious in the case of, for example, simple geometrical judgments (see EIIp49), it is also and even more so in the case of empirical judgments: Empirical judgements are only meaningful if the judgement is connected to a causal system of supporting judgements.

> So the structure of an idea ('the connection of subject and predicate') comes from the reality which is its object. As the idea belongs to a system of ideas, so its object (if something physical) belongs to a physical system. The object of this system of ideas is the system of physical causes and effects. Spinoza expresses this in his talk about thought and extension both being attributes of the same substance. The constraints to which thought is subject (expressed in the subject-predicate relation) are exercised by the intellectual system of which it is a part, which is identified by reference to its subject matter (physical reality). What Spinoza is getting at is that there would be no articulated thought, hence no inquiry, discovery, knowledge, were thinking not part of the very same world of the physical causes and effects which form its object or subject matter. (This is of course contrary to the view of Descartes.) The more a given idea represents of the connection of causes and effects the firmer and more determinate is its own structure; the more is it 'adequate'. (Winch 2019)

Here mathematical and empirical judgement are on a par: The more clearly one understands the context in which the judgement is embedded, the more determinate becomes the judgement and the less it is possible to judge otherwise. In order to make a genuine judgement rather than just putting words or images together, I must have some understanding of the context in which this judgement is embedded. Unless there are some further supporting reasons, ideas, or judgements, it can be questioned whether a sentence that is uttered as if it were an assertion in fact is one. That judgments are given with the world and constraint by it, but therefore also always to a minimal degree true, might also provide an alternative underpinning for and relate to Winch's early conviction that truthful speaking is the norm in any society and that any human society is always also a moral

society that is characterized by a shared language and the exercise of intelligence.[9] And, as Wittgenstein says, "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (PI 23), and "[i]t is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions, but in form of life." (PI 241)

Hence there is a certain agreement that grounds the fact that humans can and do belong to a society or a shared life form, but there is a further and equally important aspect of the position each human occupies in the universe. The constraint by the world on the individual's perception and experience also means that, while there is truth in all ideas, we are embedded in a nexus of physical causes that determine our bodily states and therefore our judgements and which determine, thereby, also individual perspectives on the world. And this, given what has been said so far, is not only of epistemological, but also moral, consequence.

2. Man's Fragmented and Unique Position

In his 'Particularity and Morals', Winch cites Spinoza as an ally in his opposition to moral systems that operate on the assumption or invocation of objective, general, rational moral principles. This criticism is based on the unique point of reference that each moral individual occupies in the network of causes or nature and which cannot and should not be neglected by moral philosophy. We have to view each moral agent as an individual with particular interests and in a particular situation, such that the assumption that any generalization of what to do in a particular situation is deeply problematic, to say the least:

> Opponents of Kant since Schopenhauer have retorted that a rational principle could not of itself dispose of the force necessary to make a man act counter to his own strong interests. That force could come only from some strong practical engagement of the agent in the situation in which he has to act. It is the same point as that made by Spinoza: 'An emotion can only be controlled or destroyed by another emotion contrary thereto, and with more power for controlling emotion.' And: 'A true knowledge of good and evil cannot check any emotion by virtue of being true, but only in so far as it is considered as an emotion.' [E4p7, p14] In fact Spinoza maintained (in my opinion with some justice) that 'knowledge of good and evil', expressed in a purely general way, is a confused form of awareness. In his view I can attain clarity only through a sharpening of my perception of the particular circumstances which characterize my individual presence in the world, a sharpening of perception which is at the same time a purification of my practical involvement. Since the most important aspect of this practical involvement is involvement with other human beings, what is required is an account of our knowledge and understanding of other human beings which will make it possible to see how

[9] Winch 1959: 239-40

> such knowledge and understanding can of itself impose moral bounds on our will. An account that would achieve this is one which makes recognition of such moral bounds on the will a criterion for the knowledge and understanding of human beings that is in question." (Winch 1987: 173)

This passage provides some insight not only into Winch's view on Spinoza's moral philosophy, but also into the reasons for his sympathy for Spinoza's whole philosophical system. The constitution of any human being is deeply and inextricably embedded into her surroundings, which constrain not only her thoughts, but also her emotions and actions and, while being part of the whole of nature and governed by general laws. In their presence, composition and influence, they are unique to each individual and fundamentally influence the character of her being as well as the possibilities she will entertain in each situation in which she has to make a decision. And it is these circumstances and their relevance for the individual from their own point of view that need to be understood if we want to say with any justification that we understand the individual in question. This mirrors Winch's own philosophical view that "[a] proper understanding of the character and importance of human individuality will alter our sense of both the moral subject and those to whom he is responsive." (Gaita 1990: 118)

While understanding an individual involves seeing each individual thing and event in its relation to the whole, it is nonetheless still the case that for man as a finite being it is virtually impossible to achieve such an infinitely complex view, not only for other individuals, but also concerning one's own position. Our position in the world, by virtue of our limited nature, is determined to be fragmented and distorted. Men are part of this natural order, they are subject to and driven about by a wide variety of external and internal causes that are impossible to grasp in all their details, but this neither dispenses with the need to understand those circumstances as well as possible nor is it an evaluative statement, and even less an invitation to despair. Rather, understanding and analysing the world and our understanding of it, seeing that each of us is neither fully in control of our actions nor our circumstances, is understanding a fact about the structure of the world: "if men are subject to emotions, it's a feature of the natural order that they should be so. And our task, as Spinoza understands it, is simply to understand this situation, not to denounce it." (Winch 2019)

From this limited and fragmented view of the world arises also the importance of individual interests that each agent attaches to certain things but not to others. For Spinoza, man has some understanding of forces acting on him because it is his body that is acted on by these forces, but because of his spatial location in a greater network of causes that is the whole of nature, he is at the same time "limited to that aspect of them which is relevant to their effects on him" (Winch 2019). The limitation of a perspective is therefore not only with respect to knowledge, but also with respect to individual interests of greatest importance. Each man will have a view of things and people that is distorted insofar as he has particular interests that are influenced by those aspects that have a

bearing on his particular finite concerns. Hence, for Winch's Spinoza, it is this attachment to the finite that is at the same time the essence of 'human bondage'[10]. Freedom, on the other hand, would be to view all things *sub specie aeternitatis* as equally real and necessary and thus detaching oneself from certain particular things.

Based on Spinoza's claim that the degree of adequacy of ideas is mirrored by the body (EVp39), Winch rejects a superficial reading of this passage that reduces it to the claim that those, whose ideas are more adequate, have a healthier body, in favour of a reading that allows for more adequate ideas not only to influence one's bodily constitution, but to move one away from bondage by extending one's body into the greater causal network: "a man whose ideas are adequate will live differently from one whose ideas are inadequate, live in such a way that his own body is not the centre of his activities. In a sense he will increasingly come to treat the whole extended universe as 'his body'." (Winch 2019) With this reconstruction, Winch broadens Spinoza's explicit conception of the effects of an increase in knowledge or adequate ideas and merges it with some aspects of Simone Weil's thought, who utilizes an analogy with a blind man's stick in order to express a similar sounding position:

> One should identify oneself with the universe itself. Everything that is less than the universe is subjected to suffering [being partial and consequently exposed to outside forces].
>
> Even though I die, the universe continues. That does not console me if I am anything other than the universe. If, however, the universe is, as it were, another body to my soul, my death ceases to have any more importance for me than that of a stranger. The same is true of my sufferings.
>
> Let the whole universe be for me, in relation to my body, what the stick of a blind man is in relation to his hand. His sensibility really no longer resides in his hand, but at the end of his stick. (Weil 1956: 19)[11]

Each individual is the centre of a variety of forces that push and pull him in various directions, but greater knowledge and understanding of that state would extend the reach of one's body and alter one's attitude towards the world. Ultimately, a position of fully understanding one's place and the forces impacting it is, for Weil probably as much as for Winch's Spinoza, an ideal state and not achievable for any finite individual. But, further, an individual would - so it seems - also cease to be a finite individual, or at least an individual in a moral sense, if it were to achieve such an identification with the universe to the ultimate degree. Therefore, we have in our daily encounters to deal with an essential human limitation in the understanding of our surroundings and therefore our emotions remain, to the degree that we lack this understanding, unstable and we continue to be

[10] See EIVpref: "Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call Bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse." (Spinoza 1985: 543)

[11] See also Winch 1989: 134-36.

driven about by external causes. But this does not preclude the improvement of our understanding and thereby a change in our attitude towards the world.

A consequence of our human condition is for Spinoza, according to Winch,

> that we are confused about *the concepts* of good and evil. And this is not a trivial or, as I feel inclined to say, 'merely local' confusion, as would be, say, confusion about the distinction between a sonnet and an epigram. To be confused about the nature of good and evil is to be confused about one's own nature and about the nature of one's relation to the rest of the world. (Winch 2019)

This confusion about the nature of good and bad, so Winch, is not located in the fact that we use 'good' and 'bad' in an egocentric fashion and relative to us insofar as they are an expression of our own desires[12], but it arises when we assume that there is good in things themselves. Since good and evil are nothing but expressions of our desires, any change in what things we consider to be good or bad and how we consider them to be good or bad can only follow from a change in our desires. "Of course our use of the words ['good' and 'bad'] may change. Spinoza's point is that if our use of the words did change in this crucial respect, the words would express different concepts entirely. Cf. Wittgenstein Zettel: if we speak according to a different grammar we are not doing something 'wrong' - we are speaking of something different.[13]" (Winch 2019) This is not to say that we cannot change what we consider good or bad, but that this change cannot be brought about by simple reflection on what we already consider 'good' and 'bad', since such a reflection would only reinforce the prejudices we hold. It can only be brought about by reflection on what is adequate in our ideas, such that our understanding about our connection with the world and the objects in it becomes more adequate and brings about real change in the direction of our desires. But even then it will not be the truth in our ideas that brings about the change, since truth cannot change desires and therefore cannot alter what we consider 'good' or 'bad'. It is not reason that can make us act against our affects: "No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but insofar as it is considered as an affect." (EIVp14)

Since our notions of 'good' and 'bad' are the result of the presence of desires in us and therefore also dependent in their application and in their force on our individual constitution, we are in fact not only egocentric in our desires, but we also have a stronger inclination towards (or desire for) things that are closer to us in space or time compared to the same thing if it lies in the future or far away from us. But this is also a consequence of our limited and individual perspective: "the dominance of what is thought to be present on the strength of the affects is a special case (perhaps a

[12] EIIIp9s: "From all this, then, it is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it." (Spinoza 1985: 500)

[13] Wittgenstein Zettel 320

specially important case) of the importance of our essentially perspectival existence and relation to other things." (Winch 2019).

But it would be mistake, so Winch, to understand Spinoza as reducing our individual identity to a particular biologically or physically understood body or portion of matter. While there is a meaningful use of such a conception in certain contexts (e.g. the body a doctor would be interested in during medical treatment), he detects a more important sense of identity in the *Ethics*: We have to understand the identity of each man "in terms of a certain coherence in the way that he lives" (Winch 2019), that is, in a manner that takes into account a person's interests, relationships with others, position in the world, involvement with particular causes, and participation in certain activities. This, for Winch, is an extension, albeit, he thinks, a legitimate one, of what Spinoza himself explicitly states. It is not only what harms a person's body or improves it, that she has an interest in and a desire to obtain or avoid; but a person also has an interest in what happens to things she is connected to, such as her property or her commitments. What happens to our house, our family and friends and whatever else we consider important, matters to us and should be included in Spinoza's picture of what it means to be a particular individual. This rich picture of what it means to be an individual, the emphasis on the individual perspective with all its connections to the world and its being influenced by the world, is what Winch found in Spinoza; a view that makes it clear that there is no general rule or guideline that could determine what matters to an individual, since any interest and desire is always dependent on the perspective from which an individual views and is connected to the world. This deep entrenchment in one's surrounding and one's attitudes towards it therefore requires that we do not think of a human individual and her identity in general or abstract terms and that when we are dealing with her as a moral subject or engage with her in such a context, we have to take this identity into account. This is our responsibility in our encounters with other individuals in any moral context, but also, and maybe even more importantly, this also applies to moral philosophy:

> Treating a person justly involves treating with seriousness his own conception of himself, his own commitments and cares, his own understanding of his situation and of what the situation demands of him. [...] Unpalatable as it may be to the theorizing moral philosopher, he has to accept in the end that men of moral good will may indeed occupy or arrive at different and even opposed moral positions - and on the basis of circumstances which cannot be differentiated from each other so as to justify one of those positions against the other in a way that would have to be accepted by any rational being. That may sound like anarchy and the ultimate denial of reason, but I believe that if we look at the way it works in practice we shall see that it is not so. (Winch 1987: 177-78)

Taking another human being seriously means taking seriously how this individual takes herself to be, and that means that we cannot dictate interests and desires onto each other, and view interests and attitudes in isolation from the person holding them. Wittgenstein diagnoses a similar problem

within ourselves, namely that we tend to regard our ethical dilemmas in isolation, without considering that they are driven in part by the attitude we take, and that we do not see ourselves as part of the situation: “If life becomes hard we think of improvements. But the most important & effective improvement, in our own attitude, hardly occurs to us, & we can decide on this only with utmost difficulty.” (CV 60) Therefore, we should reflect upon the fact that our circumstances cannot be treated in isolation, but that for our understanding and assessment it is equally relevant that they are of particular and specific importance to an individual as the individual who encounters and is influenced by them, and that they are therefore inseparable from this individual’s attitudes[14] - even if we, and Winch, might not want to go all the way with Spinoza and regard each aspect as part of a single, necessary, fully determined whole. But that we have those attitudes and interests, which are intricately related to our identity, along with the web of circumstances we are embedded in, means that they reach to the core of who we are and that, while they are up for reasonable discussion, they cannot be mandated - neither by another man nor by philosophy.

> Philosophy might indeed try to remove intellectual obstacles in the way of recognizing certain possibilities (although there is always the danger that it will throw up new obstacles). But what a man makes of the possibilities he can comprehend is a matter of what man he is. This is revealed in the way he lives; it is revealed to him in his understanding of what he can and what he cannot attach importance to. But philosophy can no more show a man what he should attach importance to than geometry can show a man where he should stand. (Winch 1968: 25)

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[14] See also Christensen 2011: 798.

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