



## Article

# Spinoza and Enlightened Pleasures

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**Abstract:** Spinoza recognizes that worldly pleasures are not contrary to the life of the philosophical sage, but such pursuits must be carefully directed. He distinguishes between a joy that affects only some parts of the body (*titillatio*) and joy that extends through the body as a whole (*hilaritas* or “cheerfulness”). Titillation can be excessive, since it can blind us to our other needs. But cheerfulness cannot be excessive, since the whole body is improved at once. In his account of cheerfulness, Spinoza can be understood to be describing the life of a *liefhebber*, which is the Dutch term for a connoisseur, or an enlightened and discriminating consumer of worldly pleasures. It is a strikingly appropriate discussion given his own historical context, in which the Dutch culture found itself suddenly in possession of delights from around the world. This paper will explore Spinoza’s account of pleasure and cheerfulness in its context, with reference to other authors who were wrestling with the problem of finding the appropriate place for worldly pleasures in a culture of broadly Calvinist sympathies.

**Keywords:** Spinoza; Dutch Golden Age; Calvinism; Jacob Cats; pleasures

## 1. Introduction

In the first twenty propositions of part five of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that we can attain some measure of dominance over wayward passions by dissociating those passions from external causes and transmuting what remains into active ideas relating to the mind’s knowledge of God. Our passions originate from things external to us (like a bouquet of flowers or the praise of a stranger) or at least from things that lie outside our own essence (like a tumor or an itch). Thus, we are initially passive recipients of them, and there is little or nothing in them that conveys to us any sense of our own autonomous powers. But a careful understanding of them, which might involve an examination of our psychology and physiology, as well as the natures of those things affecting us, can transform our passive encounters into active conceptions that are constructed from our minds’ own notions and principles of understanding. In this way, a chance encounter is converted into an expression of our own powers of understanding. Exercising those powers brings us joy, and to the extent our understanding is grounded in the necessity of the one substance, or God, we experience the love of God. Over time, the steady force of this love overpowers whatever force lies within our passions, and so we attain some measure of power over the passions; this is one variety of Spinozistic freedom.

The account that Spinoza gives can also be read as one of several attempts to maintain a cultural identity during the tumultuous expansion of economic and cultural power experienced by the Dutch Republic over Spinoza’s lifetime. Once the Republic formed after various provinces freed themselves from Spanish occupation, the Dutch embarked upon a remarkably successful campaign of world trade and colonization, which meant that a vast array of foods, spices, plants, animals, materials, and new knowledges of nature and world cultures flowed back into the Netherlands, like a great barrage of passions confronting the new state. The Dutch had their own cultural identity, of course, grounded, to some extent, in Calvinist theologies, and one challenge they faced was to transform their newfound material wealth and influence into extensions of their own culture and into some recognizably pious mode of life: in short, a dependably Dutch cosmopolitanism. The task,



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as with Spinoza's account of freedom, was to maintain an autonomous identity while being washed over by great waves of imports and profits. The challenge Spinoza describes at the level of an individual was the very same challenge that his broader economic and cultural context was experiencing (Rosenthal 2014).

We can see the challenge of maintaining cultural autonomy in the case of a minor dispute occurring in the life of Johannes Casearius, the student Spinoza mentions in Letter 9 (1663) (Spinoza 1985). Casearius lived in the same house as Spinoza in Rijnsburg, and Spinoza was teaching him the principles of Descartes's philosophy while Casearius studied theology at Leiden. But Spinoza was wary of teaching his own philosophy to Casearius: "No one is more troublesome [*magis odiosus*] to me, and there is no one with whom I have to be more on my guard. . . . He is still too childish and unstable, more anxious for novelty than for truth" (Spinoza 1985). (Casearius would have been about 21 years old when this was written.) Casearius gained his theology degree, but he was unable to secure a decent job, and so he signed on with the Dutch East India Company (VOC). He arrived in Cochin, on the southwestern coast of India, in 1669, and soon began working with Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, who was at work compiling a massive account of the botany of the Malabar coast (the greatly influential *Hortus Malabaricus*, published in Amsterdam over 1678–93). Van Reede, Casearius, and a Catholic friar they came across named "Matthew of Saint Joseph" all shared an open attitude toward various faith traditions, including those they encountered as they worked in close relation with local experts to understand the flora and fauna of the Indian coast. Conflict eventually ensued with other VOC representatives, who complained of the trio's overly liberal opinions and behavior. Friar Matthew was eventually compelled to go his own way, and both Van Reede and Casearius were ordered to move to Batavia, the Dutch capital in Indonesia. Casearius died there shortly after his arrival in 1677 (the same year as Spinoza's death). This dispute among VOC personnel, seen in a general way, was over how to maintain Dutch identity while in foreign lands, with the resulting judgment that Van Reede and Casearius were not serving as good representatives of the VOC. They were guilty of being insufficiently Dutch while in Asia.

But there was the corresponding problem back home of being insufficiently Dutch while in the Dutch Republic, as the avalanche of foreign goods reshaped the cultural landscape. As tons of spices, animals, plants, and other treasures were unloaded from VOC ships, the population had to determine how a proper Dutch person (and to some extent, this meant a proper Dutch Calvinist) should receive them (Cook 2008). But Calvinism was not the only mode of reception available to the citizens of the republic. There was a surprising array of strategies for integrating worldly pleasures into the well-led life, ranging from Calvinism to (as we shall see) Spinoza's own eager embrace of the diverse pleasures of the world. In this essay, I will briefly sketch three examples of thoughtful approaches to pleasure: a somewhat blunt and repressive attitude, represented in the early 16th century by Calvinism and Erasmus (Section 2); a restrictive but more sensitive approach to the conflict of pleasures within the self, as presented by Jacob Cats in his morality poem, *Self-Conflict*, published in 1620 (Section 3); and a more tolerant and rationalistic approach to earthly pleasures developed by Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert in his text *Ethics or the Art of Living Well* (first published in 1586) (Section 4). My objective is to provide a richer backdrop for Spinoza's own approach to worldly pleasures in parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethics*. I will argue that, when seen against this backdrop, Spinoza's approach borders on *libertinism*, subject only to the constraint that we keep our pleasures well-distributed throughout the body. In retrospect, we can see Spinoza's attitude as being in perfect accordance with the growth of the global Dutch empire and its steady movement in the direction of enlightenment values and cosmopolitanism (Section 5).

## 2. Calvin and Erasmus

Traditionally, of course, Calvinism recommends against the active pursuit of worldly pleasures, honors, and accomplishment. Calvin writes in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) that human beings have "a frenzied desire, an infinite eagerness, to pursue

wealth and honor, intrigue for power, accumulate riches, and collect all those frivolities which seem conducive to luxury and splendour" (Calvin 1845). This drive is coupled with "a remarkable dread, a remarkable hatred of poverty, mean birth, and humble condition". Therefore, driven by such frenzy and hatred, humans "must not long for, or hope for, or think of any kind of prosperity apart from the blessing of God; on it they must cast themselves, and there safely and confidently recline". But what if worldly goods are thrust upon us, independently of our strivings? Calvin observes that God might well arrange for members of the elect "to acquire some degree of fame and opulence"; but, unlike the wicked, devout people will recognize these delights as mere signals of divine blessing, and only then will "true happiness" ensue. Thus, it appears one must learn the proper way in which to regard these blessings and find a way to live with them; after all, "men ought not desire what adds to their misery" (Calvin 1845).

Calvin's reluctant embrace of worldly pleasures had been expressed earlier by Erasmus, whose 1501 *Enchiridion militis Christiani* ("Handbook of the Christian Soldier") was a popular handbook for Christians seeking moral guidance. One might expect an entertaining treatise from the author of *In Praise of Folly*, but the *Enchiridion* reads instead as a lengthy, droning sermon against all temptations of the flesh, and in the end, Erasmus is even more distrustful of worldly pleasure than Calvin was. He invokes the apostle Paul in shunning all desires of the flesh: "Walk (saith Paul) in the spirit, and ye shall not accomplish the desires and lusts of the flesh, for the flesh desireth contrary to the spirit, and the spirit contrary to the flesh, that ye cannot do whatsoever things ye would". If worldly treasures do, nevertheless, come your way, he writes further, you should follow Crates of Thebes in "flinging thy grievous and cumbrous pack into the sea, rather than it should hold thee back from Christ", as one cannot possess both riches and virtue together. Erasmus is unyielding in his conclusion that worldly pleasures are to be shunned in favor of pious renunciation (Erasmus 1905).

But, though these texts of Calvin and Erasmus cast long shadows into the 17th century, the enormous shifts in trade and culture rendered their advice mostly irrelevant. The rising tide of foreign trade lifted all boats in the Dutch economy, it seems, as wages and purchasing power grew steadily over the course of the 17th century (Israel 1995). From the lower middle class on up, Dutch society availed themselves of spices and exotic species of plants, which were cultivated with great enthusiasm for the sake of medicine, for the sake of curiosity, and also for the sake of "growing and showing"—a thoroughly un-Calvinistic desire to cause envy in others. Prime real estate in Amsterdam and Leiden was dedicated to greenhouses and gardens, and Dutch naturalists of both the academic and the hobbyist varieties became adept at growing tropical species even in the frozen winters of the northern latitudes (Cook 2008). The most famous Dutch botanical enthusiasm, the tulip craze, began with connoisseurs and scholars, but growers soon became professionals, and before long, broad segments of the population were enthusiastically speculating and investing in bulbs (Schama 1987).

So, by and large, the Dutch did not allow Calvinist scruples to get in the way of enjoying this bounty. As Simon Schama observes, "Calvinist sermons do not seem to have prevented them from spending freely on decorating their bodies with fine clothes and jewels and their houses with fine art and furnishings" (Schama 1987). Nor does Schama find much evidence for the Weberian thesis that a Protestant ethic compelled the Dutch to build up personal savings: "For all the pungency of the polemics against worldliness and luxury, there seems to be no reason to assume that the "core" groups of Dutch society, from the patriciate at the top to skilled artisans and tradesmen at the bottom, showed any special propensity to avoid consumption in favor of savings and investment" (Schama 1987). Calvinist hand-wringing among these groups was mostly epiphenomenal. But, for those with philosophical inclinations, there remained the problem of bringing the newfound pleasures of wealth into intellectual focus against a background of Calvinist or Erasmian renunciation.

### 3. Jacob Cats

Advice for maintaining one's virtue while being tempted by pleasures of the flesh was offered in many treatises, plays, and poems of the 17th century. But such advice was often found also in *emblem books*, which were compilations of allegorical engravings accompanied by poetic bits of advice alongside passages from scripture and ancient authors. These emblem books served as primers on moral virtues, with memorable images employed as teaching devices for readers of varying literacy (Roberts and Groenendijk 2004). The most prominent author of emblem books, Jacob Cats, also composed a lengthy poem, *Selfstryt*, based on the short passage in Genesis 39 in which Joseph is the target of the lust of Potiphar's wife, to whom Cats gives the name "Sephya" (Cats 1680). In *Selfstryt*, Sephya represents not only sexual lust but also the more general lust for worldly pleasures. The accompanying illustrations in the book do not picture the events of the story but rather festive dancers and luxurious dinners. Cats' depiction of Joseph's steadfast refusal of Sephya's temptations presumably reflects what he thinks everyone's attitude should be toward worldly pleasures.

Sephya employs endless strategies to get Joseph into bed with her. She advertises her extreme desirability and promises carnal delight; she complains of her husband's neglect; she reminds Joseph that he is her slave, after all, and she owns him and can command anything of him; she points out that Abraham and Jacob themselves had both wives and mistresses and retained God's favor; and that God has given us the pleasures of the world to enjoy, and we are only young once; and so on, for dozens of pages. Joseph is resolute in his refusals, answering each one of her arguments, and at one point, enjoins her as follows:

Come, Madam, then, your young affections yield  
To Heavenly things; let them no more be fill'd  
With earthly trash, but thence withdraw your love,  
And henceforth fix it upon things above;  
Where no remorse for sin nor pain doth dwell,  
But lasting joys, which these do far excel; [. . .]  
Since here we must the lust of flesh oppose,  
Or that felicity for ever loose;  
Let us that lust with angry zeal controul, [. . .]  
When in us things of God we overlay,  
Our minds it strengthens, and drives sin away. (Cats 1680)

Joseph here recommends replacing immediate and short-lived joys of the flesh with the greater and more spiritual joys relating to God. In Sephya's growing frustration, she eventually threatens Joseph with torture if he refuses, torture even worse, she says, than what her husband will impose if they are caught together. Joseph has the chance to reflect on his poor circumstances, to pray, and to gather strength for when Sephya forces her will upon him, as she inevitably will:

How strange a thing am I? what can express  
My composition in an Emblems dress?  
Half I am Beast, half Man; half black, half white;  
Deform'd and comely; and half wrong, half right.  
What dost thou do, my Soul? with suppliant knee  
Go seek thy God, in this thy strait go flee  
To him for help, thou know'st him great and strong,  
And so for those that unto him belong.  
He is the Lord of Battle, and will be  
Thy Conquest; make thou him thy victory. (Cats 1680)

The poem ends not long after this passage, but we know from Genesis how the story ends: Joseph tries to escape, but Sephyra ends up with his cloak, and she manages to convince the household and her husband that Joseph had tried to force himself upon her. The work closes with a concluding “dairy emblem” that compares the human soul to a butter churn:

The Vessel here is *Man*, therein the Broyl  
Presents the *War* ‘twixt thoughts both good and vile.  
The Cream’s the *Spirit*; Whay doth *Lust* intend.  
With restless spight each other these offend.  
Awake, dull Saint, learn what’s within thy heart:  
The Spirit’s not alone, nor th’flesh apart:  
Their powers are mixed, as together grown;  
Both in thee are as interwove in one. (Cats 1680)

Given our churning nature, our only hope is that God will give our spirit the strength to rise like cream above the lustful temptations of the flesh. The advice that Cats imparts through Joseph is that we find ways to “overlay” our natural desires with godly desires (“When in us things of God we overlay/Our minds it strengthens, and drives sin away”). It is a matter then of finding within our decidedly mixed temperament (beast/man, white/black, etc.) the elements of divine spirit and strengthening them or, through prayer, to seek God’s help in strengthening them, so that self-conflict is overcome and virtue prevails.

In the end, Cats issues the same advice as does Calvin or Erasmus: to turn away from the flesh and toward pious virtues. But his lengthy accounts of Sephyra’s temptations, and of the struggle within Joseph’s own person, reveal a much deeper and lively engagement with worldly pleasures. There can be no doubt that the broad appeal of Cats’ poem lies in the voluptuous advances of Sephyra, and the readers’ imaginative placement of themselves in Joseph’s circumstance. The poem inspires an enticing fantasy, which is at the same time excused and forgiven through Joseph’s steadfast refusals. We can take earthly delight in our own seduction, while remaining confident of our own virtue. And this state of affairs is exactly what the citizens of the golden age were looking for.

#### 4. Coornhert’s *Ethics*

This model of the human being as a well-churned mix of flesh and spirit had been developed earlier in a very popular work by Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert entitled *Ethics or the Art of Living Well* (1586), the first European ethical treatise published in a vernacular language. Coornhert was an early advocate for religious toleration and pluralism, living under the protection of William the Silent for many years. Coornhert rejected Calvinist fatalism and believed that individuals have the power and freedom to manage their passions with the aim of living a good life. It is through reason, Coornhert argues, that we can identify our natural desires and subsequently distinguish the varieties that prompt us toward good lives from those that are rooted in ignorance. Desire in general is our striving to obtain something we imagine as good, but our knowledge is often uncertain. When we have certain knowledge of our good, then desire transforms into love, which always attaches to an appropriate object. But when desire, because of our ignorance, is attached to an object that will only harm us, it is transformed into lust. Knowledge, according to Coornhert, is a power of our soul that derives from God, “like a starlet from the Divine Sun” (Coornhert 2015). Therefore, we have the divine means within our hearts to discover our true good, to direct our desires accordingly, and to resist the temptations of the flesh.

In his account of our knowledge of good and evil, Coornhert distinguishes between the passive and active aspects of intelligence. The passive component gathers information, and the active one conducts targeted investigations and issues judgment. “This is the real nature of rational man’s noble acumen,” Coornhert writes, and continues as follows:



With it he examines, finds and knows on his own, without anyone's instruction, things that were hidden from him before. It is the task of intelligence to examine what is truth and what is falsehood. But reason finds out what is good or evil.

And this reason is itself an intelligent and active force. Still, it appears to work somewhat differently from the active force of intelligence. For whereas the intelligence focuses the mind's eye on a few things, reason sees many things simultaneously. For reason [sees] virtue and sin, benefit and harmfulness, enjoyment and sorrow, pleasure and misery, weighing these things, more or less, one against the other. (Coornhert 2015)

In this way, Coornhert philosophically distinguishes the passive and active aspects of intelligence and also distinguishes between reason and intellect and is sensitive to the distinction between facts and values. He elaborates on these distinctions later, in book two of his text, but, for our purposes, it is sufficient to note that his account clearly entails that the way to living well is lit by a rational capacity within us and that this world provides its own rewards for living well. In this way, Coornhert's *Ethics* is a very early expression of the enlightenment values Spinoza would also share.

Coornhert's account of pleasure shows a similarly enlightened attitude. He recognizes that all of the external conditions or events that come our way—what he calls “intermediate things”—can be either good or bad for us, depending on how they come to inform our lives. Health, strength, beauty, pleasure, illness, ugliness, pain, riches, power, fame, and poverty all may be good for us or bad, depending on what comes of them or what we make of them. “For anyone can easily see that these things are in themselves neither good nor bad but intermediate, being good for those using them rightly and bad for those who abuse them, or in short that they are good for the good and bad for the bad” (Coornhert 2015). Coornhert's assessment of good and bad, however, is not purely rationalistic but informed also by the moral values of Christianity—a concession he made, perhaps, to better engage with his readership and the local values.

In addition to the works of Calvin and Erasmus, Jacob Cats' emblem books and his *Self-Conflict*, and Coornhert's *Ethics*, there were many other works aiming to help the Dutch navigate their way through their radically changing world. There was Justus Lipsius's very popular neo-Stoic work *On Constancy*, in which he advocated for a moderate dampening of all passions and an acceptance of fatalism; there was Anna Maria van Shurman, and her circle of fellow Labadists, urging radical moral and religious regeneration; there was a literary society of dramatists calling itself “*Nil Voluntibus Arduum*” that hoped to bring into the Netherlands more liberal, French-style theatrical spectacles (as well as liberal French mores); and so on. Also, as Simon Schama explores in great depth, Dutch artists sought to represent many of the cultural and moral dynamics in their works (Schama 1987). Of particular note here are the representations of “fat kitchens” and “thin kitchens”, which offered alternating depictions of bounty and poverty, titillating the viewing public with visions of gluttony, poverty, envy, and fear. It is fair to say that the problem of positioning oneself properly toward worldly pleasures weighed heavily on the minds of the producers of culture in this age of tulips, warships, Rembrandt, and Calvin.

## 5. Spinoza's Libertinism

We can now turn back to Spinoza and perhaps have a better sense of his position in this landscape. To begin, let us make the obvious point that Spinoza was no sort of Calvinist. It is hard to map anything in Calvin's treatment of worldly pleasures onto Spinoza's philosophy, other than perhaps a general warning not to lose oneself in them and a general recognition that success comes from God (as do all things, Spinoza would add). Spinoza endorses worldly pleasures simply for the sake of the joy and strength they bring us, as this passage from part 4 of the *Ethics* illustrates:

It is the part of the wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with

decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to one another. For the human Body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole Body may be equally capable of all the things which follow from its nature, and hence, so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things. (Spinoza 1985)

One finds here a portrait of the golden age drawn in miniature. The food, drink, scents, and plants are all newfound pleasures among the Dutch, as the spices, wine, and exotic species of plants enter into the culture through foreign trade. Music, sports, and theater, as well as works of art, which Spinoza curiously does not mention, are endeavors where the new influences are assimilated into tradition. ("Sports" here is Curley's translation of "*ludis exercitatoris*" or games involving exercise). The wise person enjoys these things because they are refreshing and restorative, and they nourish a varied set of bodily natures and prepare the mind for new ideas. Music, theater, and art are especially conducive to the mind's capacity to understand new things, though arguably all of the exotic materials arriving from around the world work to broaden the mind's horizons. Obviously, there is no inclination for Spinoza to see them as voluntary gifts of providence or rewards for living piously; the new and strange things make us happy and strengthen us, and that is their value.

It is interesting to note that this passage reflecting the bounty of the golden age is a scholium to a proposition claiming that "Hate can never be good" (Spinoza 1985). Spinoza restricts his discussion to the hatred we can feel for one another and argues that such hatred leads only to harming others and weakening our communities; and Spinoza does not shy away from calling this consequence "evil", on his understanding of the term. Not even a deity, he claims, will take pleasure in another's sorrow or misfortune or smile upon our tears. Therefore, it should be our part to take pleasure in things as far as possible, stopping just short of the point at which we feel disgust for them. His doctrine is a strong rejection of Calvinism and its insistence that we are never worthy of happiness, that we always merit hatred because of our sinful nature, and that we can bear good fortune only by reminding ourselves continually that it is not anything to which we are entitled. Pleasures, according to Spinoza, should be consumed without any degree of self-hatred (Indeed, we are, in a sense, mandated by God to pursue them, to the extent that our *conatus* is understood to follow from God's own essence).

Nevertheless, Spinoza does recognize that the pursuit of pleasure must be carefully managed. He distinguishes between joy (*laetitia*) and cheerfulness (*hilaritas*). Joy is the more general term for "that passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection" (3p11s). When joy is related to the mind and the body "at once", Spinoza calls it "Pleasure or Cheerfulness". Thus, we might initially think that pleasure or cheerfulness are bound up with the body and worldly pleasures, and joy more generally includes not only those pleasures but also any pleasures that affect the mind alone, without relation to the body. But there is a further distinction to be made. In part 4, Spinoza explains that pleasure is when one or several parts of the body are affected more than the others; cheerfulness, on the other hand, is when all parts of the body are equally affected. Pleasure can be excessive, since its power "can be so great that it surpasses the other actions of the Body, and so prevents the Body from being capable of being affected in a great many ways. Hence (by P38) it can be evil" (Spinoza 1985). In other words, excessive physical pleasures can blind us to our other needs. But cheerfulness cannot be excessive, since the whole body is improved at once, and its power of acting is strengthened while all its parts maintain the same arrangement of motion and rest to one another. Just three propositions later, we find the passage about refreshing ourselves with pleasant food, drink, scents, plants, etc., which illustrates the more balanced and more equitably distributed bodily joy, and hence, the way to attain cheerfulness as opposed to mere pleasure.

Spinoza is describing here the life of a *liefhebber*, which is the Dutch term for a connoisseur, or an enlightened and discriminating consumer of worldly pleasures. Harold Cook

compares the term to the Italian *virtuoso* and the French *amateur*, as they all suggest a deep connection between inner virtue and an appropriate love of material goods:

Such people spoke about how precious objects [created by artists and craftsman] were exemplifications of the best part of the human spirit or God's creation, feeling themselves uplifted by them. As patrons and collectors, they had the ability to identify and to bring forth enduring examples of the good and the beautiful despite human sin and mortality. (Cook 2002)

The notion of the *liefhebber* marked the Dutch transition from a parochial culture to a culture informed by the world. It names the enlightened person of means who is able to maintain a healthy and virtuous character while partaking in the great many joys of the world. Spinoza, with his background as a merchant and of course his daily experience in urban environments, saw life as the *liefhebber* as the life of the wise person: "This plan of living, then, agrees best both with our principles and with common practice. Therefore, if a way of life is to be commended, this one is best, and to be commended in every way" (Spinoza 1985).

In the first half of part 5 of the *Ethics*, the task is to turn this cheerfulness toward the intellectual love of God, so far as possible. Obviously, this does not require adopting an attitude of pious gratitude but rather gaining an intellectual understanding of the cheerfulness we experience and its place in the metaphysical structure that is God. In this process, the experience of cheerfulness is crucial. As we have seen, simple bodily pleasures can be excessive and drown out the other needs of our nature. But a well-distributed cheer, which is the development of the body's strength as a whole, results in a stronger affect: "The more an affect arises from a number of causes concurring together, the greater it is" (Spinoza 1985). However, the strength of this bodily cheerfulness will not lead to any sort of slavish devotion to the objects of our joy; being a true *liefhebber* will not addict us to worldly joys in the way that a simple bodily pleasure might monopolize our attention and our efforts. This is because the joy experienced in cheerfulness is so well distributed and cannot be attached to a singular cause:

If an affect is related to more and different causes which the Mind considers together with the affect itself, it is less harmful, we are less acted on by it, and we are affected less toward each cause, than is the case with another, equally great affect, which is related only to one cause, or fewer causes. (Spinoza 1985)

So, the general affect of cheerfulness may be considered as the optimal emotional background condition for our mental lives; a general sense of strength and cheer that enables us to turn our attention to matters as reason dictates and not as the passions command. The great benefit of the life of a *liefhebber*, in its ideal form, at least, is that one is free not only from material want but also from any sort of slavish devotion to a particular kind of pleasure or enthusiasm.

To keep our joys in proper balance, Spinoza recommends that we adopt "a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life" (Spinoza 1985). By adopting Spinoza's sure maxims of life, we learn to repay hatred with love, to mitigate and lessen our anger, to overcome fear with tenacity, and so on, and we consequently gain freedom from the particular sorrows and enthusiasms of the world and are able to direct our lives in accordance with reason:

One, therefore, who is anxious to moderate his affects and appetites from the love of Freedom alone will strive, as far as he can, to come to know the virtues and their causes, and to fill his mind with the gladness [*gaudium*] which arises from the true knowledge of them, but not at all to consider mens' vices, or to disparage men, or to enjoy a false appearance of freedom. And he who will observe these [rules] carefully—for they are not difficult—and practice them, will soon be able to direct most of his actions according to the command of reason. (Spinoza 1985)



Living under the command of reason is freedom, according to Spinoza, and so it would seem that the highest human freedom requires a steady supply of cheerfulness, not a stoic distancing of the self from worldly pleasures, and still less a Calvinist censuring of them. Spinoza's attitude toward worldly pleasures, and their implications for freedom, might even be characterized as *libertine*, tempered only by the good taste of the enlightened *liefhebber*.

It is not surprising that Spinoza's response to the problem of maintaining Dutch identity amid the treasures of the golden age would be to embrace enlightenment values and the republican value of toleration (Israel 2001). Individuals should pursue worldly pleasures, leading to an overall health of the body; and similarly, a republic consisting of several different provinces and many different citizens should also pursue varied pleasures and allow open markets and free trade, so as to cultivate the same health and strength in the state. A true republic is built upon the diversity of its citizens, insisting on conformity only when it comes to the mechanisms used to adjudicate conflicts among them. Citizens must adopt a broad attitude of toleration for one another's pleasurable pursuits. To return to our earlier example, had the representatives of the VOC granted greater latitude for Casearius and van Reede to explore the religious and cultural ideas of Malabar coast—and, had Casearius and van Reede themselves refrained from deriding their fellow Dutchmen's Calvinist values—then, the entire episode would have been an expression of proper Dutch republicanism along foreign shores. Instead, the conflict was only postponed through reassignment.

Pieter de la Court—a Dutch businessman, political thinker, and friend of both Johan De Witt and Spinoza—made this argument explicitly in his *Political Discourses* (1662). A healthy republic gains its strength from the diversity of the passions of its citizens, so long as any resulting conflicts can still be settled through laws and private contracts. Cook argues that De la Court was not alone in this view and that, in general, the republicans of the early modern state did not see the passions as wholly counterproductive to the task of living together peaceably but instead as a positive benefit when managed correctly (Cook 2002). The task of the government was to construct a system for allowing diverse passions to flourish, with the hope that the differences among citizens would cancel each other out, as it were, with no single pursuit of pleasure dominating the others. In other words, the proper republic represented good political cheer, in Spinoza's sense of the term, or a multitude of human passions of so many different designs and needs that no single passion could overrule the others. De la Court argued that, when one person's passions are allowed to dominate the state, a monarchy results, which resembles a body that is enslaved to a particular bodily pleasure. The pleasure is excessive and leads to the demise of the body's strength, and in the political state, the decay of the monarch's strength is transmitted to the monarch's subjects, who now live in a weakened condition. Only in a republic can citizens serve as proper checks upon one another's desires and only then can the body politic attain strength precisely through its diverse passions (Weststeijn 2010).

Spinozistic freedom, then, whether psychological or political, should not be seen as possible only when worldly pleasures are silenced or diminished. On the contrary, freedom requires the cultivation of our tastes for varied pleasure in such ways as to cause pervasive cheer. Enlightenment, in Spinoza's philosophy, is not only epistemic but aesthetic and cultural as well. Spinoza, therefore, proposed a forward-looking vision of Dutch culture that was in complete accordance with its newfound wealth in global trade.

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