

Descartes and Spinoza regard pity, benevolence, and noblemindedness in broad outline in a similar way, though the details of their analyses differ in some respects (if we may be allowed to extract some detail from Descartes' concise treatment of the subject).

✓ For Descartes, pity is a "species of sadness, mingled with love or good-will towards those whom we see suffering some evil of which we consider them undeserving" (Article 185). Given this description, we can isolate two other emotions associated with pity. Benevolence - the disposition to join to an object of love or good will "the things which we believe to be agreeable to it" - is the 'effect' of the love/good will aspect of pity (Article 81). Indignation - the hatred for the perpetrator of the unjust evil - is related to the component of pity that is the undeserved evil suffered by the recipient (Article 195). The element of sadness in pity is traceable to the ability to represent the evil that happens to others as possibly happening to oneself (Article 186).

The propensities to sadness and indignation predominate in persons most affected by pity. However, they are saddened and indignant, not in so far as the undeserved evils afflict others, but in so far as the same kinds of evils have afflicted the pitiers in the past or might afflict them in the future. Persons least affected by pity, on the other hand, either are so afflicted by evils themselves that they cannot perceive

the evils afflicting others, or are unendowed with the propensity to love or good will. (Article 188).

Now Cartesian generosity or noble-mindedness, together with the belief in Providence, enables one to master all one's passions (Article 156). For the generous man, controlling the passion of pity does not involve moderating its excess or making good its absence so as to reach some "golden mean" between the two extremes. For even a moderate amount of pity is deceptive, in the following way. Much of the suffering that others exhibit is a result of frustrated ambition; so that, far from being undeserved, the evils afflicting them they really bring upon themselves from their own infirmity of character. Much of the rest of human suffering that appears undeserved is really a part of the plan of Divine Providence, at which it would be 'temerity' to be indignant. The only really undeserved form of evil thus boils down to the injury inflicted by one person on another. However, Descartes thinks that pity even in this case would be misdirected.

How, then, does the noble-minded man master pity? In so far as he already fears no evils for himself, the generous man is not affected by the reference to self that characterizes the excessive pity of others. To be sure, the generous man is disposed to benevolence and compassion (used interchangeably with pity), simply because he "wishes well to one and all." But the kind of benevolence to which noble-minded men are

disposed remains unaffected by the deceptive agency of ordinary pity. Not misled by spurious causes of misery in his own life, the noble-minded man is able to see and to respond to the real cause of misery and suffering in others: the lack of constancy in the face of the dictates of fate. He does not pity the miserable for what they suffer, but for the fact that they suffer at all. For Descartes, both its quality and its object thus distinguish noble-minded pity from the ordinary emotion.

Spinoza's definition of pity occurs in a discussion of how one is affected by the presence of pleasure or pain in persons one loves. (III, xxi, xxii, Note). When a lover perceives pain in the beloved, the lover perceives a diminution of the beloved's ability to give pleasure; in so far as this diminution in the beloved is perceived, the lover will feel pain (III, xix). Pity is simply "pain arising from another's hurt"; and we find in the same passage that the pitier both becomes indignant at the cause of the pain in the other, and endeavors to remove this cause.

Spinoza then broadens his concept of pity by deducing a general tendency to 'imitate' emotions (III, xxvii). In so far as anyone resembling us is affected by an emotion, we are affected by a like emotion. The class of imitation-emotions derived from pain in general is denominated 'compassion'; while pity seems to be the subset of this class relating directly to the pain we perceive in anyone

resembling us. Furthermore, compassion automatically disposes us to free the affected thing from its misery: benevolence, or the "appetite for doing good," is the desire arising from compassion. Further still, benevolence can come into conflict with indignation - the hatred of the cause of pain in the other - in so far as the pitier conceives himself to resemble the hated perpetrator of the injury.

While Descartes seems to dwell on the excessive sadness and indignation associated with pity, Spinoza is worried about excessive benevolence. Since we are both affected by and disposed to remove the cause of any pain we perceive in others resembling ourselves, benevolence seems to qualify as one of the most prevalent desires in the social world qua "natural." In a sense, benevolence is the social equivalent or reflection of conatus. While for Descartes benevolence seems to be absent in persons most prone to pity, for Spinoza benevolence ranges almost as widely as ambition among men. Incidentally, the dynamics of benevolence and ambition seem to be similar though their effects differ: the benevolent try to remove everyone's pain, and the ambitious try to please everyone.

We have seen that Cartesian noblemindedness consists partly in benevolence or good will, directed not toward whatever evils are alleged to cause suffering in others, but toward the "inconstancy of character" that allows others to be affected by evil in the first place. The nobleminded

man still apparently feels pity; but its object is drastically different from that of the ordinary emotion, and the quality of the feeling is similar to that experienced at the performance of a tragedy. ✓

Though he may spend a good deal of time at the theatre, Spinoza's noble-minded man is completely unaffected by pity. Pity is a form of pain and thus is in itself bad (IV, 1); and we have seen that pity for Spinoza always leads to benevolence, whose excess resembles that of the socially troublesome ambition.

Now Spinoza, echoing Descartes, says that "he who is moved to help others neither by reason nor by compassion, is rightly styled inhuman" (IV, 1, Note). But like his Cartesian counterpart, the noble-minded Spinozist is aware of the deceptive quality of pity, and of the true causes of suffering in others. Noble-minded benevolence for both thinkers is thus directed toward a different object than that of ordinary benevolence. Since most human suffering is the result of poor-spiritedness or the unhealthy love of mean things, the noble-minded man will call the attention of the sufferer to this fact (V, x, xx, Note). In cases in which people do unjustly inflict injury on others, Spinoza leaves the punishment of the offenders and the compensation of the victims to the State. Spinoza's treatment of Religion and the State as concrete answers, respectively, to these questions would be an interesting topic for further investigation.

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