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“A Constant Unfolding of Far-Resonate Action”: George Eliot’s Middlemarch, Spinoza, and the Ethics of Power

Zachary J. Hardy

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“A Constant Unfolding of Far-Resonate Action”:
George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, Spinoza, and the Ethics of Power

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

Zachary Joseph Hardy

Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Adam Potkay, Advisor

Simon Joyce, Director

Robert Leventhal

Deborah Morse

Williamsburg, VA
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Preliminary Notes

I. Acknowledgements

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II. Citations

I will use the following abbreviations throughout my paper for frequently referenced texts:

<i>M</i>	<i>Middlemarch</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>ITS</i>	<i>The Impressions of Theophrastus Such</i>
<i>L</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of George Eliot</i>
<i>LJ</i>	<i>The Life of Jesus Critically Examined</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>The Essence of Christianity</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Ethics</i>
<i>TTP</i>	<i>Theological-Political Treatise</i>

When quoting from Spinoza's *Ethics*, I will include the page number as well as the section and proposition; for example (*E* 100, IIP7) is part three proposition number seven, and appears on page 100. I use Eliot's translation in my study, though I occasionally use the popular Edward Curley translation when Eliot's is problematic.

When quoting from any other work I will include an abbreviation or author's name, followed by page number.

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I. Introduction

Before George Eliot, penname of Mary Ann Evans, wrote the novels that brought her an enduring reputation as one of the great English novelists, she translated three influential works of German philosophy into English: David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, and Benedict de Spinoza's *Ethics*. In this study I will assess how these three thinkers, with particular emphasis on Spinoza, influenced George Eliot's life, philosophy, and novels.

I begin by introducing the works of Strauss and Feuerbach, and discuss how Eliot's translations of these works contributed to her rejection of Christian faith in favor of a secular humanism. I then describe Eliot's translation of the *Ethics*, and offer an explication of Spinoza's philosophy, highlighting the aspects most relevant to Eliot's fiction. Several critics before me have addressed the relationship between Eliot and Spinoza, but I will show many of their studies have either misinterpreted certain aspects of Spinoza's thought, or do not adequately examine the actual texts of Eliot's novels. In subsequent parts of the paper I hope to strengthen the existing body of Eliot – Spinoza scholarship by offering a thorough reading of her magnum opus *Middlemarch* that will demonstrate the profound similarities between Eliot and Spinoza's worldview.

I argue that *Middlemarch*'s central protagonist Dorothea Brooke, a woman with a great amount of emotional and intellectual energy, is at first unable to properly use that energy to attain personal happiness. As the novel progresses, Dorothea develops in her understanding of her own mind, as well as the world around her; her increased understanding allows her to properly direct her energies toward productive outlets by the

novel's end. Using Spinoza's language, *Middlemarch* chronicles Dorothea's progression toward a greater knowledge of her own desires, emotions, and the external world, such that she can more actively control her emotional states, and organize her life in a way that increases her own virtue, power, and personal freedom—which for Spinoza are all synonyms. I then look at Tertius Lydgate as a foil to Dorothea; Lydgate also has a potential to impact the world, but cannot actualize his full potential because of a series of bad personal decisions and a wider range of external causes. While focusing on Dorothea and Lydgate I will also discuss the characters Mr. Casaubon, Will Ladislaw, Rosamond Vincy, and Nicholas Bulstrode in relation to Eliot's understanding of Spinoza. To close my argument I briefly examine Eliot's final novels and summarize the thrust of her philosophical project.

II. Eliot's Early Life and Translation of Strauss and Feuerbach

Mary Ann Evans (hereafter referred to simply as Eliot) was born to Robert and Christiana Evans on November 22, 1819, and lived with her family on their estate near Nuneaton, a town in the Midlands county of Warwickshire, until she was twenty-one. Around the time of Eliot's birth, the Midlands region contained a number of dissenting religious sects, including Unitarians, Baptists, Wesleyans, Quakers, and Presbyterians. Eliot had some exposure to this diversity in her own life, as Robert Evans' brother was a devout Methodist, and from ages twelve to sixteen she attended a school run by Baptists. According to biographer Rosemary Ashton, Eliot's exposure to a wide number of Christian denominations gave her the "inward knowledge of a variety of types of faith

and of worship” (Ashton 19-20). In her teenage and young-adult years Eliot ascribed to Calvinist theology, which emphasizes predestination and rejects the belief that salvation can come through good works. Her Calvinist leanings are reflected in the morally severe and self-critical tone of her early letters; and though Calvinism required her to distrust fiction as a form of falsehood, she still read widely, including Shakespeare, Scott, *Don Quixote*, and *Robinson Crusoe* (Ashton 24-8).

After the death of her mother and the marriage of her brother Isaac, Eliot and her father moved to Coventry—a Warwickshire town of around 30,000 residents known for its ribbon manufacturing—in 1841. Eliot was exposed to an even wider assortment of religious beliefs, and also met Charles Bray—a freethinker and philanthropist who made his fortune in the ribbon industry. Bray published the *Philosophy of Necessity* around the same time Eliot moved to Coventry, in which he argues for a deterministic worldview where all material phenomena, including human choices, are governed by immutable natural laws and necessitated by the causes that precede them; though the *Philosophy of Necessity* is now a forgotten work, it made an impact on Eliot when she first encountered it as a young woman, and Bray aligns himself with Spinoza on many philosophical questions (Anger 77). During this time Eliot also read books critical of religious belief, one of which includes the *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, written by Charles Bray’s brother-in-law Charles Hennell. In the *Inquiry*, Hennell examines the four gospels in order to determine the facticity of their account of Jesus’s life, and concludes that though Jesus was a great mystic and moral thinker, there is little evidence for his virgin birth, many miracles, death, and resurrection. Despite the uncertainty of eternal life, Hennell still maintains that efforts should be made to improve material and social

conditions on earth. Hennell closely read David Strauss's biblical critique the *Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*— the first text Eliot will translate— and later worked with Strauss in order to arrange a German translation of his *Inquiry* (Ashton 37-8).

Eliot began expressing serious religious doubts upon her move to Coventry; however, as Ashton observes, these doubts are not fully expressed in her letters because of the piety of her closest correspondent and best friend, Maria Lewis. Finally on January 2, 1842, Eliot refused to attend church for the first time. Though Eliot's rebellion against religious belief outraged her father and alienated Lewis, during this period she became close friends with Hennell's two sisters, Cara and Sara— the latter being the recipient of many of Eliot's surviving letters. Alongside Cara Hennell, Eliot read a number of German literary texts including Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy, Lessing's dramatic homily on religious tolerance *Nathan der Weise*, and Goethe's second novel *Wilhelm Meister* (Ashton 47)¹. She also associated with a number of other prominent intellectuals at the Bray family estate, including Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, evolutionary biologist Herbert Spencer, and the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Eliot began translating David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined* (originally *Das Leben Jesu: Kritisch Bearbeitet* [1835]) in 1844. She took over the project from Charles Hennell's fiancé Elizabeth Rebecca "Rufa" Brabant, who had already completed about one hundred of the book's eight hundred pages; Eliot was sought out for the work because of her wide reading in German literature (*L I.171*;

¹ Anthony McCobb exhaustively documents Eliot's background in German intellectual history and culture in *George Eliot's Knowledge of German Life and Letters*. The first half of the book gives biographical details regarding Eliot's studies of German texts and travels to Germany; the latter half compiles all the German texts she read, or likely read, based on evidence found in her letters and journals, as well as the writings of her close

Ashton 47). Shortly after beginning the project, Eliot began to profess a dislike for the tedious labor of translation. Her letters from the time often include bitter remarks regarding the project; two examples include the following:

I sicken at the idea of having Strauss in my head and on my hands for a lustrum [OED: an ancient Roman term for a five year period], instead of saying good bye to him for a year... I am only inclined to vow that I will never translate again if I live to correct the sheets for Strauss. (*L* I.176)

Glad am I that some one can enjoy Strauss! The million certainly will not, and I have ceased to sit down to him with any relish (*L* I.185).

However, Eliot still found the translation process a rewarding one. When she was close to finishing the project, she qualified her earlier scorn with the remark “I am not really disgusted with Strauss. I only fancy so sometimes, as I do with all earthly things” (*L* I.190). Beyond simply expressing her opinions about the translation in her correspondence, Eliot makes requests for edits, and asks for suggestions on how to properly render Strauss’s German in English. She considers questions such as the use of “as though” over “as if,” and more technical matters such as the use of “paschal meal” over “Passover,” and “the Lord’s supper” over “the sacrament” (*L* I.189, 208-9).

The Life of Jesus strives to reconcile literal interpretations of scripture— which take the assertions of the Bible as unquestioned fact— and the naturalist interpretations of scripture— which argues the supernatural events are products of the witness’s fallible sensory experience or misinformation from other sources. What Strauss produces in favor of these “supernaturalist” and “naturalist” modes of interpretation is the mythical method of interpretation. In short, the mythical method of interpretation characterizes Jesus’s life

and miracles as myths written to fulfill Old Testament prophecies and to express certain moral and spiritual ideas through metaphor. He presents two major principles in support of his method. The first is an appeal to the immutable nature of natural laws: “no just notion of the true nature of history is possible without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles” (*LJ* 74-5). The lack of other primary sources detailing the events of Jesus’s life, according to Strauss, further suggests that any claim to historical accuracy found in the gospels were later additions, and that the original collections of stories and sayings of Jesus were not intended to be taken as fact. The second principle is that prophecies of a messiah found in the Old Testament were simply applied to the life and sayings of Jesus; in Strauss’s words, “many of the legends respecting [Jesus] had not to be newly invented; they already existed in the popular hope of the Messiah, having been mostly derived with various modifications from the Old Testament, and merely transferred to Jesus, and accommodated to his character and doctrines” (*LJ* 84). The remainder of the work is an exhaustive examination of each story found in the four Gospels in terms of this mythical interpretative method.

Strauss’s reading of the Transfiguration serves as an excellent example of how he employs his method of mythical interpretation. The Transfiguration of Jesus is a major episode in the New Testament where Jesus— along with Peter, James, and John— ascends a mountain, and when they all reach the top Jesus’s face and garments shine with a bright light; then the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah appear to converse with Jesus, and the voice of God calls Jesus his son². On one hand are the supernaturalists,

² The Transfiguration appears in Matthew 17: 1-9, Mark 9: 2-9, and Luke 9: 28-69.

who maintain that the account of the Transfiguration is literally true, and that God in his divine omnipotence directly caused Jesus's face and clothing to glow, and for Moses and Elijah to appear. On the other hand, there are the naturalists who argue that the miracles of the Transfiguration are products of the witness's fallible subjective experience: the light radiating from Jesus's face and clothing was a mere optical illusion, and the appearances of Moses, Elijah, and the voice of God were further illusions that resulted from a state of lucid dreaming or religious ecstasy.

Strauss finds both interpretations inadequate; the literal interpretation because the light emanating from Jesus and the appearance of the dead prophets violate the unchanging natural laws that govern the universe, and the rationalist interpretation because of textual details that would contradict it— namely Jesus's command to not tell anyone of the Transfiguration until his resurrection, implying the Transfiguration was not a mere phantasm shared by the three witnesses. Instead, Strauss proposes his mythical interpretation of the story, in which the close parallel between Jesus's transfiguration and receiving of the Law on Mt. Sinai show that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies. Strauss explains that the mythical importance of the Transfiguration story is twofold:

First, to exhibit in the life of Jesus an enhanced repetition of the glorification of Moses; and secondly, to bring Jesus as the Messiah into contact with his two forerunners,— by this appearance of the lawgiver and the prophet, of the founder and the reformer of the theocracy, to represent Jesus as the perfecter of the kingdom of God, and the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. (*LJ* 545)

However damaging Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was to orthodox Christian faith,

Strauss maintains that his work in no manner definitively disproves or invalidates the religion. He instead believes his “mythical interpretation, by renouncing the historical body of [the gospel] narratives, rescues and preserves the idea which resides in them, and which alone constitutes their vitality and spirit” (*LJ* 546). In other words, Strauss argues that by acknowledging the lack of concrete historical evidence for Jesus’s life and miracles, the Christian becomes liberated from ungrounded, literal interpretations of the New Testament in favor of the spiritual, allegorical, and symbolic interpretations that more fully express the religion’s ethos. Despite Strauss’s efforts to conserve the importance of Holy Scripture, English critics still responded to *The Life of Jesus* with outrage upon its publication in 1846; Anthony Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, for example called it “the most pestilential book ever vomited out of the jaws of hell” (*LJ* xlvi). It similarly scandalized Germany in 1835, and was the subject of numerous rebuttals and refutations. Eliot’s own work as a translator still received praise, despite the controversial nature of the text (*L* I.227).

Though Eliot made a “vow” of never translating again, she published a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* in 1854 (originally *Das Wesen des Christentums* [1841]). Feuerbach advocated materialist, atheist, and humanist positions throughout his career, and associated with the Young Hegelians— a group of thinkers that articulated a radically leftist interpretation of G.W.F. Hegel’s philosophy. Feuerbach’s central argument in *The Essence of Christianity* is that Christian doctrine displaces man’s deepest values and desires onto an external object: an anthropomorphized God that the human mind fabricates in order to represent its ideal moral and intellectual self. In his own words Feuerbach says, “Man is nothing without an

object. ... But the object to which a subject essentially, necessarily relates, is nothing else than this subject's own, but objective, nature" (*EC 4*). Feuerbach views religion as a form of human knowledge that arises from the imagination, which is the most immediate— but also the most “indirect”— instantiation of man's self-knowledge (*EC 13*). Though religion contains elements of truth disguised with metaphors and symbols, the religious man remains fundamentally ignorant of the foundation of religious belief— that God is nothing other than man's subjective consciousness perceived objectively.

Feuerbach's goal is to demystify religious belief such that human beings are understood to be the sources of love and moral feeling— not a transcendent creator God— because the mediation of human essence through God results in a degradation of life itself. Feuerbach argues that ideas and emotions lose all meaning if humanity is not recognized as their source:

Thus the work of the self-conscious reason in relation to religion is simply to destroy an illusion:— an illusion, however, which is by no means indifferent, but which, on the contrary, is profoundly injurious in its effect on mankind; which deprives man as well of the power of real life, as of the genuine sense of truth and virtue; for even love, in itself the deepest, truest, emotion, becomes by means of religiousness merely ostensible, illusory, since religious love gives itself to man only for God's sake, so that it is given in appearance to man, but in reality to God. (*EC 271*)

According to Feuerbach, emotions and moral principles must become separated from institutionalized religion so that intangible concepts like love, justice, and forgiveness are deemed significant because they come from the human mind and not God. At the end of

the work Feuerbach declares “love is not holy, because it is a predicate of God, but it is a predicate of God because it is in itself divine” (*EC* 270). Throughout the work he offers counter-interpretations to many miracles and doctrines that he argues reveal the truth buried within the myths and rites of the Christian religion, not unlike Strauss’s method in *The Life of Jesus*. For instance, he asserts baptism is nothing but an expression of humanity’s value of water, and by extension nature as a whole; while in the Lord’s Supper man expresses his celebration of the human capacity to transform naturally occurring wheat and grapes into consumable goods, and his ability to reason and make the world useful to him³.

Eliot, whose faith in Christianity had long since been extinguished, took strongly to Feuerbach’s views. In a letter to Sara Hennell she writes “with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree,” and expressed frustration at the book’s negative reviewers, “who set up a mound of stupidity and conscientiousness between every really new book and the public” (*L* II.153, 137). More specifically, she admired Feuerbach’s argument that all morality stems from religious feeling, but religion should be understood as a product of humanity, and rooted in sympathy and identification with one’s fellow man— not rigid moral imperatives and doctrines⁴. Eliot found translating Feuerbach more enjoyable than

³ Feuerbach is perhaps best known in present times as an influence on Karl Marx, who used Feuerbach as a starting point of sorts for his own philosophy. In his early work the “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845), Marx argues that while Feuerbach effectively criticized Christianity as a form of alienated knowledge, he did not recognize “religious sentiment is itself a social product”— that is to say Feuerbach did not go so far as to examine the social conditions that produced and perpetuated Christianity. This leads Marx to formulate his famous saying “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx 423).

⁴ By this time Eliot had also thoroughly studied the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte developed the philosophical doctrine of positivism, which holds that humans can achieve definitive knowledge through rigorous, empirical observation. He

Strauss— whom she found cumbersome and exhausting— because of her enthusiasm for his ideas and preference for his writing style; she writes somewhat humorously to Sara Hennell “[Feuerbach’s] text is— *for a German*— concise, lucid, and even epigrammatic now and then” (L II.141). *The Essence of Christianity* is the sole work Eliot published under her real name Marian Evans, and her translations of both *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined* and *The Essence of Christianity* are still the only editions available in English⁵.

III. Eliot’s Translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics*

Eliot proceeded to translate Spinoza’s *Ethics* (first published posthumously in 1677) shortly after the publication of *The Essence of Christianity* in 1854: however, evidence from her letters and journals show that Eliot was already engaging with Spinoza in her twenties while living in Coventry. She first mentions Spinoza in a letter dated

also developed the idea of a “religion of humanity,” a secular religious system based on humanist doctrines with its own priesthood and sacraments. Eliot, though critical of the doctrinal elements of the “religion,” admired its emphasis on sympathy and altruism. Comte and Spinoza come from very different philosophical traditions and diverge in a number of ways; most importantly, Comte argues true knowledge can be attained through empirical observation and detached from human values, whereas Spinoza insists on the inseparability of knowledge and the ways human value and employ said knowledge. The relationship between Eliot and Comte has been more thoroughly established than that of Eliot and Spinoza; see James F. Scott’s “George Eliot, Positivism, and the Social Vision of *Middlemarch*” (1972), Lesa Scholl’s “George Eliot, Harriet Martineau and the Popularisation of Comte’s *Positive Philosophy*” (2012), and David Hesse’s book-length study *George Eliot and Auguste Comte: the Influence of Comtean Philosophy on the Novels of George Eliot* (1996).

⁵ John Chapman published both *The Life of Jesus* and *The Essence of Christianity*. In 1851 he acquired the radical journal *The Westminster Review*, which was founded by the Utilitarian philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham. Chapman hired Eliot as an editor later that same year. (Ashton 86-92).

February 1843 to Francis Watts, a Professor of Theology at Spring Hill College and friend of the Bray family. She was late returning a book to him, and excuses her tardiness in part to engagement with Spinoza: “I hope I am not too rash in committing your valuable books to the railway without a guardian, but I am ashamed to retain them longer, and I feel that I need the [excuse] of being engaged in a translation of a part of Spinoza’s works for a friend” (*L I.158*). In his edition of Eliot’s letters, Gordon Haight speculates this unspecified work is the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter abbreviated to *TTP*), because it is a key text in the tradition of Biblical criticism— a topic that Eliot was immersed in at the time— and she also attempted a translation later in 1849. In 1847, about one year after the publication of *The Life of Jesus*, Eliot requested Sarah Hennell’s assistance in procuring an edition of Spinoza’s works with a sense of urgency; “Mind, I really want this,” Eliot writes, “and should have no end of difficulty getting it in any other way” (*L I.231*). She began a translation of the *TTP* two years later (*L I.232*). A letter from Mrs. Bray to Sarah Hennell dated April 19, 1849 confirms that Eliot was working on another translation; she writes “M.A. is happy now with this Spinoza to do; she says it is such a rest to her mind” (*L I.280*). Unfortunately, whatever work Eliot produced between 1843 and 1849 is lost.

In 1854 Eliot began to live openly with George Henry Lewes, who had written an article entitled “Spinoza’s Life and Work” for the *Westminster Review* in 1843 (Eliot became an editor for the journal in 1851)⁶. Lewes’s essay gives an overview of Spinoza’s

⁶ Eliot’s relationship with Lewes is well documented in her letters, journals, and biographical works. In short, Eliot and Lewes agreed to openly live together, even though Lewes was still legally married to Agnes Jervis and had several children by her. Their open marriage received much public criticism, and Eliot’s brother did not speak to her until Lewes’ death in 1878. The edition of Spinoza Lewes worked from, alongside

early life, education, excommunication from the Jewish community, and philosophical works⁷. Lewes casts Spinoza as a brave champion of the rationalist cause, unafraid to rebel against authoritarian religious institutions, and claims that “beneath [his] calm, cold stoicism, there was a childlike gaiety springing from a warm sympathizing heart” (Lewes 380). Philosophically, Lewes presents Spinoza’s thought as a materialist response to Descartes— who maintains a distinction between the soul and the body in his *Meditations* and other works. Lewes also labels Spinoza as “the acknowledged parent of a whole nation’s philosophy,” naming a whole host of German thinkers including Fichte, Hegel, Strauss and Feuerbach as all being engaged with Spinoza on some level. Though Eliot does not explicitly say she read Lewes’ essay, she almost certainly did— given her lifelong partnership with Lewes, time spent as an editor for the *Westminster Review*, and Sophia Hennell’s reference to the essay in a letter to Eliot dated July 1855⁸.

Eliot’s translation of the *Ethics* is well documented in her letters and journals. On November 8th, 1854— while visiting Weimar and Berlin with Lewes as he gathered material for his biography of Goethe⁹— she writes in her journal “began translating

Berthold Auerbach’s German translation, is the *Spinozae Opera Posthuma*— a collection of Spinoza’s works published by his closest friends in 1677 consisting of the *Ethics*, the *Political Treatise*, the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the *Letters*, and a grammar of the Hebrew language. This is also the edition that Eliot requested Sarah Hennell’s help in acquiring.

⁷ Lewes himself was very well read in the German philosophical and literary traditions; his essay on Spinoza contains references to a wide range of German intellectuals including Leibnitz, Lessing, Herder, Kant, Schelling, Novalis, Schleiermacher, and Goethe.

⁸ Sophia Hennell praises Lewes’ essay over another essay on Spinoza written by James Froude, by saying the Froude essay is “less excellent, however, in our judgment than a former very attractive one— one peculiarly lucid and searching on the same subject” (*L* II.211).

⁹ Goethe was greatly influenced by Spinoza, and openly confessed at the end of his life to be an unabashed Spinozist. Most scholarship that addresses Goethe’s relationship with

Spinoza's *Ethics*;" she continues to reference his name frequently until the completion of the project in the winter of 1856, often with the terse comment "worked at Spinoza," or simply, "Spinoza" (Harris and Johnston 33-8). Eliot greatly enjoyed traveling Germany, working, and living with Lewes; "I think it is impossible," she writes in a letter describing their new life together, "for two human beings to be more happy in each other" (*L* II.186). Bouts of illness, a difficult transition back to London, and work for the *Westminster Review* delayed her translation of the second half of the *Ethics*.

Despite Eliot's intensive labor over the translation, a dispute with the publisher over payment and the time it took to complete the project prevented its publication during her lifetime, and the work was not made available until 1981. No records give an account of her reaction to her work going unpublished; though in a letter to Charles Bray written before the publisher dropped the project she makes a vague statement about not wanting to be credited with the work: "By the way, when Spinoza comes out, be so good as not to mention *my* name in connection with it. I particularly wish not to be known as the translator of the *Ethics*, for reasons which it would be 'too tedious to mention'" (*L* II.233). The "reason" is likely because the work was to be published under Lewes' name, and therefore she did not want to be known publicly as the true translator. I also suggest that Eliot, or Lewes on her behalf, might have not pursued publication because of Spinoza's reputation as a radical materialist and atheist. Feuerbach, while radical in his critique of Christianity, still strives to preserve the reality of a universal human essence, and abstractions like love and sympathy. Spinoza maintains that all humans share the

Spinoza has yet to be translated in German; one essential title is *Der Junge Goethe und Spinoza* (1969) by Martin Bollacher. Eliot herself studied Goethe extensively, and her letters and journals contain several references to Goethe in conjunction with Spinoza.

essences of *conatus*— a striving to preserve one’s existence— and thought, but argues any other universal is a fiction produced by the imagination; for instance, uniting all types of human love under a single universal concept of “Love” would be a mere construction. It ultimately remains unclear what “reasons” prevented the publication of the *Ethics*, but they must have been significant in order for Eliot or Lewes to not publish a work that took two years of almost daily labor to produce. Eliot also may have abandoned the project because it was during the mid-1850s that she began writing fiction. Her first major works *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* were published in 1857 and 1859, respectively.

In order to prepare for my reading of Eliot’s *Middlemarch* from the vantage of Spinoza’s philosophy, I will now present the elements of Spinoza’s *Ethics* that most pertain to Eliot’s thought and works. The *Ethics* is a notoriously difficult and abstract text written in a style similar to Euclid’s *Elements*, consisting of a series of propositions and arguments based on a predetermined set of definitions and axioms. In Part I, Spinoza first posits that all reality is a single “substance” that exists necessarily, and consists of “infinite attributes, every one of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence” (*E* 9, IP11). He defines attributes as “what the mind perceives of a substance, as constituting the essence of substance;” such attributes of substance could include predicates like red, cold, loud, and sour— but the primary attributes Spinoza identifies are “extension” and “thought” (*E* 2, ID4; *E* 44, IIP1-2). Simply put, extension is the manner in which substance expresses itself physically in space, and thought is the manner in which substance expresses itself as an object of the mind. These two attributes are expressed by substance simultaneously, but are perceived by the intellect as being distinct from one

another. Donald Davidson clarifies Spinoza's conception of the attributes by arguing that the two main attributes are differentiated through language; that is to say when I speak of something in my mind I use a different set of words and phrases than if I were to be describing an object I see before me, and vice-versa, but regardless of the attribute I am still speaking of one single and undivided substance (Davidson 305-6).

Nothing can exist outside of this substance, which Spinoza calls God, or Nature. For Spinoza, God is not the transcendent first cause of reality as he is in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but the immanent, material cause of all finite things. Spinoza calls finite things modes, and defines a mode as a modification of substance, "or that which exists in something else, through which it is conceived (*E 2, ID5*). Any finite thing, however great or small, both depends upon other modes for its existence and is causally determined by other modes:

Every individual thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to action unless its action and existence be determined by a cause, which is also finite and has a determinate cause: and again this cause cannot exist or be determined to action unless its action and existence be determined by another cause which is also finite and has a determine existence, and so on *in infinitum*.
(*E 25, IP28*)

Here Spinoza argues that all things are necessarily part of the same fabric of material reality, and are connected through a single web of causes. Bodies continually act and react upon each other, and though bodies maintain their distinct individuality, every determinate thing relies on other determinate things to exist and constitute itself.

The beginning of the *Ethics* is characterized by a tension between God as one singular substance, and God as a plurality of all modes and their causes. The opposition can be grasped through Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans*, translated as 'nature naturing,' and *natura naturata*, 'nature natured.' *Natura Naturans* is that which "is in itself and is conceived by itself, or such attributes of substance [that] express an eternal and infinite essence," and *natura naturata*, is "everything that follows from the necessity of the nature of God or any of his attributes" (*E* 27; IP29S). More simply, substance—*natura naturans*—is the grand unfolding of all material reality, whereas *natura naturata* is the ensemble of modes that follow necessarily from substance's infinite attributes. Thus while Spinoza deduces reality in terms of producer and produced, he simultaneously abolishes any distinction between the two by conceiving of substance as something neither above nor below reality, but as reality itself. This resolution becomes further apparent with the proposition "God is the immanent and not the transient cause of all things," echoed later with the similar claim, "the existence and essence of God are one and the same thing" (*E* 20, IP18; *E* 21, IP20). These two propositions together equate God's power, essence, and existence as the same concepts; this inverts God from transcendent cause of all things to the immediate material, modal world. The concept of God as a singular container of all reality dissolves in favor of a world of surfaces, represented by corporeal nature.

Spinoza's materialism becomes fully articulated with his assertion that the human mind is a mere corporeal mode produced by the material body: "The object of the idea which constitutes the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else" (*E* 53, IIP13). In this crucial proposition Spinoza immerses the

mind into the immanent plane of reality, such that it too exists amongst the world's many objects that continually act and react upon each other in a single web of causation. Any state of the human mind must therefore be considered as the product, and component, of an entirely materialist horizon. Donald Davidson can again help clarify Spinoza's complex language and argumentation; he succinctly summarizes the total unity of body and mind as follows: "A change in the psychic character, or intensity, or equality of an emotion does not lead to change in a bodily state; it is one" (Davidson 301). All human thoughts, whether in the form of confused emotions or abstract intuitions, are components of the material body, and are therefore subject to the same causal chains that produce and determine other modes.

The Italian Marxist philosopher and Spinoza scholar Antonio Negri argues the publication of the *TTP* between the composition of Parts II and III of the *Ethics* serves as a decisive moment where Spinoza immerses mode, substance and attribute "into history, into politics, into the phenomenology of a single collected life" (Negri 84). To assess the implications of his reduction of reality to a single material horizon, Spinoza turns to the developing Hebrew state as presented in the Old Testament as a case study by which he examines how the imagination shapes humanity's perception of reality, assimilation of knowledge, and creation of power structures. According to Spinoza, the Israelites misunderstood the world around them as being caused by a creator-God, rather than as a product of "the rules determining the nature of each individual thing ... to exist and to behave in a certain way" (*TTP* 195). The Hebrews, uneducated due to their enslavement by the Egyptians, thus took myth as a true understanding of reality, and sought a ruler to protect them from a world that appeared menacing. Spinoza argues the reliance on myth

and authoritarian government ultimately led to their bondage, as they were subjected to the exhaustive legal codes that governed every aspect of their lives. Though the moral codes Moses instituted were stringent and frequently arbitrary, they were still produced necessarily as a means by which the Hebrews strove to preserve in their existence.

Spinoza, who after the completion of the *TTP* possessed a clearer vision of the strictly corporeal reality he wished to describe, completed Parts III, IV, and V— which in a sense make up a second part of the *Ethics*. Spinoza opens Part III with the argument that man does not act from free will but the causally determined appetite; men believe in the illusion of human freedom “because they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined,” and that “decisions of the mind are nothing else than the appetites themselves which vary with the constitutions of the body” (*E* 97, IIP2). A baby believes it freely seeks its mother’s breast because it is ignorant its hunger is the true cause for his desire, just as an angry man believes he freely seeks revenge because he is ignorant of the power his own anger has on his actions. From this claim about the appetite Spinoza proceeds to formulate his theory of *conatus*, which states “the effort by which every thing strives to preserve in existing, is nothing but the actual essence of that thing” (*E* 100, IIP7). In other words, the human appetite, whether it strives for carnal pleasure or rational understanding, is not a component of man’s being but is his being itself; desire, for Spinoza, is simply the appetite insofar as one is conscious of it.

From *conatus*— a striving to preserve in one’s existence and man’s very essence— arise the emotions (rendered “affects” in other translations), which Spinoza defines as “those affections of the body by which its power of acting is increased or

diminished, is assisted or restrained, and also the ideas of those of those affections” (*E* 93, IIID3). Joy and sorrow are the primary emotions and serve as the foundation for all other emotions within Spinoza’s system. Joy is understood simply to be the passion “whereby the mind passes to a higher degree of perfection,” a higher degree of perfection understood to be an increased power to preserve in one’s existence; opposed to joy is pain, the passion “whereby the mind passes to a lower degree of perfection” (*E* 102, IIIP11)¹⁰. Part III contains an appendix titled “Definitions of the Emotions,” in which Spinoza catalogues a great number of other emotions including contempt, confidence, and repentance. However, the emotions— along with opinions and mental images— first appear to the mind in a confused and mutilated way; he calls these inadequate ideas, and considers them the first, least sophisticated type of knowledge. Despite their inadequacy, desire and the emotions are the causes of human striving. Spinoza clarifies this notion with an example in the Preface to Part IV: A man, seeking the comforts of the domestic life, determines to build a house and mistakenly understands habitation to be the “final cause,” or end goal, of his building the house because, like many, he is ignorant of the causes of his appetite. What he considers to be the “final cause”— habitation— is actually the desire for domestic comforts and is only an “efficient cause”— the agent that brings about change and motion, which is in this case the building of the house (*E* 154-55; IVpref.). There are no final causes for Spinoza, because being is always striving to

¹⁰ Eliot makes the somewhat dubious decision to translate the Latin *laetitia* as “pleasure,” as does Samuel Shirley in his edition of Spinoza’s works. Curley translates *laetitia* as “joy,” which is a more literal rendering, and as Potkay suggests, best captures the cognitive aspect of the emotion (Curley 161; Potkay 240). For the duration of my paper I will use Curley’s translation when referring to *laetitia*. Furthermore, it should be noted that *laetitia* has another meaning, “fertility,” which I feel relates to Spinoza’s concept of pleasure/ joy as being an increase in one’s power, productivity, and presence in the world.

preserve in its existence and never reaches such an end.

Spinoza argues that because desire and the affects are the efficient causes of man's actions, liberation from the passions is understood to involve an ordering of the passions in accord with reason. He calls reason the second order of knowledge, and defines it as the "adequate common notions and ideas which we possess of the properties of things" (*E* 76, IIP40S). Common notions are "a representation of a composition between two or more bodies, and a unity of this composition" and are necessarily adequate ideas (Deleuze 54). The third order of knowledge is intuitive cognition that understands finite things under "the form of eternity," or in other words, contemplating objects as being products of a causally determined material reality. By taking all human thoughts and actions as modes of God, or Nature, inadequate ideas like irrational moral imperatives, fictional historical narratives, and belief in absolute good and evil, are dispelled for a clear understanding of the material causes that shape reality. For Spinoza, any type of adequate knowledge can only arise from knowledge of finite modes and causes, a point he emphasizes in both the *Ethics* and the *TTP*:

The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God. (*E* 232, VP24)

The more we come to understand natural things, the greater and more perfect the knowledge of God we acquire. (*TTP* 59)

The emotions are one type of "singular" and "natural" thing that the mind can come to understand, and Spinoza confidently states that there is no emotion of the body "of which we cannot form some clear and distinct idea" (*E* 220, VP4). An adequate understanding of the emotions involves viewing them as an instantiation of *conatus*, and does not

displace one's emotions onto the external world: if I say a snake is evil because I am afraid of it I have an inadequate understanding of both the snake and my own fear; instead I should understand that my fear is a type of striving to preserve in existence as it encourages me to avoid bodily harm, and that the snake's ability to harm me does not reflect an evil nature but its own striving to preserve in its existence.

An adequate knowledge of God, or Nature, allows the mind to modulate the passions such that the sorrowful passions are mitigated and the joyful passions are maximized. Spinoza explains this idea in Part V of the *Ethics* by writing "So long as we are not agitated by emotions which are contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and concatenating the affections of the body according to the intellect" (*E* 223-4, VP10). To formulate this claim differently, once a man understands the nature of his subjective being and his environment, he can position himself in the world such that he can use and manipulate objects to his own advantage, rather than being controlled by external causes. The mind's ability to orient its passions towards rational, productive ends is what Spinoza understands to be human freedom, because in that process the passive emotions of the body become real-world actions. This conception of freedom is not a passive state of perfect virtue but a power of the mind that is always at work, as desire and emotions themselves continually change with the external world and therefore must continually be re-ordered and adjusted.

Consider a simple example that illustrates Spinoza's idea of modulating the affects, such that passive emotional states can be transformed into free actions. An aging man decides one weekend to take a hike in the mountains in order to escape the crowded suburbs and maintain his physical health; however, because of his age the long hike

causes his muscles and joints to be sore the day following his excursion. The relaxation and pleasure brought about from the hike are understood to be joyful passions, while the pain and fatigue that result are sorrowful passions. In order to act freely in this situation, the man must first become aware of how hiking affects his body and mind— that it brings him relaxation and keeps him in shape, but also makes him sore. Once he has these clear and distinct ideas, he is then able to evaluate if hiking is the best activity he can pursue to attain his goals of physical and mental well-being. He might conclude he should pursue an alternate activity, like swimming, in order to reduce damage inflicted on his aging joints. He also might determine that hiking of all activities is still the best for him to engage in, despite the soreness that results from it. Thus even if a temporary stiffness of joints results from hiking, he has become the adequate, self-reflexive cause of his pain, because he was aware that hiking would result in that body state, and determined the benefits would outweigh the negatives. A whole host of other, more complicated situations could be devised to further illustrate Spinoza's idea of human freedom, but this example should provide the general thrust of his argument: humans can orient themselves in the world in such a way that their desires harmonize with rational thinking.

Because Spinoza emphasizes the importance of minimizing the impact external things have on the mind, he has historically been viewed as a philosopher working in the Stoic tradition alongside ancient figures like Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. The Classical Stoics believed the universe operates according to absolute natural laws, and that human lives are a mere part of the larger deterministic chain. The goal of the Stoic is to diminish the power of the emotions over the mind to the point of their extirpation, such that the mind can withstand whatever happens in the

outside world, as the infinite number of external causes that shape the universe far exceed the power of one individual. The virtuous man, according to the Stoics, possesses the traits of mental calmness, self-sufficiency, and temperance. Spinoza's thought undeniably aligns itself with many of these doctrines; like the Stoics, he conceives the world as being a causally determined network of related things, and understands the passions to be irrational ideas of external objects. Most importantly, Spinoza sees uncontrolled emotions as the main cause of human unhappiness. He writes in the Preface to Part IV "the inability of man to govern and restrain his passions I call *servitude*. For when man is subject to passions he is not in his own power, but in the power of destiny" (*E* 153, IVpref.). However, Spinoza consciously distances himself from the Stoics; he mentions the Stoics one time in the *Ethics* in order to criticize them: "The Stoics, indeed, supposed that [the passions] depend entirely on our Will, and that we can keep them under absolute control. Nevertheless, they were compelled by experience, though not by their principles, to admit, that considerable practice and effort are required in order to subdue and regulate the passions" (*E* 215, Vpref.). Here Spinoza contends that Classical Stoicism relies on the constructed concepts of human free will and the absolute power of the mind to control the body's emotions.

In opposition to the Stoics, Spinoza argues that the human mind exists immanently within nature and cannot 'rise above' the body and control it with disinterested rationality; in Part IV he writes that "it is impossible that man should not be a part of Nature and should suffer no other changes than those which can be understood by means of his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause" (*E* 159-6, IVP4). Because all human beings share *conatus*— an innate striving to preserve in one's

existence— humans exist within a constant state of desire for what they imagine will help sustain their being: both the emotions— confused and mutilated ideas— and reason— adequate knowledge of the world and its causes— arise from *conatus* as the faculties by which humans direct themselves toward what they desire. Spinoza maintains that both the emotions and reason are essential for achieving virtue, because the emotions assist the mind in attaining knowledge of itself and of external things. In “The Joyful Passions in Spinoza’s Theory of Relations,” Simon Duffy demonstrates the epistemological role the emotions play in Spinoza’s philosophy¹¹. The experience of a joyful passion— which by definition is passive and results from external causes— encourages the mind to locate the cause of the passion, and form common notions about the cause, thus giving the mind the power to transform the passive joyful passion into an active action. To return to my earlier example of the man who enjoys hiking, the joy he experiences during his first hiking excursion leads him to the knowledge that hiking is the cause of his pleasure; once he has reached this knowledge he can then position himself in the world such that he can enjoy this pleasure more often, and thereby his reason becomes the efficient cause of his activity and the joy he experiences thereof. Duffy concludes his essay by stating “the joyful passive affection is the mechanism by which the mind moves from an inadequate idea to an adequate idea and by which the body moves from experiencing a passion to an action” (Duffy 62).

¹¹ Duffy structures his essay in terms of a comparison between Gilles Deleuze’s and Pierre Machery’s interpretations of Spinoza’s theory of the affects, ultimately favoring Deleuze. My explication of Spinoza has also been informed by Deleuze’s two major works on Spinoza: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (1968) and *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1970).

Valtteri Viljanen constructs a similar argument in *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*. Viljanen emphasizes Spinoza's belief that the passions are modes of substance, work in a predictable manner, and can be modulated to produce certain outcomes just like lines on a geometric plane— given that one has an adequate understanding of their emotions and the external causes that relate to them. The mind will always be subject to the passive affects— joy and sorrow being the most fundamental— so therefore the mind's power lies not in its ability to eliminate the emotions, but in the way it can create productive relationships between its own striving and the external things it strives towards. Valtteri Viljanen beautifully summarizes the importance of the emotions in Spinoza's ethical system by writing:

Reason and affectivity are tightly intertwined in Spinoza's philosophy, because they both have their basis in the essential *conatus*. Accordingly, rationality does not imply lack of emotions. ... Granted, human existence is a fragile affair of innumerable conflicts, sorrows, and tumults of emotion; the comforting message Spinoza wants to convey is that there is a way to attain, not an unemotional existence without struggles, but a joyful and fulfilling life of the Spinozistic sage, the rationally desiring being. (Viljanen 180)

Spinoza's political philosophy further distances him from the Stoics, as he argues virtue is necessarily a collective, social endeavor. Though the Stoics say that the rational man both engages in mutually productive friendships and works to lessen evil in the world and helps others, true virtue ultimately results in a self-sufficiency that frees one from the reliance on other people. For instance, Seneca writes in his *Consolations*, "If no

one can do [the virtuous man] an injury, no one can do him a service either. ...It is impossible, therefore, for any one either to injure or to benefit the wise man” (Seneca’s *De Consolatione* as quoted in Debrabender 56-7). Spinoza, in stark contrast, claims that “there is nothing more useful to man than man,” and believes virtue can only be attained by actively engaging with a community of other thinking beings. Liberation is necessarily a collective endeavor for Spinoza, in which rational men come together to constitute a single democratically constituted political body, such that “the minds and bodies of all should compose as it were one mind and one body” (*E* 169, IVP18S). In Etienne Balibar’s words the State is a “collective individual,” or “an individual of individuals” (Balibar 116)¹². Because the desires of men who live according to reason are oriented toward the single good of increasing the understanding and maximizing the joyful passions, each man can pursue that end with a greater power in a State than if he were in solitude; it must also be noted that Spinoza understands the State to be a grouping of rational beings, and not simply a government and its institutions. Communication, the free flow of information, between beings becomes the means through which man increases his understanding of singular things and thereby acts freely, as knowledge is always constituted in a political context. For Spinoza, the political and intellectual aspects of man are united into a single striving.

The freely constituted society for Spinoza ensures well being for all, because the rational man considers how his actions will impact others, and always tries to act in a way that is good not only for him, but for all. Spinoza formulates this argument in Part IV in several places; two examples include the following:

¹² My interpretation of Spinoza’s political philosophy is largely informed by Etienne Balibar’s essential work *Spinoza and Politics*.

It follows that men who are governed by reason, i.e., men who under the guidance of reason seek what is useful for them, desire nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men also, and thus are just, faithful and honest. (*E* 169; IVP18S)

The free man never acts with deceit but always with fidelity. (*E* 206; IVP77)

Moral action—which could take on the forms of generous acts, fair business practices, resisting violence, and many others—is brought about by the power of the understanding from the basis of a striving to preserve one’s existence, and not obedience to moral imperatives out of fear, guilt, or similar sorrowful passion. Spinoza thus anticipates the criticism of Christian ethics formulated by Feuerbach nearly two centuries later, who also maintained that morality ought to be grounded in an outward concern for others because it is in man’s material essence to care for other beings.

It is where Spinoza differs from the Ancient Stoics that I contend George Eliot most aligns with Spinoza. After examining the existing body of scholarship on Eliot’s relationship with Spinoza, I will demonstrate that Eliot, like Spinoza, understands that the only way humans can achieve freedom in a causally-determined world is to successfully orient, not eliminate, one’s desires and emotions in accords to the mind’s understanding. Freedom, for Eliot, is also a collective endeavor, and must always be pursued alongside similar rational beings.

IV. Revising the Eliot-Spinoza Connection

Several studies have been published on George Eliot’s relationship to Spinoza,

and this phase of my essay will serve as an overview of current scholarship on the subject. Dorothy Atkins' 1978 work *George Eliot and Spinoza* is the first book-length study of Spinoza's influence on Eliot's fiction. It consists of two parts, first an overview of Spinoza's *Ethics*, followed by an analysis of central characters from *Adam Bede* and *Daniel Deronda* based on Spinoza's ethical philosophy. According to Atkins, Adam Bede moves to a greater state of freedom over the course of the novel by learning that Hetty Sorrell—despite her outward beauty—is vain, petty, and selfish, and that he should instead cultivate his love for Dinah Morris—a beautiful and intelligent woman who serves as a Methodist lay preacher and missionary (Atkins 97-123). She concludes her analysis of Adam by writing “His passage from inadequate ideas and the resultant emotional bondage has entailed a journey from reliance on imperfect knowledge...through reason and intuition to freedom from bondage to unrestrained passions” (Atkins 123). Dinah Morris, Atkins argues, exemplifies Spinoza's idea of freedom and blessedness, as she possesses an intellect capable of understanding the complexities of the world from a perspective of “eternity,” which in turn allows her to help others—including Adam—ascend to greater states of freedom (Atkins 123-39). In stark contrast to Dinah, Hetty lives in a state of bondage to her emotions because she lacks an adequate understanding of herself and her environment. As such, she cannot properly control her actions and becomes pregnant by a young gentleman Arthur Donnithorne, who also lives in bondage to his passion. Out of despair and desperation she murders her baby, and comes close to receiving the death sentence when tried for her crimes (Atkins 139-57). After she offers her analysis of *Adam Bede*, Atkins gestures toward the Spinozan theme of bondage and freedom in Eliot's other novels. *George Eliot*

and Spinoza is very successful in establishing the Eliot-Spinoza relationship and boasts a detailed examination of *Adam Bede*; but, I find the study somewhat oversimplifies Spinoza's theory of the affects by reducing his ethical system to a simple binary of bondage and freedom from the passions. New Spinoza scholarship— such as the works by Negri, Duffy, Viljanen, and Balibar I previously cited in my explication— can help build on Atkins' work to create a more current account of Eliot's relationship with Spinoza that emphasizes questions of the affects, power, and politics.

I contend Moira Gatens has produced the most productive scholarship on the Eliot-Spinoza connection since Atkins. Gatens has published multiple articles on Eliot and Spinoza; I will briefly discuss two that share similar lines of argument. In her 2009 article "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot," Gatens claims like others before her that Eliot should be viewed as both a novelist and a philosopher. According to Gatens, Eliot's philosophic project seeks to show how the imagination "grounds our disposition to feel sympathy for our fellow human beings," and that "it is this disposition and its potential refinement as moral knowledge that she sought to realize in her novels" ("The Art and Philosophy..." 74). To support her argument Gatens examines several important passages from *Middlemarch* that shows the connection between Dorothea's disposition to sympathize and the knowledge that arises thereof; however, her reading of the novel is incomplete as it does not closely examine how Eliot's language reflects Spinoza's influence, nor does it fully investigate the intimate relationship between knowledge and power that Eliot and Spinoza both develop.

Gatens continues this conversation about Eliot as both novelist and philosopher with another article published several years later titled "Compelling Fictions: Spinoza

and George Eliot on Imagination and Belief.” Gatens speculates what Spinoza’s philosophy may say about the arts, and concludes that Eliot’s use of narrative is in accord with Spinoza’s thinking because Eliot possesses an imagination capable of creating fictional characters and stories, and also presents her stories in a detailed, scientific manner; “if Spinoza’s philosophy were to be capable of developing a theory of art,” Gatens says, “then there is every reason to suppose that it would be compatible with Eliot’s ethical realism” (“Compelling Fictions...” 86). My reading of *Middlemarch* will incorporate these overarching themes of Gatens’ work by operating on the assumptions that Eliot’s novels represent an attempt to practice philosophy in an alternative mode, and that Spinoza would approve of the novel as a means by which a reader can come to more adequate knowledge of human nature and its place in the larger world.

Several other pieces of scholarship on Eliot and Spinoza have been published within the past ten years, though I do not find them to be of the same caliber as the work of Atkins and Gatens. Miriam Henson published “George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* As a Translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics*” in 2009, winning the annual essay prize awarded by *The George Eliot Review*. Henson opens her essay by quoting an insightful passage from an Eliot letter written in 1843 to the Bray family. In the letter she alludes to the complexity of Spinoza’s philosophy, and suggests that the public could better use an interpretation of his works than an actual translation:

What is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza’s works, but a true estimation of his life and system. After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of

making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them and give an analysis. (*L* I.321)

Henson suggests that *Middlemarch* acts as such an “estimation” of Spinoza’s philosophy, and expresses ideas that cannot be grasped solely through the *Ethics*’ cold, mathematical proofs— a compelling proposition. She argues that Eliot’s own philosophy is largely aligned with Spinoza’s, but diverges from Spinoza in her emphasis on the importance of the emotions for the moral life. In Henson’s words, Eliot “chooses to encourage a compassion based on feeling, rather than that exercised by Spinoza’s ideal rational man” (Henson 25).

I find it problematic that Henson discusses sympathy, compassion, and pity as equitable concepts, because this is not faithful to either Eliot or Spinoza— nor does it consider Gatens’ argument that sympathy, for Eliot, can lead to usable “moral knowledge” (“The Art and Philosophy...” 74). In my study of *Middlemarch* I will seek to disentangle sympathy from compassion and pity, and consider Eliot’s conception of sympathy as being in accord with Spinoza’s thought¹³. Eliot understands sympathy as a mechanism by which a person can learn about the experience of another through images and other representations; compassion and pity are emotions that might arise from the extension of sympathy— but are not necessarily related to sympathy. Though Spinoza does not specifically address sympathy, he considers communication the most important element in maintaining a stable society because the open circulation of information allows for differences between individuals to be overcome through tolerance and rational

¹³ Curley translates the Latin *comiseratio* as “pity,” but as with the translation of *laetitia* as pleasure and pain I will treat compassion and pity as representing the same general concept.

understanding (Balibar 105-124). I propose that sympathy, as Eliot conceives it, is a certain species of the communication that Spinoza (as interpreted by Balibar) argues is so essential. With regards to compassion and pity, Spinoza conceives these emotions as passive affects produced by the body in reaction to external causes, and must be transformed by reason into action in order to become useful; he goes as far to say that “compassion in a man who lives according to reason, is in itself evil and useless” (*E* 190, IVP50). I will show that Eliot also understands compassion and pity to be debilitating, unless these emotions are used to produce substantial action.

Isobel Armstrong focuses on Eliot and Spinoza’s shared understanding of the emotions as being material body states in her 2013 essay, “George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Emotions”. In Spinoza, Armstrong explains, the emotions of love and hate are generated primarily through images, or fragmented ideas of the imagination; these emotions work on both a personal subjective level and on societal, cultural levels. She then argues Eliot’s novels are in alignment with Spinoza’s theory of the emotions, first by showing how the thoughts of *Middlemarch*’s Dorothea Brooke are described as being a series of mental images in the scenes that describe her love for Edward Casaubon and later Will Ladislaw. Armstrong goes on to say that Eliot examines how affects work on a collective and historical level in *Daniel Deronda*, as the novel presents the issues of anti-Semitism and class divisions as products of Europe’s historical distrust of Jews that perpetuate themselves via “the mimetic contagion of affect” (Armstrong 306). Though her explication of Spinoza’s conception of love and hate is quite sophisticated, I also find Armstrong’s treatment of Eliot’s texts inadequate— as she spends only five pages examining two of Eliot’s greatest novels.

Simon Calder's 2012 essay "George Eliot, Spinoza, and the Ethics of Literature" represents yet another attempt to examine Eliot's relationship with Spinoza by discussing their respective conceptions of the imagination, emotions, and reason. Though he agrees Eliot and Spinoza agree on many questions, Calder concludes that Eliot's fiction in contrast to Spinoza "reveal[s] the virtue of oscillating between two incommensurable modes of ('adequate' and 'inadequate') judgments" and shows "oscillation must neither dissolve into a battle nor resolve itself into a synthesis" (Calder 186-7). I find this claim somewhat problematic for reasons similar to my criticism of Henson's article on *Middlemarch*: Eliot, I will argue along with Calder, does indeed align herself with Spinoza by conceiving of knowledge as existing in "inadequate" and "adequate" forms; but, counter to Calder, Eliot also understands that any "oscillation" between the two must "resolve itself into a synthesis" in order for humans to achieve a state of activity and freedom. For Eliot and Spinoza alike, virtue involves the ordering of the passions in accord with reason such that the two can work as a single force. I also find puzzling Calder's decision to examine the relationship between Eliot and Spinoza by looking at *The Lifted Veil*, an obscure early work of Eliot's published in 1859. The novella differs from the realist style that characterizes the main body of Eliot's work, and more closely resembles works of gothic horror like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in its depictions of clairvoyance and pseudoscience. What I feel is needed is a sustained reading of Eliot's greatest work—*Middlemarch*—in terms of Spinoza's philosophy, as interpreted by the most current authorities on Spinoza.

V. A Spinozan reading of *Middlemarch*

I will now turn my focus to *Middlemarch*, and show with more detail than critics before me, that the novel represents a worldview profoundly related to that of Spinoza's. My reading of *Middlemarch* will consider the central protagonist Dorothea Brooke as being characterized by an abundance of energy, and argue that the novel shows how she adjusts her energies and desires such that she increases her happiness and influence. In Spinozan terms, I argue *Middlemarch* is about Dorothea's progression toward an increased understanding of her subjective being and the world, thus allowing her to actively modulate her affects such that they are in accords with reason and her own self interest; by the novel's conclusion her progression in results in an increased level of virtue, power, and freedom— which for Spinoza are all synonyms. To support and expand my argument, I also analyze Tertius Lydgate as a character with a potential for success and influence similar to Dorothea, but does not achieve a comparable level of actualization because of a complex mixture of his own poor decision-making and external causes. Along the way I examine include Will Ladislaw, Rosamond Vincy, and Bulstrode in order to further elucidate *Middlemarch*'s Spinozist elements.

The Prelude introduces the novel's theme of human energy, female energy in particular, and the transformation of that energy into substantial action in a causally determined world with a discussion of St. Theresa of Avila. Eliot presents St. Theresa—the sixteenth-century Christian mystic, monastic reformer, and author of influential devotional literature— as having a “passionate, ideal nature” that “demanded an epic life” (*M* 3). St. Theresa, unsatisfied with the frivolous “many-volumed romances” and “social conquests,” finds the reforming of religious orders as the object to which she can direct her energy towards— to great success and historical influence. Unfortunately, Eliot

laments, many women who possess passionate and intelligent natures like St. Theresa do not find such an opportunity to cultivate their power, leading to their unhappiness and eventual obscurity; she writes that “With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; ... for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order” (*M* 3). It is the existing social structures, and not an inborn “feminine incompetence,” that prevent women from fully actualizing their potential, Eliot claims. She likens this problem to a young swan that does not live with its own kind, and instead gets raised “uneasily” among ducklings. The Prelude and the themes it introduces are Spinozan because it presents St. Theresa’s life as a striving that comes not from the free will as defined in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but from a deeper and more foundational force, much like Spinoza’s *conatus*, which he again defines as “the effort by which every thing strives to preserve in existing” (*E* 100, IIP7). Theresa was able to position herself such that her striving, comprised of desires, emotions, and ideas, is ordered in a way that maximizes her power to transform her mental energy into real action, or as the narrator says, “shape” her “thought[s]” and “deeds” into a “noble agreement.”

Though she does not do so explicitly until the novel’s conclusion, Eliot invites the reader to consider Dorothea Brooke as a “later-born Theresa” also in search for an “epic life” of “constant unfolding of far-resonate action”— an outlet for her desires that results in her own happiness and historical influence. Dorothea is intelligent in a general sense, given by her reading and memorization of works like “Pascal’s *Pensees*” and “Jeremy Taylor,” and also possesses a “theoretic” mind which “yearn[s] after some lofty

conception of the world” (*M* 5-6)¹⁴. The theoretic aspect of her mind implies both a mix of imagination and concrete idea; she can understand the world as it exists as well as think of how she would like to change it for the better. Dorothea’s combination of intelligence and religious impulses lead her to dream of a philanthropic project, in which the dilapidated houses on her Uncle’s estate would be torn down and replaced with “real houses fit for human beings” of her own design (*M* 21). It is in the attempted enactment of the cottage project that marks Dorothea’s progression towards human freedom as Spinoza conceives it, because with the project she might transform the compassion she feels for Middlemarch’s poorer citizens into substantive activity.

Despite her intelligence and other virtues, Dorothea still exists within a state of emotional bondage, in that she does not fully understand the nature of her desires and the emotions that arise from them¹⁵. Spinoza would more generally characterize Dorothea as presented in the novel’s opening scenes as a person who has yet to orient her striving, *conatus*, toward rational, productive ends. She frequently acts “impetuously,” and has a “very childlike” understanding of marriage and societal expectations of courtship (*M* 23, 7); for instance she does not wish to marry Sir James Chettam but accepts his advances in the hopes of his supporting her housing project. Dorothea’s romantic attention instead

¹⁴ Blaise Pascal (1623—62) was a French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher; *Pensées* documents his religious awakening after a near-fatal carriage accident, and includes the first formulation of Pascal’s Wager—an influential argument for God’s existence which states that one ought cultivate religious faith and live morally, because if God exists one will receive eternal life in heaven, and if God does not exist one only loses temporal pleasures and comforts. Jeremy Taylor (1613—67) was an Anglican cleric known for his eloquent prose style. One of his most famous works is a two-volume devotional manual *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, which has received praise from John Wesley and Samuel Coleridge, among others.

¹⁵ Atkins, as noted, establishes that Eliot often depicts her characters as being in bondage or free from their emotions. See pg. 32.

falls on the Reverend Edward Casaubon, a clergyman many years her senior, as she imagines his wealth of knowledge will allow her to “judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian” and thus help others in the community (*M* 41). Casaubon proposes to Dorothea by sending her a letter after a brief courtship, though he does not seek her hand for mutual love and companionship, but rather to assist him in completing his life’s work *The Key to All Mythologies*— a historical work in which he hopes to argue “all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed” (*M* 16). In Dorothea’s excitement she does not examine Casaubon’s letter “critically” and discern that beneath his eloquent language he wishes to marry her for selfish reasons (*M* 28).

Dorothea’s initial knowledge of Casaubon is distorted, and based on fantasies and images that bear no correspondence to reality. When first introduced, Dorothea envisions Casaubon as a genius of the same caliber as John Milton or the 16th-century theologian Richard Hooker. Eliot employs Free Indirect Discourse (hereafter abbreviated to FID) in order to reveal the great disparity between Dorothea’s fantasy of Casaubon, and Casaubon as he actually exists. FID is a third-person narrative technique pioneered by Jane Austen and Goethe, among others, in which the narrator speaks a character’s thoughts on their behalf. In his seminal work on the subject, Roy Pascal says FID “may be heard as a tone of irony, or sympathy, of negation or approval underlying the statement of the character” (Pascal 17). Entering into Dorothea’s mind, the narrator recounts her thoughts as follows: “Here was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning almost amounted

to a proof of whatever he believed!” (M 15). With a gently mocking tone, the narrator reveals the irony of her adoration for Casaubon. Again using FID, the narrator explains that Casaubon was simply the first potential outlet that could satisfy her yearning to impact the world and engage in meaningful labor: “she was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the world’s habits” (M 28). Dorothea thinks that without a wiser guide she will remain subjected to her own ignorance, and only by committing herself to another will she achieve the freedom she desires. More specifically, Dorothea does not know how to transform the compassion she has for others into real action, and marries Casaubon in an irrational attempt to fulfill that desire.

In Spinozan terms, Dorothea has an “inadequate idea” of Casaubon because her knowledge of him is primarily influenced by distorted mental images, and not observation or reasoning. Dorothea’s infatuation with Casaubon closely resembles Spinoza’s descriptions of wonder and devotion. In the appendix to Part III of the *Ethics* titled “Definitions of the Emotions” Spinoza defines wonder as follows: “Wonder is that state of mind in which we remain fixed in the imagination of a particular object. The mind remains fixed, because this single imagination has no connection with any other” (*E* 140, IIIapp.4)¹⁶. A definition of devotion follows, being a “love towards one who excites our wonder” (*E* 142, IIIapp.10). Wonder and devotion can pose significant problems to the mind because they limit the number of ways the mind can be affected and objects it

¹⁶ Spinoza claims wonder is not a “true emotion” following his definition. Wonder does not constitute a “true” emotion because it, along with all other emotions, is derived from the three primary emotions— desire, pleasure, and pain. Spinoza at great lengths argues that the ideas of good and evil are value judgments that do not adequately reflect the nature of things in themselves; therefore wonder and devotion might also not be “true” emotions because they arise from an inadequate knowledge of things.

can contemplate. For Spinoza, the mind should strive to understand a large number of things and how they relate to one another and Nature as a whole— not retract the scope of its reach by fixating on a single specific thing¹⁷. Dorothea's fate is the later; she woefully overestimates Casaubon's greatness, ignores objections to the marriage from others, and allows her mind to fixate on his image.

As a consequence of her serious misjudgment of Casaubon's character, Dorothea experiences an overwhelming unhappiness that severely limits her ability to be happy and achieve her goals. To further characterize her in terms of Spinoza's account of the affects, Dorothea suffers because marrying Casaubon results in a reduction of her power of acting. In the first half of this paper, I explained how Spinoza's ethical system is based on power, and that every emotional state, except for desire, can be understood in terms of "[joy] ... whereby the mind passes to a higher degree of perfection" and "[sorrow] ... whereby the mind passes to a lower degree of perfection," perfection in this case meaning one's power of acting (*E* 102, IIP11). Upon Dorothea's return from her honeymoon in Rome to Lowick, Casaubon's estate, the narrator employs phrases and concepts that closely resemble Spinoza's in order to describe her depression and inactivity at length:

Meanwhile there was the snow and the low arch of dun vapor—there was the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid—where the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies.— "What shall I do?" "Whatever you please, my

¹⁷ Spinoza phrases this notion as conceiving things "under a form of eternity". See VP22-30.

dear:" that had been her brief history since she had left off learning morning lessons and practising silly rhythms on the hated piano. Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness. Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colorless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight. (*M* 173)

Both Dorothea's body and mind are shown to be restricted and unable to express their full potential in this rich passage. On a physical level, Dorothea cannot indulge in a "ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness," "ruminant" being defined by the OED as "of an animal that chews the cud." The humorous phrase "ruminant joy" represents the physical pleasure brought about through marital affection, in both a sexual sense and the intimate gestures exchanged between lovers, such as innocent caresses and sharing bedchambers. This type of animal "joy"—an increased level of activity—is unavailable to Dorothea because Casaubon's old age and obsession with his scholarship is coupled with a sterility and detachment from simple corporeal pleasures. Dorothea's bodily inactivity is further reflected in the wintry landscape. The "snow" and "chill" indicates a dormancy, or even death, of natural life, and along with the "dun vapor" presumed to be gray smoke of fireplaces, renders the whole environment "colorless." Lowick's drab interior is similarly inert and unwelcoming, containing "shrunken" furniture and a tapestry of a "ghostly stag."

Mentally, Dorothea's suffering ironically comes from the paradoxical liberty of her domestic position. Though she has an abundance of free time, she can only occupy herself with trivial tasks such as "practising silly rhythms on the hated piano;" and the "never-read books" do not appeal to her because they are merely leather-bound "volumes of polite literature" intended to compliment the furniture and not intellectually stimulating works like Pascal and Jeremy Taylor (*M* 48, 5). By marrying Casaubon, Dorothea hoped to assist him in the completion of his project by organizing his notes, translating passages, and even helping the writing process; more generally, she sought an arena in which she could both help others and increase her own sphere of influence, or as the narrator says here, "bring guidance" to her energy. But not only is Dorothea unable to give Casaubon assistance, she lives within a state of "moral imprisonment," as she cannot carry out her dream of drafting architecture plans and building cottages on behalf of Middlemarch's poorest residents. From the beginning of their relationship, Casaubon does "not care about building cottages" like Dorothea, and focuses solely on his project (*M* 22). The properties of Lowick also do not need any major renovations, and thus Dorothea has no opportunity to take "active duties" within the estate by spearheading improvements (*M* 50). Moreover, the wealth Dorothea gains after marrying Casaubon alienates her from the poorer people she hopes to help; when the community gathers for the funeral of Mr. Featherstone— a miserly Middlemarch aristocrat— Dorothea experiences a lonely detachment from those around her because she is "not at ease in the perspective and chilliness" of her higher social position (*M* 203). Dorothea seeks direct involvement with the world, and not simply idle observation from the vantage point of the upper class. The lack of substantial work with which she can fill her time, in both her

personal and social life, ultimately causes her to lose a “sense of connection” with the world— represented by the phrase “a manifold pregnant existence”— which previously appeared to her as a source of numerous potential ways to act.

In sum, the world that Dorothea occupies once married is one of “stifling oppression,” where she cannot express her power of mind or body: she is unable to indulge in the physical pleasures of marriage and become a mother, use her intellect to help Casaubon in writing the *Key*, nor enact her philanthropic projects. Following his definition of pleasure and pain, Spinoza goes on to say that “when the emotion of pleasure is related at once to the mind and the body I call it *titillation* or *hilarity*; the emotion of pain in the same case, *bodily suffering* or *melancholy*”¹⁸. It is clear that Dorothea suffers from a species of “bodily suffering or melancholy,” because both her “power of action possessed by the body” as well as “the mind” are limited, and the simple act of maintaining her own consciousness and living her day-to-day life must be done “painfully.” This is ultimately because Dorothea looked to external things to “bring guidance into [a] worthy and imperative occupation,” that is to say she wanted Casaubon and the institution of marriage to orient her desires and emotions toward productive ends; however, true joy, freedom, and virtue must come through the mind’s own adequate ideas.

Casaubon cannot overcome his own self-interest to express marital affection or to assist Dorothea in achieving happiness, which ultimately reflects his own lack of

¹⁸ Like her questionable rendering of *laetitia*, Eliot’s translation of *hilaritatem* to “hilarity” seems somewhat inadequate; Curley opts for “cheerfulness,” which I find is both a more literal translation and affords Spinoza’s idea of pleasure as being in both mind and body more clarity (Curley 161).

freedom. In the chapter following the passage describing Dorothea's suffering, the narrator discusses the nature of Casaubon's unhappy condition as follows:

To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight. ... His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare from transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best an egoistic scrupulosity. ... It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self— never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action. (*M* 177-6)

The narrator portrays the limitations of Casaubon's character in terms of both body and mind, much like the previous passage regarding Dorothea. Eliot, like Spinoza, understands the emotions to be bodily states, hence the narrator claims that in order to experience "intense joy," one must have either a "strong bodily frame" that can engage in a variety of physical activity, or an "enthusiastic soul" that can engage in a variety of mental activity (ideally both). Casaubon does not have a strong body, and also has a weak soul, despite being articulate and scholarly; the use of such words like "shrinks,"

“narrow,” and “small” all illustrate how Casaubon’s mind is not expansive, but limited in its ability to interact with the world and position himself in a way that increases his power. He cannot be “possessed” by the “glory” of being, or have his “consciousness rapturously transformed” into more grand and clear ideas that would lead to the “energy of an action.” This lack of freedom is also reflected in the failure of his project; he dooms the *Key* to irrelevance because he will not consult the most recent German scholarship on the Bible, myth, and hermeneutics— which ironically may include Spinoza and the forerunners to Strauss and Feuerbach (*M* 132-3). Casaubon’s thoughts cannot transcend his own ego to consider the lives of others and extend sympathy to them, which is reflected in his inconsiderate treatment of Dorothea and his non-interest in contributing to her philanthropic projects. And just as he cannot extend sympathy to others, he also cannot receive it. Eliot indirectly argues in this passage that were Casaubon able to open himself up to the world and other people— specifically by accepting the assistance Dorothea seeks to give him— he might achieve a greater sense of happiness. Spinoza, as discussed, understands freedom and virtue as necessarily the ability to actively engage with the world in different ways, but Casaubon cannot enjoy physical pleasures, successfully complete his life’s work, nor cultivate productive relationships with others. One might go as far to say he is the least free character in the book, or is almost as restricted as the vain and egotistical Rosamond Vincy, whom I will discuss in time.

The voice of Eliot’s narrator shifts markedly from the passages describing Dorothea’s unhappiness to the meditation on Casaubon’s discontents, which allows Eliot to put forth her own arguments regarding the proper use of sympathy. With Dorothea, the narrator employs FID to exercise an imaginative sympathy that directly engages with her

ideas and feelings. To contrast, the narrator expresses mere pity for Casaubon— given by the terse comment “For my part I am very sorry for him”— and describes him in a detached, essayistic style (*M* 176). In his previously cited work, Pascal criticizes Eliot’s use of FID as being less sophisticated than Austen’s because Eliot’s narrative voice frequently interrupts the story in order to make open judgments on characters and situations (Pascal 88). Eliot’s narrator does frequently comment and pass judgment on her characters and the events taking place, but I argue it is not because of an unsophisticated style. When considered in the context of Spinoza, and larger philosophical concerns of the relationship between the emotions and reason, the highly involved narrator seeks to demonstrate to the reader how to properly exercise the intellectual faculty of sympathy.

In *Middlemarch* and her other fiction, Eliot understands sympathy to be a faculty of the mind distinct from the emotions, namely compassion and pity. Sympathy, for Eliot, is a mode of thinking inflected with the imagination— a way of gathering data of the outside world, so to say, by considering objects and events from a perspective beyond one’s own ego. Emotions like compassion and pity might arise from the employment of sympathy— particularly if one sympathizes with a person or thing that suffers— but are not strictly related to sympathy as a form of contemplation. I argue that Eliot— in the same vein as Spinoza— understands that the emotions can harm the mind and its power of acting, and therefore must be transformed in action if they are to become productive. Eliot is implicitly arguing that it is best to keep characters like Casaubon at both a sympathetic and emotional distance in order to prevent an unwanted expenditure of mental energy. The narrator observes that Casaubon is a man whose “mental estate” had

been “mapped out a quarter of a century before” and thus has his “sensibilities fenced in” (*M* 177). This means that because his temperament and mental life have long since been established, he has little potential for a substantial change in character; hence it would be largely futile to have compassion for him on a significant level, as any extension of compassion would not result in an action that would any personal transformation or real increase in his happiness.

As Casaubon’s scholarship and marriage continue to fail later in Book IV, the narrator elaborates further on Casaubon’s unsympathetic character by writing, “Instead of wondering at this result of misery in Mr. Casaubon, I think it quite ordinary. Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self” (*M* 260). His problems, the narrator explains, arise from a simple and commonplace phenomenon: Casaubon is one man among many who cannot consider things beyond his own ego, and therefore cannot achieve a state of true virtue or happiness. Casaubon should thus not elicit much emotional response from the reader or anyone in his own life, because in addition to being a static character by virtue of his age, in his fixation on his own person he does not even have the means to make use of compassion. Thus while one could sympathize with Casaubon in order to understand his character and experience, extending compassion to him would effectively represent wasted energy that could be instead directed elsewhere; and because compassion often arises from sympathy, Eliot also suggests it might be best to avoid sympathizing with him also, and instead observe him from a distance as the narrator does. Dorothea in contrast possesses a “blossoming youth” that has yet to find a permanent position in the world, as well as an ability to consider the

world beyond her own self, and could therefore profit from the help others might offer her (*M* 173).

Miriam Hensen argues Eliot emphasizes the ethical importance of compassion and therefore departs from Spinoza, who claims in the *Ethics* that “compassion in a man who lives according to reason, is in itself evil and useless” (Henson 20; *E* 190, IVP50). But with this distinction in the narrator’s treatment of the two characters, I argue Eliot reaches similar conclusions to Spinoza regarding the nature of emotions like compassion and pity. Considered in themselves, these emotions harm the mind that feels them because the mind participates in the pain of another; these emotions only become useful and productive when they are rationally directed toward a suitable object and can lead to action. *Middlemarch*’s narrator discusses the necessary modulation of sympathy in a famous passage: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity” (*M* 124). Though the most enlightened men remain in a state of “stupidity” with regards to the mass of activity surrounding them, it is a necessary stupidity, because the indiscriminate exercising of our sympathy would effectively lead to destruction. One would be overwhelmed by the world’s infinite amount of things, many of which are trivial matters that don’t merit our attention like the grass growing, or a squirrel’s heart beating. The emotions that might arise from the contemplation of such insignificant things are likewise not worth the reduction of the mind’s power.

Dorothea extends her sympathy and affection to Casaubon without fully considering if he is a worthy object to direct her intellectual and emotional energy

towards; though she comes to realize he is in most senses a failure as their marriage progresses. Dorothea's disappointment with Casaubon comes early in their marriage during their honeymoon. The narrator muses over her situation, this time without using FID, by rhetorically asking, "How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither?" (125). Dorothea's ascent to rational understanding first comes in the form of physical feeling, given by the phrase "had not distinctly observed but felt." Spinoza's account of the affects can once again be used as a framework to understand Dorothea's experience: knowledge for Spinoza begins in the imagination—which broadly represents immediate emotional experience and mental images—and progresses into clear, distinct knowledge upon the examination of things under the principle of causal necessity. Though Dorothea has begun to form adequate ideas of Casaubon, she still suffers from "sorrow," a reduction in her power of acting, which the narrator describes using words like "depression" and "anteroom," and metaphors that parallel the passage that begins with "Meanwhile there was the snow..." (*M* 173).

Dorothea observes Casaubon's behavior more directly as their honeymoon progresses, allowing her to acquire a better understanding of his depressed, insipid character; the narrator describes the process of her coming to knowledge by writing, "she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness" (*M* 126). Her knowledge of Casaubon becomes even clearer in the succeeding chapters,

as he continues to neglect her emotionally and refuses to accept her assistance in finishing the *Key*. She also converses with Will about Casaubon's project, who explains to her the *Key* is a futile endeavor as he does not know German (*M* 132-3). Shortly after her talk with Will, the narrator describes Dorothea's ascent to a greater awareness of self and the world in one of the novel's well-known passages:

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (*M* 135)

The narrator summarizes the progression of Dorothea's emerging consciousness with regards to both her own desires— given by the image of a young cow seeking the mother's "udder"— and the nature of Casaubon's own character. Dorothea's many emotions— including compassion for helping the poor, hope in a better future, and implied longing for physical intimacy— temporarily found an outlet in Casaubon at the beginning of their relationship because she had a mere mental image of his true character. Once she knows that he will not lead her to happiness, she cannot reconcile her desires and emotions with the knowledge she has accumulated, thereby making it impossible for her to have a "distinct" idea of Casaubon that is also a joyful "feeling."

Once Dorothea finally realizes that Casaubon lacks the greatness she formerly attributed to him, she begins to act upon that knowledge. Casaubon, growing in suspicion and jealousy regarding Dorothea's friendship with his nephew and financial dependent Will Ladislaw, makes it increasingly difficult for the two to interact, and secretly rewrites his will such that Dorothea must surrender her inheritance if she marries Will. While reading in bed together one evening, Casaubon asks Dorothea if in the case of his death she will make a promise to "avoid doing what [he] should deprecate" and "apply" to do what "[he] should desire" (*M* 296). Dorothea does not answer him directly, and requests time to "reflect" upon his request; she understands that pledging her unwavering loyalty to Casaubon— whether his request related to Will, his research, or another matter— will not likely result in her own happiness because she both desires Will's friendship and "had become altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that *Key*" (*M* 296-7). Casaubon dies the following day before Dorothea can respond to his request; the revelation that he altered his will only confirms her knowledge of Casaubon's failings.

Two essential propositions from Spinoza's *Ethics* can help shed light on Dorothea's decision to not answer Casaubon in this scene, as well as her experience throughout the novel's second half. First, Spinoza writes "an emotion which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it," meaning that once one understands the nature of an emotion— how it is produced, how it relates to one's temperament, what one might do to decrease or increase its intensity, and so on— it no longer exerts a controlling force on the agent, but instead the agent can begin to gain control over it (*E* 219, VP3). Spinoza goes on to say "so long as we are not agitated by emotions which are contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and

concatenating the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect” (*E* 223-4; VP10). This proposition argues that once one gains knowledge of their emotions, one can begin to modulate them such that they harmonize with the faculty of reason, and thereby turn passive emotions into action. Dorothea both forms “clear and distinct idea[s]” of her emotions and undergoes the process of “ordering and concatenating” the emotions such that, by the end of the novel, they are under the control of her intellect, and not the external forces that shape her existence. When married to Casaubon she is “agitated” by an oppressive *ennui* that conflicts with her otherwise passionate, generous, and intelligent character. Learning about her husband’s personal and professional failures, and feeling the sorrowful emotions that accompany her coming to knowledge, leads her to reposition herself in the world such that she can express a greater degree of power.

After Casaubon’s death, the narrator describes Dorothea’s movement from passivity to activity by writing “now her judgment, instead of being controlled by dutiful devotion, was made active by the embittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion” (*M* 306). Several Spinozan words appear in this short sentence: Dorothea is said to have once been “controlled” by “devotion,” but coming to knowledge regarding the true nature of Casaubon and their relationship allows her thoughts to once again become “active.” Dorothea’s progression towards a greater degree of power and freedom is made clear when she gathers Casaubon’s papers related to Lowick’s upkeep and locks the desks and drawers containing all his other writings— including materials for the *Key to All Mythologies* (*M* 307). Dorothea performs a similar, but even more radical, gesture that symbolizes her increased power of acting once she returns to live at Lowick after staying with Cecilia

and Sir James for a short period. While organizing Casaubon's notebooks and "questioning the eighteen months" of their marriage, Dorothea feels a resurgence of "the pity which had been the restraining motive in her life;" but from the vantage of her increased understanding, she now knows that such "pity" was an imprisoning emotion that caused her to make an irrational decision (*M* 333). To seize mental control of the pity she once felt for Casaubon, she takes the guide he made her at the end of his life which instructed her on how to finish and publish the *Key*— the only writing of Casaubon's addressed to her— and seals it in an envelope along with the note "*I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in—Dorothea?*," and puts it in her own desk (*M* 333-4). Spinoza would characterize this action as Dorothea's mitigation of her sorrowful passion: by symbolically ridding herself of Casaubon's *Key* she eliminates the effect pity has on her mind and body.

Dorothea does not become fully liberated from Casaubon's influence after his death, as his will stipulates she must surrender her inheritance if she marries Will Ladislaw, with whom she felt an immediate connection with during their first encounters in Rome. Will also desires her friendship, but does not wish to disrespect his Uncle and benefactor Casaubon. He takes a job as an editor for the newspaper intended to help Mr. Brooke's campaign for Parliament so he can begin promulgating his ideas for social reform, and to place himself in proximity to Dorothea. However, the two are still not able to openly express their love for one another, and despite Will's ability to "write the highest style of leading article," the public opinion of the newspaper is low, and Mr. Brooke's disastrous campaign limits his ability to express his ideas.

Dorothea's philanthropic projects and visions of social reform have also yet to gain significant traction. While the uneducated but hardworking Middlemarch land surveyor Caleb Garth becomes manager of Freshitt and Tipton—the estates of Sir James Chettam and Mr. Brooke respectively—and seeks to improve the quality of life for their residents through Dorothea's influence, she exercises little involvement with the projects (*M* 250-52). Sir James finances the improvements on his own land with Mr. Garth overseeing logistical matters, Mr. Brooke only reverts his tendency to cut expenses for the upkeep of his estate in order to improve his campaign's image, and Lowick, now in Dorothea's possession, does not need major improvements (*M* 242, 50). The fortune Dorothea inherits from Casaubon is also too small to finance her dream to “buy land and found a village which should be a school of industry” (*M* 472). She eventually determines to give generously to the New Fever Hospital—a hospital founded by the ex-criminal turned wealthy banker and philanthropist Nicholas Bulstrode and directed by Tertius Lydgate—but giving money in no way fulfills her desire to help others. Returning to Spinoza, Dorothea's compassion remains a sorrowful passion because the emotion only causes her to take on the pain of others. One might say it is bottled up inside her, and in order for the emotion to become an active affect, she must direct her compassion toward a rational and productive outlet.

Dorothea's experience for the remainder of the novel is a continued progression toward a greater knowledge of self and the world, a progress that leads to her increased power of acting. The narrative action that leads to the novel's conclusion begins when Lydgate is suspected by the townspeople to have been bribed by Nicholas Bulstrode to kill John Raffles—a tramp who was threatening to reveal Bulstrode's secret criminal

history to the town. Dorothea has an intense urge to help Lydgate— whom she admires for his service to the Middlemarch hospital and vision for medical reforms— which the narrator describes as follows:

In her luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, her thought was going out over the lot of others, and her emotions were imprisoned. The idea of some active good within her reach, ‘haunted her like a passion,’ and another’s need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless. (*M* 469)

Dorothea waits for her meeting with Lydgate to discuss his innocence in a state of painful compassion. She attempts to sympathize with him, but comes to no distinct idea of the extent of his troubles or how she might help him, only an inadequate idea of “some active good” and a vague image of someone in need. After Dorothea consults with Lydgate and learns that he borrowed money from Bulstrode in order to pay his mounting debts, she “immediately form[s] a plan of relieving Lydgate,” and by doing she refines her compassion— which is up to this point a merely passive affect— into an action by promising him £1,000 to free him from his debt to Bulstrode (*M* 474). Simply giving Lydgate money does not fully satisfy Dorothea however, because she feels a detachment from the abstract concept of money, as previously discussed. Her need to have direct involvement with others leads her to visit Rosamond to assure her of Lydgate’s innocence, thus helping both in a way that money itself could not.

Shortly after her conversation with Lydgate, Dorothea goes to his residence in order to drop off the check for £1,000 and talk with Rosamond, but to her horror she

walks in on Rosamond and Will Ladislaw holding hands and sharing an intense conversation— leading Dorothea to think they are having an affair. The suspicion of an affair between Rosamond and Lydgate leads Dorothea to finally acknowledge she has been harboring a love for Will ever since she first met him in Rome:

The limit of resistance was reached, and she had sunk back helpless within the clutch of inescapable anguish. Dismissing Tantripp with a few faint words, she locked her door, and turning away from it towards the vacant room she pressed her hands hard on the top of her head, and moaned out—
"Oh, I did love him!"

Then came the hour in which the waves of suffering shook her too thoroughly to leave any power of thought. . . .

She discovered her passion to herself in the unshrinking utterance of despair. (*M* 484-5)

The word “discovered” shows that her love for Will was hitherto unknown to her in a direct way: it had been slowly developing on an unconscious level through their passionate encounters, and her tendency to think of him during her lonely marriage. By articulating the words “I did love him!” she begins to form an adequate idea of her emotion, and recognizes it is her repressed love for Will that contributes to her persistent listlessness and frustration. The narrator says that because she reaches a better understanding her emotions, she becomes “liberated from its terrible conflict” (*M* 485). As Spinoza would say, her passion is no longer a passive passion because she has formed a clear idea of it, and can then act on that idea.

Though Dorothea finally recognizes she loves Will, she still suffers because she was unable to persuade Rosamond into believing Lydgate is innocent, and also believes Will and Rosamond are having an affair. Despite her suffering, she still exercises an imaginative sympathy in order to determine the way she will proceed:

She began now to live through that yesterday morning deliberately again, forcing herself to dwell on every detail and its possible meaning. Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only? She forced herself to think of it as bound up with another woman's life—a woman towards whom she had set out with a longing to carry some clearness and comfort into her beclouded youth. . . . All the active thought with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of Lydgate's lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own, seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles— all this vivid sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance. She said to her own irremediable grief, that it should make her more helpful, instead of driving her back from effort.

. . . She felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (*M* 486)

Dorothea's urge to help Lydgate was at one point brought about by "representing" his trials through vague, generalized mental images, but once she determines to return to

Lydgate's residence she understands his plights with an "active thought." Dorothea's asking herself questions like "Was she alone in that scene?" and "Was it her event only?" show that sympathy— understood to be a mode of thinking in which the mind gains an understanding of others by imagining reality beyond one's own ego— is a form of such "active thought." This employment of sympathy allows her to acquire knowledge that presents itself as a "power" to her mind. Her compassion, as well as the anger and jealousy she feels at the prospect of the hypothetical affair, no longer inhibits her power of acting because she understands these emotions are but one part of a larger network of causes that includes other people she cares about, and that it would be best to act with the good of others in mind. As the narrator says, Dorothea determines to make her grief a means to "make her more helpful," and not "[drive] her back from effort." Spinoza himself says in the *Ethics* that "He who lives according to the guidance of reason strives as far as he can to compensate the hatred, anger, contempt, etc. of others towards him with love or generosity;" Dorothea does precisely this: she mitigates the power of her sadness in order to respond to the perceived betrayal of Rosamond and Will with kindness and generosity (*E* 206, IVP72).

I argue Henson's claim that Eliot "chooses to emphasize a compassion based on feeling, rather than that exercised by Spinoza's ideal rational man" does not accurately reflect Dorothea's experience in these final chapters of *Middlemarch*, as well the distinction between sympathy and compassion Eliot is carving out (Henson 25).

Dorothea's moral action only becomes possible once she has sympathized with the other individuals in the situation. The narrator says that Dorothea's "sympathetic experience" asserts itself "as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the

day of our ignorance,” a statement that very clearly demonstrates Eliot understands sympathy to be capable of producing adequate, usable knowledge. Spinoza would consider Dorothea’s thinking of these events as contemplation “under a form of eternity,” because she recognizes her own experience is only one component of a much larger fabric of reality that includes other subjective beings. The narrator goes on to say “she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance,” which indicates her intellect has further expanded its scope to see a whole picture of the surrounding world. Dorothea acts only after she experiences this joyous intuition of God, or Nature, not simply because she feels compassion and reacts to that feeling.

The narrator also states that Dorothea’s experience is but “a part of that involuntary, palpitating life”— taken to be the part of nature that includes animals, plants, and inanimate things that exists alongside man. I argue these lines further solidify Eliot’s relationship with Spinoza because they show that Dorothea, like any other mode, exerts *conatus*, or a striving to preserve her own existence. The narrator goes on to say that she can neither be “a mere spectator” or wallow in her own “selfish complaining,” thus saying that it is in Dorothea’s very disposition or nature to sympathize with others and seek a rational way to help them. The good she seeks is united with the good for others because she understands the world beyond her own limited perspective; to phrase this notion another way, her striving to preserve in her existence necessarily includes a striving to help others preserve their existence. Dorothea’s decision to visit Rosamond to clear Lydgate’s name is further tinged with self-interestedness, as talking with Rosamond will allow her to inquire about Will and determine the nature of the suspected affair.

After Rosamond becomes convinced of her husband's interest, she explains to Dorothea that she and Will are not carrying on an affair, but that Will in fact told her "he loved another woman"—who Rosamond intuitively is Dorothea (*M* 491).

Before Will leaves Middlemarch—as Mr. Brooke's campaign fails and he fears his love for Dorothea will cause her further despair—he visits Rosamond one last time. Rosamond tells Will she told Dorothea about his love for "another woman," leading Will to postpone his departure and again seek out Dorothea at Lowick. The two kiss after a passionate exchange, and Dorothea determines amid sobs and physical jerks that she wishes to give up her fortune in order to marry Will, and thereby secure herself a lasting happiness. The narrator describes the scene as follows:

"Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break," said Dorothea, starting from her seat, the flood of her young passion bearing down all the obstructions which had kept her silent—the great tears rising and falling in an instant: "I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth."

In an instant Will was close to her and had his arms round her, but she drew her head back and held his away gently that she might go on speaking, her large tear-filled eyes looking at his very simply, while she said in a sobbing childlike way, "We could live quite well on my own fortune—it is too much—seven hundred a-year—I want so little—no new clothes—and I will learn what everything costs. (*M* 500)

Like the scene in which she acknowledges her love for Will, Dorothea admits she dislikes her wealth, finally allowing her to act such that her wealth no longer troubles her.

Throughout the novel Dorothea expresses a dislike for excess and indulgence, as she feels

luxury a disgrace in the face of poverty and human suffering; the very opening lines of Chapter I say that “Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress” (*M* 5). Giving up her wealth empowers her in many ways: she becomes fully liberated from her unhappy marriage with Casaubon, does not feel alienated from lower social classes, and is able to marry Will, the man she truly loves. Giving up her wealth also opens more possibilities for action, by making her consider “what everything costs” and closely managing her finances. Dorothea affirms her decision to marry Will by saying these simple words to her sister Celia: “This is what I am going to do. I have promised to marry Mr. Ladislaw; and I am going to marry him” (*M* 505).

In the novel’s “Finale,” which offers a sweeping picture of the characters’ lives after the novel’s main action, Dorothea is said to have attained a lasting happiness after renouncing her fortune and marrying Will. She loves Will in a manner that is not just mere infatuation with a mental image, and marriage allows her to position herself in the world such that she can improve the lives of others:

She never repented that she had given up position and fortune to marry Will Ladislaw, and he would have held it the greatest shame as well as sorrow to him if she had repented. They were bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it. No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself. (*M* 513)

Dorothea at long last no longer has to experience the “doubtful pains” of determining what she seeks to accomplish in life, and how she will go about doing so. Because she has an adequate knowledge of herself and the world, her life is “filled with a beneficent activity”—referring to her role as a supportive wife and as a benefactress of the community. More generally, the phrase “beneficent activity” represents a capacity for positive influence and active involvement in her community; “beneficent” could also refer to Dorothea’s own increase in joy and power. One might say she doesn’t have any major surprises in store for her in terms of self-knowledge, as she recognizes that she loves Will and that a modest income will better connect her with other people. Because her desire and love for Will is rationally ordered such that she can express her emotions as actions, it is a constant love that is “stronger than any impulses which could have marred it.” Desire and emotions are powerful forces, but Dorothea grasps mental ownership of her emotions rather than letting them act upon her. Eliot, aligning herself with Spinoza, understands that the Stoic ideal of eliminating the emotions from the mental life is impossible. Instead, virtue involves the ordering of the emotions in accordance to reason from the foundation of one’s self-interest. By rejecting her wealth for Will’s love, Dorothea finally orders her emotions in a way that both maximizes her happiness and proves useful to the larger community.

Dorothea and Will’s relationship exemplifies Spinoza’s notions of a democratically constituted political body, in which two rational individuals come together, from the foundation of their striving to preserve in existence, to pursue the same end with an increased level of power. I argue self-interest at a fundamental level drives Dorothea and Will’s love because Dorothea’s passionate nature requires an object which

she can serve with devotion, and Ladislaw's romantic nature takes interest in Dorothea's depth of feeling and sweeping visions of societal progress. Their relationship, however, achieves much more than selfish satisfaction for the two of them, but a lasting happiness and freedom. As quoted earlier, Spinoza proclaims that "there is nothing more useful to man than man," and Dorothea and Will undeniably are very useful to one another, as they both desire the same rational goal of implementing social reforms and pursue that goal with a greater strength than if they were solitary. Will becomes an "ardent public man, working well in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good ... and getting at last returned to Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses (*M* 513). Will's efforts in politics represent an active engagement with the world and a desire to produce positive change for other people, whereas Casaubon worked on a futile, inert work of scholarship that would remain within the realm of obscure academia even if it was successful. Dorothea is finally able to admire her husband works and is able to give him "wifely help."

The narrator defends her decision to marry Will as rational and empowering, against those that may criticize her for remarrying and disregard for her husband's final wishes. Sir James— representing the opinion of a typical gentleman— considers Dorothea's second marriage to Will "a mistake," which in turn influences the following generations of Middlemarch to think that "she could not have been 'a nice woman,' else she would not have married the one or the other" (*M* 514). Although the narrator admits the events that shape Dorothea's life are not "ideally beautiful," the narrator implies that society's judgment of Dorothea is narrow-minded and fails to consider questions of power, productivity, and the causal necessity that determines all things. The narrator

applauds Dorothea for positively improving the lives of succeeding generations, even though she violated social norms through her hasty remarriage to a man her deceased husband despised. Eliot argues here that obedience to cultural and religious expectations of marriage does not necessarily make one virtuous; rather, the virtue of a person is determined their presence in the world as a beneficial force. To further criticize the shallow judgments of society, the narrator humorously notes that while Dorothea's decision to remarry received public criticism, "no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought to have done— not even Sir James Chettam" (*M* 513). I would also suggest that by defending Dorothea's decision to remarry, Eliot covertly defends her own lifelong partnership with George Henry Lewes, to whom Eliot dedicated *Middlemarch* in her manuscripts¹⁹. Like Dorothea and Will, Eliot and Lewes mutually aided one another as companions in their intellectual endeavors: Lewes encouraged Eliot to first write fiction and helped publish her work, and Eliot helped Lewes on his major philosophical project *The Problems of Life and Mind*.

Though Spinoza himself lived a solitary life, he advocates marriage as a positive, rational endeavor: "It is certain that matrimony is in accordance with reason, if the desire of corporeal union is produced not merely by beauty of person but also by the love of possessing and wisely educating children; and if, besides the love of both man and woman is not excited by the person alone but is chiefly caused by freedom of soul" (*E* 211, IVapp.19). It is clear that Dorothea and Will's marriage arises from "freedom of

¹⁹ Ashton has made a similar argument by saying that Eliot took so strongly to Feuerbach because he criticizes the Christian conception of marriage, and Eliot was translating Feuerbach around the same time she entered into a partnership with Lewes (Ashton 109). Feuerbach understands marriage to be "the free bond of love," and is sacred "by the very nature of the union which is therein affected," not because it was somehow ordained by God's providence (*EC* 268).

soul” rather than a “meretricious love” caused by bodily lust or an inadequate idea of marriage as divinely ordained. The productive nature of their relation is most literally represented in the birth of their child, and is most emphasized in Will’s acquisition of a seat in Parliament; both things arise from a mutual striving toward the same rational end, as they operate together as “one mind and one body” (*E* 169, IVP18S). Because of the intimate connection between their mind and body, the narrator says that Will’s well being and emotional stability depend on Dorothea’s own constancy; her regretting her decision to marry him would result in his own “shame” and “sorrow,” both of which are sorrowful passions that inhibit one’s power of acting. The same would presumably be the case if Will suddenly “repented” of his decision to pursue Dorothea.

Dorothea’s giving up her wealth in order to marry Will does complicate her moral character, because the large amount of money inherited from Casaubon would allow her to fund many philanthropic projects— one might ask, if she truly desired to help improve as many lives as possible, shouldn’t she have simply kept the money? I argue that while giving up her wealth may not have been the best choice from a utilitarian standpoint, Dorothea’s decision actually represents another way in which she seizes control of her life’s situation and positions herself in the world such that she is happiest. Dorothea does not want to be a wealthy benefactress who simply gives away money— something abstract and intangible— from an isolated position in high society. Marrying Will affords her an opportunity to help others in a way simply beyond giving money to charitable causes; as the narrator says, “Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them” (*M* 513).

The decision also minimizes her suffering, as she does not want to be a wealthy benefactress who simply gives away money from an isolated position in society.

No specific details are given on how exactly Dorothea aids her husband with his seat in Parliament and his reform agenda; I suggest she might help him investigate the needs of the community by interacting with his constituents on a personal level.

Whatever the “wifely help” she gives to Will is, the narrator assures the reader in the closing lines of the novel that she impacted the world positively by once again comparing her actions to those of St. Theresa:

A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know.

Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (*M* 515)

The deterministic worldview Eliot and Spinoza share features prominently in this final passage, as the narrator explains what qualifies as a virtuous life changes as the values of society change. The reverence for ancestors that made Antigone's choice to bury her brother Polyneices with full ceremony so great is not valued in 19th century English society like it was when Sophocles wrote his tragedies; likewise it was the emergence of Protestantism and the Catholic Church's counter-reformation—a historical condition unique to 16th century Europe—that allowed St. Theresa of Avila to become so influential. The inadequate ideas of ancestor worship and religious piety have been dispensed with after the European Enlightenment; therefore within a provincial town like Middlemarch—against the historical backdrop of a nation's progression toward the secular and capitalist values that define modernity—the passionately philanthropic would attempt to help the world as Dorothea does: building houses to increase the poor's standard of living, funding a hospital to advance the medical field, and pushing for democratic reforms in the political sphere.

In this passage Eliot separates the ethically good life from the religious life: Dorothea is not a saint that possesses strong faith in religious doctrines, nor does she die for her beliefs, yet she manages to impact the lives of countless others, both in her life and in following generations. The narrator's use of the word "faithfully" to describe Dorothea's diligent pursuit of moral action further makes this distinction; here "faithfully" means "loyally, devoutly; with fidelity," instead of "with full or devout religious faith" (OED). Feuerbach's influence on Eliot is also evident here. As explained in the first half of this study, Eliot greatly admired Feuerbach's argument that religious feeling must be redirected from the anthropomorphized image of God to its true object—

humanity; Dorothea expresses her moral energy for the good of herself and others, not for the sake of obeying moral imperatives.

I have emphasized throughout this study that Spinoza equates action, power, and virtue, and I find the narrator's appraisal of Dorothea's life as a one of rich activity in the "Finale" to be no different. Dorothea's "full" and rich intellectual and emotional life is compared to the mighty river that Cyrus the Great dammed and redirected into smaller canals—a powerful natural force that must be tamed if it is to become useful²⁰. Her emotions do not get "spent in channels" that are historically important, as she becomes a typical Victorian wife and mother on a superficial level; however, she still manages to implement social reforms, thereby forever shaping the way society progresses and unfolds itself. Even if she only changes the world indirectly through Will's career as a politician, and rests in an "unvisited tomb," Dorothea's influence is still said to be "incalculably diffusive."

I will close my analysis of Dorothea by arguing that she achieves the type of immortality Spinoza argues the mind can achieve in Part V of the *Ethics*; he formulates this idea as follows: "He who has a body capable of a great variety of action has a mind the greater portion of which is eternal" (*E* 239; V.39). A careful reader of Spinoza will know that Spinoza does not understand the mind's immortality as a literal, embodied immortality as described in the Bible. Instead, Spinoza understands the "eternal" part of the mind to be the part that contemplates things under "a form of eternity," thereby giving the mind power to order the body's passive affects in accords with reason. The mind's power of reason becomes the orchestrator of its body's emotions, and because the mind

²⁰ This story is described in Herodotus's *Histories*.

exists within a single immanent plane of reality, the power it exerts on the world can ripple across vast expanses of time and space. Dorothea, as demonstrated throughout this paper, comes to contemplate things under a form of eternity, and acts such that her mind positively impacts the way English society unfolds forever. I conclude that Dorothea achieves what every rational human desires: a life filled with love and emotions that are ordered harmoniously with her own mind and the world around her— a life “wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonate action” (*M* 515, 3).

To strengthen my analyses of *Middlemarch* as a novel that reflects a Spinozist worldview, I will now analyze Tertius Lydgate’s character— the second major protagonist of the novel— as a character who does not increase his power of acting throughout the course of the novel. Whereas Dorothea ends the novel in a situation that maximizes her personal happiness and social influence, Lydgate does not fully actualize himself through a succession of poor decisions on his own part and environmentally determined conditions. Despite his talent and good intentions, Lydgate fails to reform Middlemarch’s medical field, falls into bankruptcy, and soils his public reputation by closely associating with the austerely religious banker and philanthropist Nicholas Bulstrode.

Lydgate comes to Middlemarch with the goal to begin a successful practice and legitimize the medical field by introducing reforms. Upon his examination of an encyclopedia entry on heart valves in his early boyhood, he immediately feels a rush of “intellectual passion” and determines that he will enter the medical field (*M* 92). From that point Lydgate dreams of running a successful practice while also “enlarging the scientific, rational basis of his profession” by researching organs and the tissues that

comprise them. Implementing medical reforms becomes another goal of his, thus combining his other ambitions of running a practice and conducting scientific research. In the first half of 19th century when the action of *Middlemarch* takes place, the medical profession lacked the scientific foundation that now characterizes modern practices. Doctors frequently treated illnesses with counter-productive practices such as bloodletting—the intentional removal of blood from a patient in hopes of curing the malady in question—or sold their patients fake medicines. Lydgate hopes to make important discoveries regarding the body’s workings, and explicitly states he will not prescribe medicines in order to prove the legitimacy of his practice and rectify the reputation of the field as a whole (*M* 94). While studying medicine in Paris, he unwittingly becomes involved in a scandal and moves to Middlemarch in search of a clean start. Lydgate determines to not marry for several years in order to establish his reputation in the town and surrounding areas; however, he marries Rosamond Vincy shortly after his arrival in the hopes she will help him achieve his goals.

Lydgate’s marriage to Rosamond is unhappy because he enters into the relationship with selfish motivations and unrealistic expectations. Lydgate proposes to her because he imagines her to have the “female radiance” he seeks in a wife (*M* 105). His proposal to Rosamond is an impulsive decision in which he forgets “everything else” but her, and becomes “completely mastered by the outrush” of his own emotion (*M* 190). The narrator shows that Lydgate’s action was not fully of his own accord—as he does not consider any other factors but her own beauty. To freely perform an action for both Eliot and Spinoza is to orient one’s desires toward rational outlets, but Lydgate is instead “mastered” by his own desire. The narrator goes on to explain that Lydgate’s reckless

decision to marry her is primarily caused by a lack of the ability to sympathize with Rosamond. Though he is intelligent and talented within the confines of the medical profession, Lydgate cannot utilize his imagination to recognize she is another thinking, feeling human being with her own desires and emotions. Because sympathy can produce adequate knowledge, this lack prevents him from achieving true freedom. He views her instead as a woman “which must be classed with flowers and music,” and of a beauty “which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys” (*M* 105). The comparison of her “womanhood” to “flowers and music” demonstrates that by viewing her as an unchanging object he has an inadequate knowledge of her true nature.

Rosamond also enters into marriage with Lydgate out of selfish motivation: “In Rosamond’s romance,” the narrator explains, “it was not necessary to imagine much the inward life of the hero [Lydgate], or his serious business in the world” (*M* 106). She doesn’t make attempt to understand how important his medical career is to him, or make any sacrifices to help him achieve his goals. Whereas Dorothea looks to marriage as a means to help her husband and others, Rosamond simply views marriage as a means to “rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people” (*M* 106). Rosamond, in other words, marries Lydgate in order to secure for herself wealth, a comfortable living situation, and the veneration of other people. Money is fundamentally the object of Rosamond’s desire, with Lydgate in many ways simply being a means to acquire money. This fact is emphasized throughout their narrative, and most clearly at the novel’s end when Lydgate tells her they are bankrupt and must reduce their standard of living, causing Rosamond to

effectively lose all her passion for Lydgate and plunge into a deep depression. Spinoza, in the appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*, describes the love of money as a trait common to irrational minds: “Money presents a compendium of all things and thus the idea of money chiefly occupies the minds of the vulgar, because they can hardly imagine any form of pleasure without the idea of money as its cause” (*E* 213, IVapp.28). In other words, money to the irrational mind can represent all the objects one might desire, leading it to become desired above all else. Such is the case for Rosamond; to her, money stands in for all she finds good in the world—servants, fashionable clothing, food to host lavish parties, and so on—and she cannot conceive of herself as being happy without it. Because Lydgate does not satisfy her desire for wealth, she does not achieve any sort of lasting happiness.

Rosamond is also selfish in a way that prevents her from sympathizing with those around her, and therefore from acting freely. Her egotistical personality is the subject of a famous passage of *Middlemarch*, in which the narrator describes the ignorance and shortsightedness of viewing the world strictly from the perspective of one’s ego. The narrator explains that scratches on a “pier-glass” form a “series of concentric circles” when looked at under the light of a candle, but upon closer examination the scratches are revealed to extend “in all directions”—the concentric circles simply being an optical illusion produced by the candle. The narrator explains the metaphor, and connects it to Rosamond’s egoism, as follows:

The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example. Rosamond had a Providence of her own who had kindly made her more charming than other girls, and who

seemed to have arranged Fred's illness and Mr. Wrench's mistake in order to bring her and Lydgate within effective proximity. (*M* 166-67).

The narrator's message here is quite clear: the universe is fundamentally indifferent to individuals and their desires, and anything that would suggest the existence of providence— either divine or one's "own"— is the product of irrational fantasy. Reason can lead the mind to understand the world does not revolve around one's individual experience— or even humanity as whole.

The narrator's treatment of Rosamond is very similar to that of Casaubon. Shortly after the parable of the "pier-glass," the narrator asks the reader to "think no unfair evil" of Rosamond, defending her behavior as a mere consequence of her disposition and environmental causes by saying:

She had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide. ... Nature had inspired many arts in finishing Mrs. Lemon's favourite pupil, who by general consent (Fred's excepted) was a rare compound of beauty, cleverness, and amiability (*M* 169).

Once again Eliot is echoing the arguments of the *Ethics*; Spinoza claims that value judgments of good and evil are products of inadequate knowledge, and that those judgments merely reflect whether they are helpful or harmful to the agent making the judgment. To label Rosamond "evil" would be to not fully understand the nature of her character and her surroundings. Rosamond's egotism comes first from her innate drive to preserve her own existence— *conatus*— and is then perpetuated later through the praise she received at her finishing school as well as attention received from suitors. Thus in

addition to training the reader in the proper use of their sympathies, the narrator attempts to show the reader how to consider individuals as products of unfolding Nature.

Lydgate's ability to establish a successful practice and enact his medical reforms is further limited by wider ranging societal conditions— in addition to poor decision making in his personal life. First, the citizens of Middlemarch meet Lydgate's vision of medical reform with opposition. The townspeople— unconcerned with science and advances in research— desire medicines out of a superstitious belief in their efficacy; for instance one townswoman claims, when discussing Lydgate's reforms with others, that “what keeps me up best is the pink mixture, not the brown,” and then asks “Does *he* suppose that people will pay him only to come an sit with them and go away again?” (*M* 276). They also distrust the New Fever Hospital, a hospital financed by Bulstrode that Lydgate becomes involved with as a means of advancing his career. Mrs. Dollop— the gossiping landlady of a popular Middlemarch tavern— goes as far to claim that Lydgate intends to let people die under his watch at the hospital “for the sake of cutting them up” and examining their organs (*M* 274). Furthermore, the other doctors of the town also dislike Lydgate because they find him arrogant and his refusal to prescribe drugs “innovation for the sake of noise and show” (*M* 281) They also distrust the hospital, as it is overseen by the austere religious Bulstrode (*M* 275).

By entering into a political and business partnership with Bulstrode Lydgate's potential for acting is decreased even further. Lydgate agrees to serve as head doctor for Bulstrode's new hospital when he first moves to Middlemarch, viewing it as the perfect medium in which to enact his plans; however, he is ignorant of Bulstrode's reputation, and quickly gets absorbed into the contested public debate of which clergyman will serve

as chaplain. Though he feels frustration with “the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity,” he continues to associate with Bulstrode in order to advance his career (*M* 115). As his marriage deteriorates and Rosamond’s lavish spending result in his bankruptcy, Bulstrode offers him a loan (the loan that Dorothea helps him pay back)—perpetuating his relationship with the banker. John Raffles—Bulstrode’s blackmailer—dies under Lydgate’s watch shortly after receiving the loan, leading the townspeople to suspect he killed Raffles with an opium overdose for Bulstrode as payment for the loan.

Bulstrode is yet another character of the novel that lives within a state of emotional bondage, much like Casaubon and Rosamond. Bulstrode’s charitable inclinations come about not through a rational motivation to improve the lives of others— as is the case with Dorothea— but instead through emotional factors related to the crimes he committed when he worked as an accountant for a Pawnbroker that sold stolen goods. He quit the job after he realized he could not reconcile his religious beliefs with the business, and develops into a devout Methodist who is notorious for his stern moral judgment and lack of sympathy (*M* 433). The narrator demonstrates, however, that his religious feeling is simply an instantiation of his innate egoism, or as Spinoza would say, *conatus*. Bulstrode justifies his accumulation of wealth, despite many passages in the Bible that condemn desire for worldly goods, by erroneously interpreting his life’s unfolding as a part of God’s Providence; he believes that making large sums of money as an honest banker would improve “the service he could do to the cause of religion,” and grounds his “action[s]” in that belief (*M* 383). Bulstrode’s worldly success increases his sense of importance to the world and to God’s eternal providence in a self-perpetuating

cycle, which the narrator describes as follows: “For the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust our belief” (*M* 323). Through the narrator’s voice Eliot argues inadequate ideas and passive passions can in a sense feed on themselves, in the opposite way joyful passive passions are necessary for the ascent to virtue. The New Fever Hospital serves a means for Bulstrode to both increase his political presence and bolster his reputation as a god-fearing family man, as well as a means to assuage his lingering fear and regret. Spinoza addresses the question of fear as a motivator for doing good: he writes that “He who is led by fear and does good in order that he may avoid an evil, is not led by reason” (*E* 200, IVP63). Feuerbach’s argument that moral actions ought to be grounded in love for humanity, because the idea of God is merely a distorted image of man’s ideal self is also present in Eliot’s critique of Bulstrode’s misguided religious beliefs.

Raffles manages to reveal the truth about Bulstrode’s past before his death, and the news quickly spreads throughout Middlemarch. Caleb Garth terminates all business relations with him, and he is publicly denounced as a criminal and religious hypocrite at a Town Hall meeting. As Bulstrode extended so many favors to Lydgate, Lydgate feels “morally forced” to stand by his benefactor, despite his desire to disassociate himself from him— a sentiment which indicates Lydgate’s lack of freedom (*M* 450-1). He is only saved through the beneficent actions of Dorothea, and not by his own effort or those close to him. For Spinoza, the free man understands himself and the world; but two of the people Lydgate most closely associates with— Rosamond and Bulstrode— lack an awareness of their respective desires and egos. To again contrast Lydgate’s experience with Dorothea’s, Lydgate does not surround himself with people who have adequate

ideas and order their desires harmoniously with reason, and therefore he cannot join forces with them to pursue the same goal with an increased power; Dorothea and Will in contrast achieve a state of collective liberation by uniting to form a single political “body” that acts with greater power than either individual alone.

The “Finale” of *Middlemarch* depicts Lydgate as a man that never realized his full potential for action and lives in a state of regret. Lydgate builds an “excellent practice” in London and an unnamed Continental bathing-place, and though he appears outwardly successful he still regards himself a “failure” because “he had not done what he once meant to do” (*M* 512). He makes no great changes to the medical profession, only writing a treatise on Gout, a condition characterized by attacks of inflammatory arthritis, most often appearing in the big toe, that come from the crystallization of uric acid on joints. Gout is most frequently caused by excess consumption of alcohol, sugar, red meats, and seafood, leading the narrator to label Gout a disease with “a great deal of wealth on its side” (*M* 512). The narrator’s remark gestures toward the ironic disparity between the ambitious dreams Lydgate held as a young man, and his later role as a doctor that only serves the wealthy.

Lydgate also remains disappointed with his domestic life “to the last” (*M* 513). He opposes Rosamond’s will “less and less” as their marriage progresses, but the narrator explains he would “occasionally let slip a bitter speech which was more memorable than the signs he made of his repentance” (*M* 513) One time he calls her his “basil plant,” alluding to a story from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, in which a woman plants the head of her murdered lover in a pot of basil and waters it with her tears— implying that Rosamond herself flourished from his own destruction. Such a biting, yet sophisticated,

outburst indicates Lydgate possesses a strong sense of regret, which is specifically listed by Spinoza as a sorrowful passion. The free man, Spinoza might say, should either have the awareness that certain decisions might result in a sense of regret and avoid them, or—in the case of making a mistake—know that feeling regret will further inhibit one’s ability to act, and work towards an understanding of his emotion such that it ceases to control him. Conversely, Dorothea “never repented” the fact she married Will, indicating her increased level of power.

VI. Concluding Remarks: Spinoza and Eliot’s Final Novels

Eliot continues to develop the worldview she expressed in *Middlemarch* in her next novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876). The major narrative arc of the novel involves the choice Daniel Deronda—a gifted young man raised by his wealthy uncle with a secret Jewish heritage—makes between two distinct life paths: whether he will help the materialistic and egotistical Gwendolyn Harleth learn how to extend sympathy and imagine life beyond her own perspective, or become the disciple of the Jewish mystic Mordecai and carry out his vision of empowering the Jewish race.

Deronda is able to exercise his imagination for moral purposes, and rationally analyze the causes of his emotions, thoughts, and the social realities around him—even in times of mental turbulence. For instance, after he attends a meeting of underground Jewish intellectuals and proto-Zionists with Mordecai, the narrator explains he “question[s] actively” the nature of his emotional and intellectual response to the ideas he heard discussed; he can “feel strongly” but also “examine the grounds of his emotions,”

allowing him to make decisions that best allow him to increase his power, and not have his “course determined by mere contagion, without consent of reason” (*DD* 434). To contrast Deronda with Dorothea, both share a similar desire to impact the world positively, and manage to shape their lives such that they can best transform their striving into substantial real-world activity, but Deronda is able to understand and modulate his emotional states more quickly and precisely than Dorothea. Once he learns of his secret Jewish heritage— a revelation similar to Dorothea’s revelation she loves Will— Deronda determines to pledge himself to Mordecai and distance himself from Gwendolyn in a decisive moment of action.

Daniel Deronda, like *Middlemarch*, could also serve as the “estimation” of Spinoza’s work that Eliot in her letter claims is needed if his work is to be understood by a wider audience. I say that if one accepts this proposition, *Daniel Deronda* represents a further attempt of Eliot’s to reconcile emotional states with a life of reason. Not only is Deronda able to actively use his imagination to sympathize, and thereby acquire knowledge, with Gwendolyn, Mordecai, and others, he ends the novel engaged to Mirah, a beautiful Jewess and secret half-sister of Mordecai. Rather than allow his passions to disrupt his decision to carry on Mordecai’s visions, he acts on his love because he recognizes marrying her will increase his power on many levels. Dorothea’s love for Will expands beyond his individual person by virtue of his career as a public servant; likewise, Deronda’s love for Mirah expands beyond her toward the whole Jewish race— indicating he has achieved the state of blessedness Spinoza describes at the end of the *Ethics*, which he understands to be the experience of a joyous intuitive knowledge of God and a freedom from the sorrowful passions.

Eliot published her final, often marginalized, work *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (hereafter *Impressions*) in 1879— three years after the publication of *Daniel Deronda* and one year after the death of G.H. Lewes. *Impressions* is a collection of eighteen loosely related essays written by a fictional minor scholar that each describe the different types personalities the narrator is acquainted with²¹. Eliot considered *Impressions* a novel, though it represents a significant departure in form from the realist novels she is best known for; despite the difference in form, Eliot espouses a philosophical and ethical stance in *Impressions* similar to that of *Daniel Deronda* and *Middlemarch*. She continues to insist that egoism inhibits one's ability to attain a true understanding of the world and its causes. Consider two examples that respectively echo two famous passages from *Middlemarch*; the first in which Eliot asks “Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world...?,” and the second in which she explains the shortsightedness of viewing the world simply through one's own ego with the parable of the “pier-glass” (*M* 260, 166-7):

If a squint or other ocular defect disturbs my vision, I can get instructed in the fact, be made aware that my condition is abnormal, and either through spectacles or diligent imagination I can learn the average appearance of things: is there no remedy or corrective for that inward squint which consists in a dissatisfied egoism or other want of mental balance? (*ITS* 9)

²¹ The title is an allusion to the ancient Theophrastus, Aristotle's philosophical successor and author of *Characters*, a work that outlines thirty different types of personalities and their moral characteristics. The first modern edition of *Characters* was published in 1592 by Isaac Casaubon, who Eliot named *Middlemarch*'s Edward Casaubon after (Strange 314).

Examining the world in order to find consolation is very much like looking carefully over the pages of a book in order to find our own name, if not in the text, at least in a laudatory note: whether we find what we want or not, our preoccupation has hindered us from a true knowledge of the contents. (*ITS* 10)

As with *Middlemarch*, the narrator of *Impressions* argues that one overcomes the limitations of the ego through an increased understanding of one's self and the world, and characterizes such understanding as an intimate mixture of emotions and objective facts. The wise man, for him, is able to have powerful—nearly mystical—imaginative experiences, but can translate the private content of his imagination into communicable knowledge and substantial action. In one essay he expresses this idea by arguing that the works of great writers like “Shakespeare; Milton; and Goethe” all “come from that thoroughly sane imagination which constantly distinguishes between its real experience and ideal creations” (*ITS* 167).

S. Pearl Brilmyer recently suggested a similarity between the philosophy espoused by the essayist of *Impressions* and that of Frederich Nietzsche²². Both writers, according to Brilmyer, seek to show the insignificance of man's experiences and ideas against the infinite backdrop of the natural world. She quotes from Nietzsche's 1873 essay “On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense,” in which Nietzsche seeks to demonstrate “how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature” (Nietzsche as cited in Brilmyer 46). In the essay Nietzsche claims that neither

²² I owe Brilmyer a deal of debt because her recent essay “‘The Natural History of My Inward Self’: Sensing Character in George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*” was influential in the development of this paper.

truth claims nor moral judgments are objectively true, because language is a fabricated set of concepts that reduces the differences and complexities found in the real world.

Truth, Nietzsche declares, “is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms— in short, a sum of human relations...which, after long use, seem fixed, canonical, and binding to people” (Nietzsche 51)²³.

Though Brilmyer proposes an alignment between the two, Nietzsche actually dismisses Eliot with a brief fragment titled “G. Eliot” in *The Twilight of the Idols* (1888). He calls her a “moral little female” and claims that Eliot, along with other unnamed English writers, preserve Christian morality despite their disbelief in God (Nietzsche 193-4). According to Nietzsche, the rejection of religious faith also necessitates the rejection of any moral system that was grounded in faith. I hope to have just demonstrated the contrary. Eliot’s moral stance does serve as a call to identify with one’s neighbors and help those in need; this position undeniably resembles the Christian formulation of the Golden Rule as written in the Gospel of Matthew: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7: 12, KJV). But for both Eliot and Spinoza— as well as Strauss and Feuerbach— this idea can be carried out through humanity’s power of reason and innate

²³ I find Brilmyer’s comparison of Eliot to Nietzsche in this case very productive. Eliot formulates a very similar statement on language’s inability to capture the wealth of difference in the world in a rich passage from *Daniel Deronda*: “The driest argument has its hallucinations, too hastily concluding that its net will now at last be large enough to hold the universe. Men may dream in demonstrations, and cut out an illusory world in the shape of axioms, definitions, and propositions, with a final exclusion of fact signed Q.E.D. No formulas for thinking will save us mortals from mistake in our imperfect apprehension of the matter to be thought about. ... We must be patient with the inevitable makeshift of our human thinking, whether in its sum total or in the separate minds that have made the sum” (*DD* 438).

instinct to preserve in one's existence— not through an obedience to moral imperatives enforced by fear, guilt, and other inhibiting emotions.

Eliot copied down in a notebook a quote from the German poet and critic Heinrich Heine that relates Goethe's poems with Spinoza's pantheism, likely around the time she began translating the *Ethics*; it reads in translation as follows: "It is in his songs that Goethe's pantheism reveals itself with greater purity and charm. The doctrine of Spinoza has escaped from its chrysalid mathematical form, and flutters about us as a lyric of Goethe" (Wiesenfarth 148). To close this study, I am inclined to formulate a similar statement about Eliot and Spinoza: In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Spinoza's theory of action and power is freed from abstract definitions, axioms, and propositions of the *Ethics*, and is made "accessible to a accessible to a larger number" through the rich cast of characters and the warm, humorous, and ironic voice of the narrator (*L* I.321).

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Appendix A: Eliot's references to Spinoza in her letters and journals

I. Letters²⁴

²⁴ I quote from the standard edition of Eliot's letters edited by Gordon Haight and published by Yale University Press. I have also included references to Spinoza in conjunction with Eliot in the correspondence of her close friends.

Eliot to Francis Watts; February 1843

I hope I am not too rash in committing your valuable books to the railway without a guardian, but I am ashamed to retain them longer, and I feel that I need the excuses of being engaged in a translation of a part of Spinoza's works for a friend and of having had some family trials for not returning them before. (*L I.158*)

Mrs. Bray to Sara Hennell; January 4, 1843

Spinoza came (from Dr. Brabant) and looked so temptingly easy that I grieved to let Mary Ann carry it off, for I am sure I could understand his Latin better than her English; but it would disappoint her. (*L I.158*)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; February 18, 1847

Mr. Bray will carry to London Dr. Brabant's Spinoza. Will you be so kind as to send it forward to Devizes, *paying the carriage*, for which Mr. B. will settle with you. (*L I.231*)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; February 28, 1847

I certainly should have been delighted if the Spinoza parcel could have been sent at a high pitch of velocity to Devizes and found its mark somewhere above Dr. B's ear, so as

to give a salutary bruise to his Nos. 6 and 7²⁵— but since cannon-ball speed is not attainable, I am not sorry that you should extract a little pleasure from his property before it reaches him. As you *have* detained it, will you take the trouble to ask Mr. Chapman to get me a copy of the same edition if possible— Mind, I really want this, and should have no end of difficulty getting it in any other way. (*L I.231*)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; September 16, 1847

I cannot forgive you for not asking me for the two shillings which owe you. You ought either to have felt sure that it was only an infirmity of memory which kept me in debt, or to have told me that I was too good-for-nothing to be your friend. I have given the two shillings to Mr. Bray and I beg that for my sake you will demand them from him when he goes to London. The fact was that I had asked him to pay you the carriage in the first instance when I sent Spinoza to you, and so I the more easily lost sight of the matter. But pray have the generosity another time to save me from the pain of finding that I have neglected to pay *even* my money debts, when there are so many others which I am unable to defray. Now I have scolded you I can talk of other things. (*L I.236*)

Eliot to John Sibree; February 1848

How difficult it is to be great in this world, where there is a tariff for spiritualities as well as for beeves and cheese and tallow. It is scarcely possible for a man simple to give out

²⁵ Nos. 6 and 7 refer to the phrenologist George Combre's claim that Organs Six and Seven of the brain contribute to destructiveness and secretiveness respectively (*L I.232*).

his true inspiration— the real profound conviction which he has won by hard wrestling or the few a far between pearls of imagination— he must go on talking or writing by rote or he must starve. Would it not be better to take to tent-making with Paul or to spectacle-making with Spinoza? (*L I.252*)

Mrs. Bray to Sara Hennell; March 10, 1849

I suppose M.A. writes to you, and tells you her great desire to undertake Spinoza. She can find time now, and the occupation is just what she longs for. I advise her communicate herself with Mr. Chapman immediately about the subject and suppose she will. (*L I.280*)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; April 18, 1849

I am translating the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza and seem to want the only friend that knows how to praise or blame. How exquisite is the satisfaction of feeling that another mind than your own sees precisely where and what is the difficulty— and can exactly appreciate the success with which it is overcome. One knows— *sed longo intervallo*— the full meaning of the “fit audience though few.” How an artist must hate the noodles that stare at his picture with a vague notion that it *is* a clever thing to be able to paint. (*L I.280-1*)

Mrs. Bray to Sara Hennell; April 19, 1849

M.A. is happy now with this Spinoza to do; she says it is such a rest to her mind. (*L I.280*)

Eliot to Mr. and Mrs. Bray; December 4, 1849

I write at once to answer your questions about business. Spinoza and I have been divorced for several months. My want of health has obliged me to renounce all application. I take walks, play on the piano, read Voltaire, talk to my friends, and just take a dose of mathematics every day to prevent my brain from becoming quite soft. Therefore I am by no means eager to supersede any other person's labours, and Mr. Chapman is absolved from observing any delicacy towards me about Spinoza or his translators²⁶. If you are anxious to publish the translation in question I could, after a few months, finish the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* to keep it company but I confess to you, that I think you would do better to abstain from printing a translation. What is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza's works, but a true estimate of his life and system. After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them and give an analysis. For those who read the very words Spinoza wrote, there is the same sort of interest in his style as in the conversation of a person of great capacity who has led a solitary life, and who says from his own soul what all the world is saying by rote, but this interest hardly belongs to a translation (*L* I.321-22).

Eliot to George Combre; January 22, 1853

²⁶ Eliot alludes to Samuel Hitchcock, who began translating the *Ethics* for his brother and sought Chapman as a publisher. The finished Hitchcock translation was never published; six manuscripts are housed in the Library of Congress (*L* I.321).

That idea of Plato, of Spinoza, of Goethe, and of many others— that immortality is the destiny of the worthy only,— of those who have sublimated themselves by pursuit of truth and beauty, is a very fascinating [one], but it seems to me, at least in this stage of my development, which is imperfect enough, to be rather the hallucination of an intense personality than to have any foundation in reason. (*L VIII.70*)

Eliot to Charles Bray; November 12, 1854

We work hard in the mornings till our heads are hot, then walk out, dine at three and, if we don't go out, read diligently aloud in the evening. I think it is impossible for two human beings to be more happy in each other. (*L II.186*)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; November 22, 1854

I should be very glad to have my pen employed in something that would yield immediate profit, and there are plenty of subjects suggested by new German books which would be fresh and instructive in an English Review. But I cannot bring myself to run the risk of a refusal from an editor. Indeed I cannot for several reasons make any proposition at present. So I am working at what will ultimately yield something which is secured by agreement with Bohn. (*L II.189*)

Eliot to Charles Bray; April 4, 1855

Mr. Lewes is gone to Arthur Help's at Vernon Hill for a week or ten days, and on his return I shall join him in London where— that is, in the environs— we shall establish ourselves till the big books are fairly through the press, when I hope our wings will be

plumed for a new flight to the south of Germany and Italy, for which we both yearn²⁷. (*L* II.197)

Eliot to Sara Hennell; July 21 1855

You hardly do justice to Froude's article on Spinoza. I don't at all agree with Froude's own views, but I think his account of Spinoza's doctrines admirable. (*L* II.211)

Eliot to Charles Bray; March 26, 1856

By the way, when Spinoza comes out, be so good as not to mention *my* name in connection with it. I particularly wish not to be known as the translator of the *Ethics*, for reasons which it would be "too tedious to mention."²⁸ (*L* II.233)

Henry George Bohn to George Henry Lewes; June 3, 1856²⁹

Dear Sir,

I shall be obliged by your sending me a copy of the agreement between us for Spinoza as I do not at present find any signed or unsigned³⁰. It is so long ago since we entertained the subject, that I had lost sight of it, indeed given it up till I lately saw your M.S. and reminder. It is only now that I can conveniently send it to press, but before I do so shall be glad to see that we are agreed as to terms.

²⁷ The "big books" are Lewes's *Life of Goethe*— published in October 1855— and her own translation of the *Ethics*.

²⁸ See page – for discussion of this passage.

²⁹ Dorothy Atkins includes in an appendix to *George Eliot and Spinoza* the correspondence between George Henry Lewes and the publisher Henry George Bohn regarding the publication of Eliot's translation of *the Ethics*. I have also reproduced their correspondence for the sake of comprehensiveness.

³⁰ Lewes delivered Eliot's manuscript of the *Ethics* to Bohn May 8, 1856 (*L* VIII.156).

I presume you mean the printer to modernize the English of the printed volume, as it will want alteration.

If you propose leaving England in July it will have to tarry till you return.

Yours my Dear Sir, very faithfully, Henry G. Bohn (*L VIII.156*)

Bohn to Lewes; June 7, 1856

Dear Sir,

I think there must be some mistake in your recollection of what was intended between us in the matter of Spinoza. The sum in my mind has always been fifty pounds, the same as Comte, but it is so long since the subject was entertained that I had virtually given it up, and the particulars have passed out of my mind. Indeed I had no notice from you that you meant to proceed with it till I saw the materials of the volume on my table. What might be a reasonable speculation two or three years ago may be a very doubtful one now, but supposing the editorship not to be more than 50/-/- and the book to be what was then intended I do not wish to waive the undertaking on account of delay. If half the volume is to be a mere reprint of the old translation, which I never contemplated, I can see no reason why the cost of editing should be more than Comte³¹.

I am aware that no signed agreement has passed between us, but I always meant there should be one, and believe you have a memorandum in my son's handwriting which I should be glad to see as soon as you can conveniently bring it here.

Yours, Dear Sir, faithfully, Henry G. Bohn (*L VIII.156-7*)

³¹ This "old translation" is the *TTP*; Lewes had borrowed an anonymous translation of the *TTP* from Bohn and returned it to him with Eliot's manuscript (*L VIII*).

Lewes to Bohn; June 8, 1856

Dear Sir,

Your letter has greatly surprised me. I send you a literal copy of the memorandum drawn up by your son, and you "think there it he some mistake in my recollection of what was intended between us." Surely you cannot have read my letter with attention?

Then again as to the delay. I spoke frequently to your son about the work being in progress and occasionally even to yourself long before the m.s. was in your hands.

The reprint of the old translation was agreed on by us, and ou gave me the volume for that purpose. The only difference being that if my Introduction and extracts from the other works occupied too great a space, it was not to be printed entire, but some portions of it abridged. As however I deemed it necessary that the work should, if possible, be entire, I have so contrived it.

You forget that the 75£ covers not only cost of editing but the translation of the Ethics which is entirely new, and has never been translated before.

I confess not to understand one passage in your letter where you allude to there being no "signed agreement," as I cannot suppose an honorable man thinks a memorandum less binding than a regular bond.

You may remember that when Spinoza was first entertained and Mr. Kelly was to translate it, I asked 50£ for the editing alone; and declined to accept less. Subsequently we talked the matter over, and arranged to get the whole of what was necessary in one volume for 75£; and this is what your son records in his memorandum.

[unsigned] (*L VIII.157-8*)

Bohn to Lewes; June 13, 1856

Dear Sir,

With regard to my delay in going to press with your Spinoza, you would under any circumstances have little cause of complaint. After taking more than two years to produce, what I had reason to expect in a few months, you bring it to me at a time when there is no encouragement to publish it. The book was originally a proposition of your own, to be carried out in conjunction with Mr. Kelly; and as our agreement was never completed, and you had given me no indication of your intention to proceed, I concluded you had abandoned it for the more lucrative pursuit of Goethe. Your letter of a recent date announced your completion of the work, but added that as my hands were probably full you would like to keep it by you till I was ready. You say you spoke frequently to my son about the work, which he does not recollect; and you certainly did not speak to me about it, unless very lately, which does not alter the case. I never for a moment dreamt of your reprinting the old translation and therefore could not have agreed to it. I gave you that volume as I should have given you any other on the subject, which I might happen to have in stock, to aid your labors, but not to become a substitute for them; and when I see that you have not made a single correction in an antiquated text, I have reason to be apprehensive. The notion of abridging it may have been in your own mind, but certainly never entered mine, for I detest abridgements. You say I forget that the 75£ covers not only the cost of editing, but also the translation of Ethics. I remember that our intention was to have translations both of the Ethics and the Tractatus made by Mr. Kelly and accompanied by an Introduction and notes by yourself; and my impression is that you were to receive 25£ for editing and the remainder of 501 for translating. My rule of

paying'3/-/- or 3/3/- per sheet of 32 pages for translating and editing is so uniform that it must be something more than ordinarily inviting which would tempt me to swerve from it. But you have my son's memorandum of an intended agreement, and I will abide it, although unsigned, as far as it commits me to what you state. You will remember that I had nothing which could bind you to the performance of your part of the contract, which I should have required had it been completed in the usual form. Please to bring the paper with you and we will then enter into a proper, for I should not consent to publish without one.

I remain Dear Sir, Yours faithfully, Henry G. Bohn (*L VIII.158-9*)

Lewes to Bohn; June 15, 1856

Sir,

From the tenor of your insulting letter of the 13th June I presume you are so accustomed to have your own word disbelieved that you have grown reckless in expressing your disbelief of the word of others. As I am not accustomed to have mine doubted, and moreover as I altogether decline to have transactions with a man who shows such wonderful facility in forgetting and such persistency in denying his own written agreement—As you show in your letters I beg you will send back my m.s. and consider the whole business at an end between us. If the m.s. be sent to me at the

Office of the Leader

352 Strand

I will— on hearing of its safe arrival— send you back the written agreement, and so terminate all matters between us.

Your obedient servant, G.H.L. (*L VIII.159-60*)

Bohn to Lewes; June 18, 1856

Sir,

My letter was not insulting or intended to be so, nor am I accustomed to have my word disbelieved by honest men, having never intentionally uttered anything which I could not verify, although knaves would willingly have it otherwise. When you can prove anything to the contrary I will present you with all I have. If after a delay of two years in producing your volume I have forgotten the particulars of a memorandum drawn up by my son, and of which I have no copy, there is not much to be wondered at, and you had no right to take offence at my wishing to see it. I never proposed to deny an agreement between us, but merely to see it, telling you at the same time that I should conform to it although not signed. There could be no use whatever in written agreements if they are not to be consulted in case of doubt. As a literary man I should have been glad, for the honor of the fraternity, that your letter had been couched in more gentlemanly phrase. The manuscript has been sent as you directed, to 352 Strand.

Yours respectfully, Henry G. Bohn (*L VIII.160*)

Eliot to Charles Lee Lewes; May 9, 1862

Pater wrote yesterday to Mr. Burton to tell him how much he admired the pictures, and today we have had a letter from him in reply” when he received Pater’s he was reading

the memoirs of Spinoza by that dear little man and great author— a pretty coincidence, was it not?³² (*L IV.30*)

Eliot to Sarah Hennell; October 28, 1865

But it seems to me much better to read a man's own writings than to read what others say about him. Especially when the man is first-rate and the "others" are third-rate. As Goethe said long ago about Spinoza, "Ich immer vorzog, von dem Menschen zu erfahren *wie er dachte*, als von einem andern zu hören, *wie er hätte denken sollen*."³³ However, I am not fond of expressing criticism or disapprobation. The difficulty is, to digest and live upon any valuable truth oneself. (*L IV.207*)

Eliot to Sarah Hennell; August 10, 1866

The color of Amsterdam is ugly: the houses are of a chocolate colour, almost black (an artificial tinge given to the bricks) and the woodwork on them screams out in ugly patches of cream-colour; the canals have no trees along their sides, and the boats are infrequent. We looked about for the very Portugese Synagoge where Spinoza was nearly assassinated as he came from worship. But it no longer exists. There are no less than three Portugese Synagogues now— very large and handsome. (*L IV.298*)

³² The "memoirs of Spinoza" are either Lewes's articles "Spinoza's Life and Works" or the section on Spinoza in his *Biographical History of Philosophy*.

³³ The sentence translates to "I always preferred knowing what an author himself said, to knowing what others thought he ought to have said," and is found in Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Eliot had this written on a cover flap of a journal, and will quote this passage in English in 1871.

Eliot to Alexander Main; September 4, 1871

Do you remember Goethe's wise words about reading Spinoza?—"I always preferred knowing what an author himself said, to knowing what others thought he ought to have said." (*L V.182*)

Eliot to Asher Isaac Meyers; January 18, 1879

I am not in the habit of reading printed observations on my writings, but my husband informed me that various excellent persons had (with the best intention) repeated the mistaken statement that the Jew named Cohn, of whom he gave some recollections in the Fort-nightly Review ten or twelve years ago, bore a resemblance to Mordecai, and was thus a guarantee that the character was not an impossible ideal³⁴. Mr. Lewes took several opportunities (in conversation) of pointing out that no such resemblance existed, Cohn being a keen dialectician and a highly impressive man, but without any specific Jewish enthusiasm. His type was rather that of Spinoza whose metaphysical system attracted his subtle intellect, and in relation to Judaism Spinoza was in contrast with my conception of Mordecai. (*L VII.96*)

II. Journals and Notebooks³⁵

³⁴ Mordecai, a central character in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), is a Jewish mystic who seeks Deronda as a disciple to carry out his vision of strengthening the Jewish community in Europe.

³⁵ Whereas Eliot's letters stylistically resemble her prose fiction in a general sense, her journal and notebook entries are much less clear, often containing single words, fragmented notes, and quotations— frequently in foreign languages. Though her entries become very redundant I have reproduced them all for the sake of being comprehensive. I

Diary 1854-1861; November 8, 1854

Began translating Spinoza's *Ethics*. (Harris and Johnston 33)

Diary 1854-1861; November 9, 1854

Translated Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 33)

Diary 1854-1861; November 13, 1854

Translated Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 34)

Diary 1854-1861; November 24, 1854

Began "Briefe über Spinoza."³⁶ (Harris and Johnston 35)

Diary 1854-1861; November 26, 1854

Read Jacobi's Briefe über Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 35)

Diary 1854-1861; December 4, 1854

quote from the following sources: *The Journals of George Eliot* (Ed. Harris and Johnson), *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook 1854-1879* (Ed. Wiesenfarth), *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks* (Ed. Pratt and Neufeldt), and *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks* (Ed. Irwin).

³⁶ Jacobi's *Briefe über Spinoza*, or *Letters on Spinoza*, are a series of letters written between Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn, in which Jacobi argues Spinoza's materialist philosophy results in atheism. The letters between Jacobi and Mendelssohn progressed into a major intellectual debate throughout Europe, and is now known as the Pantheist Controversy.

I talked principally with Prof. Stahr, about German style, Lessing, Spinoza, History of Jesus etc³⁷. (Harris and Johnston 36)

Diary 1854-1861; December 7, 1854

Read Scherr— worked at Spinoza— walked in the Thiergarten³⁸. (Harris and Johnston 37)

Diary 1854-1861; December 9, 1854

Worked at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 38)

Diary 1854-1861; December 10, 1854

Worked at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 38)

Diary 1854-1861; December 11, 1854

Scherr— Spinoza— Thiergarten. (Harris and Johnston 38)

Diary 1854-1861; December 12, 1854

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 38)

³⁷ Adolf Stahr was a German literary critic and historian whom Eliot and Lewes met with several times during their travels. Eliot specifically notes she read his “Toro” several days after dining at his house, a two-volume history of major artists and their works (Harris and Johnston 41).

³⁸ Johannes Scherr (1817-1886) was a German historian and novelist that wrote voluminously on the history, literature, and culture of Germany and other countries. Eliot read Scherr frequently while translating the *Ethics*.

Diary 1854-1861; December 13, 1854

Head not clear, so I did not get through much of Spinoza this morning. (Harris and Johnston 38)

Diary 1854-1861; December 15, 1854

Worked at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 38)

Diary 1854-1861; December 17, 1854

Worked well at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 39)

Diary 1854-1861; December 18, 1854

Finished revising Part I of Spinoza's Ethics. (Harris and Johnston 39)

Diary 1854-1861; December 19, 1854

Began Part II of Ethics. (Harris and Johnston 39)

Diary 1854-1861; December 20, 1854

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 39)

Diary 1854-1861; December 21, 1854

Copied the appendix to 1st book of Ethics. ... G. finished "As you like it". He then went to Prof. Olfers', and I wrote at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 39-40)

Diary 1854-1861; December 22, 1854

Scherr, Spinoza, walk in the rain. (Harris and Johnston 40)

Diary 1854-1861; December 23, 1854

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 40)

Diary 1854-1861; December 24, 1854

Worked at Spinoza. Walked to the Neue Museum, but failed to get in. Came home and copied Goethe's Discourse on Shakespeare. Read, at dinner, his wonderful observations on Spinoza. Particularly struck with the beautiful modesty of the passage in which he says he cannot presume to say that he thoroughly understands Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 40)

Diary 1854-1861; December 26, 1854

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 40)

Diary 1854-1861; December 29, 1854

Worked a little at Spinoza but not well enough to do much. (Harris and Johnston 41)

Diary 1854-1861; January 1, 1855

Worked at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 41)

Diary 1854-1861; January 2, 1855

Spinoza and a bit of Kestner letters. (Harris and Johnston 41)

Diary 1854-1861; January 5, 1855

Read a little of Stahr and worked a little at Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 42)

Diary 1854-1861; January 8, 1855

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 42)

Diary 1854-1861; January 9, 1855

Read Stahr and finished translating the 2nd book of the Ethics. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 14, 1855

Spinoza. We had a delightful two hours' walk in the frosty air toward Charlottenburg.

Talked about Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 15, 1855

Stahr— Spinoza— Walk in the Thiergarten. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 16, 1855

Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 17, 1855

Little done at Spinoza, as I was not well and went to have a bath. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 18, 1855

Revised Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; January 20, 1855

Finished the revision of Book II of Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 43)

Diary 1854-1861; March 15, 1855³⁹

I have written the Preface to the third Book of Ethics, read Scherr and Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis. (Harris and Johnston 54)

Diary 1854-1861; March 18, 1855

Read Scherr. Translated Spinoza. In the evening wrote. (Harris and Johnston 54)

Diary 1854-1861; March 19, 1855

Read Scherr, translated Spinoza and walked before dinner. (Harris and Johnston 54)

³⁹ Eliot and Lewes returned to England in early March. Confronted with the logistical difficulties of their relationship, Eliot stayed in Dover for six weeks while Lewes went back to London. They eventually settled in Richmond, an outer suburb of London that afforded them a seclusion to both enjoy each other's company and focus on their work. Eliot was much less happy at this time than while traveling, and frequently complains of depression and headaches. (Harris and Johnston 48)

Diary 1854-1861; March 21, 1855

Read Scherr and translated Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; March 22, 1855

Read Scherr, wrote Spinoza. Read Macbeth. In the evening wrote. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; March 26, 1855

Began Scherr again. Revised Spinoza. Read Romeo and Juliet and the Nibelungen Lied. Sewed and wrote. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; March 27, 1855

Revised Spinoza. Read Athenæum. Walked on the hill. Read Nibelungen and revised Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; March 31, 1855

Revised Spinoza. Finished Nibelungen Lied. In the evening wrote a couple of pages of Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; April 2, 1855

Translated Spinoza and in the evening revised it. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; April 3, 1855

Translated and revised Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; April 4, 1855

Translated. Read Athenæum and article in W.R. Too headachy to revise Spinoza. (Harris and Johnston 55)

Diary 1854-1861; April 5, 1855

Translated Spinoza. In the evening revised it, read Scherr. (Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 6, 1855

Letter from Mr. Chapman. ...In the evening revised Spinoza and read Gibbon. (Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 7, 1855

Wrote Spinoza and a letter to G. enclosing Mr. C's. (Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 8, 1855

Read Schrader. Spinoza. Leader and Athenæum. (Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 9, 1855

Painful letter which upset me for work. Walked out and then translated 2 pages of Spinoza. Read Henry V. In the evening translated again. (Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 10, 1855

Translated Spinoza. Walked feeling much depression against which I struggled hard.
Read Henry V and Henry VIII. Wrote to Mr. Chapman. Revised Spinoza. (Harris and
Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; April 11, 1855

Finished Book III of Spinoza's Ethics. Read Henry VIII. Revised Spinoza in the evening.
(Harris and Johnston 56)

Diary 1854-1861; June 13, 1855

Began Part IV of Spinoza's Ethics. (Harris and Johnston 57)

Diary 1854-1861; October 13-14, 1855

Finished Part IV of *Spinoza's Ethics*. (Harris and Johnston 57)

Diary 1854-1861; January 6, 1856

Began to revise Book IV of Spinoza's Ethics, and continued this work through the week,
being able to work but slowly. (Harris and Johnston 58)

Diary 1854-1861; February 19, 1856

Since the 6 January I have been occupied with Spinoza and, except a review of Griswold's American Poets, have done nothing else but translate the Fifth Book of the Ethics and revise the whole of my translation from the beginning. This evening I have finished my revision. (Harris and Johnston 58)

Diary 1854-1861; December 30, 1856

[List of of work completed] 1856 from Jan. to July.

Finished Trans. of Sp. Ethics Feb. 19. ... (Harris and Johnston 64)

A Writer's Notebook; undated note on journal cover

“Ich immer vorzog, von dem Menschen zu erfahren wie er dachte, als von einem andern zu hören, wie er hätte denken sollen.” Goethe, a propos of Spinoza⁴⁰. (Wiesenfarth 3)

A Writer's Notebook; circa 1854-56

“Constatirt ist es, dass der Lebenswandel des Spinoza frei von allem Tadel war, und rein und makellos wie das Leben seines göttlichen Veters, Iesu Christi. Auch wie dieser litt er für seine Lehre, wie dieser trug er die Dornenkrone. Ueberall, wo ein großer Geist seinen Gedanken ausspricht, ist Golgatha. ... Er wurde feierlich ausgestossen aus der Gemeinschaft Israels und unwürdig erklärt huifüro den Namen Iude zu tragen. Seine christlichen Feinde waren großmüthig genug, ihm diesen Namen zu lassen⁴¹.” Heine. (Wiesenfarth 10)

⁴⁰ See footnote 33.

⁴¹ Translation: “It is perfectly clear that Spinoza's life was beyond reproach and as pure and spotless as the life of his divine cousin Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, Spinoza also suffered

A Writer's Notebook 1854-1879; circa 1854-56

“Am reinsten und lieblichsten beurkundet sich dieser Goethesche Pantheismus in seinen kleinen Liedern. Die Lehre des Spinoza hat sich aus der mathematischen Hülle entpuppt und umflattert uns als Goethesches Lied. Daher die Wuth unserer Orthodoxen und Pietisten gegen das Goethesche Lied. Mit ihren frommen Bärentatzen tappfen sie nach diesem Schmetterling, der ihnen beMndig entflattert. Das ist so zart ätherisch, so duftig beflügelt. ... Diese Goetheschen Lieder haben einen neckischen Zauber, der unbeschreibbar. Die harmonischen Verse umschlingen dein Herz wie eine zärtliche Geliebte; das Wort umarmt dich, während der Gedanke dich küsst⁴².” Heine.

(Wiesenfarth 10-11)

The Folger Notebook; 1868-71

Spinoza, Ethics. iv. 67. Life, not death! — how to live — not how to die⁴³. (Pratt and Neufeldt 31)

for his teachings; like him, he wore a crown of thorns. Wherever a great soul utters its thoughts, there is Golgatha. ... He was solemnly expelled from the community of Israel and pronounced unworthy to call himself a Jew. His Christian enemies, however, were generous enough to allow him that name.” (Wiesenfarth 147)

⁴² Translation: “It is in his songs that Goethe's pantheism reveals itself with greater purity and charm. The doctrine of Spinoza has escaped from its chrysalid mathematical form, and flutters about us as a lyric of Goethe. Hence the wrath displayed by our orthodox believers and pietists against Goethe's song. With their pious bears' paws they make clumsy efforts to seize this butterfly that constantly eludes their grasp; so delicately ethereal, so lightly winged is Goethe's song. ... These songs of Goethe have a coquettish charm that is indescribable: the harmonious verses entwine themselves around the heart like a tenderly loved on; the world embraces whilst the thought kisses thee.” (Wiesenfarth 148)

⁴³ Eliot at this time was reading the Irish historian and philosopher W.E.H. Lecky; in his *History of European Morals* he writes “There is a profound wisdom in the maxims of Spinoza, that ‘the proper study of a wise man is not how to die, but how to live,’ and that ‘there is no subject on which the sage will think less than death’” (Pratt and Neufeldt

Pforzheimer MS 711⁴⁴; 1871-77

Spinoza 1632-77. Sabbatai Zewi contemp. ...

From 166 to 1664, when Spinoza was from the age of 24 to 32, he produced the *Tractatus Theol. Pol.*, his first work.

Porta Coeli of Abraham de Herrera, a Kabbalistic & quasi-philosophical book that appeared in Amsterdam, 1656, certainly used by Spinoza. (Irwin 356-7)

Pforzheimer MS 710; 1872-1877

Sabbatai-Zewi, who excited wide-spread belief in himself as the Messiah (subsequently arrested by the Turkish authorities & induced to turn Mussulman to save himself) was the contemporary of Spinoza (1632-77) who evidently refers to him or had him in mind when writing the passage in the *Tractatus* about the possible restoration of the Jews. The *Tractatus* was written 1656 to 1664 when Spinoza was 24-32 & was his first work. Abraham de Herrera's *Porta Coeli*, a cabbalistic-philosophic book which certainly influenced Spinoza, was published at Amsterdam 1656. (Irwin 421)

121). The full proposition from the *Ethics* reads: "The free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom consists not in the contemplation of death, but of life" (*E* 203; IVP67).

⁴⁴ The Pforzheimer manuscripts contain Eliot's research on Judaism, which she accumulated for the Jewish plotline of *Daniel Deronda*. William Baker first published these as *Some George Eliot Journals* (4 Vols.), though I quote from the more recent transcriptions by Jane Irwin.