# Do we Think Language or Speak Thought? A Spinozan Solution

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***Abstract:*** The article presents a Spinozan response to the titular problem which engages with the discourse surrounding mind-body dualism.
The issue in question has been deliberated philosophically for centuries, and the rational solutions presented were mostly concerned with the causal relation between thought and language: does language—with its content and grammar—activate speech or, alternately, do linguistic concepts and rules shape our thoughts and mental images?
Despite the many recent successes in neuroscience, the cognitive processes of human awareness are still a mystery which might well be associated with dimensions we are unaware of.
In this respect, the article will present the main approaches that have attempted to address this question, including—inter alia—Wittgenstein, Chomsky, Pinker, Shimron, and others to this very day. The article will then present the approach offered by Spinoza's Ethics based on the connection the Ethics establishes between the metaphysical and the cognitive.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative in nature and is based on a textual interpretation of Spinoza's Ethics and Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. After reviewing the issue's theoretical background and the manner in which it addresses the titular question, the study will seek to address said titular question. To this end, the discussion will contain references to, interpretations of, and notes on Spinoza's Ethics and other relevant sources, including a treatment of the issue's theoretical background, and the article will conclude with a focused conclusion.

### Theoretical Background and Literature Review

In What kind of Creatures Are We? Noam Chomsky (2016) presents a historical survey of the opinions on language and thought. His conclusion at the book's opening is "...it [language] has been studied intensively and productively for 2,500 years, but with no clear answer to the question of what language is...." (p. 2). He further determines that the opinions on

the issue have not been defined properly because they ignore the "...basic property..." associated with the question of what language actually is.

Chomsky opens his book Language and Problems of Knowledge (1988), on the other hand, with an impressive statement on the importance of studying language in the context of studying human nature: "...There are several reasons why language has been and will continue to be of particular significance for the study of human nature. One is that language appears to be a true species property, unique to the human species in its essentials and a common part of our shared biological endowment [....] Furthermore, language enters in a crucial way into thought, action, and social relations. Finally, language is relatively accessible to study...." (p. 2).

With respect to the latter, Chomsky later stresses that speakers developed a system of knowledge which has a mental, and therefore a neural, representation in a particular physical form. Chomsky then addresses the problems of perception and production. In this respect, Chomsky states that the source of linguistic knowledge and its system of rules might be found in children's environments or in the natural biological resources present in their brains. In other words, that part of the brain/mind responsible for the capacity to perceive and produce in environmental interactions is the same part that constitutes the unique linguistic capacity common to the human species.

Chomsky further states that there is a material world, and that the mind-body problem as conceived by Descartes has yet to be resolved. It is thus uncertain whether we can ask whether certain phenomena occur beyond the domain of bodies and in the separate domain of minds.

In sum, and according to Chomsky, the source of language capacities is biological and genetic. Language is not the same as thought, but rather a universal inherent capacity closely associated with the cognitive structures of our physiological brain. Genetics provide the basic capacity, while the environment provides the specific language people acquire. With that said, and while language is not the same as thought, language does amount to an instinct that supports thought.

Moreover, a closer reading of Chomsky's approach reveals a flexible semantic maneuver shifting between the materialist and idealist aspects of the question of whether we think language or speak thought, but without an unambiguous and focused treatment of this issue in the linguistic domain.

In another example, the (later) Wittgenstein in Philosophical Investigations makes extensive use of metaphors. He describes language, for example, as a city with an ancient centre and modern suburbs, and

uses a toolbox as a metaphor for words with different meanings (§11, §. 14), just as the levers in a train driver's car look similar but have different roles (§12). In this respect, Wittgenstein's use of metaphors effectively outlines the limits of language as an explanatory instrument and illustrates Wittgenstein's claim that language does not have a one-to-one structure but is rather a set of language games. It is thus readily understood that these language games are those which construct the new 'suburbs' language needs to establish in the linguistic anomaly of the city metaphor. Put differently, Wittgenstein provides another example of language's flexibility, the very flexibility that prevents it from possessing rigid borders.

Wittgenstein further discusses, defines, and analyses human traits such as thought (§§316-362), imagination (§§363-397), intentionality (§§428-465), empiricism (§§466-490), mental states and processes (§§571-610), desire and intentionality (§§611-660), and intention to (§§661-693), even though these are abstract concepts which are inherently internal (including the "empiricals," since desire, intention, thought, and imagination express human beings' empirical experience). In this respect, Wittgenstein states that thought does not precede language as a pre-structured matrix for word reception, but rather that language is the precondition for thought's existence. Accordingly, he combines thought and language in his conclusions and posits a human activity of speech and writing that are not translations of thought, but rather an empirical method of action that promotes our capacity for worldly existence.

The early Wittgenstein (1922) presents an interesting proximity to Spinoza. While the former was primarily influenced by Frege, Russell, Schopenhauer and Kraus, his work displays a clear similarity to Spinoza with respect to the boundaries of language and the limits of an individual's consciousness of the world's boundaries. With that said, the early Wittgenstein is primarily concerned with the logical conditions of the representation of reality in language and clearly states that you cannot employ language to present a thing that contradicts logic (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, §3.032). Spinoza, who is concerned with the metaphysical structure of reality and with the possibility of its perception, also establishes logical and geometrical statements as leading motifs in understanding reality and the world.

Like Spinoza, the later Wittgenstein (Investigations) discusses a wide range of actions such as intention, intentionality, will, etc. He even engages in a detailed discussion of the mental aspect of language comprehension and perceives it as a capacity associated with an empirical process (§§150-157). With that said, and while he does address the physiological aspect of neurobiological processes (§158), and despite the

fact that his approach to language as a tool meant for the understanding of things corresponds to Spinoza's approach in some respects, as we shall see below, we cannot escape the fact that we are concerned with a complicated and twisting discourse. As for the titular question under discussion, the later Wittgenstein does not offer readers clear and unambiguous answers.

Like Chomsky, Steven Pinker in The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language (1995) states that language is of our minds. He further states that language is a result of the (DNA) instinct[1] and that it is a distinct part of the biological makeup and a biological adaptation to the conveyance of information. Pinker also addresses the depths of linguistic possibility from the finiteness of words and the infiniteness of sentences through what he refers to as a combinatorial system[2]. He also analyses the complexity and methods of operation of compound linguistic syntax as the latter is both the product and the makeup of our thoughts. According to Pinker, what limits thoughts and context to syntax is the mouth: a distinct physiological organ that cannot pronounce more than one word at a time. As Pinker states it, "...Grammar is a protocol that has to interconnect the ear, the mouth, and the mind, three very different kinds of machine..." (p. 125). Pinker also addresses children's learning processes and states that part of grammatical organization as a template of language is in itself part of the language acquisition mechanism which allows children to understand the noises (speech) they hear from their parents.

In Chapter 13, 'Mind Design', Pinker—like Chomsky—argues against cultural relativism. According to Pinker, there is a universal human nature that includes a universal language instinct for all cultures (languages) grounded in the rules we presented above. In Pinker's view, language is so natural to us that we tend to take it for granted. If, however, we examine what is required to join words and form normal sentences, we discover that the mechanisms of mental language must possess a complex design made up of many interrelated parts. In this respect, Pinker later presents the speech traits of the so-called "universal people:" gossip, lying, storytelling, metaphors, poetry, etc. Pinker also identifies the instincts associated with inherent psychological tendencies as a list of complex interrelations between universal human nature and the conditions of life in a human body on planet Earth.

As a whole, Pinker's universal and multicultural approach to language accords with Spinoza's approach that establishes human nature as

[1] Pinker and Chomsky adopt the concept of 'instinct' from Hume and Darwin at the descriptive, rather than interpretive, level. Chomsky, for his part, refers to it as a kind of instinct rather than an instinct per se in *Language and Problems of Knowledge* (1988).
[2] Pinker (1995), Chapter 4 ("How Language Works").

fundamentally uniform and subject to psychophysical regularity. Spinoza, however, would have rejected the dualism suggesting a reciprocal relationship between psychological tendencies and living conditions in the human body. According to Spinoza, as we shall see below, we are not concerned with two entities, but rather with humans as one entity with two aspects that do not possess a causal relationship

**Yair Shimron**

In his critique of Chomsky's inherent language theory, which rejects the possibility that children learn language from evidence presented to them by their environment as babies and later via the education system, Shimron (2000) argues that children learn language from what is presented to them by way of associative memory, induction, analogy, and other mechanisms people employ for learning in daily adult life. Children thus learn language via empirical skills that are not necessarily linguistic in nature, but rather those that we employ for learning other things (p. 97).

Shimron further argues for a gradual development of language and critiques Chomsky's 'super mutation' theory, that posits people as possessing perfect grammar. Specifically, Shimron argues that there is no difference between human learning by sight that learns to distinguish shapes as a learning process and learning a native language (p. 19). The initial language infants learn can be found primarily in their expression of distress in an untrained voice long before they listen to their environment (p. 16). In this respect, Shimron addresses the process of language creation and states that sounds can be mental symbols. These symbols are stored in the brain and are released from it in the process of speech (p. 32). This, in turn, paves the path for lexical thought. It is thus possible to shift from a sense impression leaving a descriptive impression in the sub-linguistic stage of impressions, to the speech phase, which places words and sentences at the disposal of the lexical state of thought. Shimron, for his part, explains this transition by 'feedback,' which is the interim stage between the sub-linguistic and speech stages of thought (p. 39). Shimron later states that language operates in an entirely abstract domain. Even though the sensual perception if the world is physical, Shimron argues, information about the world is not directly dependent upon physical factors but is rather an entirely abstract activity independent of space and time. Language can thus convey world knowledge directly to conscious awareness, and occasionally even identify with it affirmatively or negatively, regardless of whether said knowledge is truthful or false (pp. 41-42).

As a whole, Shimron critiques the approach posited by Chomsky, Grodzinsky, Pinker, and Reinhart, whereby the linguistic evidence presented to children is meagre and atrophied and thus complemented by

genetics. Instead, Shimron argues, the language presented to children is not atrophied, but rather proper and rich, and they pick it up from their environment, and, among other things, from their parents' discourse with other parties (pp. 63-65).

Furthermore, and insofar as we are concerned with language as a lexical thinking device which also encompasses error, Shimron's approach also accords with Spinoza's approach. This also applies to Shimron's critique of Chomsky with regard to language learning methods. With that said, Shimron still fails to provide us with a crystallized framework for producing a clear answer to the titular question under discussion.

**Pelletier, Francis Jeffry & Ryan M. Nefdt**

Pelletier and Nefdt (2025), in turn, expand the discourse on the concept of linguistic relativity. In their discussion on the link between language and cognition, they argue that the idea of language determining thought via an environmental feedback mechanism and the idea of linguistic relativity in general is associated with erroneous conceptualization and interpretation with respect to linguistic relativity, linguistic relativism, linguistic determinism, Whorfianism, and both the weak and strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

In other words, different languages can shape information in different conceptual forms within human consciousness, and by so doing create a variance that makes the concept (of linguistic relativity) vague and makes it difficult to engage in any discussion of linguistics and cognitive science. The book itself represents a kind of summary of a century of research on linguistic universality vs. linguistic relativism and compares the positions of Benjamin Lee Whorf, Edward Sapir, Noam Chomsky, and Lera Boroditsky.

Differences between languages can thus affect:

1. Minor Relativism—the book defines the three levels of relativism: the speed at which received information is processed, the attention accorded to it, and certain thinking habits.

2. Medial Relativism—linguistic structures may shape some of our cognitive categories more significantly.

3. Grand Relativism—The strong argument whereby different languages create separate worldviews, or worldviews that lack mutual intelligibility. In light of this interpretation, the authors argue that the structure of language exerts some effect on cognitive processes. In any case, any such effects discovered in studies are usually minor, and do not amount to the creation of entirely different "worlds of thought" (pp. 67-91).

As the authors put it: “...Ultimately, the choice seems to force a preference for universalism or particularism about language and thought in theory....” (pp. 125-126).

This sentence, in turn, reflects the main debate the volume presents on the issue on linguistic relativity: do language and human thought rely on universal structures common to all humans, or do they depend profoundly on particular languages and cultures?

**(Universalism)**

Reflects the position whereby there are basic cognitive structures common to all humans. The world’s languages may be different, but they express a single fundamental concept system in different ways. According to this approach, linguistic differences do not give rise to different manners of thinking in a profound manner.

**(Particularism)**

Reflects the positions whereby different languages and cultures create, or at least shape, different manners of thinking. They are not necessarily underpinned by a single universal system of concepts. Each language community may thus possess a unique way of organising the world and understanding it.

Accordingly, the volume’s authors present the aforementioned theoretical tension (universalism vs. particularism) as an issue that has yet to determined decisively  and even offer further research directions for the open questions remaining in this respect (pp. 127-132).

Pelletier and Nefdt offer a wide-ranging overview of the relations between language and conscious awareness and of the effect this exerts on the differences between the relativist and universalist approaches to language variances insofar as cognitive perceptions and worldviews are concerned. Moreover, their discussion of the tension between these approaches does not seek to be decisive and advises the reader that further research is necessary. Furthermore, their approach suggesting that the effects of linguistic relativism are minor approximates Spinoza’s, as we shall see below. In any case, their offer of further discussion will later lead us to Spinoza’s unambiguous message with regard to the titular question under discussion.

**Bogucki, Krystian**

In his discussion of Wittgenstein's Tractatus, Bogucki (2026) posits a distinction between a meaningful sentence, which expresses a proposition

that can represent a realistic world situation, and a nonsensical sentence, which does not contain a realistic expression about the world[3].

In this respect, Bogucki attempts to address the Tractatus's meaningless sentences and how readers may nonetheless understand them (following Cora Diamond).

Moreover, Bogucki offers the activation of the imagination or the pretence of understanding as an imagined proposition.

Bogucki's innovation in this respect lies beyond what is offered by Wittgenstein by the very proposal that understanding the Tractatus's propositions is not the readers' responsibility. The Tractatus treats the propositions as if they offered a pretence of understanding actual propositional contact, when they offer a semblance of thought which bears some meaning in the world. According to Bogucki, the constraint established by the latter activity is thus a manifestation of the limits of language.

As a whole, Bogucki summarizes the crux of his approach when he states that we need to understand the make-believe proposition expressed by a nonsensical sentence in order to understand it.

In other words, readers do not discover a hidden meaning in the Tractatus's propositions, but rather activate the imagination that allows these sentences to become intelligible.

Bogucki's approach is offered here on account of its proximity to Spinoza's approach on the issue of language, imagination, error, and awareness. In this respect, Spinoza discusses the association between language, imagination, error and its correction by way of reflective awareness. The very reflection Bogucki offers on the Tractatus to its reader as a motivation for the activation of the imagination, as well as Bogucki's critique of the latter, accords with Spinoza's approach to the correction of error via reflection, as in, for example: "…it is necessary to distinguish between ideas and the words by which we signify things…." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 49, Scholium, tr. Curley).

**Spinoza**

Spinoza does not address the issue of language-thought relations directly, but it is possible to outline his approach to it clearly from the structure of his philosophical method and from incidental statements in the psychological division of the Ethics (Parts E.2, E.3, and E.4). More specifically, the extensive discussion of mind-body relations and their operation, as well as the law of self preservation, the unity of mind and

[3] Bogucki, K. (2026). Wittgenstein on the Intelligibility of the *Tractatus*. *Acta Analytica* (2026). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12136-026-00691-5.

body, the definition of good and evil, the identification of will as intellect, and the perception of a word as a sign or symbol of something in reality all provide a clear establishment of his position on the issue of the relation between language and thought.

In his work on Hebrew Grammar (Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae), for example, Spinoza does not present a theory concerning the role of language in everyday life. Even so, the fact that he accords an important role to language even as he stresses its limitations is quite readily apparent.

Language is a necessary means of communication, common thinking, and the transmission of knowledge. However, in the most basic sense of thought/language relations, words are not identical to the things themselves, because—substantively speaking—they are not the things themselves, nor are they thoughts. Accordingly, language—as an existential aid—can also give rise to misunderstandings and prejudice even when human consciousness does not distinguish between words as values and actual reality.

**Body and Mind**

In discussing mind-body relations, Spinoza establishes that we are concerned with both sides of the same coin: "...that the mind and the body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension...." (Ethics, Part 3, Proposition 2, Scholium, tr. Curley). In other words, humans can be examined from two aspects (body and mind), and both represent the same entity manifested from two descriptive and experiential perspectives: (a) the body, which represents a finite and delimited part and which is defined as a manner of the infinite extension aspect of god (nature)[4] (Ethics, Part 2, Definition 1, tr. Curley), and (b) human thought, which is derived from the infinite thought aspect of god (nature) (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 1, tr. Curley). In this respect, Spinoza concludes that body and mind are two aspects of the same entity—the human—just as you cannot observe both sides of a coin at the same time, but only one side at a time. Accordingly, "...The Body cannot determine the Mind to thinking, and the Mind cannot determine the Body to motion, to rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else)...." (Ethics, Part 3, Proposition 2, tr. Curley).

[4] Spinoza establishes an equivalence between god and nature—*Deus sive natura*. God is not a personal entity, but rather an absolutely infinite totality. See, for example, *Ethics*, Part 4, Preface (tr. Curley), as well as *Ethics*, Part 3, Proposition 4, Demonstration (tr. Curley).

**Definition of Thought**

As Spinoza relates it: "...By idea I understand a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing...." (Ethics, Part 2, Definition 3, tr. Curley). Spinoza thus establishes that human thought is a kind of "printing press" of concepts. He later establishes that emotions like love, passion, etc. are an emotional expression, an "activation of the Mind" as a result of the idea they previously embedded in human consciousness (Ethics, Part 2, Axiom 3, tr. Curley). In this respect, Spinoza later states that "...The order and connection of ideas [=the concepts the Mind establishes—"prints" in consciousness as a 'thing' of thought] is the same as the order and connection of things...." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 7, tr. Curley, my addition in square brackets). In other words, concepts established in thought are the equivalent of things or events in reality—once again, both sides of the same coin.[5]

**Language: Words, Numbers, Sentences, and Grammar**

A word is a symbol or sign by which we (consciously) signify things in reality (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 49, Corollary and Scholium, tr. Curley). This mental expression of an external object by way of a word as a symbol of the thing reflects an idea as a product of thought and as a point of contact between the word itself and the thing according with it in reality. As Spinoza phrases it: "...Words are a part of the imagination [...] words, as much as the imagination, can be the cause of many and great errors unless we are very wary of them...." (Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, s.88, tr. Curley).

Spinoza then proceeds to state that "...They are only signs of things as they are in the imagination and not as they are in the intellect...."[6] (Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, s. 89, tr. Curley).

In other words, the word as a symbol or a "sign of the thing" is a means for the advancement of an adequate idea.[7]

[5] Eisenberger et al. (2003)'s empirical study showed that participants eliminated from a virtual social game demonstrated brain activity associated with physical pain. In other words, some of the brain regions associated with physical pain are also associated with mental distress arising from social rejection.

[6] See also Spinoza's Hebrew Grammar (*Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*), tr. Bloom.

[7] In this respect, Mogens Lærke (2014) focuses on Spinoza's goal of explaining the nature of things, not the meaning of words. In Lærke's reading, Spinoza employs Euclid's geometrical method to this end as a means of philosophical expression that does not permit the errors of imagination that words might cause (p. 519). In this sense, the geometrical method addresses the task of shifting [concepts] from their relative meaning. This method, therefore, served as more than a deductive tool for producing new truths. For Spinoza, it also served as a semantic tool for creating new meanings. Accordingly, and if Spinoza did indeed engage in such a methodical and geometrical reconstruction of a new philosophical language, this obviously affects our understanding of the philosophical system he expressed (p. 544). See also David Savan (1958)'s discussion of Stewart Hampshire's interpretation of Spinoza's attempt to unbind the connection between language and imagination through geometry (p. 212).

Accordingly, it can thus far be stated that:

(a) an idea is a concept that the mind produces as a thinking entity;

(b) this activity has a physiological equivalent;

(c) an idea is a mental expression, a "link" between something in reality and the word. Language is thus an aid to the identification of things in reality and their mental linkage to the idea as a product of thought.

We thus conclude that we think language in our mind, but use our bodies to speak (or write, or type) thought (ideas which include the identification of a reality + language). These are two aspects of the same thing, or, as Spinoza states it, a thing "...which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension...." (Ethics, Part 3, Proposition 2, Scholium, tr. Curley).

**The Mind's Modes of Operation**

The mind (or consciousness) establishes concepts. Concepts, as products of thought and/or experience, may both accord with reality as well as not accord with reality. In this respect, Spinoza describes one of the causes of error as being "...Those notions they call Universal, like Man, Horse, Dog, etc...." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 40, Scholium I, tr. Curley). These concepts are depicted by each person in a different manner. One person may view humans as animals who walk on two feet, another may view them as animals who laugh, while still another will see them as animals gifted with wisdom. In sum, every person forms images according to their personal views (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 40, Scholium I, tr. Curley). Furthermore, an imaginary concept such as a winged horse (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 49, Scholium, tr. Curley) is also a concept of linguistic significance and not necessarily an error provided the person imagining it is aware that it is an imaginary concept.[8] In this case, we are concerned with a linguistic concept (an adjective—a word) as a symbol whose absence negates the meaning of a thing both in reality and in the

[8] According to David Savan (1958), Spinoza's approach to language via the internal structure of human reason allows us to use words correctly as we compare them to the experiences provided by our imagination. According to Spinoza, words are no more than bodily motions. Bodily motions that have occurred together once will tend to occur together again alongside their associated circumstances. Those associated circumstances, in turn, include our goals, our desires, and our interests. It is in this manner, therefore, that words arise from experience and are linked to it. They thus express the structure of our own bodies more than they do the nature of external bodies. In this respect, Spinoza provides the example of a soldier who might link the word "horse" with the image of a war horse which is armoured and in battle, while a farmer would call upon the image of a slow and heavy animal engaged in agricultural labour (pp. 212-223). The *Ethics*' positive goal, therefore, is to show that experience and its forms can be perceived through their living ideas provided we acknowledge the limitations of language. Spinoza's opinions, therefore, are that things are understood when they are perceived by reason alone and without words and pictorial images (p. 225).

imagination.[9] This issue, in turn, addresses the important role played by metaphor in language. For example, we might say "this child is a flower", or "man is wolf to man", etc. Even though metaphors are linguistic anomalies, they are nonetheless products of the conscious mind with a clear, distinct, and reflective awareness: "...He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing...." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 43, tr. Curley). In other words, it is possible to distinguish between ideas and the word by which we signify things. If we possess the clear and distinct idea that we are concerned with a linguistic anomaly, then our idea is real, i.e. it accords with reality.[10]

It should once again be stressed that the concepts established in the conscious mind (idea + word) as a mental process exist alongside a physiological process of brain activity, speech, writing, typing, singing, or painting (the other side of the coin). Spinoza rarely discusses the physiological aspect and refers the reader to the sciences concerning the physical body, medicine, etc. instead.

**The Will and the Intellect**

Spinoza's monist approach to the issue of whether we think language or speak thought is all the more reinforced when he states that "...The will and the intellect are one and the same...." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition

[9] G.H.R. Parkinson (1969) is opposed to David Savan (1958)'s thesis that Spinoza's view of words and the imagination are such that he could not determine that philosophical statements could be expressed reliably in language. In this respect, Parkinson (1969) stresses the differences between the three levels of knowledge in Spinoza with respect to the use of language.

The problem Parkinson (1969) is trying to address is whether Spinoza can maintain both claims simultaneously, viz. that the true idea is not a word, but that a true idea can still nonetheless be afforded a linguistic expression which accords with reality. In this respect, Parkinson (1969) argues that is it possible to express the intuitive level of consciousness, the one residing above the level of scientific knowledge for Spinoza, in words, as Spinoza clams in Part 5 of the *Ethics* (pp. 15-39).

With regard to the relation between language and intuitive perception in Part 5 of the *Ethics*, Ben Shlomo (2012) provides a review of the literature and a comprehensive discussion of the relations between language and mysticism in general, with a particular emphasis on the limitations of language in describing mystics' experiences (pp. 56-80).

Bogucki (2026), on the other hand, makes a distinction between a meaningful sentence, which expresses a real-world situation, and a nonsensical sentence, which does not contain a real expression about something in the world. As such, he accords with Spinoza's approach insofar as an item of language, as a concept established by the mind, may be meaningful both when it accords with reality as well as when it is a product of the imagination (pp. 22-23). Accordingly, the winged horse does not accord with reality, and truth rests on adapting the idea to reality if we are aware of its nature as a product of the imagination.

[10] For Spinoza, according to Hübner (2025), language is both a hindrance as well as a necessity. As presented above, words do not ensure the adequate idea—the truth. On the other hand, it is impossible to function without them: communication, imagination, memory, science, and life as a whole. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive a human existence without language. In this respect, this article offers a review of the relevant Spinozist literature which addresses this issue.

49, Corollary, tr. Curley). In this respect, the Ethics' treatment of this issue rests on the logic of the relations between good and evil. Spinoza defines good as "...what we certainly know to be useful to us...." (Ethics, Part 4, Definition 1, tr. Curley) and evil as "...what we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some good...." (Ethics, Part 4, Definition 2, tr. Curley). In this respect, the idea of good and evil includes an a priori element of affirmation or negation: "...In the Mind, there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea...." (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 49, tr. Curley). It does not take much, therefore, to proceed from these definitions to finding the will and the intellect identical. After all, when the intellect establishes an idea suggesting a thing benefits us, then it desires it. In other words, the intellect is simultaneously a will for the affirmative. If, one the other hand, the intellect establishes that a thing harms us, then it rejects it or seeks to distance itself from it, and then it is a will for negation. In this light, the Spinozan logic in finding the will and the intellect identical becomes readily apparent. This conclusion, therefore, then leads us to the law of survival or the aspiration for individual being, where that which seeks to exist shall aspire, by way of the intellect, toward the good and distance itself from evil.

**The Law of Self-Preservation (The Conatus)**

The conatus, as stated by Spinoza, is "...Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in being...." (Ethics, Part 3, Proposition 6, tr. Curley). In this statement, Spinoza expresses what is currently referred to as the "law of survival" or the "law of self-preservation". This law, in turn, applies to anything present in nature—whether object, plant, or animal. In this respect, an object in motion will strive insofar as it can (powered by the energy it received) to persist in motion (as applies to rocks, mortars, rockets, and the movements of planetary bodies according to Newton's mass equations). Similarly, a tree during a dry season shall strive to deepen its roots to damper strata to exist. Animals, too, shall do whatever they can to obtain food for self-preservation. Finally, humans, too, are not lonely islands in nature (see Ethics, Part 3, Preface, tr. Curley), but rather part of nature as a whole. In other words, we are concerned with a universal law of nature with no exceptions.

Similarly, newborn infants are also subject to the laws of nature and strive to exist to the best of their capacity (**Statement 5 above**). Before they learn language, their minds establish preliminary concepts (**Statement 2 above**) according to their sensory perceptions of their environment (**Statement 1 above**). All this occurs in a reality where the infants conduct themselves for the purpose of existence (**Statement 4**

**above**), when they still cannot see, but can smell, hear, feel, and taste. Piaget (1952) refers to this as "adaptation". In this respect—three centuries prior to Piaget, and in the spirit of the Ethics—Spinoza would have added "for the purpose of self-existence" to Piaget's "adaptation".[11]

In the next stage, the infants receive the first concepts and their association with objects and events within their range of perception. In other words, their minds create concepts—ideas in the Spinozan sense—whose physical aspect is objects and events (**Statement 3 above**). This, in turn, is the connection between language as a mental concept and the environment as a physiological reality matching the concepts established by conscious awareness.[12]

At this point, language (in the form of language items and grammatical rules) enters conscious awareness as an essential tool for human existence. In this respect, an existential concept is one which accords with an actual reality (or an imagined—erroneous—reality). The establishment of a concept in conscious awareness is thus an encounter between the image of an object, an implement, or a meaningful event and its cognitive expression as a linguistic concept (the sign or symbol of a thing), with the latter being a word, a sentence, or a number. In addressing the question of the stage in which conscious awareness establishes the preliminary association between a linguistic concept and the image of reality (an object, event, etc.) which accords with it, Piaget (1952) notes that infants' aspiration toward existence means that the crucial nature of the link between the infants and their environment gives rise to conscious ideas that develop continuously alongside the linguistic concepts the infant acquires from their environment and later from the education system. In adulthood these ideas, in turn, develop according to

[11] From the moment of birth, infants act to provide their basic needs. According to Piaget, this adaptation develops gradually through the infants' interaction with their environment, and it becomes more complex during childhood, and includes the development of thought, problem solving, and understanding the world. For Piaget, adaptation does not merely mean "preserving life". He describes it as a process made up of two complementary aspects: assimilation and accommodation. More specifically, the beginning of this process can be observed as early as in a newborn's reflexive functioning. See Piaget (1952), pp. 29-32.

[12] According to Wittgenstein, thought does not precede language as a rational framework for perceiving words. Instead, language is the precondition for the existence of thought. Compared to Spinoza, it does not appear we are concerned with a single entity with two aspects. With that said, Spinoza would not have rejected this argument summarily if we are concerned with the human activities of speech and writing that are not a translation of thought but rather a joint empirical mode of action performed by a single entity (body and mind: conscious awareness and physiological brain cells). See Wittgenstein (2009), §§ 466-490.

At this point, it is worth mentioning Shimron (2000), who—unlike Chomsky, Grodzinsky, and Reinhart—argues that the linguistic testimony presented to children is not meagre, but rather diverse and perfected by virtue of genetics. According to Shimron (2000), children acquire language from their environment—and, *inter alia*, from the conversations held by their parents and other parties (see Shimron (2000), pp. 63-65).

the principle of good and evil associated with the ideas originally established by their conscious awareness as infants.[13]

Moreover, it should once again be noted that the conscious awareness which establishes ideas corresponds to physiological brain activity. We are thus concerned with two expressions: conscious awareness of language, and language as the expression of a reality perceived by the senses. These two, in turn, work in tandem within the individual who acts according to their nature for the purpose of advancing the needs of their own existence.[14]

Given the universal validity of the self-preservation law, it is not possible to escape the fact that language—as a descriptive tool for reality—constitutes an essential component of conduct according to this law. What we are concerned with, therefore, is concepts that the human species establishes in its conscious awareness for the purpose of existence and in accordance with the definition of good and evil, and with the will and the intellect considered one and the same (Ethics, Part 2, Proposition 49, Corollary, tr. Curley). It is, after all, impossible to conceive a human existence that does not include linguistic communication between humans.

## CONCLUSION

Our preliminary review of the various approaches to the titular question did not unequivocally address the issue under discussion.

While the useful contributions made by Wittgenstein, Chomsky, and Pinker advanced the discourse on this issue, they nonetheless did not offer an unequivocal response to the issue in question, and the present article's titular question still leaves us with a sense of vagueness. In this respect,

[13] Pelletier and Nefdt (2025)'s book addresses the issue of linguistic relativity and its effect on conscious awareness. In this respect, different languages give rise to separate worldviews. At the very least, the structure of a language exerts some effect on cognitive processes (pp. 67-91). From the Spinozan perspective under discussion, this effect—however minor—constitutes a corroboration of Spinoza's approach whereby a word is a symbol or sign that might bias the intellect in the ideational encounter between the word (sign) and its object in reality (to Spinoza, such an idea is unintentional).

[14] In this respect, it should be noted that—in principle—this does not contradict Chomsky's and Pinker's instinct-based approach, since instinct—like intuition—encompasses the process of concept establishment by conscious awareness within the mind alongside the physiological activity of brain sensors as the other side of the proverbial coin. Instinct also expresses prior experience established in conscious awareness on the one hand and in brain cell memory on the other hand and does so simultaneously. Both dimensions, therefore, contain the potential for learning, awareness, understanding, speaking, writing, or any other actions. With that said, it should be stressed that Chomsky's instinct-based conceptual approach, as well as the discussion of language as a genetic (physical) capacity, are a kind of twisting path that does not reflect a conclusive statement with regard to what activates what. We are thus left with a kind of dualism akin to Descartes', which Chomsky often quotes. See René Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, Articles. 30-34 (tr. Voss), especially with regard to the pineal gland in Article 31.

Shimron's study offers a clear and unequivocal answer. Other studies presented herein offer different perspectives that constitute supplementations that do not offer a holistic response to the question under discussion.

Furthermore, Spinoza's approach in the Ethics, as presented herein, is based on a holistic premise grounded in metaphysical principles which necessarily give rise to the psychophysical principles of his philosophical method. The foundation for addressing this issue, therefore, is encompassed by the encounter between the law of self-preservation (the conatus) and his overall pan-psychic approach.

Following Spinoza, the article is subject to the human limitation of using language to describe both sides of the same person (thought and extension). In any case, we are concerned with a single existential action: we think language and simultaneously speak thought without maintaining a causal relation between the two. In other words, both are a single whole like the coin metaphor presented above. In sum, we are concerned with a single action that reflects two attributes of both nature and human, who is not a separate kingdom of nature, but rather part (modus) of nature in general.

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