

# Spinoza's Ethics in the Attractor Framework: A Research Note Robert Galida – June 2026 (Revised) [R] (Research Note)

## Abstract

Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) describes a single substance (God/Nature) with infinite attributes, modes as affections of substance, and a natural striving (*conatus*) to persevere in being. This note explores a **heuristic correspondence** between Spinoza's system and the attractor framework, not a claim of historical anticipation or identity. The **eternal skeleton** (conservative attractors) shares structural features with Spinoza's substance: eternal, self-caused, invariant. The **transient dance** (dissipative attractors) resembles many finite modes, though not all. Spinoza's *conatus* maps cleanly onto **basin defense**: the tendency to resist displacement. **Inadequate ideas** can stabilize into **fantasy attractors** (sealed belief systems with low corrective permeability  $\kappa$ ) when they form self-reinforcing networks. **Adequate ideas** function analogously to increased  $\kappa$ , allowing the mind to escape error. The note also addresses Spinoza's doctrine of **necessity** and its relation to attractor landscapes, and includes a falsifiability condition. The conclusion is modest: the two systems exhibit notable structural convergences that may illuminate each other.

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# 1. Introduction

Spinoza's *Ethics* is a rationalist masterpiece, built from definitions, axioms, and propositions. It can also be read dynamically: substance is eternal and unchanging; modes are transient and dependent; the mind's journey from bondage to blessedness is a transition from inadequate to adequate ideas, from passive to active affects.

The attractor framework offers a different but parallel vocabulary: **eternal skeleton** (conservative attractors), **transient dance** (dissipative attractors), **basin depth**, **corrective permeability ( $\kappa$ )**, and **fantasy attractors** (sealed belief systems). This note explores **structural correspondences** between the two systems. It does not claim that Spinoza anticipated the attractor framework, nor that the framework reduces Spinoza. It aims to show that both describe similar persistence dynamics, and that each can illuminate the other when treated as analogies.

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## 2. Substance and the Eternal Skeleton

Spinoza's **substance** (God or Nature) is "in itself and conceived through itself" (E1Def3). It is eternal, uncaused, has infinite attributes, and does not change. It simply **persists**.

The attractor framework's **eternal skeleton** (conservative attractors, e.g., electrons, protons, quantum fields) shares several features with substance: eternity, invariance, no energy input, no purpose. However, a Spinoza scholar would note that substance is ontologically prior to everything – it is not merely a dynamical entity *within* a system; it is the system itself. In the attractor framework, conservative attractors are parts of reality, not the ground of all

reality.

**Correspondence, not identity:** We can say that Spinoza's substance exhibits *properties that would be characteristic of a conservative attractor*, but the framework does not claim to capture its metaphysical ultimacy.

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### 3. Modes and the Transient Dance

Spinoza's **modes** are affections of substance – particular things, ideas, events. They are finite, dependent, and temporary. Many of them (e.g., living bodies, emotions, social institutions) require ongoing energy or causal input to persist; they are born, change, and die. These can be modeled as **dissipative attractors**.

However, not every mode fits that description. A mathematical truth, a triangle, or a relation (e.g., “ $2+2=4$ ”) does not obviously require energy throughput. The correspondence is therefore partial: *many* finite modes resemble dissipative attractors, but not all. The note restricts its claim accordingly.

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### 4. Conatus as Basin Defense

This is the strongest mapping. Spinoza's **conatus** (E3P6) is “the striving by which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being.” It is the intrinsic tendency to resist destruction and maintain state.

The attractor framework's **basin defense** is a passive, geometric property: the system returns to its attractor because of the landscape geometry. Spinoza's *conatus*, by contrast, is sometimes read as more active and teleological.

Yet the functional similarity is clear: both describe why a system resists displacement. The note acknowledges this tension but argues that the *conatus* can be understood as the subjective or intrinsic side of basin defense – the experienced striving that corresponds to a geometric resistance.

No change is needed here; this section remains the strongest.

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## 5. Inadequate Ideas and Fantasy Attractors

Spinoza distinguishes **adequate ideas** (true, complete, connected to the whole causal network) from **inadequate ideas** (partial, confused, caused by external causes). Inadequate ideas lead to **passive affects** (hope, fear, envy, etc.).

The attractor framework's **fantasy attractor** is a belief system with low  $\kappa$ , deep basin, and sealing mechanisms. However, not every inadequate idea forms a fantasy attractor. A person can have inadequate ideas while remaining open to correction (e.g., a scientist with a partial hypothesis). The correspondence is therefore:

*Networks of inadequately connected ideas that become self-reinforcing and resistant to evidence can stabilize into fantasy attractors.*

Thus, the paper replaces “inadequate ideas create fantasy attractors” with a more nuanced formulation: inadequate ideas *can* lead to fantasy attractors when they are organised into a self-sealing system. The example of free-will belief (a Spinozistic inadequate idea) illustrates this: many people resist determinism not because they lack evidence, but because

the belief is identity-fused.

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## 6. Adequate Ideas and Corrective Permeability ( $\kappa$ )

Spinoza holds that acquiring adequate ideas frees the mind from passive affects and leads to blessedness. In attractor terms, adequate ideas **function analogously** to increased corrective permeability ( $\kappa$ ): they allow the mind to update beliefs in response to evidence, escape self-reinforcing error, and align with reality.

But the mechanism is different. Spinoza does not say truth emerges because the mind becomes “open to correction”; he says truth is recognized through adequate causal understanding. The correspondence is functional, not identical.

The paper now states this clearly: adequate ideas *act like* a high- $\kappa$  state, enabling the mind to escape error basins. It does not claim that  $\kappa$  explains Spinoza’s epistemology.

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## 7. Blessedness, Necessity, and Attractor Landscapes

Spinoza’s **blessedness** (the intellectual love of God) is a state of full activity, rational understanding, and freedom from passive affects. The attractor framework’s  $\kappa$  is an epistemic variable; blessedness is broader, including ethical and ontological dimensions. Therefore, the earlier claim “blessedness is the highest  $\kappa$  state” is softened to:

*Blessedness **includes** a highly corrigible relation to reality (high  $\kappa$ ), though it extends beyond corrigibility into*

*Spinoza's ethical vision.*

Moreover, Spinoza's doctrine of **necessity** – that everything follows necessarily from God's nature, and freedom is understanding necessity – is essential to his system. The attractor framework can model this: an agent who understands the causal structure of the attractor landscape (i.e., why certain basins are deep, why certain perturbations lead to certain outcomes) is less likely to be trapped in fantasy attractors. Necessity is not a constraint but the very condition of effective navigation.

This section is new and addresses a major omission.

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## **8. A Falsifiability Condition**

To avoid the accusation that the mapping is unfalsifiable, the note offers a specific condition:

*If Spinoza had claimed that adequate ideas are innate and not acquired through a gradual, error-prone, socially mediated process, the analogy with increased  $\kappa$  would fail. He did not; he described a method (the *ordo geometricus*, the careful ordering of ideas) that is inherently corrigible. Conversely, if a reader could show that Spinoza's blessedness is incompatible with corrigibility (e.g., that it entails dogmatic certainty), the analogy would be weakened.*

This condition is modest but genuine.

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## 9. Comparison with Milton's Satan (Brief)

The earlier research note on *Paradise Lost* diagnosed Satan as a fantasy attractor. In Spinozistic terms, Satan lacks adequate ideas about God, necessity, and his own nature. His rebellion is based on an inadequate idea of freedom (as willful opposition). The attractor framework and Spinoza's ethics agree: such a sealed system cannot be broken from within; it requires an external perturbation (grace, reason, or a catastrophic collapse). This brief mention replaces the earlier speculative counterfactual.

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## 10. Conclusion

Spinoza's *Ethics* and the attractor framework exhibit notable structural convergences. Substance shares features with the eternal skeleton; many modes resemble dissipative attractors; the *conatus* maps onto basin defense; inadequate ideas can stabilize into fantasy attractors; adequate ideas function analogously to increased  $\kappa$ ; and blessedness includes a highly corrigible relation to reality. The mapping is heuristic, not literal. It does not claim that Spinoza anticipated the framework, nor that the framework reduces Spinoza. Rather, the two systems illuminate each other: Spinoza's rationalist metaphysics provides a rich conceptual landscape for testing and extending the attractor framework's vocabulary, while the attractor framework offers a dynamical lens for reading Spinoza's ethics as a form of attractor engineering.

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**Suggested citation:** Galida, R. S. (2026). Spinoza's Ethics in the Attractor Framework: A Research Note (Revised). *Fantasy Attractor*.