PART V

ETHICS: DE POTENTIA INTELLECTUS SEU DE LIBERTATE HUMANA
In Part 5 of his *Ethics*, entitled “De potentia intellectus sive de libertate humana”, Spinoza begins—as he himself says in the *Preface*—on the second part of his ethics, “de modo, sive via, quae ad libertatem ducit”. While the first part, Part 4, dealt with “de servitute humana, seu de affectuum viribus”, the second part (Part 5) deals with the *potentia rationis*: what *ratio* is able to do in regard to the emotions so that we can speak of true freedom (*libertas*) or blessedness (*beatitudo*). *Servitudo* is contrasted to *libertas*, *vires affectuum* to *potentia rationis*. The *Preface* of Part 5 is further devoted to an extensive critique of the idea of freedom and free will both in Descartes and the Stoics. At the end of the *Preface* Spinoza claims that the power of *ratio* exists exclusively in the understanding (*intelligere*): only through or in understanding shall we find the *remedia* against the emotions or passions.

What exactly those *remedia* are is made clear in *Ethics* 5p1–20 and are precisely summed up in the *scholium* of *Ethics* 5p20. In a certain sense the first twenty propositions cover the whole problem of ‘the second part of the ethics’. Nevertheless, some twenty additional propositions follow, which deal with the further problem of “those things which pertain to the Mind’s duration without relation to the body (the Body’s existence)” (5p20s, 5p40s). This theme is notorious for posing one of the most difficult problems of interpretation in the *Ethics* and some commentators are even of the opinion that Spinoza should not have written this part of the *Ethics* (5p21–42) at all.¹

The strictly ethical section of the *Ethics* (Parts 4 and 5) presents the reader with numerous other problems of interpretation (apart from the typically philosophical problem of how a deterministic view of man