# HOW SPEAK OF ETERNITY? RHETORIC IN *ETHICS* V

'How well he's read, to reason against reading!'

(*Love's Labours Lost* I.i 94)

## [1] The Anomalies of *Ethics* V

In 'Spinoza and the Three "Ethics"', Gilles Deleuze makes a number of claims for the peculiarity of Part V of the *Ethics*: while the rest of the work oscillates stably between conceptually precise demonstrations and discursive scholia, he asserts that Part V adds something more: 'There is yet a third *Ethics* incarnated in book V', he writes[1]; it is an 'aerial book of light' distinct and set apart from everything else. Here, the geometrical method 'takes on strange powers'; its demonstrations are 'violently contracted' and 'proceed by intervals and leaps, hiatuses and contractions'.[2] What emerges in this final part is 'a new order of thought':

> The reader has the impression that the geometric method here assumes a strange and wild demeanour, which could almost make one believe that that book V was only a provisional version, a rough sketch: the propositions and demonstrations are traversed by such violent hiatuses, and include so many ellipses and contractions, that the syllogisms seem to be replaced by simple 'enthymemes'. And the more one reads book V, the more one realises that these features are neither imperfections in the working out of the method nor shortcuts, but are perfectly adapted to essences insofar as they surpass any order of discursivity or deduction.[3]

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[1] G. Deleuze, 'Spinoza and the Three "Ethics",' in W. Montag and T. Stolze (eds), *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 30.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] Ibid.

To summarise crudely, Part V sounds odd. It has a different tone and different language; its method is unsettling. What is at stake in Part V of the *Ethics* is a Deleuzian event, a radically new redistribution of sense on the textual surface.

Other critics have concurred with this sense of oddness in Part V, at least from VP21 onwards. Lord, for example, speaks of Spinoza's writing in these final propositions as 'strange and incoherent'.[4] It is important to bear in mind, though, that this is not to say with Allison that Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind is 'highly obscure'[5] or, with Bennett, that it is 'rubbish which causes others to write rubbish'[6]; rather, it is to draw attention to the peculiar way in which Spinoza goes about discussing these doctrines. My aim in this essay is to investigate these stylistic idiosyncrasies by focusing on the experience *of the reader* encountering Part V. That is, many of the scholarly dismissals of Part V of the *Ethics* tend, quite naturally, to neglect the status of the claims therein as words on the page; what is missed is the rhetorical effect of Spinoza's language on a reader approaching the end of the book. Surprise, puzzlement, even discomfort are, I will argue, constituent elements of the proper reading experience of the final pages of the *Ethics*. And indeed, there can hardly be a reader who does not experience some hermeneutic anxiety upon encountering a God who loves, rejoices and glories in a relatively traditional manner after the iconoclastic dismantling of the traditional attributes of God in Parts I to IV. This essay will suggest that such anxiety is intentionally provoked, for it emerges out of a reflective attitude towards the text and its choice of language, and such reflection on language is a means of 'rhetorical therapy' that makes the communication of adequate ideas possible.

I will examine, first, what is going on in Part V for it to be seen as such a peculiar conclusion to the *Ethics*, and, secondly, whether there are good philosophical reasons for such

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[4] B. Lord, *Spinoza's* Ethics (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 153.
[5] H. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 166.
[6] J. Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's* Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 374.

peculiarity. I begin by locating three particular rhetorical peculiarities in Part V following Matheron and Suhamy. I then use such an analysis to think further about Spinoza's attitude to language in general; in particular, I am interested in the metaphilosophical significance of this philosophy of language, what it means for the ability of the philosophical text to be able to communicate adequately. David Savan is particular pessimistic about this ability in 'Spinoza and Language'; however, I argue that thinking through the idea of linguistic signs as affects allows one to posit the existence of a rhetorical therapy in parallel to the affective therapy Spinoza describes in Propositions 1 to 20 of Part V.[7]

## [1.1] 'Dei Natura Gaudet...'

A good place to begin when it comes to considering the oddness of *Ethics* V is VP35D: 'God is absolutely infinite, that is the nature of God enjoys infinite perfection [*Dei natura gaudet infinita perfectio*], accompanied by the idea of himself.'[8] Spinoza's use of the verb *gaudere* here is strikingly problematic as a way of describing something God does. It is problematic, first, since, according to VP17, strictly-speaking God 'is not affected with any affect of joy or sadness' and, secondly and more specifically, in IIIP18S2 Spinoza had defined *gaudium* as follows, 'Gladness [*gaudium*] is a joy which has arisen from the image of a past thing whose outcome we doubted'. *Gaudium* implies that God can doubt or that he might be wrong or that he is subject to the passing of time in order to increase his knowledge; it even implies that

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[7] Attention to the rhetoric of Spinoza's writings is long-standing in relation to the *TTP* (see L. Bove, 'La théorie de langage chez Spinoza,' *L'Enseignement philosophique* 4 (1991); S. Frankel, 'Politics and Rhetoric: The Intended Audience of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*', *Review of Metaphysics* 52.4 (1999)), but research on Spinoza's writerly practices in the *Ethics* has also recently gained ground: see C. Hervet, *De l'imagination à l'entendement: La puissance du langage chez Spinoza* (Paris: Garnier, 2012); M. Laerke, 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52.3 (2014); C.B. Long, 'The Rhetoric of the Geometrical Method: Spinoza's Double Strategy,' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34 (2001); Chapter One of R. Gangle, *Diagrammatic Immanence: Category Theory and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). The question of *reading* the *Ethics* remains relatively unexplored, however. This focus to supplement my earlier article: D. Whistler, 'Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the "Spinoza Effect",' *Speculations* 3 (2012). While the latter focused on (what I there name) the 'centrifugal force' of language in Spinoza's *Ethics*, through which names proliferate, this essay concerns its 'centripetal' brake: the constraints on sense Spinoza institutes.

[8] B. Spinoza, *Ethics* in *Collected Works* vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), VP35D. Henceforth, all citations of the *Ethics* will be made in the main text in this form.

God can be surprised at false expectations. Far more than many other affects, then, *gaudium* seems an inappropriate predicate for God (or even for 'the nature of God'). Indeed, Spinoza's comments in Part IV add to the feeling that something is not right here: 'Confidence and despair, gladness [*gaudium*] and remorse are signs of a mind lacking in power. For though confidence and gladness are affects of joy, they still presuppose that a sadness has preceded them.' (IVP47S) Spinoza continues, 'the more we strive to live according to the guidance of reason', the more we will avoid the affect of gladness. Perfect rationality is irreconcilable with *gaudium*; to predicate this affect of God, as Spinoza does in VP35D, is therefore odd, to say the very least.

It is for such reasons that in *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* Matheron writes, 'The word *gaudet* is evidently improper, if—at the very least—one remembers the definition of the word *gaudium* in IIIP18S2. But how speak of eternity?'[9] Matheron seems to imply in this concluding question that the impropriety of *gaudet* in VP35 is a consequence of Spinoza's subject-matter therein: once he starts talking of salvation, of eternity and of the life of the mind 'without relation to the body' (VP20S), his language *has to* become improper.

[1.2] Suhamy's 'Surprising Expresssions'

Ariel Suhamy has returned to Matheron's question, 'How speak of eternity?', to expand on the various linguistic improprieties found in and around Spinoza's discussion of eternity in *Ethics* V. His argument therefore contributes to my cumulative case for the peculiarity of sense to be found therein; indeed, the very first words of Suhamy's article make the following claim, 'The language of Part V breaks with the rigour of the previous parts.'[10] There are, in general, three types of rhetorical peculiarity—or 'surprising expression'[11]—he points to.

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[9] A. Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 592.

[10] A. Suhamy, 'Comment parler de l'éternité? Les joies de la Ve partie de l'*Éthique*', *Études philosophiques* 2 (1997), 201.

[11] Ibid., 202.

First, Spinoza's use of metaphor. According to Suhamy, VP23S employs the only metaphor in the entire *Ethics*:

> Though it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body... still, we feel and know by experience that we are eternal. For the mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves.

Throughout the Scholium as a whole, Spinoza has struggled to articulate his point; the laboured comparison with recollection in the passage above testifies to this. The structure of Spinoza's guiding thought could be crudely paraphrased: although the experience of eternity is not like recollection, it is in fact rather like recollection. Moreover, the sudden and unexpected shift to a metaphorical register ('the eyes of the mind') forms part of this very struggle: it seems very plausible to suggest that it is only because Spinoza has here entered upon the difficult terrain of 'speaking of eternity' that he makes recourse to the image of 'the eyes of the mind'.

Second, Suhamy points to Spinoza's insistence on the fictionality of his talk of 'coming to know of the mind's eternity'. VP31S and VP33S are the two key passages:

> It should be noted that although we are already certain that the mind is eternal... nevertheless, for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show, we shall consider it as if it were now beginning to be, and were now beginning to understand things under a species of eternity.

> Although this love toward God has had no beginning, it still has all the perfections of

love, just as if it had come to be (as we have feigned). There is no difference here, except that the mind has had eternally the same perfections which, in our fiction, now come to it.

These are of course very important passages for the metaphysics of Part V and the role of fictions in them has been stressed repeatedly by those who see the first kind of knowledge as constructive[12]; all that matters for the present, though, is the failure to speak of eternity in an adequate and direct manner, of which such recourse to fictions is a symptom. When it comes to speaking of eternity, Spinoza certainly does talk in a more faltering voice.

Finally, Suhamy returns to the use of inappropriate affects to describe God and the mind (insofar as it is eternal). There is, as we have seen, Spinoza's problematic predication of *gaudium* to God in VP35, but VP36S also reads as a litany of improprieties:

Our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in a constant and eternal love of God or in God's love for men. And this love, or blessedness, is called glory... For whether this love is related to God or the mind, it can rightly be called satisfaction of mind... For insofar as it is related to God, it is joy (if I may still be permitted to use this term), accompanied by the idea of himself.

For Spinoza to speak of 'God's love for men' just a few propositions after he had concluded that 'strictly speaking God loves no one' (VP17C) is 'manifestly improper', in Suhamy's words.[13] While the use of such terms has been explained away as accommodation to the religiously orthodox of his age[14], these explanations merely underline how inappropriate Spinoza's use of 'love' must be as a means of communicating his *vera philosophia*.

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[12] See, for example, M. Gatens and G. Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 1999), 38-9.

[13] Suhamy, 'Comment parler de l'éternité?', 202.

[14] See, for example, Allison, *Spinoza*, 173-4.

Moreover, the same is true of ascribing joy to the mind insofar as it is eternal, and Spinoza is not afraid of hiding his embarrassment here; hence the caveat, 'if I may still be permitted to use this term'. This metaphilosophical aside acknowledges the problematic language being deployed: Spinoza admits that he cannot quite hit on a precise, adequate and direct way of speaking of eternity. Joy signals an increase in power; however, there are no increases or decreases in power when it comes to eternity.

For Suhamy, these 'surprising expressions' all attempt to describe eternity in terms of temporal figures. Hence, the metaphor of 'the eyes of the mind' occurs precisely when Spinoza 'establishes an analogy between intellectual feeling and feeling for the past'[15]: the mind insofar as it is eternal is directly compared to the mind insofar as it is temporal. VP31S and VP33S, in Suhamy's words, 'deliberately forge the fiction of a beginning of eternity in time for pedagogical reasons.'[16] What is more, the improper deployments of *gaudium*, *laetitia* and *amor* are again examples of affects defined in terms of time transposed onto the plane of eternity. For Suhamy, this is evidence of a 'rapprochement' between temporal and eternal concerns, a narrowing of the divide between them through rhetoric.[17]

What Matheron and Suhamy help identify, then, are three peculiar uses of language in *Ethics* V that substantiate, to some extent, Deleuze's claims for the oddness of these final pages. Metaphor, fictions and improper terms illustrate the strange rhetoric of Part V. They do not seem to be found in the previous four parts; rather, it is when Spinoza comes to speak of eternity that language must be used differently. It is therefore now a question of *why* precisely Spinoza employs language in this peculiar way in Part V.[18]

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[15] Suhamy, 'Comment parler de l'éternité?', 201.
[16] Ibid., 201-2.
[17] Ibid., 201.
[18] It should be emphasised at this stage that this peculiarity is relative to Spinoza's *Ethics*; the use of metaphor or fiction is not particularly surprising in the context of his other works.

**[2] The Problem of the Philosophical Text**

There are two ways of going about answering such a question: first, one could turn to the subject matter of Part V itself, particularly discussions of eternity therein, to understand why Spinoza feels necessitated to speak of eternity in such odd ways[19]; secondly, one could turn to questions surrounding the nature of language to interrogate what precisely Spinoza thinks he is doing when he uses language metaphorically or employs inappropriate terms. It is this latter path I take in this essay. That is, while these rhetorical improprieties obviously tell us much about Spinoza's difficulties in forming consistent doctrines of eternity and immortality, I contend that the stakes are even higher: they tell us something about Spinoza's writing in general, the way he goes about composing a philosophical text and how linguistic signs are at times able to communicate adequate ideas. To get at what is going on in the rhetoric of Part V, I pass by way of Spinoza's general philosophy of language, i.e. his views on what language is and its role in a philosophy-text. Moreover, my contention is that such an approach not only (partially) validates Deleuze's observations, it also (partially) contests them. What it will suggest is that these rhetorical peculiarities are not, in fact, isolated to Part V, but are to be found (admittedly, in more muted form) throughout the *Ethics* as a whole.

[2.1] Language as Affect

Words—whether spoken or written—are signs, but they do not exhaust the category of signs.[20] Indeed, they are merely 'good examples'[21] of this much larger and, ultimately, extremely vast category. Sign (or image or figure)[22] is an affect: an idea of the way our body is affected by other bodies. Moreover, thinking by means of this kind of affect is the very

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[19] This is the path Suhamy takes.
[20] In what follows, I summarise the conclusion of L. Vinciguerra, *Spinoza et le signe: La genèse de l'imagination* (Paris: Vrin, 2005). For his summary of this work in English, 'Mark, Image, Sign: A Semiotic Approach to Spinoza', *European Journal of Philosophy* 20.1 (2012).
[21] Vinciguerra, 'Mark, Image, Sign', 134.
[22] The terms 'image' and 'figure' are closely related to sign for Spinoza, and, for the purpose of this essay, I identify them.

definition of imagination, as IIP17C makes clear.[23]

Moreover, the 'internal logic' of signs is only explicable with reference to Spinoza's physics and, in particular, the fourth Postulate of *Ethics* II:

> When a fluid part of the human body is determined by an external body so that it frequently thrusts against a soft part [of the body], it changes its surface and, as it were, impresses on [the soft part] certain traces of the external body striking against [the fluid part]. (IIPostIV)

IIPostIV provides a description of the genesis of traces (or marks or *vestigia*), the physical bases of signs. The meaning of a sign is the idea of such a trace or, as Vinciguerra puts it, 'marks become signs as soon as they get interpreted.'[24] Traces are therefore constituted in the process of collision, when one body very literally leaves its mark on another—even if (according to IIP16C) this mark tells the interpreter more about the body affected than the body affecting. A key consequence is that the ability to produce and receive signs is extended to any body 'capable of impressing marks on other bodies and of being marked themselves'.[25] There is nothing particularly human about signification; rather, it is merely a matter of a partly fluid body involved in collisions.

It follows from this that human minds do not create sign-meanings; they merely interpret or, at best, modify them. In other words, human minds are not in control of signs, for signs come from outside. This is in no way *our* semiotic process, but we 'participate in the semiotic process of nature.'[26] Moreover, what matters when it comes to interpreting signs are

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[23] It reads: 'The affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things... And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.'

[24] Vinciguerra, 'Mark, Image, Sign', 136.

[25] Ibid., 135.

[26] Ibid., 136. Vinciguerra writes more fully, 'A human being cannot be said to be the substantial *subjectum* of its thoughts, but is rather subject to thoughts or ideas that traverse it; it also cannot be regarded as the exclusive *auctor* of what it imagines. We should rather think of it as... an interpreter.' (Ibid., 133.)

the habits of the interpreter. There is a minimal form of relativism here, for meanings are dependent on subjective constitution, as IIP18S makes clear:

> A soldier, having seen traces of a horse in the sand, will immediately pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a horseman and from that to the thought of war, and so on. But a farmer will pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a plough, and then to that of a field and so on. And so each one, according as he has been accustomed to join and connect the images of things in this or that way, will pass from one thought to another.

The point is that interpretation is a matter of habit: if one is accustomed to associate horses with war, then this will decisively influence one's interpretation of the sign 'horse'. To extend this line of thought further, the interpretation of a sign is a matter of previous signs and previous acts of interpretation: bodily marks, as well as the ideas of those marks, have a memory, and it is this memory which is productive of meaning. Hence, Spinoza is committed to the entirely arbitrary nature of the sign. As he insists in IIP18S, 'The thought of [an apple] has no similarity to that articulate sound [i.e. "*pomum*"] and nothing in common with it except that... the man often heard the word *pomum* while he saw the fruit.' Linguistic meaning rests on conventional past associations alone.

Signs, including linguistic signs, therefore belong definitively to the first kind of knowledge. According to the schema of IIP40S2, 'opinion or imagination' consists (in part) of knowledge 'from signs, for example, from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things and form certain ideas of them.' What is more, Spinoza is insistent that 'to knowledge of the first kind pertain all those ideas which are inadequate and confused' and that it 'is the only cause of falsity'. And from the 'example' Spinoza gives in IIP40S2 we can be sure that linguistic signs are the very model of that inadequate way of thinking. Even

more explicitly, Spinoza asserts in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* that 'words… can be the cause of many and great errors, unless we are wary of them… They are only signs of things as they are in the imagination, but not as they are in the intellect.'[27] And this is of course partly why, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza is so critical of 'superstitious veneration of the letter… adoring images and pictures, i.e. paper and ink, as the word of God.'[28]

It is also worth pointing out that the inadequacy of language seems to have formed one of the major discussion-points in Spinoza's first Amsterdam circle. It is a central theme in Jelles' extant work[29] and dominates Balling's Quaker treatise, *The Light Upon the Candlestick. The Light* begins, 'Things are not for words, but words for things', and Balling goes on to present a thoroughly negative conception of words as hindrances to understanding, plunging mankind into 'a sea of confusion'. Indeed, he remarks, 'If we would better express things unto another by words and speeches, we had need find new words and consequently a whole new language: but that would be toil and labour indeed.'[30] In fact, ultimately no such replacement language could ever be satisfactory, since language is *by nature* epistemically deficient.

There are significant issues surrounding Spinoza's theory of inadequacy at play here. For the most part, such questions lie beyond the scope of this essay; however, I note two uncontroversial features of inadequacy for the purposes of what follows. First, Spinoza often speaks of inadequacy as a form of 'mutilation', and such mutilation has two aspects: it *truncates* the idea, so that it becomes partial and insufficient, and it also *defaces* the idea, so that it is expressive in a confused, disordered manner (IIP28, IIP29, IIP35). The form of the

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[27] B. Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* in *Collected Works* vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 38. Henceforth referred to and cited in the main text as *TIE*.

[28] B. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. and trans. J. Israel and M. Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 164, 170. Henceforth referred to and cited in the main text as *TTP*.

[29] See K.O. Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle*, trans. S. Roosenburg (Paris: Vrin, 1984), 116-7.

[30] P. Balling, *The Light upon the Candlestick*; English translation in W. Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (London, 1800), 626.

idea is pared down and its content obscured. Secondly, the formation of inadequate ideas signals a lack in the subject's activity: inadequate ideas indicate passivity (IIP29S). Hence, ideas gained through language are mutilated and indicators of passivity, according to Spinoza, whereas adequate ideas (the ones to which the philosopher aspires) are absolute (IIP34) and signs of activity. This separation of sign from adequacy is ultimately why the truth requires no sign for Spinoza (*TIE* 18)[31], as well as why he claims in the *TTP* that 'something is understood when it is grasped by the mind alone without words or visions' (64).

[2.2] The Inadequacy of Philosophical Texts

If words are consigned to inadequacy, then what does it mean for the practice of philosophy? If philosophical texts are necessarily and entirely composed of linguistic signs, then they surely must possess exactly the same epistemic characteristics as those linguistic signs. Philosophy, in consequence, seems an inadequate practice. Such consideration are central to what follows, for only a metaphilosophical description of the role of language in the constitution of philosophy can account for the status of the rhetoric of *Ethics* V.

The seemingly inevitable consequence of Spinoza's philosophy of language is the view that his own philosophical texts, including the *Ethics*, inadequately express the truth. Savan (to whom I shall return) puts it thus, 'Spinoza's views on words and language make it impossible for him to hold that his writings (or anyone else's) can be a direct or literal exposition of philosophical truth.' He continues, 'So sharply does Spinoza separate words from adequate ideas that it is difficult to make out for language any useful philosophical function at all.'[32] Spinoza's philosophy takes place in a linguistic medium and is therefore to be consigned to mere inadequacy. There is no possibility of salvaging the words he uses (and

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[31] Vinciguerra interprets this claim very differently in *Spinoza et le signe*.

[32] D. Savan, 'Spinoza and Language' in S.P. Kashap (ed), *Studies in Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 239. He writes elsewhere, Spinoza's 'theory of language led him to believe that no simple, direct, precise and consistent verbal account of the true philosophy was possible.' (Ibid., 244)

so the texts he writes) from mutilation—at least according to Savan.

It is worth remembering at this point Spinoza's insistence throughout his oeuvre that knowing the truth is not enough; the philosopher must bring others to the truth as well. She must 'strive that many acquire' the supreme good alongside her (*TIE* 23). It is insufficient for Spinoza himself to understand the subject matter of the *Ethics* adequately; it is an integral part of his role as philosopher to communicate it to others (*TIE* 23-4). However, even adequate ideas become inadequate, it seems, once they are communicated through written or verbal language; so, if the *Ethics* is intended to communicate adequate ideas adequately and if it is true that all ideas are transformed into inadequate ones in the process of writing, then Spinoza's project seems to be a failure.

There seems to be a fundamental problem reconciling Spinoza's theory of language with his avowed attempt to communicate philosophical truths linguistically. At stake then is whether language does indeed consign philosophical texts to inescapable inadequacy. In the rest of this section, I want survey two inadequate responses to this problem.

(a) *The Power of the Geometrical Method*: Spinoza is the arch-representative of early modern philosophy's *esprit géométrique*, a tradition that is meant for the most part to eschew ornate style for clarity and semantic univocity. The *Ethics*' geometrical method is the form of presentation aped by philosophers who wish to efface textuality and communicate in pure thought. In this manner, a traditional reaction to my concern with Spinoza's philosophy of language runs as follows: Spinoza's deployment of the geometrical method in the *Ethics* is intended precisely to overcome these weaknesses of language I have been describing. The rigorous demonstrative power and mathematical precision of organising the text geometrically is meant in some way to ensure that adequate ideas are communicated adequately. The geometrical method

does away with the vicissitudes of hermeneutics. In other words, there must be some sense in which Spinoza deploys the geometric method to sure up the philosophical text against the weaknesses inherent in linguistic signs.[33] However, later in this essay, I will suggest that this view is not merely false, rather *the opposite is the case*: the geometrical method exacerbates the problem of philosophical language, and Spinoza himself acknowledges this. Indeed, I will argue that the rhetorical improprieties of *Ethics* V are, in part, an attempt *to save language from the dangers of the geometrical method*. One way to provisionally get at this is by means of the basic contention that the above response to the problem of philosophical language (that the geometrical method shores up the text) is blatantly false when put too crudely: the geometrical method still takes place in a linguistic medium; it is still communicated through signs—and to this extent it cannot avoid the mutilation that mars all graphic communication of ideas. Whatever else one might say, it is impossible to deny that the *Ethics* is written in language, that it uses linguistic signs to communicate the truth, and, like all forms of sign, these usually give rise to inadequate ideas.

(b) *Savan's Pessimism*: In the wake of the failure of this recourse to the geometrical method, a second response to the problem of philosophical language can be located in Savan's 'Spinoza and Language' already mentioned above. As we have seen, Savan is extremely pessimistic about the role that linguistic signs play in philosophical texts for Spinoza. He writes,

> The imaginative, general and confused character of words is, in Spinoza's view, not

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[33] Versions of this view surface in Allison, *Spinoza*, 43 and Stephen Nadler, *Spinoza's* Ethics*: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40; however, Deleuze is more flagrant both in his interpretation of Spinoza's opposition to signs in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1992), particularly Chapter 3 and Appendix) and in his contention that the *Ethics* communicates in pure concepts in 'Spinoza and the three "Ethics"' (28).

contingent or accidental. It is not the result of ignorance and cannot be eliminated by knowledge. It is rather the necessary consequence of the action of external bodies upon our body... No purgative can eliminate [it].[34]

Language is ineluctably problematic. As Savan goes on to ask (and this is indeed the very question motivating my essay), 'How then can language represent, express or formulate the clear and distinct ideas of the true philosophy?'[35] To answer this question, he goes on to identify a series of deliberate and debilitating verbal contradictions in the *Ethics*, including the use of improper terms in Part V discussed earlier. For example, Savan points out that in *Ethics* V love is 'explicitly affirmed and explicitly denied' of God[36] (as we have seen) as evidence for the fact that Spinoza 'is willing to use language which he regards as radically inadequate'[37], even if it problematizes his ability to communicate the truth adequately. Savan emphasises these 'contradictions' so as to draw attention to the *negative work* language does in the *Ethics*, flagging up the very dangers of using language, thereby directing the mind away from it. That is, philosophical language foregrounds its own inadequacy and so reminds the reader of the need to transcend it. In Savan's words, 'By recognising [this inadequacy] we may hold more firmly to the positive content of the clear ideas which are native to the intellect.'[38] He continues,

A large part of the task of the *Ethics* is to show the philosophers how many of their errors originate in... confusing the intellect with the imagination [i.e. with knowledge gained through signs]. The positive task of the *Ethics* is to show that once the

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[34] Savan, 'Spinoza and Language', 238.
[35] Ibid., 239.
[36] Ibid., 244.
[37] Ibid., 241.
[38] Ibid., 246.

limitations are recognised we can conceive of substance and its modes through their own living ideas.[39]

Language is inadequate, so the role of the philosophical text is to deploy such language to negate itself in the name of an unsayable idea. Spinoza here hovers on the brink of a mystic apophaticism.

## [3] Rhetorical Therapy

In what follows, I argue that Savan gets it fundamentally wrong[40], and he does so by focusing on what language *essentially* is, its (for him) *ineluctable* inadequacy. This is to ignore the *pragmatic* attitude Spinoza brings to signs: it is not what they are, but what one does with them that counts. Savan's radical pessimism therefore seems misplaced.

### [3.1] Language as Affect Redux

VP3 reads, 'An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.' Signs are affects, for they are ideas of affections (or *vestigia*) on the body; they are, moreover, affects which indicate passivity, increasing the proportion of inadequate ideas in the mind. In consequence, language is equally as subject to the principle introduced in VP3 as any other affect. That is, a clear and distinct idea of language transforms it from a passion into an active affect. And VP4 must also be borne in mind in this context: 'There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept.' There is no way in which language can be exempt from this universal law of affects; it too is

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[39] Ibid., 248.
[40] For another attempt to dispute Savan's account, see Laerke, 'Spinoza's Language'.

subject to affective therapy[41], alongside love, hate or fear. Therefore, the inadequacies of linguistic signs can be (at least partially) overcome to the extent that we *reflect* on language. Language no longer signals a lack of activity insofar we have knowledge of language. Again, we must apply the following Spinozan principle rigorously to language: 'The more an affect is known to us, then, the more it is in our power, and the less the mind is acted on it by it.' (VP3C) Problems with language are neutralised, once it is adequately known. These are the implications of thinking through the idea of language *as affect*.

The more general point is that once one takes seriously the fact that language is an affect, it is subject to the same therapeutic practices as all other affects. And so the taxonomy Spinoza sets out at the opening of *Ethics* V of these various therapies that increase activity holds good for language too. From this simple realisation, crucial consequences follow: Spinoza is in fact able to overcome the problem of the inadequacy of the philosophical text in a number of ways and these ways parallel the 'paths to liberation' set out in VP1-19. Therefore, the key to correcting an apophatic conception of Spinozan language is simple: to think through the consequences of language as affect. It is not what affects *are* that matters; it is what one *does* with them that counts; therefore, to call language inadequate *in itself* is to fail to take the above seriously. Savan's pessimism is misplaced because it treats language as ineluctably inadequate; yet, this would make linguistic signs unique among Spinozan affects in their inability to be transformed into an epistemic aid rather than a hindrance.

In other words, once one shifts away from considering language *as such* to considering the ways in which it can be *used*, it stops being an insuperable obstacle. Indeed, there is in Spinoza's philosophy no such thing as 'language as such', if this is taken as something fixed or determined: Spinoza is a critic of what I have elsewhere called, 'the myth of the linguistic given', the idea that language has properties fixed and determined in

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[41] The notion of 'affective therapy' is taken from P. Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza. La cinquième partie: Les voies de libération* (Paris: PUF, 1994), 49-82.

advance, which are given to us preformed.[42] What is denied by such givenness is the plasticity of language, its ability to do or be whatever one transforms it into. Another way of articulating the same point is that Spinoza's insistence on language as affect shifts discussions of language *away from linguistics to rhetoric*. If one's engagement with language is pragmatically-oriented, then a study of the ontology of language becomes redundant (at least beyond mere philosophical curiosity). On the other hand, rhetoric—the way language is deployed in order to achieve intended effects—becomes absolutely central to the Spinozan account of not only linguistic signs in general, but the composition of philosophical texts in particular. Moreover, my contention that Spinoza marginalises linguistics in the name of rhetoric is enriched when one returns to Part V and the obvious rhetorical dimension to Spinoza's use of metaphor, improper terms and discursive asides therein.

Furthermore, this Spinozan switch from linguistics to rhetoric also sheds light on the exact nature of the clear and distinct idea of language required to transform passive signs into active ones. To form an adequate idea of language is not so much a matter of scientifically studying its make-up, but of knowing its effects. In other words, linguistic signs bring about an increase in one's activity when accompanied by *knowledge of rhetoric*.[43]

[3.2] Methodological Language

With this in mind, I return to Spinoza's implicit suggestion in VP3 and VP4 that one way of mitigating the inadequacy of linguistic signs is to form a clear and distinct idea of language itself—that is, through awareness of rhetoric the problem of philosophical language dissipates. This is, as I have argued, one of a number of linguistic therapies that are available to the philosopher.

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[42] See my comments on Locke in D. Whistler, 'First Reflections on the Idea of a Speculative Pragmatics,' in M.H. Farris and J. Ramey (eds), *Speculation, Heresy and Gnosis in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion: The Enigmatic Absolute* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

[43] Of course, the importance of rhetoric has long been acknowledged in respect to Spinoza's practice elsewhere, particularly in the *TTP*. See the works cited in foonote 7.

Take Spinoza's use of improper language in VP36: 'Insofar as [love] is related to God, it is joy (if I may still be permitted to use this term) accompanied by the idea of himself.' The metaphilosophical aside here flags up Spinoza's own awareness of his improper use of 'joy' in this context. Not only does he use 'joy' in a disconcerting sense, he draws attention to this fact and so ensures the reader does not miss such a peculiar piece of terminological deployment. It is as if employing 'joy' in an improper manner gives Spinoza an excuse to make such an aside to *show* that he is reflecting on his use of language as he does so. This momentary shift to a metaphilosophical key makes clear how aware Spinoza is of his own rhetorical devices, and so constitutes clear evidence of Spinoza forming a clear and distinct idea of the language he is using. He exhibits the adequate idea he possesses of his own rhetorical practice.

A further context for this type of practice is significant: the discussion of method in the *TIE*. Early in the *TIE,* Spinoza asks whether we need to already be following a method in order formulate a philosophical methodology. If so, it seems there would need to be another method for discovering this method, and so on, such that the determination of method prior to the act of philosophising generates an infinite regress. Spinoza is here merely making explicit a problem that plagued Descartes in the *Regulae*: this work presents a set of rules for the improvement of the intellect and, as such, presupposes the need for such rules. However, this presupposition is only justified by the *Regulae*'s fourth rule; only at this point does Descartes set down a rule about the need to adopt rules: 'We need a method if we are to investigate the truth of things.'[44] This generates a vicious circle that mirrors Spinoza's anxiety about infinite regress: the formulation of method always already presupposes the adoption of a method. In his later work, Descartes resorts to practices of meditation and spiritual exercise to persuade his readers of his method without presupposing it. Descartes indirectly steers the reader into

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[44] R. Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4.

methodological reflection by compelling her to develop method autonomously. This realisation can only be *indirectly* alluded to in the text; it has to take place extra-textually. Only once the subject stops reading and starts to think for herself can she sign up to Cartesian method.[45]

Spinoza provides a very different solution to the problem. He employs an analogy:

> Matters stand here as they do with corporeal tools… To forge iron a hammer is needed; and to have a hammer, it must be made; for this another hammer and other tools are needed [and so on]. But just as men, in the beginning, were able to make the easiest things with the tools they were born with (however laboriously and imperfectly), and once these had been made, made other, more difficult things with less labour and more perfectly, and so, proceeding gradually from the simplest works to tools and from tools to other works and tools, reached the point where they accomplished so many and so difficult things with little labour, in the same way the intellect, by its inborn power, makes intellectual tools for itself, by which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools, or the power of searching further, and so proceeds by stages, until it reaches the pinnacle of wisdom. (*TIE* 16-7)

One is always already in the midst of philosophising and so one has always already adopted a method. Spinoza does not see methodological reflection as a problem at all; rather, it is the Cartesian attempt to begin from scratch, to start philosophy afresh by formulating a method *ab inititio* that is problematic. Instead of the ideal of a methodological prolegomenon to philosophy, Spinoza substitutes a pragmatic, piecemeal approach, in which one formulates method as one goes along.[46] Methodological reflection is simultaneous with textual

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[45] I return in more detail to the issue of philosophical communication in Descartes at the end of the paper.

[46] He writes, 'To find the best method of seeking the truth, there is no need of another method to seek the

reasoning, and this is what Spinoza means when he calls his methodological ideal 'reflexive' or 'reflective' philosophy (19)—philosophy that reflects on method as it goes along.[47] Therefore, method need not be extra-textual, but rather the formation of method occurs while one is reading. There is no need to transcend the text when it comes to the *Ethics*. Adequate ideas are not necessarily ideas attained independently of language; they can be ideas attained while reading philosophical language.

Moreover, this idea of continually reflecting as one goes along is precisely what is exemplified in Spinoza's aside in VP36. Spinoza exhibits the fact that he is reflecting on his rhetoric as he deploys it. Indeed, such methodological use of language can be extended to many of the anomalies one finds in Part V of the *Ethics*: Spinoza does not just employ a fiction in VP31 and VP32, he reflects on this use of fiction and insists on flagging it up to the reader. The text oscillates between a first-order level of communicating content and second-order reflection on how such content is being communicated. This embedding of second-order reflection into the philosophical text is precisely the role ascribed to method in the *TIE* and, what is more, such a methodological use of language exemplifies in practice the Spinozan therapy of forming clear and distinct ideas of one's affects. A connection is here established between the general therapeutic principles of VP3 and VP4, the description of method in the *TIE* and the way these are both put into practice in the propositions on eternity in *Ethics* V. The metaphilosophical asides illustrate a use of rhetoric informed by a clear and distinct understanding of rhetoric. Language is thereby transformed from a passion which impedes philosophical communication into a means of increasing one's activity.

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method of seeking the truth, or of a third method to seek the second, and so on, to infinity. For in that way we would never arrive at knowledge of the truth or indeed at any knowledge.' (16) See also IIP21S.

[47] Joachim paraphrases, 'Method… is the knowledge of knowledge – knowledge reflecting upon and controlling itself… Our search [for method] is not an incompletable regress antecedent to knowledge. It is a reflection which presupposes that we already possess knowledge on which to reflect.' H.H. Joachim, *Spinoza's Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 57.

[3.3] Rhetoric in *Ethics* I-IV

What is more, such methodological asides are not merely confined to *Ethics* V. Rather, there are a number of occasions earlier in the text where this device—as well as other forms of rhetorical therapy—is evident. The most obvious examples are to be found at the very opening of the work: in the definitions to Part I.[48] Spinoza's repeated stress on '*intelligo*' in constructing the definitions acts as a second-order register embedded within the elucidation of these fundamental concepts: 'By substance, *I mean* that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself…' (ID3), 'By God, *I mean* a being absolutely infinite…' (ID6), etc. As Spinoza defines substance and God, he draws attention to his mode of proceeding and, in particular, the seeming contingency of the words he is using.[49] This is another example of his reflexive methodology: one of the ways in which he makes his definitions more adequate is by including flashes of second-order reflection within them. Spinoza's affective therapy of the sign is found even here. *Pace* Deleuze, therefore, I am arguing that there is no radical break between the rhetoric of *Ethics* V and the earlier parts, even if these devices do indeed become more evident in the book's final propositions.

And yet, even if it is only a matter of degree, in *Ethics* V Spinoza does make a special effort to make the reader more active in relation to language. Spinoza's insistent methodological reflections on language in Part V—the asides flagging up the peculiarity of his rhetoric—are meant to foster an active engagement with language, rather than a passive reliance on it. Among other things, this implies that previously within the *Ethics* there has been a temptation to relate to language too passively. Such a suggestion throws light on the role of the geometrical method and the widely-held assumption that it manages to overcome the weaknesses of linguistic signs. For the implication seems to be that, in Parts I to IV, when

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[48] Another example of such metaphilosophical reflection in the earlier parts of the *Ethics* is III Def of Affects XX, analysed by Laerke in 'Spinoza's Language'.

[49] In a letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza is even more emphatic: 'I say that this definition explains clearly enough what *I wish to understand* by substance, or attribute.' B. Spinoza, 'Letter 9' in *Collected Works* vol. 1, ed. and trans. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 195.

the geometrical method is employed without much reflection or qualification, language becomes *too transparent*, too taken for granted. And this is precisely what those who assume the geometrical method overcomes language presuppose: that language is no longer problematic, that it can be taken for granted, that it becomes a transparent veil cast over the mathematical rigour of Spinoza's ideas. Yet, if this is true, we can now see that the geometrical method is *dangerous*: it leads to passivity in relation to language; the reader is affected by it almost unconsciously. When one takes language and its rhetorical tricks for granted, one lacks activity.

In consequence, Spinoza's self-conscious, reflective and methodological use of rhetorical devices in *Ethics* V can be read as a polemic against the power of the geometrical method. Spinoza, on this reading, deliberately defamiliarises and alienates the language of the text: he purposefully makes Part V odd and peculiar, so as to force the reader to form a clear and distinct idea of the way language operates. Part V is odd for a reason: one can only speak of eternity, when one knows clearly and distinctly what it is to speak.[50]

**[4] The Emendation of the Reader**

As a coda to the foregoing, I want to end by linking this discussion of Spinoza's use of rhetoric with the concept of emendation.

Savan's apophatic reading brings Spinoza close to Descartes. In the early modern period, it is Descartes who most urgently articulates the need for a philosophical reader to transcend language in the name of wordless illumination.[51] The very point of Descartes'

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[50] This evidently raises the question of the point of Spinoza using the geometrical method at all. I provide a partial answer at the end of the essay.

[51] What follows owes much to A.O. Rorty's 'The Structure of Descartes' *Meditations*' (in Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Descartes'* Meditations [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], 1-20), as well as Kosman and

*Meditations* is to shake the subject free from dependence on the text in the name of an interior contemplative activity that cannot be represented in language: it intends to teach the reader that the text is to be shaken off, for one must cease to read in order to philosophise. Hence, the *Meditations* provide 'the easiest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses'[52], including the eyes with which one reads. And the actual activity of meditation itself always occurs once the text has fallen silent: the Second Meditation ends, 'I should like to stop here and meditate for some time on this new knowledge I have gained'[53], and likewise the Third Meditation: 'Before examining [the doctrine of error] more carefully and investigating other truths which may be derived from it, I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes and gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light.'[54] Moreover, Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* is, in large part, a polemic against the practice of reading itself: 'The sciences contained in books… do not get so close to the truth as do the simple reasonings which a man of good sense, using his natural powers, can carry out in dealing with whatever objects he may come across.'[55] Throughout his oeuvre, Descartes shows his unease with representing his thought linguistically: 'Often what seemed true to me when I first conceived it has looked false when I tried to put it on paper.'[56] For Descartes, the transformative spiritual act that is

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Hatfield's contributions to the same volume, but my main source for this interpretation of Descartes is J. Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Cottingham attempts to shift the attention of philosophers to 'activities rather than theories, with ways of living rather than [textual] doctrines' (Ibid., 3) – and he draws on Descartes to do so. For example, Cottingham raises the example of 'spiritual exercises' to substantiate the importance of the practical, non-textual aspect to religion, referring both to those recommended by Ignatius Loyola and also to Descartes' *Meditations* (Ibid., 4; see also the discussion of Descartes, ibid., 12-4). According to Cottingham, truths are not gained through reading propositions and analysing them, but through a spiritual practice that prepares the mind for the receipt of a Cartesian 'irresistible light'.

[52] Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, 73.

[53] Ibid., 86.

[54] Ibid., 98.

[55] Ibid., 26. Descartes' works thus become manuals of 'self-instruction' (ibid., 54), where what matters is not the truth one gains from the text but the impetus to undertake meditative exercises oneself. In the *Meditations*, he writes, 'I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me' (ibid., 72) and similarly, in *Discourse on the Method*, he speaks of those 'capable of discovering for themselves everything I think I have discovered.' (Ibid., 52)

[56] Ibid., 49.

proper to philosophy takes place away from the text.

I have argued, *pace Savan*, that for Spinoza philosophy transforms the way we think and behave *while we are reading*. The formation of adequate ideas through second-order reflection is—in line with Spinoza's claims about methodology—a thoroughly textual effect.

This becomes clearer in respect to Spinoza's ideas about emendation. As he insists from the very beginning of the *TIE*, 'What must be done first, before all else: emending the intellect.' (*TIE* 12) The process of emending achieves at least three ends simultaneously, although this list should be multiplied to include elements such as the rhetorical therapy outlined above. First, emendation ameliorates the subject's specific conceptual content; second, it cultivates the subject's epistemic virtues; third, it transforms the subject's whole being in a manner which is both ethical but also quasi-religious.

First, therefore, emendation is the method by which inadequate concepts become adequate. Aaron Garrett, for example, invokes emendation in his discussion of the definitions of *Ethics* I.[57] These definitions Spinoza here gives are traditional and unobjectionable; nearly all religious believers could assent to their contents. Spinoza employs the rigour of the geometrical method in the first fifteen propositions to *emend* the concept of substance (for example) in the reader's mind. Hence, Garrett writes, summing up this line of thought,

> Although clearly derived from the tradition, Spinoza will use his definitions in ways which are hard to countenance within the existing philosophical tradition… He performs a kind of internal emendation for and through philosophers and philosophy.[58]

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[57] A. Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter Six (Garrett also discusses other meanings of emendation in Chapter Three).

[58] Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*, 168. See further Zourabichvili's comments on the 'strategy of the chimera' and 'speaking spinozan' (*Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 111-2, 147-9).

Secondly, in the *TIE* itself, Spinoza defines emendation in line with early modern methodological thought: rather than limiting it to the emendation of individual concepts, he formulates it as a means of directing the mind by means of universal, a priori rules. Such rules are intended to cultivate intellectual virtues, i.e. habits of forming adequate ideas. These habits precede and make possible specific instances of conceptual emendation: 'Before anything else we must devise a way of healing the intellect, and purifying it, as much as we can in the beginning, so that it understands things successfully, without error and as well as possible.' (11) This, then, is the second strand to Spinoza's conception of emendation: 'constructing certain rules as aids, so that the mind does not weary itself in useless things' (19). However, it is not just intellectual virtues which Spinozan emendation is intended to cultivate. Where emendation goes beyond many forms of early modern methodology is in its promotion of other forms of virtue. The process of emendation is intended to develop the well-being of the whole human being. Spinoza highlights this third function of emendation at the very opening of the *TIE*, where he provides an autobiographical portrait of his turn to philosophy, imitating (and parodying) Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*. The aspiring philosopher must turn her attention away from transient and unsatisfying pleasures, such as wealth, fame and lust, in order to focus on the sole value able to sustain a life well lived—truth. The *TIE* opens, 'After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile… I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good… whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity.' (7) The wise person ought to emend their own being in the name of 'a joy entirely exempt from sadness' (9). Emendation, therefore, is 'a way of healing the intellect, and purifying it, as much as we can', not only in order to know adequately, but also in order to live the best possible life (11).

All forms of emendation occur through practising philosophy, and such philosophical

practice is communicated and exemplified in the text of the *Ethics* itself. The piece-meal and pragmatic nature of Spinozan 'reflective' methodology illustrates this process: through second-order reflection embedded in the text itself the reader's mind becomes directed towards adequate ideas. The definitions at the very start of the *Ethics* are a case in point: Spinoza's metaphilosophical emphasis on the fact that he is devising these definitions is embedded within the definitions themselves (through the repeated deployment of *intelligo*), and this in turn aids the very process of emendation that Garrett describes above.

Therefore, emendation is a process achieved by tarrying with and reflecting on the text; it does not require the reader to withdraw into non-textual interiority, as we have seen Cartesian meditation do. The philosopher remains a reader—this ultimately is Spinoza's difference from Cartesian practice, in this respect at least.[59] Method does not withdraw the reader from the text to a state of non-textual meditation, but provides rules for directing the mind as it reads. Such emendatory reading is closely connected to the affective therapy discussed in the main body of the paper: they are both means to work on language—through self-conscious rhetoric or metaphilosophical asides—to communicate adequate ideas.

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[59] The *becoming adequate* of philosophy thus takes place *between* words and concepts. There is, in consequence, an intermediary zone where thought *becomes* adequate. At the beginning of the process of emendation, thinking is confronted by signs; at the end of it, thinking forms concepts. It is within this liminal zone that the reader truly becomes a philosopher. Spinoza's method of emendation is directed, therefore, towards this realm, and it is in the *TTP* that Spinoza describes precisely this in-between space where signs become concepts, and he names it *history* (98). That is, in the midst of defending 'the true method of interpreting Scripture' (98), Spinoza proposes an *ontology of the text* orientated around this liminal zone. The fundamental ground of Spinoza's theory of scriptural interpretation is his insistence that one must attend to not merely one or two realms of hermeneutic activity (literal meaning and truth) as previously assumed by literalists and spiritualists, like Al-Fakar and Maimonides, but, in addition, to a liminal zone of intended meaning—the plane of historical sense—residing between the literal text of inadequate signs and the propositional truths of adequate concepts. The assemblage of the text's history 'is the most certain and only way to uncover its true meaning'—its sense (105). To get to the bottom of a text, one *cannot* rush from language to truth, from the sign to the concept, and similarly—more broadly—the work done by emendation in Spinoza's philosophy occurs in this historical zone: concepts are ameliorated, intellectual virtues are cultivated and ethical values are transformed, all while the reader constructs *the history of the text*. (See J. Lagrée, 'Irrationality with or without Reason: An Analysis of Chapter XV of the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*' in J. Force and R. Popkin (eds), *The Books of Nature and Scripture* (Dordecht: Springer, 1994); S. Preus, 'A Hidden Opponent in Spinoza's *Tractatus.*' *Harvard Theological Review* 88.3 (1995); S. Zac, *Spinoza et l'interprétation de l'Ecriture* (Paris: PUF, 1965), Chapters II and V.) Spinozan emendation therefore names precisely that effort of the mind to tarry in the historical domain of the text as a critical reader, to keep open this third ontological level in the face of the temptation to foreclose it. See further Zourabichvili (*Spinoza*, 165-6) on 'the pedagogics of the concept' in the *Ethics*.

For present purposes, such an account of the different types of emendation brought about by the *Ethics* provides the beginnings of an answer to a question left hanging above—namely, if (as suggested earlier in the essay) the geometrical method is dangerous insofar as it bypasses the labour of interpretation and thereby pacifies the reader, why then did Spinoza employ it at all? One of a number of possible answers is simply that the geometrical method is useful for some forms of emendation but not others. That is, it may assist in the process of conceptual emendation: the rigour and cogency of the opening propositions to Part I compel the reader to assent to the unorthodox concepts developed there. Nevertheless, as I have repeatedly claimed, the geometrical method tends to inhibit the second-order reflection necessary for the reader to fully participate in the emendatory process, particularly the second-order reflection constitutive of rhetorical therapy.

One of the specific purposes of the 'surprising' expressions in Part V identified at the beginning of the essay is to remedy such emendatory limitations. The metaphilosophical asides, the metaphors, malaprops and improper uses of concepts all push back again the irresistible deductive flow of the geometrical method; they inhibit its syllogistic force. To take one example: to affirm, as Spinoza does in VP36S, that God loves a few pages after asserting to the contrary that 'strictly speaking God loves no one' awakens the reader from her 'geometric slumber': because this claim is improper, it gives rise to second-order reflection, thereby accomplishing the Spinozan ideal of tarrying with the text to make its sense more adequate. Such rhetorical therapy is a crucial component of the reader's emendation.

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