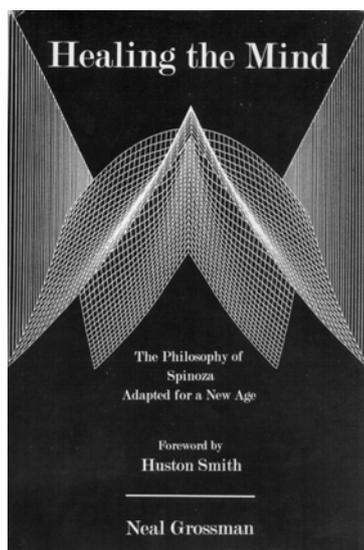


## BOOK EXCERPT



Neal Grossman

*Healing the Mind:*

*The Philosophy of Spinoza Adapted for a New Age* ↗

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### 1 Some considerations against materialism<sup>1</sup>

I say “considerations” rather than “proofs,” because, as history shows, any belief system may be clung to no matter what the evidence to the contrary may be; to those who are deeply wedded to materialism and whose whole life would be thrown in disarray should they come to believe in the existence of spirit, what I have to say here will not be convincing (for there is nothing that could convince such people). The following considerations, therefore, are addressed to those intellectuals who feel in their hearts and suspect in their minds that perhaps we are more than just bodies, and yet are hesitant to explore for themselves a nonmaterialistic framework because they fear ridicule from their friends and colleagues.

- 1 One consideration is a kind of argument from authority: many, if not most, of the creative geniuses of our culture — poets, novelists, artists, musicians, scientists, and philosophers — have expressed strong beliefs in a spiritual dimension to reality. Of course, this is merely a consideration, not an argument, but is it not odd that our intelligentsia at best ignores and at worst treats with scorn and ridicule a world view espoused by so many of our culture’s acknowledged creative geniuses? Are these geniuses all softheaded, mushy-brained, fuzzy thinkers? When Einstein writes, “Ev-

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<sup>1</sup> pp 48–51. Since *Healing the Mind* was completed fifteen years ago, this section lacks more recent evidence against materialism. On the other hand, it makes a view points that have not been sufficiently stressed in the more recent literature.

everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a Spirit is manifest in the Laws of the Universe — a Spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we, with our modest powers, must feel humble,” is he being softheaded, uncritical? Why is it that almost without exception the great creative scientists of this century (Einstein, Schrödinger, de Broglie, Heisenberg, Pauli, Gödel, Eddington, Bohm, Wigner, Margenau, etc.) subscribed to a spiritual worldview? And why is it that this fact is systematically ignored by most intellectuals?

- 2 A second consideration, which in my opinion is direct evidence for the survival of consciousness after the death of the body, is the phenomenon of the near-death experience (NDE). There is a growing body of data, collected by respectable physicians and psychologists, subjected to appropriate statistical analysis, that appear to rule out every attempt to explain (or explain away) the NDE in physiological and/or psychological terms. To my knowledge, there is not a single researcher in the field who, as a result of his research, is not inclined to take the NDE at face value — that is, people really do leave their bodies during such experiences. One would think that intellectuals would undertake a serious study of this phenomenon, because the issue — whether consciousness can exist outside the body — is so important and so highly relevant for assessing life’s meaning. And yet, like the bishop who refused to look through Galileo’s telescope (because he “knew” there could be no such thing as moons circling Jupiter), the intellectuals of our time generally refuse to look at what is at the very least strong *prima facie* evidence for the existence of consciousness independent of the body.
- 3 The third consideration involves the intuition that there are no rational grounds for suicide. A person who takes, or attempts to take, his own life by that act demonstrates that his mind is unbalanced at the time. It does not matter what “reasons” he gives for committing suicide, because the reasons are themselves the product of an unbalanced mind. I believe this would be the attitude of all psychiatrists and therapists. I cannot imagine any circumstances under which a psychiatrist might say to a suicidal client, “Yes, you have good reasons to kill yourself. I agree that that’s the rational thing to do.” Now if this intuition that suicidal behavior is a symptom of mental imbalance is accepted, then I want to apply this intuition to collective behavior. For example, when the tragedy of mass suicide involving the followers of Jim Jones occurred in Guyana, no one argued that they had good reasons to kill themselves. On the contrary, everyone agreed that the fact of mass suicide was sufficient evidence for the claim that Jones and his followers were psychologically unbalanced.

Cannot the same argument be advanced for Western civilization as a whole? For Western civilization is now actively contemplating suicide in two ways: (1) through global nuclear war and (2) through irreversible pollution and destruction of the environment upon which our existence depends. But isn’t this insane? Suppose an anthropologist from another planet visits earth after we self-destruct by means of

nuclear war. What will he think? Will he think that we had “good reasons” to destroy ourselves or will he automatically take the fact that we destroyed ourselves as proof that we had collectively gone insane? Would he not ask, “What did these poor deluded people believe, what did they value, how did they live their lives, how did they become so psychologically unbalanced that they could see no alternative to self-destruction?”

I suggest that the materialist beliefs and values of our culture are leading directly to self-destruction and therefore that these beliefs and values may properly be called insane. As men and women of good conscience, we should not participate in a thought structure that is leading toward the annihilation of life on earth, but instead should explore, intellectually and personally, with our hearts and our minds, alternative thought-systems, such as Plato’s and Spinoza’s, which provide metaphysical grounds for fostering, in ourselves and in others, life-supporting values and qualities such as cooperation, compassion, true generosity, genuine acceptance and appreciation of those who are different from us, and Universal Love.

- 4 For our final consideration, we will present a version of an argument first given by William James in his essay “On Human Immortality.” This argument is among the masterpieces of philosophical reasoning, for it grants the materialist just about everything and yet demonstrates that there can be no compelling reasons for believing that spirit does not exist. The materialist believes that human beings are nothing over and above a physical body, which includes the brain, and hence, everything about us must be explicable solely in terms of the body. In particular, those aspects of ourselves we are in the habit of calling “mental” or “psychological” — e.g., thoughts, consciousness, awareness, and so on — must be produced by the body (since otherwise they would have a reality independent of the body, which is contrary to materialism). Since on this view the mind itself is produced by the body, particularly the nervous system, there can be nothing in the mind that is independent of our body, and our mind is thus a function of our body. To say that the mind is a function of the body means that there can be nothing in our mind that does not correlate with something or other in our body. Now although we have above presented some empirical reasons for thinking that this is false — i.e., people in the near-death experience report a continuation of conscious experience even when the brain is not functioning — let us here assume that it is true. That is, let us assume a complete functional dependence of the mind on the body — that there is no thought, no perception, no feeling, however subtle, that does not depend on the functioning of the brain. William James grants this, and then shows that this still cannot prove that materialism is true. James says, in effect, that from the fact (if it be a fact) that our conscious experience is *totally dependent* upon our nervous system, it does not follow that our consciousness is *produced* by our nervous system.

Consider, for example, a television set. Everyone will agree that the picture that appears on the screen is a function of the inner workings of the set. Every detail of color, shading, motion, and so on, corresponds to something happening in the

mechanism of the set, and nothing can appear on the screen that does not correspond to something in the mechanism. But we know that the picture itself does not originate in the mechanism of the set; it originates in the TV studio and is transmitted in the form of electromagnetic radiation to the antenna of our television set. The set itself is simply a receiver: it transforms the electromagnetic signals (which signals exist independently of any TV set) into the form of sound and light that we experience when we watch TV. The TV set does not generate or produce the signal (or information); it merely transforms (“transmits” is James’s term) it from one form (electromagnetic) into another (visible picture). Thus it does not follow, from the fact that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the picture and the mechanism of the set, that the picture is produced by the mechanism.

Analogously, from the fact that our conscious experience is, or may be, a total function of the nervous system, so that nothing can belong to the former that does not have some counterpart in the latter, it does not follow that our consciousness is produced by, or originates in, the nervous system. It could be that our body is simply a mechanism that receives a consciousness that exists independent of the body and transforms it into the form we experience as “our own.” The wondrous details of the correlation between conscious experience and the brain are the most neurophysiology can demonstrate. It cannot decide the issue between whether the brain produces conscious experience or whether the brain merely transforms consciousness from one form into another. Thus, neurophysiology is *neutral* with respect to this issue, and there are hence no scientific reasons for preferring a materialistic point of view over a nonmaterialist point of view. Once the reader sees that materialism is a non sequitur, that it does not and cannot ever follow from the facts of neurophysiology, he is then free to examine other philosophical perspectives concerning the nature of the mind and its relation to the body.

## 2 Shakespeare’s metaphor and Spinoza’s metaphysics<sup>2</sup>

Consider the Shakespearean metaphor, “All the world’s a stage, and all the people in it players.” Imagine now an actor who is so deeply immersed in his role that he has completely forgotten his true identity and believes himself to *be* the character he is playing. In this metaphor, the *character* the actor is playing is analogous to the imaginative portion of the mind (ego, personality); the *actor* himself is analogous to what we have called the “whole mind” or the “higher self.” The *play* itself, which includes the role the actor is playing, is analogous to the temporal order. The “*real*” offstage world, which includes the play, is analogous to the eternal order. The *amnesia* of the actor is analogous to the human condition; for our amnesic actor, like the human persona, believes the experiences of his character to be the experiences of his self and allows his emotions to be determined by those of his character.

But the role of the character is determined by the script, over which the character has

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2 pp. 238–243.

no control. Indeed, the emotions, the behavior, and the very lines spoken by the character are all determined by the script. The actor, should he desire to recover from his amnesia, must first understand that he is more than the character he finds himself playing, and then begin to detach himself from the experiences of his character. As he develops “second-order awareness” — which awareness has his character’s experiences as its content — he develops, or “remembers,” a sense of himself as something more than the character he is playing. And with this expanded sense of self there arises a joy and happiness that are constant, even though the character’s emotions may fluctuate. For when memory returns, the actor’s state of mind is determined more by factors external to his role than by the joys and sorrows of his character. . .

This metaphor may be used as a vehicle to better understand several aspects of Spinoza’s metaphysics.

- 1 The character, of course, has no “free will,” and neither does our amnesic actor who thinks he *is* his character. For, we are supposing, every action, behavior, emotion, spoken word, and so on, that the character performs has been written into the script; the character is not “free” to choose his lines. Freedom for the actor is not to be found within the context of the play (which context is analogous to the temporal order). Freedom from bondage to the script lies in recovering from amnesia, in recollecting that his true identity is separate from that of his character (which recollection is analogous to the experiential knowledge that our mind belongs to the eternal order).
- 2 Furthermore, the concept of a character in a play is analogous to Spinoza’s concept of an inadequate idea; for nothing that the character says or does, thinks or feels, can be understood in terms of the character himself, but only in terms of the play as a whole. A character in a play, considered by itself without relation to the other characters, the plot, and so on, is an incomplete entity, requiring for its completion the rest of the play (which is analogous to the temporal order as a whole). But the true happiness of our amnesic actor does not lie within the context of the play; it lies in his waking up to his wider reality — his larger mind — which constitutes his true identity. Analogously, the imaginative portion of our mind is an incomplete, or inadequate, idea; its completion lies in its interconnectedness with the ideas of other things within the temporal order. Ultimately, the adequate idea, of which our personality or imagination is a portion, is the idea of the temporal order as a whole. But our freedom, or salvation, does not lie within the temporal order at all; rather, it lies in our waking up to the knowledge of our true identity as an eternal mode of thought within the Mind of God.
- 3 We may also use this metaphor to understand why mystics have been ambivalent toward sexuality, generally advising seekers to abstain. For in terms of our metaphor, sexuality is the glue that holds the play together. To seek for the completion of our being through sex is to seek for it in the temporal order, within the context of the play. Insofar as we are the body and its personality, we are compelled to seek in this direction; but insofar as “we know and feel we are eternal,” we know

that our true completion, or salvation, lies in a different direction altogether. To seek for “continuous, supreme, and unending happiness” in the temporal order is to look for it where it cannot be found.

Nevertheless, the healthy experience of sexuality is not without value. For sexuality, insofar as it is the force that connects the various elements of the play into a single whole, transcends, so to speak, the details of the play. Therefore, insofar as we are able to experience sex with clarity of mind — that is, without emotions, such as guilt and anxiety, which decrease our power of acting, and without possessive attachment to the body or personality of our partner, which attachment sustains the illusions of the temporal order — and insofar as we are able to feel in our heart connected with our partner and the Earth, we gain a momentary taste of the eternal order.

However, the difference between a “momentary taste” and the “continuous, supreme, and unending happiness” that accompanies the knowledge of the eternity of our minds cannot be overemphasized. For our actor, insofar as he has amnesia, is constrained to suffer the emotions of his character, even if he has occasional glimpses of the play as a whole. But as he awakens to his true identity, he no longer suffers the emotions of his character and is able to maintain a constant peace of mind even as the emotions of his character fluctuate widely. The awakened actor’s peace of mind and inner balance transcend the joys and sorrows of his character.

- 4 Moreover, we note that the mind of the awakened — or *awakening*, since Spinoza seems to be describing a *process* of awakening — actor contains all of the perceptions and emotions of the amnesic actor, but these constitute only a small part of his whole mind. Let us use our metaphor to interpret the following passage from Spinoza: “[T]hat mind suffers the most whose largest part consists of inadequate ideas, so that it is distinguished by what it suffers rather than by what it does, while on the contrary, that mind acts the most whose largest part consists of adequate ideas, so that, although it may possess as many inadequate ideas as the first, it is nevertheless distinguished by those which belong to human virtue [or power] rather than by those which belong to human impotence” (*Ethics*, pt. 5, prop. 20, note).

Now consider three actors: A, who has total amnesia and believes without doubt that he is his character; B, who has partial amnesia and sometimes believes he is his character, and other times has thoughts and memories that pertain to his identity as an actor; and C, who has completely recovered his memory. What distinguishes the minds of A, B, and C from one another is their content — the thoughts and feelings that constitute their inner life. The mind of A is filled entirely with the thoughts and feelings that pertain to his character; that is to say, it is constituted entirely by inadequate ideas. The mind of A is passive, or in other words, it suffers because its inner life is determined externally by the role of its character. By contrast, although the minds of B and C also contain the thoughts and feelings (inadequate ideas) appropriate to their character, they contain in addition thoughts

(adequate ideas) that pertain to their identity as actors. So the mind of B is more active, or suffers less, than the mind of A, and that of C is more active than that of B. That is, the inner life of C is not at all determined by that of his character; A on the other hand, has no power or “virtue” to think any thought other than those which are scripted for his character — his amnesia has rendered his mind impotent.

As the actor gradually recovers his memory (B), the ratio of adequate ideas to inadequate ideas increases, and at some point in this process of awakening, the ratio is large enough so that the content of his mind is distinguished more by thoughts that pertain to his identity as an actor than by thoughts that pertain to the role of his character. And should the script call for the death of his character, the mind of C will be totally unperturbed, but the mind of A will be filled with anxiety, since the latter mind experiences the death of his character as if it were the death of himself.

Unlike a play, however, the script for *every* human life calls for the death of its character (the personality). To the extent that we, like A, are ignorant of our true nature and identify solely with our personality, we are anxious and fearful. To the extent that, like C, we have awakened to the knowledge of the eternity of our mind, then the death of our personality is “of no consequence.” “[I]t is possible,” says Spinoza, “for the human mind to be of such a nature that that part of it which we have shown perishes with its body [the imagination or personality], in comparison with that part of it which remains, is of no consequence” (*Ethics*, pt. 5, prop. 38).

- 5 Finally, we may use this metaphor to enliven Spinoza’s concept of spiritual love. Insofar as the actor suffers from amnesia and believes herself to be her character, the loves that she feels within the play are determined by the experiences of her character. Suppose, to give a concrete example, it is determined by the script that another character in the play praises her, or gives her money, or does her a favor — that is to say, affects her with joy. Since, as we are supposing, her amnesia causes her to believe that her joy is caused by what the other did for her in the play, she will feel love toward the other character. This is analogous to imaginative love.

But now suppose that the actor suddenly recovers from her amnesia and recognizes that the character who affected her with joy in the play is really a person who, off-stage, is a good friend of hers. Feelings of joy and friendliness, unconditioned by any constraints within the play, now permeate her character; the love she now feels for her friend is qualitatively different from the love that she-as-her-character felt for her friend’s character. The latter is completely subsumed and transformed into the former.

Indeed, her affection for her friend remains constant even if, within the play, her friend’s character inflicts her character with pain, suffering, or any kind of sorrow. The hatred of her character for her friend’s character is experienced as real only insofar as she suffers from amnesia, but diminishes to nothing when she recovers her memory.

Moreover, to pursue the metaphor, the production of a play requires a spirit of co-

operation among all involved. This “spirit of cooperation” permeates each actor’s role, and is present even if the script calls for two actors to play the roles of adversaries. On the one hand, the “spirit of cooperation” is completely independent of the various roles within the play; on the other hand, it completely permeates each and every role. And it remains present even if an actor is so into his character that he has forgotten it. The amnesic actor is then constrained to suffer — to experience as real — the joys and sorrows of his character. But as soon as he recovers his memory, the spirit of cooperation becomes once again present to him, and the sufferings of his character are no longer real to him and are hence, as Spinoza says, “of no consequence.”

Just as the spirit of cooperation is the force that holds the play together, so spiritual love is the force that creates the temporal order. Insofar as we are lost in the drama of our personalities, we are unconscious of this love. We become conscious of it insofar as we are able to transcend our personality and experience our mind as eternal — as part, along with all other minds, of the infinite Mind of God. If, like the amnesic actor, we are unconscious of this spiritual love, then we are constrained to experience the sufferings of our personalities as real; and conversely, the more we seek relief from our sufferings through the experiences of the personality within the temporal order, the more unconscious of this love we become. But as soon as we regain awareness of the union that exists between our mind and all other minds, the joys and sorrows of our personalities dissolve into and are transformed by the eternal spiritual love in which our essential nature has its being.

### 3 Rational faith and the satisfaction of longing<sup>3</sup>

“We feel and know,” Spinoza tells us, “that we are eternal.” And yet, until we become fully conscious of our eternal nature, we also feel and know that we are incomplete. For the personality, in its state of separation from the knowledge of its union with the mind of God, feels its incompleteness very deeply, which manifests consciously as a chronic *longing*. We generally seek to satisfy this longing through imaginative experience, where satisfaction is impossible in principle. The completion of our being, salvation, does not lie in the experiences of our body in the physical world; rather, it lies in expanding the scope of our consciousness, so that we experience our self as the eternal mode of thought that we in fact are.

This all-too-human habit of seeking for our completion where it cannot be found arises from, and sustains, the belief that our personality is all that we are. Imagine the absurdity of our amnesic actor who, feeling that something is missing, seeks for the satisfaction of his ensuing longing solely within the confines of his character and the play. But the longing, we are supposing, is caused by his amnesia, and its satisfaction lies outside the context of the play. If our actor has (1) a strong faith that his longing can be satisfied and (2) an equally strong conviction that it cannot be satisfied within the drama of

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3 pp. 244–246.

the play, then he will gradually cease identifying with the experiences of his character. That is to say, he will gradually regain some of his “power of action,” which he had totally invested in this character, and this will create some space within his mind for an occasional memory of his “real” life to pop in. These memories, scattered at first, will reinforce his initial faith, causing him to further cease endeavoring to find happiness through the experiences of his character, creating more space within his mind for more memories to return, and so on until, eventually, he regains the full knowledge of who he really is.

And like our amnesic actor, we humans, if we are to satisfy the longing for our completeness, must cease searching for it where it can't be found — in the temporal order, in the drama in which our character (the personality or imagination) participates. We must do everything we can to strengthen both our faith that our longing can be satisfied *and* our understanding that it cannot be satisfied within the temporal order.

The importance of nurturing within ourselves a conscious faith that our longing *can* be satisfied cannot be overemphasized. For many people come to believe, through their own experience, that longing cannot be satisfied within the temporal order, but erroneously conclude that their longing cannot be satisfied period, and hence, that angst and suffering are a necessary feature of their lives. This leads invariably to despair and cynicism. Indeed, cynicism is the emotional consequence of (1) longing, a strongly felt sense of one's own incompleteness; (2) the understanding that longing cannot be satisfied through imaginative experiences within the temporal order; and (3) the (false) belief that the temporal order is all there is. The reader is urged to guard against cynicism, for once it has infected and taken hold of the mind, it saps the mind of strength and vitality and is very difficult to eradicate. The actor who wholeheartedly believes without any doubt that the play is all there is will never recover her memory.

Nevertheless, the cynic might focus on her own longing and consider whether the faith that we urge is not simply an application of the principle of sufficient reason, which we discussed at the beginning of this book. Can there be such a thing, in the whole order of nature in which we exist, as a need that has no satisfaction? Certainly every felt need of the body — hunger, thirst, sex, warmth, etc. — has its satisfaction. But *longing* is a felt need that remains after, and even during, the satisfaction of all bodily needs. It remains during, and even after, the pursuit and satisfaction of all imagined needs of the personality — for status, wealth, and worldly power. For the longing of which we speak is not caused by the absence of any of these; nor can it be satisfied by the acquisition of such things, as everyone knows from experience.

Rather, as we have said, *longing* pertains to the separation of the personality from its eternal source, from which it continuously emanates. *Longing* is the emotional component of the imagination's knowledge, conscious or unconscious, that it is in itself incomplete. Hence, the satisfaction of *longing* lies in the healing of this incompleteness, or separation; the healing is the knowledge of the union that exists between itself and the “larger mind” in which it is embedded. For, to consult our metaphor, the mind of the amnesic actor is still united to, or embedded in, the mind of his real self, regardless

of whether or not he is conscious of that union. And the single most important requirement to becoming conscious of this union is the belief that this union exists and that it is possible to experience it directly.

This is why we stress the importance of rational faith, for no one undertakes to do anything the outcome of which is deemed impossible or remote. No one who believes that her personal drama is all she is will endeavor to regain awareness of the connection that exists between her personality and the larger mind in which her personality is embedded. And to the extent that her faith in the existence of such a connection is only partial, or fluctuates, her effort to disengage from her personal drama in order to awaken into the knowledge of union will also be only partial. Therefore, everything that supports our faith, everything that reminds us of where our true happiness lies is of great benefit to us.