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Spinoza on Sympathy and Humanity

This presentation tackles the issue of identifying what defines human mentality and behaviour in Spinoza's panpsychist and determinist universe. Spinoza does not define humans in his works. In addition to this, Spinoza's unique combination of determinism with panpsychism challenges commonsense criteria by which we characterize human beings through possession of special intelligence, creativity, and free will. Indeed, in Spinoza's universe all things are "animate" (i.e., endowed with a mind, perceptions, feelings, consciousness, etc.; see E2p13s) and their behaviour does not depend on free will (E2p48, E3p2). In my presentation I will show that, in spite of the lack of a definition of "human", in the *Ethics* Spinoza describes the mechanism through which we, from a subjective point of view, acknowledge others' humanity by recognizing something "similar to us" in nature. This mechanism rests on the phenomenon that he calls "imitation of affects" (E3p27s), by which one's affects are supposed to mirror the affects of fellow human beings. Based on these analyses, I will argue that what identifies someone as "human" is mimetic-empathic behaviour, that is, the capacity to project feelings and thoughts with which we are familiar onto other individuals, and act according to the mental states we attribute to others.