

Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*:

Two Ways of Knowing, Two Ways of Living

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Philosophy in the Graduate School of
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ABSTRACT

While both intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*) and reason (*ratio*) are adequate ways of knowing for Spinoza, they are not equal. “The greatest virtue of the mind” and “the greatest human perfection” consist in understanding things by intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza regards as superior to reason. Understanding why on Spinoza’s account intuition is superior to reason is crucial for understanding his epistemological and ethical theories. Yet, the nature of this superiority has been the subject of some controversy due to Spinoza’s parsimonious treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*. In my dissertation, I explore this fundamental but relatively unexplored issue in Spinoza scholarship by investigating the nature of this distinction and its ethical implications. I suggest that these two kinds of adequate knowledge differ not only in terms of their method, but also with respect to their representative content. More specifically, I hold that unlike reason, which is a universal knowledge, intuitive knowledge descends to a level of particularity, including an adequate knowledge of one’s own essence as it follows directly from God, which represents a superior form of self-knowledge. Attaining this superior self-knowledge makes intuitive knowledge the culmination of not only understanding but also happiness. Since, for Spinoza, there is an intrinsic relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and how we live our lives, I argue that these two ways of knowing are at the same time two ways of living.

Key Words: Spinoza, intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*), reason, blessedness (*beatitudo*), intellectual love of God, affect, self-knowledge, common notions

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**REASON AND INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE IN SPINOZA'S *ETHICS*:
TWO WAYS OF KNOWING, TWO WAYS OF LIVING**

Introduction

Spinoza's aim in the *Ethics* is to show that human happiness and well-being do not lie in a life enslaved to the passions or in the acquisition of transitory goods that people ordinarily pursue. Rather, the good human life, for Spinoza, is a life of reason. As it is to be expected from a rationalist of the 17th century, Spinoza places as much confidence in reason's ability to lead a good life as he does in its power to reveal the fundamental order and content of reality. But he is distinctive in that he emphasizes the importance of a special form of intellectual cognition: namely, intuition. Spinoza considers knowledge obtained by intuition (*scientia intuitiva*) as the most powerful and most desirable kind of knowledge, and hence as superior to reason. Accordingly, he holds that the greatest virtue of the mind and the greatest human perfection consist in understanding things through intuitive knowledge. Whereas reason is necessary in order to lead a happy life, for Spinoza, it cannot reach ultimate happiness and blessedness. Why does Spinoza consider intuition as a more powerful and valuable form of knowledge than reason? My dissertation addresses this fundamental but relatively unexplored question in Spinoza scholarship.

This question is an ethical as much as an epistemological one, since for Spinoza there is an intrinsic relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the good life. Thus, understanding why on Spinoza's account intuition is superior to reason is

crucial to understanding his epistemological and ethical theories. However, due to Spinoza's limited treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*, few Spinoza scholars have systematically addressed this issue. Of those who have, most maintain that reason and intuitive knowledge differ only in terms of their *method*—that is, the process by which they are attained.¹ Nevertheless, I show that the above two kinds of adequate knowledge differ not only in terms of their method but also in terms of their *content*. More specifically, I hold that intuitive knowledge is superior to reason in Spinoza's system since there is something that can be known by intuition—namely, the unique essences of things—that cannot be known by reason. Unlike reason, which is a “universal knowledge,”² intuitive knowledge descends to a level of particularity, including the adequate knowledge of one's own essence as it follows directly from God, which is a superior form of self-knowledge. Having shown this, I turn next to the ethical implications of this epistemic difference in content. I argue that this difference is reflected in Spinoza's ethical theory in such a way that attaining this superior self-knowledge makes intuitive knowledge the culmination of not only understanding but also happiness. Intuitive knowledge differs from and is superior to reason not only in that it is a higher form of cognition, but also because it descends to a level of particularity and ascends to a level of affective power that reason cannot access. This leads to my conclusion that these *two ways of knowing* are at the same time *two ways of living*.

¹ This view is held by scholars such as Yirmiyahu Yovel (1989), Steven Nadler (2006), and Ronald Sandler (2005).

² *Ethics*, Part V, Scholium to Proposition 36.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. While the first three chapters examine the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge, the remaining three chapters focus on how this distinction bears on Spinoza's ethical theory.

Chapter 1, titled "Setting the Stage: The Metaphysical Background to the Epistemological Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge," includes a brief outline of Spinoza's metaphysics of God and the human being, together with an introduction to Spinoza's theory of human knowledge. This chapter is necessary because we cannot deal effectively with epistemic (and ethical) questions in Spinoza's thought without having a general grasp of his unique metaphysical framework. After presenting the ontological relation between substance and modes in Spinoza's metaphysics, and his conception of the human being in this context, I introduce Spinoza's tri-partite division of knowledge [*cognitio*]: opinion or imagination [*opinio vel imaginatio*], knowledge of the first kind; reason [*ratio*], knowledge of the second kind; and intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*], knowledge of the third kind. I conclude this chapter by showing how reason and intuitive knowledge *qua* adequate knowledge are closer to one another than either is to knowledge of the first kind, which, on Spinoza's view, is the only cause of falsity.

After providing this background in Chapter 1, in Chapters 2 and 3 I present my interpretation of the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge. In Chapter 2, titled "Reason and Intuitive Knowledge: Foundations and Methodologies," I begin by introducing the foundations and methodologies of these two kinds of adequate knowledge. I give an account of 'common notions', which Spinoza identifies as the

foundation of reason, by showing how these differ from fictitious abstracts such as Transcendentals and Universals. Unlike the latter Scholastic terms, common notions are adequate ideas that represent real properties shared by all or some bodies. I argue that reason is attained by way of common notions, and that thanks to this process we rise above the mutilated and confused images provided by knowledge of the first kind and begin to know things as they truly are; in this way, rational process reveals itself as an ascent. Next, I show that the foundation of intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza identifies as “knowledge of God,” is nothing but the “Idea of God” or “Infinite Intellect.” The idea of God supplies not only “knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” but also knowledge of what *follows* from God’s eternal and infinite essence. I hold that it is in virtue of this intermediary role that the idea of God functions as the foundation for intuitive knowledge. It provides the ground for knowing the attributes of God that are involved in our being, and for deducing what follows from this knowledge. I conclude this chapter by showing how intuitive knowledge is attained through a special inferential process that consists in inferring knowledge of the essence of singular things *from* knowledge of God’s essence.

In Chapter 3, titled “The Epistemological Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza’s *Ethics*,” I provide a more systematic comparative analysis of reason and intuitive knowledge. Contra commentators such as Steven Nadler and Yirmiyahu Yovel, I argue that intuitive knowledge differs from reason not only in terms of its method of cognition, but also in terms of its content. My argument is supported by an examination of Spinoza’s account of essences in the *Ethics*, which reveals that he is

committed to both unique and shared essences. Based on this dual commitment, I argue that whereas for Spinoza both reason and intuition can be said to reach adequate knowledge of the *shared* essence of a thing, the *unique* essence of a singular thing (which is nothing but its actual essence) can only be known through intuitive knowledge. Reason can provide us with only a limited understanding of singular things, including ourselves, since it reflects knowledge of singular things through their shared aspects rather than by way of their unique essences. I conclude this chapter by elaborating on the foundational function and privileged position of a special instance of intuitive knowledge: intuitive self-knowledge—i.e., adequate knowledge of one’s *own* essence as it follows directly from God. By grasping the knowledge that *I* am in God and conceived through God, intuitive self-knowledge supplies a maximal understanding of oneself and God at the same time.

Chapter 4, titled “Setting the Stage: Good Life, Action and Passion for Spinoza,” is similar in function to Chapter 1, in that they both provide the background necessary to appreciate the significance of the distinction between reason and intuition. Chapter 4 includes an outline of Spinoza’s account of the affects and how they relate to knowledge and his conception of good life. For Spinoza, the ethical problem regarding what the good life consists in is essentially a cognitive-affective problem, rather than solely a cognitive one. This is because, thanks to his innovative construal of human affects and their relation to cognition, Spinoza considers the process of attaining adequate knowledge as not only a purely intellectual process, but also an affective one. For this reason, it is crucial that we examine Spinoza’s account of the affects and how they relate to

knowledge in general, before we can elaborate on how the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza's ethical theory. After providing this background in Chapter 4, in Chapters 5 and 6 I present my interpretation of the ethical significance of reason and intuitive knowledge, respectively.

In Chapter 5, titled "The Ethical Significance of Reason," I look at the ethical significance that Spinoza accords to reason by considering different aspects of the relationship between rational knowledge and morality. First, I show how reason relates to the ethical life by providing the possibility of an interpersonal morality with an objectivized value system. More specifically, I argue that reason provides room for genuine concern for the well-being of others, as well as an objective standard to ground value judgments, due to its close connection to the concept of human nature. Then, I turn to Spinoza's account of how reason functions as an affective power against the passive affects, and thereby present the second main respect in which reason relates to the ethical life. By looking at Spinoza's remedies for the passions, I show how, on Spinoza's account, human freedom is attained by rational knowledge, which enables us to moderate and restrain the passions by way of re-ordering our ideas according to the order of the intellect. After focusing on the power of reason over the passions, I conclude this chapter by presenting the limits of this very power of reason, including, most importantly, its susceptibility to *akrasia*.

In the final chapter of the dissertation, titled "The Ethical Significance of Intuitive Knowledge," I focus on a relatively unexplored area of Spinoza scholarship, namely, the affective power of intuitive knowledge, and show how it differs from and is superior to

the affective power of reason. First, I offer a reading of Spinoza's conception of self-understanding, according to which adequate knowledge of oneself is attained *via* a transformative ascent. I argue that self-understanding through intuitive knowledge results in producing a body of knowledge that is superior to reason not only intellectually but also affectively, since it *relates* to *me* in a more direct and intimate manner. Then, I look at two active affects arising from intuitive knowledge, the greatest satisfaction of mind (*summa acquiescentia*) and intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*), in order to show how the affective state accompanying intuitive knowledge reflects the fact that this superior kind of cognition supplies a maximal understanding of both oneself and God. I conclude this chapter by arguing that since intuitive knowledge gives rise to blessedness (*beatitudo*), i.e. the highest happiness that a human being can hope for, it offers a more powerful weapon against the passions than reason.

Put in general terms, this dissertation is an attempt to understand a very specific aspect of Spinoza's thought which, once explicated, will make an important contribution toward understanding the general lesson of the *Ethics*. The lesson for Spinoza is this: the more we understand nature through reason, the more we become free and happy. However, it is only when we understand *ourselves* as a part of nature through intuition that we can reach the ultimate happiness, or what Spinoza calls 'blessedness'. It is only by appreciating the superior ethical value of intuitive knowledge that we can see the main direction that Spinoza wants his readers to go: to strive for the greatest human perfection, which consists in the highest form of understanding. Moreover, in fleshing out the distinction that Spinoza draws between reason and intuitive knowledge, and by

highlighting the intellectual and affective role of intuition, we begin to see the *Ethics* as a unified work. Spinoza's treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics* is parsimonious, and thus we are left to our own devices to strive to reconstruct what he has in mind. The present dissertation is the outcome of such a striving.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: The Metaphysical Background to the Epistemological Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge

Since it is clear through itself that the mind understands itself the better, the more it understands of Nature, it is evident from that that this part of the Method will be more perfect as the mind understands more things, and will be most perfect when the mind attends to or reflects on *knowledge of the most perfect Being*. (TdIE [16], my italics)¹

There are those who feign a God, like man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions. But how far they wander from *the true knowledge of God*, is sufficiently established by what has already been demonstrated. (EIP15S, my italics)²

According to Spinoza our well-being, happiness, and freedom consist in the “knowledge of the most perfect Being.” The ultimate perfection or the highest good for a human being is knowledge of “God or Nature.”³ Establishing this conclusion with demonstrative certainty is the main project of the *Ethics*.⁴ Attaining true knowledge of God, rather than sticking to an anthropomorphized conception of the same, is the main direction that

¹ All translations of Spinoza’s writings including the *Ethics* (E), the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE), and the *Short Treatise* (KV) are those of Edwin Curley in Spinoza (1985). Quotations from the Latin text of the *Ethics* are from the Gebhart edition *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhart (1925), reprinted in *Éthique* (1999), a bilingual Latin-French edition presented and translated by Bernard Pautrat.

² References to the *Ethics* will be by part (I-V), axiom (A), proposition (P), scholium (S) and corollary (C). ‘D’ indicates a definition (when immediately following a part number) or a demonstration (when immediately following a proposition number).

³ We will examine the phrase “God or Nature” and what it signifies shortly.

⁴ Steven Nadler (2006, 52).

Spinoza wants his readers to take. In the *Ethics* we see that there are two epistemic avenues, i.e. two ways of knowing, that point in this direction: reason (*ratio*) and intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). The present dissertation explores the distinction between these two epistemic avenues by exploring the extent to which they provide true knowledge of God. Since for Spinoza, “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God” (EVP24), we must also consider to what extent reason and intuitive knowledge lead to an understanding of singular things.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will present my interpretation of the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge by showing how the latter supplies the highest understanding of singular things and, thereby, the utmost knowledge of God. The present chapter provides the background required to appreciate the significance of this distinction. More specifically, it includes a brief outline of Spinoza’s metaphysics of God and of the human being, together with an introduction to his theory of human knowledge. This chapter is necessary because we cannot deal effectively with epistemic (and ethical) questions in Spinoza’s thought without having a general grasp of his unique metaphysical framework. We cannot understand, for instance, the relation between “knowledge of singular things” and “knowledge of God,” unless we have a sense of what God *qua* substance and singular things *qua* modes signify in Spinoza’s thought.

After presenting the ontological relation between substance (God) and modes in Spinoza’s metaphysics and his conception of the human being in this context, I introduce

Spinoza's tri-partite division of knowledge [*cognitio*]⁵: opinion or imagination [*opinio vel imaginatio*], or knowledge of the first kind; reason [*ratio*], or knowledge of the second kind; and intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*], or knowledge of the third kind. I conclude by showing that reason and intuitive knowledge *qua* adequate types of knowledge are closer to one another than either is to knowledge of the first kind. This is because the latter is, on Spinoza's view, the only cause of falsity.

1.1. Spinoza's Metaphysics of God: Substance and Modes

In Part I of the *Ethics* titled "Of God" (*De Deo*), Spinoza introduces the general features of his metaphysics of God. Central to this account are the terms 'substance', 'attribute', and 'mode.' Spinoza defines substance as that which is "in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e. that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed" (E1D3). Spinoza defines substance as that which is "in itself": that which is ontologically independent (not in something else, that is, dependent upon that thing for its being). In addition to employing this self-subsistence criterion of substance, Spinoza also introduces an epistemological or conceptual component: a substance is that which can be conceived or understood on its own terms, without appealing to the concept of anything else.

After substance, Spinoza defines what he calls 'attributes': "By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence"

⁵ Note that the English translation of Spinoza's term 'cognitio' as 'knowledge' is well established. However, Jonathan Bennett (1984) and Don Garrett (2010) use the cognate term 'cognition' instead since Spinoza's 'cognitio' includes within its scope ideas that he characterizes as "inadequate" and "false." In this dissertation I use 'cognition' and 'knowledge' interchangeably.

(EID4).⁶ According to Spinoza, the infinite and eternal essence of God or substance is expressed by an infinite number of divine attributes (EID6) (among which we know only two: thought and extension).⁷ Each attribute, for Spinoza, “expresses the reality, or being of substance” (EIP10S), which is to say that each attribute “expresses eternal and infinite essence” of God (EIP11).⁸ Importantly, rather than endorsing a real distinction between substance and attribute (according to which substance is some natureless thing or substratum underlying the attribute), Spinoza holds that substance is simply the attribute itself. Elsewhere in the *Ethics* and in his several correspondences, Spinoza identifies substance with its attributes.⁹ In Letter IX, for instance, Spinoza states that “By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself...I understand the same by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such

⁶ Note that in the definition of attribute, Spinoza speaks of “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.” Does the term ‘intellect’ refer to a finite intellect or an infinite one? And accordingly, does this definition suggest that an attribute is not a real thing or nature, but instead simply a way of seeing or perceiving things pertaining to the finite intellect? Or are attributes real aspects of the world, not merely conceptual projections onto it? Wolfson (1934, 146) characterizes the difference between these two positions as follows: “According to the former interpretation [subjectivism], to be perceived by the mind means to be *invented* by the mind, for of themselves the attributes have no independent existence at all but are identical with the essence of the substance. According to the latter interpretation [objectivism], to be perceived by the mind means only to be *discovered* by the mind, for even of themselves the attributes have independent existence in the essence of substance.” Does the former “subjectivist” reading or the latter “objectivist” reading of ‘attribute’ better capture what Spinoza has in mind regarding attributes? For purposes of this dissertation, I do not need to delve into this interpretative debate. For treatments of this issue see Wolfson (ibid), Deleuze (1988), and Shein (2009).

⁷ According to EIIA5, “We neither feel nor perceive any singular things...except bodies and modes of thinking.”

⁸ “God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists” (EIP11).

⁹ In the *Ethics* Spinoza says that “there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except *substances or, what is the same, their attributes*, and their affections” (EIP4D, my italics). See also Letter II, where Spinoza states that “By attribute I understand whatever is conceived through itself and in itself, so that the conception of it does not involve the conception of another thing.”

and such a definite nature to substance.” As we see in EIP10, like substance, “each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself” (EIP10).

The third category of Spinoza’s ontology is ‘mode’: “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived” (EID5). According to Spinoza, “a substance is prior in nature to its affections” (EIP1). Substance is both ontologically and epistemologically prior to its modes, since modes are dependent upon the substance to which they belong for their being and their being understood.¹⁰ Singular things are nothing but finite things, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (EIP25C and EIID7).¹¹

Having introduced three important terms of Spinoza’s metaphysics, I will now elaborate on the ontological relation between two of them: substance and modes. In the first fifteen propositions of the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents the basic elements of his construal of God, according to which God is the infinite, necessarily existing (uncaused)¹² and unique substance of the universe. Since God is the only substance, and (by axiom 1) whatever is, is either a substance or in a substance, then everything else must be in God: “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (EIP15). By the definition of mode in EID5 that we presented earlier, EIP15 entails

¹⁰ Nadler (2006, 58).

¹¹ EIP25C: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” EIID7: “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.”

¹² EID1: “By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.”

that everything that exists besides God is a mode of God. But what is a mode and what is it for a mode to be *in* God?

1.1.1. God and Things: “Whatever is, is in God.”

It is not clear what Spinoza means in stating that “whatever is, is in God,” and this ambiguity has led to an ongoing debate among commentators as to how to interpret this phrase. According to one popular interpretation of Spinoza’s conception of the relation between substance (God) and its modes (everything else that exists), things are in God in the sense that they are properties or states of God.¹³ They inhere in God as in a subject or substratum. This makes Spinoza’s account of substance-mode relationship similar to that of Descartes, for whom the modes of a substance are the properties that inhere in its principal attribute and, thus are predicable of it.¹⁴ On this reading, which we may call the “inherence interpretation,” just as motion is a state of the moving body, so the moving body itself would be a property or state of God. Likewise, just as thought is a state or property of a thinking mind, the thinking mind itself is a property or state of God. The moving body and the thinking mind are nothing but God’s natures—extended nature and thinking nature, respectively—existing or expressing themselves in one way (mode) or another. Spinoza’s wording in EIP25C lends credence to this view, where he states: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.”

¹³ This is how Pierre Bayle (1965) read Spinoza. For a developed version of the argument that modes are merely properties of substance, see Carriero (1995).

¹⁴ Nadler (2006, 74).

As clean as this interpretation initially looks, it gives rise to some problems. If things and their properties are themselves nothing but properties of God and thus are predicable of God, it seems that some unacceptable conclusions follow. According to Spinoza's contemporary Pierre Bayle, for instance, the most problematic conclusion of all is that God would be the ultimate subject of all the thoughts and actions of human beings, including the most evil thoughts and deeds conceivable.¹⁵ Moreover, on this interpretation, carrots, telephones, mountains, desks, dogs, and human beings would all be properties of God, and therefore they can be predicated of God (just as one would say that this paper is white).¹⁶ In addition to the absurdity of predicating all of these properties of God, this view leads to the strange result of thinking that objects and individuals are merely properties of a thing, rather than being independent things to which properties belong.¹⁷ What does it mean for a particular thing to be just a property? This is one of the difficulties that confront the inherence interpretation.

¹⁵ As Bayle (1965, 311) states, "Here is a philosopher who finds it good that God be both the agent and the victim of all the crimes and miseries of man."

¹⁶ For Bayle (1965, 308), other unacceptable consequences of this reading include the following: (1) The logical problem that God would have incompatible properties since, for instance, a tall human being and a short person would equally be states of God; and (2) The theological problem that God itself would be subject to change, division and motion, since the modes of God are divisible, constantly changing and moving. For a brief account of Bayle's reading and how Spinoza could reply to the objections he raises, see Nadler (2006, 75-76&78).

¹⁷ Curley (1969, 18) thinks that it is odd to regard the items that we normally think of as "things" and real individuals as properties or states of something else. Doing so is, according to Curley, to make a serious category mistake: "Spinoza's modes are, *prima facie*, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes' modes are related to substance, for they are particular things, not qualities. And it is difficult to know what it would mean to say that particular things inhere in substance...What it would mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving." Carriero (2005), on the other hand, argues that we could conceive of modes as particularized properties, such as the table's roundness or this roundness instead of roundness in general. On such an understanding, modes would be particulars and thus, perhaps, of the right logical type. Della Rocca (2008, 62), states that "to make this important point (as Carriero does so well) is not to eradicate the intuitive unease that Curley rightly feels at

For those who would reject the inherence interpretation, there is language in the *Ethics* that supports an alternative reading, which we may call the “causal interpretation.” According to the causal interpretation, which was first offered by Edwin Curley, the relation between substance and modes, or God and things, is described solely in causal terms.¹⁸ On this construal, to say that Spinozistic modes inhere in substance is just to say that they are caused by substance. In other words, modes are simply causally dependent on substance. Especially important for this interpretation is EIP16, where God is described not so much as the underlying substance or subject of all things, but as the necessary and universal cause of all that exists: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes...” Besides EIP16, Spinoza states in a number of places in the *Ethics* that God causes, determines or produces modes. In EIP18D God is described as “the cause of all things”; in EIP24, Spinoza tells us that things are “produced” by God; and in EIP26, EIP27 and EIP28 he describes the ways in which things have been “determined” by God. In short, on this interpretation the in-relation is simply a causal relation.¹⁹

While the causal interpretation expresses a true, certain and undeniable aspect of the substance/mode relationship, it does so by overlooking the inherence aspect

the thought that ordinary objects are modes in the Cartesian sense. This is because it may seem extremely implausible to regard the table, your mind, and your body as simply particularized states of something else...Such a view would seem scarcely intelligible; it does not do justice to our sense of the robustness that we and other ordinary objects seem to enjoy.” Della Rocca (ibid) thinks that this is the root objection Curley and others have to treating Spinozistic modes as modes in the Cartesian sense.

¹⁸ Curley (1969), (1988). For a similar interpretation, see also Allison (1987, chapter 3).

¹⁹ Curley (ibid) also notes TdIE [92], wherein Spinoza seems to equate the in-relation and the causal relation.

altogether. This creates a difficulty for the causal interpretation, since Spinoza does not describe modes solely in causal terms. As seen earlier, in EIP25C, he explicitly suggests that modes are the states or affections of God. Moreover, Spinoza insists elsewhere that God or substance is the *immanent* cause of its modes: “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things” (IP18). Unlike a transitive cause, which brings about effects that are ontologically distinct from itself, an immanent cause is typically understood to be a cause whose effects belong to or are a part of itself.²⁰ If this is the case, then how can the causal interpretation make sense of immanent causation? Moreover, how does it explain EIP25C? These are some of the questions that confront the causal interpretation.

I have summarized two different readings of the “in” relation and the difficulties that confront each of them. But I will not delve into these interpretations further. Instead, I will present a third way to interpret the relationship between God and things, one which has advantages over the previous two. According to this reading, which has been suggested by Michael Della Rocca, the dependence of modes on God, i.e. modal dependence, involves both inherence and causal dependence.²¹ Importantly, however, on

²⁰ Nadler (2006, 79). The baseball’s being the cause of the broken window is an instance of transitive causation. We will revisit the issue of immanent causation in the next sub-section.

²¹ On Della Rocca’s (2008, 61) interpretation, Spinoza agrees with Descartes that modal dependence involves both inherence and conceptual dependence, but he differs from Descartes in that he sees inherence as nothing but conceptual dependence. For Spinoza, there is only one relation of dependence here, and not two as in Descartes. Della Rocca (2008, 67) adds that while he disagrees with Curley about inherence, “[Curley] is, I believe, absolutely right that the in-relation just is causation or, more generally, conception. And here I depart from Carriero’s interpretation in a significant way. Although Carriero holds that Spinozistic modes do inhere in substance— and I agree—he also holds that the in-relation is a completely separate relation from the relation of causation. I find such a distinction inimical to Spinoza’s rationalism.”

this model, inherence *just is* causal and, ultimately, conceptual dependence. Thus, to say that one thing inheres in another is to say that it is understood or conceived through or intelligible in terms of this other.²² This reading is in line with Spinoza’s claim that modes are *conceived through* God (EID5). To say that a mode is in God is just to say that it is conceived through God, which, in turn, means that it is caused by God. In short, on this model, the relationship between God and things is described as that of a double dependency—conceptual and causal—that all things have on God. God is the ultimate, immanent, and sustaining cause of all that exists.²³ And all that exists depends on/follows from/ is caused by/ is conceived through God. Since “the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of its cause” (EIA4), knowledge of singular things depends on and involves the knowledge of God. Consequently, an adequate conception of any thing necessarily involves God, which will be relevant to our discussion of the connection between understanding singular things and attaining true knowledge of God in the chapters to come. In order to have a better sense of the ontological relation between God and things, let us now turn to Spinoza’s innovative conception of “God or Nature.”

1.1.2. “God or Nature”

One of the most original aspects of Spinoza’s construal of God lies in his conception of God as the immanent, rather than transcendent, cause of all things. According to the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of divinity, God is a transcendent creator who

²² Della Rocca (2008, 68).

²³ Nadler (2001, 98) also holds this view.

causes a world distinct from himself to come into being.²⁴ God creates this world out of nothing by a spontaneous act of free will. And, he could just as easily have created nothing outside himself. By contrast, Spinoza's God is the cause of all things because all things follow causally and necessarily from the divine nature.²⁵ As Spinoza puts it, from God's infinite power or nature "all things have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles" (EIP17S1). God alone is a free cause, not because he acts from the freedom of the will (EIP32, C1), but since he alone exists from the necessity of his nature and acts from the necessity of his nature, namely from the laws of his nature, and is compelled by no one (EIP17, EIP17C2). In nature, there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (EIP29), and things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced (EIP33).

Moreover, unlike the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of divinity, according to which God is a transcendent creator distinct from and outside of nature, Spinoza's God is not separated from nature. In a letter to Henry Oldenburg of April 1662 Spinoza writes: "I do not separate God from nature as everyone known to me has done."²⁶ Spinoza is

²⁴ As Steven Nadler (2006, 83) notes, despite various trends of immanency in Jewish and Christian mystical thought, Judeo-Christian God essentially stands outside of his creation.

²⁵ Nadler (2001, 98).

²⁶ Letter VI, G IV.36/C I.188.

well known for his identification of God with Nature, which is summed up in a phrase that occurs in the Latin edition of the *Ethics*: “*Deus, sive Natura*” (“God, or Nature”): “That eternal and infinite being we call *God, or Nature*, acts from the same necessity from which he exists” (Part IV, Preface, my italics). This has been considered to be an ambiguous phrase, since we cannot really be sure about the extent of the identification of God with Nature. Is God the whole of Nature with everything in it, including all the modes that are in him, or is he just some fundamental, eternal, universal aspect of the Nature?

Before answering this question, it is useful to bring to our attention the fact that Spinoza recognizes two sides of nature. To see how, consider the Scholium to EIP29 where Spinoza draws an important distinction between independent and dependent aspects of nature:

I wish to explain here...what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*...[B]y *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and conceived though itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, that is (by P14C1 and P14C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things that are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.

As we see in this passage, there is on the one hand an independent, self-caused aspect of the universe—God and its attributes, from which all else follows. This is what Spinoza calls *Natura naturans*, “naturing Nature.” The second aspect of the universe is that which

is produced and sustained by the self-caused aspect: *Natura naturata*, “natured Nature.”²⁷ While *Natura Naturans* is “in itself and conceived through itself”, *Natura Naturata* (the modal aspect) can neither be nor be conceived without God or *Natura naturans*. We can now ask the question: Is God the whole of Nature with everything in it, including all the modes that are in him, or is he just *Natura naturans*?

Since only *Natura Naturans* is “in itself and conceived through itself,” it seems that, strictly speaking, what is identical with God is *Natura naturans*. But given that Spinoza identifies *Deus* with *Natura*, and *Natura* includes both *naturans* and *naturata* aspects, then would it not naturally follow that *Deus* is to be identified with each of these aspects? If, as seen in EIP29S, *Natura naturans* is “God insofar as he is considered as a free cause,” it would seem to follow that *Natura naturata* is also God, insofar as God is considered in some other way.²⁸

In order to understand what this “other way” might be, let me return to the issue of immanent causation. As stated earlier, according to Spinoza “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things” (EIP18). One important characteristic of immanent causation is the inseparability of cause and effect.²⁹ As we clearly see in the following

²⁷ We find Spinoza’s division of the whole Nature into *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* in an earlier work, i.e. the *Short Treatise* (KV), as well. See KV 1, Chapters VIII&IX.

²⁸ Nadler (2006, 83).

²⁹ Nadler (2006, 79).

corollary, without the continued existence and operation of the cause, the effect would cease to exist.³⁰

God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, *or* (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being [*causa essendi*] of things" (EIP24C).

As we proceed to EIP25 and EIP25S, we get a better sense of the nature of the relation between God (cause) and things (effect): "God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence" (EIP15) and "God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself" (EIP25S). According to Spinoza, the latter is established clearly from a corollary that is familiar to us: "Particular things are nothing but...modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way" (EIP16C). In other words, the fact that particular things inhere in God or are conceived through/ caused by God establishes that "God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself" (EIP25).³¹

More insight into the nature of the relation between God and things can be gleaned from the following observation by Martin Lin, which will also be relevant in Chapter 3 as we discuss the distinctive content of intuitive cognition. The Neoplatonic

³⁰ As Nadler (*ibid*) notes, this is what medieval philosophers called *causalitas secundum esse*, or causality with respect to being. They contrasted it with *causalitas secundum fieri*, or causality with respect to becoming (or coming into being). Whereas sun is a *causalitas secundum esse* of its light and heat, a builder is a *causalitas secundum fieri* of a house. Unlike the former case, the builder does not need to continuously work to keep the house in being. Rather, once the house is built, the completed house *qua* effect is ontologically independent from the activity of the builder *qua* cause. Nadler (*ibid*, 80) concludes that Spinoza thinks that God stands to all things in a relationship of *causalitas secundum esse*. That Spinoza thinks this is clear from EIP24C, which is quoted in the text.

³¹ According to Lin (2004, 34-5), this scholium presents us with Spinoza's unique understanding of divine concurrence, which does not preclude the causal activity of creatures.

idea that an effect manifests the nature of its cause—that is, cause gives something of itself to or impresses itself upon its effect—was pervasive in the seventeenth century. According to Lin, following this Neoplatonic idea Spinoza holds that effects, or the things produced by God, are the manifestation or exemplification of their cause, i.e. God's power. He argues that Spinoza diverges from the traditional view represented by Thomas Aquinas, because on Spinoza's account the power of creatures does not resemble or imitate the power of God.³² Rather, the power of creatures *is* that very power by which God is the cause of himself, but in a finite form. As Lin observes, this difference lies in the fact that whereas the traditional view represented by Thomas views God as a transcendent cause, for Spinoza God is the immanent cause of all creatures (meaning that everything inheres in God as modes of a substance).

Taking all of this into account, we can now see that/how *Natura naturata* is also God. *Natura naturata* is also God insofar as his power is manifested in modal form. *Natura naturata* (modes or effects) in both its essence and its existence, depend—both causally and conceptually—in a very intimate way on *Natura naturans* (cause). Having focused on Spinoza's identification of God with Nature on the basis of his account of immanent causation, we will now turn to an important member of *Natura naturata*: singular things.

³² Lin (ibid, 46-9). As we will see in Chapter 3, according to Spinoza's conception of efficient causality the power of singular things *exemplifies* the power by which God is the cause of himself.

1.1.3. Singular Things

As stated earlier, according to Spinoza “The more we understand *singular things* the more we understand God” (EVP24, my italics).³³ We will see later that he describes intuitive cognition as “knowledge of singular things” as opposed to reason, which he portrays as “universal knowledge.” Since singular things occupy a central place in the topic of this dissertation, it is important that we understand their role in Spinoza’s metaphysics. We saw earlier that singular things are finite things, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (EIP25C and EIID7).³⁴ When Spinoza uses the phrase “singular thing” or “particular thing,” he is thus speaking of a “certain and determinate way” in which an attribute of God is expressed. While the finite modes in the attribute of extension are individual bodies, the finite modes in the attribute of thought are ideas or minds.³⁵ They are all modes because they are in God and follow from God, and thus are both causally and conceptually dependent on God. They are included in the *natured* aspect of the universe that is produced and sustained by the *naturing* nature. And they belong to God or Nature as its immanent effects: “Particular

³³ According to Spinoza, this is evident from EIP25C.

³⁴ EIP25C: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” EIID7: “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.”

³⁵ As we will see in the next section, according to Spinoza, a body existing in nature and the idea of the existing body, that is, the mind, are one and the same thing explained through different attributes.

things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way" (EIP25C).

According to Spinoza, each particular thing is determined to act and to be acted upon by other particular things:

Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (EIP28)³⁶

This infinite network of finite causes and finite effects is what Spinoza calls elsewhere "the common order of Nature and the constitution of things."³⁷ According to the common order of Nature, any singular thing implicates all other things to infinity.³⁸ As we see in EIIP30D, the duration of finite modes depends on the common order of Nature. This point will be relevant to explaining why we can have only inadequate cognition of the duration of singular things, including ourselves (an issue that we will discuss in the next section and again in Chapter 3).

³⁶ IP28 is important because for the first time we have an explicit appeal to finite things—an explicit characterization of the things that are finite.

³⁷ The term "common order of Nature" first comes up in EIIP29. Then in EIIP30D we see that Spinoza identifies it with the infinite network of finite causes and finite effects in EIP28. We will look at this term in connection with inadequate cognition in the next section.

³⁸ Likewise, following EIIP9, the idea of any singular thing implicates the ideas of all the other bodies to infinity.

According to Spinoza whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect has been so determined by God.³⁹ Nevertheless, singular things or things that are finite and have a determinate existence could not have been produced by the absolute nature of an attribute of God. This is because,

...whatever follows from the absolute nature of an attribute of God is eternal and infinite (by EIP21). It had, therefore, to follow either from God or from an attribute of God insofar as it is considered to be affected by some mode. For there is nothing except substance and its modes (by A1, D3, and D5) and modes (by P25C) are nothing but affections of God's attributes. But it also could not follow from God, or from an attribute of God, insofar as it is affected by a modification which is eternal and infinite (by P22). It had, therefore, to follow from, or be determined to exist and produce an effect by God or an attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence....(EIP28D)

1.1.4. Infinite Modes

This is a good place to note that in Spinoza's metaphysics there are not only finite but also infinite modes.⁴⁰ The metaphysical role and definition of infinite modes are laid down in EIP21 and EIP22, both of which are invoked in the passage just quoted:

All the things, which follow from the absolute nature of any of God's attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, or are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite. (EIP21)

Whatever follows from some attribute of God insofar as it is modified by a modification which, through the same attribute, exists necessarily and is infinite, must also exist necessarily and infinite. (EIP22)

³⁹ EIP28D. According to Spinoza, this follows from EIP26 and EIP24C. We have already looked at the content of EIP24C. According to EIP26, "A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect."

⁴⁰ As Curley (1988, 35) notes there is no talk of infinite modes in Descartes.

Whereas the modes that follow directly from the absolute nature of God are commonly called the *immediate* infinite modes (IP21), the modes that follow directly from those immediate infinite modes are often called the *mediate* infinite modes (IP22).⁴¹ Spinoza's account of infinite modes in the *Ethics* is not well fleshed out, but it is possible to highlight some of their characteristic features. First and foremost, infinite modes stand in a more direct relation to substance and its attributes than finite modes do. Infinite modes are different from finite modes in that they are infinite, and follow from the absolute nature of God's attributes in virtue of which they are eternal and infinite. Nevertheless, in spite of this direct relation, they are still modes—that is, they are caused by/ follow from/ conceived through God. Hence, rather than being a part of the independent, self-caused aspect of nature—that is, of *Natura Naturans*—they belong to *Natura naturata*, which is produced and sustained by the self-caused aspect. *Qua* modes, infinite modes are not self-

⁴¹ IP21, together with EIP22, seems to block the descent from the absolute nature of God's attributes to the finite modes. How can this be compatible with the fact that the finite modes must inhere in God? In other words, if there is a gap between finite things and the infinite nature of God, then would such a gap not violate the fact that finite things, *qua* modes, are conceived through/ follow from God's absolute nature? This is a notoriously difficult question facing Spinoza's metaphysics, one that was raised by Leibniz just one year after Spinoza's death. This worry is sometimes presented in terms of whether Spinoza can “derive” the finite from the infinite. This is a deep problem that I will not attempt to solve in this dissertation. Melamed (unpublished manuscript titled “Spinoza's Infinite Modes”) suggests that if we pay attention to the wording in EIP21, we will see that Spinoza seems to bar any descent from the “absolute nature of the attributes” to the finite modes, while the possibility of a descent from the attribute in general to the finite mode is left open. Melamed then proposes a distinction between two layers of the realm of substance: the inner layer, i.e. “the absolute nature of the attributes” from which only infinite modes can follow, and the external layer, from which finite modes can follow as well. Nadler (2006, 103), on the other hand, suggests that Spinoza is not troubled in the *Ethics* with the problem of how to derive a world consisting of a plurality of finite modes from unified and infinite substance. This is because, for Spinoza, the universe of finite modes is simply a given and experience tells us that there are finite things in the world around us. As Nadler (ibid, 104) recognizes, however, the trouble with this approach is that it leaves the existence of a plurality of finite modes itself undetermined and unexplained—as a kind of brute fact. And this, Nadler concedes, would seem to run counter to Spinoza's causal rationalism.

caused or “conceived through itself.” They are, hence, the effects of the causality of *Natura naturans*.

As we see in EIP21 and EIP22, Spinoza defines infinite modes as infinite and eternal. But are they infinite and eternal in exactly the same way as God and its attributes are? The answer to this question bears on our construal of the relation between modes and God. Let us start with infinity: are the infinite modes infinite in exactly the same way as God and its attributes are? I believe that infinite modes are not infinite in exactly the same way as the *Natura naturans* is. In a famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer (Letter XII), Spinoza makes an important distinction between that which is infinite by its nature and cannot in any way be conceived to be finite, and that which is infinite by the force of the cause in which they inhere. Applying this distinction to our case, while *Natura Naturans* is infinite by its nature and cannot in any way be conceived to be finite, infinite modes *qua Natura naturata* are infinite by the force of the cause in which they inhere. As Yitzak Melamed holds, while the infinity of the substance and the attributes is of a primary kind and as such does not allow for any partition, the infinity of the modes is only secondary and derivative, and thus allows divisibility.⁴²

What about eternity? Whether Spinoza endorses a durational or non-durational account of eternity, and whether the sort of eternity he attributes to *Natura naturans* is the same as that which he attributes to *Natura naturata*, are controversial questions.⁴³

⁴² Both Melamed (ibid) and Deleuze (1988, 78) attribute this reading to Spinoza on the basis of Letter XII.

⁴³ There has been an ongoing scholarly controversy over Spinoza’s understanding of eternity (*aeternitas*) in the *Ethics*. The vast majority of scholars have attributed to the mature Spinoza a Platonic understanding of eternity, according to which, as Wolfson (1934, 358) describes, “eternity is the antithesis of time and it means the exclusion of any kind of temporal relations.” See Hardin (1978), Steinberg (1981), Garber (2005), and

Spinoza defines eternity in EID8: “By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.” Such existence—that is, eternity—“cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.” True eternity, then, explicitly contrasts with sempiternity or everlastingness in time, in that it stands outside of all temporal categories whatsoever. In the same letter to Meyer, Spinoza distinguishes the existence of substance from the existence of modes by saying that the former is of an entirely different kind from the latter. There, Spinoza explicitly states that it is to the existence of modes alone that we can apply the term *duration*, whereas the corresponding term for substance is *eternity*, that is, the infinite enjoyment of existence or of being (*essendi*). Since from the fact that God is *causa sui*, it follows that God’s essence involves existence and thus cannot be conceived except as existing, “God is eternal, or all God’s attributes are eternal” (EIP19). Following the definition of eternity and the distinction Spinoza draws in Letter XII, I hold that Spinoza endorses a non-durational eternity as far as *Natura Naturans* is concerned. But is the sort of eternity that Spinoza attributes to *Natura naturans* the same as that which he attributes to *Natura naturata*? I hold that nothing except substance or God’s attributes can be eternal in this non

Nadler (2006) for this view. There are, however, few commentators, including Donagan (1973) and Kneale (1973), who have attributed to Spinoza an Aristotelian understanding according to which, as Wolfson (1934, 358) describes, “eternity is only endless time.” For more on the distinction between the Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of eternity, see Wolfson’s study on Spinoza (ibid). I follow Tad Schmaltz (unpublished manuscript titled “Spinoza on Eternity and Duration: The 1663 Connection”) in holding that, on Spinoza’s considered view, substance is eternal in a non-durational sense, but that modes can be eternal only in a durational sense. Yet, I diverge from Schmaltz in that, unlike him, I hold that the formal essences of singular things can be eternal only in a durational sense (like infinite modes). This point will be relevant in my discussion of the eternity of the mind in Chapter 6.

durational sense. This is because all other things (all modes) are *in* God and *conceived through* God. A mode does not exist through itself, i.e. it is not *causa sui*. Hence, a mode, albeit infinite, can be said to be eternal *only* by virtue of God as its cause, *not* by virtue of itself.⁴⁴ In sum, I hold that while the eternity of the substance and its attributes is of a primary kind and as such does not allow for any temporal categories, the eternity of the modes is only secondary and derivative, and thus allows temporality in the form of everlastingness.⁴⁵ This point will be relevant to our discussion of the eternity of the mind in Chapter 6.

Having seen what the infinity and eternity of the infinite modes consist in, there is one final question that needs to be addressed: What exactly is the function of infinite modes in Spinoza's system? Spinoza's account of infinite modes is one of the most ambiguous, undeveloped and complicated issues in Spinoza's metaphysics, and there is yet no consensus on how to interpret them.⁴⁶ For the purposes of this section, rather than

⁴⁴ For a similar view, see Deleuze (1988, 66). As I argue in connection with the eternity of the mind in Chapter 6, I think this point is supported by the fact that whereas the eternal existence of God is conceived as an eternal truth through his own essence (EID8), the eternity of the mind, for instance, is "considered as an eternal truth *through God's nature*" (EVP37D, my italics).

⁴⁵ Even though, as I will show, I do not endorse Yovel's interpretation of infinite modes as expressing laws of nature, I agree with him (1991, 79-80) that infinite modes present us with a stepping down in the levels of infinity and necessity (with eternity replaced by infinite duration and *causa sui* necessity replaced by transmitted necessity of an *effectus alii*), pertaining to *Natura Naturata*.

⁴⁶ See Nadler (2006, 87-98) for a comprehensive account of various approaches to the issue of the infinite modes. Many scholars, including Curley (1969) & (1988), Yovel (1991) and Garrett (2009), interpret infinite modes as including the most general laws of nature, which are the universal and eternal aspects of the world together governing all things in all ways. For this interpretation, these scholars lean heavily on the following passage from the TdIE: "...But there is also no need for us to understand their series. The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, *or* order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things. That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the *laws inscribed in these things*, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered" (TdIE [101], my italics). For the alternative view that Spinozistic infinite

delving into different interpretations, I will briefly present a reading that I believe makes the most sense. On this reading, held by Melamed, the main aim of Spinoza's theory of infinite modes is twofold: (1) to create a holistic and comprehensive connection between all the modes of each attribute, and (2) to function as the bridges between the realm of substance (and its attributes) and that of the finite modes, thereby avoiding a situation wherein the latter is detached from the former. On this reading, infinite modes function as mediating entities between substance and finite modes by binding all finite modes of the relevant attribute.⁴⁷ While the immediate infinite mode of thought, namely, "infinite intellect," provides a system of causes that binds together all ideas, the corresponding mode of extension, that is, "motion and rest," provides the system which binds together all bodies.⁴⁸ As shown earlier, unlike substance and its attributes, the infinity of modes is only secondary and derivative, and thus allows for divisibility.⁴⁹ For this reason, while the infinity of *Natura naturans* does not allow any partition, infinite modes provide the system of causes in which finite modes can participate in and influence each other.

modes of extension are to be identified with enduring features of the material world rather than with eternal laws, see Schmaltz (ibid). Schmaltz agrees with Donagan (1988) that the Spinozistic infinite modes of extension cannot be said to be eternal in a non-durational sense. As I noted earlier, this is a point on which I agree with Schmaltz.

⁴⁷ Melamed (ibid).

⁴⁸ Spinoza gives these examples of immediate infinite modes in Letter LXIV. (While in the letter he calls the immediate infinite mode of thought "absolutely infinite intellect," in the *Short Treatise* he simply refers to it as "Intellect.") In that letter he also claims that "the face of the whole Universe" (*facies totius Universi*) is the mediate infinite mode of extension. But he does not give any example of a corresponding mediate infinite mode of thought. The issue of the mediate infinite modes and how they relate to the immediate infinite modes is complicated. See Schmaltz (1997) for a discussion of mediate infinite modes.

⁴⁹ In order to support his claim that unlike *Natura naturans*, infinite modes are divisible, Melamed (ibid) notes that on several occasions Spinoza clearly speaks of parts of infinite modes. The human mind, for instance, is said to be part of the infinite intellect, as we see in EIIP9C, EVP40S and in Letter XXXII.

1.1.5. Back to Singular Things

As Spinoza states in EIP28S, God is absolutely the proximate cause of things produced immediately by him, i.e. immediate infinite modes:

Since certain things had to be produced by God immediately, namely, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature, and others (which nevertheless can neither be nor be conceived without God) had to be produced by the mediation of these first things, it follows:

I. That God is absolutely the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not [a proximate cause] in his own kind, as they say. For God's effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause (by P15 and P24C).

If God is the proximate cause of things that follow immediately from him, what does this imply for singular things? Is God the remote cause of singular things? The answers to these questions lie in the rest of the Scholium:

II. That God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things, except perhaps so that we may distinguish them from those things that he has produced immediately, or rather, that follow from his absolute nature. For by a remote cause we understand one which is not conjoined in any way with its effect. But all things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.

As we see in this passage, Spinoza is not really saying that God is the remote cause of singular things as such. Saying this without any qualification would mean that God “is not conjoined in any way with [singular things].” This is not acceptable to Spinoza who holds, as we have seen, that singular things inhere in God and depend on God such that they can neither be nor be conceived without him. Given all of this, and given his commitment to immanent causation and the inseparability of God and things, even though singular things can be said to be causally *more* remote from God as compared to

infinite modes, they cannot be remote from God as such. They exist at a more determinate level, being nothing but “affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (EIP25C).

I will say more about singular things in Chapter 3, where I give an account of the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge. Having completed our brief account of Spinoza’s metaphysics of God and the ontological relationship between God or Nature and things, it is now time to turn to Spinoza’s account of the human being and how it fits into his metaphysical scheme.

1.2. Spinoza’s Metaphysics of the Human Being

Beginning in Part II of the *Ethics* titled “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind” (*De Natura et Origine Mentis*), Spinoza turns his attention to one particular member of the world of finite modes: the human being. In his brief Preface to Part II he writes:

I pass now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, or the infinite and eternal being—not, indeed, all of them, for we have demonstrated (IP16) that infinitely many things must follow from it in infinitely many modes, but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness.

Providing a clear indication of the ultimately practical orientation of Spinoza’s thought, this passage sets the agenda not only for the second part, but also for the remainder of the *Ethics* as a whole.⁵⁰ The rest of the *Ethics* involves a search for the conditions of human happiness *via* the attainment of true knowledge of God.

⁵⁰ Allison (1987, 84).

A human being, for Spinoza, consists of a mind and a body (EIIIP13C). Stated this way, Spinoza's account of the human being does not seem particularly original; but his answers to the questions "What is mind?" and "What is body?" present us with some of the most unique and intriguing aspects of Spinoza's thought. According to Spinoza, "The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists" (EIIIP11), and the singular thing or "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else" (EIIIP13). Hence for Spinoza the human mind is nothing but the idea of the human body, which in turn is nothing but the object of the human mind (EIIIP11, 13). In order to highlight the originality of Spinoza's conception of the human being, in what follows I will show how he (1) ascribes a fundamental unity to the human being, and (2) construes the human being as part of nature.

1.2.1. Unity of the Human Being

One of the most innovative aspects of Spinoza's conception of the human being relates to the unity that he ascribes to it. Unlike Descartes, Spinoza holds that from an ontological point of view, there is fundamental identity of mind and body and thus a fundamental unity of the human being.⁵¹ Given that, for Spinoza, God is the only substance, there is no

⁵¹ As is well known, Descartes is a substance dualist in the sense that he conceives of the world as consisting of two radically distinct kinds of substances—namely, thinking substances and extended substances. According to Descartes' doctrine of the "real distinction" between mind (or soul) and body, the mind, the thinking substance, and the body, the extended substance, each can be clearly and distinctly understood without the other. In other words, considered in themselves, mind and body are "complete substances," in the sense that each can be conceived to exist without the other, or without anything else

way that the human being can be conceived of as a union of two *substances* à la Descartes. A human being can be only a finite mode by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (EIP25C). As Spinoza states in the first two propositions of Part II, God is a thinking thing and an extended thing. In other words, thought and extension are attributes of God.⁵² Because of the fundamental and underlying unity of Substance, Thought and Extension are just two different ways of "comprehending" one and the same Nature.⁵³ What this implies for the individual thing is that "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways" (EIP7S). Hence a human being, who is composed of a mind and body, is a modification both of thought and of extension. And it is a modification, which is one and the same thing expressed in different ways since "the mind and the body are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension" (EIP21S).

Yet it is important to note that this ontological identity thesis does not prevent Spinoza from holding that there is a conceptual distinction between thought and extension, and hence mind and body. For Spinoza, each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself (EI10) and, for that matter, the modes of these attributes must be

except God. Reflected by this conceptual independence is the ontological independence meaning that each substance is capable of existing without the other, hence the possibility of existence of the soul disembodied or the immortality of the soul. As we will see in Chapter 6, even though Spinoza talks about eternity of the mind, he does not, thereby, endorse a theory of the immortality of the soul as Descartes did.

⁵² Recall that according to EID6: "By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence."

⁵³ In the Scholium to the famous parallelism doctrine of EIP7, Spinoza states that "the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that."

understood through the attributes of which they are modes, and not through any other (EIIP6). In EIIP2, Spinoza applies his denial of interaction announced in EIIP6 to the special case of human mind and body: “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).” Since the concept of mind does not involve the concept of body or vice versa, we cannot explain the body by the features of the mind or vice versa.⁵⁴

However, although the causes of a mode must be found exclusively under its own attribute, following EIIP6, mind and body for Spinoza are intimately related, as the definition of the mind as the idea of the body suggests. Accordingly, there is an intimate relation between the “order” of causes, and hence the order of knowledge, under the different attributes established by the parallelism doctrine. This reads: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” The demonstration of this important proposition is very short and rests on one of the central axioms of the *Ethics*, namely EIA4: “the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” More specifically, the demonstration of the parallelism doctrine reads: “This is evident from IA4; for the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect.” While this demonstration has been dismissed as both incomplete and unsuccessful,⁵⁵ Margaret Wilson holds that Spinoza’s

⁵⁴ Because there is no causal and/or conceptual interaction between mind and body in Spinoza’s account, the fundamental problem of mind-body interaction that is inherent to Cartesian philosophy does not, technically speaking, arise.

⁵⁵ See Wilson (1996, 133, n. 9) where she mentions Bennett (1984, 131), who takes a particularly negative view of the use EIA4, which he says Spinoza gives us “no reason” for accepting. Also see Wilson (1991) for her critique of Bennett’s treatment of the axiom in detail.

point here seems straightforward at a certain level of intelligibility: Just as an effect depends on its cause, so the knowledge or idea of that effect depends on the knowledge or the idea of its cause.⁵⁶ Thus the epistemic relationship between the idea of *a* and the idea of *b* mirrors the causal relationship between *a* and *b*. Whereas each idea belongs to an infinite series of finite modes of Thought, each body belongs to an infinite series of finite modes in Extension. The order and connection of the infinite series of bodies is reflected in thought by the infinite series of ideas. These parallel series, however, are metaphysically grounded in the power of one and the same substance. In other words, “the order” of understanding is the same as “the order” of being, which Spinoza expresses by stating that “God’s power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting” (EIP7C). So, we are back to where we started: ontologically speaking, there is one order, which is expressed in different, yet, parallel ways:

A circle existing in nature and the idea of the existing circle, which is also in God, are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes. Therefore, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another. (IIP7S)

Just like the circle and its idea, a human body existing in nature and the idea of the existing body—that is, the human mind, which is also in God, are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes. The fundamental identity of the mind and body, and thus the fundamental unity of the human being, is thus based on the proposition that the mind is “the idea of” the body (or the body “the object of” the mind).

⁵⁶ Wilson (1996, 97).

1.2.2. Human Being as a Part of Nature

Another original aspect of Spinoza's thought lies in his opposition to any conception of human nature that makes it a kind of "dominion within a dominion" that is exempt from the laws of nature that govern everything else.⁵⁷ For Spinoza, ontologically speaking, there is nothing whatsoever that distinguishes a human being from any other particular and determinate mode in nature. It is just one of the infinitely many finite things that follow from the necessity of divine nature. In a very important Corollary, Spinoza states that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God (EIII1C).⁵⁸ In other words, a human mind is one of the infinitely many ideas that make up the infinite intellect of God.⁵⁹ The human mind is therefore *just like* the "ideas" of other extended bodies, all of which together constitute God's infinite system of thought. Just as human body belongs to the infinite series of finite modes in Extension, the human mind belongs to the infinite series of finite modes of Thought.⁶⁰ Spinoza states:

The things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless *animate*. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of

⁵⁷ In the Preface to the Part III of the *Ethics* Spinoza states, "Most of those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat not of natural things, which follow from the common laws of Nature, but of things which are outside Nature." These people "seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion." Here there is no doubt that the main target is Descartes. I will say more on how Spinoza's views on this topic differ from those of Descartes in Chapter 4.

⁵⁸ I am going to elaborate on EIII1C in the next section.

⁵⁹ As stated earlier, infinite intellect is the immediate infinite mode under the attribute of Thought. I will say more on infinite intellect in the next section and in Chapter 2, where we will see that it is the foundation of intuitive knowledge. For the time being it is sufficient to know that infinite intellect is God's infinite system of thought.

⁶⁰ As seen earlier, the human mind and human body are, ontologically speaking, the same thing expressed in different ways.

which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human body [i.e. the human mind]. (EIIP13S, my italics)

Curley points to the fact that the word here translated as ‘animate’ (*animata*) is an adjectival form of the Latin word for soul (*anima*),⁶¹ and suggests that it would be reasonable to read this as saying that, “in the same sense in which a man has a soul all things have a soul.”⁶² So, *every* extended body has a mind, since for each thing there is necessarily an idea in God. In other words, no matter how bizarre it looks, carrots, tables and even rocks have minds, if by ‘mind’ we mean “the idea of the body.”

Let us accept that having a mind *per se* is not peculiar to humans. It is not the distinctive feature of being a human.⁶³ Does this suggest that there is nothing special whatsoever about the human mind? If so, why is Spinoza especially interested in explaining those things that can lead us to knowledge of the human mind and its highest blessedness, as he states in the Preface to the Part II of the *Ethics*? There is something special about the human mind and, for that matter, the human body, although on a general

⁶¹ To remember the classical meaning of *anima* it would be helpful to go back to Aristotle for whom soul (*psyche, anima*) is what essentially distinguishes a living body from an inanimate body. For Aristotle the soul, *qua* form, essence, or nature of the organism, is that in virtue of which it is alive. (*De Anima*) “The soul is the cause or source of the living body. The terms cause and source have many senses. But the soul is the cause of its body alike in all three senses, which we explicitly recognize. It is the source of movement, it is the end, and it is the essence of the whole living body. That it is the last is clear; for in everything the essence is identical with the cause of its being, and here, in the case of living things, their being is to live, and of their being and their living the soul in them is the cause or source” (*De Anima*, Book II, 415b9-13) in Aristotle (1984).

⁶² Curley (1988, 71). Note that there is a controversy regarding the usage of the “individual” in this passage. The controversy addresses whether by ‘individual’ Spinoza means the same as “thing,” or whether he reserves the former for entities with a certain complexity. See Gueroult (1974, 164-5), Matheron (1969, 22), and Curley (1988, 72-3 & 157, n. 31) for different views on this issue.

⁶³ The question as to whether or not Spinoza has a definite conception of human nature and if he has, what it is and how it is relevant will be discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

ontological level they are not distinct from the rest of the nature. After stating that whatever has been said about the human mind must also be said about the idea of anything, Spinoza himself concedes the following:

However we also cannot deny that ideas differ among themselves, as the objects do, and that one [idea] is more excellent than the other and contains more reality, just as the object of the one is more excellent than the object of the other and contains more reality. And so to determine what is the difference between the human Mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us...to know the nature of its object, i.e. of the human body...I say this in general, that in proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we can know the excellence of one mind over the others. (EIIP13S)

Following this passage we see that what is special about the human mind is connected to the complexity of the human body and its various capacities to affect and to be affected, thanks to which human mind has more complex and developed capacities of perception (including memory, imagination, affectivity and self-awareness⁶⁴). Thus, although mind and body are conceptually and causally distinct, they are related in a fundamental way that allows us to explain the complexity of human mind by the complexity of human body. This relation between the mind and the body marks a unique aspect of Spinoza's approach to mental development: unlike Cartesian dualism, which leads us to talk as if

⁶⁴ Although it is not included in this list, consciousness is another capacity that the human beings have. Whether or not Spinoza has a consistent and developed account of consciousness is a disputed issue. Nadler (2008) recently offered an interpretation, suggesting that consciousness is a certain complexity in thinking that is the correlate of the complexity of a body. Nadler thinks that Spinoza offers the possibility of a fairly sophisticated, naturalistic account of consciousness, one that grounds it in the nature and capacities of the body, rather than in relation to "the ideas of ideas view." For other accounts of consciousness in Spinoza's *Ethics*, see Curley (1969, 126-29) and (1988, 71-73), Matheron (1994), Wilson (1999) and LeBuffe (2010).

our mental development might be independent of our physical development, for Spinoza the human mind is united to its body (EIIIP13S) in a such a way that it has greater or less power and perfection insofar as its object—that is, the human body—has greater or lesser perfection.

So any developmental account pertaining to human beings in a Spinozistic universe must be given (1) in terms of “different degrees of development of the power of their minds-and-bodies,” in other words, “of their whole personality,”⁶⁵ and (2) never forgetting the fact that a human being is as much a part of Nature as anything else, and that she is subject to the necessities that follow from God’s divine nature, from which not even God is exempt. In other words, any such account must take into account Spinoza’s unique metaphysics of the human being, which cannot be thought independently of his metaphysics of God or Nature.

We will now turn our attention to the issue of human knowledge, since for Spinoza, reaching adequate knowledge of Nature and our place in it is *the* way to develop our “whole personality.” How can a human being attain “true knowledge of God”? To what extent do reason and intuitive knowledge play different roles in its attainment? As stated earlier, these are the main questions to be addressed in this dissertation. Having provided a brief outline of Spinoza’s metaphysics of God and of the human being, I will now introduce some of the main elements of his theory of human knowledge.

⁶⁵ Hampshire (2005, 61-62).

1.3. Spinoza's Theory of Human Knowledge

In order to comprehend Spinoza's account of human knowledge, one has to understand how Spinoza distinguishes between adequate and inadequate ideas. But even more fundamentally, what is an idea for Spinoza? Spinoza defines 'idea' as "a concept of the mind, which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing" (EIID3), explaining that he intentionally uses the word 'concept' rather than 'perception' since the former "seems to express an action of the mind" rather than a mind that is acted on by the object, as seems to be the case with perception. For Spinoza, having knowledge or having ideas involves some sort of mental activity, and even though Spinoza seems to use several terms as equivalent to 'idea' throughout Part II—including 'perception'—he never departs from the notion that having ideas involves some sort of mental activity.⁶⁶

The reason why every idea involves mental activity is because every idea involves some kind of affirmation or negation. Spinoza makes this point clear where he speaks of those who "think that ideas consist in images which are formed in us from encounters with external bodies," saying that "they look on ideas...as mute pictures on a panel. And preoccupied with this prejudice, do not see that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation" (EIIIP49S2). As this passage shows us, what is unacceptable for Spinoza is the notion that ideas are like "pictures," dead and inert mental objects that are there for the mind to apprehend.⁶⁷ For Spinoza "an idea consists neither in the image

⁶⁶ Wilson (1996, 94).

⁶⁷ Nadler (2006, 160). See also Michael Della Rocca (2003).

of anything, nor in words” (EIIP49S2), it is not “something mute, like a picture on a tablet” (EIIP43S).⁶⁸ Thus there are no inactive ideas for Spinoza. Yet there are *inadequate* ideas on which the passions of the mind depend, as opposed to *adequate* ideas, from which the actions of the mind arise (EIIP3).⁶⁹ So passivity of the mind does not mean having inactive ideas. In contrast, it implies a mental activity that is not complete or adequate. I will elaborate on the passivity and activity of the mind in Chapter 4 when I discuss the *affectus* (feelings-affects) that accompany ideas.

In what follows, I present Spinoza’s distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas by adverting to the concept of Infinite Intellect. I will show that the essential contrast between inadequate and adequate knowledge can be characterized as a contrast between perceiving “according to the common order of nature” and understanding “following the order of the intellect.” I will conclude the section by showing how reason and intuitive knowledge *qua* adequate knowledge are closer to one another than either is to knowledge of the first kind.

⁶⁸ As Nadler (2006, 159) states, one of the questions debated by early modern philosophers is whether the mind’s ideas are objects, mental pictures that the mind apprehends, or rather acts, mental acts of apprehending. Are ideas things directly and immediately perceived or perceptions of things? Nadler suggests that Descartes seems to treat them in both ways: both as things that mind immediately perceives (see *Principles of Philosophy*, I, 13-14) and as an “operation of the intellect” (*Fourth Replies*, AT VII.232/CSM II.163), which is not “different from the action itself” (*Letter to Mersenne*, 28 January 1641, AT III.295).

⁶⁹ As we will see in Chapter 4, although inadequate and adequate describe an idea, they also describe a cause. IID1 reads: “I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone.” So, if we have adequate ideas, it follows that we are the adequate cause of the feelings that result, and consequently we are active (EIID2). On the contrary, insofar as we have inadequate ideas, we are the inadequate causes of our feelings, which are passions (EIII1).

1.3.1. Adequate versus Inadequate Ideas

Descartes classified ideas into two groups: “clear and distinct” ideas (belonging primarily to intellect or reason), and ideas that are “obscure and confused” (associated primarily with imagination and sense).⁷⁰ Although in some places Spinoza still uses the Cartesian distinction, he introduces a new distinction among ideas: adequate ideas versus inadequate ideas. At EIID4, Spinoza defines an adequate idea as “an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.” With implicit reference back to EIA6, Spinoza goes on to explain what he means by ‘intrinsic’, stating that he says “intrinsic to exclude what is extrinsic, namely the agreement of the idea with its object.” Although, as Wilson points out, Spinoza does not give a thorough explanation of what these intrinsic denominations are and how they relate to the extrinsic “agreement,”⁷¹ at least we can say that for Spinoza, truth and adequacy are reciprocal notions. All true ideas are adequate and vice versa. In Letter LX he makes a similar point in response to Tschirnhaus’s question concerning the relationship between truth and adequacy, where he writes:

I recognize no other difference between a true and an adequate idea than that the word true refers only to the agreement of the idea with its *ideatum*, while the word adequate refers to the nature of the idea in itself; so that there is really no difference between a true and adequate idea except this extrinsic relation.⁷²

⁷⁰ Wilson (1996, p. 95).

⁷¹ Wilson (ibid) also holds that the remarks Spinoza makes later in Part II tend to produce more confusion than they remove.

⁷² Allison (1987, 102).

Thus, the truth of an idea is an extrinsic relationship in which the idea stands to its object, whereas the adequacy of an idea implies its completeness in the sense that from it all the properties of its *ideatum* (object) can be deduced. An idea is adequate, then, when it includes a perfect and complete knowledge of its object, which is intimately associated with a causal understanding. We know from EIA4 that “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” Hence to know a thing is to know its causes and to see how it follows necessarily from its cause (EAI3). Spinoza expresses the relation between causal understanding, adequacy and deduction of properties in the same Letter to Tschirnhaus:

...in order that I may know which out of many ideas of a thing will enable all the properties of the object to be deduced, I follow this one rule, that *the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause*. (Letter LX, my italics)

Only when an idea of a thing gives the relevant causal information from which all properties of an object can be deduced can that idea be said to be adequate. The adequate idea of a circle, for example, involves the efficient cause of a circle—namely, “that a circle is the space described by a line of which one point is fixed and the other movable”—enabling one to deduce from it all the properties of a circle.⁷³ Inadequate

⁷³ Notice that in the passage from Letter LX, Spinoza uses ‘idea’ and ‘definition’ interchangeably, suggesting that there is a relation between definition and adequacy in the sense that an adequate idea is a definition that expresses the efficient cause of the thing. For a similar idea see TdIE [95-97], where Spinoza states that a complete definition must explain the inmost essence of the thing. On this account, definition is the statement of the distinctive mark of a thing considered in itself (and not in relation to other things), and the distinction stated must be a distinction of essence internal to the thing defined. Even though I am not going to make use of this relation here, it is interesting to note that Spinozan definition looks very much like Aristotle’s account of definition. Aristotle holds that the essence of *x* is precisely what *x* is, (*Metaphysics*, 1030a3) and that “there is an essence of just those things whose formula (*logos*) is a definition (*horismos*)” (1030a6). In other words: Only what is definable has an essence. The formula (*logos*) of the essence of *x* is a formula in which *x* itself does not appear but which “expresses” *x* (1029b19-20). Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in Aristotle (1984).

ideas, by contrast, are like “conclusions without premises” (IIP28D). They are “mutilated and confused” and do not allow one to attain a sufficient and complete causal understanding of a thing. Just as all true ideas are also adequate ideas, and vice versa, so all false ideas are inadequate ideas, and vice versa. The difference between a true and a false idea lies in whether or not the idea agrees with its object—namely, in this “extrinsic denomination”—not in the nature or inner characteristic of the idea itself. It is in the latter, i.e. in the intrinsic features of ideas, on the other hand, where the difference between adequate and inadequate ideas can be found. Having presented the basic terminology, I will now elaborate on Spinoza’s account of adequacy and truth in relation to a central concept of Spinoza’s system: Infinite Intellect.

1.3.2. Infinite Intellect or God’s Idea (*Idea Dei*)

One of the most important propositions of Part I of the *Ethics* is EIP16, which reads: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).” Together with its metaphysical significance, an important feature of EIP16 is the explicit introduction for the first time in the *Ethics* of the concept of “infinite intellect.” Later in EIIP3, the demonstration of which partly depends on EIP16, we are presented with an equivalent of the infinite intellect: God’s Idea (*Idea Dei*). According to EIIP3, “In God there is necessarily an idea both of his essence and of everything which necessarily follows from his essence.” EIIP4 explicitly connects the expression “infinite intellect”

with “the idea of God,” and argues that the idea of God “must be unique” on the grounds that God is unique.

As Wilson says, any legitimate account of Spinoza’s theory of knowledge must take full account of the role of “*idea Dei*.”⁷⁴ We will see in Chapter 2 how this account is related in a crucial way to Spinoza’s account of intuitive knowledge. For the time being, though, consider the following corollary in order to understand the relation among the human mind, infinite intellect, and adequacy and inadequacy of human knowledge:

Hence it follows that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; and therefore when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing else but this: that God—not insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is explicated through the nature of the human mind, that is insofar as he constitutes the essence of human mind—has this or that idea. And when we say that God has this or that idea not only insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind but also insofar as he has the idea of another thing simultaneously with the human mind, then we are saying that the human mind perceives a thing partially or inadequately. (EIP11C)

Just after this corollary, Spinoza says in a Scholium “Here, no doubt, my readers will come to a halt, and think of many things which will give them pause.” Then he invites his readers to “continue on with him slowly, step by step, and to make no judgment on these matters until they read through all of them.” Let us accept Spinoza’s invitation and continue on with him step by step. What does EIP11C tell us? First, as stated earlier, the human mind is a member of and participates in the infinite system of actual thought that is necessarily produced from the essence of God or Nature: This system is called the infinite intellect or the idea of God. The human mind is a finite and limited member, however, and Spinoza expresses this point by stating that when one says

⁷⁴ Wilson (1996, 96).

that “The human mind perceives this or that idea,” it means that “God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind, or insofar as he constitutes the essence of human mind, has this or that idea.” As Allison puts it, this is Spinoza’s rather elaborate way of saying that perception follows not from the absolute system of thought, but from the particular nature of the perceiving mind.⁷⁵ But this is not the only point that Spinoza is making here. He is also making a distinction between the human mind’s adequate and inadequate perception. For Spinoza, adequate perception occurs if the perceiving mind, which is a part of the infinite system of thought, conceives an idea in a complete way. But insofar as God “has the idea of another thing simultaneously with the human mind, then we are saying that the human mind perceives a thing partially or inadequately.” In other words, an idea is inadequate if it is incomplete or dependent (in the infinite system of thought or knowledge) on other ideas that the human mind does not possess.

It is important to note that, for Spinoza, there is a sense in which all ideas are true and adequate, for all ideas are in God (EIP15), and all ideas in God agree entirely with their objects (by EIIP7C); this in turn means that (by IA6) “all ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true” (EIIP32). In other words, all ideas, insofar as they are parts of infinite intellect, are true because they are all in God and possessed adequately by God. What this implies is that “there is nothing positive in ideas on account of which they are false” (EIIP33). If so, then what is the source of falsity or inadequacy? For Spinoza, the source of falsity is “the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and

⁷⁵ Allison (1987, 94). Note that the word ‘perception’ is used here, as elsewhere, in a very broad sense, to refer to all mental events of which conscious apprehension is merely one particular manifestation.

confused, ideas involve” (EIIIP35), and “there are no inadequate or confused ideas except insofar as they are related to the singular mind of someone” (EIIIP36D).

1.3.3. Common Order of Nature vs. Order of the Intellect

In order to understand the nature of inadequacy better, we should remember Spinoza’s construal of human mind as the idea of an *actually existing human body*. An actually existing human body provides the focal point from and through which alone the human mind can perceive its world.⁷⁶ As noted earlier, according to Spinoza the human body is extremely complex,⁷⁷ and this gives it the capacity to affect other bodies and to be affected by other bodies in a wide variety of ways (EIIIP13S, postulates III, IV, VI, II/103).⁷⁸ So each human body is a complex yet finite mode of extension that is determined by its network of relations with external bodies; and the mind *qua* the idea of the body, following the parallelism doctrine, reflects in the realm of thought everything that occurs in the world of extension.

Even though God possesses all ideas adequately, ideas that we have are not immediately adequate as they are in God. This is because the only ideas that we have under natural conditions of perception are the ideas that represent what happens to our

⁷⁶ Allison (1987, 107).

⁷⁷ Bodies vary enormously in their complexity, from the simplest bodies to the composite bodies composed only of the simplest possible bodies, to composite bodies composed of composite bodies with degrees of complexity of that range to infinity.

⁷⁸ Unlike Descartes, according to whom the human body is really distinct from the human mind and the mind can know itself as a simple substance, Spinoza conceives of neither the body nor the mind as simple. On the contrary, for Spinoza both are infinitely complex.

body.⁷⁹ Our initial stage of cognition is through these ideas of the affections of the body that represent the effect of another body on ours. As Spinoza states, the mind perceives its own body (by EIIP19), external bodies (by EIIP26) and itself (by EIIP23) only through the very ideas themselves of the affections of the body. So not only does the mind's knowledge of its body (EIIP19) depend on the ideas of the affections of the body, but so too is its knowledge of bodies other than its own in sense perception (EIIP16), its imagination of things,⁸⁰ its memory of the past (EIIP18),⁸¹ and finally its knowledge of itself (EIIPP20-23).

As Spinoza states, we *feel* that our body is affected in many ways (EIIA4, my italics).⁸² But can we *know adequately*, or have adequate ideas of, the affections of our body? What are the chances that the human mind can know the affections of its body in an adequate way? In other words, what are the chances that sense-perception, self-

⁷⁹ Deleuze (1988, 73).

⁸⁰ EIIP17: "If the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard the same external body as actually existing, or as present to it, until the body is affected by an affect that excludes the existence or presence of that body." It is important to note that, unlike EIIP17, where imagination is used in a narrow sense, throughout the *Ethics* imagination is explained as a function of the mind's knowledge of the states of its own body. As Curley (1988, 158) notes, in Spinoza's usage, imagination includes not only ordinary sense perception, but also what we would normally call imagination. Allison (1987, 108) makes a similar point in saying that Spinoza often uses the term imagination in a very broad sense to denote all thought that is according to the "common order of nature," including sense perception, in which the order of ideas in the mind reflects the order of affections of the body. In the rest of this dissertation, I will follow the broad meaning of imagination when I use imaginative knowledge and knowledge of the first kind interchangeably.

⁸¹ According to EIIP18, if the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, then when the mind subsequently imagines one of them, it will immediately recollect the others as well.

⁸² Since thought and extension are the only two attributes that we can know of, "we neither feel nor perceive any singular things except bodies and modes of thinking" (EIIA5). So no individual things are known to us except bodies (modes which express in a certain and determinate way the essence of God insofar as he is considered as an extended thing) and ideas (modes of thought, conceptions formed by the mind because it is a thinking thing) (EIID1&3, EIIA5).

perception (self-awareness),⁸³ imagination, or memory, can provide us with adequate knowledge? The answer is: None. Why none?

The main problem is that the ideas of the affections of the body represent not only what happens to our body but also a mixing of the natures of both bodies—that is, our body coupled with the affecting body. In Spinoza’s words, “all modes by which a body is affected by another body follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body” (A1” [II/99]). Hence, the principle that “the idea of any mode in which the human body is affected by external bodies must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body” (EIIIP16).⁸⁴ From EIIIP16 follows two very important corollaries: 1) The human mind perceives the nature of a great many bodies together with the nature of its own body, which is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite, and 2) The ideas, which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies.

The second corollary is especially important in order to understand how ideas can be inadequate and confused insofar they are related to the singular mind of someone. What does it mean to say that our ideas of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies? It means that since the perceptual

⁸³ I use ‘self-perception’ or ‘self-awareness’ to denote any ideas that we have of ourselves based on the affections of our body. We will see in Chapter 3 how one’s knowledge of oneself through intuitive knowledge is totally different than self-perception, in that the latter is necessarily inadequate whereas the former is adequate and being so, the source of the highest blessedness.

⁸⁴ For Allison (1987, 107), this principle is at the root of Spinoza’s account of perception, and indeed of his whole analysis of knowledge.

awareness of external bodies is a function of one's sensory apparatus, this awareness provides information about how a body appears, and this, strictly speaking, is a fact more about the constitution of one's own body than about the nature of the external body. This is precisely the principle underlying the account of error.⁸⁵ Now, consider the following example:

When we look at the sun, we imagine it as about two hundred feet away from us, an error which does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than six hundred diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun. (EIIIP35S)

This example is one of the two examples⁸⁶ that Spinoza gives in order to explain fully how error consists in the privation of knowledge.⁸⁷ Our imaginative idea that the sun is located about two hundred feet away from us is an accurate description of how the sun actually *appears* under certain conditions, or how it is perceived by virtue of its affection of the body. The error does not lie in how the sun appears to us *per se*, but in the fact that this imaginative idea involves a confusion between how the sun appears and how the sun really is. All the perceptual ideas that we have in this manner reflect the condition of the body in its interplay with the environment rather than the true nature of the connection of things. Confusing the former with the latter leads the mind to fall into error.

⁸⁵ Ibid (108).

⁸⁶ The second example regards the idea of freedom that some people have. According to Spinoza, men are deceived into thinking of themselves as free, since they do not know the causes of their actions.

⁸⁷ "Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve" (EIIIP35).

In the example regarding the distance of the sun, our inadequate idea of the sun involves the nature of the sun insofar as our body is affected by it, and this affection does represent the effect of the sun on me. Yet it does not *explain* the nature of the sun. An inadequate idea always lacks a “comprehension” that would be concerned with causes, since it only retains the effect of one body on another. Such an idea involves the nature of an external thing but does not *explain* it (EIIP18S). And this confusion can only be remedied by an adequate understanding of what the sun really is, in other words by perceiving the sun “following the order of the intellect” rather than “according to the common order of nature.” For Spinoza, having a true idea is “knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way” (EIIP43S), and the only way that we can know a thing perfectly and in the best way is through an adequate understanding of it.⁸⁸

Earlier I emphasized the connection between adequacy and causal understanding. To know a thing adequately is to know its causes and to see how it follows necessarily from its causes (EAI3). To the contrary, what is lacking in inadequate ideas is a “comprehension” that would be concerned with causes. This contrast can also be characterized as one between perceiving “according to the common order of nature” and understanding “following the order of the intellect.” As shown above, the common order of Nature is nothing but the infinite network of finite causes and finite effects. According

⁸⁸ In EIIP43, Spinoza states, in a very Cartesian fashion, that one “who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing.” But what is the reliable mark of truth? Both Allison and Nadler suggest that the criterion for the reliable mark of truth lies in an idea’s adequacy, and they suggest that this follows from Spinoza’s initial definition of an adequate idea. Hence adequacy is the inner characteristic of an idea by virtue of which it is judged to be true. Allison (1987), p. 103, and Nadler (2006) p.163.

to the common order of Nature, any singular thing implicates all other things to infinity.⁸⁹ Hence, if one wants to adequately know x, since to know x is to know its causes, one has to know an infinity of finite causes. Being the finite minds that we are, we can never get clear and distinct ideas as long as we try to understand things on this horizontal level, since “it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things, not only because there are innumerable many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence.”⁹⁰ That is why as long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of Nature, “it does not have adequate knowledge, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge, of itself, of its own body and of external bodies” (EIP29C). Moreover, as we saw earlier, the duration of our body depends on this common order of Nature.⁹¹ In other words, a singular thing has a durational existence and is determined to exist in a certain way insofar as it is in the common order of nature.⁹² And we can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge of the duration of our body (EIP30) and of the singular things which are outside of us

⁸⁹ “Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity” (EIP28).

⁹⁰ TdIE [100].

⁹¹ EIP30D.

⁹² Although this horizontal infinite causal chain follows from God since from God infinitely many things follow in infinitely many modes (IP16) and following EIP3 it falls under the infinite intellect since God can think infinitely many things in infinitely many ways, what we can grasp from this is only a mutilated extract.

(EIIP31). We cannot possibly *understand* singular things according to the common order of nature, since we cannot possibly know their infinitely many finite causes and we can never have an adequate knowledge of durational existence. Since we have no adequate knowledge of the duration of the singular things (EIIP31), we regard all particular things as contingent (EIIP31C) and we do so only because of a defect in our knowledge—namely, since the order of causes is hidden from us (EI33S) as long as we stay on this horizontal level.

Unlike inadequate ideas, adequate ideas provide a causal understanding of things according to the order of the intellect—that is, *sub specie aeternitatis* (SSA). The phrase *sub specie aeternitatis*, to which we will return in Chapters 2 and 3, indicates a way of knowing singular things by conceiving of them “under the aspect of eternity” or “from the point of view of eternity,” i.e., “without any relation to time.”⁹³ As Spinoza defines it, “To conceive things [SSA] is...to conceive things insofar as they are *conceived through God’s essence*, as real beings, or insofar as through God’s essence they involve existence” (EVP30D, my italics). Only when we consider things SSA can we be said to attain an adequate causal understanding, since only then do we comprehend things in connection to the infinite and eternal essence of their cause—i.e., God.

Spinoza states, “As long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of Nature—that is insofar as the mind perceives things through the ideas of the

⁹³ Throughout this dissertation, I use the Latin phrase *sub specie aeternitatis* (SSA) instead of its widely used translation “under a species of eternity,” except for where the latter occurs in passages quoted from Curley (1985). Holding that ‘sous une espèce d’éternité’ does not quite convey the meaning of the original Latin phrase, Pautrat (1999, 8), who used ‘sous une espèce d’éternité’ for the first two editions of his translation, chose to use ‘sous l’aspect de l’éternité’ for the third edition. Although I use the Latin phrasing throughout my dissertation, I prefer ‘from the point of view of eternity’ and ‘under the aspect of eternity’ to the common translation.

affections of the body—it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies” (EIP29C). If this is the case, what do we do in order to get rid of this mutilated and confused state of mind, which is the main cause of our errors? How then can a human mind, as a finite mode, apprehend the world and itself according to the “order of the intellect”? How can it perceive things in the manner of the infinite intellect? In other words, how can the mind have an adequate knowledge of itself, its own body and of external bodies? The following passage contains a condensed answer to this question:

I say expressly that the mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [NS: mutilated] knowledge, of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of Nature, that is so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is *determined internally*, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For so often as it is disposed internally, in *this* or *another* way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly, as I shall show below. (EIP29S, my italics)

This passage tells us that the mind has adequate knowledge of itself, its own body and of external bodies only so long as it is determined internally. We will see in detail what internal determination of the mind entails in Chapters 2 and 3. For the time being, notice that this passage tells us not only that the mind is determined either (1) externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, or (2) internally—*but also* that the mind is disposed internally in two ways: *either* (2a) from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions, *or* (2b) in another way, which is not stated here by Spinoza but which, in my view, corresponds to the intuitive knowledge. Hence, here, Spinoza is presenting us with three ways in which the

mind is determined, namely, (1), (2a) and (2b), anticipating his account of three kinds of knowledge in EIIP40S2.

1.3.4. Three Kinds of Cognition

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes three kinds of cognition [*cognitio*]: opinion or imagination [*opinio vel imaginatio*], knowledge of the first kind; reason [*ratio*], knowledge of the second kind; and intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*], knowledge of the third kind.⁹⁴ Whereas knowledge of the first kind, which includes cognition due to random experience and imagination, is the only cause of falsity and inadequacy, knowledge of the second and third kinds are necessarily true and adequate. (EIIP41) Knowledge of the second kind arises “from the fact that we have common notions, and adequate ideas of the properties of things.” Combining this with EIIP29S (the passage cited at the end of the previous section), we see that as long as one knows things through knowledge of the second kind, one’s mind is determined internally from the fact that “it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions.” Common notions are said to be the foundations of reasoning (EIIP40S1), and Spinoza calls this second kind of knowledge ‘reason’ (*ratio*). Knowledge of the third kind, i.e. intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*), is “another way” that the mind can be internally determined. It is a “knowing that proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal

⁹⁴ In EIIP40S2, Spinoza presents the ways in which “we perceive many things and form universal notions,” and he introduces his account of three kinds of knowledge.

essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (EIIIP40S2). As we will see later, the highest form of understanding and the ultimate source of blessedness is comprised of the love of God arising from the third kind of knowledge (VP42D).

Knowledge of the first kind can be broadly understood as the initial cognitive stage in which we find ourselves as human beings. It expresses the natural conditions of our existence insofar as we do not start with adequate ideas. In EIIIP40S2 Spinoza presents knowledge of the first kind as coming from two main sources: 1) from a mutilated and confused perception of singular things that have been represented to us through the senses, which Spinoza also calls knowledge from random experience (*experience vaga*), and 2) from signs, such as from the fact that we recollect things through our memory or imagination. As shown earlier, neither memory, imagination or sense perception can provide us with an understanding “following the order of the intellect.” They are all sources of error and inadequate ideas, which are *signs* in that they indicate our actual state and our incapacity to rid ourselves of a trace.⁹⁵ So long as our mind is “determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things,” that is, insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it is passive. Insofar as our mind has “adequate ideas, it necessarily *does* certain things, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it necessarily *undergoes* other things” (EIIIP1, my italics). So whereas knowledge of the first kind, or imaginative cognition, implies passivity of the mind, reason and intuitive knowledge imply the activity—that is, internal determination—of the mind. It is important to see that

⁹⁵ Deleuze (1988, 74).

there is almost a break between the first and the second kinds since adequate ideas and mind's activity begin with the second (EIIIP41 and EIIIP42). In other words, one manages to have adequate ideas through the production of common notions, which represents a breaking point from our initial, natural condition (which determines that we have only inadequate ideas). The distinction between knowledge of the first kind and other types of knowledge is clear once one appreciates Spinoza's distinction between inadequacy and adequacy. And once one understands the adequate/inadequate distinction, one can explain the respective distinctions between truth and falsity, activity and passivity, internal and external determination of the mind, completeness and incompleteness of an idea, and finally understanding things SSA, i.e. according to *the Order of the Intellect* and perceiving things durationally following *the Common Order of Nature*.

Whereas inadequate ideas pertain to “knowledge of the first kind” in Spinoza's taxonomy of knowledge, adequate ideas concern what he calls “knowledge of the second kind or reason” (*rationem*) and “knowledge of the third kind, or intuitive knowledge” (*scientia intuitiva*).⁹⁶ Reason and intuitive knowledge are thus two kinds of knowledge through which we can understand things SSA. To the extent that we get to know things by way of these two adequate kinds of cognition, rather than being “determined externally by fortuitous encounters,” our mind is “determined *internally*” according to the order of the intellect (EIIIP29S, my italics). As what we have said so far clearly suggests, reason and intuitive knowledge are closer to one another than either is to the first kind.

⁹⁶ Note that among three kinds of knowledge, intuitive knowledge is the only one on which Spinoza bestows the honorific title ‘scientia’.

Yet, despite these commonalities, these two superior kinds of knowledge are not equal. “The greatest virtue of the mind” (EVP25) and “the greatest human perfection” (EVP27D) consist in understanding things by intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza clearly regards as the best, most powerful and most desirable kind of the three, and hence superior to reason.

Why and on what grounds does Spinoza regard intuitive knowledge as superior to reason? The answer to this question is crucial to understanding not only his epistemological but also his ethical theory, since for Spinoza there is an intrinsic relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the good life.⁹⁷ However, due to Spinoza’s limited treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*, the nature of this superiority is not clear. As Wilson points out, explaining how Spinoza understands the “third kind of knowledge”—or for that matter, the second—is a serious problem.⁹⁸ The aim of this dissertation is to take steps towards solving this problem by offering an interpretation of the second and the third kinds of knowledge and the ways in which they differ.

⁹⁷ As Wilson (1996, 90) puts it, “Spinoza simply is not a ‘modern’ (‘post-Cartesian’) thinker, if this designation implies accepting a merely extrinsic or instrumental relation between the pursuit of human knowledge and the achievement of personal happiness, both in ordinary life and in relation to the prospect of eternity.”

⁹⁸ Wilson (ibid, 132).

Chapter 2

Reason and Intuitive Knowledge: Foundations and Methodologies

After providing the definitions of reason and intuitive knowledge in EIIP40S2,¹ Spinoza goes on to offer an example meant to illustrate his proposed division of knowledge:

Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher without any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the demonstration of P19 in Book VII of Euclid, namely, from the common property of proportionals. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second. (EIIP40S2)

This illustration brings out the differences in *method* between the three kinds of knowledge by depicting the four ways that we may come to know what the fourth number is.² The first two ways present us with two sub-kinds of imagination.³ More

¹ As shown in Chapter 1, Spinoza introduces his definitions of reason and intuitive knowledge in EIIP40S2: “It is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions...from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things. This I shall call reason (*rationem*) and the second kind of knowledge. In addition...there is (as I shall show in what follows) another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things.”

² Spinoza presents different versions of the division among the three kinds of knowledge in the *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being* (KV2, I-II), in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE [18-29]) and in the *Ethics* (EIIP40S2). Despite the differences, there is one feature of Spinoza’s

important for the present discussion, however, are the last two ways of knowing the fourth number, which correspond to reason and intuitive knowledge, respectively. According to Spinoza's example, we have knowledge of the second kind just in case our knowledge is based on the proof of Proposition 19 in Book 7 of Euclid's *Elements*. Thanks to Euclid's proof, we know which numbers are proportional, and we discover the fourth number through our understanding of the common property of proportionals. In short, reason consists in applying our understanding of the common property of proportionals in order to determine the value of the fourth number. By contrast, for knowledge of the third kind, one has an *immediate insight* into the solution without any demonstration required, such as might occur when the problem involves very simple numbers.

Having seen Spinoza's definitions of reason and intuitive knowledge in the previous chapter, and the mathematical example that is supposed to illustrate this division of knowledge above, we may now consider what exactly the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge consists in. I will provide a more systematic

division that is preserved with little variation in each version: the use of an example from mathematics. For an interpretation of different versions of the division among three kinds of knowledge, see Curley (1973a), and Carr (1978).

³ First, we may have been taught by someone to employ the following rule: multiply the second number by the third, and divide the product by the first. If we simply apply this rule because this is what we have been told to do without having been given any reason or demonstration, then our knowledge is what Spinoza calls knowledge from signs [*ex signis*]. This is one sub-kind of the first kind of knowledge, one variety of imagination. If, on the other hand, we have tested the rule by performing calculations with it in simple cases where the answer is obvious, or if our teacher has done this for us, or if we have discovered the rule ourselves by generalizing from such simple cases, then our knowledge is what Spinoza calls knowledge from vagrant experience [*experientia vaga*]. This is the second sub-kind of the first kind of knowledge, another variety of imagination. Curley (1973a, 27-28).

comparative analysis of reason and intuitive knowledge in the next chapter. Here, I lay the groundwork for this analysis to come by starting with the foundations and methodologies of these two kinds of adequate knowledge. I begin in Section I with an account of common notions, which, according to Spinoza, are the foundations of reasoning. Then, I show the process by which knowledge of the second kind is attained by way of common notions. I follow a similar structure in Section II: I first provide an account of the foundation of intuitive knowledge—knowledge of God or Idea of God—by examining the complex status that the Idea of God has in Spinoza’s system. Next, I look at the inferential process involved in intuitive knowledge. Despite the fact that in the mathematical example above Spinoza likens the experience of intuitive knowledge to an immediate grasp of the truth “in one glance,” intuitive knowledge, as I will show in this section, consists in *inferring* from the given knowledge of God the adequate knowledge of the essences of things.

2.1. Reason

2.1.1. The Foundation of Reason: Common Notions

In the *Ethics* Spinoza holds that we attain reason or knowledge of the second kind “from the fact that we have *common notions* and adequate ideas of properties of things” (EIP40S2, my italics). This description is significant in that it introduces a new concept that was not present in Spinoza’s earlier works—that is, the concept of a *common notion*.⁴

To give a preliminary definition, common notions are adequate ideas that represent the

⁴ Although Spinoza’s earlier works have contributed to a significant degree to his epistemology, it is only in the *Ethics* that we are presented with the theory of common notions.

common properties of bodies. They are central to our understanding of reason since they are “the foundations of our reasoning”⁵ from which knowledge of the second kind arises. To be more specific, our passage from knowledge of the first kind to that of the second kind—that is, from mind’s passivity to its activity—can be possible only through common notions. Despite their critical role within his mature theory of knowledge in the *Ethics*, Spinoza is very brief in his exposition of common notions. Nevertheless, we are not totally at a loss if we can grasp, through the brevity of his account, (1) what common notions are *not*, and (2) the real aspect of nature that they express.

(1) A good place to start in order to understand what common notions are is to show what they are *not*. Although common notions are general ideas, it is vital that we do not confuse this generality with the abstractness of other⁶ universal concepts. So we will start by noting that common notions are *not* abstract concepts. In the *Ethics* Spinoza specifically talks about two kinds of abstract concepts: transcendentals and universals.⁷ As he states in EIIP40S1, transcendentals—namely, concepts like Being, Thing, and Something—arise from a complete confusion in the mind due to the fact that the image-

⁵ EIIP40S1.

⁶ I say “other” since, as we will see shortly, common notions are also universal concepts.

⁷ Although Spinoza suggests in EIIP40S1 that “some axioms, or notions result from other causes” rather than common notions, he explores only the universals and transcendentals in the *Ethics*. Since Spinoza does not present any other notions or axioms in the *Ethics*, Gueroult (1974, 363) suggests a classification of what Spinoza might have had in his mind by referring to *Cogitata Metaphysica*: 1) Time, number, and measure which are useful and common to all men, but badly founded (*mal fondées*) since they arise from the imaginative fiction of discontinuity. 2) Good, order, and perfect, which are badly founded since they are caused by a comparison among the things that are imaginatively perceived and by reference to a general idea; but nevertheless useful to all mankind. 3) Limit, figure, etc. which are also badly founded since they confer a reality, which is nothing but a negation. But they, too, are useful.

forming capacity of the body is greatly exceeded by the images. To be more specific, for Spinoza the human body, being limited, is capable of forming distinctly only a certain number of images⁸ at the same time. If that number is exceeded it gives rise to a confusion within the images. If that number is *greatly* exceeded,

...the images will all be completely confused with one another...and when the images in the body are *completely confused*, the mind also will imagine all the bodies confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute, namely under the attribute of Being, Thing, and so forth. (EIIIP40S1, my italics)

The transcendentals thus formed signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree since they reflect the intellect's inability to make distinctions. The case is similar for "those notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog and the like" since they, too, have arisen from similar causes—that is, because so many images are formed at one time in the human body that they surpass the power of imagining. Although the confusion is not absolute here as in the case of the transcendentals,⁹ the power of imagining is surpassed to the point where the mind cannot capture the small differences between individuals. Take, for instance, the universal "Man." In this case, for Spinoza, since the mind cannot imagine the slight differences of the singular men such as the size or color of each one or their determinate number, all it can imagine distinctly is "what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body." Insofar as the imagination overlooks differences

⁸ Here Spinoza refers us to EIIIP17S for his explanation of what an image is. In EIIIP17S, Spinoza states that "the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things...And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines." As we have seen in Chapter 1, imagination can never be a source of adequate knowledge for Spinoza, since it can never reflect the order of the intellect.

⁹ Gueroult (1974, 370, n.100) notes that due to the absolute confusion involved in the transcendentals, Spinoza calls them 'terms', whereas universals, which involve a lesser confusion, are called 'notions'.

among the outwardly similar bodies, it forms abstractions on the basis of these imagined agreements. The word ‘man’ is such an abstract concept based on a variable perceptible characteristic that strikes our imagination.¹⁰ Importantly neither the imagined agreement nor the concept representing it is *real*. They are both abstract, variable and may change from person to person. To be more specific:

..it should be noted that these notions are not formed by all in the same way, but vary from one to another, in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by, and what the mind imagines or recollects more easily. For example, those who have more often regarded men’s stature with wonder will understand by the word man an animal of erect stature. But those who have been accustomed to consider something else will form another common image of men—for example, that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a *rational animal*. (EIP40S1, my italics)

This is a good place to introduce an important caveat regarding abstract ideas. According to Spinoza an abstract idea such as “rational animal” arises when our capacity of being affected is exceeded and we are content with imagining instead of comprehending. As Deleuze notes, there is an important connection between such abstract ideas and fiction.¹¹ This is because, to the extent that an abstraction consists in explaining things by means of images, it presupposes fiction.¹² In Spinoza’s words, fictions arise from the mind’s power of feigning and,

¹⁰ In EIP49S2, in the context of Spinoza’s refutation of the doctrine of the freedom of the will, he introduces an important distinction between an idea, or concept of the mind, and the images of things which we imagine. In addition to this distinction, which we already explained in Chapter 1, he presents yet another distinction by warning his readers to distinguish between ideas and the *words* by which we signify things. He states that many people either completely confuse these three—ideas, images, and words—or do not distinguish them accurately enough. The main problem with images and words for Spinoza is that their essences are “constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought.”

¹¹ Deleuze (1988, 44).

¹² For Spinoza’s account of how fiction is different from true ideas, see TdIE [52-65].

...the less the mind understands and the more things it perceives, the greater its power of feigning is; and the more things it understands, the more that power is diminished...the less men know Nature, the more easily they can feign many things, such as, that trees speak, that men are changed in a moment into stones and into springs, that nothing becomes something, that even gods are changed into beasts and into men and infinitely many other things of that kind. (TdIE 58)

It is important to note, however, that, for Spinoza, not all abstractions are fictions.

We see this clearly in his treatment of the abstractions involved in idealizations:

Things like [a candle burning where there are no bodies] are sometimes supposed, although *this last is clearly understood to be impossible*. But when this happens, nothing at all is feigned ... *Here, then, there is no fiction, but true and sheer assertions*. (TdIE 57, my italics)

Spinoza thus believes that sober and literal truths can be expressed in terms of idealizations.¹³ These idealizations, although they are impossible, are accepted by him not as “fictitious ideas” but as “true and sheer assertions” (TdIE 57). In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza gives a name to such ideas: “being of reason” (*entia rationis*). Beings of reason, for Spinoza, “are in our intellect and not in Nature; so these are only our work, and they help us to understand things distinctly” (KV1, X). In the same work Spinoza calls the idea of a *perfect man* in our intellect a ‘being of reason’ “that could be a cause of our seeing (when we examine ourselves) whether we have any means of arriving at such perfection” (KV2, IV). Beings of reason, such as the idea of a perfect man, are thus abstract and ideal constructs whose function is to aid in our reasoning.¹⁴ Importantly,

¹³ See Garrett (1996, 313, n.31) for a very useful footnote regarding Spinoza’s usage of limiting cases.

¹⁴ Gueroult (1974, 376) states that geometric beings can be considered as another example of being of reason. This is because, unlike the beings of imagination, the geometric figures proceed from reason and they have a foundation in nature. Although the geometric figures do not correspond to a separate existence outside of us in nature like the beings of imagination, they are born from an operation of the intellect,

even though beings of reason are abstract, they differ from fictitious abstractions that are the products of our imagination, such as Aristotle's notion of "rational animal." Unlike fictitious abstractions, which are fictitious and subjective, beings of reason are objective and legitimate abstractions. This is because, unlike fictitious abstractions, they are the product of our reason. Even though Spinoza does not give an account of "beings of reason" in the *Ethics*,¹⁵ he does make use of ideals, including, most importantly, "the free man" in Part IV. We shall see the ethical significance of the ideal of the free man in Chapter 5.

Going back to our discussion of Spinoza's assessment of Scholastic terms such as Universals and Transcendentals, what he opposes here is not universality *per se*. Martial Gueroult expresses this point by marking a difference between illusory universality and objective universality.¹⁶ Whereas, as we will see, the common notions express an

whereas the beings of imagination are born out of confusion of the cerebral traces. It is an act of intellect by which reason determines extension by motion and constructs a priori the entities genetically conceivable. (TdIE, App.1) Whereas the definitions of the general concepts (animal, man, etc) change from person to person, their definitions are necessary and universal, they remain unchangeable, expressing a structure essential to things. Also, these notions have a plain objective value, since while constructing them, reason obeys the rules commanded by the immanent properties of extension and motion common to all singular things. That is why, although there is no perfect triangle or circle in nature, and these geometric beings are beings of reason rather than the beings of physically real, these beings of reason are not pure phantoms but they have a certain essence or nature having a certain reality in itself. They are comprised from the eternity in the nature of God, belonging to the divine intellect, as "eternal truth" and conceived by the divine understanding. Remember that from God's infinite power or nature "all things have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle it follows, from eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles" (EIP17S1).

¹⁵ In the *Ethics*, the term "being of reason" appears only once in EIP49S (G II/ 135), as Spinoza says "...the thing to note above all, is how easily we are deceived when we confuse universals with singulars, and beings of reason and abstractions with real beings." He distinguishes beings of reason from real beings in a very similar way in Letter 83 to Tschirnhaus, (G IV/ 335).

¹⁶ Gueroult (1974, 387). Yovel (1994, 98, 10) distinguishes genera and transcendentals from common notions by calling the former the illegitimate universals, and the latter legitimate universals.

objective universality, the Scholastic notions such as kinds and species present us with a solely *illusory universality*. Aristotle's definition of man as "rational animal," for instance, is deeply problematic for Spinoza since it is an instance of such an illusory universality.¹⁷ This is because it involves a confusion—namely, that far from expressing the essence of man as Aristotle and the Aristotelians thought, *rational animal* merely reflects what a particular individual happens to regard as important, which, in turn, is a function of the condition of that individual's body.¹⁸ In other words, concepts such as Aristotelian "species" do not retain from things anything real, but only the confused and variable residue of impressions that they leave on the particular bodies.¹⁹ This is a general problem of Scholastic concepts such as Transcendentals and Universals, which are proper to imagination, unlike common notions, which are proper to reason. Hence these Scholastic concepts can only yield what Spinoza calls knowledge of the first kind.²⁰ By contrast, Spinoza's common notions yield knowledge of the second kind, or reason, as we

¹⁷ As I will argue in connection with Spinoza's construal of human nature in Chapters 3 and 5, although he is famously known to oppose the Aristotelian conception of the human nature as "rational animal" on the grounds that it is a fictitious abstraction, he nonetheless maintains that rationality is a distinctive mark of humanity.

¹⁸ Allison (1987, 116). Note that "rational animal" is an instance of illusory universality since, as shown earlier, it is one of those notions that "are not formed by all in the same way, but vary from one to another, in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by, and what the mind imagines or recollects more easily" (EIIIP40S1).

¹⁹ See Gueroult (1974, 372-3) for a comparative account of Spinoza and Descartes concerning the production of general concepts, such as universals.

²⁰ As shown in Chapter 1, knowledge of the first kind corresponds to two distinct ways in which such notions can be formed: namely, either from the confused perception of particular things as they are encountered in experience (called "experience from random experience"), or from signs, which include both sensory and memory images.

will see. The common notions are to these Scholastic concepts as being is to non-being and true is to false. They are not variable and confused, but are necessarily adequate and clear and distinct ideas. Having shown what common notions are not, let us now look at what they in fact are.

(2) Common notions are general ideas that represent properties common to bodies, either to all bodies or to some bodies (at least two, mine and another).²¹ Hence, these ideas fall into two classes corresponding to two levels of generality: “general common notions” and “specific common notions.”²² Spinoza introduces the former in EIIP38, which reads: “Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.” In other words, those things which are “common to all things,” of which we have “common notions,” are properties of which we also have adequate ideas. Although the scope of this proposition is universal in the sense that it pertains to “those things, which are common to *all*,” in its demonstration only what is “common to all bodies” is taken into consideration:

Let A be something which is common to all bodies, and which is equally in the part of each body and in the whole. I say that A can only be conceived adequately. For its idea (by P7C) will necessarily be adequate in God, both insofar as he has the idea of the human body and insofar as he has ideas of its affections, which (by P16, P25, and P27) involve in part both the nature of the human body and that of external bodies. That is (by P12 and P13) this idea will necessarily be adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the human mind, *or* insofar as he has ideas that are in the human mind. The mind, therefore (by P11C), necessarily perceives A adequately, and does so both insofar as it perceives itself and insofar as it

²¹ Deleuze (1988, 54).

²² Note that Spinoza does not make such a distinction between general common notions and specific common notions. Nevertheless, I employ this distinction since I believe that it sheds some light on his views.

perceives its own or any external body. Nor can A be conceived in another way, q.e.d.

Following this passage we see that *A* is not something that pertains to a particular body as such. On the contrary, being “common to all” and “equally in the part and in the whole,” it is something *shared* by all bodies. In the Corollary to EIIP38 Spinoza tells us that there really are *As*—that is, “certain things” in which all bodies agree. Now, what can be an example of such a thing that is shared by all bodies and which is “equally in the part and in the whole” of each body? At EIIP13L2 Spinoza gives *motion and rest* as an example of what is common to all bodies. To be more specific, he states that all bodies agree in that “they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest” (EIIL2D). *Extension* is another example of such a thing, which is common to all bodies. Since a body is a mode that expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (EIID1), by this definition all bodies and every part of every body agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute—that is, extension. Even though Spinoza does not explicitly say it, these examples suggest that general common notions indicate attributes and infinite modes.²³

According to Spinoza, the mind necessarily perceives *A* adequately insofar as it perceives itself, its own body or any external body (by EIIP11C).²⁴ To put it in more

²³ As we will see in the next chapter, it is thanks to these examples that Curley (1973a, 51) interprets reason as the knowledge of the attributes, such as extension, and of infinite modes such as motion and rest, and construes the laws of motion as examples of a common notion.

²⁴ See Chapter 1 for an account of this very important corollary: “Hence it follows that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; and therefore when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing else but this: that God—not insofar as he is infinite but insofar as he is explicated through the nature of the human mind, that is insofar as he constitutes the essence of human mind—has this

simple terms, since properties such as motion-and-rest and extension are present in all bodies, they will be present in all our experience of bodies, and from this—Spinoza thinks—it follows that they can only be adequately conceived, i.e. that our ideas of extension and motion and rest must necessarily be adequate.²⁵

As stated earlier, common notions differ in their relative generality. In addition to notions representing properties that are shared by *all* existing bodies, including “extension” and “motion and rest” (EIIIL2D), there are “certain ideas, or notions, common to *all men*” (EIIP38C, my italics), but not to *all things*. In other words, in addition to common notions representing “things which are common to all,” there are common notions representing properties which are common to *some* things to the exclusion of others, as we see in EIIP39:

If something is common to, and *peculiar* to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind (my italics).²⁶

or that idea. And when we say that God has this or that idea not only insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind but also insofar as he has the idea of another thing simultaneously with the human mind, then we are saying that the human mind perceives a thing partially or inadequately.”

²⁵ Curley (1973a, 50).

²⁶ The demonstration of EIIP39 reads as follows: “Let A be that which is *common to, and peculiar to*, the human body and certain external bodies, which is equally in the human body and in the same external bodies, and finally, which is equally in the part of each external body and in the whole. There will be an adequate idea of A in God (by P7C), both insofar as he has the idea of the human body, and insofar as he has ideas of the posited external bodies. Let it be posited now that the human body is affected by an external body through what it has in common with it, that is by A; the idea of this affection, insofar as it involves property A, will be adequate in God insofar as he is affected with the idea of the human body, that is (by P13), insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind. And so (by P11C), the idea is also adequate in the human mind, q.e.d.” As the demonstration shows, this time A signifies some property that is common and peculiar to a group of bodies, to the exclusion of others” (my italics).

It is interesting to note that in Part II of his *Ethics*, Spinoza never gives examples of “specific common notions” (unlike general common notions). Yet, taking into consideration the fact that he uses the notion of human nature in close connection with reason in Part IV, it is reasonable to conceive of “human nature” or “humanity” as an example of a specific common notion, one which represents the properties that are common and distinctive to human beings and stipulates conditions for a mode’s being a human being. The specific common notion of human nature will be relevant to our discussion of the connection between reason and shared essences in Chapter 3.

The common properties represented by common notions of two levels of generality correspond to two sorts of bodies that physics distinguishes: simple bodies (*corpora simplicissima*) and composite bodies (*corpora composita*).²⁷ Properties that are common to all bodies such as extension and motion-and-rest are those of the simple bodies, and hence they are the simplest properties. Nevertheless, they equally pertain to composite bodies, such as the human body, insofar as composite bodies are formed of simple bodies. So the properties that the general common notions represent are absolutely universal in the extended universe.²⁸ The properties that the specific common notions represent, on the other hand, are the ones common and *peculiar to some* composite bodies but not to all of them. Thus, parallel to the hierarchy of the composite bodies—or Individuals—there exists a hierarchy of common and peculiar properties, of a decreasing generality and increasing complexity. On the top of this hierarchy we find the properties

²⁷ Gueroult (1974, 338-9).

²⁸ According to Gueroult (1974, 338), the ideas of these properties are the most simple common notions, or common notions of the primary degree.

pertaining to the complex human bodies. Correlative to these properties, there exists a hierarchical system of common notions of a decreasing generality and increasing complexity constituted by the ideas of these properties.

Regardless of their generality or complexity, common notions are always anchored in the shared properties of the bodies.²⁹ In other words, common notions are so named primarily because they represent something common to bodies.³⁰ These common properties are not imagined agreements that are represented by abstract concepts such as transcendentals or universals.³¹ They are *real* relations of agreement or composition among existing bodies, and hence they are a real aspect of extended nature that is represented by common notions, which, in turn, are a real aspect of thinking nature.

At this point we should recall the parallelism doctrine of EIIP7, which reads “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” When we try to understand the common notions in light of the parallelism doctrine we see that the common properties of things and their ideas—that is, common notions—are in fact one and the same thing expressing the same real aspect of nature, which is conceived now under the attribute of extension, now under the attribute of thought. So just like the circle and its idea, or a human body and human mind, common properties and common notions

²⁹ Since in EIIP37-39 Spinoza uses ‘thing’ and ‘body’ interchangeably, it seems that common notions are the adequate ideas of things—that is, bodies. Yet, following the famous EIIP7 guaranteeing the parallelism of things and ideas, we can, presumably, conclude that just as there are common notions concerning bodies, so too are there common notions that concern ideas or minds.

³⁰ Deleuze (1988, 54).

³¹ Yet, as we will see towards the end of this chapter, according to Spinoza imagination can sometimes facilitate rather than obstruct common notions by adding to their intellectual evidence some sensible evidence. See EIIP47S for this claim.

of parallel modes of different attributes are one and the same thing explained through different attributes.

What does all this suggest about the distribution of common notions? Are the general common notions absolutely universal in the thinking universe just as the properties that they represent are absolutely universal in the extended universe? To be more specific, if it is a property of all bodies (including the simplest ones) to be extended, is the idea of this property in all minds? Are the most general common notions inherent to all minds in virtue of their being minds—that is, are they intrinsic to every mind, meaning the idea of each and every body? Although Spinoza does not give a definitive answer to this question, I believe that it is safe to hold that general common notions are inherent to all thinking nature, not only to human minds.³² Yet, it is crucial to remember that Spinoza notes that not all ideas are equal and that the idea of a human body is different from the idea of a desk, for instance, insofar as its object is more capable than the latter of doing many things at once (EIIIP13S).³³ So as we have stated before, what is special to the human mind is connected to the complexity of human body and its various capacities to affect and to be affected, thanks to which human mind has more complex and developed capacities of perception (including memory, imagination, affectivity and self-awareness). It is due to the lack of these developed capacities that in the minds of the

³² Recall that for Spinoza human minds are ontologically on a par with other minds: “The things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless *animate*. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human body [i.e. the human mind]” (EIIIP13S, my italics).

³³ “In proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at one, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once” (EIIIP13S).

beasts (*bruta*), for instance, common notions are bound to rest latent; although the beasts have access to sentiments, they cannot reason.³⁴

In our human mind, on the other hand, common notions are the foundations of our reasoning and give rise to the production of other adequate ideas insofar as we manage to use them and, thereby, make their adequate knowledge explicit. In order to define knowledge of the second kind, Spinoza states that “we perceive many things and form universal notions from the fact that we *have* common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of the things” (EIIIP40S2; my italics). But how do we *have* these common notions to begin with? It is striking that Spinoza does not talk about the formation of common notions in Part II of the *Ethics*. He solely makes it clear that (1) we have certain common notions: “there are certain ideas or notions common to all *men*” (EIIIP38C), and (2) common notions are necessarily adequate ideas.³⁵

It is tempting to see common notions as innate ideas, due to their *a priori* nature and foundational function vis-à-vis reason.³⁶ Descartes and Leibniz have famously appealed to the theory of innate ideas in order to explain the foundations of our rational knowledge. Their basic claim was that our knowledge of necessary and universal truths cannot be derived from experience. On the contrary, they thought that the sources of such

³⁴ In EIIIP57S Spinoza states that “The affects of the animals, which are called irrational (for after we know the origin of the mind, we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things) differ from men’s affects as much as their nature differs from human nature.”

³⁵ As shown earlier, the adequacy of the common notions is established by the Corollary to EIIIP11 in the demonstrations of both EIIIP38 and EIIIP39.

³⁶ Herman De Dijn (1996, 226), for instance, thinks that this is Spinoza’s version of the Cartesian idea that in every perception there are clear and distinct ideas of the fundamental common characteristics of all things and of all bodies. He states that these common notions are undoubtedly notions like cause-effect, thing-property, whole-part, essence-existence, motion-rest, extension, and figure.

knowledge must lie in the mind and reflect its very structure, and that only this can account for its necessity and universality.³⁷ Hence, innate ideas were viewed as dispositions that pertain universally to the human mind, but of which any given individual is not necessarily conscious.³⁸ Spinoza's conception of the mind as the idea of the body does not allow him to distinguish, in the manner of Descartes, between innate and adventitious ideas—that is, between those that come from the mind and those that come from external bodies.³⁹ Yet, it does allow him to make an analogous distinction: namely, that between ideas that are correlated with specific features of particular bodies and those whose correlates are common to all bodies or some bodies. And, as Allison states, this distinction leads to much the same result. Common notions correspond to what is common to all bodies, and the mind possesses them in their totality and understands them adequately. So Spinoza's common notions, like the innate ideas of Descartes and Leibniz, are common to all human minds (EIP38C) and they are the foundation of rational knowledge.⁴⁰

³⁷ As Allison (1987, 113) notes, this theory was not construed in a naïve psychological sense—that is, it was not held, as some critics of the theory (the most famous of which was Locke) seemed to think, that either the infant or the untutored savage, who were favorites of the philosophical literature of the time, were actually conscious of the “true concept of God” or the basic principles of mathematics.

³⁸ As Descartes expressed the matter in response to a critique: “For I never wrote or concluded that the mind required innate ideas which were in some sort different from its faculty of thinking, but when I observed the existence in me of certain thoughts which proceeded, not from extraneous objects nor from the determination of my will, but solely from the faculty of thinking which is within me, then I might distinguish the ideas or notions (which are the forms of these thoughts) from other thoughts adventitious or factitious, I termed the former ‘innate.’ In the same sense we say that in some families generosity is innate, in others certain diseases like gout or gravel, not that on this account the babes of these families suffer from these diseases in their mother’s womb, but because they are born with a certain disposition or propensity for contracting them.” (Descartes, “Notes against a Program,” in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, p.442.)

³⁹ Allison (1987, 113).

⁴⁰ Allison (1987, 113-4).

Although it makes sense to liken or even identify Spinoza's common notions to, or even identify them with, innate ideas, we have to be careful and clear about one thing: even if the common notions are identified with innate ideas, there is still a sense in which common notions are *formed*.⁴¹ And forming a common notion involves not just perceiving properties common to all or some existing bodies, but also their active comprehension. We form common notions insofar as we *perceive* the real agreements among the singular things existing in extended nature of which our body is a part. In this sense, common notions are drawn from nature of which we are a part.⁴² Having said that, it is easy to see why Spinoza's theory of the genesis of common notions makes him the most empirically oriented thinker among the rationalists.⁴³ In Delahunty's words,

The concepts involved in framing common notions are plainly not innate in any crude sense: if [Spinoza] cannot say that experience *induces* us to form them (since that would contravene his denial of interaction...), he would still have to concede that the experience of outer bodies *occasions* these ideas to arise in us. There is thus an empirical element in the common notions.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Deleuze (1992, 280).

⁴² Yovel (1994, 97-8) states that the autonomy of reason is exercised by "drawing its ideas from nature," though this does not require passing through particulars but instead is accomplished directly by grasping the law-like patterns inscribed in the universe. In order to show the textual source of "drawing its ideas from nature," Yovel (ibid, 98, n.10) quotes a passage from TTP, end of Ch. 14 with his translation and emphasis: "Common notions are the foundations of Philosophy and should be *drawn from nature alone*" (as against the foundations of Faith which should be drawn from the Bible alone).

⁴³ Yovel (1994, 97).

⁴⁴ Delahunty (1985, 75). To support his point, Delahunty also notes another important passage from EIIP47S that I will explore later in this chapter: "...our knowledge of common notions is (startlingly) said to be 'clearer' than our knowledge of such philosophical truths as the infinity and eternity of God, (EIIP47S). Our power to visualize bodies (a power stemming from the imagination, and ultimately from the fact that we ourselves are embodied) makes it easier for us to grasp the most general features of bodies; whereas God's infinity and eternity, being essentially undepictable, can be seized only by the intellect (which holds itself aloof from the body: II,3)."

Despite this empiricist orientation, however, Spinoza is a thoroughgoing rationalist as we see from the fact that, for him, the mind's *perceiving* "many things at once" does not automatically lead to a clear and distinct understanding of "their agreements, differences and oppositions" (EIP29S). On the contrary, it usually leads to confused ideas, as we have seen in the case of Scholastic concepts. How then can we perceive "many things at once" and understand "distinctly"? We can do this only if we make the adequate knowledge of the common notions in us explicit. To this end, we should be able to not only perceive but also *comprehend* these real agreements among bodies such that our mind is actively ordering its *own* thoughts without the influence of any sort of external determination.

To conclude, even if the common notions are the central features of the human mind that pertain to the mind as a thinking thing, we still need to *form* or activate them. Importantly, just possessing common notions does not guarantee that one will effectively develop rational capacities. It depends on the success with which the mind can develop adequate thinking, being "disposed internally" to understand "the agreements, differences and oppositions between the things."⁴⁵ Internal determination of the mind by its own powers in this way—that is, the fact that it uses the ideas that are generated by itself—paves the way to the self-sufficiency and autonomy of reason. Only when we actively use the common notions that we possess can we be said to really *have* them in a non-latent way and attain knowledge of the second kind, which brings us to the topic of our next section.

⁴⁵ De Dijn (1996, 227).

2.1.2. The Methodology of Reason: How Do We Attain Knowledge of the Second Kind?

The answer to the question posed by the above section heading is simple: We attain knowledge of the second kind through common notions. In other words, reason is knowledge *by way of* common properties. Since the “things we understand clearly and distinctly are either common properties of things or deduced from them” (EVP12D), it makes sense to see reason as the *sequence* of adequate ideas following from general and specific common notions. In order to have see how this happens, we first have to take into consideration the fact that the second kind of knowledge must always come *second* to our initial condition determining us to have only inadequate ideas. In what follows, after showing how, thanks to reason, we ascend from a mutilated and confused perception of things to a clear and distinct perception of things *by* their common properties, I will elaborate on the connection between reason and causal understanding in order to better understand the nature of this ascent.

2.1.2.1. Reason as Removal of Error

Given that our original cognitive stance is error, *ratio*, I hold, is essentially the correction of error, its removal and replacement by adequate ideas.⁴⁶ We have already seen in Chapter 1 that the main cause of error and confusion for Spinoza stems from mind’s

⁴⁶ Yovel (1994, 93).

dependence on the ideas of particular affections of the body. The main problem with such dependence is that the ideas of affections of the body represent not only what happens to our body, but also a mixing of the natures of both bodies—that is, our body coupled with the affecting body. In other words, the ideas of affections of the body reflect the condition of the body in its interplay with the environment, rather than the true nature of the connection of things. Confusing the former with the latter leads the mind to fall into error.

According to Spinoza, the mind does not know itself, its own body or external bodies except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of its body (EIIP23, P19 and P26). But insofar as it has these ideas, then neither of itself (by P29), nor of its own body (by P27) nor of external bodies (by P25) does it have an adequate knowledge, but only (by P28 and P28S) a mutilated and confused knowledge—which is knowledge of the first kind. Thus the inadequate ideas of the affections of the body derived from ordinary sense experience are never complete. Although some thoughts and concepts—like the Scholastic concepts—occur in the mind as the result of body’s affection by external bodies, they represent the common order of nature, not the order of the intellect. As shown in Chapter 1, as long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of nature, “it does not have adequate knowledge, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge, of itself, of its own body and of external bodies” (EIIP29C).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of the “common order of nature” and how it differs from the “order of the intellect” see sub-section 1.3.3 in Chapter 1. As shown there, the transitive causation pertaining to the finite modes presents us with “the common order of Nature and the constitution of things,” which is the infinite network of finite causes and finite effects (EIP28). According to the common order of Nature, any singular thing implicates all other things to infinity. Hence, if one wants to know x, since to know x is to know its causes, one has to know an infinity of finite causes if one wants to have an adequate knowledge of x. Being

To the extent that imaginative knowledge and reason pertain to the common order of nature and the order of the intellect respectively, there is almost a break between them. Nonetheless, common notions and imaginative ideas are connected in an important way insofar as they are both related to an actually *existing* human body, although in different ways. Recall that due to Spinoza's construal of human mind as the idea of an *actually existing human body*, it is the human body, or an actually existing human body, which provides the focal point from and through which alone the human mind can perceive its world.⁴⁸ As shown earlier, the experience of outer bodies—namely, the perception of the affection of the actually existing human bodies—*occasions* common notions to arise in us.⁴⁹ We form them with the sole power of mind insofar as we comprehend the properties that are common to all bodies or some bodies in the midst of our imaginative perceptions. So although reason is autonomous and spontaneous, it must not be construed as springing out of nothingness as a skyhook; nor should it seem possible (as it is in Descartes) without there being a world and a body.⁵⁰ There is one nature that we are a part of, and it

the finite minds we are, we can never arrive at clear and distinct ideas so long as we try to understand things on this *horizontal level*, since “it would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things, not only because there are innumerable many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence” (TdIE [100]). That is why, as long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of nature, “it does not have adequate knowledge, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge, of itself, of its own body and of external bodies” (EIIP29C).

⁴⁸ Allison (1987,107).

⁴⁹ R.J.Delahunty (1985, 75).

⁵⁰ Yovel (1994, 96).

is our body—that is, the affections of our body, which provide us with the keys to understand this nature.

Although common notions grasp these properties in the midst of imaginative perceptions or “experiential substrate,”⁵¹ they do not come from these perceptions. Common notions are invested with an absolute epistemological value since they are born from and depend solely on the power of the mind—that is, seeing the reality of things adequately through these images. Just as the cause of error lies in our dependence on the affections of an actually existing human body, which gives rise to a disordered and random thought process, the correction of this error lies in a different construal of these affections, this time in an ordered way—that is, through common notions. In order to better understand this point, take note of two contrasts: (1) between **EIIP28**, which reads: “The ideas of the affections of the human body, insofar as they are related only to the human mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused,” and **EIIP39D**, which tells us that if “the human body is affected by an external body through what it has in common with it, that is by A, the idea of this affection, insofar as it involves property A, will be...adequate in the human mind”; and (2) between **EIIP29C**, which reads “...so long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of Nature, it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its body, and of external bodies,” and **EIIP38D**, which reads “The mind...necessarily perceives A

⁵¹ Yovel (ibid, 98) uses this term by saying that among the questions unanswered by Spinoza’s theory is whether this substrate—or, body’s exposure to the causality of nature—is a condition of *ratio* or merely its counterpart under mind-body parallelism.

adequately, and does so both insofar as it perceives itself and insofar as it perceives its own or any external body.”

As these contrasts highlight, not only what causes error but also what removes error is tied up with the ideas of the affections of our body. There is a way to make the ideas of the affections of the body, and for that matter our knowledge of our mind, body and external bodies adequate, and that way is related to how we consider our body’s affection. Whereas in the case of the imaginative ideas we consider the affection to be caused by that which is *singular* in the affecting body, in the case of common notions we consider the affection to be caused by that which the affecting body has in *common* with the affected body. Rather than being an expression of what is singular to an individual body, a common notion provides us with an understanding of things through their shared aspects, in virtue of which it is an adequate idea. Recall the sun example that Spinoza gives in order to explain fully how error consists in the privation of knowledge.⁵² When we look at the sun, we imagine it as being about two hundred feet away from us. In this example, the error can be removed only if we understand what the sun really is. And we can understand what the sun really is and that it is bigger in reality than we see it only if we apply to our vision of the sun the notion of this property common to all vision, that an object seen from far away is much smaller than it is seen near. To the extent that this

⁵² As stated in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, “Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve” (EIIIP35). According to the Scholium that follows, “When we look at the sun, we imagine it as about two hundred feet away from us, an error which does not consist simply in this imagining, but in the fact that while we imagine it in this way, we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagining. For even if we later come to know that it is more than six hundred diameters of the earth away from us, we nevertheless imagine it as near. For we imagine the sun so near not because we do not know its true distance, but because an affection of our body involves the essence of the sun insofar as our body is affected by the sun.”

property is common to all vision rather than all things, the common notion representing this property would reasonably be considered as a specific common notion rather than a general one. By employing this specific common notion, I perceive the sun “following the order of the intellect” rather than “according to the common order of nature.”

Insofar as the ideas of the affection of a body involve common properties—that is, insofar as mind perceives itself, its body or any external body through common notions instead of ideas of the affections of a *single* body—the mind is determined internally. And this, in turn, means that the mind is guided by its own thoughts, which are ordered in accordance with the order of the intellect. It is in virtue of reason that the errors arising from our initial cognitive condition are removed and we ascend from a mutilated and confused perception of things to a clear and distinct perception of things *by* their common properties. In order to better understand the nature of this ascent, we need to elaborate somewhat on the causal understanding provided by reason.

2.1.2.2. Reason and Causal Understanding

As shown in Chapter 1, we cannot possibly *understand* singular things according to the common order of nature since we cannot possibly know their infinitely many finite causes, and hence we can never have adequate knowledge of this durational existence.⁵³

Since we do not have adequate knowledge of the duration of singular things (EIIP31), we regard all particular things as contingent (EIIP31C). We do so only because of a defect of

⁵³ As we saw in Chapter 1, since a singular thing has a durational existence and is determined to exist in a certain way insofar as it is in the common order of nature, we can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge of the duration of our body (EIIP30) and of the singular things which are outside of us (EIIP31).

our knowledge—namely, since the order of causes is hidden from us (EI33S) as long as we stay on the horizontal level. If this is the case, what do we do in order to overcome this mutilated and confused state of mind, which is the main cause of our errors? In other words, how do we correct for the defects of our knowledge and discover the order of causes hidden from us, and thereby begin to understand according to the order of the intellect? We already know the answer to this question from our previous discussion: we apply our knowledge of the common notions to our perceptions. Instead of dealing with the confused empirical data, we cognize the real agreements in nature so that we can conceive the finite modes through common notions representing real agreements in nature.

Although common notions and imaginative ideas are somewhat related (as shown earlier), there is a radical distinction between them insofar as an imaginative idea is the confused idea of a singular thing existing in duration, while a common notion is the clear and distinct notion of an eternal property shared by some or all bodies.⁵⁴ While our perception of things as contingent depends only on imagination (EIIP44C1), it is of the nature of reason to perceive things truly (EIIP41)—that is, as they are in themselves. What does it mean to perceive things as they are in themselves? It means to perceive them, not as contingent but as necessary, which in turn *implies* that it is the nature of reason to regard things SSA. Understanding this implication is crucial if we are to better understand the ascent made possible thanks to knowledge of the second kind. In the

⁵⁴ Spinoza states that the common notions must be conceived without any relation to time, but under a certain species of eternity in EIIP44C2. It is interesting that Spinoza waits till EIIP44C2 to present the eternal aspect of the common notions instead of doing it in EIIP38 and 39 as he introduces the theory itself.

Demonstration of the Second Corollary to EIIP44, Spinoza states that “since the necessity of things is the very necessity of God’s eternal nature, it is of the nature of reason to regard things under a certain species of eternity.” In other words, it is because of the identification of the necessity of things with the very necessity of God’s eternal nature that perceiving things as necessary implies regarding things SSA. So far so good. But what is the basis of this identification?

The identification of the necessity of things with the very necessity of God’s eternal nature is based on EIP16: “From the necessity of divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes...” We already stated in Chapter 1 that for Spinoza God alone is a free cause,⁵⁵ since he alone exists from the necessity of his nature and acts from the necessity of his nature, namely from the laws of his nature, and is compelled by no one (EIP17, EIP17C2). In nature, there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (EIP29). Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order, than they have been produced (EIP33). Hence, everything that exists is brought into being by God or Nature with a deterministic necessity. What does it all mean? It means that the necessity of things is in fact nothing but the necessity of the eternal nature of God. Insofar as we perceive things through real agreements in nature, we perceive them truly—that is, as necessary and SSA, and we rise above the imaginative perception of things as contingent, thereby removing a huge error.

⁵⁵ Though God is not a free cause because he acts from freedom of the will. As Spinoza explicitly says in EIP32C1 “...God does not produce any effect by the freedom of the will.”

As such, the common notions provide us with a causal understanding of singular things, and thus with the perception of necessity inherent in nature. It is thanks to common notions that we can grasp a thing's causal connections, not only to other objects, but more importantly to the attributes of God and the infinite modes.⁵⁶ Sense experience alone could never provide the information conveyed by common notions, since the senses present things only as they appear from a given perspective at a given moment in time. Common notions allow the mind to “perceive many things” and form “universal notions,” because they enable the mind to represent in a single idea *all* or *some* of the many things that share in a certain property, and to draw conclusions from these adequate and universal representations. Because these representations are adequate, they allow the mind to cognize or infer without danger of error that something is true.⁵⁷

Having elaborated on the nature of the ascent that is made possible thanks to reason, I will conclude this section by summarizing the process by which knowledge of the second kind is attained. I hold that reason consists in applying that which we *know* as a common property to a given singular thing (or given singular things) in order to determine that thing (or those singular things) with respect to that property.⁵⁸ Going back to the mathematical example, reason consists in applying our understanding of the common property of proportionals in order to determine what the fourth number is. It is

⁵⁶ As we noted earlier, among the examples of the properties that are common to all bodies are extension and motion and rest. Thus, among the notions that are common to all men are knowledge of the nature of an attribute, such as extension, and knowledge of the nature of an infinite mode, such as motion and rest. These are both knowledge of something universal, of something common to all bodies.

⁵⁷ Garrett (2010, 108).

⁵⁸ I follow Gueroult in holding this. See Gueroult (1974), section XXXIII.

in this sense that reason is knowledge *by* common properties, thus presupposing knowledge of common notions. Nevertheless, reason includes not only cases where our knowledge of something presupposes knowledge of common notions, but also knowledge of the common notions themselves.⁵⁹ So, as a process it requires that we make explicit/evident knowledge of these common notions—that is, that we perceive or comprehend what is common to actually existing bodies. At the end of the day, as stated in the very beginning of this section, for Spinoza, “things we understand clearly and distinctly are either common properties of things or deduced from them” (EVP12D). So in order to be able to deduce anything from these common properties, we should be in a position to understand them clearly and distinctly. It is in this sense that common notions are the foundations of our reasoning. If we do not *have* this foundation to begin with, we cannot reason. But we do not realize/know that we *have* this foundation unless we build something upon it—that is, unless we try to conceive things through their common properties. So I suggest that the process of reason involves both the formation of common notions and their application to singular things.⁶⁰

The more we have common notions and understand things through these adequate ideas, the better we get at understanding “the agreements, differences and oppositions between the things” and at regarding things as necessary. Since the necessity of things (a common property shared by all) is identical with the necessity of the eternal nature of

⁵⁹ Curley (1973a, 52).

⁶⁰ Recall that we do not *form* common notions in the way abstract concepts are formed, nor are they results of a process of induction from a number of imaginative perceptions. In other words, they are not *abstract* concepts or imaginative ideas. As Deleuze (1992, 281) puts it, common notions are adequate ideas since they are complete, and if we form them we *have* them as God *has* them.

God,⁶¹ by regarding things as necessary, the second kind of knowledge *reaches* the knowledge of God, which, according to Spinoza, is the foundation of intuitive knowledge (EVP20). Rational knowledge of the necessity of things brings us, hence, to “the doorstep of intuitive knowledge.”⁶² The foundation and methodology of intuitive knowledge is the subject of our next section.

2.2. Intuitive Knowledge

Spinoza begins his deduction of intuitive knowledge in EIIP45, right after the demonstration of EIIP44C2, where—as we saw—he identifies the necessity of things with the necessity of the eternal nature of God. In other words, the deduction of intuitive knowledge starts where the deduction of reason ends, suggesting a continuity between these two kinds of knowledge.⁶³ Although Spinoza introduces the deduction of intuitive knowledge in Part II, it is only in Part V of the *Ethics* that he explicitly lays out the foundation for this knowledge. In the Scholium to EVP20 we learn that the *knowledge of God* is precisely that foundation.

How does the “knowledge of God” work as a foundation for this type of knowledge? Even more fundamentally, what does “knowledge of God” entail? In the

⁶¹ Note that from this eternal necessity of God’s nature follows “the force by which each singular thing perseveres in existing”—that it, its *conatus* (EIIP45S). This point will be important when we consider the representative content of intuitive knowledge in the next chapter.

⁶² Gueroult (1974, 413-4) uses this helpful analogy.

⁶³ That there is continuity between reason and intuitive knowledge is also suggested by EVP28, where Spinoza maintains that the desire to know things by the latter arises from the former. For an elaborate account of their mutually reinforcing characters, see Syliane Malinowski-Charles (2004).

very beginning of this dissertation, I noted that Spinoza wants his readers to attain true knowledge of God, and that it is only through intuitive knowledge that one can reach this utmost perfection. The question as to how intuitive knowledge provides us with this perfection has yet to be answered. But there is also another question here: if knowledge of God is something to be attained through intuitive knowledge, then how can knowledge of God be said to be the foundation of intuitive knowledge? To see how, we have to understand what Spinoza means when he refers to knowledge of God as the ground of intuitive knowledge.

As stated earlier, Spinoza defines intuitive knowledge as proceeding “from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (EIIIP40S2)—that is, from adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence to adequate knowledge of what follows from this knowledge in terms of the essences of things. In his deduction of intuitive knowledge, Spinoza states that “the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence,” which is known to all (EIIIP47 and EIIIP47S) and from which we can deduce “a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form the third kind of knowledge, which we spoke in P40S2” (EIIIP47S). But how can we *have* adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence, and deduce what *follows* from this eternal and infinite essence? To do this, we have to have a foundation that will provide us with not only “knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” but also what *follows* from this knowledge. In other words, I hold that we have to interpret “knowledge of God” as “knowledge of God’s essence and of everything following from this essence.”

Once we do so, we will see that *knowledge of God* is nothing but the *idea of God*, which is defined by Spinoza as follows: “In God there is necessarily an idea both of his essence and of everything which necessarily follows from his essence.” So the idea of God is the foundation of intuitive knowledge, and the idea of God is to intuitive knowledge what common notions are to reason.⁶⁴ In what follows, we will see precisely what this idea of God is and how it works as the foundation of intuitive knowledge. After looking at the foundation of knowledge of the third kind, I will elaborate on the methodology of this superior kind of cognition.

2.2.1. The Foundation of Intuitive Knowledge: Idea of God or Infinite Intellect

Let us start by remembering that the idea of God is equivalent to God’s infinite intellect,⁶⁵ and the “infinite intellect” and the “idea of God” cannot be dissociated.⁶⁶ As shown earlier, it is in EIP16 where Spinoza introduces the concept of the “infinite intellect” for the first time: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an *infinite intellect*).” Thus all that “can fall under *infinite intellect*” follows from the necessity of God’s divine essence, and the infinite intellect comprehends nothing except God’s attributes and affections (EIP30). The infinite intellect or the idea of God

⁶⁴ Gueroult (1974, 416).

⁶⁵ Henceforth, within the context of the foundation of intuitive knowledge, I will use “infinite intellect,” “idea of God” and “knowledge of God” interchangeably.

⁶⁶ Deleuze (1988, 80) maintains that despite the fact that “infinite intellect” and the “idea of God” cannot be dissociated, there is a way to distinguish them terminologically from one another: the idea of God is the idea in its objective being, and infinite intellect is the same idea considered in its formal being. Notice that Spinoza states “What is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in nature” (EI30, EIIP7C).

represents God's attributes and all of the modes following from these attributes. But what does this representative power imply, and more importantly, how does the infinite intellect or the idea of God work as a foundation from which intuitive knowledge arises?

To answer these questions, first we have to reconsider the ontological status of the infinite intellect within Spinoza's metaphysics. Infinite intellect is an immediate *infinite mode* of the attribute of thought. Thus it stands in a more direct relation to substance and its attributes than the finite modes of thought do. More specifically, it is different from the finite modes in that it is infinite and follows from the absolute nature of thought, in virtue of which it is eternal and infinite. Despite this, it is still a mode, and consequently, rather than being a part of the independent, self-caused aspect of nature—that is, of *Natura Naturans*—it belongs to *Natura naturata*, which is produced and sustained by the self-caused aspect.⁶⁷ *Qua* mode, infinite intellect is not self-caused or “conceived through itself.”⁶⁸

As stated earlier, infinite modes function as mediating entities between substance and finite modes by binding all of the finite modes of the relevant attribute.⁶⁹ The infinite mode of thought—that is, the infinite intellect, provides a system of causes that binds together all ideas, including the ideas of the attributes of God, i.e. the independent aspect of the nature together with the ideas of everything that follow from this. Infinite intellect

⁶⁷ EIP31: “The actual intellect, whether finite or infinite... must be referred to *Natura naturata*, *not* to *Natura naturans*.” As shown in Chapter 1, while *Natura Naturans* is “in itself and conceived through itself”, *Natura Naturata* (the modal aspect) can neither be nor be conceived without God or *Natura naturans*.

⁶⁸ Emilia Giancotti (1991, 108) states that, from the point of view of quality, there is no difference between the necessary existence of infinite modes and the necessary existence of finite modes since they are all necessary *effects* of divine causality.

⁶⁹ Yitzak Melamed, Unpublished notes on Infinite Modes.

qua mode thus has ideas of attributes of God that are self-caused. For more insight into the nature of infinite intellect or the idea of God, consider the following passage from the Scholium following EIIP3, in which Spinoza defines the idea of God:

God acts with the same necessity by which he understands himself, that is, just as it follows from the necessity of the divine nature (as everyone maintains unanimously) that God understands himself, with the same necessity it also follows that God does infinitely many things in infinitely many modes. And then we have shown in EIP34 that God's power is nothing except God's active essence. And so it is as impossible for us to conceive that God does not act as it is to conceive that he does not exist. (EIIP3S)

God understands himself from the necessity of his divine nature. Since God acts as he understands himself and as he exists, the necessity for God to understand himself appears to be *equal* to the necessity of existing.⁷⁰ In other words, God understands himself and forms an idea “both of his essence and of everything, which necessarily follows from his essence” (EIIP3) with the *same* necessity by which he exists and “does infinitely many things in infinitely many modes.” So there corresponds to the *idea of God* a power of thinking equal to that of existing and acting. But how is this possible? How can a mode be of something that is self-caused? How can we reconcile these characteristics with the purely modal being of the infinite intellect?⁷¹

⁷⁰ Deleuze (1992, 101). Pointing to the almost axiomatic nature of this statement, Deleuze notes that this *axiom* derives from Aristotelian conceptions: God thinks himself, is himself the object of his thought, his knowledge has no other object than himself. Such is the principle opposed to the idea of a divine understanding that thinks “possibles.” Noting this traditional background as well as that the Hebrews invoked by Spinoza were Jewish Aristotelians, Deleuze states that Spinoza's theory of the idea of God is too original to be based on a mere axiom or an appeal to some tradition.

⁷¹ In other words, how can infinite intellect, which is not self-caused or “conceived through itself,” have ideas of attributes of God? This is a problem that has been pointed out by a number of scholars, including Margaret Wilson. Wilson (1983, 173) reminds us that Spinoza clearly and firmly distinguishes the status of infinite intellect *qua* mode from that of the attribute of thought. She continues as follows: “Now, surely if it is a mode, all its ideas (including our minds) must be modes. But famously Spinoza holds that ideas and their *ideata* must be causally parallel. There seems to be an outright contradiction between the latter notion

The fact that infinite intellect (which is not self-caused or conceived through itself) has ideas of attributes of God points to the complex and special status of the idea of God in Spinoza's thought. Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of the distinction between the formal being of an idea and its objective (representative) content is helpful in delineating the nature of this status. The modes of Thought—that is particular ideas—have their own formal reality *qua* modes, like all modes of all attributes. In other words, all ideas have their own formal reality as modes of the attribute of thought. Yet, unlike the modes of other attributes, ideas are *of* things—that is, they represent things. Hence, they have an objective reality as well. Having made this distinction, Deleuze holds, we can reconcile the modal status of the idea of God with the fact that it comprehends the self-caused attributes on the condition that the power of the idea of God must be understood objectively.⁷² How so? Recall that in EIIP7C, Spinoza says that “whatever follows *formally* from God's infinite nature follows *objectively* in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection” (EIIP7C). As noted earlier, there corresponds to the idea of God a power of thinking equal to that of existing and acting. Thus to the extent that the idea of God represents the attributes and modes, it has a power equal to what it represents. But this objective power would remain virtual, i.e. would not be actualized, if the idea of God and all the other ideas did not have their formal being—that is, if they were not themselves *formed*. As Spinoza states in EIIP5:

and the supposition that ‘other caused’ ideas take as their *ideata* self-caused attributes.” In this dissertation, I do not need to solve the dilemma that Wilson raises. For our purposes here it will suffice to highlight the two aspects of the idea of God as we will see very shortly.

⁷² Deleuze (1988, 80).

The formal being of ideas admits God as a cause only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explained by any other attribute. That is, the ideas, both of God's attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, as their efficient cause, but God himself, insofar as he is a thinking thing.

So it seems that for Spinoza "other caused" ideas do take as their *ideata* "self-caused" attributes only if God is their efficient cause insofar as he is a thinking thing. This is also evident from EIIP3, where Spinoza infers that God can form the idea of his essence, and of all the things that follow necessarily from it "solely from the fact that God is a thinking thing, and not from the fact that he is the object of his idea."⁷³ So the formal being of all ideas, including the idea of God, admits God as its cause insofar as he is a thinking thing. All of this shows, according to Deleuze, that the attribute of thought *formally* contains a mode—namely, the idea of God or infinite intellect, which, taken *objectively*, represents the attributes themselves.⁷⁴ And he considers the fact that the attribute of thought contains such a mode as a privilege of the attribute of thought.⁷⁵

⁷³ EIIP5D. The second part of the demonstration reads as follows: "But another way of demonstrating this is the following. The formal being of ideas is a mode of thinking (as is known through itself), that is (by IP25C), a mode, which expresses, in a certain way, God's nature insofar as he is a thinking thing. And so (by IP10) it involves the concept of no other attribute of God, and consequently (by IA4) is the effect of no other attribute than thought. And so the formal being of ideas admits God as its cause insofar as he is considered only as a thinking thing, and so on, q.e.d."

⁷⁴ Deleuze (1992, 124).

⁷⁵ Unlike Wilson (1983, 173), who considers this as a potential disruption of the parallelism doctrine, Deleuze argues that this privilege of thought is not a disruption of parallelism but is integral to it. I will not go into the details of Deleuze's convoluted argument for this claim here, since I am not sure if I am clear on his solution and, from what I understand, I am not convinced that he can solve the dilemma that Wilson raises. Suffice it to say here that Deleuze (*ibid*) presents his account by making a distinction between epistemological parallelism (that holds between the idea and its object, which implies the correspondence and identity between a mode of thinking and a different mode considered under a specific attribute) and ontological parallelism (that holds between modes under all the attributes, modes that differ only in their attribute) and suggests that it is again the idea of God which enables Spinoza to pass from epistemological parallelism to the ontological one. See also Deleuze (1988, 89-90).

Deleuze's approach thus highlights two aspects of the idea of God. The idea of God or infinite intellect *qua* mode is *formally* contained in the attribute of thought. But at the same time, this mode, taken *objectively*, represents the attributes themselves.⁷⁶ *On the one hand*, the idea of God is unique since God is unique (EIIP4). So from the viewpoint of its objective necessity, the idea of God is an absolute principle, with no less unity than absolutely infinite substance.⁷⁷ *On the other hand*, though, from the viewpoint of its formal possibility, the idea of God is only a mode whose principle is to be found in the attribute of thought or God insofar as he is a thinking thing. Importantly, when Spinoza congratulates certain Hebrews for having seen that God, God's intellect and the things understood by him were *one and the same thing* (EIIP7S) he means at once that (1) God's intellect is the knowledge (*scientia*) he has of his own nature, and this knowledge comprises an infinity of things that necessarily result from this nature, and (2) neither God's understanding nor the things he understands have less unity than God himself.⁷⁸ Thanks to its modal function, infinite intellect imparts or transfers God's substantial unity to the modes, including our minds, which are finite yet integral parts of it.

If this is the case, then does this mean that a finite mind can, in fact, understand God the way God understands himself? In EIP30 Spinoza states that "an actual intellect, *whether finite or infinite*, must comprehend God's attributes and God's affections, and

⁷⁶ Deleuze (1992, 124).

⁷⁷ Ibid (127).

⁷⁸ Ibid (100, 101, 128).

nothing else.”⁷⁹ Later he uses this proposition in the demonstration of EIIP4 to show that the idea of God must be unique. Yet interestingly, this time he leaves out the “finite” part by stating that “an infinite intellect comprehends nothing except God’s attributes and his affections.” Now, does this suggest that by EIIP4 Spinoza no longer believes that a finite intellect can comprehend God’s attributes and his affections? For one thing, Spinoza firmly holds that any mode of thinking,⁸⁰ whether finite or infinite, can contain *objectively* only what must necessarily be in nature. And in nature (by EIP14C1) there is only one substance, namely God, and there are no affections other than the ones which are in God and which can neither be nor be conceived without God (by P15). One implication of this is that any intellect can objectively represent only what must necessarily be in nature. But infinite intellect is special in the sense that it objectively contains *everything*—that is, an infinity of attributes each one of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence and an infinite number of things following from this in infinitely many modes. As we have stated before, our mind, like every other finite intellect, is only a *part* of infinite intellect. Importantly, though, not only our mind but also its knowledge of God is a part of the infinite understanding by which God knows

⁷⁹ Note that in the Scholium to EIP31, Spinoza explains the reason why he speaks here of actual intellect, stating that it “is not because I concede that there is any potential intellect, but because, wishing to avoid all confusion, I wanted to speak only of what we perceive as clearly as possible, that is, of the intellection itself. We perceive nothing more clearly than that. For we can understand nothing that does not lead to more perfect knowledge of the intellections.”

⁸⁰ In the Demonstration of EIP31, Spinoza states that “by intellect (as is known through itself) we understand not absolute thought, but only a certain mode of thinking...which must be perceived through absolute thought, that is (by P15 and D6), it must be so conceived through an attribute of God, which expresses the eternal and infinite essence of thought, that it can neither be nor be conceived without that [attribute]; and so (by P29S), like the other modes of thinking, it must be referred to *Natura naturata*, not to *Natura naturans*, q.e.d.”

himself. Hence, our mind's knowledge of God is the very knowledge by which God knows himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by human mind's essence.⁸¹ In other words, our mind's knowledge of God is the very knowledge by which God knows himself.

If our mind's knowledge of God is the very knowledge by which God knows himself, then can finite intellects such as our minds comprehend God's attributes and his affections? Since we are only a finite part of the infinite intellect (EIP11C), and since thought and extension, the attributes that are involved in our being, are the only attributes that we can know, obviously, we cannot know *everything* pertaining to God, nor can we completely understand God the way he understands himself. But if we—*qua* finite modes—can have any understanding that pertains to God's infinite nature, it is thanks to the complex status and the intermediary role of the idea of God allowing us to partake in God's thinking of his essence and everything following from his essence, including us. Being a system binding together all ideas, including the ideas of the attributes of God, the infinite intellect supplies not only the “knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence” but also of what *follows* from this knowledge. It is in virtue of this intermediary role that the infinite intellect functions as the foundation of intuitive knowledge, and provides the ground to know about God's attributes that are involved in our being and deduce what follows from this knowledge. In other words, it enables our mind to be determined

⁸¹ This bears an important similarity to mind's intellectual love of God, since Spinoza defines the mind's intellectual love of God as the very love by which God loves himself—not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by human mind's essence, considered SSA. That is, the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself (EVP36). I will give an account of intellectual love of God in the final chapter of the dissertation.

internally⁸² from the fact that the mind proceeds *from* an adequate knowledge of God's attributes *to* what follows from them, namely, adequate knowledge of the essences of things. And this brings us to the issue of the process through which intuitive knowledge is attained.

2.2.2. The Methodology of Intuitive Knowledge: How do we attain Intuitive Knowledge?

Recall that in the mathematical example, Spinoza likens the experience of intuitive knowledge to an immediate grasp of the truth “in one glance” (EIP40S2). Although the term ‘*intuitiva*’ suggests a style of cognition that is direct and immediate, in its official definition he describes this superior form of cognition as an inferential *process*, wherein we can distinguish between discrete cognitive steps.⁸³ To be more specific, according to its definition, intuitive knowledge “proceeds *from* an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God *to* the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (EIP40S2, my italics). Intuitive knowledge is attained once the adequate knowledge of the essence of things is *inferred from* an adequate knowledge of the essence of one of God's attributes.⁸⁴ After its definition, Spinoza does not really give an elaborate account

⁸² Remember that the first way that our mind could be determined internally was from the fact that it perceives “the agreements, differences and oppositions between the things,” which is nothing but knowledge of the second kind.

⁸³ Garrett (2010, 109). As Garrett (ibid, 110) notes, despite the fact that we can distinguish cognitive steps in Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva*, in a sufficiently powerful mind these steps might well be taken instantaneously.

⁸⁴ In addition to EIP40S2, EVP25, EVP36S and EIP47S are yet other passages where the inferential character of intuitive knowledge is explicit. As Garrett (2010, 110) notes, even in the mathematical example, Spinoza characterizes intuitive knowledge as at least partly inferential: “we see this much more

of the inferential process through which we attain this superior knowledge.⁸⁵ Despite his notoriously parsimonious account, I believe that it is possible to get a sense of this process once we determine the conditions for the possibility of this knowledge.

2.2.2.1. Conditions for the Possibility of Intuitive Knowledge

Although Spinoza starts his account of intuitive knowledge in Part II, it is only in Part V of the *Ethics* that one gets a complete picture of intuitive knowledge. As we reach the end of the *Ethics* we see that three conditions are required in order for our mind to have access to knowledge of the third kind:

that each idea of each singular thing involves the essence of God (EII45) and adequate knowledge of this essence (EII46),

that the human mind *has* ideas that involve the adequate idea of the essence of God (EII47),

that the human mind “conceives the body’s essence under a species of eternity” (EV29).

I will leave the last condition to the next chapter.⁸⁶ In order to understand what the first two conditions amount to, let us take a look at the Propositions 45-47 of Part II of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza establishes that the adequate idea of God—that is, the foundation of intuitive knowledge—is necessarily present in all human minds:

clearly because we *infer* the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second” (EII40S2, my italics).

⁸⁵ As Curley (1973a, 56) notes, we are left pretty much to our own devices in interpreting Spinoza’s definition of the intuitive knowledge.

⁸⁶ After elaborating on this condition in Chapter 2 in connection to intuitive self-knowledge, I will return to it in Chapter 6 as I focus on the issue of the eternity of the mind and how it relates to the affective power of intuitive knowledge.

Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God. (EIIIP45)

The knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, which each idea involves, is adequate and perfect. (EIIIP46)

The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence. (EIIIP47)

The first thing to notice here is the existence of two stages: (1) Propositions 45 and 46 consider the idea of a singular thing *in itself* and show that it involves (*involvit*) adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God. (2) Proposition 47 states that the human mind *has* those ideas and deduces from them the possibility of intuitive knowledge in the Scholium to this proposition. In order to see how Spinoza moves from stage 1 to the stage 2 let us start with the demonstration of EIIIP45:

The idea of a singular thing, which actually exists necessarily involves both the essence of the thing and its existence (by P8C⁸⁷). But singular things (by IP15) cannot be conceived without God—on the contrary, because (by P6⁸⁸) they have God for a cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes, their ideas must involve the concept of their attribute (by IA4⁸⁹), that is (by ID6⁹⁰), must involve an eternal and infinite essence of God, q.e.d.

Simply put, this demonstration shows that since singular things can neither exist nor be conceived without God, their ideas necessarily involve the eternal and infinite essence of God. In other words, Spinoza derives from the way things are on the ontological plane,

⁸⁷ EIIIP8C: "...And when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration."

⁸⁸ EIIIP6: "The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute."

⁸⁹ EIA4: "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause."

⁹⁰ EID6: "By God, I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence."

how their ideas are on the epistemological plane. The key to understanding this derivation is the famous fourth axiom of the Part I of the *Ethics*: “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” *Via* this axiom, as a function of the necessary dependence of the effect on the cause, Spinoza establishes a dynamic and intrinsic relation that holds between not only the singular things and God, but also between the ideas of these singular things and the idea of God. As the first sentence of the demonstration states, the idea of a singular thing, which actually exists necessarily, involves both the essence of the thing and its existence. But both essence and existence of things are the *effects* and their knowledge depends on and involves the knowledge of their *cause*—that is, the knowledge of God. Importantly, though, singular things have God for a cause *not* insofar as he is the absolutely infinite substance, *but* insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes. Hence, the ideas of singular things necessarily involve the idea of the attribute: the idea of the eternal and infinite essence of God. Since involving the *idea* of the eternal and infinite essence of God is, for the idea of every singular thing, to involve the *essence itself*, “each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God” (EIP45).⁹¹

⁹¹ Note that in this proposition Spinoza refers to both “each idea of each body” and “each idea of each singular thing which actually exists.” Gueroult (1974, 421) argues that these two expressions refer to two different cases. According to Gueroult, in the first case, what is at stake is *each mind*, and Spinoza aims to establish the claim that every idea of every body, namely, every mind, involves necessarily the eternal and infinite nature of God. In the second case, Spinoza aims to show that all ideas by which the human mind knows singular things—including the ideas of its body, external bodies and itself—involve the eternal and infinite essence of the God. I do not take “each idea of each body” and “each singular thing which actually exists” to refer to two different cases, as Gueroult does, since Spinoza connects these two terms by ‘or’ (*vel*), which suggests that he uses them interchangeably.

After showing in EIIP46 that “the knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence which each idea *involves* is *adequate*...” (my italics), Spinoza moves from the first stage to the second stage by stating that “The human mind *has* an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” (EIIP47). The demonstration of this proposition is as follows:

The human mind has ideas (by P22) from which it perceives (by P23) itself, (by P19) its own body, and (by P16C1 and P17) external bodies as actually existing. And so (by P45 and P46) it *has* an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence, q.e.d. (EIIP47D, my italics)

According to EIIP47D, the human mind has this adequate knowledge of God, since it has *ideas* through which it perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies as *actually existing*. But how can Spinoza deduce from the fact that the human mind has ideas through which it perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies as actually existing, that the mind has an *adequate* knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence? As we saw earlier, these ideas would necessarily be inadequate if by ‘actual existence’ Spinoza meant the durational existence of things, which depends on the common order of nature. However, as we will see in Chapter 3, in EIIP45S Spinoza makes it clear that by existence he does not understand determinate duration, but rather “the very nature of existence”—or, the actual essences of singular things. We will see what the “very nature of existence” means and how it relates to intuitive knowledge in the next chapter. For the time being, suffice it to say that according to Spinoza, the relevant ideas—i.e., those involving the eternal and infinite essence of God (EIIP45)—are not the ideas of the determinate durational existence of singular things.

Having demonstrated that the human mind has adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence, in EIIP47S Spinoza establishes for the first time the possibility of attaining intuitive knowledge:

From this we see that God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all. And since all things are in God and are conceived through God, it follows that we can deduce from this knowledge a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form that third kind of knowledge of which we spoke in P40S2 and of whose excellence and utility we shall speak in Part V. (my italics)

It is hard not to be struck by the unbridled optimism with which Spinoza describes our cognitive powers. But does the fact that “God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all” (or that “the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence”) mean that *everyone* will be able to attain knowledge of the third kind? In the previous section, I argued that even though common notions are the foundations of reason and intrinsic to all human minds, this does not suggest that every mind will succeed in attaining knowledge of the second kind.⁹² Similarly, the fact that the idea of God is the foundation of intuitive knowledge, and that it is known by everyone, does not suggest that everyone will be able to reach knowledge of the third kind.⁹³ This is because the idea of God is, albeit necessary, not sufficient to attain knowledge of the third kind. Intuitive knowledge consists in actively using this foundation by deducing “from this knowledge a great many things which we know adequately”—that is, deducing adequate

⁹² In this sense, common notions may be considered as necessary but not sufficient conditions to know via reason.

⁹³ Gueroult (1974, 421), in a similar fashion, argues that from the fact that the nature of mind involves the essence of God or the knowledge of God's essence, it does not follow *ipso facto* that mind is conscious of this idea. That is why even though the minds of all things (minerals, vegetables, animals, men) involve the idea of God, none except the human mind can succeed in making this idea at the same time a real conscious object for itself.

knowledge of the essences of singular things from adequate knowledge of God's essence. Hence the definition of intuitive knowledge: "...this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (EIIP40S2).

2.2.2.2. Idea of God and Common Notions

Having described the inferential process entailed by intuitive knowledge, I will now clarify an important point regarding the idea of God that will later bear on our discussion of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge. In EIIP46D Spinoza states that "...what gives knowledge of an eternal and infinite essence of God is *common to all and is equally in the part and in the whole*. And so (by P38) this knowledge will be adequate" (my italics). Due to Spinoza's wording, one might be tempted to interpret *the idea of God* as a common notion.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the following Scholium suggests that the idea of God is *not* a common notion:

But that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have conjoined the name *God* to the images of things which they are used to seeing. Men can hardly avoid this, because they are continually affected by external bodies. (EIIP47S)

We can derive the following interrelated points from this passage: (a) The fact that we can imagine bodies helps to enhance the clarity of our knowledge of common notions. (b) The idea of God is not a common notion, since we cannot imagine God like we imagine

⁹⁴ See Charlie Huenemann (2008) for such an example.

bodies.⁹⁵ (c) Applying the name *God* to images of things results necessarily in error by taking us farther away from the true knowledge of God.⁹⁶ Each of these points requires further elaboration.

(a) As stated in the previous section, there is a distinction between imaginative ideas and common notions in that while the former is the confused idea of a singular thing existing in duration, the latter is the clear and distinct notion of an eternal property shared by some or all bodies. Accordingly, whereas imagination provides a durational perception of things, reason supplies knowledge of things SSA. Despite this distinction, common notions represent properties *of* actually existing *bodies*, which we not only adequately cognize but also can vividly imagine. Hence imagination can sometimes facilitate rather than obstruct common notions by adding to their intellectual evidence some sensible evidence. In other words, common notions can be made clearer (at least at times) by imagination.

⁹⁵ As we noted earlier, Delahunty (1985, 75) invokes this passage in order to support his view that there is an empirical element in common notions: "...our knowledge of common notions is (startlingly) said to be 'clearer' than our knowledge of such philosophical truths as the infinity and eternity of God, (EIIP47S). Our power to visualize bodies (a power stemming from the imagination, and ultimately from the fact that we ourselves are embodied) makes it easier for us to grasp the most general features of bodies; whereas God's infinity and eternity, being essentially undepictable, can be seized only by the intellect (which holds itself aloof from the body: II,3)."

⁹⁶ Spinoza goes on in this Scholium to say that most errors consist only in our not rightly applying names to things. "For when someone says that the lines which are drawn from the center of a circle to its circumference are unequal, he surely understands (then at least) by a circle something different from what mathematicians understand. Similarly when men err in calculating, they have certain numbers in their mind and different ones on the paper. So if you consider what they have in mind, they really do not err, though they seem to err because we think they have in their mind the numbers which are on the paper...And most controversies have arisen from this, that men do not rightly explain their own mind, or interpret the mind of the other man badly. For really when they contradict one another most vehemently, they either have the same thoughts, or they are thinking of different things, so that what they think are errors and absurdities in the other are not."

(b) ‘The knowledge of God’ is *not* a common notion since it comprehends the essence of God, which, unlike common notions, cannot be imagined in any way. The idea of God cannot be a common notion since God is not a property of things. So despite Spinoza’s wording in EIIP46D, which has led some scholars to interpret *the idea of God* or “the knowledge of God” as a common notion, it is clear that the foundation of intuitive knowledge—unlike that of reason—is not a common notion.

(c) By thus distinguishing the idea of God from the common notions, Spinoza also marks a distinction between those things that can be imagined, like the common notions, and those that can never be imagined, like God. In a famous letter to Lodewijk Meyer (Letter XII), Spinoza makes a similar distinction as he warns against the failure to distinguish between “that which we can apprehend *only* by the intellect and not by the imagination,” and “that which can *also* be apprehended by imagination.”⁹⁷ As Spinoza states, “...there are many things which we cannot at all grasp by the imagination, but only by the intellect (such as Substance, God, Eternity, etc.).” If someone tries to explain things like God by way of imagination, “he will accomplish nothing more than if he takes pains to go mad with his imagination.” Accordingly, and returning to the passage I quoted earlier, “conjoin[ing] the name *God* to the images of things which they are used to seeing,” and thinking that God can be apprehended by imagination, are mistakes that give rise to a confused state of mind and produce severe errors.

⁹⁷ Recall that I invoked this letter in Chapter 1 to show how Spinoza distinguishes the existence of substance from the existence of modes by saying that the former is of an entirely different kind from the latter. In Letter XII, Spinoza explicitly states that it is to the existence of modes alone that we can apply the term *duration*, whereas the corresponding term for substance is *eternity*, that is, the infinite enjoyment of existence or of being (*essendi*).

To sum up, intuitive knowledge has its foundation in the idea of God that is beyond and outside the imagination, and thus cannot be grasped except by the intellect.⁹⁸ As we ascend to the level of intuitive knowledge, the ties to imagination are cut and our mind is determined wholly internally—not “from the fact that it regards a number of things at once to understand their agreements, differences and oppositions” as it would be the case with reason, but in “*another way*” (EIIIP29S).⁹⁹ At the highest level of internal determination, imagination cannot function *even* as a support. This is the level wherein the human mind “conceives the body’s essence under a species of eternity” (EV29). This brings us to the last condition of intuitive knowledge, which will be the focus of the next chapter. As we will see, the mind’s conceiving of its body’s essence SSA is nothing but its conceiving of its “very existence ...insofar as [it is] in God” (EIIIP45S).¹⁰⁰

2.3. Concluding Remarks on Foundations and Methodologies

⁹⁸ Gueroult (1974, 425).

⁹⁹ As stated in Chapter 1, EIIIP29S reads as follows: “I say expressly that the mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [NS: mutilated] knowledge, of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of Nature, that is so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is *determined internally*, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For so often as it is disposed internally, in *this* or *another* way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly, as I shall show below” (my italics). As I maintained in Chapter 1, EIIIP29S tells us not only that the mind is determined either (1) externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, or (2) internally, *but also* that the mind is disposed internally in two ways: (2a) *either* from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions, *or* (2b) in another way, which is not stated here by Spinoza but which, in my view, corresponds to the intuitive knowledge. Hence, in this Scholium, Spinoza is presenting us with three ways in which the mind is determined: (1), (2a) and (2b), anticipating his account of three kinds of knowledge in EIIIP40S2.

¹⁰⁰ As we will see in Chapter 6, the mind’s conceiving of its body’s essence SSA is just its conceiving of its own essence “as an eternal truth, through God’s nature” (EVP37D). This is because, as we will see, “the idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal” (EVP23S).

Before proceeding to a more systematic analysis of the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the next chapter, let us take stock of what we have done in this chapter. We have seen that the foundations of reason and intuitive knowledge are common notions and knowledge of God, respectively. Unlike abstract concepts such as transcendentals or universals, common notions represent *real* relations of agreement or composition between existing bodies. Since these representations are adequate, to the extent that we employ common notions our mind cognizes or infers without danger of error that something is true. Knowledge of God or the idea of God, on the other hand, functions as a system binding together all ideas—including the ideas of the attributes of God—and allows us to partake in God’s thinking of his essence and everything following from his essence. While common notions represent common properties of bodies that can also be *imagined*, the knowledge of God or the idea of God can only be considered as an object of the intellect. In other words, whereas common notions contain an empirical element, the idea of God is beyond and outside of the imagination.

In addition to this difference in their foundations, reason and intuitive knowledge also differ in terms of their methods of cognition—that is, the processes by which they are attained. We attain reason through common notions. Reason includes knowledge of common notions themselves, and it also consists in applying that which we know as a common property to a given singular thing in order to determine that thing with respect to that property. Thanks to this process we rise above the mutilated and confused images provided by knowledge of the first kind, and begin to know things as they truly are; in

this way, rational process reveals itself as an ascent. Common notions provide us with a causal understanding of singular things, and thus with the perception of necessity inherent in nature.

Intuitive knowledge, on the other hand, starts where reason leaves us—with knowledge of God—and then *descends* to knowledge of the essences of singular things. We attain this superior form of cognition by way of a special inferential process involving ordered steps, which consist in inferring the knowledge of the essence of singular things *from* the knowledge of God’s essence (by EIIP40S2, EVP25D). Since these steps proceed directly from the idea of the essence of God and end up at the idea of essences of things, this mode of knowing is different than knowledge of the second kind. Unlike reason, it does not require any quasi-syllogistic operations with generalizations and their instances.¹⁰¹ The “ordering” interpretation of intuitive knowledge proposed and defended by Spencer Carr¹⁰² rests on this inferential process. This process leads from cognition of causes to cognition of effects, beginning with an adequate cognition of God. According to Carr, it is opposed to the rational process, which starts from cognition of effects—that is, things—and then reaches the cognition of causes. I believe that the ordering interpretation fits nicely with my reading of reason as consisting in an ascent, and with my reading of intuitive knowledge as descending from knowledge of the essence of God to the essence of singular things.¹⁰³ Yet, even though the ordering

¹⁰¹ Garrett (2010, 110). For further elaboration on this point see Garrett (ibid, 110-112).

¹⁰² Carr (1978).

¹⁰³ In Chapter 6, I propose that in Spinoza’s thought attaining adequate knowledge of oneself takes the form of a transformative ascent, the final stage of which consists in intuitive self-knowledge.

interpretation emphasizes an important difference in methods of cognition between reason and intuitive knowledge, it does not necessarily suggest that they have different kinds of objects.¹⁰⁴

In this chapter I presented an account of how reason and intuitive knowledge differ in terms of their foundations and methodologies. However, I have not yet addressed a critical question: why and on what grounds does Spinoza regard intuitive knowledge as superior to reason? Does this superiority stem only from the fact that these two kinds of adequate knowledge differ with respect to their *method* (and foundations)? Does it solely stem from the fact that unlike reason, intuitive knowledge does not require any quasi-syllogistic operations with generalizations and their instances? Or is there more to the explanation of the superiority of intuitive knowledge, perhaps in terms of its representative *content*? Does the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge include a difference in content in the sense that there is something that can be known by intuition that cannot be known by reason? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁴ See Garrett (2010) for a developed version of Carr's ordering interpretation. Neither Carr's interpretation nor Garrett's developed version suggests that reason and intuitive knowledge differ in terms of their representative content.

Chapter 3

The Epistemological Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*

As shown in Chapter 1, in Spinoza's taxonomy of knowledge, reason and intuitive knowledge are closer to one another than either is to the first kind, since they are both "necessarily true" (EIP41) and consist in adequate ideas. Moreover, they both constitute the intellect (EVP40C) and lead to understanding that defines the power of the mind (Preface to Part V). Yet, despite these commonalities, these two superior kinds of knowledge are not equal. "The greatest virtue of the mind" (EVP25) and "the greatest human perfection" (EVP27D) consist in understanding things by intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza clearly regards as the best, most powerful and most desirable kind of the three, and hence as superior to reason. Why and on what grounds does Spinoza regard intuitive knowledge as superior to reason? Due to Spinoza's parsimonious treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*, the nature of this superiority has been the subject of some controversy among commentators. According to one dominant line of reading, which I call the 'method interpretation', reason and intuitive knowledge differ only in terms of the process by which they are attained. The "method interpretation," which is held by commentators such as Steven Nadler and Yirmiyahu Yovel, maintains that the epistemic disparity between reason and intuitive knowledge is due entirely to differences in their *methods* of cognition, with the

implication being that everything that can be known by intuition can also be known by reason.¹ In this chapter, I argue that the above two kinds of adequate knowledge differ not only with respect to their *method*, but also in terms of their representative *content*. More specifically, I argue that the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge includes a difference in content in that there is something that can be known by intuition—namely, the unique essences of things—that cannot be known by reason.

The suggestion that the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge includes a difference in content is not a novel one. Commentators such as Edwin Curley and Henry Allison have argued that whereas reason involves the universal knowledge of the properties of things, intuitive knowledge relates to the essences of things, and hence that adequate knowledge of the essences of things is limited to intuitive knowledge.² Although these authors have maintained that the essences of things are exclusively known by intuitive knowledge, they have not fleshed out the nature of these essences. In this chapter, I attempt to fill this gap by grounding my “content interpretation” in a more thorough examination of Spinoza’s account of the essences of things in the *Ethics*. After introducing Spinoza’s limited treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in Section 1, in Section 2 I focus on his account of essences, showing that he is committed to both unique and shared essences in the *Ethics*. In the sections that follow,

¹ Nadler (2006), Yovel (1989). See also Sandler (2005).

² Edwin Curley (1973a), Henry Allison (1987), and Margaret Wilson (1996) hold this view. Wilson is cautious, however; she argues that reason involves knowledge of the properties of things while intuitive knowledge entails the knowledge of the essences of things, but she stresses that the matter hinges on what the innermost essences of things are taken to be. Unfortunately she does not attempt to address this issue.

I consider how this dual commitment bears on the question regarding whether there is something known by intuitive knowledge that cannot be known by reason. In Section 3, I argue that reason as well as intuition can be said to reach adequate knowledge of the shared essences of things. In Section 4, I assert that the unique essence of a thing, i.e. its actual essence, can be adequately known only by intuitive knowledge once we conceive it *sub specie aeternitatis*—that is, insofar as it is comprehended in God’s attributes. In Section 5, I give an account of the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge and suggest that it descends to a level of particularity that reason cannot since it consists in forming adequate ideas of particular powers of existing, rather than common notions. Finally, in Section 6, I elaborate on the foundational function and privileged position of a special instance of intuitive knowledge: intuitive self-knowledge—i.e., adequate knowledge of one’s *own* essence as it follows directly from God.

3.1. Content versus Method Interpretations

I start by introducing Spinoza’s limited treatment of the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge in the *Ethics*. Let us first return to his definitions of reason and intuitive knowledge in EIIP40S2:

It is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions...from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things. This I shall call reason (*rationem*) and the second kind of knowledge. In addition...there is (as I shall show in what follows) another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal]³ essence of things.

³ “NS” introduces a variant reading from *De Nagelate Schriften van B.D.S.*, the Dutch translation of Spinoza’s *Opera posthuma* that appeared in the same year (1677) as the Latin original. Note that ‘formal’

These definitions seem to suggest that intuitive knowledge reaches adequate knowledge of the essences of things, whereas reason relates to the mind's apprehension of common notions and the general properties of things. Although *prima facie* it appears that the difference between reason and intuition involves a difference in content, the above definitions go unelaborated and thus provide little support for this or the opposite conclusion. Fortunately, as shown earlier, after providing these definitions, Spinoza in uncharacteristic fashion goes on to offer the famous mathematical example of the fourth proportional in order to exemplify his proposed division of knowledge:

Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher without any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the demonstration of P19 in Book VII of Euclid, namely, from the common property of proportionals. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second.

As stated in Chapter 2, this illustration brings out the differences in *method* between the three kinds of knowledge by depicting the four ways that we may come to know what the fourth number is. While reason consists in applying our understanding of the common property of proportionals in order to determine the value of the fourth number, in the case

does not appear in front of or otherwise qualify the phrase 'essence of things' neither in the Latin text of EIP40S2, where Spinoza introduces the definition of intuitive knowledge for the first time; nor in the Dutch text of EVP25D, where Spinoza invokes this definition. See Section 4 for my take on the notion of "formal essence."

of knowledge of the third kind, one has an *immediate insight* into the solution without any demonstration required. As Spinoza's example suggests, the basic difference between the second and third kinds of knowledge is that the former deduces its conclusions from previously given general principles, whereas the latter grasps the truth in an immediate manner, *in one glance*, without having to appeal to any such principles.⁴ So what is plainly distinctive about intuitive knowledge in this example is the cognitive *process*, the way of knowing that it constitutes or gives rise to.⁵ Importantly, while this example does underscore the distinction in *method* between reason and intuition, it does not entail or otherwise suggest any additional difference with respect to their content. Since both reason and intuition are presented as a different way of solving the *same* problem, there would seem to be no difference in the object of cognition in Spinoza's proposed division.⁶ Another possibility is that the example is simply misleading,⁷ or that it was

⁴ Allison (1987, 118).

⁵ Sandler (2005, 84).

⁶ Curley (1973a, 29). However, one might question whether the fact that reason and intuition are different ways of solving the *same* problem necessarily suggests that what is known in each case does not vary from one to another based on the following analogy: Imagine two chess players: a novice and a grandmaster. They are both looking at a particular position on the same chess board in an effort to solve the same problem, namely, what is the next best move for white? The novice player extensively analyzes the positioning predicament, calculates and runs counterfactuals for half an hour, often divining as many moves ahead as possible, in an attempt to determine the best move. The grandmaster, on the other hand, immediately recognizes the 'correct' move without consciously analyzing anything at all (Ross 2006). Assume that as a result of their respective processes, the novice and the grandmaster make the same "correct" move. For the present purposes, then, the question is this: Is the representative content of the cognition the same in the case of the novice and the grandmaster? The answer would seem to be in the negative, since the novice player undergoes a large series of calculations by which the correct move is eventually determined, whereas the grandmaster sees only the correct move in a single glance and with the ease that anyone would see the fourth proportional in the case of the simplest numbers. Following this line of reasoning, one might plausibly argue that even in Spinoza's mathematical example, there is room for suggesting that intuitive knowledge and reason do not have the same representative content even though they provide the same answer to the same question.

intended merely to illustrate the differences in the methods rather than the content of cognition.⁸

Presenting the difference between the three kinds of knowledge *merely* as a difference in *method*, this example supports an interpretation embraced by scholars such as Steven Nadler and Yirmiyahu Yovel.⁹ In line with the example, Nadler construes the difference not really in terms of content, but in terms of their respective methods by stating that whereas knowledge of the second kind is discursive and involves inferring the effect from its cause, intuitive knowledge seems to be an *immediate* perception of the connection between cause and effect, resulting in a singular conception of the essence of a thing.¹⁰ For Nadler, both the second and the third kinds of knowledge involve the adequate knowledge of individuals, and thus lead to an idea of a thing that situates it in its proper causal context. Both ways of knowing, for Nadler, present us with ways of

⁷ Curley (1973a, 29). Another reason the example might be misleading relates to the fact that Spinoza illustrates intuitive knowledge as something that “no one fails to see,” whereas he famously concludes his *Ethics* with remarks about how difficult and rare that type of knowledge is (EVP42).

⁸ Yovel (1989, 232, n.1.), for instance, considers the mathematical example as at best a partial analogy that illustrates the intuitive and synoptic qualities of the third kind of knowledge, but misses some of the most important ones. Above all, he says, the example is incompatible with the definition of the third kind of knowledge in the *Ethics*, according to which intuitive knowledge proceeds from the essence of some attribute of God, rather than being gained directly by a particular intuition as the example suggests.

⁹ Yovel (1989, 156) sees the job of reason as the application of common notions and explanatory schemes to particular instances, and holds that “all the information we need and can possess of the object of our inquiry has already been supplied by *ratio*, the scientific investigation which subjects the object to a network of mechanistic laws.” For Yovel, even though reason is a prerequisite for intuitive knowledge, the latter does not add anything new to our knowledge. This is because intuitive knowledge consists in interiorization of what we already know of the object by way of reason. In a somewhat vague manner, he argues that intuitive cognition provides a distinct cognitive gain due to the fact that, thanks to it, we grasp internally the particular essence and express the same metaphysical truth in a deeper and complementary way.

¹⁰ Nadler (2006, 180-1).

knowing a particular thing independent of its durational and changing relationships to other particular things and place it explicitly in relation to an attribute and to the eternal principles that govern all the modes of that attribute, such that one sees not only *that* the thing is necessitated but also *how*.¹¹

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the above mathematical example, there is language in the *Ethics* aside from the definitions in which Spinoza appears to distinguish reason and intuition in terms of what can be known by them. One such passage is the Scholium to EVP36, which is one of the rare times that Spinoza gives us an explicit comparison between reason and intuitive knowledge:

I thought this worth the trouble of noting here, in order to show by this example how much the *knowledge of singular things* I have called intuitive, or knowledge of the third kind (see IIP40S2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the *universal knowledge* I have called knowledge of the second kind. (my italics)

Curley considers this Scholium as a key remark, which, together with the definitions in EIIP40S2, supports the view that whereas reason is universal knowledge of the attributes and infinite modes, intuition is knowledge of the essences of finite modes.¹²

¹¹ Genevieve Lloyd's (1986, 227-8) view, on the other hand, suggests that the second kind of knowledge is a knowledge of the particular only insofar as it subsumes them under common notions. But on this view when we know a thing by the second kind of knowledge, we know only *that* it is necessitated by finite and infinite causes, not *how*. Garrett (2010, 108) holds a similar view. He thinks that even though the common notions are adequate ideas and thus allow the mind to cognize or infer without danger of error *that* something is true, because they do not proceed through the causal order of essences, they do not allow the mind to see *how* and *why* it is true. According to Garrett (ibid), "Thus, in Spinoza's case of the fourth proportional, one who follows the demonstration of Euclid knows that it is a common property of proportions that the product of the means equals the product of the extremes, which allows a calculation that $x=6$ in $1/2 = 3/x$. But one who has the highest kind of cognition sees through an understanding of the particular ratio expressed by $1/2$ that $3/6$ is equally an expression of that same unique ratio."

¹² Curley (1973a, 57). In other words, while intuition includes adequate knowledge of the essences of the singular things, i.e. finite modes, it does not include adequate knowledge of the essences of the divine attributes. It is because the knowledge of the nature of an attribute, such as extension, is knowledge of something universal, of something common to all bodies, which is the object of reason. Sandler (2005, 77),

Another important passage is EIIP37, which reads: “What is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the *essence* of any singular thing” (my italics). Recall that common notions, which Spinoza calls “the foundations of reasoning” (EIIP40S1), represent “what is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole.” That is why common notions, namely general ideas of those things that are common to all,¹³ “do not explain the essence of any singular thing” (EIIP44C2D2). Thus, to the extent that reason employs common notions, it cannot reach adequate knowledge of the essence of a singular thing.¹⁴

These passages suggest that whereas reason is a “universal” knowledge in that it is knowledge of the common properties of things, intuitive knowledge is the knowledge of singular things since it concerns their essences.¹⁵ Does this imply that there is something that can be known by intuitive knowledge—the essences of singular things—

on the other hand, at first presents this Scholium as one of the passages where Spinoza appears to distinguish the second and third kinds of knowledge in terms of what can be known by them. But then, drawing on the rest of the Scholium, he interprets it as supporting the method view (Ibid, 84). In the final section of this chapter I will address the rest of this Scholium and propose an interpretation that supports the content view.

¹³ As shown in Chapter 2, in addition to general common notions, Spinoza also talks about specific common notions, which represent properties that are common and peculiar to certain things rather than all things.

¹⁴ I will argue in Section 3 that although reason cannot reach adequate knowledge of the essence of a singular thing *qua* singular, it can reach adequate knowledge of the shared essences of singular things.

¹⁵ Based on these passages, Allison (1987, 117) holds that intuition is superior to reason in that, unlike reason, it is able to arrive at the knowledge of the essence of individuals. He says that whereas the province of reason is general truths, which hold universally and do not pertain to any individuals in particular, intuition achieves “adequate knowledge of the essence of things.” Consequently, he holds, it is concrete and particular, whereas reason is abstract and general. So according to Allison’s interpretation, Spinoza’s definition of knowledge of the second kind in the *Ethics* refers only to the mind’s apprehension of common notions and of the properties of things in general but not to the knowledge of particular things that instantiate such properties.

that cannot be known by reason? This question lies at the crux of the debate between method and content interpretations, and its answer hinges on Spinoza's account of the essences of singular things in the *Ethics*.¹⁶

3. 2. Essences of Singular Things

As shown in Chapter 1, in Spinoza's metaphysics there is only one substance, namely, God, whose infinite and eternal essence is expressed by an infinite number of divine attributes (EID6).¹⁷ Everything else, including singular things, is a mode or an affection of God. More specifically, singular things are finite modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (EIP25C and EIID7).¹⁸ If singular things are solely affections of God, then what do their essences consist in? Here is Spinoza's answer:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. (EIIDI)¹⁹

¹⁶ As stated in the beginning of this chapter, although both Curley and Allison hold that adequate ideas of singular things—more specifically, adequate knowledge of the *essences* of things—are limited to intuitive knowledge, neither of them gives an elaborate account of what these modal essences, and hence the content of the intuitive knowledge, consists in.

¹⁷ Among the infinite number of divine attributes, we know only two: thought and extension.

¹⁸ Recall that in Spinoza's metaphysics there are not only finite but also infinite modes.

¹⁹ Wilson (1996, 119) thinks that this definition is too abstract to throw any significant light on Spinoza's conception of the essences of things. Bennett (1984, 61) likewise holds that this definition is poorly formulated.

Note that rather than offering a definition of “essence,” this passage defines what belongs to an essence by highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the singular thing and its essence. Simply put, just as the thing cannot be or be conceived without its essence, the essence of a thing, which provides the identity conditions of the thing, cannot be or be conceived without the thing.²⁰ Moreover, if the essence of a thing is present, then the thing is present, and if the essence of a thing ceases to be present, then the thing ceases to be present.²¹ This relation of reciprocity has the important consequence that each thing has its own essence and that no two things share the same essence. In order to see why, suppose that two different things, x and y, share the same essence E. If x and y are distinct modes, then each has something that is not conceived through the other. In other words, then they cannot be conceived completely through each other in that there would be some aspect of x that cannot be conceived through y, and vice versa. But if E is the essence of x, then E can be conceived completely through x, including that portion that cannot be conceived through y. But then E cannot be conceived completely through y as well, and thus cannot be the essence of y according to the definition of essence above. So on this definition, the essence of a thing is unique to that thing. Moreover, we can say that on this definition there is no real distinction between a thing and its essence.

²⁰ Spinoza invokes EIID2 in the demonstration of EIIP10, which reads, “The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.” If the being of substance did pertain to the essence of man, then, by the definition of essence in EIID2, “the substance being given, man would necessarily be given, and consequently man would exist necessarily, which (by A1) is absurd” (EIIP10D). Moreover, in EIIP10S, Spinoza argues that the claim that “anything without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived pertains to its essence” is a mistake. This is because “singular things can neither be nor be conceived without God, and nevertheless, God does not pertain to their essences.”

²¹ Commentators who read EIID2 in this way include Bennett (1984, 61), Yovel (1989, 163), Della Rocca (2008, 95; 2004, 133), and Martin (2008, 491).

Spinoza refers to EIID2 in order to demonstrate why “what is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole does not constitute the essence of any singular thing.”²² He uses a *reductio* very similar to the one above: Let A be something which is “common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole.” If A were to constitute the essence of a singular thing T, then by the definition of essence above, not only could T neither be nor be conceived without A, but also A could neither be nor be conceived without T. In other words, A would cease to be present if T ceased to be present, and vice versa. But this is absurd. Therefore, A does not pertain to the essence of T, “nor does it constitute the essence of any other singular thing” (EIIP37D). Simply put, if something constitutes the essence of a singular thing, then the conception of the essence is tied exclusively to the conception of that thing, and so it cannot be something common to all (or even other) things.²³

After his abstract and general definition of essences in EIID2, Spinoza presents us with his specialized notion of essence—namely, “actual essence” [*essentia actualis*] in EIIP7.²⁴ The actual essence of a singular thing is nothing but a singular thing’s striving or *conatus* to persevere in its existence. Importantly, there is a close connection between the actual essence of a singular thing and its actual existence in that the former entails the latter. In other words, when the actual essence of a thing is given, the thing is necessarily

²² As I noted in Section 1, this proposition is one of the passages suggesting that reason and intuition are distinguished by their content.

²³ Thanks to Tad Schmaltz for this clarification.

²⁴ Note that Spinoza introduces another specialized notion of essence: formal essence (*essentia formalis*) in EIIP8. I will look at this notion in Section 4.

posited as actually existing, and when it is taken away, the thing ceases to actually exist. According to Spinoza's famous *conatus* doctrine of EIIP6,²⁵ each singular thing strives to persevere in its *own* being and no singular thing can exist without its actual essence—that is, its striving to persevere in its existence.²⁶ Since this striving is simply the striving to preserve *oneself*, the essence of singular thing A is unique to A since it is the striving to preserve A. In short, the *conatus* of each singular thing is unique to that thing and cannot be shared with any other singular thing. Thus, Spinoza's conception of actual essence, just like the general definition of essence, provides further evidence for Spinoza's commitment to the uniqueness of essences.²⁷

²⁵ The *conatus* doctrine of EIIP6 reads: "Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being." The Latin is: *Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*. At this point, one might ask what "insofar as it is in itself" ("*quantum in se est*") qualification means. While "*quantum in se est*" is translated by Curley (1985) as "as far as it can by its own power," Garrett (2002) thinks that a more literal translation would be "insofar as it is in itself." As Garrett states, Spinoza makes use of 'in se' in the sense of "in itself" in some other propositions in the *Ethics* including EID3 where he defines "substance" as follows: "By substance I understand what is in itself [*in se*] and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed." Thus being *in se* suggests substantiality, and hence conceptual and causal independence *par excellence*. Having said that, can singular things, which are modes having finite and determinate existences, be *in se* at all? Both Don Garrett and Martin Lin's answers are positive. Whereas Garrett (2002, 149) suggests understanding *in se* relation as an inherence relation where singular things might be called "quasi-substances"—that is, as finite approximations to a genuine substance, Lin (2004) emphasizes the expressive relationship between modes and God. Lin and Garrett reach the same conclusion from different directions. Lin puts more emphasis on the efficient causality implied by *in se* as *causa sui*, which in turn implies an expression relation. According to Lin, as we will see in Section 5, we can see self-preservative action of individual modes as exemplifying the power by which God is the cause of himself.

²⁶ Spinoza also suggests in EII13S (GII.99-100) that the essence of an individual body is constituted by a certain ratio of motion and rest, such that when certain extended properties are given, the individual is given, and when they are taken away, the individual is taken away. How does *this* singular essence of a thing comport with that which I have called the "actual essence" (which is conceived as a function of a thing's *conatus*)? I believe that the inconsistency here is only apparent, since one can say that the actual essence of any body consists in its *striving* to maintain a ratio of motion and rest, as Nadler suggests (2006, 195, n.5).

²⁷ Commentators who interpret the *conatus* doctrine this way include Della Rocca (2004, 133-4) and Martin (2008, 491-2).

Spinoza's definition of the essence of a thing in EIID2, together with the *conatus* doctrine, provides textual evidence for the view that Spinoza understands the essences of singular things to be unique to the thing.²⁸ Yet there is also textual support for the alternative interpretation, namely, that Spinoza uses the term 'essence' to refer to a common nature repeated in the modes of the same kind, which would suggest that distinct singular things such as distinct members of the same species have the exact same essence. One such passage is EIP17S, where Spinoza states that men "can agree entirely according to their essence" such that if the essence of one could be destroyed the other's essence would also be destroyed, whereas "if the existence of one perishes, the other's existence will not thereby perish" (EIP17S). This passage suggests that the essence of a man, unlike his existence, is not unique to that man. Thus even though "in existing they must differ," in essence, men are identical—that is, they share the same essence, i.e. human nature.²⁹ It is clear that Spinoza's definition of essence in EIID2 cannot apply to this conception of shared essence, since, for instance, it is not the case that human nature (or humanity) "can neither be nor be conceived" without Adam. If Adam dies, human nature is not thereby "taken away" with him.

Spinoza's remarks about human nature in Part IV of the *Ethics* provide further textual support for the interpretation that essences of things are shared. Especially in the

²⁸ Note that there are passages in the *Short Treatise* (KV) in which Spinoza endorses this view. He writes, for instance, that "If God had created all men like Adam...then he would have created only Adam, and not Peter and Paul. But God's true perfection is that he gives all things their essence, from the last to the greatest...We conclude then by saying that Peter must agree with the idea of Peter...and not with the idea of Man..." (KV I, Chapter VI (G I 43)). For another similar passage, see KV I, Chapter X (GI 49).

²⁹ In EI there is another passage—EIP8S2—which provides less direct textual support for the interpretation that Spinoza uses the term 'essence' to refer to a common nature. For an excellent treatment of this passage see Martin (2008, 493-4).

second half of Part IV, Spinoza holds the general metaphysical thesis that whenever two things “agree in nature,” they will to that extent be mutually beneficial, since the nature that each strives to benefit is the same.³⁰ This thesis opens up the possibility for Spinoza’s account of interpersonal morality, which is based on the idea that “among singular things there is nothing more useful to man than a man”—especially a man who lives according to the guidance of reason (EIVP35C1). In order to explain why this is the case, Spinoza invokes the notion of human nature:³¹ “insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good for *human nature*, and hence, for each man, that is (by 31C), those things which agree with the nature of each man” (EIVP35D, my italics).³² Another passage where Spinoza uses the notion of human nature in a similar way is EIIIP57S:

...the affects of the animals which are called irrational...differ from men’s affects as much as *their nature* differs from *human nature*. Both the horse and the man are driven by a lust to procreate; but the one is driven by an *equine lust*, and the other by a *human lust*. So also the lusts and appetites of insects, fish, and birds must vary. (my italics)

³⁰ Note that EIVPP29-36 concern relations among human beings and the preconditions for sustained mutually beneficial cooperation, i.e. collaborative morality. See for instance EIVP30: “No thing can be evil for us through what it possesses in common with our nature, but insofar as it is evil for us, it is contrary to us” and EIVP31: “Insofar as a thing is in agreement with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good.” I will elaborate on the connection between reason and Spinoza’s account of collaborative morality in Chapter 5.

³¹ It seems safe to say that Spinoza uses ‘essence’, ‘nature’ and ‘form’ interchangeably, following a long tradition. Note that Spinoza equates ‘nature’ and ‘essence’ in EIVD8.

³² As Martin (2008, 492) notes, in EIVP31D, Spinoza appears to understand ‘our nature’ (*nostra natura*) as the nature shared by each human being. All this suggests that although Spinoza is famously known to oppose the Aristotelian conception of the human nature as “rational animal” on the grounds that it is a fictitious abstraction, there is evidence to suggest that he does not reject all conceptions of human nature, and hence that he does not reject all species concepts. Moreover, even though he does not define a human being as a “rational animal,” Spinoza nonetheless maintains that rationality is a distinctive mark of humanity, since the shared essence of human beings involves (at least in part) the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas. We will see this relates to Spinoza’s moral theory in Chapter 5.

So the affect of a horse differs from the affect of a human being as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other, suggesting that human nature and equine nature are two different essences shared by or repeated in the distinct modes of the same species.³³ Importantly, Spinoza refers to this Scholium later in Part IV to demonstrate his view that the law against killing animals is based more on empty superstition and unmanly compassion than sound reason, which teaches us “to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from *human nature*” (EIVP37S1, my italics).³⁴

How do we reconcile the passages where Spinoza uses the term ‘essence’ to refer to a specific nature shared by distinct modes with EIID2 and the *conatus* doctrine? One recent strategy has been to see Spinoza as espousing both unique and shared essences in the *Ethics*, and hence as speaking of essences at different levels of generality and specificity.³⁵ According to this view, one reading does not exclude the other since

³³ Note that EIIP57 and its demonstration is a point about how one individual differs from another “to the extent that the essence of the one individual differs from the essence of the other.” The language Spinoza uses in these passages, especially towards the end of the demonstration, where he invokes EIIP9S, seems to be supportive of the unique essences view. EVP22, which reads “Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity,” is another passage seeming to accommodate both conceptions of essences. The essence of the human body mentioned in EVP22 might be a common nature that human beings share, but then again it might be the unique essence of a particular body, which pertains to the essence of a particular mind. I will return to EVP22 in Sections 5 and 6 of the present chapter, and also in Chapter 6 in connection with Spinoza’s account of eternity of the mind. According to Della Rocca (2004, 128-134), EIVP35D provides another example where both unique and shared essences are at work.

³⁴ Even though Spinoza does not deny that these animals have sensations, he does deny that we are “not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us.”

³⁵ Della Rocca (2008, 95). While Della Rocca does not elaborate on how this strategy would work, Martin (2008) gives a detailed account of Spinoza’s dual commitment to unique and shared essences motivated by

Spinoza's framework of the essences of singular things is rooted in a dual commitment to unique and shared essences.³⁶ If this is true, then, in Spinoza's metaphysics there is room for both shared essences, which capture what is common to different singular things, and unique essences, which capture what is distinctive of particular singular things.³⁷ To be more specific, there is room for both the essence of Adam insofar as he is a human being, which he shares with other human beings, and the essence of Adam insofar as he is Adam, which is unique to him and cannot be shared by anyone else. If so, then how does Spinoza's espousal of both of these essences bear on our main question as to whether there is something that can be known by intuitive knowledge—the essences of things—that cannot be known by reason?

3.3. Shared Essences and Reason

Whether the essence of a thing is *exclusively* known by intuition depends on whether we are contemplating unique or shared essences. Insofar as the shared essences of things are concerned, reason, as well as intuition, can be said to reach adequate knowledge of them,

his conviction that Spinoza's framework of modal essences at work in the *Ethics* can only be comprehended by recognizing Spinoza's simultaneous commitment to both types of essence. Commentators such as Yovel (1989), on the other hand, see Spinoza as a proponent of new science and maintain that in his system the causal, mechanistic laws of nature have replaced universal essences. Nevertheless, Yovel (*ibid*, 162) argues that this does not mean that Spinoza gave up the concept of essence as such, since he substitutes particular essences for universal ones. Martin (2008, 504-7) comes very close to Yovel's view by suggesting that shared essences are laws of nature.

³⁶ Martin (2008, 490).

³⁷ In order to make sense of the textual evidence for both conceptions of essences in the *Ethics*, I will proceed on the assumption that the strategy suggested by Della Rocca and Martin is the right one.

or so I hold.³⁸ That reason relates to the shared essences of things follows from the fact that reason provides one with an understanding of things through their *shared* aspects. That reason relates to one shared essence in particular—namely, human nature—is explicitly seen in the Part IV of the *Ethics*, where (as we saw in the previous section) Spinoza invokes the notion of human nature in connection with his account of interpersonal morality.

Before focusing on the specific connection between reason and human nature, let me briefly show how reason relates to shared essences in general. Recall that for Spinoza knowledge of the second kind arises “from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of properties of things.”³⁹ As Spinoza demonstrates in EIIP38, those things which are “common to all things,” of which we have “common notions,” are properties of which we also have adequate ideas. As shown in Chapter 2, common notions differ in their relative generality. In addition to notions representing properties that are shared by *all* existing bodies, including “extension” and “motion and rest” (EIIL2D),⁴⁰ there are “certain ideas, or notions, common to *all men*” (EIIP38C, my italics), but not to *all things*. In other words, in addition to general common notions representing “things which are common to all,”⁴¹ there are specific common notions

³⁸ Since intuitive knowledge, by its definition, reaches the adequate knowledge of the essences of things, it would reach these essences regardless of their being shared or unique ones.

³⁹ EIIP40S2. As we saw in Chapter 2, this description is significant in that it introduces a new concept, which was not present in Spinoza’s earlier works—that is, the concept of a *common notion*.

⁴⁰ These examples pave the way for Curley’s interpretation of reason as knowledge of the attributes, such as extension, and infinite modes such as motion and rest (1973a, 51).

⁴¹ As noted in Chapter 2, since in EIIP37-39 Spinoza uses ‘thing’ and ‘body’ interchangeably, it seems that common notions are the adequate ideas of things—that is, bodies. Yet, following the famous EIIP7

representing properties which are common to *some* things to the exclusion of others. Together, general common notions and specific common notions allow the mind to “perceive many things” and form “universal notions,” because they enable the mind to represent in a single idea *all* or *some* of the many things that share in a certain property, and to draw conclusions from these adequate and universal representations.⁴²

Having recalled the account of common notions in Chapter 2, how does the fact that reason employs common notions in order to gain adequate knowledge of things bear on the question of whether reason can be said to reach adequate knowledge of the *essences* of things? In light of the above discussion, it is clear that neither general nor specific common notions can explain the essence of a singular thing *qua* singular.⁴³ Nevertheless, my contention is that both general and specific common notions can explain the “shared essences” of things. General common notions, which as we have seen represent properties that are shared by all existing bodies, explain the shared essence of any mode of extension, though not a mode of thought. The notion of “motion and rest” would explain, for instance, what Adam, Paul and the rock Adam threw at Paul share *qua* bodies. Likewise, specific common notions, which represent properties that are not only common but also *peculiar* to a group of things, can also be said to explain the shared

guaranteeing the parallelism of things and ideas, we can, presumably, conclude that just as there are common notions concerning bodies, so too are there common notions that concern ideas or minds.

⁴² Garrett (2010, 108). As we saw earlier, Garrett notes that because these representations are adequate, they allow the mind to cognize or infer without danger of error that something is true.

⁴³ This is because, as we saw in Section 1, according to Spinoza “What is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing” (EIP37). Note that the demonstration of EIP37 discussed in Section 2 could easily be modified to apply to what is common to *some* things and is equally in the part and in the whole of those things.

essences of things.⁴⁴ I maintained in Chapter 2 that it is reasonable to conceive of “human nature” or “humanity” as an example of a specific common notion, one which represents the properties that are common and distinctive to human beings and stipulates conditions for a mode’s being a human being. Although both general and specific common notions can thus be said to explain the shared essences of things, it is the latter one which brings us back to the connection between reason and human nature.

The specific common notion of human nature allows the mind to represent in this notion all human beings who share in the same essence, and enables us to draw conclusions from this universal representation. In virtue of the power of reason to comprehend human beings through their shared aspects by employing the notion of human nature, we understand not only the essence of Adam insofar as he is human, but also that Adam and I and all other human beings share the very same essence, which involves the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas. The rational understanding of oneself and each other through this shared aspect leads to the comprehension that “man’s greatest good, namely to know God, is common to all men” (EIVP36D),⁴⁵ as well as to the conclusion that for a human being there is nothing more valuable than another human being, who lives according to the guidance of reason (a proposition which grounds Spinoza’s argument for collaborative morality).⁴⁶ We will

⁴⁴ Gueroult (1974, 342) holds that that the property (or properties) common and peculiar to certain bodies expresses the specific structure of the thing and hence its specific (or shared) essence.

⁴⁵ In EIVP36S Spinoza states that “it is not by accident that man’s greatest good is common to all; rather it arises from the very nature of reason.”

⁴⁶ As we will see in Chapter 5, it is helpful here to distinguish the shared essence of human beings insofar as it can be known by reason, and the shared essence of human beings insofar as it involves (in part)

return to the topic of “human nature” in Chapter 5 as we look at how reason relates to the ethical life by grounding the possibility of collaborative morality.

To the extent that we can make use of common notions, instead of being “determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things,” our mind is “determined internally from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions.”⁴⁷ Hence, according to Spinoza, reason allows us to understand not only the agreements but also “the differences, and oppositions” among things.⁴⁸ In other words, it is thanks to reason that we can understand not only whose nature agrees with our nature, but also whose nature is different from our nature, and act accordingly. As we have stated above, reason “teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from human nature” (EIVP37S1). Although reason thereby descends to a relatively particular and distinctive level of understanding of singular things *via* specific common notions, it can never capture what is unique to a singular thing.

the capacity to reason. The statement that “for a human being there is nothing more valuable than another human being, who lives according to the guidance of reason” entails not only that we *have* a shared essence that can be known by reason, but also that we are by nature beings *that reason*, and hence creatures that can reach agreement on ends—a feat that is impossible for beings whose actions are driven solely by passion. See IVP36 and EIV36S, which is quoted in the previous footnote in support of this point. See also EIVP32 for Spinoza’s view that insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature.

⁴⁷ As noted earlier, Spinoza makes this distinction between the external determination of the mind and internal determination of the mind in EIIP29S.

⁴⁸ Reason, thus, allows us to understand not only the agreements but also “the differences, and oppositions” among things, including human beings. Note that, for Spinoza, insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature (EIVP32). Thus the fact that Adam is a human being does not guarantee that he will completely agree in nature with another human being. It is thanks to reason that we can distinguish a human being who is guided by reason from another who is subject to her passions.

Despite the fact that common notions provide the conceptual and explanatory framework within which the truth of *singular* things can be apprehended, as Nadler⁴⁹ suggests, it is important not to forget that this understanding is always through some shared properties, which “does not constitute the [unique] essence of any singular thing” (EIP37). So although common notions provide us with an adequate understanding of singular things through their shared essences, they “do not explain the [unique] essence of any singular thing” (EIP44C2D). The universal character of reason thus poses an important limitation on its content: it can provide us with only a limited understanding of singular things, since it reflects knowledge of singular things through their shared aspects rather than by way of their unique essences.

Having seen how reason relates to shared essences in general and to the notion of human nature in particular, it should now be clear that there would be no difference in content between reason and intuition if the essences of things were all shared essences. If Spinoza were committed solely to shared essences, then we would be justified in holding that the only difference between reason and intuitive knowledge is a difference in their respective methods of cognition. Yet, as we have seen, according to one major strand in Spinoza’s thinking, the essences of singular things are unique.⁵⁰ It is on this basis that I maintain that there is something that can be known by intuitive knowledge—namely, the unique (actual)⁵¹ essences of things—that cannot be known by reason.

⁴⁹ Nadler (2006, 181).

⁵⁰ Della Rocca (2008, 95).

⁵¹ Henceforth I will use ‘unique essences’ and ‘actual essences’ interchangeably.

3.4. Actual Essences via Intuitive Knowledge

Attributing to Spinoza the view that intuitive knowledge can reach adequate knowledge of the actual essences of things immediately raises a serious objection, one that must be met if we are to establish the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge. According to this objection, we cannot have adequate knowledge of the actual essences of things because (1) the actual essence of a thing endures for as long as the thing endures, that is to say, it is durational,⁵² and (2) we cannot have adequate knowledge of the duration of things (EIIPP30, 31). Therefore, so the argument goes, human cognition of actual essences is limited to knowledge of the first kind.⁵³ In this section, I address this potential criticism—which I will call the ‘durational objection’—by showing that the actual essence of a singular thing can be adequately known by intuitive knowledge once we conceive of the existence of the thing *insofar as it is in God*.

The durational objection rests on the assumption that the actual essence of a singular thing is completely durational insofar as it is identical with the durationally determined singular thing. This assumption is derived from the close connection between the actual essence of a thing and its actual existence, which was noted in Section 2 above. The actual essence of a thing, unlike its shared essence, entails its actual existence, meaning that when the former is given, the thing is necessarily posited as actually existing, and when it is taken away, the thing ceases to actually exist. In the *Ethics*,

⁵² Both Garrett (2010) and Martin (2008) hold that actual essences of things are durational.

⁵³ Garrett (2010, 112) holds that human cognition of actual essences—even one’s own—is limited to cognition of the first kind.

Spinoza is very clear that we cannot have adequate knowledge of the actual existence and modifications of things, since this requires adequate knowledge of how that thing specifically came into existence and underwent modifications in relation to an infinite number of other causal circumstances. As shown in Chapter 1, he calls this infinite network of finite causes and effects “the common order of Nature and the constitution of things.”⁵⁴ A singular thing has a durational existence and is determined to exist in a certain way insofar as it is in the common order of nature, which determines the duration of its body (EIP30D). Since, for Spinoza, we can have but an inadequate knowledge of the duration of our body (EIP30) and of the singular things that exist outside of us (EIP31), we cannot possibly *understand* singular things, including ourselves insofar as our mind perceives them from the common order of nature.⁵⁵ This is because understanding durational existence in accordance with the common order of nature is simply beyond the capabilities of human cognition. Does this imply that we cannot have an adequate knowledge of the actual essences of things, on the grounds that they are likewise durational?

⁵⁴ As also shown in Chapter 1, Spinoza describes this infinite network of finite causes and effects in EIP28: “Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.”

⁵⁵ We saw in Chapter 1 that according to the common order of Nature, any singular thing implicates all the other things to infinity. Hence, if one wants to know x, since to know x is to know its causes, one has to know an infinity of finite causes. That is why as long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of Nature, “it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies” (EIP29C).

As Spinoza states in EIIIP8D, the *conatus* of a thing involves “indefinite time,” which means that unless it is destroyed by an external cause, a thing will always continue to exist by virtue of the same power by which it now exists. For Spinoza, to the extent that “we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it” (EIIIP4D). Yet, insofar as we attend to the thing together with the external causes, “there is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whereas one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed” (EIVA1). This is the only axiom of Part IV of the *Ethics*, and it “concerns singular things insofar as they are considered in relation to a certain time and place” (EVP37S). According to Spinoza, it is evident from this axiom that “the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (EIVP3). If we were to interpret all of this as holding that the actual essence of a thing is dependent on the common order of nature and has a *determinate* duration, then we could not avoid the conclusion that for Spinoza human cognition of actual essences is limited to knowledge of the first kind, as the durational objection holds. Thankfully we need not be led to this conclusion since, as I will now show, a thing’s actual essence does not have the same sort of durational character that its determinate existence has.

I will begin by noting that for Spinoza, thinking of “singular things insofar as they are considered in relation to a certain time and place” is not the only way by which we can conceive of the existence of things. According to Spinoza,

We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of divine nature. (EVP29S)

Spinoza continues in this Scholium by saying that conceiving of things in this second way as true, or real, is nothing but conceiving of them *sub specie aeternitatis*. As shown in Chapter 1, the phrase *sub specie aeternitatis* indicates a way of knowing singular things by conceiving of them “under the aspect of eternity” or “from the point of view of eternity,” i.e., “without any relation to time.” For Spinoza, since the essence of God involves existence, it is impossible to conceive of God’s existence in relation to a time and place.⁵⁶ Eternity is the very essence of God, and nothing except God or God’s attributes can be eternal in this sense. This is because everything else is *in* God and *conceived through* God. Since singular things do not exist through themselves—namely, are not *causa sui*, they can be said to be eternal *only* by virtue of God as its cause, *not* by virtue of themselves.⁵⁷ Singular things can be conceived of *sub specie aeternitatis*, namely, “insofar as they are *conceived through God’s essence*, as real beings, or insofar as through God’s essence they involve existence” (EVP30D, my italics). Conceiving of things *sub specie aeternitatis* and conceiving of them in relation to a specific time and place are thus two ways in which we can understand the existence of things. Spinoza again employs this distinction in EIIP45S:⁵⁸

⁵⁶ As shown in Chapter 1, the reason why the essence of substance involves existence is owing to its property of being *causa sui*. In the very first definition of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines *causa sui* as follows: “By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing.”

⁵⁷ Deleuze (1988, 66).

By existence I do not understand duration, that is, existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of *the very nature of existence*, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature in infinitely many modes (see I16). I am speaking, I say, of *the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God*. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still *the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature*. Concerning this, see IP24C. (my italics)

Thus, in addition to abstractly conceiving of the determined, durational existence of singular things, we can also conceive of their existence insofar as they are in God. In other words, there are two different ways by which we can conceive of the existence of singular things: (1) insofar as they are said to have duration, and (2) insofar as they are in God or comprehended in God's attributes. EIIP45S is critical here, because when Spinoza draws this distinction, he contrasts durational existence, whereby each singular thing is *determined* to exist in a certain way, with the "force by which each one perseveres in existing," namely, its "actual essence" (EIIP7). He describes the force by which each thing perseveres in existence as "the very existence of singular things *insofar as they are in God*" (my italics), not as a power involving definite time. This point is also supported by EIIP8, which reads "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being involves no finite time, but an indefinite time." The crucial contrast here is that between the *indeterminate* duration of the actual essence of a thing and the *determinate* duration of its actual existence. I argue that the durational objection fails because it mistakenly construes the actual essence of a thing as involving the latter.

⁵⁸ Note that Spinoza invokes EIIP45S (together with EIIP45) at the very end of EVP29S in support of his claim that the ideas of the things "...we conceive under a species of eternity...involve the eternal and infinite essence of God."

EIIP45S and EIIP8 therefore suggest that the actual essence of a thing does not have a durational character in the way that its determinate existence has. Since the actual essence of a thing does not have a determinate duration, we can be said to reach intuitive knowledge of this essence, meaning that we can attain adequate knowledge of the actual essence as it “follows from the eternal necessity of God’s nature.” We can conceive of the actual essences of singular things to the extent that we comprehend those things *sub specie aeternitatis*—that is, “insofar as they are conceived through God’s essence, as real beings, or insofar as through God’s essence they involve existence” (EVP30D).

Spinoza’s letter to Meyer (Letter XII) further supports the view that there is a distinction between abstractly conceiving of the determinate durational existence of singular things and conceiving of their existence insofar as they are in God. As shown in Chapter 1, in this letter, Spinoza uses “eternity” and “duration” in order to qualify the existence of substance (and attributes) and modes respectively.⁵⁹ According to Spinoza, whereas the existence of substance (and attributes) can only be conceived of as eternal, the existence of modes can solely be conceived of as durational, which I call ‘duration in its wide sense’. The duration in its wide sense (i.e. the existence of modes) can be thought of in two ways: (1) in an abstracted way, namely, insofar as we conceive of singular things to exist in relation to a certain time and place, and (2) in a non-abstracted way, i.e., in a way wherein modes are not isolated from substance, and, thereby, eternity.

As we see in Letter XII, the modes of substance can never be correctly understood

⁵⁹ Recall that, in addition to Chapter 1, we talked about Letter XII also in Chapter 2 in order to show how Spinoza distinguishes between that which we can apprehend *only* by the intellect and that which can *also* be apprehended by imagination. This point will come up in the next section as we look at the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge.

to the extent that they are thought of in the first way, namely, insofar as they are confused with mental constructs (*entia rationis*) or aids to imagination such as time, measure, and number. “For by doing so we are separating them from Substance and from the manner of their efflux from Eternity, and in such isolation they can never be correctly understood.” Conceiving of the actual existence or determinate durational existence a singular thing, which I call ‘duration in its narrow sense’, results in such a confused cognition.⁶⁰ As we saw earlier, we can only have an inadequate knowledge of the determinate duration of singular things, i.e. duration in its narrow sense. Thankfully, this is not the only way to conceive of the duration of singular things. We can conceive of the duration of singular things in a non-abstracted way to the extent that we conceive of their existence insofar as they are contained in God’s attributes. Whereas we can have only an inadequate knowledge of the actual durational existence of bodies, we can have an adequate knowledge of the actual essence of a particular body involving indefinite duration. This is because indefinite duration involved in the actual essence is the species of eternity under which the unique essence is conceived. By conceiving of the actual essence of a singular thing, we thereby conceive of its duration in a non-abstracted manner, i.e. in a way “which is not isolated from eternity and Substance.” Having said this we can set up the following lengthy equation for Spinoza:

conceiving of the duration of singular things in a non-abstracted way=conceiving of the existence of singular things insofar as they are contained in God’s attributes=conceiving of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes=conceiving of the actual essence of singular

⁶⁰ Spinoza sometimes uses duration in this narrow sense to refer solely to the determined existence of singular things. See, for instance, EIIP30 and 31.

things involving an indefinite duration=conceiving of the singular things *sub specie aeternitatis*

I hold that the durational objection fails not only because it mistakenly construes the actual essence of a thing as involving the determinate duration of its actual existence (as I showed earlier), but also because it overlooks the fact that there is a non-abstracted way to conceive of the duration of singular things. Before concluding this section, I will address an issue that I myself overlooked as I was elaborating on Spinoza's account of the essences of things in Section 2: the issue of formal essences.

Actual Essences as Unique Formal Essences

In addition to EIIP45S and EVP29S that we quoted earlier, we find Spinoza presenting the very same difference between the two ways that a singular thing is said to exist elsewhere:

...as long as singular things do not exist except *insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes*, but insofar also as *they are said to have duration*, their objective being, or ideas, do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration (EIIP8C, my italics).

Interestingly, in EIIP8, i.e. the proposition preceding this Corollary, rather than relating the existence "insofar as the [singular things] are comprehended in God's attributes" to the actual essence of the thing as he does in EIIP45S, Spinoza relates the former to another specialized notion of essence: formal essence (*essentia formalis*). When we look at EIIP8 we see that Spinoza, for the first and the last time in the *Ethics*, makes

operational use of the ‘formal essence’ in connection with the existence of singular things insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes.⁶¹

The ideas of singular things, or of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God’s attributes.

There has been scholarly dispute as to how to interpret formal essences and their relation/distinction to/from actual essences in Spinoza’s metaphysical system.⁶² While some commentators including Don Garrett have interpreted formal essences to be separate from actual essences,⁶³ others have tried to understand the distinction by reducing one essence to the other.⁶⁴ In what follows, I will argue briefly that, conceived in a certain way, the formal essence of a thing is identical to its actual essence.

It has been suggested that the essences at issue in EVP22 are the formal essences: “...in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity.”⁶⁵ If this is correct, and if the formal essence of a thing is thus conceived of *sub specie aeternitatis*, how do we distinguish formal essence of a thing from its actual essence? Recall that earlier in Section 2, I presented EVP22 as one

⁶¹ As we noted earlier, ‘formal’ appears for a second time in the Dutch text of EIP40S2. In his account of intuitive knowledge, Don Rutherford (1999, 459, n.19) assumes that it is not to be attributed to Spinoza. See also EIP17S (GII63) for another passage that Spinoza uses the term ‘formal essence’.

⁶² In addition to this, there has also been scholarly dispute as to how to interpret the issue of non-existent modes in Spinoza’s thought. See, for instance, Curley (1969, 138-40), Martin (2008) and Yakira (1994). For the purposes of this chapter I do not need to address the issue of non-existent modes in Spinoza’s *Ethics*.

⁶³ See Martin (2008) and Garrett (2009&2010) for this view.

⁶⁴ Among such commentators are Wolfson (1934), Donagan (1988) and Delahunty (1985).

⁶⁵ Don Garrett (2009&2010), for instance, assumes that the context makes it clear that the appearance of the term ‘essence’ here refers to “formal essence.”

of the passages that seems to accommodate both unique and shared essences. In other words, the essence of the human body mentioned in EVP22 might be a common nature that human beings share, but then again it might be the unique essence of a particular body, which pertains to the essence of a particular mind. Having recalled this, I believe that the answer to the question I just posed depends on whether what is at stake is the formal essence of a singular thing *qua* shared essence or the formal essence of a singular thing *qua* unique essence.⁶⁶ If what is at stake is the latter, then I hold that there is absolutely no difference between conceiving of “the very existence of [a singular thing] insofar as [it is] God” (EIIP45S) and of the formal unique essence of a singular thing “that is contained in God’s attributes” (EIIP8).⁶⁷ In other words, I hold that conceiving of the actual essence of a singular thing is just conceiving of its formal unique essence.⁶⁸ This is because conceiving of the former is nothing but conceiving of the

⁶⁶ While Della Rocca (2008, 257-8) thinks that the essence at stake in EVP22 is the unique essence without qualifying it as ‘formal essence’, Don Garrett (2010, 104) interprets it as the formal essence, which he sees as “the pervasive feature of an attribute that consists in the compatibility of the laws of nature of that attribute with the existence of the thing itself, so that the thing itself can exist at any place where the requisite finite causes may prove to be present.” Within the context that I will use EVP22 in the rest of this chapter and Chapter 6—namely, the context of the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge and its ethical implications—I will focus on the reading of EVP22 as implying unique essences as Della Rocca does. This does not suggest, however, that I see this passage to be exclusively about unique essences.

⁶⁷ If what is at stake is the former, then the formal essence of Adam *qua* human will be different from the very existence of Adam insofar as he is in God. Commentators such as Donagan (1973) and (1988), Delahunty (1985), and Matson (1990) have often noted that the formal essence of a thing constitutes in some way the “possibility” or “actualizability” of that thing. If my reading here is correct, then the formal essence of a thing *qua* shared essence would constitute in some way the “possibility” or “actualizability” of that thing, whereas formal essence of a thing *qua* unique essence refers to its own very existence insofar as it is comprehended in God’s attributes. This reading, however, is only tentative. As my discussion here makes it clear, I believe that we do not need the notion of “formal essence” in order to explain the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge. In that regard, I radically differ from Garrett (2010) and come closer to Rutherford (1999, 459, n.19).

⁶⁸ Henceforth, when I say ‘unique essence’ or ‘actual essence’ it should also be taken to refer to ‘formal unique essence’ as well, even though I will not use the term ‘formal unique essence’ for the sake of simplicity.

existence of the singular thing insofar as it is comprehended in God's attributes—that is, the kind of existence Spinoza distinguishes from determinate durational existence not only in EVP29S and EIIP45S, but also in EIIP8 and EIIP8C.⁶⁹

To conclude this section, on my reading, understanding singular things by way of their actual essences does not amount to an adequate cognition of their present actual existence, determining and determined by other finite modes. That is to say, it does not amount to an understanding of how singular things specifically came into existence and underwent modifications in relation to an infinite number of other causal circumstances. Rather, it concerns the very nature of their existence or the internal force by which they persevere in existence following from the eternal necessity of God's nature.⁷⁰ But what exactly does it mean to understand the very nature of a thing's existence following from

⁶⁹ Don Garrett, in his durational objection, totally overlooks this connection between EVP29S, EIIP45S, and EIIP8&C. Note that my reading here is consistent with EIID2, according to which there is no real distinction between a thing and its essence. Since Spinoza describes the actual essence of a thing as “the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God” and as involving indefinite time, it seems that once the actual essence of a thing or the formal unique essence is given, the thing is necessarily posited as actually existing (and vice versa), but only in the second of the senses distinguished in VP29S—that is, insofar as we conceive it to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of divine nature. It is thus wrong to say that once the actual essence is given, the thing is necessarily posited as existing in relation to a certain time and place, since the determinate durational existence of a thing presupposes not only its actual essence but also the external causes that determine it to exist in a certain way.

⁷⁰ Gueroult (1974, 421) also notes the special nature of conceiving of the very nature of the existence of things. He states that in the demonstration of EIIP45 Spinoza makes a decisive turning-point determined by the way he uses EIA4, applying it not to the external causes determining the existence (or the duration) of the singular body, but to its internal and unique cause, namely God. Gueroult maintains that later in the Scholium to this proposition, i.e. in EIIP45S, Spinoza makes it even more clear that we are no longer on the level of durational existence, but the very nature of existence—that is, the force by which each one perseveres in existing following from the eternal necessity of God's nature. He concludes that since the actual essence of a body, contrary to its actual existence, does not depend on the common order of Nature (the chain of finite causes described in EIP28), but on God, the only absolute cause in itself, it escapes from the temporality and approximates the eternity by being conceived SSA.

God's essence? To put the question in more concrete terms with an example, what does understanding the very nature of Adam's existence following from God's essence entail? We know that it does not amount to the limited knowledge of Adam's durational existence through which we may come to know the events of his life and the circumstances of his death.⁷¹ Nor does it entail understanding Adam's properties *qua* human—that is, *qua* human body and human mind—together with the laws that govern changes in these properties. Intuitive knowledge of the very nature of Adam's existence following from God's essence is different from and superior to not only the inadequate knowledge we have of Adam's durational existence, but also the adequate knowledge we have, due to reason, of Adam as a human being.

Thus far we have seen what “understanding of the very nature of Adam's existence following from God's essence” does *not* amount to. But seeing this brings us only halfway to the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge. In the next section, I will flesh out what such an understanding *does* amount to, arguing that it is nothing but our intuitive grasp of the relation of God's essence to Adam's unique essence, which in turn is a direct comprehension of Adam's unique expression of God's power.

3.5. The Distinctive Content of Intuitive Knowledge

In order to better understand the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge, it is helpful to start by considering the relation between the essence of God and the essence of things. In

⁷¹ This would constitute knowledge of the first kind that we defined in Chapter 1.

his metaphysics, Spinoza distinguishes between the essence of God and that of things produced by God. Whereas the essence of God necessarily involves existence owing to his property of being *causa sui*, the essence of produced things does not involve existence (EIP24), and thus such things are not *causa sui*. God is the efficient cause not only of their existence but also of their essence (EIP25). In Spinoza's words, "God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, *or* (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things" (EIP24C).⁷² Importantly, as briefly seen in Chapter 1, Spinoza's conception of efficient causality is one according to which (1) effects, or the things produced by God, are the manifestation or exemplification of their cause, i.e. God's power⁷³, and (2) "God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself" (EIP25S).⁷⁴ In order to understand how this conception of efficient causality bears on the relation of the essence of God to the essence of things, note that for Spinoza, (2) follows clearly from the fact that singular things are "modes by which God's attributes are *expressed* in a certain and determinate way" (EIP25C, my italics).⁷⁵ In other words, that "God must be called the

⁷² The rest of this Corollary reads as follows: "For—whether the things exist or not—so long as we attend to their essence, we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration. So their essence can be the cause neither of their existence nor of their duration, but only God, to whose nature alone it pertains to exist [, can be the cause] (by P14C1)".

⁷³ As Martin Lin (2004, 30-2) shows, the Neoplatonic idea that an effect manifests the nature of its cause—that is, cause gives something of itself to or impresses itself upon its effect—is pervasive in the seventeenth century. For an account of how this conception of efficient causality stands behind Spinoza's conception of expression in detail, see *ibid*, 32-49.

⁷⁴ This Scholium presents us with Spinoza's unique understanding of divine concurrence, which does not preclude the causal activity of creatures. *Ibid*, 34-5.

⁷⁵ For Spinoza, the demonstration of this Corollary is evident from EIP15 and EID5.

cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself” is established from the fact that singular things “*express* in a certain and determinate way, God’s power, by which God is and acts” (EIIIP6D, my italics).⁷⁶ The natural consequence of this conception of efficient causality is that the power of singular things *exemplifies* the power by which God is the cause of himself.⁷⁷ Or, as Spinoza puts it in EIVP4D:

The power by which the singular things (and consequently, [any] man) preserve their being is the power itself of God *or* Nature (by IP24C),⁷⁸ not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it is explained through the man’s essence (by IIIIP7). The man’s power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God *or* Nature’s infinite power, that is (by IP34),⁷⁹ of its essence.

So the *conatus* of a singular thing is nothing but God’s very power manifested in a finite form. In other words, the actual essence of a singular thing is a partial expression of God’s infinite and eternal essence. This is the relation of the essence of God to the essence of singular things, and understanding the very nature of a thing’s existence

⁷⁶ “For singular things are modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by IP25C), that is (by IP34), things that express in a certain and determinate way, God’s power, by which God is and acts” (EIIIP6D).

⁷⁷ As seen in Chapter 1, Lin (ibid, 46-9) notes that Spinoza diverges from the traditional view represented by Thomas in that on Spinoza’s account the power of creatures does not resemble or imitate the power of God. Rather it is that very power, but in a finite form. As Lin correctly observes, this difference lies in the fact that whereas, for Spinoza, God is the immanent cause of all creatures (meaning that everything inheres in God as modes of a substance), the traditional view represented by Thomas views God as a transcendent cause.

⁷⁸ Note that Spinoza invokes EIP24C also in EIIP45S, where he describes *conatus* as the very existence of singular things as we noted above.

⁷⁹ “God’s power is his essence itself” (EIP34).

following from God's essence is nothing but the intuitive grasp of this relation.⁸⁰ Hence, when one understands a singular thing by way of its actual essence, one thereby apprehends at once (1) that thing insofar as it is conceived through God's essence, as a real being (EVP30D),⁸¹ and (2) God's essence insofar as it is explained through the essence of the thing, such that the more we understand singular things in *this* way, the more we understand God (EVP24).

More insight into the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge can be gleaned from EIIP47S, where Spinoza establishes the possibility of attaining intuitive knowledge:

From this we see that God's infinite essence and his eternity is known to all. And since all things are in God and conceived through God, it follows that we can deduce from this knowledge a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form the third kind of knowledge...

As shown in Chapter 2, Spinoza derives EIIP47S from the conclusions of EIIPP45-47, which altogether show that the human mind *has* an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence. According to EIIP47D, the human mind has this adequate knowledge of God, since it has *ideas* from which it perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies as *actually existing*. As we saw above, these ideas would necessarily be inadequate if by 'actual existence' Spinoza meant the durational existence of these things,

⁸⁰ According to Wilson (1996, 132), Spinoza gives us some reason to suppose that what he has in mind regarding intuitive knowledge is something like our coming to grasp intuitively the "force to persevere in existence" that defines the essence of a singular thing as a manifestation and consequence of God's power. Yet, as she states, "unfortunately and exasperatingly he says little else to elucidate this fundamental notion." Hopefully my account here helps to clarify this issue.

⁸¹ Rutherford (1999, 461) makes a similar point although he does not give an elaborate account. He aptly notes that when we conceive singular things by way of their actual essences, we conceive them "not in terms of its duration but in terms of the force or power by which that duration is sustained—a power, which itself 'involves no definite time', but is understood as a necessary and eternal expression of God's essence" (ibid, n.23).

which depends on the common order of nature. However, as we saw, in EIIP45S Spinoza makes it clear that by existence he does not understand duration, but rather ‘the very nature of existence’—or, the actual essences of singular things. The relevant ideas—i.e., those involving the eternal and infinite essence of God (EIIP45)—are thus ideas of the actual essences of things, which, as we just saw, are partial expressions of God’s eternal and infinite essence.⁸² They are ideas of singular things conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*—that is, “insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature” (EVP29S).⁸³

Thus far I have suggested that knowledge of the third kind consists in our intuitive grasp of the relation of the infinite power of God to the actual essence of singular things, and that this understanding is grounded in adequate ideas of actual essences, which involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.⁸⁴ How then are ideas of actual essences distinct in content from the ideas of reason? This question must be answered if we are to provide a fuller account of the distinctive content of knowledge of the third kind. As we saw in Section 2, the *conatus* of each singular thing is unique to that thing and cannot be shared with any other singular thing. When we combine this with what was suggested in the beginning of this section, i.e. that the *conatus* of a singular thing is God’s very power manifested in a finite form, we see that the actual essences of things are by nature

⁸² Note that in EIIP45 Spinoza invokes EIIP8C that we discussed in connection with the issue of formal essences in the previous section.

⁸³ As noted earlier Spinoza refers to both EIIP45 and EIIP45S in EVP29S.

⁸⁴ As we will see in the next and final section of this chapter, one can form adequate ideas of actual essences of other singular things only to the extent that one forms an adequate idea of one’s *own* actual essence.

particular expressions of the singular⁸⁵ power of God. As shown earlier, as with everything in Spinozistic ontology, the ideas of these unique essences are in God: “In God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity” (EVP22).⁸⁶ More specifically, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the singular essence of each human body *sub specie aeternitatis*.⁸⁷ Unlike these ideas, which are *particular* expressions of the power of God, ideas of reason express adequate ideas of *common properties* pertaining to actually existing bodies. As shown in Section 3, since these properties do not constitute the essence of any singular thing (EIP37), common notions cannot be said to explain unique essences of things, even though they can explain their shared essences.

Before concluding this section, let me return to a point regarding common notions that I raised in Chapter 2. According to Spinoza, common notions represent properties of actually existing bodies, which we not only adequately cognize but also can vividly imagine (EIP47S). This suggests that although common properties of bodies are conceived intellectually, they are also perceivable imaginatively due to the fact that they

⁸⁵ Spinoza states in EIP14C1 that “God is unique.”

⁸⁶ As Don Garrett (2010, 111, n.24) observes, the parallelism and identity of ideas with their objects guarantees, for Spinoza, the unique reference of each idea to that of which it is properly the idea. Thus the idea that expresses the essence of a particular thing achieves in this way unique reference to that essence. Needless to say, duration is not a determining factor in differentiating one unique essence from another, since these are conceived *sub specie aeternitatis* rather than “in relation to a certain time and place” (EVP29S). For a passage where Spinoza talks about determination that is not durational see EVP40S, where Spinoza states that eternal modes of thinking determine each other to infinity, and “they all constitute God’s eternal and infinite intellect.”

⁸⁷ As discussed in the previous section, EVP22 seems to accommodate both conceptions of essences. Thus, in God, there exist ideas not only of the unique essences of things, but also of the common nature that human beings share. As I noted there, when I use EVP22 in the rest of this chapter and later in Chapter 6, I will focus on the former.

are *of* actually existing bodies. As shown earlier, Spinoza also notes in EIIP47S that “the knowledge of God”—namely, the foundation of intuitive knowledge, is *not* a common notion since it comprehends the essence of God, which, unlike common notions, cannot be imagined in any way. In addition to this, in the same chapter, we also noted that in Letter XII, Spinoza warns against the failure to distinguish between “that which we can apprehend *only* by the intellect and not by the imagination,” and “that which can *also* be apprehended by imagination.” Having recalled all this, I believe that the distinction Spinoza makes here lends credence to the view that common notions (i.e. “ideas of reason”) and “ideas of actual essences of things involving the eternal and infinite essence of God” are distinct objects of cognition, whereby the latter can be apprehended only by the intellect whereas the former can be apprehended not only by intellect but also imagination.

Through reason, by its very definition in EIIP40S2, “we perceive many things and form *universal* notions...from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things...” (my italics). Through intuitive knowledge, on the other hand, we reach an adequate idea of the unique essence of a singular thing as it follows directly from divine nature.⁸⁸ In forming such an idea, what I conceive is not a property

⁸⁸ According to EIP21, “All the things, which follow from the absolute nature of any of God’s attributes have always had to exist and be infinite, or are, through the same attribute, eternal and infinite.” IP21, together with EIP22, seems to block the *direct* derivation or inference of a finite mode from one of God’s infinite attributes (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of EIIP21-2 in the context of infinite modes). If there is such a gap between finite things and the infinite nature of God, then would this not violate the fact that finite things, *qua* modes, are conceived through/ follow from God’s absolute nature? As stated in Chapter 1, this is a notoriously difficult question facing Spinoza’s metaphysics, which is sometimes presented in terms of whether Spinoza can “derive” the finite from the infinite. Does this gap preclude the descent from the absolute nature of God’s attributes to the finite modes? This is a deep problem that I will not attempt to solve in this dissertation. I will say, however, that we can still be said to conceive of the essence of a singular thing, which is a finite or partial expression of God’s infinite power, as following *directly* from

that is represented by a common notion, or equally in the part and in the whole; rather it is this or that singular thing, which I conceive of as a particular instance of power or striving *sub specie aeternitatis*. In forming an adequate idea of Adam's essence, then, I am not conceiving of a property such as extension; rather I am conceiving of Adam as a particular power of existing, which I understand "to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of divine nature" (EVP29S). Since intuitive knowledge consists in forming adequate ideas of particular powers of existing, rather than common notions, it descends to a level of particularity that reason cannot. And this, I conclude, is where the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge lies, and why Spinoza describes it as 'knowledge of singular things' rather than 'universal knowledge' in EVP36S.⁸⁹ Since there is no real distinction between the singular thing and its unique essence, it is not surprising that Spinoza describes intuitive knowledge as "knowledge of singular things" in EVP36S.⁹⁰ According to my content interpretation, then, while reason is "universal knowledge" in that it is knowledge of the common properties of things, intuitive knowledge is "knowledge of singular things" since it concerns their unique essences.

infinite divine nature. This is because what is ruled out in EIP21 is the derivation *from* the infinite and eternal nature of God *of* something that has "a determinate existence, *or* duration" (EIP21D). Since the actual essence of a thing involves an indefinite rather than a determinate duration (EIIP8), we can infer this essence from God's infinite essence.

⁸⁹ Recall that in Section 1 above, I presented EVP36S as one of the passages in which Spinoza appears to distinguish reason and intuition in terms of what can be known by each.

⁹⁰ See also EVP24 where Spinoza states "The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God" by referring to intuitive knowledge, as is clear from EVP25.

3.6. Intuitive Self-Knowledge as a Special Instance of Intuitive Knowledge

Having presented the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge of singular things in general, I will now introduce a special instance of this superior form of cognition: intuitive *self-knowledge*. According to Spinoza, even though in principle it is possible for us to understand *any* singular thing—be it my desk or Adam—via intuitive knowledge, this depends on one fundamental condition. We already noted this condition in Chapter 2:⁹¹ that “[the mind] conceives the body’s essence under a species of eternity” (EV29) or that we have adequate knowledge of our *own* essence as it follows directly from God. To be more specific, I can form an adequate idea of this or that unique essence *only* based on my conception of the idea of *my* own essence, which I understand to follow from God’s nature. This superior form of self-knowledge is foundational in Spinoza’s account, since “the mind conceives nothing under a species of eternity except insofar as it conceives its body’s essence under a species of eternity (by P29)...” (EVP31D). It is only when the mind “conceives its body’s essence under a species of eternity” that it can be said to “have the power of conceiving [singular] things under a species of eternity” (EVP29D)—that is to say, the power of knowing things via knowledge of the third kind. But why is that?

⁹¹ In Chapter 2, I suggested that as we reach the end of the *Ethics* we see that three conditions are required in order for our mind to have access to knowledge of the third kind: (1) that each idea of each singular thing involves the essence of God (EII45) and adequate knowledge of this essence (EIIP46), (2) that the human mind has ideas that involve the adequate idea of the essence of God (EIIP47), and (3) that the human mind “conceives the body’s essence under a species of eternity” (EVP29). After presenting these conditions I noted that I would leave the last condition to this chapter and focused instead on the first two conditions.

We saw in Chapter 1 that since, for Spinoza, the human mind is just the idea of an actually existing human body (EIIP11 and EIIP13), the human body provides the focal point from and through which the human mind can perceive its world.⁹² That is why our knowledge of singular things, whether inadequate or adequate, is based on the way in which our mind conceives of its own body. As Spinoza states in EVP29,

Whatever the mind understands under a species of eternity, it understands not from the fact that it conceives the body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the body's essence under a species of eternity.

To the extent that the mind conceives of “its body's present actual presence,” it can only have inadequate knowledge of singular things as enduring things, as explained in Section 4 above. To the extent that the mind conceives of the body's essence *sub specie aeternitatis*, or “the very existence of the body insofar as it is in God,” on the other hand, it can be said to have the power of knowing other singular things by intuitive knowledge.⁹³ This is because it is only *then* that the mind has “knowledge of God” (EVP31D), which—as we saw in Chapter 2—Spinoza considers as the foundation of intuitive knowledge (EVP20S).⁹⁴ In Spinoza's words, “insofar as our mind knows itself and its body under a species of eternity, it necessarily has knowledge of God, and knows

⁹² Allison (1987, 107).

⁹³ Importantly, the mind's conceiving of its body's essence *sub specie aeternitatis* is just its conceiving of its own essence. This is because given EIIP13, “the idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal” (EVP23S). Note that EVP23, where Spinoza presents us with his doctrine of the eternity of the mind, is one of the most controversial propositions of the *Ethics*: “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” I will address this issue in Chapter 6.

⁹⁴ As noted earlier, Spinoza invokes EIIP47S in EVP20S in order to support his view that knowledge of God is the foundation of intuitive knowledge.

that it is in God and is conceived through God” (EVP30). Intuitive self-knowledge thus consists in adequate knowledge of God and of the way in which our mind and body as singular things depend on God. And only to the extent that we have this self-knowledge can our mind be said to be capable of “knowing all those things which can follow from *this given knowledge of God*...that is, of knowing things by the third kind of knowledge (see the Def. of this in IIP40S2)...” (EVP31D, my italics).⁹⁵

As we saw in the previous section, in EIIP47S Spinoza establishes the possibility of attaining intuitive knowledge of singular things in general by stating that this consists in deducing “a great many things” from knowledge of God’s infinite essence and his eternity, which the human mind possesses since it has ideas from which it perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies as *actually existing* (EIIP46D, my italics). Since, as we saw in this section, intuitive self-knowledge provides the basis for intuitive knowledge of other singular things (EVP30, EVP31D), it should now be clear that the ideas of the human mind from which it perceives itself and its own body as actually existing provide the basis for its ideas from which it perceives external bodies as actually existing—that is, in terms of the very nature of their existence or their actual essences.

Importantly, intuitive self-knowledge is not only foundational but also privileged in that it allows me to know the essence of a singular thing directly as *my* essence. In order to see how, consider the following: According to EVP36S, intuitive knowledge is more powerful than reason since only through the former can I infer *that all things*

⁹⁵ EVP31D thus clearly indicates that intuitive self-knowledge extends to essences of other singular things, as Spinoza identifies “knowing all things which can follow from the given knowledge of God” with “knowing things by the third kind of knowledge” by invoking the very definition of intuitive knowledge in EIIP40S2.

depend on God both for their essence and their existence “from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God.” Such an inference, which directly concerns the actual essence of a singular thing, is exclusive to the distinctive mode of knowing by which intuitive knowledge is attained, and provides a distinct cognitive gain over the universal knowledge demonstrated by reason.⁹⁶ Even though what we have said so far applies to intuitive knowledge of singular things in general, the cognitive gain associated with such an inference is most palpable when the actual essence at stake is one’s own essence. This is because in this case the inference not only takes its most direct and immediate form, but also reveals the *experienced* character of intuitive self-knowledge.

When I infer the knowledge “that all things depend on God both for their essence and their existence” immediately from *my* “very essence,” I apprehend the relation of the essence of God to *my* essence. This is because there is an indexical component involved in intuitive self-knowledge. And it allows me to recognize that the particular instance of power, which I understand to depend on God, is *my* power or *conatus*.⁹⁷ This realization

⁹⁶ According to EVP36S, as I interpret it, even if reason does apprehend *that* all things depend on God for their essence and their existence, it cannot make the subsequent simple and immediate inferential move and subsume any individual thing under that principle and “see” that its unique essence follows from God. Note that EVP36S is not the only passage where the inferential character of intuition comes into play. As we showed in Chapter 2, the very definition of intuitive knowledge in EIIP40S2 and EIIP47S are other passages where this inferential character is explicit. Thus as Garrett (2010, 109) notes, although the term ‘*intuitiva*’ suggests a style of cognition that is direct and immediate, we can distinguish between discrete cognitive steps in Spinoza’s *scientia intuitiva*, which might be taken instantaneously in a sufficiently powerful mind (ibid, 110). The fact that intuitive knowledge involves this *sui generis* kind of inference is important in explaining its methodology, but does not, by itself, explain the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge, which is the main focus here.

⁹⁷ I am indebted to Tad Schmaltz for this suggestion, which will be relevant to our discussion of the affective power of intuitive knowledge in Chapter 6.

is nothing but a direct comprehension of my unique expression of God's power.⁹⁸ Rather than universal knowledge of the "dependence on God" *qua* property, it is the particular knowledge of my actual essence, my power following from the eternal necessity of God's nature. It is, in other words, the knowledge that *I* am in God and conceived through God, which allows me to *see* that I necessarily depend on and follow from God,⁹⁹ and *experience* my being as a modal expression of God.¹⁰⁰ That is why for Spinoza, "the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is" (EVP31S).

As we suggested in the previous section, intuitive knowledge in general is nothing but the intuitive grasp of the relation of the essence of God to the essence of singular things. Nevertheless, due to the fact that we can have intuitive knowledge of other singular things only based on intuitive self-knowledge, it seems that we do not *directly* know the unique essences of other finite things as they depend on and follow from God. Thus, it seems that self-knowledge provides us with the most immediate and direct form of intuitive knowledge through which we are able to intuitively grasp the relation of God's essence to the essence of singular things other than oneself. Moreover, it seems

⁹⁸ Thus I disagree with Sandler's assertion that EVP36S supports the method-interpretation by suggesting that the difference between reason and intuitive knowledge is solely one of the method of cognition and the strength of affect (2005, 84). Even Yovel (1989, 166-7), who endorses a method-interpretation, concedes that "it is the content of this realization, not only its intuitive manner, which gives it the powerful affective response it has."

⁹⁹ According to Spinoza "the things we grasp only through reason, we do not *see*, but know only through a conviction in the intellect that it must be so and not otherwise" (KV, Chapter II, [2], my italics).

¹⁰⁰ Herman De Dijn (1991, 128). Although De Dijn does not elaborate on what kind of experience this is, it should be one determined by the intellect as opposed to random experience (*experientia vaga*), which is not determined by the intellect. See TdIE [18] for Spinoza's distinction between these two kinds of experience, and Curley (1973a) and Gabbey (1996) for further elaboration on *experientia vaga*.

that unlike intuitive self-knowledge, my intuitive knowledge of other singular things does not have an experienced character in that I cannot *experience* the being of something else as a modal expression of God. Both the experienced character of intuitive self-knowledge and the indexical component involved in this superior cognition will be relevant to our discussion of the affective power and ethical significance of intuitive knowledge in Chapter 6.

Having distinguished intuitive self-knowledge from intuitive knowledge of other singular things in virtue of the former's foundational function and privileged position, we shall now return to the main issue of this chapter: the distinctive content of intuitive knowledge. Two interrelated points should be highlighted: (1) Based on our discussion of intuitive knowledge in the previous section and various passages in the *Ethics*,¹⁰¹ it is clear that Spinoza does not restrict intuitive knowledge to self-knowledge, or to knowledge of one's own essence. The fact that intuitive self-knowledge provides the basis for intuitive knowledge of other singular things implies that to the extent that one attains the former, one can in principle bring any singular thing within knowledge of the third kind (i.e., understand the very nature of its existence).¹⁰² As we showed in the previous section, to know a singular thing by knowledge of the third kind is nothing but to conceive of it as a particular power of existing, which follows eternally from God's essence. It is to conceive of *that* thing not as something that comes into existence,

¹⁰¹ These passages include EVP24, EVP25D, EIIP40S2, EVP36S, and EVP42S.

¹⁰² This does not suggest that we can understand the very nature of the existence of another singular thing in *exactly the same way* in which we understand the very nature of our own existence. This is because, as shown earlier, intuitive self-knowledge provides us with the most immediate and direct form of intuitive knowledge.

undergoes modifications in relation to an infinite number of other causal circumstances, and then passes away, but rather as a unique power of existing, which I understand “to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of divine nature” (EVP29S). (2) The content of intuitive knowledge—that is, what the mind knows of singular things—is different than the content of reason regardless of whether what is at stake is knowledge of oneself or that of other singular things. In the former case I form an adequate idea of myself as a unique power of existing following from God, while in the latter case I form an adequate idea of this or that singular thing in a similar way, albeit based on intuitive self-knowledge. In both cases, I form adequate ideas of the unique essences of things, rather than adequate ideas of their *common properties*, which do not constitute the essence of any singular thing *qua* singular (EIIP37). Thus the content interpretation holds across the board, applying to both intuitive self-knowledge and intuitive knowledge of other singular things.

I hold that intuitive knowledge differs from and is superior to reason not only in that it is a higher method of cognition, but also because it descends to a level of particularity and ascends to a level of affective power that reason cannot access. Having examined the level of particularity to which this superior kind cognition descends in this chapter, we can now see, albeit partially, why Spinoza holds that “the greatest virtue of the mind” (EVP25) and “the greatest human perfection” (EVP27D) consist in understanding things by intuitive knowledge. In order for our account of the superiority of intuitive knowledge over reason to be complete, we need to elaborate on the nature of the affective power accompanying this superior form of cognition. What does the

affective power of intuitive knowledge consist in, and in what sense is it superior to that of reason? If intuitive knowledge is intellectually and affectively superior to reason, then what is the ethical significance of reason? And before all this, what exactly is the ethical significance of the pursuit of adequate knowledge in Spinoza's thought? In the remaining chapters of dissertation, I will attempt to answer these questions in order to flesh out the sense in which the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza's ethics.

Chapter 4

Setting the Stage: Good Life, Action and Passion for Spinoza

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in *ordinary life* are empty and futile, and I saw that all things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves...I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be *the true good*...whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me *the greatest joy, to eternity*. (my italics)

This is the start of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (TdIE), which is one of Spinoza's earliest works. It is clear from the opening paragraphs of the TdIE that the origin of Spinoza's philosophizing is the ethical dissatisfaction with ordinary life and its values.¹ An ordinary life, as Spinoza describes it, is a life dominated by the pursuit of transitory goods like honor, sensual pleasure and wealth (TdIE [3]). Furthermore, we learn in his most mature work, the *Ethics*, that the ordinary life is a life enslaved to passions and guided by unreflective attachment to prejudices, such as the belief in a teleological order in nature (EI Appendix). For Spinoza, ordinary people living an ordinary life are under various self-illusions, such as that they have free-will. Moreover, wandering far from "the true knowledge of God," they "feign a God, like man, consisting of a body and a mind, and subject to passions" (EIP15S). Adhering to an

¹ Herman De Dijn (1991, 120).

anthropomorphic conception of God and an anthropocentric view of nature;² being in a “fickle and inconstant” (EIVP58S) state of mind due to the pursuit of “empty and futile” goods; living a passive existence in the bondage of affects such as pride, humility, jealousy, hatred, fear and hope: these are all aspects of the ordinary life. Their common denominator is that each of them arises from ignorance, i.e. from a lack of understanding the nature of things, including ourselves, as they (and we) really are.

According to Spinoza, human happiness and well-being do not lie in the ordinary life ruled by ignorance and left to the mercy of fortune. Rather, the good human life is a life according to the order of the intellect, since for Spinoza there is an intrinsic relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the good life. Striving for understanding is the first and only foundation of virtue (EIVP26), and thus Spinoza construes the goal of ethics as an intellectualist one that amounts to nothing but increasing one’s own power of understanding. In his words, “we know nothing to be certainly good or evil, except what really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding” (EIVP27). Consequently, the problem of determining the good life is for Spinoza a cognitive problem: it concerns how we get from our state of ignorance in the “ordinary life” to an understanding things “according to the order of the intellect,” the culmination of which “would continuously give [us] the greatest joy, to eternity” (TdIE [I]).³ To use Spinoza’s technical terminology, ethics is essentially the problem of how we

² Ibid (1995, 248).

³ According to Spinoza, the greatest joy is blessedness (*beatitudo*), which is nothing but the highest good (*summum bonum*), and “whatever can be a means to his attaining [the highest good] is called a true good (*verum bonum*)” (TdIE, [13]). We will look at Spinoza’s account of blessedness and how it relates to intuitive knowledge in Chapter 6.

get from our confused perception of the world through *inadequate* ideas to viewing it by way of *adequate* ideas.

Spinoza is of course not the first philosopher to construe the good life as consisting in understanding. Neither is his critique of the pursuit of goods like honor, sensual pleasure and wealth as a basis of happiness a novel one.⁴ Many philosophers before Spinoza, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, thought in their own ways that there is an intimate connection between virtue and knowledge, and held that one cannot attain a happy life based (only) on the pursuit of external and transitory goods. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Spinoza belongs to the long tradition of intellectualism in important respects, there is something novel and unique in his approach to the ethical problem of the good life. For him, the ethical problem of the good life is a cognitive-affective problem, rather than a solely cognitive one. This is because, thanks to his innovative construal of human affects and their relation to cognition, Spinoza considers the process of attaining adequate knowledge as not only a purely intellectual process but also an affective one.

⁴ For vivid discussions of Spinoza's critique of the pursuit of goods like honor, wealth, and especially sensual pleasure, see Harry Frankfurt (1986). Frankfurt does not think that Spinoza's critique is innovative and, thus, he is somewhat surprised by the fact that the opening section of the TdIE (its first 16 or 17 paragraphs), where Spinoza presents his critique, has been regarded by many readers as one of the most inspiring pieces of writing in philosophical literature. Quoting Joachim (1958, 14-15) as speaking of the "sweep and the grandeur of the thoughts TdIE embodies," Frankfurt avers that he finds its "grandeur" a trifle conventional and its moral stance even somewhat banal. Stating that his own opinion of the work is somewhat less enthusiastic, Frankfurt (ibid) notes that "it is certainly an interesting text, if not for the novelty and the inherent value of its ideas then for the rather surprising illumination of Spinoza's intimate psychic processes and concerns which it provides."

In Chapters 5 and 6, I will offer accounts of the ethical significance of reason and intuitive knowledge, respectively. In this chapter, I provide the background required to formulate these accounts and to appreciate how the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza's ethical theory. More specifically, I give an outline of Spinoza's account of the affects by delineating its original features. Given that knowledge and affectivity are so closely connected in Spinoza's conception of the good life, it is crucial that we examine Spinoza's innovative account of affects and how they relate to knowledge before moving on to the ethical significance of specific kinds of knowledge.

4.1. Introduction to Spinoza's Account of the Affects

A good place to start is Part III of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza provides an account of the origin, nature and basic mechanism of human affects. He opens by expressing his discontent with the way philosophers have treated affect, mind and mind's relationship to the rest of the world:

Most of those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of Nature, but of things which are outside Nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in Nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of Nature, that he has absolute power of his actions, and that he is determined only by himself.

For Spinoza, regarding man as a "dominion within a dominion" is treating the mind as an autonomous entity that is not subject to the deterministic and law-like necessity that governs all natural things and their interactions. It is to treat the mind as a supernatural entity existing outside of nature and exempt from its laws, thanks to the supposed fact

that the human mind is endowed with a freedom of will that renders it undetermined. For Spinoza this is unacceptable, since he holds, as shown in Chapter 1, that the human mind, no less than anything else, is simply a part of Nature. The states of the human mind and those of its object—that is, the human body—are governed by “the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another” (EIIIPreface). The laws and rules of Nature “are always and everywhere the same” and “so the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, namely, through the universal laws and rules of nature” (ibid).

As an extension of this naturalistic approach, Spinoza treats human affects such as hate, anger, and envy, as natural phenomena, since “... [These], considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and force of nature as the other singular things. And therefore they acknowledge certain causes, through which they are understood, and have certain properties, as worthy of our knowledge as the properties of anything...” (ibid). Spinoza concludes the Preface to Part III with the following famous declaration:

I shall treat the nature and powers of the affects, and the power of the Mind over them, by the same Method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the Mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.

After presenting his thoroughgoing naturalism in relation to the affects in the Preface to Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza goes on to provide three definitions: those of *adequate and inadequate cause*, *action and passion*, and *affect*. Altogether these constitute the backbone of his account of the affects:

I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, *or* inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone. (EIIID1)

I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside of us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is (by D1), when something in us, or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause. (EIIID2)

By affect (*affectus*)⁵ I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. (EIIID3)

Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections I understand by the affect an action; otherwise a passion.

Before elaborating on these definitions, it is helpful to take a brief look at Descartes' view of the relation between mind and affect. Spinoza depicts Descartes in the Preface to Part III as someone who “believed that the mind has absolute power over its own actions” and “sought to show the way by which the mind can have absolute dominion over its affects.” Notwithstanding the fact that Spinoza praises Descartes for explaining emotions through their first causes—that is, for treating them as natural things in the same Preface—Spinoza has little adulation for other aspects of Descartes' account of the affects. Understanding the grounds for Spinoza's discontent with Descartes' views is helpful for highlighting the novelty of Spinoza's account.

⁵ As Allison (1987, 235, n. 5) notes, the proper translation of *affectus* is a controversial issue. While some translators, including Shirley and Elwes have rendered it as “emotion;” others, including Curley have translated it as “affect,” simply anglicizing the Latin. Since I am using Curley's translation in this dissertation, I render *affectus* as “affect” when quoting. Nevertheless, I follow Allison in that, when discussing Spinoza's doctrine, sometimes I use “emotion.” For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each reading, see Curley (1985, 625). One of the main advantages of “affect” is that, unlike “emotion,” it refers to the states of the body as well as the mind. See also Lin (2006, 398, n.7) on this same issue.

4.2. Descartes on the Affects, Action, Will

Descartes starts *The Passions of the Soul* (*The Passions*)⁶ by distinguishing between actions and passions. Following the traditional view, which goes back to Aristotle, he argues that these are not two distinct things, but merely two names for one and the same thing.⁷ Which one is used depends on the relevant point of view: the same occurrence can be viewed as an action from the perspective of the subject that makes it happen, or as a passion from the standpoint of the subject to which it happens.⁸ Since, on Descartes' view, the body acts directly and immediately on the soul, what in the body is an action is in the soul a passion. In Article 27 of *The Passions*, Descartes states that the passions of the soul may generally be defined as follows:

perceptions or sensations or excitations of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits.

For Descartes, the passions arise from bodily changes, which are communicated by animal spirits to the pineal gland, and thus give rise to affective states in the soul— affective states that relate particularly to the soul and not to the body. The main function of the passions is to dispose the soul toward willing specific actions. In Descartes' words, “they dispose our soul to will the things nature tells us are useful for us and to persist in

⁶ *The Passions of the Soul* was originally published in French as *Les Passions de l'âme* in 1649. In this dissertation, I will use Stephen Voss's translation in 1989.

⁷ “That what is a Passion with respect to a subject is always an Action in some other respect” (*The Passions*, Article 1).

⁸ As Allison (1987, 125) notes, the same occurrence can be viewed as an action in relation to the agent (cause) and a passion in relation to the patient (effect).

this volition” (*The Passions*, Article 52).⁹ Even though the passions are “all in their nature good” (*The Passions*, Article 211) in that they prompt us to act in ways that are in general conducive to our well-being, their effects are not uniformly beneficial.¹⁰ Moreover, since the passions originate in the body, any malfunction of the body can interfere with the normal operation of the passions. For these reasons, it is necessary that the passions be guided by the will, whose “proper weapons” against the misuse and excess of the passions are “firm and determinate judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil, which it has resolved to follow in conducting the actions of its life” (*The Passions*, Article 48).¹¹

For Descartes, any alleged conflicts that people have customarily imagined between the higher part of the soul, which is called rational, and the lower part of the soul, which is called sensitive or appetitive, “consist only in the opposition between the movements which the body by its spirits and the soul by its will tend to excite simultaneously in the gland” (*The Passions*, Article 47).¹² By sending messages through

⁹ According to Descartes “the principal effect of all the passions in men is that they incite and dispose their soul to will the things for which they prepare their body, so that the sensation of fear incites it to will to flee, that of boldness to will to do battle, and so on for the rest” (*The Passions*, Article 40).

¹⁰ Since the passions are usually directed at immediate ends, they exaggerate the goodness or badness of their objects, causing us, for example, to flee quickly from apparent dangers.

¹¹ At the end of *The Passions*, Descartes summarizes his position by stating that the chief use of “Wisdom” lies in its teaching us to be masters of our passions and “to render ourselves such masters of them, and to manage them with such ingenuity, that the evils they cause can be easily borne, and we even derive Joy from them all” (*The Passions*, Article 212).

¹² As Paul Hoffman (1991, 167) aptly notes, unlike the Platonic and Aristotelian view that the soul has a higher rational part that can be in conflict with a lower sensitive part, Descartes holds that the soul has no parts, and everything in us that opposes reason should be attributed to our body alone (*The Passions*, Article 47). Moreover, since Descartes groups the passions with sensation and imagination, which are perceptions of the mind that arise from external impulses, he radically differs from the Aristotelian scholastic philosophers who attached the passions to the appetitive faculty rather than the perceptive.

the pineal gland to the rest of the body, the soul is able to influence the body and exercise the resolve required to regulate its passions by its will. While this process forms the basis of Descartes' account of voluntary action, the claim that thanks to our will we can command the passions absolutely (a claim that Descartes shares with the Stoics) constitutes the fundamental tenet of his moral philosophy.¹³ In order to comprehend this process better we need to elaborate on the Cartesian conception of will.

On the standard reading of Descartes, the mind has two faculties or two basic capacities: intellect and will. To be more specific, within the general category of conscious thought (*cogitatio*), one may distinguish two principal modes of operation: perception, or the operation of the intellect (comprising sensing, imagining and pure

While, for the scholastics, the passions pertained to the appetitive faculty, and were principally organized around a distinction between the 'irascible' and the 'concupiscent' appetites, Descartes was attempting to fashion a conception of the passions based on a very different conception of the soul, one in which there is no distinction among appetites (Ibid, Article 68). Descartes' categorization of the passions was based on a list of six primitive passions, which pertain to the perceptive rather than to the appetitive faculty: wonder, desire, love and hatred, joy and sadness –“all the others are either composed from some of these six or they are species of them” (Ibid, Article 69).

¹³ Note, however, that 'absolute command' does not mean *direct* command, given Descartes' view that we cannot directly change the passions. According to Descartes, “there is no soul so weak that it cannot, when well guided, acquire an absolute power over its passions” (Ibid, Article 50). As he explains how this is possible, Descartes writes that through habituation we can separate movements of the pineal gland from the thoughts to which they are joined by nature and join them to certain other thoughts. He thinks that such a habit can be acquired by a single action and does not require long practice, and that any soul can gain power over its passions if it is guided in the right way, which means that a weak soul that might not be able to suppress a passion once it is present can, by developing the right habits, prevent the passion from occurring in the first place. For an interesting analysis of Descartes' construal of the soul's control over the passions see Paul Hoffman (1991, 169-170). In the Preface to Part V of the *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly addresses and criticizes article 50 of *The Passions* by stating that it is based on the assumption of a hypothesis “more occult than any occult quality” (EV Preface). This hypothesis is nothing but Descartes' account of the union of mind and body involving the causal interaction of these, which, as we saw in Chapter 1, conflicts with Spinoza's view of the causal isolation of the attributes. In addition to this, in the same Preface, Spinoza also notes his discontent regarding Descartes' views of the will and its freedom—a topic which is of central importance to our subject and which I will elaborate on in the next section.

intellection), and volition, or the operation of the will (comprising desire,¹⁴ aversion, assertion, denial and doubt) (*Principles*, 1:3).¹⁵ Whereas the intellect is the mind's faculty of having ideas (representational states) that are purely passive, the causal power of the mind comes from the will and its active, non-representational volitions or mental states. Importantly, then, Descartes subscribes to the traditional view that while perception is a passive faculty of the mind, volition is active.¹⁶ In Descartes' words,

[The actions of the soul] are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it; as on the other hand, all the sorts of cases of perception or knowledge to be found in us can be called its passions, because it is often not our soul that makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them (*The Passions*, Article 17).

Since for Descartes volitions and ideas, though both mental modes, are separate from each other, there is a difference between merely having an idea and believing it. In order to believe something, to reach a judgment, or to act on a judgment, something more is needed and this something is provided by the will. For example, for Descartes the ideas that there is a coffee shop around the corner and that I need some coffee now, by themselves, are not enough to get me to walk over to the coffee shop. Instead, a separate kind of mental state—an act of will—is necessary to carry out the action. Volition and

¹⁴ Note that even though Descartes attributes desire to will in *Principles*, he suggests in *the Passions* that desire is a passion, and thus not volitional. See, for instance, *The Passions*, Articles 57 and 86-90. According to Article 86 where Descartes defines desire, "The passion of Desire is an agitation of the soul, caused by the spirits, which disposes it to will for the future the things it represents to itself to be suitable. Thus we desire not only the presence of absent good but also the preservation of the present, and in addition the absence of evil, both what we already have and what we believe we might receive in time to come."

¹⁵ John Cottingham (1988, 239-57).

¹⁶ As Susan James (1997, 124) notes, it is the Aristotelian conviction that there are in the soul two kinds of thoughts—active volitions and passive perceptions—in terms of which passions must be interpreted.

intellect thus come together in all cases of action.¹⁷ What happens in human judgment and choice is that the intellect presents ideas to the will for its consideration. The will can then assent to an idea, deny it, or suspend judgment. It is only when I join a non-representational volition—such as an act of assent—to an idea, that the idea is believed or the judgment is made.¹⁸

The prominent properties of the will, according to Descartes, are thus its capacity to assent to judgments and the freedom with which it does so. It is in respect of the latter property that we are able to regulate our passions and we most resemble God: “It is only the will or freedom of choice which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp” (*Fourth Meditation*).¹⁹ Even though there is undoubtedly much more to say on Descartes’ distinction between will and intellect, what matters for our purposes is how this distinction grounds that between the activity and passivity of the mind. Against this Cartesian background, we are in a better position to appreciate the originality of Spinoza’s account of the affects, will and what constitutes as “activity of the mind.”

¹⁷ Della Rocca (2008, 123). As Della Rocca (ibid, 125) notes, since on Descartes’ view belief involves the notion of power, he (Descartes) assimilates belief to action generally; and thus this is a point on which Spinoza agrees with Descartes.

¹⁸ Nadler (2006, 187).

¹⁹ According to Descartes, whereas the intellect is finite and limited in the sense that it does not have ideas of all possible things, the will is not only a free and active faculty of the mind but also indefinite in its extent. Nevertheless, since the will has a greater extent than the intellect and is not restrained by it, sometimes things outside the intellect move the will to assent. Even though, ideally, the will would assent only to clear and distinct ideas, this is not always the case. And this is where error enters into the picture. By attempting to show in the *Fourth Meditation* that our errors or false beliefs are a product of our free will, Descartes purports to establish that these beliefs are our fault, not God’s.

4.3. Back to Spinoza

4.3.1. The Issue of the Free Will

I will start from the most obvious point on which Spinoza diverges from Descartes: the freedom of will. As already stated, according to Spinoza, the mind is not endowed with the kind of freedom of will that renders it undetermined. Unlike Descartes, who grants freedom to the will, Spinoza claims that the will “requires a cause by which it is determined to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.” (EIP32). In other words, for Spinoza,

In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity. (EIIIP48).

The mind is a certain and determinate mode of thinking (by IIP11), and so (by IP17C2) cannot be a free cause of its own actions, or cannot have an absolute faculty of willing and not willing. Rather, it must be determined to willing this or that (by IP28) by a cause which is also determined by another, and this cause again by another, etc. (EIIIP48D).

Volitions are thus incorporated into the causal order of substance, ensuring that the whole of the human mind is a part of nature and subject to its laws, which, as shown above, “are always and everywhere the same” (EIIIPreface) As Spinoza states in EIIIP35S, thinking of ourselves as having free will is an error that we commit since we are unaware of how we are determined by causes:

Men are deceived in that they think themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of

the causes by which they are determined. This, then, is their idea of freedom—that they do not know any cause of their actions. (EIP35S)²⁰

It is important to note here that, for Spinoza, not even God's will can be said to be free, since "God does not produce any effect by the freedom of the will" (EIP32C1). Spinoza thus rejects the theological doctrine of voluntarism, and with it the view that nature is to be explained by an appeal to God's infinite will.²¹ As stated in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, God alone is a free cause, not because he acts from freedom of the will (EIP32, C1), but since he alone exists and acts from the necessity of his nature (namely from the laws of his nature) and is compelled by no one (EIP17, EIP17C2). According to this novel conception of freedom, strictly speaking, only God is free in the sense of being *causa sui* and thus completely unconstrained.²² Nevertheless, Spinoza does not deny that human beings can achieve freedom of a sort: one which is not a "libertarian" conception of freedom that takes a person's will to be free only when it is undetermined.²³ Even though human beings, unlike God, can never totally remove themselves from external causes and thus can never be totally *causae sui*, there is still a kind of freedom available

²⁰ EIP35S. As shown in Chapter 1, Spinoza gives another example in the same Scholium: Being ignorant of the true distance of sun, we imagine that it is about two hundred feet away from us. The error here does not lie in how the sun appears to us *per se*. It consists in the privation of knowledge. Recall that for Spinoza, "falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve" (EIP35).

²¹ James (1997, 149).

²² Spinoza defines *causa sui* in the very first definition of the *Ethics*: "By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing."

²³ Note that Spinoza insists in the *Short Treatise* that "true freedom" does not consist in "being able to do or omit something," as if with a perfect spontaneity (KV I.4). In a deterministic universe such as that conceived by Spinoza, there are no spontaneous events and there is no room for a libertarian conception of freedom. In other words, it is not the case that, having made a choice, all things being the same, I could have made a different choice.

to them: one which consists not in an absence of determinism, but in activity or adequate knowledge. We will elaborate on this innovative sense of freedom in connection with our discussion of action later in this chapter, and as we look at how reason and intuitive knowledge relate to the ethical life in the next two chapters.

4.3.2. Separation of Intellect and Will

As shown earlier, according to Descartes the will is not only free but also a separate faculty from the intellect. This brings us to the second point on which Spinoza diverges from Descartes. For Spinoza, “the will and the intellect are the one and the same” (EIIIP49C). Unlike the Cartesian mind, whose power to think works in two cooperating ways based on its two faculties, the Spinozist mind has a single unified power: the power to form ideas from which other ideas follow. According to Spinoza, there is no such thing as an absolute faculty (*facultas*) that can be called ‘the will’, any more than there is some absolute faculty that can be called ‘the understanding’ (IIP48S).²⁴ Such faculties distinct from any actual idea or particular act of the mind “are either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings or universals which we are used to forming from particulars. So intellect and will are to this or that idea, or this or that volition, as “stone-ness” is to this or that stone, or man to Peter and Paul.” (IIP48S).²⁵ After stating in the same Scholium that by will he understands “a faculty of affirming and denying, and not desire,” and that

²⁴ Nadler (2006, 187).

²⁵ Recall that Spinoza’s critique of universals has been introduced in Chapter 2.

this faculty is not distinguished from the singular volitions, Spinoza goes on to show that volitions are identical with ideas:

In the mind there is no volition, or (*sive*) affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea. (EIIIP49)

Importantly, as we see in EIIIP49, in denying separate acts of the will Spinoza does not deny that there are volitions. He merely holds that “singular volitions”—which he equates with affirmations (or denials) (EIIIP48S and EIIIP49)—“and ideas are one and the same” (EIIIP49CD).

For Spinoza, an idea cannot be conceived without a certain affirmation, which is to say that in having an idea, one affirms it. In the Demonstration of EIIIP49, after advancing the claim that ideas involve affirmations, Spinoza states that because an idea cannot be conceived without a certain affirmation, and because that affirmation cannot be conceived without the idea, it follows (given Spinoza’s conception of essence in EIID2) that the affirmation pertains to the essence of the idea, and that the affirmation is identical with the idea.²⁶ Spinoza makes this point more concretely by way of an example in the same demonstration:

Let us conceive...some singular volition, say a mode of thinking by which the mind affirms that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. This affirmation involves the concept, *or* idea, of the triangle, that is, it cannot be conceived without the idea of the triangle. For to say that A must involve the concept of B is the same as to say that A cannot be conceived without B. Further

²⁶ Della Rocca (2003, 202). Recall EIID2: “I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.” As Della Rocca (*ibid*) states, it is not immediately clear in EIIIP49D exactly what role Spinoza’s notion of essence plays or how this further claim about identity follows from the claim about essence.

this affirmation (by A3) also cannot be without the idea of the triangle. Therefore, this affirmation can neither be nor be conceived without the idea of the triangle.

Next, this idea of the triangle must involve this same affirmation, namely, that its three angles equal two right angles. So conversely, this idea of the triangle also can neither be nor be conceived without this affirmation.

To take another example that Spinoza offers, having an idea of a winged horse is simply affirming that the horse has wings. This much is clear from the rhetorical question that Spinoza poses in EIIP49S: “what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of the horse?”²⁷

Notice that in EIIP49D, Spinoza is not solely presupposing that ideas are inherently propositional in character.²⁸ He goes beyond this to claim that each idea is inherently an affirmation that something is the case, which means that each idea is something like a belief.²⁹ Since having an idea of a winged is something like believing that the horse has wings, we can say that, for Spinoza, unlike Descartes, there is no difference between merely having an idea and believing it. Contra Descartes, who construes ideas as inherently passive—that is, as passively waiting for volitions to bring

²⁷ The rest of the example reads as follows: “For if the mind perceived nothing else except the winged horse, it would regard it as present to itself, and would not have any cause of doubting its existence, or any faculty of dissenting, unless either the imagination of the winged horse were joined to an idea which excluded the existence of the same horse, or the mind perceived that its idea of a winged horse was inadequate. And then either it will necessarily deny the horse’s existence, or it will necessarily doubt it” (EIIP49S)

²⁸ For a helpful discussion of the problems that arise related to this claim, see Curley (1975, 169-174).

²⁹ Della Rocca (2003, 202). As Della Rocca notes, the claim that each idea is something like a belief is quite controversial as it seems perfectly possible to have an idea without thereby affirming it. And unfortunately Spinoza offers no argument for this controversial claim here. Bennett (1984, 164), for instance, explicitly interprets EIIP49 as saying that each idea is a belief, and he also raises the worry about lack of support for this claim (ibid, 167). Curley (1975, 169) also complains that there is no argument here. See also Lloyd (1994, 69-70), Donagan (1988, 46), Cottingham (1988, 243-44), and Wilson (1996, 124-26). For Della Rocca’s interpretation of why Spinoza thinks that all ideas involve affirmation, and that one cannot have an idea without affirming it see Della Rocca (2003).

them to life³⁰—for Spinoza, as shown earlier, there are no inactive ideas akin to “mute pictures on a panel” (EIP49S2). Spinoza defines ideas as “the concept[s] of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing” (EIID3).³¹ Ideas as such are active, with an inherent tendency to prompt action.

An important implication of what has been said so far is that for Spinoza, belief and activity do not turn on some mysterious, non-representational act of will. They are not the outcome of two radically different kinds of mental states—that is, perceptions and acts of assent. Rather, these phenomena are to be explained simply in terms of ideas (or mental representations) themselves.³² Even though, like Descartes, Spinoza holds that belief involves the notion of power and thus can be assimilated to action generally, unlike Descartes, he holds that the mental power resides *not* in a separate volition, but in the idea itself.³³ According to Spinoza, since there is no will over and above ideas, we do only what our ideas determine us to do. In other words, the power of the mind does not

³⁰ Della Rocca (2003, 207) and (2008, 124). As Della Rocca (2003, 228, n.23) notes, the main textual evidence for the view that, for Descartes, the ideas are inherently passive is in *The Passions*, Article 17 that we quoted earlier in the text. As Della Rocca (ibid) aptly points out, Descartes’ position is more ambiguous than Spinoza or Della Rocca himself portrays it, and there are other passages in which Descartes seems to allow that ideas are active. See especially *The Passions*, Article 1. As he notes, though, even though Spinoza’s criticism of Descartes may not do full justice to Descartes’ position, it is directed at what is genuinely a strand in Descartes’ thinking. For an interesting critique of Spinoza on similar grounds, see Cottingham (1988).

³¹ As Spinoza explains right after this definition, he says “concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the mind.”

³² Della Rocca, (2008, 126-127). As Della Rocca (2003) convincingly argues, trying to explain will as a separate faculty from perception, and volitions as non-representational mental states would constitute a violation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason that Spinoza is committed to.

³³ Della Rocca (2008, 125).

come from its free will; it comes from ideas, from the intellect, alone: “the power of the mind is defined by understanding alone” (E5Preface).

To put the point in more concrete terms by invoking our previous example, unlike Descartes, for Spinoza the ideas that there is a coffee shop around the corner and that I need some coffee now, by themselves, are enough to cause me to act. It is *not* the case that a separate kind of mental state—an act of will—is necessary to carry out the action. Note, however, that, on Spinoza’s view, the presence of these ideas in my mind does not mean that I will always be trying to get coffee. Although each idea has some power, not all ideas are equally powerful for Spinoza. If I am to be prevented from acting on these ideas or if an idea is not to be believed or acted on, this is not because I employed an act of will separate from all ideas. It is rather because some other, more powerful idea has led me in a different direction, diverting me away from the original idea. We will revisit the important issue of the power of ideas when we discuss the phenomenon of *akrasia* in relation to the respective affective powers of reason and intuitive knowledge.

4.3.3. Spinoza’s Distinction between Acting and Being Acted On

Having seen the main tenets of Spinoza’s construal of ideas and will against the backdrop of Descartes’ views, we are now in a position to elaborate on and appreciate the novelty of Spinoza’s definitions of action and passion that we presented earlier. Spinoza agrees with Descartes in accepting the standard view that actions are what a thing does and passions are what it undergoes. But there is a very important sense in which he differs from Descartes: for Spinoza, there is no distinction between will and intellect. Accordingly, he does not ground his distinction between actions and passions of the mind

in a separation between will and intellect, like Descartes did. In this sense, Spinoza represents a break from the Aristotelian and Cartesian conviction that there are in the soul two kinds of thoughts—active volitions and passive perceptions—in terms of which actions and passions must be interpreted.³⁴

On Spinoza's novel account, we act when something happens of which we are the adequate cause, that is, when that effect can be clearly and distinctly understood through us or our nature alone. On the other hand, we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial or inadequate cause (EIID2). Importantly, then, although 'inadequate' and 'adequate' describe an idea as we saw before, they also describe a cause:

I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone (EIID1).

These two usages of 'adequate' and 'inadequate' are closely related in that, for Spinoza, we are the adequate cause of our adequate ideas, and the inadequate cause of our inadequate ideas. In other words, we act insofar as we have adequate ideas, and we undergo something insofar as we have inadequate ideas.³⁵

³⁴ James (1997, 124). James (ibid, 125) notes that it took a great deal of courage to challenge the distinction between perceptions and volitions mainly because this distinction provided the basis for the conceptions of voluntary action on which Christian salvation was held to depend. Unlike Spinoza, both Descartes and Malebranche ensured that the will remained central to their conceptions of thought, and that volition survived as the epitome of the soul's activity. This was thanks to Descartes' cautious orthodoxy and desire to avoid theological controversy, and Malebranche's intense religious faith.

³⁵ Hoffman (1991, 171).

As shown in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, an idea is adequate when it includes a perfect and complete knowledge *or* causal understanding of its object. Inadequate ideas, by contrast, are like “conclusions without premises” (IIP28D). Rather than being “clear and distinct,” they are “mutilated and confused.”³⁶ As we see here, in addition to mirroring his distinctions between internal and external determination of the mind and understanding things according to *the Order of the Intellect* and perceiving things following *the Common Order of Nature*, Spinoza’s distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas explains the distinction between activity of the mind and passivity of the mind. While we are said to act when our mind is determined internally—that is, when we possess adequate ideas which can be explained by the mind alone—we are said to be acted on when our mind is determined externally—that is, when we are only the partial or inadequate cause of a thought or idea, so that the idea cannot be explained by appeal to our mind alone. In other words, whether a particular thought process is active or passive depends on whether the ideas it contains are adequate or inadequate, which, in turn depends on how these ideas are caused. While to the extent that we have adequate ideas we act on the basis of adequate representations of the world and ourselves, to the extent that we have inadequate ideas, we are guided by mutilated and confused representations of the world and ourselves. The former case constitutes the true meaning of activity and the novel meaning of freedom that Spinoza attributes to human beings. Freedom, for

³⁶ As we saw in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, an adequate idea is one that has all the “internal denominations” – notably, intellectual clarity and distinctness—of a “true idea” (EIID4). “A true idea is one that fully agrees with what it represents” (EIA6). The truth of an idea is an extrinsic relationship in which the idea stands to its object, whereas the adequacy of an idea implies its completeness in the sense that from it all the properties of its *ideatum* (object) can be deduced. Just as all true ideas are also adequate ideas, and vice versa, so all false ideas are inadequate ideas, and vice versa.

human beings, consists in nothing but gaining adequate knowledge, and acting and being the adequate cause of one's own effects. The latter case, on the other hand, represents what Spinoza calls "bondage" in the Preface to Part IV of the *Ethics* defining it as "man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects." This brings us to Spinoza's definition of affect.

4.3.4. Spinoza's Definition of Affect

As stated earlier, Spinoza defines affect as "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (EIIID3).³⁷ According to Spinoza there are three main types of affects: desire (*cupiditas*), joy (*laetitia*), and sadness (*tristitia*) (EIIIP11S). Among these, desire is the most basic since it is identified with "man's very essence" (EDef. Aff. I), i.e. his actual essence (*conatus*), which is nothing but the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being (EIIIP7). As we see in EIIIP9S, the striving of the mind alone is called will, and insofar as this striving is related to the mind and body together, it is

³⁷ In this definition, 'at the same time' renders the Latin adverb *simul*. For an interesting discussion of the semantic value of this adverb and its signification in Spinoza's construal of the nature of the affects, see Chantal Jaquet (2004, 83-119). For another definition of the affect see also the following: "For all ideas that we have of bodies indicate the actual constitution of our own Body (by EIIIP16C2) more than the nature of the external body. But this [idea], which constitutes the form of the affect, must indicate or express a constitution of the Body (or some part of it), which the Body (or some part of it) has because its power of acting, or force of existing, is increased or diminished, aided or restrained (*Ethics*, Definition of the Affects).

called appetite.³⁸ Appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite is what we know as desire.³⁹

From the primary affect of desire, which functions as the basic motivating force in human behavior, follows the affects of joy and sadness.⁴⁰ For Spinoza, despite the fact that each individual thing strives to persevere in its being (EIIIP6), the power or striving that constitutes the essence of the individual does not remain unmodified throughout a person's lifetime. It is constantly subject to change in that it can enjoy an increase or strengthening, or it can suffer a decrease or diminution.⁴¹ Spinoza defines joy as "a man's passage from a lesser to a greater perfection" and sadness as "a man's passage from a greater to a lesser perfection" (EIIIDA2-3). Importantly, as Spinoza himself stresses, joy and sadness are not the cause of the change; rather, they are the transition or passage (*transitio*) itself from one condition to another. (G II. 191) As such, each joy and sadness felt by an individual records the level of its power in relation to the power it possessed

³⁸ Spinoza does not have a further term for the striving of the human body in particular.

³⁹ As Michael Della Rocca (2008, 154) notes, there is not much riding on this apparent distinction between appetite in general and desire in particular. As we see later in Part III, Spinoza explicitly downplays the distinction between desire and appetite when he offers his definitions of the affects. There, in the first of these definitions, he says, "I really recognize no difference between human appetite and desire," and he goes on to stipulate that "by the word desire, I understand any of a man's strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions."

⁴⁰ As Allison (1987, 137) observes, the status of desire as a distinct primary emotion is complicated by the ambiguity of Spinoza's account arising from the fact that he insists that there are as many kinds of desire as there are kinds of pleasure and pain, and that there are as many kinds of these as there are objects by which the body is affected (EIIIP56). So construed, Allison notes, a desire is a distinct emotion, but given its dependence on pleasure and pain, it seems not to be primary. Even granting this ambiguity, Allison notes, it still seems possible to make a case for the claim that desire is a primary as well as a distinct emotion. This is because, although a particular desire depends on what the mind deems pleasurable or at least a means of avoiding pain, the desire itself is not a pleasure or a pain. We cannot therefore account for the emotive life of a human being simply in terms of pleasure and pain; it is also necessary to include desire, which functions as the basic motivating force in human behavior.

⁴¹ Nadler (2006, 200).

previously. It is the move either from a better condition to a worse condition, or vice versa. In other words, joy and sadness are changes in an individual's power of acting, i.e. her passage to a greater or lesser power of acting, a greater or lesser ability to bring about certain effects.

According to Spinoza, all the other affects are functions of or can be derived from the three primary ones. Love, for example, is what we feel when an external object increases our power, and consequently it is a kind of joy—joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause. Hatred is sadness accompanied by the idea of objects that diminish our power. Envy is hatred of other people whose happiness makes us sad because it lessens our power.⁴² Having completed a brief introduction to Spinoza's account of the affects, we will now look at how Spinoza distinguishes between two classes of affects: passive affects or passions, and active affects or actions.

4.3.5. Passive Affects (Passions) and Active Affects (Actions)

According to Spinoza, passions and actions are two species of affects, which, as we saw, indicate changes in an individual's power or *conatus*. Increases or decreases in an individual's power of acting can come about either through the action of external things, or from within.⁴³ A passive affect, or passion (*passio*),⁴⁴ is a change in the individual's

⁴² Spinoza gives a complete list of his definitions of various affects at the end of the third part of the *Ethics* (starting at II/190). See Stephen Voss (1981) on how Spinoza enumerated the affects.

⁴³ Recall that after his definition of affect in EIID3, Spinoza notes that "...if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion."

power whose adequate cause lies not wholly in the individual itself, but partly in external things. For Spinoza, as for many of his predecessors, one of the defining features of the passions is their passivity in that they are modifications of power that an individual undergoes or suffers. When we suffer passions, we are not self-sufficient, or self-directed, but instead we are responding to forces beyond our control, i.e., we are passive. Passions are the affects that are related to man insofar as he is acted on—that is, when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial or inadequate cause (EIID2). In other words, as stated earlier, passions are related to man insofar as he has inadequate ideas.

An active affect, or action, on the other hand, is a change in individual's power whose adequate cause lies wholly in the individual itself (EIID3). These are affects related to man insofar as he acts—that is, insofar as he has adequate ideas.⁴⁵ While the passions that are brought about by external things can be for the better—that is, joy—or for the worse—that is, sadness—active affects that are brought about by the individual are always improvements in an individual's power.⁴⁶ Active affects must always be internally generated increases in one's power, since it is inconceivable that an individual's striving for preservation could, by itself, give rise to a decrease in itself. In

⁴⁴ In this dissertation I will use 'passive affect' and 'passion' and 'active affect' and 'action' interchangeably.

⁴⁵ Spinoza treats actions in the final two propositions of Part III, when he says that "this will be enough concerning the affects that are related to man insofar as he is acted on. It remains to add a few words about those that are related to him insofar as he acts" (IIP57S).

⁴⁶ Nadler (2006, 202).

Spinoza's words "no affects of sadness can be related to the mind insofar as it acts, but only affects of joy and desire" (EIIIP59D). Since people cannot, insofar as they are active, bring it about that their power of acting is decreased, unlike passive desire and joy, sadness has no active counterpart. Active joy and active desire, which Spinoza introduces in EIIIP58, are the "active affects," or active counterparts of the passive affects. While the greatest satisfaction of mind (*summa acquiescentia*), which, as we will see in Chapter 6, is an important example of an active joy, tenacity (*animositas*) and nobility (*generositas*) are listed among active desires (EIIIP59S).⁴⁷ Active affects are remarkable not only for their novelty against the backdrop of traditional accounts of the passions, but also for their importance to Spinoza's ethical arguments of Parts IV and V of the *Ethics*.

As shown above, one important aspect of Spinoza's innovative approach to the distinction between action and passion is that he no longer bases it on a parallel distinction between will and intellect. Now that we have seen how Spinoza distinguishes active affects from passive ones, we are in position to appreciate another related aspect of the originality of Spinoza's thought. As Susan James observes, a strand in the traditional view that associates the mind with activity and the body with passivity remained influential among those mechanical philosophers who conceived bodies (including human ones) as passive because they have no power to move themselves, and who

⁴⁷ EIIIP59S: "All actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands I related to strength of character, which I divide into tenacity and nobility. For by tenacity I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being. By nobility I understand the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship."

contrasted this feature of the material world with the capacity of human minds to will.⁴⁸ For Spinoza, construing the distinction between activity and passivity based on such an asymmetrical conception of mind and body is simply not tenable.⁴⁹ Since, on the basis of the parallelism doctrine that he presents in EIIP7, the body and the mind are one and the same thing viewed under two attributes, a human being's desire and transition to a higher or a lower level of perfection are treated at once in terms of the body's power of acting and the mind's power of thinking. Accordingly, Spinoza claims that whatever increases or diminishes the body's power of acting must likewise increase or diminish the mind's power of thinking (IIP11). Thus, all actions and passions are equally mental and physical phenomena, in that passions in the mind correspond to the passions in the body and that the actions in the mind correspond to the actions in the body.⁵⁰ In Spinoza's words, "the order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind" (EIIP2S).

4.3.6. Ideas as Affects and Affects as Ideas

Now that we have a good grasp of Spinoza's innovative construal of human affects, can we explain why, on his account, the ethical problem of the good life is a cognitive-

⁴⁸ James (1997, 154-156).

⁴⁹ Note, however, that, as we will see in the last chapter, even though there is no "such" asymmetry, there is a sense that Spinoza gives a certain primacy to the mind due to its reflectivity.

⁵⁰ While, under the attribute of extension, a passion is an externally caused affection of the body which results in an increase or decrease of our body's power of acting; under the attribute of thought, a passion is an externally caused idea which results in an increase or decrease of our mind's power of thinking. Likewise, an action in the mind is an internally caused affection of the mind, which results in an increase of our mind's power of thinking; an action of the body is an internally caused affection of the body, which results in an increase of body's power of acting.

affective problem, rather than being solely a cognitive one? Before we can answer this question, we need to look at the relation between affects and ideas. According to Spinoza, there is an affective component to ideas in that each idea is followed by affects (*affectus*) that result from it as from their cause. As shown earlier, every idea *qua* idea “involves an affirmation or negation” (EIIIP49S), and thus has a belief component. But ideas also have an affective component in that they are united to affects in such a way that “[an] idea is not really distinguished from the affect itself...it is only conceptually distinguished from it” (EIVP8D). As Don Garrett observes, unlike the common view, shared by Hume and Kant, which treats affects and ideas as two classes of mental events or entities, on Spinoza’s view, ideas have a dual nature or two aspects: an affective one and a representational one. In other words, Spinoza construes the affective and representational as two aspects of the *same* mental events or entities.⁵¹

That ideas have an affective aspect should not come as a surprise since we have already seen that, for Spinoza, there is a correlation between adequate ideas and activity on the one hand, and inadequate ideas and passivity on the other. As we stated above, whereas active affects are “related to man insofar as he acts”, passive affects are those which are “related to man insofar as he is acted on” (EIIIP57S). According to Spinoza, while the former arise from adequate ideas alone, the latter depend on inadequate ideas alone (EIIIP3). Whereas adequate ideas that increase our power of thinking are always a

⁵¹ Garrett (1996, 296). See also Yovel (1989, Ch.6).

source of active affects, inadequate ideas can only be a source of passive affects, i.e. either passive joy or sadness.⁵²

Ideas and affects are thus so closely related that it would not be wrong to say that an idea is an affect insofar as it increases, diminishes, aids or restrains one's power of acting, which is positively correlated to one's power of understanding.⁵³ Does this mean that all adequate and inadequate ideas are actions and passions respectively? Almost. The only adequate ideas that are *not* emotions are those that do not change our power of acting. Likewise, some inadequate ideas are not passions. This is because a state of mind partially determined by an external cause but which does not reflect a change in our power of acting is not a passion.⁵⁴ Hence only inadequate ideas which do not register a greater or lesser power of thinking relative to previous states are not called passions.⁵⁵ There is thus an affective dimension to any significant increase or decrease in one's knowledge.

Importantly, for Spinoza, not only are all ideas that register a greater or lesser power of thinking relative to previous states affects, but also all affects are ideas. This important point derives from the following axiom:

⁵² Recall that while the passions that are brought about by external things can be for the better—that is, joy—or for the worse—that is, sadness—active affects that are brought about by the individual are always improvements in an individual's power.

⁵³ Sandler (2005, 76).

⁵⁴ It seems that this could happen only when the power of the externally caused idea is perfectly counterbalanced by the power of other ideas.

⁵⁵ Lin (2006, 399, n.9).

There are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind, unless there is in the same individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, and the like. But there can be an idea, even though there is no other mode of thinking. (EIIA3)

We have already seen earlier that, for Spinoza, all volition or affirmation and negation are ideas, in that they are all to be understood by ideas (EIIP49). Here, in this axiom, which Spinoza invokes in the demonstration of EIIP49, we are presented with a more general claim that Spinoza applies not only to affirmation, but also to all other mental states, such as love, joy, etc. At first sight, it seems that in this axiom Spinoza is solely making a point about ideas as necessary conditions for the existence of mental states such as desire, love, and affirmation. However, as Michael Della Rocca convincingly argues, even though EIIA3 is more naturally read as simply making this necessity claim, Spinoza intends the axiom to have a richer meaning: namely that ideas fully and exclusively account for these mental states.⁵⁶ In other words, the affects of the mind—just like other mental states such as affirmations, thoughts, sensory perceptions, and memories⁵⁷—are all ideas, or are to be explained solely in terms of ideas. Since what the mind does is always to have certain ideas, all mental states are of a single kind.⁵⁸ According to Della

⁵⁶ Della Rocca (2003, 213-214). According to Della Rocca, the use of EIIA3 in EIIP11D supports this reading. Note that EIIP11D is the only other citation of EIIA3 in the *Ethics*: “The essence of man (by EIIP10C) is constituted by certain modes of God’s attributes, namely (by IIA2), by modes of thinking, of all of which (by IIA3) the idea is prior in nature, and when it is given the other modes (to which the idea is prior in nature) must be in the same individual (by IIA3).” Della Rocca (*ibid.*, 229, n.41) states that Gueroult fully appreciates the richer meaning of EIIA3 that he extracts from EIIP11D and notes that his presentation is much indebted to Gueroult (1974, 33).

⁵⁷ As James (1997, 151) notes, although we still have thoughts of different kinds and can distinguish for instance memory from pure perceptions, these are no longer seen as amalgamations of two components: perception and will.

Rocca this richer interpretation of EIIA3 also helps us understand how, in EIIP49, Spinoza establishes, “not simply the mild Cartesian claim that affirmation requires ideas, but also the deeply anti-Cartesian claim that if an affirmation exists, its existence is due simply to the presence of certain idea.”⁵⁹

Further evidence for seeing Spinoza as holding that affects (and affirmations) are explained only by relevant ideas comes from the general definition of affects at the end of Part III of the *Ethics*:

An affect that is called a passion of the mind is a confused *idea*, by which the mind affirms of its body, or of some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before, which, when it is given, determines the mind to think of this rather than that...An affect or passion of the mind is a confused idea. For we have shown (IIIP3) that the mind is acted on only insofar as it has inadequate or confused ideas (GII.203-4/C I.542, my italics).

As we see here, for Spinoza, the representational nature of the affects is fully on display in that a passion of the mind, which is a species of affect, is just an idea, an affirmation. Even though he does not say anything about actions of the mind, it is easy to generalize from the case of the passions and attribute the following to Spinoza: While passions are confused ideas, which are caused from outside the mind, active affects are clear and

⁵⁸ Recall again that Spinoza defines ideas as “concepts of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing” (EIID3).

⁵⁹ Della Rocca (2003, 214). Della Rocca goes on to say that Descartes would reject this view since for Descartes, in each case, the presence of an affirmation is due to, or consists in part in, the presence of an act of will over and above the relevant idea. It is precisely this Cartesian view that Spinoza rejects in EIIP49D with the help of EIIA3.

distinct or adequate ideas, which are caused from within the mind.⁶⁰ Importantly, then, unlike the commonsense view, according to which there is more to affects of the mind than mere ideas, such as a different kind of non-representational mental state, a mental buzz that is distinctive of a feeling of joy, for Spinoza, representation is all there is to these affects insofar as they are viewed under the attribute of thought.⁶¹ Insofar as love is concerned, for instance, there is no feeling of love, no burning affection over and above the representation of an object as the cause of an increase in power.⁶² In making the transition which is constitutive of joy or sadness, the mind simply moves from one representation to another. Desire, on the part of the mind, is just the mind's tendency to go from one representation to another.⁶³ In sum, for Spinoza, representation is all there is

⁶⁰ As Hoffman (1991, 172) puts it, unlike Descartes who, as shown earlier, ascribes to the traditional Aristotelian view that an action and passion are two names for the same thing, Spinoza rejects this correspondence between actions and passions. According to Spinoza, our passions, being inadequate ideas, can follow only from other inadequate ideas, that is, from other passions; and our actions, being adequate ideas, can follow only from other adequate ideas, that is, from other actions (EIIIP40, IIIP3). So passions can bring about passions and actions can bring about actions.

⁶¹ Della Rocca (2008,158). Note that this is consistent with Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism, which commits him to the view that passions in the mind correspond to the passions in the body and that the actions in the mind correspond to the actions in the body (EIIIP2S). Affects in the mind thus correspond to the affects in the body. Following Spinoza's identity thesis—that a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing expressed in two ways—affects in the mind can be said to be the same thing as affects in the body (EIIIP7S). Nevertheless, given Spinoza's rejection of any interaction between modes of thought and modes of extension, those affects which are modes of thought can be brought about only by affects that are also modes of thought, and so on (IIIP2). Thus an affect, insofar as it is viewed under the attribute of thought, can only be explained by having recourse to ideas, not to non-representational states over and above ideas.

⁶² Della Rocca (2008, 157).

⁶³ Della Rocca (2008, 157). As Della Rocca (*ibid*) continues, "Of course, the tendency may not always be successful—desires can be frustrated—but this tendency is a tendency to have certain ideas. And, insofar as we are in ourselves, the mind's desire is simply the tendency to come to have an idea of a more powerful bodily state, an idea that itself is a more powerful mental state." As Della Rocca notes, this last point is obvious from EIIIP12: "The mind, insofar as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting." On Della Rocca's reading, then, desire, as well as joy and sadness, is reducible to and identified with an idea.

to joy, sadness, desire and all other affects, since Spinoza constructs all the other affects out of these three basic ones.

Having shown that all ideas that register a greater or lesser power of thinking relative to previous states are affects, and all affects are ideas, we can now appreciate how interwoven cognition and affectivity are for Spinoza. Since there is an affective dimension to any significant increase or decrease in one's knowledge, and a cognitive dimension to any affect according to Spinoza, the ethical problem of the good life for Spinoza is a cognitive-affective problem, rather than solely a cognitive one. To revise what was said in the beginning of this chapter, the ethical problem of the good life concerns how we get from a state of ignorance and bondage to *passive affects* in "ordinary life," to a state of understanding, happiness and freedom coupled with *active affects* in a life "according to the order of the intellect." It concerns, in other words, how we can gain some degree of control over the affective influence of externally-induced inadequate ideas (i.e. passions) thanks to the cognitive-affective power provided by our mind's self-derived adequate ideas.

According to Spinoza, becoming free and virtuous is not a question of whether our will exercises the resolve required to overcome our passions. It consists in becoming active and self-governing individuals, who are able to "moderate and restrain" their passions (EIIP56S) thanks to the activity of their mind, which is internally determined by its own ideas. As we stated in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, to the extent that we get to know things by way of the two adequate kinds of cognition, rather than being "determined externally by fortuitous encounters," our mind is "determined *internally*" according to the

order of the intellect (EIIIP29S, my italics). Once we start knowing things *via* reason and intuitive knowledge, we leave behind the errors and illusions of the ordinary life. Instead, we get to know things according to the order of the intellect, thanks to which we attain a superior cognitive-affective state. But what exactly does this superior cognitive-affective state consist in? Is there any difference between the cognitive-affective powers of the two adequate ways of knowing, namely, reason and intuitive knowledge? Given that for Spinoza there is an intrinsic relationship between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the good life, how do these two kinds of knowledge relate to the ethical life? I will address these questions by considering first the affective power of reason and how knowing things *via* reason relates to the ethical life.

Chapter 5

The Ethical Significance of Reason

As discussed previously, according to Spinoza, knowledge of the second kind (reason) arises “from the fact that we have *common notions* and adequate ideas of the properties of things” (EIP40S2, my italics). Reason represents a condition of activity, since to the extent that we can make use of common notions, instead of being “determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things,” our mind is “determined internally from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions” (EIP29S). By perceiving agreements, disagreements and oppositions in Nature *via* objective and eternal properties represented by common notions, we attain a general scientific and causal understanding of Nature. In other words, thanks to reason, we obtain a detached viewpoint from which we can rise above our imaginative knowledge of things, and thereby remove our errors. So far so good. But what does this all have to do with ethics?

Spinoza makes it clear that we cannot pursue an ethical life without rational knowledge.¹ For him, being guided by reason is co-extensive with being virtuous, which,

¹ The case of the prophets that Spinoza presents in *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* (TTP) is an exception to the view that one cannot pursue an ethical life without rational knowledge. In TTP, Spinoza holds that the prophets were ethically superior people. Yet he also insists that the intellect has nothing whatsoever to contribute to Biblical prophecy. The prophets—who were usually simple men from common, even lowly backgrounds—did not have philosophical wisdom, theological training, or scientific knowledge, and therefore they are not necessarily to be believed when they appear to pronounce on such topics. Thus, prophecy, as Spinoza sees it, is not a cognitive discipline. See Steven Nadler (forthcoming) for an excellent treatment of prophesy in Spinoza and Maimonides.

in turn, is identified with being free.² That Spinoza accords such importance to reason should not come as a surprise, considering the fact that the goal of ethics is for him nothing but increasing one's power of understanding. Since reason is a way to know things adequately and to understand them, it appears that attaining rational knowledge would guarantee living a virtuous and ethical life. But is just *any* rational knowledge important from an ethical perspective? Are all rational ideas affectively powerful? How exactly does the representative content of reason—that is, what is known by way of the second kind of knowledge—relate to an ethical life?

In addressing these questions, I will elaborate on the ethical significance that Spinoza accords to reason, and consider some of the more nuanced aspects of the seemingly straightforward relationship between rational knowledge and morality in Spinoza's thought. In particular, I will argue that in Spinoza's account, reason relates to the ethical life in two main respects: (i) by grounding the possibility of an interpersonal morality with an objectivized value system; and (ii) by functioning as an affective power against the passive affects. After presenting the affective power of reason, I will conclude by examining the limits of this power, which confront us in the form of susceptibility to *akrasia*.

² As Spinoza states in EIVP24 "Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being...by the guidance of reason."

5.1. Reason, Collaborative Morality and the ‘Free Man’

Spinoza constructs his moral philosophy entirely on top of his descriptive account of human psychology in Part III of the *Ethics*. In the previous chapter, I presented the main tenets of this account, but I left out one important component: Spinoza’s construal of human beings as thoroughly egoistic agents who are always motivated by self-interest. In this section, I will first address this important feature of Spinoza’s thought and introduce two problems that it poses for his ethical system: the problem of a lack of genuine concern for others, and the problem of the subjectivity and arbitrariness of value judgments. Then, I will show how reason enters into the picture by addressing these problems. More specifically, I will show how, on Spinoza’s account, reason provides room for (1) genuine concern for the well-being of others, and (2) an objective standard to ground value judgments, due to its close connection to the concept of *human nature*.

In Part IV of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza presents much of his ethical theory, he uses the species-bound notion of ‘human nature’ in two critical contexts: (1) in relation to his conception of collaborative morality (EIVPP35), and (2) as he introduces “the model of *human nature* that we set before ourselves” (Preface to Part IV, my italics). As we will see, understanding the first context will help us see how Spinoza’s account of collaborative morality smoothes out the selfish edge of his egoism by incorporating into his system a genuine concern for others. Understanding the second context, on the other hand, will enable us to see how Spinoza’s model of human of human nature, which he characterizes as the ideal of the “free man,” embodies an objective and rational standard

for our evaluative terms such as good, evil,³ perfection and imperfection. Before looking at these two contexts, I will introduce the main elements of Spinoza's psychological egoism and its implications for his ethical system.

5.1.1. Psychological Egoism

Just as Spinoza's moral philosophy is based on his account of human psychology, so the latter is based on his account of metaphysics. Thus the best place to start in order to understand Spinoza's grounds for embracing psychological egoism, is what we might think of as the backbone of his metaphysics of finite beings, i.e. his famous *conatus* doctrine: "Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (EIIIP6). The *conatus* doctrine first and foremost implies that this striving necessarily follows from the nature of each singular thing.⁴ Every singular thing, universally and necessarily, strives for self-preservation insofar as it is in itself—that is, insofar as it is not prevented by an external cause. Consider, for instance, EIIIP9, where Spinoza applies the *conatus* doctrine to the human mind:

Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has.

This proposition is of great importance for it establishes the universality of the *conatus* principle for the explanation of all human behavior.⁵ According to this, all human

³ Note that in this dissertation I will use 'bad' and 'evil' interchangeably.

⁴ As the demonstration of EIIIP6 makes it clear, the doctrine applies to each singular thing, i.e. each thing that is finite and has a determinate existence (EIID7).

⁵ Allison (1987, 134).

behavior, whether it be an activity of the mind arising from adequate ideas or a passive response to external stimuli based on inadequate ideas, is an expression of the endeavor of the individual in question to persevere in its own being. From this we can easily see the absolute impossibility for Spinoza of what we might call “disinterested” action. Another important passage where Spinoza applies the *conatus* doctrine to the human being in general is the Scholium following EIIP9:

When this striving is related...to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things.

Thus, one can no more help striving to preserve one’s being than a stone can help falling when it is dropped.⁶ It is simply one’s nature, and nothing can violate the laws of its own being, unless a thing is prevented by external causes to do so.⁷ Importantly, for Spinoza, rather than implying solely striving for persistence, *conatus* means striving for an increase in one’s power of acting.⁸ On the basis of his claim that we strive, insofar as we are in ourselves, to persevere in being, Spinoza says that we also strive to *increase* our power of acting. He makes this claim about the human mind in particular in EIIP12:

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ One of the key propositions that the demonstration of the *conatus* doctrine rests on is EIIP4, where Spinoza rules out the possibility of self-destruction: “No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” According to Spinoza this proposition is evident through itself. See Della Rocca (2008, 137-143) for a reading of this proposition as “perhaps the simplest and most powerful expression of Spinoza’s rationalism.”

⁸ It is thus different from, what Daniel Garber (1994, 45) calls ‘Descartes’ principle of persistence’ according to which: “each thing, insofar as it is in itself, always remains in the same state; and that consequently, when it is once moved, it always continues to move.” (*Principles* II 37) See Garber (ibid) for a comparative account of Descartes and Spinoza on persistence and *conatus*.

“The mind as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body’s power of acting” (EIIIP12).⁹ Since, based on Spinoza’s parallelism doctrine, “the idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body’s power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind’s power of thinking” (EIIIP11),¹⁰ EIIIP12 can be read as follows: If having certain ideas will increase the mind’s power of thinking, then the mind will strive to have those ideas insofar as it can.¹¹

For Spinoza, desire for self-preservation and increasing one’s own power functions as the basic motivating force in human behavior. In this regard, he reveals an important similarity to Hobbes, even though, unlike the latter, Spinoza does not affirm this on the basis of an empirical knowledge of human nature, but rather deduces it from the very status of human beings as finite modes.¹² If all human desire is to some extent—i.e. to the extent that we are in ourselves—directed at our own preservation and at increasing our power of acting, what does this imply for Spinoza’s account of motivation? It means that a person is moved to pursue or avoid this or that solely by the

⁹ Note that in the crucial part of the demonstration of EIIIP12, in order to support the claim that we strive to increase our power of acting, Spinoza relies on EIIIP6, which concerns the striving for self-preservation. But it is not clear why it should follow that the striving for self-preservation requires us to increase our power of acting. See Della Rocca (2008, 157-158) for problems related to this demonstration.

¹⁰ According to Spinoza, EIIIP11 is evident from both EIIP7 and EIIP14.

¹¹ Della Rocca (2008, 155).

¹² Allison (1987, 131). As Nadler (2006, 208) notes, Spinoza’s psychological egoism is similar to and may have been influenced by that of Thomas Hobbes, whose work Spinoza read in the 1660’s while composing the *Ethics* and who claimed in his *Leviathan* that “of the voluntary acts of every man the object is some good to himself” (*Leviathan* XIV.8). For a comparison of Spinoza and Hobbes on this issue, see Curley (1988, Chapter 3). For Hobbes’ discussion of the passions generally, which is strikingly similar to Spinoza’s in some important respects, see *Leviathan* IV. See also James (1997) for an excellent analysis of Spinoza and Hobbes in contradistinction to Descartes and Malebranche on the issue of passions.

positive or negative effects that a thing has on the contributions that it makes to his project of self-preservation.

Given Spinoza's account of the three main affects that I presented earlier, the psychological version of this claim would then simply be that each person desires to experience joy. More specifically, it would mean that in all we do, we always, to the extent that we are in ourselves, desire not only our perseverance in existence but also our own joy or happiness. Since desire is just striving to preserve our power of acting, and thus to seek what will increase that power and to avoid what will decrease it, by necessity we want the joyful and avoid the sad (EIVP19, EIIP28).¹³ In Spinoza's words, "We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it" (EIIP28). Since, as Spinoza makes clear here, the joy or sadness in question are one's *own* joy and sadness, this indicates that our actions are focused on our *own* well being. In other words, humans are thoroughly egoistic creatures in that they are always motivated by self-interest.

Having seen on what grounds Spinoza embraces psychological egoism, it is time to look at the implications of this view for his construal of evaluative terms. More specifically, it is time to look at how Spinoza conceives of the relationship between value judgments and desire in an agent, given how he construes the motivational basis for the agent's behavior. Unlike the commonsensical view, according to which desire would

¹³ EIVP19: "From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil."

follow judgment and one desires and pursues those things that one has judged to be a good thing to do, Spinoza insists that

...we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. (EIIIP9S)

Likewise, we do not avoid something because we judge it to be bad; on the contrary we judge something to be bad because we are naturally led away from it by aversion. In short, we call something “good” because we desire it and “bad” because we are averse to it. Value judgments on this account necessarily become egoistic, since something is “good” if it benefits *me*, and “bad” if it harms *me*.¹⁴

Another attempt at giving an account of good and evil comes from EIIIP39S, where Spinoza invokes EIIIP9S that we just cited:

By good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be. And by evil [I understand here] every kind of sadness, and especially what frustrates longing. For we have shown above (in P9S) that we desire nothing because we judge it to be good, but on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it. (EIIIP39S)

The way Spinoza conceives of the relation between value judgments and desire here implies that, on his view, there can be no desire to do something simply because it is the right or the good thing to do, irrespective of any connection the action may have to our *own* joy or self-preservation.

As we see in the rest of the Scholium quoted above, according to Spinoza, every individual “from his own affect” judges a thing good or bad, useful or useless, better or

¹⁴ Nadler (2006, 209).

worse, and finally best or worst. While, for instance, “the greedy man judges an abundance of money best, and poverty worst,” for the ambitious man nothing is more desired than esteem and more dreaded than shame (EIIIP39S). Given the differences among us in the way in which we are affected by things, the judgments about what is good or bad that derive from the affects differ from one person to the next:

Because each one judges from his own affect what is good and what is bad, what is better and what is worse, it follows that men can vary as much in judgment as in affect. The result is that when we compare them with one another, we distinguish them only by a difference of affects, and call some intrepid, others timid, and others, finally, by another name. (EIIIP51S)

Moreover, the same thing can be good for an individual at time t and bad for the same individual at time $t+1$, since one and the same man can be affected by one and the same object in different ways at different times (EIIIP51). Since different individuals can react differently to the same thing and the same individual can be affected by the same thing differently at different times, so as long as our value judgments are *limited* to what each individual desires on the basis of how they are *affected by* things, there are no absolute standards of good and bad that will hold for all people.

Spinoza’s account of the relationship between value judgments and desire appears to raise some issues for his ethical system. That Spinoza wants to allow room for genuine concern for others and some kind of objectivity in moral judgment is clearly seen in Part IV of the *Ethics*. What is not as clear, at least for now, is how Spinoza can derive such an account of morality from his descriptive account of human psychology in Part III. There are two problems here: (1) The problem of lack of a genuine concern for others, and (2) The problem of subjectivity and arbitrariness of value judgments. More specifically,

(1) Given that, for Spinoza, there can be no desire that is totally divorced from a concern with our self-interest and “no one strives to preserve his being for the sake of anything else” (EIVP25),¹⁵ is there any way that interests of other individuals can enter into ones’ *own* considerations? If the self and its interests are the fundamental objects of all the desiring of human beings and there is no motivational source within the mind that is radically different from egoistic motivations, then is there any room for genuine concern for others? Does Spinoza’s psychological egoism necessarily generate an ethical system that is fundamentally egoistic?

(2) Given that, for Spinoza, we typically evaluate things in terms of the degree to which they are useful or pleasing to us, and that every individual “from his own affect” judges a thing good or bad or useful or useless, does this mean that Spinoza’s psychological account of human behavior commits him to an individualistic relativism, even subjectivism in such judgments about what is good or bad and right or wrong? Does Spinoza’s construal of the relationship between desire and value judgments necessarily generate an ethical system that is fundamentally subjectivist?

The answers to these questions lie in Spinoza’s account of reason. I start by looking at how reason provides room for genuine concern for others by way of employing the specific common notion of human nature, thereby grounding Spinoza’s account of interpersonal morality.

¹⁵ Thus the striving is intrinsically and necessarily, not derivatively valuable.

5.1.2. Reason, Human Nature, and Interpersonal Morality

As shown in Chapter 3, due to its universal character, reason reflects knowledge of singular things through their shared aspects—including their shared essences—rather than by way of their unique essences. In this section, I consider how reason relates to one shared essence in particular, namely, *human nature*, together with the ethical significance of this relation. We will see in particular how adequate knowledge of our shared essence *via* reason enables us to take interests of others into consideration by allowing us to realize that for a human being there is nothing more useful than another human being who is guided by reason.

5.1.2.1. Spinoza's Conception of Human Nature

According to Spinoza's anti-anthropocentrism, any conception of human nature that construes human beings as a "dominion within a dominion" and, thus, as exempt from the laws of nature governing everything else, is doomed to failure. If this is the case, then in what sense are human beings distinctive and in what sense can they be said to share a nature that is not only common but also peculiar to them? As shown in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, ontologically speaking there is nothing whatsoever that distinguishes a human being from any other particular and determinate mode in nature. Accordingly, having a mind *per se* is not peculiar to humans, i.e. it is not the distinctive feature of being a human.¹⁶ The minds of humans and animals differ only in terms of degree, i.e. degree of

¹⁶ For this see the sub-section 1.2.2 in Chapter 1.

power and reflection, just like their bodies differ only in terms of complexity.¹⁷ However, this difference in degree has consequences—including most importantly the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas—such that the difference between humans and non-humans reveals itself *as if* what is at stake are two radically different heterogeneous natures with nothing in common.¹⁸ Thus, although Spinoza is famously known to oppose the Aristotelian conception of the human nature as “rational animal” on the grounds that it is a fictitious abstraction, he nonetheless maintains that rationality is a distinctive mark of humanity. Combining all this, we can say that for Spinoza, what makes human beings distinctive is not their possession of a rational soul, utterly different *in kind* from other parts of nature, thereby making them a “dominion within a dominion.” Rather, it is the affinities and commonalities among human beings, including most peculiarly the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas, that allow human beings to collaborate with one another and reach agreement on ends.¹⁹

Even though we will mainly focus on the way Spinoza invokes the notion of human nature in Part IV of the *Ethics*, it is important to note that Part IV is not the first place where the importance of affinities and commonalities among humans figures in the

¹⁷ As shown in Chapter 1, following EIIP13S, we see that what is special to the human mind is connected to the complexity of human body and its various capacities to affect and to be affected, thanks to which human mind has more complex and developed capacities of perception (including memory, imagination, affectivity and self-awareness). Thus, although mind and body are conceptually and causally distinct, they are related in a fundamental way that allows us to explain the complexity of human mind by the complexity of human body.

¹⁸ Gueroult (1974, 10).

¹⁹ Lloyd (1994, 160).

Ethics. As we see in Part III, one of the key aspects of Spinozistic psychology—that is, his doctrine of the imitation of the affects—is based on the idea of likeness that we perceive between ourselves and others. More specifically, Spinoza holds, “If we imagine a thing *like us*, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with the same affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect” (EIIIP27, my italics). This proposition is designed to explain how we can feel compassion for others, feel their joys and sorrows, even when we have not experienced any prior affect for them, simply because they are “like us.” In Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not explain how much similarity there must be in order to generate this fellow-feeling,²⁰ nor does he offer this similarity as something to be adequately known. Rather, “likeness” is presented in Part III as something to be *imagined* and, as with everything arising from imagination, it rests on a partial and subjective viewpoint. As we proceed to Part IV, however, we see that there is an objective basis of commonalities and affinities among human beings: the specific common notion of *human nature*, which represents the properties that are common to and distinctive of human beings.

5.1.2.2. Spinoza’s Argument for Collaborative Morality

As shown in Chapter 3, Spinoza uses the specific common notion of “human nature” in the second half of Part IV of the *Ethics* in order to ground his conception of collaborative morality. Spinoza’s account of collaborative morality depends on the general

²⁰ Curley (1988, 118) thinks that it would be too much to expect this from him.

metaphysical thesis that whenever two things “agree in nature,” they will to that extent be mutually beneficial, since the nature that each strives to benefit is the same.²¹ Applying this thesis to human beings, Spinoza states “what is most useful to man is what most agrees with his own nature...that is (as is known through itself) man” (EIVP35C1). Human beings agree with each other in that they all share the same *human nature*, which involves the *capacity to reason*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all human beings are on a par in terms of the degree to which they are active. While some human beings are more active in that they actually fulfill this capacity by living in accordance to the guidance of reason, most of them are less so, which implies that there are degrees of “agreement in nature” and thus of “being useful to each other,” according to Spinoza. Consequently, what is *most* useful to a man, and thus what *most* agrees with his own nature, is not just any man, and certainly not one who is subject to passions.²² Rather, it is one who “entirely acts from the laws of his own nature”—that is, a man who lives according to the guidance of reason. This is because, in Spinoza’s words, “insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good

²¹ Note that EIVPP29-36 concern relations among human beings and the preconditions for sustained mutually beneficial cooperation, i.e. collaborative morality. See for instance EIVP30: “No thing can be evil for us through what it possesses in common with our nature, but insofar as it is evil for us, it is contrary to us” and EIVP31: “Insofar as a thing is in agreement with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good.” For a critical assessment of EIVPP30-31 see Bennett (1984, 299-302). For an excellent critique of EIVP35D, see Della Rocca (2004, 128-134), who argues that EIVP35D reflects a deep tension in Spinoza’s metaphysics arising from the fact that both unique and shared essences are at work.

²² Note that, for Spinoza, “insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature” (EIVP32). See also EIVP33 for a similar point. Thus the fact that Adam is a human being does not guarantee that he will completely agree in nature with another human being. Since reason allows us to understand not only the agreements but also “the differences, and oppositions” among things, including human beings, it is thanks to reason that we can distinguish a human being who is guided by reason from another who is subject to her passions. In other words, it is thanks to reason that we can understand not only whose nature agrees with our nature, but also whose nature is different from our nature, and act accordingly.

for *human nature*, and hence, for each man, that is (by 31C), those things which agree with the nature of each man” (EIVP35D, my italics). Therefore “among singular things there is nothing more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason” (EIVP35C1).²³ The operative assumption in all this is that, in spite of individual differences, we share a common human nature as rational beings.²⁴

Having recalled how Spinoza invokes the notion of human nature in order to support his argument for collaborative morality, it is helpful here to distinguish between human nature insofar as it involves the capacity to reason, and human nature insofar as it can be known by reason. Spinoza’s argument for collaborative morality entails that we are by nature beings *that reason*, and hence creatures that can reach agreement on ends—a feat that is impossible for beings whose actions are driven solely by passion.²⁵ Nevertheless, it also requires that we have a shared essence that can be *known adequately* and, hence, objectively by reason. To the extent that reason employs the common notion of human nature, we have the power to know human beings, including ourselves, *adequately* through our shared essence. To be more specific, we have the power to understand not only the essence of Adam insofar as he is human, but also that Adam and I and all other human beings share the very same essence, which involves the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas. The rational understanding of oneself and

²³ For different interpretations of Spinoza’s collaborative morality and whether or not Spinoza can successfully derive it from his psychological theory, see Diane Steinberg (1984), Lee Rice (1991), Jonathan Bennett (1984), and Steven Barbone (1993).

²⁴ Allison (1987, 151).

²⁵ See IVP36 and EIV36S for this.

each other through this shared aspect has significant ethical implications, including that it provides room for genuine concern for the well-being of others, which lies at the intersection of true self-interest and virtue.

5.1.2.3. Self-Interest, Virtue and Rationality

Before showing how such an understanding provides room for genuine concern for others' interest and well-being, I will elaborate somewhat on Spinoza's unique construal of the relationship among rationality, self-interest and virtue. Spinoza's moral philosophy is virtue-oriented, in that what matters most is the kind of person one is and the character one possesses, rather than the actions that one performs, or the intentions that one has. Nonetheless, his construal of virtue is different than his ancient Greek predecessors for whom "virtue" or *arête* was considered as a trait that causes a thing to perform its characteristic function with excellence.²⁶ Rather, Spinoza defines virtue, in EIVD8, as power:

By virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e. (by IIIP7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature of man insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.

According to Spinoza, "No one can desire to be blessed, to act well and to live well, unless at the same time he desires to be, to act, and to live, that is, to actually exist" (EIVP21). Even though, for him, desire for self-preservation functions as the basic

²⁶ Nadler (2006, 225).

motivating force in human behavior and “the striving to preserve oneself is the first and only foundation of virtue” (EIVP22C), it is important to note that he is far from equating virtue with survival, or identifying what is virtuous with what is in one’s self-interest narrowly conceived.²⁷ This is because, for Spinoza not all instances of desire are counted as virtue:

...all the appetites, *or* desires²⁸ are passions only insofar as they arise from inadequate ideas, and are counted as virtues when they are aroused or generated by adequate ideas. (EVP4S)

According to Spinoza “a man cannot be said absolutely to act from virtue insofar as he is determined to do something because he has inadequate ideas” (EIVP23). To the extent that a person has inadequate ideas, he is lacking in power and allows himself to be guided by things outside of him, rather than by what “[his] own nature, considered in itself, demands” (EIVP37S1). Thus, even though according to Spinoza the mind endeavors to strive as far as it can both in terms of its adequate and inadequate ideas—that is, whether a person lives under a guidance of reason or in bondage to the passions—only the former instance of this striving counts as virtuous:

Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our beings (these three signify the same thing) by the *guidance of reason*, from the foundation of seeking one’s own advantage. (EIVP24)

²⁷ Allison (1987, 148). See Youpa (2003), for the view that we should not understand Spinozistic self-preservation in terms of the commonsense, empiricist sense of prolonging our lives. Instead, Youpa (ibid, 477) suggests, self-preservation, for Spinoza, is a perfection preservation and perfection enhancement, which does not essentially involve extending the duration of an individual’s existence. See also Yovel (1999) on this issue.

²⁸ As stated earlier in Chapter 4, for Spinoza, there really is no difference between human appetite and desire.

Acting out of virtue is then an enlightened form of self-interested behavior in that it is guided by reason, rather than passions. Reason's guidance comes embodied in what Spinoza calls in EIVP18 the "dictates of reason" (*dictamina rationis*). These rational dictates demand

...that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead man to a greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can. (EIVP18S)

Since what is *really* advantageous in life is understanding, for human beings, the chief endeavor of those who live "under the guidance of reason" is to increase their understanding such that things are deemed useful only insofar as they contribute to the attainment of that end (EIVP26).²⁹ Thus, as stated earlier, for Spinoza, striving for understanding is the first and only foundation of virtue (EIVP26), and the ethical goal is an intellectualist one in that it is nothing but increasing one's power of understanding.

5.1.2.4. Self-Interest and Others' Interests

We have seen what Spinoza's account of virtue amounts to and how it introduces a strong element of intellectualism into his apparently narrow conception of what is in one's self-interest. Next we will look at the following interrelated questions: Given Spinoza's equation of the pursuit of virtue with the pursuit of one's self-interest, how is the rational understanding of oneself and others by way of our shared essence connected to the ethical end of increasing one's own power of thinking? And how does such an understanding provide room for genuine concern for the well-being of others? Not surprisingly, the

²⁹ Allison (1987, 148).

answers to these questions can be found in Spinoza's account of collaborative morality, according to which there is nothing more truly useful for a human being than another human being who is guided by reason.³⁰ Once we reach an understanding of ourselves and each other *qua* human, we thereby comprehend that, since we all share the same essence, by benefiting other human beings, we are, in fact benefiting ourselves *qua* human, and vice versa.³¹ Moreover, the rational understanding of oneself and others through this shared aspect leads to the comprehension that "man's greatest good, namely to know God, is common to all men" (EIVP36D).³²

The following propositions, which also relate to Spinoza's account of collaborative morality, help us understand better the crucial connection among virtue, self-interest and the interests of others:

The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally. (EIVP36)

The good which everyone who seeks *virtue* wants for himself, he also desires for other men. (EIVP37)

The former proposition is important in that it sheds light on a contrast we made earlier between the pursuit of external goods in the ordinary life and the pursuit of understanding in the life according to intellect. Unlike the goods that people pursue in the ordinary life,

³⁰ Importantly, the criterion of usefulness here does not depend on a subjective basis where "each one, from his own affect, judges a thing good or bad, useful or useless" (EIIIP39S). Rather than depending on the way we are affected by things as a result of random experience, usefulness depends on adequate knowledge. I give Spinoza's account of how evaluative terms gain their objectivity in the next section.

³¹ Note that Spinoza states that "when each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another" (EIVP35C2). He thinks that that this is so is also confirmed by daily experience (EIVP35S). For a critique of this see Della Rocca (2008, 192-9).

³² In EIVP36S Spinoza states that "it is not by accident that man's greatest good is common to all; rather it arises from the very nature of reason."

which are finite commodities such as wealth, human beings who live according to reason value and pursue the same good, which is something eternal, imperishable, and capable of being shared equally by all: i.e. knowledge or understanding.³³ Since, unlike wealth, knowledge is not a limited resource, human beings do not come into conflict with one another as they pursue it. Acquisition of understanding is thus not a zero-sum game. Quite the contrary, one person's acquisition of knowledge actually enhances the capacity of others to attain it.³⁴ This is because human beings who are guided by reason are free of such divisive passions as jealousy, envy, and hate. Moreover, as likeminded rational individuals who are similarly motivated in that they strive for understanding, they are likely to be of positive assistance to each other in this project.³⁵ Hence the latter proposition: the good, which everyone who seeks true self-interest or virtue wants for himself—i.e. understanding—he also *desires* for other men (EIVP37). Even though Spinoza does not make this connection, it seems plausible to suggest that this desire is an

³³ We will return to this distinction between the goods that people pursue in the ordinary life and those that are pursued in a life according to reason, in the context of our discussion of “love toward God” in Chapter 6. There, we will see that this special kind of love differs from ordinary love in that it is attached to the greatest good of those who are guided by reason—i.e. knowledge of God or understanding (EIVP36D).

³⁴ Allison (1987, 152).

³⁵ In addition to these two reasons, which derive from what Allison (1987, 152) calls “the utilitarian argument,” there is also room in Spinoza's psychological theory to suggest that surrounding oneself with rational and virtuous individuals will do much positively to reinforce one's own desire to live according to reason, and thus one's own pursuit of perfection. This view rests on Spinoza's conviction that a good which one loves or desires for oneself will be loved more constantly and with greater strength, if it is believed that others love it also: “if we imagine that someone loves, desires, or hates, something we ourselves love, desire or hate, we shall thereby love, desire or hate it with greater constancy” (EIIIP31). As Nadler (2006, 242) puts it, applying this to knowledge, it follows that seeing someone else who loves virtue and desires knowledge will make me love and desire them more. Therefore, it is useful to me and in my interest to have other human beings love virtue and desire knowledge. See also EIVP37D2 and Della Rocca (2004) for an analysis of this point.

active desire, just as the joy arising from the rational knowledge of each other *qua* human is an active joy.³⁶

To conclude, Spinoza's ethical system is both intellectualistic and egoistic in that it is centered on increasing one's power of understanding. Our rational understanding of ourselves and each other *qua* human is centrally connected to the ethical goal of increasing our power of understanding. This is because the common nature we all share and our awareness of this nature through reason allow us to collaborate with one another, strengthen our individual powers of understanding, and thus to be "endowed with virtue" (EIVP20). Spinoza's account of collaborative morality incorporates into his system a genuine concern for others by establishing that there is nothing more useful—that is, more contributive to his attainment of understanding—than another man who is guided by reason. The interests of other human beings thus enter into one's own considerations through their usefulness to oneself based on this enlightened conception of self-interest.³⁷ To the extent that we rationally cognize each other by way of our shared essence (human nature), we cannot fail to take the interests of our fellow human beings into consideration, since failing to do so would be failing to pursue what is truly advantageous and virtuous for us: understanding, which is common to all human beings.

³⁶ Recall that according to Spinoza "all actions that follow from affects related to the mind insofar as it understands I relate to strength of character, which I divide into *tenacity* and *nobility*. (EIIIP59S) The close connection between true self-interest and interests of others might suggest that the active desire of tenacity—that is, "the desire by which each one strives solely from the dictates of reason, to preserve his being" cannot be thought in isolation from another active desire, which regards our concern for the interests of the others—that is nobility, "the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them in friendship" (EIIIP59S).

³⁷ Garrett (1990, 225).

Having shown how reason provides room for genuine concern for the well-being of others due to its close connection to the concept of *human nature*, we will now see how reason supplies an objectivizing standard that grounds value judgments.

5.1.3. Reason, the Free Man and Objectivity of Evaluative Terms

As shown earlier, according to Spinoza's account in Part III of the *Ethics*, one judges that something is good because one desires it, and one desires it because it brings about an increase in one's power of acting. In the Preface to Part IV of the *Ethics*, we see Spinoza adhering to the same relativized and subjectivized conception of good and evil as he criticizes the usage of these terms in ordinary thinking:

As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, music is good for one who is melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf. (GII 208)

According to Spinoza, evaluative terms like good, bad, perfection and imperfection, in their common usage, arise because we compare things to one another.³⁸ This indicates that there is nothing positive in things considered in themselves, meaning that such terms do not refer to absolute and objective features of things, or properties that they have independently of anything else. Apart from the varied and inconstant

³⁸ See Allison (1987, 142-3) for a detailed analysis of Spinoza's construal and critique of evaluative terms in their common usage.

preferences of human beings, things themselves are neither good nor evil.³⁹ Thus the concepts of good and evil, like those of perfection and imperfection, are, at least as they are employed in ordinary thinking, subjective and anthropocentric fictions inadvertently projected onto the world.⁴⁰

5.1.3.1. The Model of Human Nature

The way Spinoza initially approaches evaluative terms suggests that he is committed to the view that there is no solid ground for any set of evaluative concepts.⁴¹ Nevertheless, immediately following the conclusion that the concepts of good and evil are just modes of thinking, Spinoza introduces a model of human nature in terms of which he explains the meanings of “good” and “evil.” He says,

³⁹ Note that this had already been established in the Appendix to Part 1: “The other notions [i.e., good, evil, sound, rotten] are also nothing but modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected; and yet the ignorant consider them the chief attributes of things, because, as we have already said, they believe all things have been made for their sake, and call the nature of a thing good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it.” Because people commonly but mistakenly believe that natural things have been created for the sake of themselves, people hold that one thing is better than another insofar as they are more attracted to it. Something is thought to be worse than another insofar as people are more averse to it.

⁴⁰ Andrew Youpa (2010, 63).

⁴¹ It is important to note that the way Spinoza conceives the evaluative terms in this Preface has led some scholars to hold that in his view there ultimately is no solid ground for evaluative language. This view, which we can consider as a minority position in the secondary literature, has been held by Koistinen and Biro (2002), and Sayre-McCord (1989). While the former (2002, 8) suggest that Spinoza is a proponent of an error theory in ethics, in his introduction to *Essays on Moral Realism*, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (1988, 10) says, “Early defenders of the error theory in ethics include Hume (on some plausible interpretations) and Spinoza, who argues that good and evil ‘are nothing but modes in which the imagination is affected in different ways, and, nevertheless, they are regarded by the ignorant as being specially attributes of things’.”

But though this is so, still we must retain these words. For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model [*exemplar*] of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model [*exemplar*] of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model [*exemplar*]. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model [*exemplar*]. (EIV Preface)

Hence, despite the initial subjectivist implications of Spinoza's construal of evaluative terms, there is an objective standard of judgment, and this standard is embodied in the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. According to Spinoza, it makes sense and it is useful to retain the terms 'good', 'bad', 'perfect' and 'imperfect' only with a view to this model. Note that, for Spinoza, by retaining these terms *with a view to* this model of human nature, their relativist meaning is not abandoned. What is given up is solely the subjectivism that was introduced with the Part III account of good and evil, and carried through in the Preface to Part IV. On this new construal, 'good' no longer means simply what one desires or what we form because we compare things to one another in random and arbitrary ways; rather, it means "useful for making a human being closer to what is truly a more perfected specimen of humanity."⁴²

This de-subjectivized model of human nature, according to which we can judge what is good or evil for a human being, provides a context within which the formal

⁴² Nadler (2006, 218).

definitions of good and evil at the beginning of Part IV take on a clearer and more specific meaning:⁴³

By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us. (EIVD1)

By evil...I shall understand that which we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some good. (EIVD2)

Even though Spinoza does not give explicit reference to the model of human nature in these definitions, it makes sense to see these reformulations as embodying the assumption that what makes something useful “to us” is its capacity to enable us to approximate the model of human nature that Spinoza sets before us, and vice versa.⁴⁴

5.1.3.2. Objectivity of the Model of Human Nature

So far we showed that while good and bad remain relative to some standard, since the standard itself—i.e. the model of human nature—is objective, the former are no longer subjective. But how do we know that the model of human nature itself is objective? Why should this model of human nature be privileged and have an advantage over any other model of a human being that we might conceive? These are crucial questions to address, since the objectivization of good and evil works only if Spinoza can provide some objectivity for the model of human nature itself. Even though Spinoza does not explicitly address this challenge in the *Ethics*, it is possible to do so on his behalf by having

⁴³ Curley (1988, 167).

⁴⁴ Garrett (1996, 274). Note that in the explanation immediately following the definitions, Spinoza states that these definitions follow from what he said in the preceding preface, namely Preface to Part IV.

recourse to a concept that he introduces in the *Short Treatise*: “being of reason” (*entia rationis*).

As shown in Chapter 2, according to Spinoza’s description in the *Short Treatise*, beings of reason “are in our intellect and not in Nature; so these are only our work, and they help us to understand things distinctly” (KV1, X). Elsewhere in the same treatise, Spinoza calls the idea of a *perfect man* in our intellect a ‘being of reason’ “that could be a cause of our seeing (when we examine ourselves) whether we have any means of arriving at such perfection.”⁴⁵ Beings of reason such as the idea of a perfect man are abstract and ideal constructs whose function is to aid in our reasoning.⁴⁶ As I emphasized in Chapter 2, although beings of reason are abstract, they differ from fictitious abstracts that are the product of our imagination. While the latter are fictitious and subjective, beings of reason are objective and legitimate abstracts. This is because, unlike the fictitious abstracts, beings of reason are products of our reason.

Importantly, however, despite the fact that beings of reason are products of reason, they differ from common notions, which, as seen earlier, are foundations of our reasoning.⁴⁷ Unlike the former that our reason creates in order to “*help us to understand distinctly*” (KV, 1, X, my italics), common notions are clear and distinct or adequate ideas themselves. While the model of human nature *qua* being of reason is a *merely* ideal

⁴⁵ KV 2, chapter IV.

⁴⁶ Heunemann (1997, 114). In suggesting that the model of human nature *qua* free man is a being of reason, I follow Heunemann (1997).

⁴⁷ Thus I disagree with Bernard Rousset (2004, 9) who claims that *exemplar naturae humanae* is produced by the imagination but that it is nevertheless a common notion.

construct and, thereby, is *not* in Nature, the common notion of human nature is not an ideal in that, as shown in Chapter 2, it represents *real* agreements in Nature.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding this distinction, the model of human nature, I argue, is related to the common notion of human nature. This is because the model of human nature is an idealization that our reason constructs out of the common notion of human nature.⁴⁹ Shortly, I will say more on the act of intellect involved in the creation of the model of human nature *qua* the free man.

After this brief account of the beings of reason, it is easy to see why it makes sense to consider the model of human nature that Spinoza introduces in the Preface to Part IV as a being of reason.⁵⁰ This is because, considering it as a being of reason enables us to claim that the model of human nature is a product of reason, rather than that of imagination. *Qua* product of reason, the model of human nature does not differ from person to person and has a privileged status whatever may be the case about other ideas of human nature arising from confused perceptions of a multitude of individual men.⁵¹

The model of human nature thus construed can then be said to have an objectivizing role

⁴⁸ As seen in Chapter 2, the specific common notion of human nature represents the properties that are common and distinctive to human beings and stipulates conditions for a mode's being a human being.

⁴⁹ As shown in Chapter 2, Gueroult (1974, 376) makes a similar point regarding geometric beings that he thinks can be considered as examples of beings of reason. Although the geometric figures do not correspond to a separate existence outside of us in nature like the beings of imagination, they are born from an operation of the intellect, whereas the beings of imagination are born out of confusion of the cerebral traces. It is an act of intellect by which reason determines extension by motion and constructs a priori the entities genetically conceivable. (TdIE, App.1)

⁵⁰ Garber (2004, 202) calls it a "creature of reason."

⁵¹ Curley (1973b, 363) makes a similar point when he says that Spinoza presents us with a foundation for ethics not on the many general ideas of human nature (i.e. universal term "man"), which confused men now use as standards in judging other men, but on the one idea of human nature, which clear-headed men could use in judging other men (and themselves).

to ground our evaluative terms. In order to better understand this objectivizing role ascribed to the model, we will now see what this model of human nature consists in.

5.1.3.3. Spinoza's Model of Human Nature *qua* Free Man

The Preface to Part IV is the last time we hear of the model of human nature, and Spinoza never presents an explicit explanation of what this model corresponds to. Notwithstanding, later in Part IV, he introduces what might be taken to represent his human ideal: the free man (*homo liber*). Here I follow scholars, including Curley, Garber and Garrett, in holding that the model of human nature that Spinoza introduces in the Preface to Part IV refers to the *ideal* of the free man that he describes later in the same part (EIVPP67-73).⁵² More specifically, I maintain that when, at the end of Part IV, we are given a sketch of the life of the free man, we are being given a description of that kind of human nature that we desire to set before ourselves and take as the standard for our judgments.

According to Spinoza's description of the free man, "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death" (EIVP67), his virtue "is seen to be as great in avoiding dangers as in overcoming them" (EIVP69), and

⁵² The nature of Spinoza's model of human nature and whether it does any philosophical work in the *Ethics* are controversial matters. Unlike Bennett (1984, 296), who holds that the model of human nature does no work and thus can be dismissed, Curley (1988, 123) thinks that we miss something if we dismiss the concept of a model as unimportant. Curley holds that the whole of Part IV of the *Ethics* is the construction of the idea of a model human being, and that idea might characterize that kind of person as free or guided by reason. Garber (2004, 184) uses more prudent language in saying that it is not implausible to associate the model of human nature Spinoza has in mind with the free man discussed in Parts IV and V. Lastly, according to Garrett (1996, 278), it is clear that the ideal "free man," the description of which is provided by EIVPP67-73, constitutes Spinoza's promised "model of human nature we set before ourselves."

he “always acting honestly, not deceptively” (EIVP73). At the center of all these fine qualities lies an essential one: being guided *solely* by reason (EIV67P, EIV68P, my italics). Since the free man is guided solely by reason, he always acts absolutely from virtue (EIVP24). The free man represents not only a state of perfect rationality and virtue, but also a state of a perfect freedom:

We shall easily see what the difference is between a man who is led only by an affect, or by opinion, and one who is led by reason. For the former, whether he will or no, does those things he is most ignorant of, whereas the latter complies with no one’s wishes but his own, and does *only* those things he knows to be the most important in life, and therefore desires very greatly. Hence I call the former a slave, the latter, a *free man*. (EIVP66S, my italics)

The way Spinoza describes the free man in the *Ethics* makes it obvious that he designs this model as an unattainable ideal for us.⁵³ This is simply because *no* human being can be guided *solely* by reason, and thereby attain a state of *complete* rationality and freedom. As shown earlier, unlike God who is perfectly free in the sense of being *causa sui*—that is, completely self-determined and utterly independent of external causes—human beings are always dependent on external causes:

It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause. (EIVP4)

⁵³ Note that Spinoza’s view of the human project as one of approximating, as much as one can, some specific ideal model is present in his earlier works. We already saw earlier that in the *Short Treatise*, he introduces the “idea of a perfect man” (KV 2, IV). In addition, in the TdIE (I.10), Spinoza asserts that “since...man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek means that will lead him to such perfection.”

Thus it follows from a thing's being a man that it is necessarily a part of nature and subject to external causes. From this, Spinoza draws the conclusion that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires (EIVP4C).⁵⁴ Since being guided *solely* by reason is impossible for finite modes like us, it is impossible for us to realize the model of human nature, the perfect character to which we aspire.

Assuming that the model of human nature *qua* free man is a being of reason, the fact that this model is unattainable is not surprising. This is because, like the idea of a “perfect man” in the *Short Treatise*, the idea of a “free man” in the *Ethics* is only an ideal and abstract creation of our reason. More specifically, the idea of a human being who is guided *solely* by reason is an idealization that our reason constructs by abstracting the common notion of human nature away from all the properties it expresses but the most distinctive one—namely, its rationality. Even though the ideal of free man involves an abstraction, it is not a fictitious idea since it is produced by reason rather than imagination. The ideal of free man is then a non-fictitious idealization, or, as one scholar puts it, “a theoretically convenient limiting case, like the concept of an ‘ideal gas’-one whose molecules have zero volume.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Central to the demonstration of this proposition and its corollary is the single axiom he gives in EIV: “There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed” (EIVA1). From this axiom it follows directly that “The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (EIVP3).

Before moving on to the ethical function of the ideal of the free man, it is important to note that there is a scholarly controversy over whether the idea of free man is adequate or not. According to a critique raised by Daniel Garber, even though it is reason that leads us to form the idea of the free man, and even though it is reason that pushes us to do that which will put us closer to the model of human nature, the model itself is an inadequate idea insofar as it represents something that cannot be realized.⁵⁶ Unlike Garber, there are other commentators such as Allison who hold that Spinoza's model of human nature is, or is based on, an adequate idea of human nature.⁵⁷ I agree with the latter interpretation. As stated above, the idea of the free man is an idealization that our reason constructs out of the specific common notion of human nature. Reason constructs the model of human nature by abstracting the common notion of human nature away from all the properties it expresses *but* the most distinctive one: rationality. Thus, on my view, Spinoza's model of human nature *qua* free man is a true assertion based on, albeit not identical to, an adequate idea of human

⁵⁵ Bennett (1984, 317). As Garrett (1990, 230-1) notes, like the concept of a person who is guided solely by reason, the concept of a "complete agreement in nature" among persons that would result in a complete coinciding of interests and advantage might also be considered as a limiting case.

⁵⁶ Garber (2004, 202). Consequently, for Garber, the model "does not do the philosophical work that it would appear to do, insofar as it isn't, *strictly speaking*, a guide for our behavior" (my italics). Even though Garber holds this, he nonetheless maintains that the model of human nature fulfills its ethical function of objectivization of value judgments, to which we will look at shortly.

⁵⁷ See Allison (1987, 142-3), Jarrett (2002, 164), and Nadler (2006, 219). Andrew Youpa (2010), on the other hand, thinks that there is a sense in which it is correct to think, like Garber does, that the idea of the free man is an inadequate idea. Yet there is also a sense in which the idea of the free man is, or is based on, an adequate idea. Specifically, he shows that, when it is regarded as the idea of a particular finite thing, the idea of the free man is inadequate. But, Youpa also holds that the idea of the free man is an adequate idea to the extent that it is based on an adequate idea of God.

nature.⁵⁸ Rather than going further into this controversy here, I will address a question that is centrally linked to the main topic of this chapter, namely, the ethical significance of reason: what exactly is the ethical function of the ideal of the free man, which is an unattainable limiting case to which we can draw near but never achieve?

5.1.3.4. Ethical Function of the Free Man

Having shown that the model of human nature *qua* free man is a construct of our reason, we are now in a position to see how, by way of creating this ideal, reason provides a basis for an objectivizing standard in Spinoza's ethics. Only relative to the ideal of the free man, which is a vivid embodiment of complete freedom and rationality, can we talk about objective standards for applying evaluative terms such as good and evil. Then, good is understood as what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the ideal of the free man. And evil is understood as what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that ideal. Even though there is no such thing as perfect freedom as far as human beings are concerned, a person can be said to be more or less free depending on the extent to which she approaches or falls short of the ideal free condition.

⁵⁸ I follow Garrett (*ibid*) and Heunemann (1997) in holding that the idea of free man is a being of reason and a true assertion. As shown in Chapter 2, for Spinoza the abstractions involved in idealizations are not fictions.

As stated earlier, even though they are not in Nature, the beings of reason “help us understand distinctly” (KV, 1, X). The ideal of free man *qua* being of reason *helps us to understand distinctly* what *objectively* puts us closer to and further away from this ideal condition. It helps us to see that while being guided by reason and the adequate cause of one’s own effects puts us closer to the ideal, being led by inadequate ideas and thus inadequate cause of our effects puts us farther away from it. In other words, thanks to this ideal, we see that whereas acquisition of adequate ideas makes us more free and virtuous, and is thus objectively and necessarily good for us, acquisition of inadequate ideas makes us less free and less virtuous and is thereby objectively and necessarily bad for us. In short, the ideal of free man sets up an objective standard against which we can be said to be more or less free—that is, more or less determined by our own ideas.

By looking at the way Spinoza characterizes the ideal of free man and makes use of it, it seems plausible to hold that he is engaged in a project of commending a particular way of life to his fellow men that is embodied in this ideal.⁵⁹ Even though Spinoza never uses strong normative language, stating, for instance, that “we ought to try to be like the free man,” he seems to be expecting that any individual who acts rationally will strive to emulate the free man. Or, as Steven Nadler puts it, the free man, for Spinoza, is an ideal model which reason approves, and thus towards which the *conatus* of a person who is beginning to be guided by reason will necessarily strive.⁶⁰ Following this, it makes sense

⁵⁹ Curley (1973b, 365). For Curley (*ibid*, 366), the ideal of free man is created and prescribed by reason, since it is the kind of life each person, insofar as he acts according to his own nature and is not determined by external causes, necessarily seeks.

⁶⁰ Nadler (2006, 236).

to hold that reason not only creates this ideal but also pushes those who have begun to be guided by reason towards this model of excellent understanding since, for Spinoza, “what we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding” (EIVP26).⁶¹ By creating the ideal of free man, reason gives us the aspiration to acquire more and more adequate ideas and strive to approximate the ideal *so far as we can*.

We have seen how reason relates to the ethical life by providing the possibility of an interpersonal morality with an objectivized value system. It is in virtue of reason that one can grasp what one has in common with one’s environment, which in turn allows for the comprehension that for a human being, there is nothing more valuable than another human being. In addition to providing room for genuine concern for others by way of employing the specific common notion of human nature, and thus grounding Spinoza’s account of interpersonal morality, reason also supplies an objectivizing standard for our evaluative terms by creating the model of human nature *qua* free man.

As we elaborated on how reason relates to the ethical life in these respects, we also learned about the nature of the relationship among the notions of virtue, freedom,

⁶¹ But what about those who have not started to be guided by reason? What about the ordinary people living ordinary lives, who are “led only by an affect, or by opinion” rather than by reason? It is not clear whether Spinoza does/can hold that the ideal of free man would have the same kind of influence on these people. As we will see in the next section, Spinoza’s account of reason’s power over the passions in the beginning of Part V of the *Ethics* provides a more detailed picture of how one can move from the ordinary life to the life of the intellect.

morality and rationality in Spinoza's thought. Most importantly, we saw that, for Spinoza, living according to the guidance of reason is co-extensive with acting out of virtue, pursuing one's own true advantage, being the adequate cause of oneself, and being free. And the more one lives according to the guidance of reason the more she is virtuous, free, active, truly self-interested and, thereby, genuinely other-interested.

As stated earlier, Spinoza presents most of his ethical theory in the *Ethics* in connection to reason by making it clear that we cannot pursue an ethical life without rational knowledge. What we have covered so far in this chapter reflects an important part of what constitutes Spinoza's moral as presented in Part IV of the *Ethics*. Even though by the end of Part IV of the *Ethics* we know a good deal about the relation between freedom and rationality, we know very little about how to go about achieving freedom. As Spinoza himself concedes, "it rarely happens that men live according to the guidance of reason" (EIVP35C2). In other words, most human beings, unfortunately, endure a passive existence in the bondage of harmful affects such as pride, humility, jealousy, hatred, fear and hope. How can these people enter upon the path of freedom? How can reason bring about a diminishing of such passions and an increase in activity and freedom? The answers of these questions are found in Spinoza's account of the affective power of reason that he provides in the first half of Part V of the *Ethics*. And this brings us to the second main respect in which reason relates to the ethical life.

5. 2. *The Power of Reason in the Face of the Passions*

The final part (Part V) of the *Ethics* is titled “Of the Power of the Intellect, or on Human Freedom” (*De Potentia Intellectus, seu de Libertate Humana*). In accordance with its title, Part V is where we find Spinoza’s elaborate account of “the mind’s power over the affects⁶² and its freedom” (EVP42S). In this section, we will focus on the first half of Part V, where Spinoza presents a variety of remedies for the affects.⁶³ Spinoza’s account of the power of reason over the passions has received much attention from commentators.⁶⁴ Here, rather than presenting an in-depth analysis of all remedies for the passions and the scholarly debates surrounding them, I will provide a critical overview of three remedies that I consider to be most relevant to the issue of personal freedom. In particular, I will show how the power of reason over the passions consists in (1) the fact that reason separates affect from the thought of an external cause which we imagine confusedly, and joins affects to true thoughts; (2) knowledge of the affects; and (3) understanding things as necessary.⁶⁵ By looking at these three techniques, we will see how, on Spinoza’s

⁶² Note that here the term “affect” (*affectus*) refers to passive affects or passions.

⁶³ I will focus on the second half of Part V of the *Ethics* in the next chapter.

⁶⁴ The most notable of these commentators are Jonathan Bennett (1984, 329-345), Edwin Curley (1988, 128-135), Martin Lin (2009, 258-283) and Colin Marshall (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ Note that in EVP20S, Spinoza provides a list of techniques for moderating the passions: “the power of the mind over the affects consists: I. In the knowledge itself of the affects (see P4S); II. In the fact that it separates the affects from the thought of an external cause, which we imagine confusedly (see P2 and P4S); III. In the time by which the affections related to things we understand surpass those related to things we conceive confusedly, or in a mutilated way (see P7); IV. In the multiplicity of causes by which affections related to common properties or to God are encouraged (see P9 and P11); V. Finally, in the order by which the mind can order its affects and connect them to one another (see P10, and in addition, P12, P13, and P14).” Curiously omitted from this list is the technique that consists in understanding things as necessary,

account, human freedom is attained by rational knowledge, which enables us to moderate and restrain the passions by way of re-ordering our ideas according to the order of the intellect. After focusing on the power of reason over the passions, I will conclude the chapter by looking at the limits of this power, including, most importantly, its susceptibility to *akrasia*.

In the Preface to Part V, Spinoza states that in the remaining part of the *Ethics*, he “shall treat of the power of reason, showing what it can do against the affects, and what freedom of mind, or blessedness, is.” He goes on to warn the reader that “it does not pertain to this investigation to show how the intellect must be perfected.” Spinoza’s ethical investigation does not regard the perfection of the intellect *per se*, which would be the concern of logic;⁶⁶ rather, it concerns

...the power of the mind, or of reason, and...above all, *how great its dominion over the affects is, and what kind of dominion it has for restraining and moderating them.* (ibid, my italics)

Spinoza’s caveat immediately before his account of reason’s power over the passions suggests that not just *any* adequate knowledge is important from an ethical perspective; what is most important is knowledge that is relevant to the ethical endeavor to moderate and restrain one’s passions. What does the affective power of reason over the passions consist in?

which is one of the three remedies that I am focusing on here together with the first two remedies in the list (and partially the fifth one to the extent that it relates to the first two).

⁶⁶ Preface to EV.

Does scientific knowledge of Nature that we attain through common notions provide an affective power against the passions? Does our knowledge of the laws of Newtonian physics or the theory of plate tectonics, for instance, have an affective power in the face of the passions? According to Spinoza, to the extent that one gains adequate knowledge—regardless of its pertaining to physics, geometry or psychology—one thereby increases her power of understanding, and this increase, as we saw, is a source of joy, hence, an affective power. Moreover, to the extent that one gains adequate knowledge, even when this is an instance of what one might call “theoretical” cognition such as the demonstration of the propositions of Euclid’s *Elements*, one is said to act from the dictates of reason. This is because, in Spinoza’s thought, “dictate of reason” means simply what is necessitated by reason. Since, broadly construed, any case of mind’s being determined by adequate ideas is a case of acting from the dictates of reason, the dictates of reason, for Spinoza, are at once theoretical and practical principles rather than solely practical ones.⁶⁷

According to Spinoza, every instance of attaining adequate knowledge is related to the ethical life insofar as it represents an increase in one’s understanding, freedom and, hence, virtue. However, rather than just any adequate knowledge, “knowledge of oneself and one’s own emotions” is particularly relevant to the ethical endeavor of moderating

⁶⁷ In holding this, I follow Rutherford (2008, 499) who argues that the dictates of reason, for Spinoza, are at once normative and theoretical principles. As Rutherford (ibid) notes, in this respect Spinoza diverges from the traditional construal of dictates of reason *qua* practical principles, which only carry normative authority for an agent insofar as they express what an agent ought to do. For an elaborate treatment of this interesting issue see Rutherford (ibid). See also Lloyd (1994) for her account of how Spinoza differs from Descartes in his implied refutation of the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge.

and restraining one's passions.⁶⁸ This is because "knowledge of oneself and one's own emotions" is capable of creating the emotional atmosphere that will be effective in this endeavor.⁶⁹ In Spinoza's words, "each of us has, in part at least, if not absolutely—the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them" (EVP4S). But how does understanding ourselves and our affects *via* reason lead to us being less acted on by or susceptible to affects? The answers to these questions are in Spinoza's account of the remedies for the passions.

5.2.1. Spinoza's Remedies for the Passions

5.2.1.1. Separating the Affects from the Thought of an External Cause, which We Imagine Confusedly and Joining Them to True Thoughts

Spinoza offers the first remedy in EVP2:

If we separate emotions or affects from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love or hate toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects.

In order to understand how this technique works, we have to realize that what is at work here is an important feature of Spinoza's construal of affects shown earlier: that all affects are ideas. Since affects are ideas, they involve an element of belief such that different affects might be distinguished from one another by the different beliefs they

⁶⁸ In the next chapter I will say more on self-knowledge and show how the culmination of self-knowledge is attained through intuitive knowledge as a result of the process of a transformative ascent.

⁶⁹ De Dijn (1992, 495).

involve.⁷⁰ Being affected by a passion, in particular, entails having an idea of its external cause. This is because passive affects have external causes, and one cannot be in a state deriving from an external cause without having an idea of that cause.⁷¹ Hate, for instance, is an idea that registers a decrease of power accompanied by an idea of an external cause of this decrease (EIIP13S), and it thereby involves an element of belief. That is, when my power goes down and I *believe* that something external caused this change, then I hate that external thing. Following this technique, if I separate my idea of the external cause from the affect (that is, the idea that registers the change in power), then I will no longer hate the external cause.⁷²

As Curley notes, Spinoza's construal of affects as involving an element of belief has a number of advantages.⁷³ First, it explains why it makes sense to talk about the affects as being rationally justified or not. This is because the beliefs they involve may or may not be rationally justified. Second, it explains the connection between the affect and the object of the affect.⁷⁴ And third, it grounds the possibility for a form of cognitive therapy. The third advantage is the most important one for our purposes here, as it is directly connected to the remedy we just presented. Translating Spinoza's language in EVP2 into Curley's words:

⁷⁰ See Bennett (1984, 271-6) and Jerome Neu (1977) for excellent accounts of this view.

⁷¹ As Lin (2009, 273) states, this follows from EIA4 and EIIP16.

⁷² Ibid (2009, 272).

⁷³ As we saw in Chapter 4 and as we will see again in this chapter, Della Rocca goes further than Curley in holding that an affect is nothing but an idea, which, in turn, is something like a belief.

⁷⁴ As Curley (1988, 130) notes, the object of the affect is the object the component belief is about.

If a certain belief is an essential component in a particular affect, and if we can destroy that belief, or weaken it, then we will have destroyed or weakened the affect of which it is a component.⁷⁵

Needless to say, this technique will work as a remedy only to the extent that we have some control over our beliefs—that is, in Spinoza’s terminology, to the extent that we are able to separate our passions from the ideas of external causes. But, given, as shown earlier, that, according to Spinoza, we cannot believe or disbelieve at will (EIIIP49S)—that is, we cannot just decide to have some beliefs and not to have others, how will this technique work as a remedy? Assuming that most harmful passions are based on false or questionable beliefs,⁷⁶ how can we be said to have some control over beliefs, on which these passions are based?

Curley believes that persistent reflection on our evidence for the beliefs at stake—that is, the process of reviewing evidence for our beliefs to see if we are rationally justified in holding them—is one way of gaining *indirect* control over our beliefs.⁷⁷ Reflecting on evidence for our beliefs is a rigorous process, which involves, among other things, assuming a distance from and actively criticizing the logic by which we have arrived at the belief, and looking into whether there are alternative explanations that might explain the evidence equally well. Imagine, for instance, that one morning I bump into a good friend of mine whom I have not seen for a long time. While I greet her very warmly, she returns my greeting in a cold and distracted manner. I immediately feel

⁷⁵ Curley (1988, 130).

⁷⁶ Curley (1988, 131 and 169, n.55). For a contrary view, see Bennett, (1984, 349-50).

⁷⁷ Curley (1988, 130-1). For an alternative interpretation, see Lin (2009, 273).

anxious thinking that I must have done something to offend her. Is my anxiety based on a justified belief? Am I rationally justified in believing that the reason why she looks cold and detached is due to something I have done? Perhaps she was not feeling good at the time. Perhaps she has been preoccupied with other matters. In a case like this, examining my evidence for this belief from a rational and critical distance might help me see the erroneous thinking that grounds my anxiety.⁷⁸

Even though Curley's interpretation of this remedy offers a plausible reading, it also invites some objections. First, one could argue that the fact that a belief is true or rationally justified, by itself, does not guarantee that no negative effect could follow from such a belief. Let us go back to the example above. Imagine that, at the end of my reflection, I realize that I am in fact rationally justified in believing that the reason why my friend looks cold and detached lies in something that I have done. Would I feel less anxious then? It seems that, in such a case, I would still feel anxious (maybe more so) even if, or precisely because, the belief is true.⁷⁹

Second, it might be objected that, even if we have indirect control over our beliefs, this remedy will not bring any improvement. Suppose I hate Adam—that is, according to Spinoza's definition of hate, I feel sadness and believe that Adam is the cause of my sadness. After reflecting on my evidence for my belief, I come to see that my belief that Adam is the cause of my sadness is false. Once this happens, that is, if you

⁷⁸ Of course, the person who has the belief may not be able to see, without help from others, that his belief is false or questionable. But, as Curley (1988, 131) notes, one of the services a good therapist can provide is to give you a different perspective on things, which, without her aid, you would believe uncritically.

⁷⁹ Thanks to Tad Schmaltz for this point.

take the idea of an external cause away from hate, then it ceases to be hate. But it is still sadness.⁸⁰

Following up on the second objection, it might be argued that someone could hate and not just feel sad even without the relevant belief. This is because emotions do not require beliefs. On this view, I do not need to *believe* that Adam is the cause of my sadness in order to hate him. All I need is a quasi-perception—i.e. to “see him as” the cause of my sadness.⁸¹ As long as I keep seeing Adam as the cause of my sadness, I will hate him even without the belief that he is the cause of my sadness.⁸²

To address these objections, I will begin with the last point. Can someone really hate without the relevant belief? Answering this question in the affirmative would clearly conflict with Spinoza’s view of affects, which was presented in Chapter 4. According to his revisionist conception of affect, all affects are ideas. Ideas, in turn, cannot be conceived without a certain affirmation, and thus they are beliefs. Therefore, all affects are in fact beliefs, which means that I cannot hate Adam without believing that he is the

⁸⁰ This objection is raised by Bennett (1984, 333-4).

⁸¹ See Jesse Prinz (2004) for a sophisticated version of the perceptual theory of emotions, which combines somatic and cognitive elements. For a purely cognitivist approach to emotions, according to which emotions are a kind of judgment, see Martha Nussbaum (2001) and Robert Solomon (1980). Nussbaum would explain the persistence of emotion cited in the example by saying that in that case one has not really ceased having the relevant belief. Even though Spinoza’s account of emotions bears important similarity to cognitivist theories of emotions, his original approach to ideas and belief makes it hard to incorporate him completely into that camp. As shown in Chapter 4, Spinoza’s conception of ideas and thus of belief is different from our usual static conception of an attitude toward a propositional object. In this sense, ideas are not inert mental representations for Spinoza. Regardless of their being adequate or inadequate, ideas prompt action. Spinoza’s conception of affects as ideas will bear interesting results in explaining the possibility of *akrasia* as the outcome of two competing ideas. We will look at Spinoza’s account of *akrasia* towards the end of this chapter.

⁸² Thanks to David Wong for bringing this point to my attention.

cause of my sadness. My hate for Adam cannot be explained by appealing to another class of mental events, which consists in perceiving him as the cause of my sadness without believing that this is the case.⁸³ This is simply because there is no such other class of mental events but ideas. As shown earlier, representation is all there is to joy, sadness, desire and all other affects formed out of these three basic ones.

What about the second objection? Is it true that this remedy will not bring any improvement since the affect of sadness will persist even if I no longer feel hatred? I believe that this objection would be justified if the remedy consisted *solely* in separating the affect from the thought of an external cause. But notice that the remedy does not only involve separating the affect—that is, the idea of the affection of the body—from the idea of this affection’s external cause. It *also* involves joining the affect to some adequate idea that is internally determined by the mind.⁸⁴ It involves, in other words, joining the affect to “true thoughts”:⁸⁵

We must, therefore, take special care to *know each affect clearly and distinctly* (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly, and with which it is fully satisfied, and *so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts*. The result will be *not only* that love, hate, etc., are destroyed (by VP2), *but also* that the appetites, or

⁸³ As shown in Chapter 4, this would be a violation of the principle of sufficient reason according to Della Rocca.

⁸⁴ Interestingly neither Curley (1988) nor Lin (2009) mentions this point as they address Bennett’s objection. Lin (*ibid*, 273) states that Spinoza would hold that sadness is not really as bad as hatred since the harmful behavioral dispositions associated with hate are disarmed when it is turned into mere sadness. According to Curley (*ibid*, 131-2), on the other hand, even if we end up replacing one passion with another, this is still a form of progress as hatred is surely a more harmful affect than sadness.

⁸⁵ Note that Spinoza’s description of this remedy in EVP20S is misleading since, there, he mentions only the separating aspect.

desires, which usually arise from such an affect cannot be excessive (by IVP61). (VP4S, my italics)⁸⁶

There are two important points to notice in this passage. *First*, it is significant that Spinoza invokes EIV61—which states that “a desire which arises from reason cannot be excessive”—in order to show why the desires arising from the affect that is joined to true thoughts cannot be excessive. Such a desire cannot be excessive since it is nothing but an active affect arising from reason. As shown earlier, for Spinoza, as much as the passions have a cognitive dimension, reason has an affective dimension. Once the affect is separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts via reason, it is also thereby joined to the active affects arising from reason. *Second*, as we see in this passage, joining the affect to “true thoughts” is facilitated by knowledge of the affects, which suggests that, the technique of separating and joining affects is very closely connected to the second remedy Spinoza presents—that is, knowledge of the affects, which is our next topic to consider.

Before moving on to the next remedy, let me finally address the first objection. Does the fact that a belief is true or rationally justified, by itself, guarantee that no negative effect could follow from such a belief? It does not. Given how we addressed the second objection, we know now that Curley’s interpretation of the indirect control of our beliefs does not capture what Spinoza has in mind regarding this remedy—at least, not in its totality. On Spinoza’s view, this remedy cannot consist solely in reflecting on the belief at hand. Rather, what seems most important for this remedy to work is that the

⁸⁶ Colin Marshall (forthcoming) focuses on this passage as he provides an intriguing interpretation of Spinoza’s view that we can destroy a passion by forming a clear and distinct idea of it.

belief be self-contained, so as not to involve elements not under one's control. As we showed in the previous paragraph, the remedy does not only consist in separating the affect from the thought of an external cause, but also joining it to some adequate idea that is internally determined by the mind. So rather than reflecting on a true belief involving elements that are not under one's control, this remedy requires joining a belief to true thoughts, and thereby making it self-contained.

5.2.1.2. Knowledge of the Affects

We can devise no other remedy for the affects which depends on our power and is more excellent than this, which consists in a *true knowledge of them*. For the mind has no other power than that of thinking and forming adequate ideas. (EV4S, my italics)

As clearly seen in this passage, Spinoza accords great importance to this remedy, which consists simply in attaining adequate knowledge of the affects. But what are his grounds for holding it? For Spinoza, "There is no affection of the body, whereof we cannot form some clear and distinct conception" (EVP4), and hence there is no affect of which we cannot form a clear and distinct idea (EVP4C). In other words, there is no affect that we cannot understand in terms of common notions. This means that our affects are capable of being understood scientifically, and this possibility provides a basis for Spinoza's recommendation that we endeavor to cultivate a detached and objective attitude toward our own emotional life instead of allowing ourselves to be passively affected by things.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Allison (1987, 161).

We have to cultivate such an attitude, since “an affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it” (EVP3). Moreover, “the more an affect is known to us, then, the more it is in our power, and the less the mind is acted on by it” (EVP3C). By thus introducing “the knowledge of the affects” as a remedy for the passions, Spinoza appears to state a version of an appealing idea that is familiar to us from various forms of psychotherapy: Gaining knowledge of our emotions allows us to master them.⁸⁸

Forming clear and distinct ideas of affects, for Spinoza, means “ordering and connecting the affections of our body according to the order of the intellect” (EVP10)—that is, perceiving adequately and truly what the causes of the affects are and why one is experiencing them.⁸⁹ The result of the process of forming clear and distinct ideas of our affects is then a re-ordering of our ideas, such that they are no longer connected according to the order of random experience, but instead reflect the true causal order of things.⁹⁰ This explains why, for Spinoza, “the more an affect is known to us...the less the mind is acted on by it” (EVP3C). This is because, the more one knows about one’s affects, i.e. one’s reactions to things, “the more control one can exercise over those

⁸⁸ Lin (2009, 270).

⁸⁹ Adequate causal perception of the affects provides a *general* understanding of our affects by way of common notions, rather than a clear and distinct idea of the complete and specific causal chain that explains the affect. As shown in Chapter 3, we can never have an adequate knowledge of the latter since it depends on the common order of Nature.

⁹⁰ Nadler (2006, 251).

reactions—which, in effect, cease to be reactions and become actions, anchored as they now are in adequate ideas.”⁹¹

Spinoza holds that once we reach a causal understanding of our passions, they cease to be passions, which are confused ideas. For instance, “insofar as we understand the causes of sadness, it ceases (by P3) to be a passion, that is (by IIIIP59),⁹² to that extent it ceases to be sadness” (EVP18S). It is important to notice that, once we form a clear and distinct idea of a passion, not only does the passion cease to be a passion, but also it is replaced by an active affect arising from reason.⁹³ In other words, by understanding the causes of passions, we turn them into actions.⁹⁴

Spinoza’s grounds for holding that one can turn passions into actions by way of understanding the causes of the former have been criticized by Jonathan Bennett as follows. For Spinoza, an idea is inadequate just in case one of its causes is outside of the mind—that is, when our mind is determined externally. An idea is adequate, on the other hand, just in case all of its causes are inside of the mind—namely, when the mind is determined internally. If this is the case, then, how can I transform a passion, which is an

⁹¹ Ibid (252).

⁹² As we have seen in the previous chapter, EIIIP59 is one of the propositions where Spinoza talks about active affects: “Among affects which are related to the mind insofar as it acts, there are none which are not related to joy or desire.” As the usage of EIIIP59 in EVP18S suggests, since insofar as the mind understands, it acts, to the extent that we understand the causes of our sadness, the affect arising from this understanding cannot be related to sadness any more.

⁹³ Note that in EVP4S that I quoted earlier, Spinoza states that the result of knowledge of the affects “will be *not only* that love, hate, etc., are destroyed (by VP2), *but also* that the appetites, or desires, which usually arise from such an affect cannot be excessive (by IVP61)” (VP4S, my italics). The appetites or desires, which arise from such an affect cannot be excessive, since, for Spinoza, “a desire which arises from reason cannot be excessive” (EIVP61). Such a desire, as shown earlier, is nothing but an active affect.

⁹⁴ Note that Bennett (1984, 335) names this technique as “turning passions into actions.”

inadequate idea having a cause outside of the mind, into an action, which is an adequate idea having all of its causes inside of the mind? As Bennett argues, this change in an idea's causal origins is simply an impossible one. He vividly puts the point by saying that I can no more accomplish that "than I can make myself royal by altering who my parents were."⁹⁵

Margaret Wilson raises a similar worry based on paradoxes that she thinks are internal to the demonstration of EVP3:⁹⁶

An affect which is a passion is a confused idea (by Gen. Def. Aff.). Therefore, if we should form a clear and distinct idea of the affect itself, *this idea will only be distinguished by reason from the affect itself*, insofar as it is related to the mind (by IIP21 and P21S). Therefore (by IIP3), the affect will cease to be a passion, q.e.d. (EVP3D, my italics)

According to this demonstration, we can form a clear and distinct *idea* of a passion, which, in its own turn, is a confused *idea*. In other words, we can form an idea of the original, confused idea. The idea of an idea differs from the original idea—that is, the passion—only by a distinction of reason. Consequently, an idea of which we form a distinct idea "ceases to be a passion." As Wilson puts it, this demonstration rests on the underlying assumption that "two ideas cannot be, respectively, distinct and confused, if

⁹⁵ Bennett (ibid, 336). For a critique of Bennett's approach, see Olli Koistinen (1999), who argues that perhaps what Spinoza has in mind is not an impossible change in an idea's causal origins but a change in the reasons we have for holding some belief, which we can obviously change. Lin (2009, 271) does not think Koistinen's account does enough to settle the matter. See also Colin Marshall (forthcoming) for two different ways to respond to Bennett.

⁹⁶ Recall that EVP3 reads, "An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it."

they are distinguished from each other only by reason.”⁹⁷ But if this is the case, then it appears that Spinoza is committed to a paradoxical position. He seems to hold at the same time both (a) that no clear and distinct idea can differ from a confused idea only by a distinction of reason, and (b) that we can form a clear and distinct idea of a passion or confused idea, and this distinct idea will be distinguished only by reason from its object idea.

As stated earlier, according to Spinoza, “insofar as we understand the causes of sadness, it ceases (by P3) to be a passion, that is (by IIIP59), to that extent it ceases to be sadness” (EVP18S). Is there any way to interpret this transition from sadness *qua* passion to a distinct understanding of the sadness *qua* action that will not be an instance of the paradoxical position described above? One way around this difficulty has been suggested by Jean-Marie Beyssade.⁹⁸ According to Beyssade, “love toward God”—which Spinoza describes as the most constant of all affects (EVP20S)—assures a non-paradoxical encounter between the passion of sadness and the clear and distinct conception of this passion.⁹⁹

Before presenting Beyssade’s position, let me introduce briefly what “love toward God” consists in. For Spinoza, “he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects” (EVP15). This is because understanding oneself and one’s affects requires that

⁹⁷ Wilson (1990, 193).

⁹⁸ Beyssade (1990).

⁹⁹ Beyssade (1990, 188) states “Ainsi, sans paradoxe logique, l’amour de Dieu assure une rencontre entre les opposés (passion triste et affect actif).”

one has a power of ordering and connecting the affections of one's body according to the order of the intellect, which is nothing but a power of bringing it about that all the affections of the body are related to the idea of God (EVP14). Forming a clear and distinct concept of an affection of the body is thus relating it to the idea of God (EVP14D). Such adequate knowledge leading toward knowledge of God brings about a joy that is accompanied by the idea of God—namely, “love toward God.”¹⁰⁰ We will say more on this active affect named “love of God” or “love toward God” in Chapter 6.¹⁰¹

On Beyssade's reading, since all the affections of the body can be related to the idea of God, all affects—even the most passive ones—are capable of contributing to “love toward God.” There is thus an element of active joy to extract from all passive affects, including sadness. Since even a passive state of sadness contains elements of the active affect of joy, the transition from sadness to action is not a paradoxical one. This is because, by forming a clear and distinct idea of sadness, we do not thereby remove the original affect. As Wilson summarizes Beyssade's reading: “forming a distinct idea of a passion does not remove it, but rather, in effect, sublimates it.”¹⁰² Even though I believe that “love toward God”—*qua* the most constant of all affects—works as an important

¹⁰⁰ As we will see in Chapter 6, love toward God, like the knowledge that generates it, is something completely under one's control. This is because, unlike ordinary love that arises from external determination of the mind, love of God stems from knowledge of God or understanding. Note that Beyssade interprets love of God as arising solely from knowledge of the second kind. His account of love toward God, thereby, does not cover “intellectual love of God,” which as we will see in Chapter 6, is the highest form of love.

¹⁰¹ As I say in Chapter 6, I use “love toward God” (*amor erga Deum*) and “love of God” (*amor Dei*) interchangeably as does Spinoza.

¹⁰² Wilson (1990, 194). As Beyssade (1990, 187) himself states, “La passion triste subsiste, mais, si l'on ose dire, moins triste et moins passive.”

remedy for the passions, I am not sure if Beyssade is right in seeing this love as assuring a non-paradoxical way of turning passions into actions. Although I will not delve further into this issue here, I share Wilson's skepticism regarding the extent to which Beyssade's reading can be said to successfully address this paradox.¹⁰³

Leaving aside the paradoxical nature of EVP3D, the mechanism that Spinoza names as "knowledge of the affects" seems to me to represent a perfect instance of reason at work. Recall that in Chapter 2, I suggested that *ratio* is essentially the correction of error, its *removal* and *replacement* by adequate ideas.¹⁰⁴ To the extent that passions are inadequate ideas, they involve "privation of knowledge" (EIIP35)—that is, they are errors. Once we form a clear and distinct idea of an affect, which is a passion, it "ceases to be a passion" (EVP3). This is because, the error that the passion involves is removed and replaced by adequate ideas, thereby integrating the affect into a new and entirely internal causal chain.

So far I focused on Spinoza's grounds for proposing this remedy within the context of his thought. But what about the tenability of this remedy independent of his grounds for holding it? Does knowledge of our emotions really help us to master them? Does perceiving adequately and truly the causes of affects help us to be less affected by

¹⁰³ See Wilson (1990, 194) for a reason for skepticism regarding whether Beyssade's reading "does succeed at *this* difficult (perhaps impossible) task." She notes that EVP3 does indeed say that a passive affect of which we form a distinct idea "ceases to be a passion," not merely that its passional aspect becomes less prominent in mind. Moreover, she notes, "if to form a distinct idea of a passion is really to conceive the common nature(s) inherent in the passion, it does not seem at all clear how the distinct idea of the passion can be "one and the same thing" as the passion itself...or how can it be the case that the two are distinguished only by reason."

¹⁰⁴ Yovel (1994, 93).

them? Does cultivating a detached and objective attitude toward our own emotional life always help to solve our emotional problems? The question as to what we can say regarding the tenability of this remedy is surely an empirical matter, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet, it would seem to make sense that knowing the causes of my anxiety would, in some cases, help alleviate it. But in other cases, it might not work. Martin Lin, for instance, predicts that his love for sensual pleasure would not diminish if he attained a scientific understanding of it—that is, if he were to learn exactly how his love of sensual pleasure was a product of evolution by natural selection.¹⁰⁵ Should we consider it a serious weakness that a remedy works only in some cases? The answer to this question rests on what kind of expectations we have, or that we think Spinoza has, regarding what the remedies for the affects can do.¹⁰⁶ We will revisit this issue shortly as we talk about the limits of the power of reason.

Having seen what the first two remedies consist in, we can now appreciate how closely connected they are to one another. The first remedy—i.e., separating the affects from the thought of an external cause (which we imagine confusedly) and joining them to true thoughts—and the second remedy—i.e., knowledge of the affects, are in fact just different expressions of the same mechanism. And this mechanism is nothing but that of re-ordering our ideas according to the order of the intellect, and thereby rightly ordering

¹⁰⁵ Lin (2009, 272).

¹⁰⁶ Curley (1988, 131), for instance, holds that if we have realistic expectations about what the remedies for the affects can do, we should not consider it a serious weakness that they work only in some cases. As it will be seen in the next section, I am sympathetic to Curley's approach.

and connecting the affections of the body.¹⁰⁷ In both remedies, reason works by showing us the inadequacy of particular ideas, which are integral to certain passions, and replacing them with the adequate ideas, together with their accompanying active affects. In the third remedy (discussed in the next section), we are presented with another instance of our mind's re-ordering of ideas according to the order of the intellect. This time, as we will see, reason does the re-ordering job by revealing to us the necessity of all things.

5.2.1.3. Understanding Things as Necessary

Spinoza introduces this remedy in EVP6: "Insofar as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them."¹⁰⁸ The demonstration of EVP6 reads as follows:

The mind understands all things to be necessary (by IP29), and to be determined by an infinite connection of causes to exist and produce effects (by IP28). And so (by P5) to the extent [the mind] brings it about that it is less acted on by the affects springing from these things, and (by EIIP48) is less affected towards them.

That Spinoza invokes EIIP48 in the demonstration is striking and raises some doubts about the plausibility of this remedy. In EIIP48, Spinoza argues that if we experience an

¹⁰⁷ This follows from EVP1: "In just the same way as thoughts and ideas of things are ordered and connected in the mind, so the affections of the body, or images of things are ordered and connected in the body." In the demonstration of EVP1, Spinoza reminds us of a central tenet of his metaphysics of mind and body: Because the mind is the idea of the body, and because the order and connection of the modes of Thought is the same as the order and connection of Extension (EIIP7), the order and connection of ideas in the human mind is naturally and necessarily correlated with the order and connection of affections (or images of things) in the body and vice versa (VP1). It follows from this that if one can effect a change in the order and connection of ones' ideas, there will necessarily be a concomitant change in the order and connection of affections of the body. As Nadler (2006, 250) aptly warns, it is not that the one change causes the other; rather, reconfiguring one's ideas just is to have one's body undergo a certain change in its condition.

¹⁰⁸ As stated earlier, this technique is curiously omitted from the list of remedies Spinoza provides in EVP20S.

affect of hate towards someone, that affect will be lessened if we find that that person is not the only cause of our sadness.¹⁰⁹ According to EIIP48D:

This is evident simply from the definitions of love and hate—see P13S. For this joy is called love of Peter, or this sadness, hatred of Peter, only because Peter is considered to be the cause of the one affect or the other. If this is taken away—either wholly or in part—the affect toward Peter is also diminished, either wholly or in part, q.e.d.

Spinoza appears to think that if we discover that the responsibility for our sadness was divided between two causes, the hate would be divided proportionally. As Bennett argues, this is problematic, since it tacitly assumes that I have a fixed quantity of hate to distribute among its objects, so that the more objects of hate there are, the less I hate each one.¹¹⁰ Suppose, for instance, that I hate Jack because I believe that he broke into my eighty-five year old grandmother's house to steal her belongings. What would it change if I learned that Jack was not alone when he was breaking into my grandmother's house and that, instead, he had an accomplice? It seems that I would not hate Jack less upon learning this. I would hate both of these people with the same level of intensity.¹¹¹ In a similar fashion, it seems that by coming to understand that the object of my hate was conditioned by an infinite chain of causes, I would not necessarily hate each link of the chain with a portion of the quantity that I initially had for the object. I could very well

¹⁰⁹ EIIP48: "Love or hate—say, of Peter—is destroyed if the sadness the hate involves, or the joy the love involves, is attached to the idea of another cause, and each is diminished to the extent that we imagine that Peter was not its only cause."

¹¹⁰ Bennett (1984, 338).

¹¹¹ For a similar example see Lin (2009, 281).

equally hate all of them with as much passion as I had for the original object of my hate alone.¹¹²

Understanding the object of my hate as necessary—that is, as conditioned by an infinite number of finite causes—will not diminish my hate toward the object, since it is implausible to think that hatred is a fixed quantity to be distributed among causes.¹¹³ This line of reasoning grounds Bennett’s criticism of the third remedy. Even though the fact that Spinoza invokes EIIP48 in the demonstration of EVP6 seems to justify this kind of criticism, I believe that it is possible to interpret EVP6 differently. More specifically, I hold that “understanding all things as necessary” is not just to grasp the existence of a greater number or an infinitely great number of causes. Rather, it is the *general* grasp of the deterministic necessity in nature, which is nothing but the understanding that “all things have been determined from the necessity of divine nature” (EIP29).¹¹⁴ But how can reflecting on the general truth that all things are necessary work as a remedy against the passions?

Thanks to reason, we understand that all things have been determined from the necessity of divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way (EIP29), and that they could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced (EIP33). Such an understanding enables us to realize that we cannot control what nature brings our way or takes from us; and consequently, it provides

¹¹² Lin (ibid, 281-2).

¹¹³ Bennett (1984, 338) and Lin (ibid). For an interesting discussion of this remedy in relation to Strawson’s reactive versus objective attitudes, see Bennett (ibid, 342-345) and Lin (ibid, 280-1).

¹¹⁴ Note that Spinoza invokes EIP29 in the demonstration of EVP6.

a detached and objective attitude toward our affects, which helps us to be less moved or troubled by things that are the objects of our passions. Accordingly, our desire or sadness, hope or fear, are diminished by the realization that the attainment or loss of that thing is brought into being with a deterministic necessity that follows from God's nature. We are no longer anxious over what may come to pass and no longer obsessed with the loss of our possessions.¹¹⁵ In Spinoza's words, "sadness over some good, which has perished is lessened as soon as the man who has lost it realizes that this good could not, in any way, have been kept" (EVP6S).¹¹⁶

Even though psychologically this is plausible, can we not conceive of a situation wherein one is bitter over how the universe must be and its inevitable effects on oneself?¹¹⁷ Let us take a slightly different example. In one of the beginning scenes of Woody Allen's movie "Annie Hall," we see the young Alvy Singer in a therapist's office with his mom. His mom tells the therapist that Alvy has been depressed since he read somewhere that the universe is expanding and will ultimately come to an end in the form of a structureless soup of heat. If the universe is expanding inevitably, there is no reason for Alvy to doing his homework. In fact, the inexorable expansion of the universe suggests to Alvy that there is no point in doing anything, really.

Now is it conceivable that one could adequately understand how the universe must be—in this case, that universe is expanding—and feel depressed because of the

¹¹⁵ Nadler (2006, 254).

¹¹⁶ I will revisit this scholium in the next and final chapter as I discuss the affective power of intuitive knowledge over the passions.

¹¹⁷ Thanks to David Wong for this point.

effects this has on one's life? It seems that, for Spinoza, if one truly understands how the universe must be, then only an active affect can follow this clear and distinct perception. This is because, as stated earlier, while the actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone, the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone (EIIIP3). How then would Spinoza explain the existence of a sense of depression, bitterness, or sadness co-existing with a certain perception of the universe? I believe that for Spinoza such a situation could mean two things: Either (a) the perception at stake is not in fact an adequate one. Alvy probably does not really understand the expansion of the universe. And the way he feels derives wholly from his inadequate perception of the universe. Or (b) the perception at stake is an adequate one, but there is another idea—an inadequate one—that either prevents the rational idea from functioning, or co-exists with the rational idea and exerts its power together with it. In the second case, we might mistakenly think that the passion that we suffer is caused by our adequate perception, whereas it is, in fact, caused by another inadequate idea. We will say more about this as we talk about the limits of the power of reason in the next section.

Before we conclude, it is important to note that, in Spinoza's thought, understanding things as necessary—that is, having a clear and distinct perception of the determinism that governs all natural things—does not lead to some kind of fatalistic resignation. Instead, it gives rise to an active joy arising from our adequate knowledge of things “as they are in themselves, that is (by IP29), not as contingent but as necessary” (EIIIP44D). Reflecting on determinism in Nature enables us to regard things—especially those external things that we tend to value in the ordinary life—with equanimity. This

equanimity does not solely concern the negative things that could happen to us in life. It also concerns the good things that we try to make happen. As stated earlier in this chapter, for Spinoza, by necessity we want the joyful and avoid the sad (EIVP19, EIIP28).¹¹⁸ Moreover, “we strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it” (EIIP28). Nevertheless, as long as the good things—i.e. those things that we strive for—are outside of our power, our pursuit of them will be prone to bad fortune as well as good fortune. And according to Spinoza, just as we learn to get less upset over bad things that happen to us because they are inevitable, we must also learn to bear ourselves with regard to good things that likewise inevitably happen to us. In both cases the object of our attachments are the external objects that we cannot control. Once we understand that we cannot control external objects that we value, we thereby learn

...how we must bear ourselves concerning matters of fortune, or things which are not in our power, that is, concerning things which do not follow from our nature—that we must expect and bear calmly both good fortune and bad. For all things follow from God’s eternal decree with the same necessity as from the essence of a triangle it follows that its three angles are equal to two right angles.¹¹⁹

Even though we cannot control external objects, for Spinoza, there is one thing that can be said to be in our power and that we truly possess: understanding or adequate knowledge. As stated earlier, to the extent that a person has adequate ideas, he does what “[his] own nature, considered in itself, demands” (EIVP37S1) rather than allowing

¹¹⁸ EIVP19: “From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil.”

¹¹⁹ This passage is found at the end of Part II of the *Ethics* (GII. 136/ CI 490).

himself to be guided by things outside of him. That is why, for Spinoza, acting absolutely from virtue—that is, acting from laws of our nature (EIVP24D)—consists in understanding alone. And the ethical goal is nothing but increasing one’s own power of understanding.¹²⁰

Having presented Spinoza’s three remedies for the passions, we can now see how reason brings about a detached and objective attitude toward our emotional life, a diminishing of harmful affects, and, consequently, an increase in one’s own activity and freedom. In all these remedies—that is, whenever we reflect on the deterministic necessity in Nature, form a clear and distinct idea of an affect, or separate an affect from the thought of an external cause, which we imagine confusedly and join it to true thoughts—we use the one and the only power of our mind: thinking and forming adequate ideas. Once we manage to enter upon the path of freedom by using these techniques, we thereby start our journey from the ordinary life to the life of the intellect. This journey, however, is not an easy one, as reason’s mastery over the passions is hard won. In order to complete our account of the power of reason over the passions, we must understand why this mastery is hard won. This, in turn, requires that we have a handle on the limits of this very power, which will be crucial later in order to understand what the superior affective power of intuitive knowledge consists in. Before turning to the ethical

¹²⁰ As Rutherford notes (2008, 497), in the case of finite modes like us, acting is limited to acts of understanding, or adequate cognition.

significance of intuitive knowledge in the next chapter, let us now conclude the present chapter by looking at the limits of the power of reason over the passions.¹²¹

5.2.2. The Limits of the Power of Reason over the Affects

Having seen Spinoza's account of remedies, it is hard not to be struck by his apparent optimism regarding the power of reason over the passions. Let us go back to the second remedy, for instance. Given that "an affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it" (EVP3), and that there is no affect of which we cannot form a clear and distinct idea (EVP4C), it seems that, for Spinoza, we can overcome *any* passion on the grounds that we can know adequately *any* passion. The optimistic tone in Spinoza's language, which is present elsewhere in his description of other remedies (such as EVP2, where he suggests that harmful affects and the "vacillations of mind arising from these affects" can be *destroyed*) might lead one to fail to acknowledge that in many other places in the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses more careful language regarding the extent of the power of reason over the affects.¹²²

One of the most notable of such places is the Preface to Part V, which serves as a warning to the reader about what can and cannot be achieved through the life of reason. As shown earlier, here we see that Spinoza is strictly opposed to the voluntaristic view,

¹²¹ In the *Ethics* Spinoza first introduces the causes of human bondage and then moves on to the power of reason to moderate and restrain the passions. By introducing first the power of reason in the face of the passions, and then the limits of this power I inverted Spinoza's ordering of these issues in order to highlight the latter.

¹²² As Curley (1988, 168, n.51) notes, Bennett's criticism of Spinoza as a psychotherapist is weakened by a failure to consistently acknowledge this point.

held by the Stoics and Descartes, that “passions depend entirely on our will, and that we can command them absolutely.”¹²³ Since, for Spinoza, there is no such thing as a free will that depends *only* on our power, even the most rational human mind “does not have absolute dominion over the passions.” The most we can do in this life is to “restrain and moderate” them. The same cautious tone is palpable in an important statement that we quoted earlier, where Spinoza states that

...each of us has, *in part at least, if not absolutely*—the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them. We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (*as far as this is possible*). (EVP4S, my italics)

In addition to the Preface to Part V, where Spinoza insists forcefully that we cannot exercise complete control over the passive affects, elsewhere in the *Ethics* he makes it clear that no human being can completely eliminate the passions from her life:

It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature. And that he should undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause....From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires. (EIVP4, P4C)

According to Spinoza, then, the fact that none of us can entirely eliminate the passions from our lives derives from our very modal status. Since we are finite modes that are parts of nature, rather than beings endowed with a free will that is undetermined and outside of nature, we will always be affected by externally caused changes. Even in the

¹²³ Spinoza makes a similar point in Letter LVIII to Schuller.

life of the most rational human being, the passions will always be there. Moreover, they will always be, to some degree, efficacious.

Given this picture of human condition, if we want to get the most useful advice from Spinoza, it makes sense to see him as offering more realistic expectations about what the remedies for the affects can do. Once we do so, we realize that his remedies for the affects are not “guaranteed mechanism[s] to reduce unpleasant emotions.”¹²⁴ Rather, they are techniques that work only in some cases, since, in any given case, there may be nothing we can do to control a harmful affect.¹²⁵ We said earlier that these techniques provide “the power of ordering and connecting the affections of our body according to the order of the intellect” (EVP10). However, as Spinoza himself explicitly puts it, this power is a limited one in that we have it only “so long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature” (ibid). Since we are a part of nature, we cannot completely avoid being overcome by dangerous affects. Consequently, we cannot always be in the position of cultivating a detached and objective view toward our affective life.¹²⁶

All of this shows that even though Spinoza belongs to a long tradition that sees reason’s mastery over the passions as the key to happiness and virtue, he is under no

¹²⁴ Bennett (1984, 337) states his discontent in follows: “In place of this pretence of an understood and guaranteed mechanism for reducing unpleasant emotions, we need something humbler and more interesting—namely, the observation that a knowledge of the causes sometimes has healing power.”

¹²⁵ Curley (1988, 131). I follow Curley (ibid, 128-135) in holding that it makes sense to see Spinoza as offering more realistic expectations about what the remedies for the affects can do.

¹²⁶ It is possible to minimize the danger if, while in a detached state, we prepare for the inevitable assault by conceiving “a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life,” which we can commit to memory, and then apply as rules of thumb when the occasion demands it. (EVP10S) As Allison (1987, 163) notes, this is Spinoza’s alternative to the training of the will advocated by the Stoics and Descartes; its goal is to condition the imagination, *not* the will, to respond in appropriate ways. According to Lin (2009, 282) this is the only technique that appears workable.

illusions regarding the extent of the power of reason. Although, reason functions as a major weapon in our struggle against the bondage of the passions, there is no guarantee that it will succeed in this endeavor. Whether reason or passion prevails in this struggle depends entirely upon the relative power of the rational and passionate ideas at stake. Sometimes reason succumbs to passion. And this happens due to two main reasons that explain two ways in which the power of reason in the face of the passions is limited:

(1) This might be due to the fact that the passions overwhelm the power of reason to such an extent that they prevent reason from functioning in the first place (or stop the functioning of reason after it has started). This is the scenario that we described above—namely, the case where passions prevent us from ever attaining a detached and objective view toward our affective life (or when passions lead us to lose sight of the detached and objective view we once held).

(2) There are also cases of reason succumbing to passions that occur *despite* the fact that reason functions. In such cases, unlike the former scenario, reason continues to function even as it is being overwhelmed. This is the scenario that takes place when individuals know very well what is good and right, and yet fail to do it. In what follows, we will look at the limits of reason, which confront us in the form of susceptibility to the phenomenon that lies at the center of human bondage: *akrasia*.

5.2.2.1. *Akrasia* and Reason

From the way Spinoza starts the Preface to Part IV, which is titled “On Human Bondage, or the Powers of the Affects” (*De Servitute Humana, seu de Affectuum Viribus*), it is

explicit that he intends, in his discussion of human bondage to the passions, to focus on the issue of *akrasia*:

Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call Bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he *sees the better for himself*, *he is still forced to follow the worse*. (my italics)

As is well-known, *akrasia* is an ancient Greek term that is used to describe a situation in which one acts against their better judgment¹²⁷—that is, when one is motivated to pursue the good and do what is right, but somehow fails to follow through on that motive.¹²⁸ *Akrasia* is usually translated as “weakness of the will” or “incontinence.” However, it should be obvious by now that, in Spinoza’s context, “weakness of the will” would not be an appropriate description of the phenomenon at stake.¹²⁹ This is simply because, as shown earlier, for Spinoza, the mental power does not reside in a separate faculty called will. Rather, it resides in the idea itself. Since there is no will over and above ideas, we do

¹²⁷ Both Lin (2006) and Eugene Marshall (2008), who have recently provided excellent and detailed treatments of Spinoza’s account of *akrasia*, define this phenomenon as “acting against one’s better judgment.”

¹²⁸ Steven Nadler (2006, 224) holds that the *akratic* situation should be distinguished from the motivational problem, wherein the question is whether it is possible for a person to know what is good or right and yet not be motivated to pursue it. Since Spinoza believes that every individual is always motivated to do what is good—that is, what will promote his own interest and aid his own striving for perseverance—he does not confront the motivational problem.

¹²⁹ Note that in ancient Greek texts, *akrasia* is often translated as “incontinence” rather than “weakness of the will.” The question as to whether or not there is a systematic treatment of the will in classical antiquity is a controversial issue. For excellent discussions of this issue see Charles Kahn (1989), Richard Sorabji (2003), A. Dihle (1982), Jean Voelke (1973), and J.P. Vernant (1990).

just as our ideas determine us to do.¹³⁰ Consequently, just as Spinoza does not attribute our control over the passions to the strength of the free will, he does not explain the lack of such control by appealing to the weakness of the will.

If it is not the weakness of the *will*, then what explains the phenomenon of *akrasia* in Spinoza's account? We have to answer this question in order to understand the nature of this limit that confronts reason. Let us start by recalling that, for Spinoza, although each idea has some power, not all ideas are equally powerful. As stated earlier, if an idea is not to be believed or acted on, this is not because I employed an act of will separate from all ideas leading me to in the other direction, but rather because some other, more powerful idea led me in the other direction. This gives us the crux of the Spinozistic explanation of *akrasia*. According to this explanation, *akrasia* consists in a situation wherein (a) both reason and passions are fully on display,¹³¹ meaning that both rational ideas and passionate ideas exert some power; and (b) we end up doing what passionate ideas determine us to do, since, in that particular situation, they are more powerful than rational ones. In Spinoza's words, in such a situation "even though [we] see the better for ourselves [we] are...*forced* to follow the worse" (Preface to Part IV, my italics).

We need to elaborate on this explanation in order to attain a better grasp of *akrasia*. In particular we need to understand why and on what grounds passionate ideas can be said to be more powerful than rational ideas, and thus prevail in the struggle

¹³⁰ As shown earlier, for Spinoza, belief and activity do not turn on some mysterious non-representational act of will. Rather, these phenomena are to be explained simply in terms of ideas—mental representations—themselves.

¹³¹ Lin (2006, 395).

between reason and passion. I will begin by looking at what the power of an idea consists in according to Spinoza. From the very explanation of *akrasia* given above, and the fact that *akratic* action is a true possibility in Spinoza's system, we can infer that, for him, the power of an idea does not refer to its adequacy or inadequacy and, for that matter, clarity or distinctness.¹³² If it did, rational ideas would *always* be more powerful than passionate ideas and *akratic* action would not be possible, which obviously is not the case.¹³³ When Spinoza talks about the power of an idea, then, he has in mind something other than the purely epistemic qualities of an idea, such as its adequacy or inadequacy.

We have textual evidence suggesting that, for Spinoza, the power of an idea refers to its *causal power* in that it is a function of the power of its causes.¹³⁴ Spinoza states in EVA2 that “the power of an effect is defined by the power of its cause, insofar as its essence is explained or defined by the essence of its cause,” by adding that this axiom is evident from EIIP7, wherein he identifies the actual essence of a thing with the *conatus* of the thing. As we know from EIIP7, the causal power of a thing is a function of its *conatus*. More specifically, the causal power of a thing—namely, a thing's disposition to act or produce effects, insofar as it is independent of external causes—is a function of its *conatus*. Now, what does all this say about the causal power of an idea? Let us start with rational ideas. Since we possess rational ideas only insofar as we are active (EIIP3), they

¹³² Lin (2006, 403) also holds that when speaking of the intensity or strength of an idea, Spinoza does not mean to refer to clarity or distinctness; nor does Spinoza mean to refer to the phenomenological character of an idea such as its vivacity or vividness.

¹³³ Moreover, if it did, passionate ideas would never overwhelm the power of rational ideas and thus prevent the latter from functioning in the first place. And this, obviously, is not the case either.

¹³⁴ Both Della Rocca (2003, 212) and Lin (*ibid*) base their accounts on this construal of the power of an idea.

can be understood through our essence alone (EIIID2). In other words, since we are the adequate cause of rational ideas, they can be clearly and distinctly perceived through our *conatus*. Therefore, the power of a rational idea is just the power of our *conatus*.¹³⁵

The passions, which are inadequate ideas, on the other hand, are defined by the power of their external causes in combination with our own power. In Spinoza's words,

The force and growth of any passion, and its perseverance in existing, are not defined by the power by which we strive to persevere in existing, but by the power of an external cause compared with our own. (EIVP5)

The power of any particular passion is then a function of the ratio of the power of the external thing that causes the passion to the human being's own power to persevere in existence.¹³⁶ Since it is possible for the power of external causes to be greater than the power of any one individual by an indefinite degree (EIVP3),¹³⁷ passions can easily be more powerful than rational ideas. When this happens, passion overwhelms reason's power and subverts its rule. And the conflict between reason and passion results in favor of the latter. When reason thus yields to passion, the outcome is an *akratic* action, wherein we act against our better judgment.

Having explained what the power of an idea consists in and how passionate ideas can be said to be more powerful than rational ones, this is a good place to introduce an

¹³⁵ Here I follow Lin (2006, 403).

¹³⁶ Nadler (2006, 222).

¹³⁷ EIVP3 reads as follows: "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes." Spinoza invokes this very important proposition in EIVP6 ("The force of any passion, or affect, can surpass the other actions, or power, of a man, so that the affect stubbornly clings to the man.") in addition to EIVP15, as we will shortly see.

important caveat. Note that, for Spinoza, the clash between rational ideas and passionate ideas is not a conflict between pure intellect and the emotions, as Plato portrayed it centuries before. Rather it is an affective struggle, one characterized by competing desires, each of which has a different source.¹³⁸ As Spinoza puts it explicitly, for him, truth *qua* truth cannot serve as a weapon against the passions:

No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect. (EIVP14)

So the truth by itself is not effective against the passions unless it is coupled with a stronger affective power.¹³⁹ Since an affect cannot be restrained except by another affect (EIVP7), reason can oppose the passions only by virtue of its affective power.¹⁴⁰ So when we are comparing the causal powers of rational ideas and passionate ideas in the context of this conflict, we are, in fact, comparing their respective affective powers.

On Spinoza's account, then, reason is susceptible to *akrasia* since, even with the help of its affective forces, it is often no match for the affects caused by external things.

In his words,

A desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented. (EIVP15)

¹³⁸ Nadler (2006, 223).

¹³⁹ This is consistent with what we said in the beginning of this chapter: namely that for Spinoza, rather than *any* adequate knowledge, knowledge that is capable of creating a certain kind of affective power is important from an ethical perspective.

¹⁴⁰ "An affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained" (EIVP7).

In this proposition, we see clearly the two parties of the affective struggle mentioned above, i.e. two competing desires arising from two different sources. The first desire, i.e. the rational desire, arises from “a *true* knowledge of good,” which according to Spinoza is different than merely “a knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁴¹ While the latter refers to our subjective perception of something as affecting us with joy or sadness, and is grounded only in how we are affected by things—that is, in the passions—“a true knowledge of good and evil” refers to our rational conception of what benefits us in a more complete and essential manner, and is grounded in understanding.¹⁴² Just as the true knowledge of good and evil *qua* rational idea is defined by our *conatus* alone, the desire arising from this cognition

...must be understood through our essence alone (by IID2), and (by IIP7) consequently its force and growth can be defined only by human power alone. (EIVP15D)

Importantly, for Spinoza, unlike other desires, which can be both good and evil, this rational desire is “always good.”¹⁴³ Moreover, since a desire which arises from reason is the very essence of man, “insofar as it is determined to doing those things which are conceived adequately through man’s essence alone,” such a desire cannot be

¹⁴¹ For the latter see, for instance, EIV8.

¹⁴² Nadler (2006, 219). In Spinoza’s words, “What we judge to be good or evil when we follow the dictate of reason must be good or evil” (EIVP35D). Earlier I provided an account of how reason supplies an objectivizing standard for our evaluative terms.

¹⁴³ “Our actions—that is, those desires which are defined by man’s power, or reason—are always good; but the other [desires] can be both good and evil” (*Ethics*, Appendix to Part IV, No III). For a similar description of desires arising from reason, see *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (KV), Part II, Chapter II, [3].

excessive (EIVP61D).¹⁴⁴ In addition to being always good and never being excessive, affects arising from reason, for Spinoza, “will always remain the same,” since they are “necessarily related to common properties of things...which we always regard as present...and which we always imagine in the same way” (EVP7D). As shown earlier, according to Spinoza, the foundations of reason are common notions, which represent permanent and pervasive features of the world such as the common properties of things, and thereby must be conceived SSA (EIP44C2D). Consequently, affects arising from or aroused by reason will always remain the same, instead of giving rise to vacillations of mind as passive affects do.¹⁴⁵

Unfortunately, despite all these fine qualities, the affective state accompanying rational ideas holds no purchase when confronted with competing desires arising from the violent affects by which we are torn. This is because, by remarks in EIVP5 that we quoted above, the force and growth of the desires arising from these passionate ideas “must be defined by the power of external causes, which, if it were compared to ours, would indefinitely surpass our power (by P3)” (EIVP15D). Therefore, as Spinoza concludes the demonstration of EIVP15, desires which arise from passive affects can be more intense than a rational desire, and, thus, can restrain or extinguish it. Among these passionate desires, those that arise for the pleasures of the moment—that is, for things

¹⁴⁴ As we see in the rest of EIVP61D, “if this desire could be excessive, then human nature, considered in itself alone, could exceed itself, or could do more than it can. This is a manifest contradiction. Therefore, this desire cannot be excessive.”

¹⁴⁵ Recall that, according to Spinoza “If we separate emotions or affects from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love or hate toward the external cause is destroyed, as are *the vacillations of mind arising from these affects*” (EVP2, my italics).

that are present, gain considerable force from their immediacy and certainty, and are consequently particularly pernicious. For Spinoza,

A desire which arises from a [true]¹⁴⁶ knowledge of good and evil, insofar as this knowledge concerns the future, can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment. (EIVP16)

As we see in its demonstration, this proposition follows from EIVP15 and EIVP9C. By EIVP9C, an affect directed at an object that we imagine to be present is stronger, other things being equal, than one toward an object that we imagine to be in the future.¹⁴⁷ By EIVP15, as we very well know now, rational desires can be less powerful than passionate ones (by EIVP15). Therefore, rational desires for future goods can be less powerful than and easily restrained by desires for the pleasures of the moment. As stated earlier, rational desires arising from our rational conception of what benefits us are “always good”, “never excessive” and “will always remain the same.” Nonetheless, unfortunately, they are not *always* powerful enough to overcome the affects caused by external things, especially those that represent an immediate increase in some aspect of one’s power of acting and thus are strong pleasures. In fact, they *often* succumb to such passions, and Spinoza expresses this very fact as he sums up his account of *akrasia* in EIVP17S where he writes:

¹⁴⁶ Note that Curley interpolates the word ‘true’ into his translation of this proposition, as the demonstration that follows makes clear that Spinoza does mean to speak of “true knowledge of good and evil” rather than solely “knowledge of good and evil.”

¹⁴⁷ As stated above, for Spinoza, the power of any particular passion is defined by the power of its external causes in combination with our own power (EIVP5). Moreover, as Spinoza shows in EIVP9-13, the relative strength of a passion is a function of the existential modality and temporal proximity of its object. Regarding the former, see, for instance, EIVP11, wherein Spinoza states that an affect brought on by something regarded as necessary is more intense than a passion for something that appears to be merely possible or contingent.

With this I believe I have shown the cause why men are moved more by opinion than by true reason, and why the true knowledge of good and evil arouses disturbances of the mind, *often* yields to lust of every kind. Hence that verse of the Poet:

...video meliora, proboque, detiora sequor...¹⁴⁸ (my italics)

To summarize: according to Spinoza, although we all have the power to understand ourselves and our affects, "...and consequently, the power to bring it about that we are less acted on by them" (EVP4S), this power is not absolute. In principle, even if someone had perfect knowledge of herself and her affects, she might still be defeated by the passions, because this knowledge does not automatically and immediately lead to an affective power strong enough to overcome the passions. Hence, although there is an intrinsic relation between the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of the good life, even the most "rational" person can find herself in trouble thanks to a vulnerability to the passions, which are always there and always, to some degree, efficacious. Reason's mastery over the passions, which Spinoza sees as the key to happiness and virtue, is thus hard won. In the power struggle between reason and passions, sometimes, reason yields to passions. Even with its epistemic superiority, reason remains at best a fragile power in the face of the passions, due to (1) the fact that passions can prevent it from functioning, and (2) its susceptibility to *akrasia*.

In our discussion of the ethical significance that Spinoza accords to reason, we considered different aspects of the relationship between rational knowledge and morality.

¹⁴⁸ The reference here is to Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VII, 20-21: "I see and approve the better, but follow the worse." These lines, which describe the situation of Medea who is torn between reason's demand that she obey her father and her passion for Jason, are often quoted or alluded to in seventeenth century discussions of freedom of the will. Cf. Descartes, *Letter to Mesland*, 9 Feb. 1645; Hobbes, "Of Liberty and Necessity," *EW* IV; Locke, *Essay*, II, xxi. 35.

In particular, we saw how reason relates to the ethical life by functioning as an affective power against the passive affects, in addition to grounding Spinoza's account of interpersonal morality and supplying an objectivizing standard for our evaluative terms (which were the topics of the previous section). Having thus elaborated on the ethical significance of knowledge of the second kind in Spinoza's account, we can now see why Spinoza believes that we cannot pursue an ethical life without rational knowledge. Moreover, having provided an account of the limits of the power of reason, we can also see why, for Spinoza, reaching a high degree of intellectual perfection and accumulating a great deal of knowledge concerning nature and our place in it, do not necessarily guarantee an ethical life. The best thing to do under these circumstances is, in Spinoza's words, "to know both our nature's power and its lack of power, so that we can determine what reason can do in moderating the affects, and what it cannot do" (EIVP17S). If reason is such a fragile power in the face of the passions, how can understanding things be said to have a higher affective power and hence play a more significant role in ethics? In order to answer this question, we need to remember that "our nature's power" does not lie in reason alone. There is another more powerful avenue for understanding things, including ourselves: namely, through intuitive knowledge. In the next and final chapter of this dissertation, I will give an elaborate account of the affective power of this superior kind of cognition based on my interpretation of how the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza's ethical theory.

Chapter 6

The Ethical Significance of Intuitive Knowledge

Intuitive knowledge, by definition, proceeds *from* adequate knowledge of the eternal necessity of God's nature *to* adequate knowledge of the essence of things (EIIIP40S2). After introducing the definition of intuitive knowledge in Part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza promises that he will speak of the "excellence and utility" (EIIIP47S)¹ of this superior kind of cognition in Part V. He keeps his promise and provides an account, albeit a very concise one, of the excellence and utility of intuitive knowledge in the second half of Part V. For Spinoza "the greatest virtue of the mind" (EVP25) and "the greatest human perfection" (EVP27D) consist in understanding things by intuitive knowledge, which he clearly regards as the most powerful and most desirable kind of the three kinds of knowledge, and hence as superior to reason. As shown in Chapter 3, intuitive knowledge differs from and is superior to reason not only in terms of its method, but also because it descends to a level of particularity that reason cannot. More specifically, unlike reason, intuitive knowledge reaches adequate knowledge of the *unique essences of things*, including adequate knowledge of one's *own* essence as it follows directly from God, which is a superior form of self-knowledge. By descending to this level of particularity, intuitive knowledge, thereby, attains a level of affective power that reason cannot access.

¹ After EIIIP40S2, where Spinoza first provides the definition of intuitive knowledge, the next place that he discusses it is in Part II is EIIIP47S: "Since all things are in God and are conceived through God, it follows that we can deduce from this knowledge a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form that third kind of knowledge of which we spoke in P40S2 and of *whose excellence and utility we shall speak in Part V*" (my italics)

But what exactly does the affective power of intuitive knowledge consist in? And how does it differ from and exceed the affective power of reason? The answers to these questions are crucial to understanding the ethical significance of intuitive knowledge and how the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza's ethical thought.

At the very end of the *Ethics*, after discussing the affective power of blessedness (*beatitudo*)—i.e. the highest happiness that arises from intuitive knowledge—Spinoza says “with this I have finished all the things I wished to show concerning the mind's power over the affects and its freedom” (EVP42S). As this clearly shows us, Spinoza sees his ethical project of providing an account of “the mind's power over the affects and its freedom” to be *complete* only once he finishes presenting his views regarding the affective power of intuitive knowledge in the second half of Part V. It is thus clear that ignoring the affective power of intuitive knowledge will result in an incomplete account of the ethics of the *Ethics*. Among Spinoza's two kinds of adequate knowledge, whereas reason has been the subject of much attention from commentators, the affective power of intuitive knowledge has been largely overlooked. Scholars such as C.D. Broad have deliberately and explicitly chosen to ignore every concept in Spinoza's system that depends on intuitive knowledge—including the intellectual love of God and human blessedness—on the grounds that these concepts belong to Spinoza's philosophy of

religion rather than to his ethics in the ordinary sense.² Others, including Curley and Lin, have simply stayed silent on the issue.³

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I will focus on this relatively unexplored area of Spinoza scholarship and propose a reading of Spinoza's account of the superior power of intuitive knowledge in the second half of Part V. In Section 1, I will argue that self-understanding through intuitive knowledge results in producing a body of knowledge that is superior to reason not only intellectually but also affectively, since it *relates to me* in a more direct and intimate manner. Here, I will offer a reading of Spinoza's conception of self-understanding according to which adequate knowledge of oneself is attained *via* a transformative ascent. Moreover, I will show how the final stage of the ascent, wherein we grasp intuitively our power as a manifestation and consequence of God's power, relates in a special manner to the eternity of the mind. In Section 2, I will show how the affective state accompanying intuitive knowledge reflects the fact that this superior kind of cognition supplies a maximal understanding of both oneself and God. To this end, I will look at two active affects arising from intuitive knowledge: the greatest satisfaction

² C.D. Broad (1930, 15-16). Broad adds that such an omission would be inexcusable if he was claiming to expound Spinoza's system as a whole, "for [Spinoza's doctrines of Intellectual Love of God, of Human Blessedness and of the Eternity of the Human Mind] are among the hardest, the most interesting, and the most characteristic parts of it." Yet, he says "I am convinced that these doctrines are the philosophic expression of certain religious and mystical experiences which Spinoza and many others have enjoyed and which seem supremely important to those who have had them." I will touch upon the issue as to whether or not experience of intuitive knowledge is a mystical one in the final section of this chapter.

³ Although both Curley (1988) and Lin (2009) rightly point out the limits of Spinoza's techniques of liberation from passions *via* reason, they do not say anything on the affective power of intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza discusses in the second half of Part V of the *Ethics*. Jonathan Bennett (1984, 372) is more explicit in his dismissal. He states that "I don't think that the final doctrines can be rescued. The only attempts at complete salvage that I have encountered have been unintelligible to me and poorly related to what Spinoza actually wrote...After three centuries of failure to profit from it, the time has come to admit that this part of the *Ethics* has nothing to teach us and is pretty certainly worthless."

of mind (*summa acquiescentia*) and the intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*). In Section 3, I will conclude by arguing that since intuitive knowledge gives rise to blessedness (*beatitudo*), i.e. the highest happiness that a human being can hope to achieve, it supplies the most powerful weapon against the passions in that, unlike reason, its affective power is not fragile in the face of the passions.

6.1. Self-Understanding through a Transformative Ascent

“Know thyself,” the ancient motto of the Oracle of Delphi, can rightly be ascribed to Spinoza, for whom attaining self-understanding is an ethical quest. According to Spinoza, self-understanding involves the power of mind and is a source of joy (EIIIP53), whereas ignorance of oneself goes hand in hand with weakness of mind and is a source of passive affects (EIVP55-6). In what follows, I propose that in Spinoza’s thought, the ethical quest of attaining adequate knowledge of oneself takes the form of a transformative ascent progressing through three steps:⁴

- i) Perceiving oneself inadequately according to the common order of Nature.
- ii) Knowing oneself adequately *via* common notions, including “human nature.”
- iii) Knowing oneself adequately through one’s essence thanks to intuitive knowledge.

⁴ See Matheron (1969) and Yovel (1989/1992) for different interpretations of Spinozistic ascent. Note that in Chapter 2, as well, I described the transition from knowledge of the first kind to knowledge of the second kind as an “ascent.”

As we saw in Chapter 1, for Spinoza, the initial stage of cognition, including that of self-cognition, is by way of ideas regarding the affections of the body.⁵ Since we cannot have adequate knowledge through these ideas, to the extent that we perceive ourselves through them or “conceive [ourselves] to exist in relation to a certain time and place” (EVP29S), we are bound up with an inadequate self-knowledge—which is an instance of knowledge of the first kind. At this stage, all we have is a partial and confused self-knowledge that is totally devoid of causal understanding. We are ignorant of ourselves, and thus liable to passive affects such as pride—i.e. “thinking more highly of oneself than is just” (EDef. Aff. XXVIII), and despondency—i.e. “thinking less highly of oneself than is just” (EDef. Aff. XXIX), both of which indicate weakness of mind (EIVP56D).

The only way to rise above this passive state of self-ignorance is to come to know about ourselves and our affects—that is, affections of our body—according to the order of the intellect as stated in Chapter 5. Such an ascent requires that we perceive the “agreements, differences and oppositions in Nature,” and, more importantly, our place in Nature through the mediation of objective and eternal properties represented by common notions. As shown earlier, one such common notion is the notion of “human nature,” which represents properties that are common to and distinctive of human beings, involving the capacity to reason or to be determined by adequate ideas.⁶ Thanks to the

⁵ As shown in Chapter 1, our mind perceives not only external bodies (by EIIP26), but also its own body (by EIIP19) and itself (by EIIP23) through the ideas of the affections of the body.

⁶ Recall that in addition to general common notions representing properties that are shared by *all* things, there are more specific common notions such as ‘human nature’, which represent properties that are common to *some* things to the exclusion of others. As Spinoza states in EIIP38C, there are “certain ideas,

common notion of human nature, we attain adequate knowledge of ourselves *qua* human—i.e. by way of our shared essence. Moreover, we also reach a rational understanding of our fellow humans, which allows us to collaborate with each other, strengthen our individual powers of understanding, and thus be “endowed with virtue” (EIVP20). This is because our rational understanding of ourselves and each other by way of the common notion of human nature leads to the comprehension that (1) for a human being there is nothing more valuable than another human being, who lives according to the guidance of reason (EIVP35C1), a proposition which grounds Spinoza’s argument for collaborative morality,⁷ and (2) “man’s greatest good, namely to know God, is common to all men” (EIVP36D).⁸

There is undoubtedly a certain degree of transformation that is achieved through the first ascent, which consists in moving from a state of self-ignorance and crude egoism to a state of what we might call *collaborative and emotional awareness*. As shown in Chapter 5, in addition to enabling us to understand ourselves *qua* human, reason also supplies an understanding of our affects, and thereby, a reduced susceptibility to being acted on by them. (EVP4S). Although in the course of this first ascent we increase our adequate ideas, such an increase is not always coupled with a corresponding increase in

or notions, common to *all men*” (EIIIP38C, my italics), but not to *all things*. For the distinction between general and specific common notions and the idea that ‘human nature’ is a specific common notion, see Chapters 2 and 3.

⁷ As stated earlier, adequate knowledge of our shared essence *via* reason enables us to take interests of others into consideration by allowing us to realize that for a human being there is nothing more useful than another human being who is guided by reason.

⁸ This point will be relevant as we talk about “love of God” in the next section.

reason's affective power that is strong enough to overcome the passions. As Spinoza writes in the *Short Treatise* (KV), "the things we grasp only through reason, we do not *see*, but know only through a *conviction* in the intellect that it must be so and not otherwise."⁹ Intellectual convictions arising from reason give rise to "good" yet fragile desires that do not affect as strongly as the desires arising from things that are "present." Thus, as we concluded the previous chapter, even with its epistemic superiority, reason remains at best a fragile power in the face of the passions, due to the fact that passions can prevent it from functioning and that it is susceptible to *akrasia*.

6.1.1. The Final Step of the Ascent through Intuitive Self-Knowledge

The final step of the ascent consists in *seeing*, rather than knowing ourselves through intellectual convictions arising from reason. In order to appreciate the import of this final step, it will help to return to the definition of intuitive knowledge and remember what exactly this superior form of cognition amounts to. Intuitive knowledge, by definition, proceeds *from* an adequate knowledge of the eternal necessity of God's nature *to* an adequate knowledge of the essence of things (EIIIP40S2). As we saw before, it is the nature of reason to regard things as necessary (EIIIP44).¹⁰ By regarding things as necessary, reason *reaches* the knowledge of God, which, for Spinoza, is the foundation of intuitive knowledge (EVP20). Rational knowledge of the necessity of things brings us to

⁹ KV1, X.

¹⁰ The necessity of things, which is a common property shared by all, is identical to the necessity of the eternal nature of God (EIIIP44C2D).

“the doorstep of intuitive knowledge.”¹¹ But reason cannot proceed further—it cannot infer from this knowledge adequate knowledge of the essences of singular things. Reason, as Spinoza describes it, is “the universal knowledge” (EVP36S). It affords us with only a limited understanding of singular things, including ourselves, through their common properties, which “do not constitute the essence of any singular thing.”¹² Adequate knowledge of the essences of things is thus limited to intuitive knowledge, which Spinoza describes as “knowledge of singular things” (Ibid). Intuitive knowledge is a more powerful kind of cognition than reason because it is superior in terms of both its method and content. In terms of its method, whereas reason deduces its conclusions from common notions, intuition grasps the truth in an *immediate* and *direct* manner, “in one glance” (EIP40S2), without having to appeal to any such mediation.¹³ In terms of its content, since intuition reaches adequate knowledge of the *unique essences of things*, it descends to a level of particularity that reason cannot reach.¹⁴ Since in Spinoza’s metaphysics the unique essence of a singular thing is its actual essence *or conatus*, namely a partial and particular expression of God’s infinite and eternal essence,

¹¹ Gueroult (1974, 413-4) uses this helpful analogy.

¹² “What is common to all things and is equally in the part and in the whole does not constitute the essence of any singular thing” (EIP37).

¹³ As shown in Chapter 2, although the term ‘*intuitiva*’ suggests a style of cognition that is direct and immediate, we can distinguish between discrete cognitive steps in Spinoza’s *scientia intuitiva*. But as Garrett (2010, 110) notes these steps might be taken instantaneously in a sufficiently powerful mind. The intuitive grasp of the relation of the essence of God to the essence of singular things involves ordered steps, which consist in inferring (1) the knowledge of the essence of things *from* the knowledge of God’s essence (by EIP40S2, EVP25D), and (2) the knowledge that things depend on God *from* the essence of things (by EVP36S).

¹⁴ For a detailed account of the epistemic distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge, as well as the distinction between unique and shared essences, see Chapter 3.

understanding singular things by way of their actual essences is nothing but a direct comprehension of that thing's unique expression of God's power.

Having recalled briefly what knowing things SSA through intuitive knowledge amounts to, we are now in a position to introduce the last step of the transformative ascent: attaining adequate knowledge of one's *own* essence as it follows directly from God. As we stated above, this cognition consists in *seeing* rather than knowing ourselves through intellectual convictions arising from reason. But what does this mean exactly? As shown earlier, for Spinoza, whereas reason provides us with the universal "knowledge that all things...depend on God both for their essence and their existence," intuitive knowledge goes one step further and enables us to *infer* this *from* our "very essence" (EVP36S). When the actual essence at stake is one's own essence, the inference not only takes its most direct and immediate form, but also reveals the *experienced* character of intuitive self-knowledge.¹⁵ By inferring the knowledge "that all things depend on God both for their essence and their existence" from *my* "very essence," I intuitively grasp the relation of the essence of God to *my* essence. This is because the indexical component involved in intuitive self-knowledge allows me to recognize that the particular instance of power, which I understand "to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature" (VP29S), is *my* power or *conatus*.¹⁶ This realization is affectively very powerful since it is a direct comprehension of my unique expression of God's power. It allows me to *see* that *I* am in God and necessarily depend on God, and to *experience* my

¹⁵ As I stated in Chapter 3, intuitive self-knowledge is not only foundational but also privileged in that it allows me to know the essence of a singular thing directly as *my* essence.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Tad Schmaltz for this suggestion.

being as a modal expression of God.¹⁷ Rather than being an instance of random experience (*experientia vaga*) that depends on mutilated and confused perception of the senses (EIIP40S2), such an experience is one that is determined by the intellect: a non-discursive experience of the self's being in God.¹⁸

The indexical component involved in intuitive knowledge is ethically important in that it enables us to *see* how abstract and general bodies of knowledge *relate* to us, thereby making them *concrete* and their affective power higher. Recall that one of Spinoza's remedies for the passions consists in understanding the necessity inherent in nature.¹⁹ The rational knowledge of the necessity of all things is effective and useful as far as it goes. Yet, this remedy is much more effective when "this knowledge that things are necessary is concerned with *singular things...*" (EVP6S, my italics).²⁰ Since intuitive knowledge is "the knowledge of *singular things*" (EVP36S, my italics)²¹ *par excellence*,

¹⁷ Herman De Dijn (1991, 128).

¹⁸ In TdIE [18], Spinoza describes random experience (*experientia vaga*) as "experience that is not determined by the intellect," which implies that there is room for considering another kind of experience—one that is determined by the intellect. The view that not all experience is random experience is supported by EVP23S where Spinoza states that "...eternity can neither be determined by time nor have any relation to time—still, we feel and *know by experience* that we are eternal" (my italics). We will look at this passage very shortly in the next sub-section. See Curley (1973a) and Gabbey (1996) for further elaboration on *experientia vaga*.

¹⁹ "Insofar as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them" (EVP6).

²⁰ Note that Spinoza does not present this remedy in connection to intuitive knowledge. But due to his emphasis on the singular things in its Scholium, I believe that it makes sense to see this remedy as reaching its most effective power when it is applied by intuitive knowledge, which, as Spinoza describes it, is knowledge of singular things.

²¹ See also EVP24. Since there is no real distinction between a thing and its essence according to EIID2, by reaching knowledge of the essences of things, intuitive knowledge provides the knowledge of singular things *par excellence*.

this remedy produces its best outcome when it is applied by way of intuition. Thanks to intuitive knowledge, I not only realize that the necessity of all things is the necessity of God,²² but I *also* infer from this knowledge of God how singular things, most notably *myself*, depend on God. Once the knowledge that all things are necessary is thus concerned with *me* or relates to *me* thanks to intuition, this knowledge stops being an intellectual conviction arising from reason. It is then that I reach the final stage of the ascent: Here I *see* that the singular thing, which I understand to follow from the necessity of the divine nature, is *me*.

At the final stage of the ascent, we achieve a deep causal understanding in that we grasp intuitively our power as a manifestation and consequence of God's power. This accomplishment completes the transformation by producing a new kind of insight which is beyond the pursuit of external goods like honor, pleasure and wealth, beyond an objective and detached knowledge of nature and our place in it, and beyond an identification with humanity.²³ Note that, whereas in Part IV of the *Ethics* Spinoza puts a lot of emphasis on the species-bound notion of "human nature" in relation to his conception of collaborative morality, in Part V, especially in the second half of it, we

²² As shown in Chapter 2, knowledge of God is the foundation of intuitive knowledge.

²³ As Antonio Damasio (2003, 268) puts it "Many people appear to require something more out of life beyond moral and law-abiding conduct, beyond the satisfaction of love, family, friendships, and good health; beyond the rewards that come from whatever one chooses (personal satisfaction, the approbation of others, honor, monetary compensation), beyond the pursuit of one's pleasures and the accumulation of possessions; and beyond an identification with country and humanity." If the reading I presented above is correct, then it seems that intuitive self-knowledge might provide us with this "something more" that we require out of life, at least in Spinoza's universe. One legitimate objection here would be: If this "something" that one requires from one's life is beyond all these things that Damasio mentions, then how can it be said to relate to the "viewpoint of my own life"? In my view, faced with this objection, Spinoza would say: it can be said to relate to the "viewpoint of my own life," but not to the "viewpoint of my ordinary life."

hardly see this notion in play. Instead Spinoza uses the term ‘thing’ as we see in his repetitive usage of “being conscious of oneself, of God and of *things*” (EVP39S, EVP42S, my italics) and in EVP24 which reads, “The more we understand singular things the more we understand God.” I take this to be suggestive of a shift that accompanies the ascent from the second stage to the third stage: i.e. a shift from humanity-based morality to an ethics of blessedness, which is grounded in our *seeing* ourselves (and others) as singular *things* that are modal expressions of God. We will say more on the ethical significance of blessedness in the final section of this chapter.

6.1.2. The Final Step of the Ascent and the Experience of Eternity

On my view, the transformative ascent described above provides us with a change of perspective, which involves moving away from “the viewpoint of ordinary life” towards “the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect.” If this interpretation is correct, then I believe it can be used to shed some light on one of the most enigmatic passages of the *Ethics*. After Spinoza covers reason’s remedies for the affects in the first half of Part V, he says,

...with this I have completed everything which concerns *this present life*. Anyone who attends to what we have said in this scholium, and at the same time, to the definitions of the mind and its affects, and finally to IIP1 and P3, will easily be able to see what I said in the beginning of this scholium, viz. that in these few words I have covered all the remedies for the affects. *So it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body*” (EVP20S, my italics).

A natural way to read these remarks is that Spinoza, having demonstrated what he had hoped to about achieving well-being in *this life*, is now preparing to discuss the *afterlife* and the immortality of the soul understood in the traditional Judeo-Christian sense as the postmortem survival of the soul.²⁴ In a similar fashion to this reading, some commentators have interpreted this transitory passage as suggesting that “Spinoza himself recognizes that he is passing into a *different realm*” (my italics), when he begins to expound his views on intuitive knowledge in the second half of Part V.²⁵ Others have contended that the reference to “this present life” in EVP20S is a concession to ordinary parlance or a “momentary slip.”²⁶ I agree with the view that Spinoza himself recognizes (and also wants his readers to recognize) that he is passing into a different realm when he begins his exposition of the excellence and utility of intuitive knowledge. Yet, on my view the difference between the two realms is *not* one between *this life* and the *afterlife*, as the first reading suggests. Rather, what is at stake is a change of perspective in this very same life—a change of perspective, which, as suggested earlier, consists in moving away from “the viewpoint of ordinary life” towards “the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect.” On my reading of this passage, then, while “this present life” represents the perspective of the ordinary life,²⁷ “those things which pertain to the mind’s

²⁴ Nadler (2006, 260).

²⁵ Broad (1930, 16).

²⁶ H.H. Joachim (1901, 296).

²⁷ Note that Joachim (ibid) makes a similar point as he points out that for Spinoza, “this present life” would naturally mean “our life so far as we are imaginative”—i.e. the life of *imagination*, associative thinking, passion and illusion.

duration without relation to the body” pertain to the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect. Moreover, I hold that the final stage of the transformative ascent relates to the eternity of the mind in a special manner, in that intuitively grasping our power as a manifestation and consequence of God’s power is nothing but *seeing* and *experiencing* that we are eternal.

There is much to unpack in the claims I just made. First of all, what is wrong with reading these remarks as suggesting that Spinoza is preparing to discuss the *afterlife* and the immortality of the soul in its traditional sense? Does Spinoza deny that we can be immortal? Looking at the rest of the *Ethics*, it seems that he does not.²⁸ Although Spinoza does not often use the term ‘immortality’,²⁹ he does speak of the eternity of the mind on various occasions including, most notably, EVP23:“The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” What does the eternity of the mind signify then, and why does it relate in a special manner to intuitive self-knowledge as I propose? What does it mean to suggest that “those things which pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body” pertain to the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect? In what follows I will address these questions and give a brief account of Spinoza’s notorious doctrine of the eternity of the mind, with a particular emphasis on how it relates to intuitive self-knowledge—that is, the final step of the transformative ascent.

²⁸ Della Rocca (2008, 254).

²⁹ As we will see shortly, in the *Ethics* Spinoza uses the term “immortality” only once.

I will begin by looking at two important features of the kind of eternal existence endorsed in traditional accounts of personal immortality. On many traditional accounts, our postmortem existence is in some way independent of the body, and the vehicle of this immortality is a soul or thinking substance. For instance, one of Descartes' primary motivations in arguing for the real distinction of mind and body is to open up the possibility of the existence of the mind when the body no longer exists, and thereby support a robust doctrine of immortality.³⁰ Again, on many traditional views of immortality, this earthly life—taken on its own—is imperfect, since in this life the virtuous are not properly rewarded and the non-virtuous are not properly punished.³¹ It is only with a view to the afterlife that we can arrive at a proper assessment of *this life* with regard to justice, and explain divine reward and punishment. The moral point of view, on many traditional accounts, is thus not centered on this life, considered on its own.

The kind of eternity of the mind that Spinoza endorses cannot be the kind of eternal existence held in traditional accounts of personal immortality. This is because the two views stated above go directly against Spinoza's views on virtue and his commitment to parallelism. Unlike the latter view, according to Spinoza, virtue is in essence its own reward. In the only passage where the word 'immortality' (*immortalitas*) occurs in the

³⁰ Descartes believed that by separating the mind from the corruptible body, his radical dualism offered the best possible defense of and explanation for the immortality of the soul. In the Letter to the Sorbonne that accompanies the *Meditations*, he explicitly says that one of his aims in the book is to combat those who would deny the immortality of the soul. Even though he does not explicitly offer a full demonstration in the *Meditations* themselves, in the Replies to the Second Set of Objections to the *Meditations*, he claims that "Our natural knowledge tells us that the mind is distinct from the body, and that it is a substance... And this entitles us to conclude that the mind, insofar as it can be known by natural philosophy is immortal" (AT VII. 153/CSM II.108-9. Also see the Synopsis that prefaces the work. (AT VII.13-14/ CSM II.0-10)

³¹ Della Rocca (2008, 255) describes this as the most important way in which Spinoza's espousal of the eternity of the mind departs from traditional notions.

Ethics, Spinoza criticizes the foolish beliefs of the multitude, who are often motivated to act virtuously by hope of an eternal reward and fear of an eternal punishment. He says that:³²

...these opinions seem no less absurd to me than if someone, because he does not believe he can nourish his body with good food to eternity, should prefer to fill himself with poisons and other deadly things, or because he sees that the mind is not *eternal, or immortal*, should prefer to be mindless, and live without reason. These [common beliefs] are so absurd they are hardly worth mentioning. (EVP41S, my italics)

The focal point of discussion here is the importance and value of virtue in *this* life. Notice that Spinoza equates the eternity of the mind with the immortality of the soul in this passage. But he does this only within the context of his critique of the absurd and naïve beliefs of the multitude. So Spinoza's own doctrine of eternity of the mind is not and cannot be the view that he is criticizing here, namely, one that is oriented towards the alleged eternal rewards in the fictitious afterlife. In sum, the notion of one's needing another kind of life in order to be rewarded for virtue is directly contrary to Spinoza's view that virtue is its own reward and vice its own punishment (EVP42).³³

What about the former view that is held in most traditional accounts—namely, the view that the mind or part of the mind can somehow exist after the death of the body?

³² As Nadler (2006, 261) notes, Spinoza nowhere in the *Ethics* explicitly says that he will establish that the soul is immortal. In this respect the *Ethics* differs from his earlier work, the *Short Treatise* (KV). See KV II.23, which bears the title *Van des Ziels Onsterfelijkheid*—"On the Immortality of the Soul." Spinoza seems perfectly comfortable with using the term 'immortal' (*Onsterfelijk*) to describe the soul in this work. See Nadler (2001, 108-110) for an account of the KV text on immortality.

³³ Moreover, as Nadler (2006, 260) rightly observes, such a consideration for divine reward and punishment would go against everything Spinoza says about the dangers of anthropomorphizing God by conceiving of him as a moral and providential being.

How can the human mind be immortal in the sense of surviving the death of the body if the mind just is, as Spinoza demonstrated in Part II, the idea of body? Up to the point where Spinoza talks about “those things which pertain to the mind’s duration without relation to the body” in EVP20S, he has consistently maintained the complete inseparability of mind and body, which, on his view, are “one and the same thing” (EIIIP7S). Based on Spinoza’s strict parallelism of modes of thought and modes of extension, the duration of the mind is tied to the duration of the body, as is clearly seen in the following passage:

...But we do not attribute to the human mind any duration that can be defined by time, except insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the body, which is explained by duration, and can be defined by time, that is (by IIP8C), we do not attribute duration to it except while the body endures. (EVP23D)

If this is the case, then what does “the mind’s duration without relation to the body” (EVP20S) correspond to? What does Spinoza mean when he says that “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal” (EVP23)? Taking into consideration Spinoza’s consistent commitment to the parallelism doctrine, and providing textual support,³⁴ Margaret Wilson has suggested that in EVP20S Spinoza has simply “misspoken” and what he meant to say was this:

³⁴ In addition to EVP23D quoted above, Wilson refers to the following passage from EVP23S: “Our mind, therefore, can be said to endure, and its existence can be defined by a certain time, only insofar as it involves the actual existence of the body, and to that extent only does it have the power of determining the existence of things by time, and of conceiving them under duration,” and EIIIP8C: “...when singular things are said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, but insofar also as they are said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.”

Now it is time to pass on to those matters that concern the reality of the mind without respect to the *duration* of the body. (my italics)³⁵

As Wilson holds, despite the fact that the language Spinoza uses in EVP20S and EVP23 suggests that he is exalting mind over body with regard to some kind of permanence, in accordance with parallelism he could and should be holding simply the following: just as the duration of the mind is tied to the duration of the body, the eternity of the mind must somehow be tied to the eternity of the body.³⁶ Likewise, Michael Della Rocca has held that, for Spinoza, although the mind or a part of the mind may exist after the death of the body as EVP23 suggests, parallelism of modes of thought and modes of extension dictates that there must be something bodily that corresponds to (and is indeed identical to) the part of the mind that exists eternally.³⁷ So unlike traditional accounts, on Spinoza's view, the eternity of the mind cannot be all and exclusively about the mind.

To sum up the discussion thus far, unlike the kind of eternal existence endorsed in traditional accounts of personal immortality, Spinoza's notion of the eternity of the mind cannot be (1) connected to a morality of eternal rewards (and punishments) to be meted out in a fictitious afterlife, or (2) understood in *complete* isolation from the body. Having

³⁵ Wilson (1996, 129) explains this move as follows: "Although I am generally reluctant to "solve" interpretative problems by simply throwing out texts, the transition to EVP21 seems to me to present a nearly unquestionable example of a case where such a move is warranted."

³⁶ Wilson (1996, 130) states that in EVP23 "Spinoza could and should be holding simply this: that the human mind has a noneternal part that perishes when the body ceases to endure; but also an eternal part, to be understood as knowledge of the essence of the body from the point of view of eternity." Below I consider how the idea of the essence of the body enters into Spinoza's account of eternity of the mind.

³⁷ Della Rocca (2008, 255). Like Wilson, Della Rocca also refers to EIIP8C that I quoted earlier.

called attention to these differences, we can now turn to Spinoza's own account of the eternity of the mind.

Spinoza's account involves some of the most difficult and puzzling propositions in the *Ethics*. Due to its difficulty and apparent impenetrability, the second half of Part V of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza introduces his account of the eternity of the mind, has been described by one scholar as "an unmitigated and seemingly unmotivated disaster...rubbish that causes others to write rubbish."³⁸ Another prominent scholar has confessed that "in spite of many years of study, I still do not feel that I understand this part of the *Ethics* at all."³⁹ Among the commentators who have bravely delved into the issue, there has been a great deal of controversy over how to understand the doctrine of the eternity of the mind in a way that would be consistent with the rest of Spinoza's system.⁴⁰ The reading that I will present below will follow for the most part an interpretation that is held by many commentators, including Steven Nadler.⁴¹ The originality of my reading will appear towards the end of this section as I look at the special relation that the eternity of the mind bears to intuitive self-knowledge.

³⁸ Bennett (1984, 357, 372).

³⁹ Curley (1988, 84) adds "I feel the freedom to confess that, of course, because I also believe no one else understands it adequately either."

⁴⁰ As Nadler (2006, 261) states, even today no consensus has emerged on whether Spinoza's account of the eternity of the mind suggests that he believes in personal immortality. A number of scholars including Hampshire (1951), Curley (1988), Morrison (1994), Yovel (1989) and Nadler (2001), (2006) have thought that what Spinoza is up to, at least in the *Ethics*, is a denial of personal immortality. Yet there is very little agreement among these commentators on just how Spinoza accomplishes this. On the other hand, there are a few commentators, including Donagan (1973) and Wolfson (1934), who do insist that Spinoza is affirming personal immortality.

⁴¹ Nadler (2001), (2006).

As stated in Chapter 1, Spinoza defines eternity in EID8: “By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.” Immediately following this definition, Spinoza explains that such existence—that is, eternity—“cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.” True eternity, then, explicitly contrasts with sempiternity or everlastingness in time, in that it stands outside of all temporal categories whatsoever. Since God’s essence involves existence and thus cannot be conceived except as existing,⁴² “God is eternal, or all God’s attributes are eternal” (EIP19). Nothing except God or God’s attributes can be eternal in this sense.⁴³ This is because everything else, including the essences of things, is *in* God and *conceived through* God. Since a mode or the essence of a mode does not exist through itself—namely, is not *causa sui*—it can be said to be eternal *only* by virtue of God as its cause, *not* by virtue of itself.⁴⁴ As shown in Chapter 3, singular things can be conceived *sub specie aeternitatis* (“under the aspect of eternity” or “from the point of view of

⁴² This follows from the fact that God is *causa sui* (EID1).

⁴³ As stated in Chapter 1, the questions as to whether Spinoza endorses a durational or non-durational account of eternity, and whether the sort of eternity he attributes to *Natura naturans* is the same as the sort of eternity as he attributes to *Natura naturata* are controversial issues. As shown in Chapter 1, I hold that Spinoza endorses a non-durational eternity insofar as *Natura Naturans* is concerned. Moreover, I also hold that the sort of eternity Spinoza attributes to *Natura naturata*, including the essences of things, cannot be same as the sort of eternity as he attributes to *Natura naturans*. Since a mode or the essence (both actual and formal) of a mode does not exist through itself, namely, is not *causa sui*, it can be said to be eternal *only* by virtue of God as its cause, *not* by virtue of itself. I think this point is supported by the fact that whereas the eternal existence of God is conceived as an eternal truth through his own essence (EID8), the eternity of the mind, for instance, is “considered as an eternal truth *through God’s nature*” (EVP37D, my italics).

⁴⁴ Deleuze (1988, 66).

eternity”)—namely, “insofar as they are *conceived through God’s essence*, as real beings, or insofar as through God’s essence they involve existence” (EVP30D, my italics).

After briefly recalling Spinoza’s treatment of eternity, again we are left with the question: what does the eternity of the mind consist in on his view? On the interpretation I follow, the human mind partakes of eternity in two distinct but related ways:⁴⁵ (1) to the extent that there is the aspect of the mind that corresponds to the eternal aspect of the body, that is, to the extent that “[the] idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal” (EVP23S), and (2) insofar as we have adequate ideas—that is, to the extent that “we know things by the second and third kind of knowledge” (EVP38D).

We find Spinoza’s account of the first kind of eternity in EVP23, which, as we saw, reads, “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” The demonstration of EVP23 proceeds as follows:

In God there is necessarily a concept, *or* idea, which expresses the essence of the human body (by P22), an idea, therefore, which is necessarily something that pertains to the essence of the human mind (by IIP13). But we do not attribute to the human mind any duration that can be defined by time, except insofar as it expresses the actual existence of the body, which is explained by duration, and can be defined by time, that is (by IIP8C), we do not attribute duration to it except while the body endures. However, since what is conceived, with a certain eternal necessity, through God’s essence itself (by P22) is nevertheless something, this something that pertains to the essence of the mind will necessarily be eternal, q.e.d.

⁴⁵ In addition to Nadler (2006), see also Garber (2005). Nadler (2006, 262) argues that neither of these ways amounts to anything more than the fact that when a person dies, the knowledge in his mind—as a set of eternally true and adequate ideas—will persist.

As shown in Chapter 3, according to EVP22, in God there is an idea that expresses the unique essence of each and every body SSA. In other words, parallel to the essence of every body that is in God, there is a corresponding idea in God that expresses this particular essence SSA. This corresponding idea pertains to the essence of the mind and, just like its object, it is necessarily eternal (EVP23S). Thus, the part of the mind that corresponds to God's idea of the unique essence of the body SSA is itself eternal. In other words, the part of the human mind that corresponds to the idea of the essence of our body is eternal. The mind then has two aspects or parts: a durational one and an eternal one. Unlike the aspect of the mind that corresponds to the determined durational existence of the body, and hence comes to an end when the determinate duration of the body comes to an end, the aspect of the mind that corresponds to the eternal aspect of the body is eternal and remains (*remanet*). Since the eternity of the mind is thus centered on God's idea of a particular body, namely *my* body, the eternity that is enjoyed here is distinctively mine.⁴⁶ Despite its distinctiveness, the eternity that I enjoy does not seem unique to me or to human beings in general. This first kind of eternity, which Nadler describes as a "rather unimpressive kind of eternity," is an eternity that belongs to all things, human and otherwise.⁴⁷ Since every mind (and body) has this kind of eternity and automatically so, it seems that there is nothing we can do to achieve this kind of eternity. Consequently, it is

⁴⁶ Della Rocca (2008, 258). According to Della Rocca, the eternal thing that I am is distinct from the eternal thing that you are "because your eternity consists in God's eternal idea of a distinct body, your body."

⁴⁷ Nadler (2006, 266).

not something in which human beings can take any pride or comfort in, since there is nothing that distinguishes this eternity of the human mind from that belonging to the idea of any other finite body.⁴⁸

There is, however, more to Spinoza's doctrine of the eternity of the mind than this rather unimpressive kind of eternity. In particular, there is a notion of eternity that applies more narrowly to the human mind, and which is complex enough to engage in acts of understanding—and thereby has the ability to increase the share of its eternal part (the intellect). According to Spinoza, “the eternal part of the mind is the intellect through which alone we are said to act” (EVP40C). As stated in Chapter 3, in the case of the human mind, its power of acting is just its power of understanding or adequate cognition. Reason and intuitive knowledge, both of which consist in adequate ideas, constitute the intellect (EVP40C) and lead to understanding. They are both adequate ways to know SSA. To the extent that we know things through reason or intuitive knowledge, we perceive them according to the order of the intellect as they truly are. In other words, to the extent that we have adequate ideas, regardless of their being rational or intuitive, we have them as God has them or God “insofar as he constitutes the essence of human mind, has [them]” (EIP11C). The more the human mind increases its number of adequate ideas, the more it increases the share of its eternal part—that is, the intellect: “The more the mind knows things by the second and third kind of knowledge, the greater the part of it that remains” (EVP38D). Notice that this in no way suggests that, for Spinoza, we

⁴⁸ As Nadler (*ibid*) notes, due to the complexity of human beings, what remains after a human being's death is, “like the essence of the body it expresses, more internally complex, so to speak, than the ideas and essences that remain after the dissolution of some other kind of body. It is not however more eternal.”

strive to understand more in this life in order to attain personal immortality in an afterlife. Rather, it means that the more things a given human mind understands adequately in this life, the larger portion of it belongs to the infinite intellect of God in this life, and so is eternal.⁴⁹ Or, to use our terminology from the account of transformative ascent, the more adequate ideas I have in *this* life, the farther away I move from “the viewpoint of ordinary life” towards “the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect” in *this* life.

Both reason and intuitive knowledge thus serve to increase the eternal part of our mind, since they both serve to increase the number of ideas that are adequate. Nonetheless, intuitive knowledge, particularly intuitive self-knowledge, relates in a special way to the eternity of the mind, or so I hold. In order to understand this special relation, we need to see the connection between the first kind of eternity and intuitive self-knowledge. Recall that in Chapter 3, I suggested that intuitive self-knowledge is foundational in Spinoza’s account, since “the mind conceives nothing under a species of eternity *except insofar as it conceives its body’s essence under a species of eternity* (by P29)...” (EVP31D, my italics). It is only when the mind “conceives its body’s essence under a species of eternity” that it can be said to “have the power of conceiving [singular] things under a species of eternity” (EVP29D)—that is to say, the power of knowing things via knowledge of the third kind.⁵⁰ Even though, as shown earlier, every mind is eternal to the extent that it involves a part that

⁴⁹ Wilson (1996, 131).

⁵⁰ As shown in Chapter 3, to the extent that the mind conceives of “its body’s present actual existence,” it can only have inadequate knowledge of singular things as enduring things. To the extent that the mind conceives of its own body’s essence SSA, on the other hand, it can be said to have the power of knowing other singular things by intuitive knowledge.

corresponds to the idea of the essence of its body, only the human mind is capable of *conceiving* or forming an idea of the essence of its body SSA. In other words, even though every mind is eternal in the first sense, only the human mind is capable of attaining adequate knowledge of its own eternity by *having* God's idea that expresses the essence of its own body SSA. The mind's conceiving of its body's essence SSA is just its conceiving of its own essence "as an eternal truth, through God's nature" (EVP37D).⁵¹ Once the mind attains adequate knowledge of itself, that is, once it forms the idea of its own essence as a certain power of understanding (which follows from the divine nature and continually depends on God), it knows by experience that it is eternal:

...although it is impossible that we should recollect that we existed before the body—since there cannot be any traces of this in the body, and eternity can neither be defined by time nor can be defined by time—still, *we feel and know by experience that we are eternal*. For the mind feels those things that it conceives in understanding no less than those it has in the memory. For the *eyes of the mind*, by which it *sees* and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves. (EVP23S, my italics)

In this passage, we observe that "the *experience* that we are eternal" has at once a *seeing* aspect, a *feeling* (affective) aspect, and an *intellectual* aspect. This language is reminiscent of what I said in the previous sub-section regarding the features of the last step of the transformative ascent. There, I suggested that attaining adequate knowledge of one's *own* essence as it follows directly from God consists in *seeing*, rather than knowing ourselves through intellectual convictions arising from reason. Moreover, I talked about

⁵¹ This is because, as stated earlier, "the idea, which expresses the essence of the body under a species of eternity, is a certain mode of thinking, which pertains to the essence of the mind, and which is necessarily eternal" (EVP23S).

the *experienced* character of intuitive self-knowledge through which I *see* that *I* am in God and necessarily depend on God, and *experience* my being as a modal expression of God. Taking into consideration this non-coincidental similarity, I interpret the experience that we are eternal as pertaining specifically to intuitive self-knowledge, and thereby the last step of the transformative ascent.⁵²

If this reading is correct, then we may read the above quoted passage as implying the following: Even though, for Spinoza, it is impossible that we can know that we are eternal by way of knowledge of the first kind, that is, by memory that depends on body's temporally determined actual existence, still, we know by the experienced character of intuitive self-knowledge that we are eternal. Since the nature of knowledge is correlative to the nature of the thing known, the knowledge of my own eternity should itself be eternal. And that is why Spinoza describes intuitive knowledge as "eternal" (EVP33D). Thanks to intuitive self-knowledge, we infer adequate knowledge of our essence from adequate knowledge of God, and thereby *see* and *experience* that we are eternal and in God. The experience of eternity in *this* life completes the transformative ascent by taking us as farther away from the perspective of the ordinary life as possible for a human being. A person who has achieved this transformation will strive to pursue virtue for its own

⁵² Note that the knowledge of eternity that is attained by the end of the transformative ascent is different from the consciousness of eternity of the mind that Spinoza thinks some men have: "If we attend the common opinion of men, we shall see that they are indeed conscious of their mind, but they confuse it with duration, and attribute it to the imagination, or memory, which they believe remains after death" (EVP34S). This sort of consciousness seems to be different from the sort of consciousness Spinoza uses in connection to intuitive knowledge by saying that "the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is" (EVP31S).

sake here and now, not out of hope for otherworldly rewards or fear of otherworldly punishments.⁵³

To summarize what I have done in this section, first, I offered a reading of Spinoza's conception of self-understanding, according to which adequate knowledge of oneself is attained *via* a transformative ascent. Then I showed how the final stage of the ascent, wherein we grasp intuitively our power as a manifestation and consequence of God's power, relates in a special manner to the eternity of the mind. In order to better understand the nature of the transformation we will now look at the affective state accompanying intuitive knowledge, which reflects the fact that this superior kind of cognition supplies a maximal understanding of both oneself and God.

6.2. Affective Power of Intuitive Knowledge

6.2.1. The Greatest Satisfaction of Mind (*summa acquiescentia*)

I will begin by focusing on the "greatest satisfaction of mind" (*summa acquiescentia*), which is the highest form of self-esteem. Spinoza defines self-esteem as "a joy born of the fact that a man considers himself and his power of acting" (EDef.f.Aff.XXV; EIIP55S). Although the most superior form of self-esteem arises from intuitive knowledge, not all self-esteem arises in this way. The distinction between what we might call false and genuine self-esteem rests on whether a mind's apprehension of its power of acting arises from inadequate ideas of imagination or adequate ideas of reason and

⁵³ Note that according to Spinoza the wisdom of the free man, i.e. the model of human nature that we introduced in Chapter 5, "is a meditation on life, not on death" (EIVP67).

intuitive knowledge.⁵⁴ In the case of the former, i.e., when we are in the first stage of the ascent vis-à-vis self-knowledge, our awareness of our power of acting is based on inadequate ideas of imagination. And to the extent that such awareness is based on imaginative ideas, the joy we derive from it may itself be a false and unwarranted joy. This would be the case, for instance, if we mistook a decrease in our power of acting for an increase due simply to self-ignorance.

Another instance of such unwarranted joy is when we ascribe to our own power of acting a change in us that was, in fact, the product of some external cause.⁵⁵ In such a scenario, we are in fact thinking more highly of our power of acting than it actually is. This coincides with Spinoza's definition of pride (*superbia*) as "love of oneself, or self-esteem (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), in so far as it so affects a man that he thinks more highly of himself than is just" (E Def. Aff. XXVIII, EIIP26S). It is noteworthy that Spinoza opposes pride not to humility, as one might expect, but rather to genuine self-esteem. This is because humility, which Spinoza defines as "a sadness which arises from the fact that a man considers his own lack of power" (E Def. Aff. XXVI), is not a virtue (EIVP53).⁵⁶ Like pride, it arises from an inadequate conception of oneself, and thus belongs to the same group of passive affects that false self-esteem belongs to.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ I follow Don Rutherford (1999, 452) in calling these 'false' and 'genuine' self-esteemes. For an excellent account of the place of *acquiescentia* in Spinoza's *Ethics* see his article. Rutherford (ibid) thinks that the ground of this distinction is laid in EIIP53 and C, which, he thinks, offer an important qualification of the definition of self-esteem given in Def. Aff. XXV. In EIIP53 Spinoza writes: "When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more, the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of acting."

⁵⁵ Rutherford (ibid).

⁵⁶ Spinoza is well-known for his revisionary construal of what Hume calls "monkish virtues" such as humility and pity as passive affects rather than virtues. Yet, in EIVP54S, Spinoza presents them as, if not

False self-esteem arises not only from confused self-knowledge, but also from the imagined esteem of others, which is likely to produce a false and unwarranted joy.⁵⁸ For Spinoza, since the multitude is “fickle and inconstant,” to the extent that our self-esteem is based on the opinion of the multitude, it is “empty” (EIVP58S).

Unlike false self-esteem, genuine self-esteem is an internally determined affect of joy, which means that it pertains only to oneself and not to anything outside of us, and it is without regard to what others think about us.⁵⁹ Spinoza introduces self-esteem as an affect of joy “accompanied by the idea of an *internal* thing as cause” (EDef.Aff.XXIV Exp., my italics), rather than an external thing. The basis of genuine self-esteem can be nothing other than our awareness of and reflection on our own power of understanding, which consists in the internal determination of our mind by adequate ideas. As Spinoza writes in EIVP52S:

While a man considers himself, he perceives nothing clearly and distinctly, *or* adequately, except those things which follow from his power of acting (by IID2),

genuine virtues themselves, then at least as means to virtue, by which people more readily learn to follow the dictates of reason. So Spinoza still ascribes a certain relative value to these “monkish virtues,” particularly since he believes that “men rarely live from the dictates of reason” (ibid).

⁵⁷ Whereas humility arises from an inadequate conception of our lack of power, it is possible to adequately conceive this same lack of power: “...if we suppose that the man conceives his lack of power because he understands something more powerful than himself, by the knowledge of which he determines his power of acting, then we conceive nothing but that the man understands himself distinctly or (by P26) that his power of acting is aided” (EIVP53D). As Jaquet (2004, 110) notes, this helping affect does not have a name, and it could be said to correspond to a virtuous humility as opposed to a vicious one. I hold that this affect corresponds to genuine self-esteem in that we understand our lack of power, not as a consequence of a lack or an intrinsic imperfection, but as a power determined by the infinite power of God.

⁵⁸ Rutherford (1999, 453).

⁵⁹ Frank Lucash (1992, 67) makes an interesting point by invoking some contemporary thinkers such as Rawls and Nozick, who suggest that self-esteem is nothing more than the esteem we get from others. Lucash holds that, unlike these thinkers Spinoza offers a foundation of self-esteem within the individual.

that is (by IIP3), which follow from his power of understanding. And so *the greatest self-esteem* there can be arises only from this reflection. (my italics)

For Spinoza, someone who increases in perfection through the exercise of understanding is necessarily aware of oneself as the cause of this increase. This is because in Spinoza's epistemology, "he who has adequate ideas, or who knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, or true knowledge, of his own knowledge" (EIP43D). Thanks to the reflexive element involved in adequate knowledge, one is filled with contentment or an inward directed joy every time she understands. Even though genuine self-esteem arises from both reason and intuitive knowledge, the "greatest satisfaction of mind" (*summa acquiescentia*) can only stem from the latter (EVP27). This is simply because

The greatest virtue of the mind is to know God (by IVP28), or to understand things by the third kind of knowledge (by P25). Indeed, this virtue is the greater, the more the mind knows things by this kind of knowledge (by P24). So he who knows things by this kind of knowledge passes to the greatest human perfection, and consequently (by Def. Aff.II), is affected with the greatest Joy, accompanied (by IIP43) *by the idea of himself and his virtue*. Therefore (by Def. Aff. XXV), the greatest satisfaction there can be arises from this kind of knowledge, q.e.d. (EVP26D, my italics)

The greatest human perfection consists in knowing things by intuitive knowledge, which, as shown earlier, provides the highest form of self-understanding. Since the mind's greatest power consists in intuitive knowledge, awareness of it naturally produces the greatest contentment. More specifically, a mind that has attained the knowledge that *my power of understanding follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature* is

simultaneously affected with the greatest satisfaction of the mind, which arises from the reflexive knowledge that this knowledge is the result of *my* power of understanding.⁶⁰

The greatest satisfaction of mind, which is the highest joy accompanied by the *idea of oneself*, does not exhaust the affective power of intuitive knowledge. From intuitive knowledge there arises another related active affect, “an intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*),” which brings us to the topic of our next sub-section.

6.2.2. Intellectual Love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*)

Spinoza defines “intellectual love of God” (*amor Dei intellectualis*) as “joy accompanied by the *idea of God* as its cause”—that is, “love of God...insofar as we understand God to be eternal” (EVP32C, my italics). Much as not all forms of self-esteem arise from intuitive knowledge, not all forms of love arise from intuitive knowledge. As we see in the *Ethics*, Spinoza’s doctrine of love develops according to the hierarchy of “ordinary love” (*communi amore*)⁶¹ (EVP20S); “love toward God” (*amor erga Deum*) or “love of God” (*amor Dei*);⁶² and finally intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*), which is not really distinguished from blessedness (*beatitudo*).⁶³ In order to see what “ordinary

⁶⁰ For the idea that the “greatest satisfaction of the mind” arises from reflexive knowledge of oneself as the cause of knowledge, see Rutherford (1999, 454).

⁶¹ As far as I know, Spinoza uses this term only once (in EVP20S) in the *Ethics*. From the context in which he uses it, it is clear that he means to refer to love of things pursued in the ordinary life.

⁶² In what follows I will use ‘love of God’ and ‘love toward God’ interchangeably.

⁶³ Spinoza provides a tri-partite classification of love in KV II.5 according to its objects. After saying “Love...is nothing but enjoying a thing and being united with it. We divide it according to according to the qualities of the object man seeks to enjoy and unite with,” Spinoza presents three objects of love: 1. Objects that are corruptible in themselves, 2. “All those modes, which we have said are the cause of singular things,” and 3. “God, or what we take to be one and the same thing, the Truth.”

love” corresponds to, let us first recall Spinoza’s definition of love: “Love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause” (EIIIDeffAff6).⁶⁴ Since love in its ordinary form is an affect that is determined externally, it carries the risk of leading to bondage. Consider the two following passages for Spinoza’s vivid description of this risk:

...sickness of the mind and misfortunes take their origin especially from too much love toward a thing which is liable to many variations and which we can never fully possess. For no one is disturbed or anxious concerning anything unless he loves it, nor do wrongs, suspicions, and enmities arise except from love for a thing which no one can really possess. (EVP20S)

A purely sensual love, moreover, that is, a Lust to procreate which arises from external appearance, and absolutely, all love which has a cause other than freedom of mind, easily passes into hate-unless (which is worse) it is a species of madness. And then it is encouraged more by discord than by harmony. See IIP31. (Appendix to Part IV: XIX)

As we see in these passages, Spinoza’s main worry regarding ordinary love derives from the nature of the objects to which this love is attached. Ordinary love that is attached to “empty and futile” goods such as honor, wealth and sensual pleasure is the kind of love

⁶⁴ See the explanation that follows: “This definition explains the essence of love clearly enough. But the definition of those authors who define *love* as *a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved* expresses a property of love, not its essence. And because these authors did not see clearly enough the essence of love, they could not have any clear concept of this property. Hence everyone has judged their definition quite obscure. But it should be noted that when I say it is a property in the lover, that he wills to join himself to the thing loved, I do not understand by will a consent, or a deliberation of the mind, *or* free decision (for we have demonstrated that this is a fiction in IIP48). Nor do I understand a desire of joining oneself to the thing loved when it is absent or continuing in its presence when it is present. For love can be conceived without either of these desires. Rather, by will I understand a satisfaction in the lover on account of the presence of the thing loved, by which the lover’s joy is strengthened or at least encouraged.” As Curley (1985, 533, n.41) notes Spinoza may have in mind Descartes, *The Passions*, Article 79 in this passage. But, as Curley goes on to say, Spinoza need not have one opponent in mind, as the conception of love here objected goes back as far as Plato’s *Symposium*.

that one would find in abundance in what we previously called “an ordinary life.” An ordinary life dominated by ordinary love would inevitably lead to a “fickle and inconstant” (EIVP58S) state of mind.

Having seen briefly the characteristics of ordinary love, the break between this inferior kind of love and “love toward God” should now be obvious.⁶⁵ As shown in Chapter 5, Spinoza introduces “love toward God” within the context of reason’s remedies for the affects by describing it as the most constant of all affects.⁶⁶ According to him, “he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects” (EVP15).⁶⁷ Love toward God, like the knowledge that generates it, is something completely under one’s control. This is because, unlike ordinary love that arises from external determination of the mind, love of God stems from knowledge of God or understanding—namely, internal determination of the mind. In contrast to ordinary love, love of God is “a love toward a thing immutable and eternal (see P15), which *we really fully possess*” (EVP20S, my italics). Since God is an eternal and unchanging being, this affect does not fluctuate in the way that so many passions, directed as they are to ephemeral things, do. It is therefore a stable and constant

⁶⁵ Like false self-esteem, ordinary love is connected to imaginative knowledge.

⁶⁶ After stating in EVP20S that “this love is the most constant of all the affects” he says “with this I have covered all the remedies for the affects,” suggesting that the love towards God is included in that account. See J.M. Beyssade (1986) for the view that this affect is related to reason.

⁶⁷ This is because, as shown in Chapter 5, understanding oneself and one’s affects requires that one has a power of ordering and connecting the affections of one’s body according to the order of the intellect, which is nothing but a power of bringing it about that all the affections of the body are related to the idea of God (EVP14). Forming a clear and distinct concept of an affection of the body is thus relating it to the idea of God (EVP14D)—that is, reaching a causal understanding of it, rather than relating it to the durational ordering they occupy in random experience. Such adequate knowledge leading toward knowledge of God brings about a joy that is accompanied by the idea of God—namely, “love toward God.”

love, just because its eternal object is itself eternal and constant. That is why it is the most constant of all affects and “cannot be tainted by any of the vices which are in ordinary love...” (EVP20S). Moreover,

This love toward God is the highest good which we can want from *the dictate of reason* (by IVP28), and is *common to all men* (by IVP36); we desire that all should enjoy it (by IVP37). And so (by Def. Aff. XXIII), it cannot be stained by an affect of envy, nor...by an affect of jealousy. On the contrary (by IIIP31), the more men we imagine to enjoy it, the more it must be encouraged. (EVP20D, my italics)

According to Spinoza, as we saw in the context of collaborative morality in Chapter 5, “it arises from the very nature of reason” (EIVP36S) that love toward God is common to all, and thus can be enjoyed and possessed equally by all men insofar as they share the same nature (EIVP36D).⁶⁸ This is because this love is attached to the greatest good of those who are guided by reason—i.e. to know God or understanding (EIVP36D). Unlike the goods that people pursue in the ordinary life, which are finite commodities such as wealth, human beings who live according to reason value and pursue the same good—i.e. understanding, which is something eternal, imperishable, and capable of being shared equally by all.

Having thus presented “love toward God,” which is a constant, stable and sharable form of active love, let us now turn to “intellectual love of God.” The distinction

⁶⁸ As we showed earlier, since, unlike wealth, knowledge is not a limited resource, human beings do not come into conflict with one another as they pursue it. Acquisition of understanding is thus not a zero-sum game. Quite the contrary, one person’s acquisition of knowledge actually enhances the capacity of others to attain it. Moreover, as like-minded rational individuals who are similarly motivated in that they strive for understanding, they are likely to be of positive assistance to each other in this project. Hence the good, which everyone who seeks true self-interest or virtue wants for himself—i.e. understanding—he also *desires* for other men (EIVP37).

between “love toward God” and “intellectual love of God” is not as clear-cut as the one between ordinary love and the former. In fact, Spinoza uses the terms ‘love of God’ and ‘love toward God’ all over Part V—both in the context of reason’s remedies in the first half and in relation to affective power of intuitive knowledge in the second half. However, unlike the generic use of ‘love toward God’, Spinoza uses the term ‘intellectual love of God’ *only* and *explicitly* in connection to intuitive knowledge. It thus seems that intellectual love of God is a special form of love of God that stems exclusively from the highest kind of cognition:⁶⁹

From the third kind of knowledge, there necessarily arises an intellectual love of God. For from this kind of knowledge there arises (by P32) joy, accompanied by the idea of God as its cause, that is (by Def. Aff. VI), love of God, not insofar as we imagine him as present (by P29), but insofar as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call intellectual love of God. (EVP32D)

Now why would Spinoza reserve a special term for love of God arising from intuitive knowledge? What is the distinguishing feature of intellectual love of God? Recall that according to Spinoza, “he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly love God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects” (EVP15).⁷⁰ Since, as shown earlier, the highest form of self-understanding is attained by way of intuitive self-knowledge, the love of God that arises from this

⁶⁹ In EVP42 and EVP33S, for instance, Spinoza uses the term “love toward God” (*amore erga Deum*) in connection to blessedness and intellectual love of God, respectively.

⁷⁰ As stated earlier, for Spinoza, rather than any adequate knowledge, “knowledge of oneself and one’s own emotions” is particularly relevant to the ethical endeavor of moderating and restraining one’s passions.

cognition—i.e. intellectual love of God—is naturally the highest form of love.⁷¹ The connection between intuitive self-knowledge and intellectual love of God is also seen in the following:⁷²

[Intellectual love of God] the mind has must be related to its actions (by P32C and IIIIP3); it is, then, *an action by which the mind contemplates itself*, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause (by P32 and P32C), that is (by IP25C and IIP11C), *an action by which God, insofar as he can be explained through the human mind*, contemplates himself [as the cause]; so (by P35), this love the mind has is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself, q.e.d. (EVP36D, my italics)

According to this passage, intellectual love of God is an action of the mind (*Mentis Actiones*). Like all actions of the mind, it arises from adequate ideas (EIIIP3). Moreover, as the reference to EVP32C in the first sentence makes it clear, the adequate ideas at stake here are the ones involved in intuitive self-knowledge. Intellectual love of God is an action of the mind that arises from the *mind's contemplation of itself* with the accompanying idea of God as its cause. The mind's contemplation of itself is just the mind's adequate knowledge of itself—that is, intuitive knowledge of the essence of the mind. As shown in Chapter 3, Spinoza suggests in EVP36S that we can have intuitive knowledge of the essence of our mind once we conceive our mind as a power of understanding depending timelessly on God. Once we thus reach adequate knowledge of our essence or power, which is God's own power in its finite form, we are affected by the

⁷¹ Note the similarity to the case of the highest form of self-esteem that arises from intuitive knowledge. As I stated in that context, since the mind's greatest power consists in intuitive knowledge, awareness of it naturally produces the greatest contentment.

⁷² See also EVP37D and EV42D as making a similar connection.

intellectual love of God, which is nothing but God's love for himself “insofar as he can be explained by the human Mind's essence.”⁷³

There is a final aspect of intellectual love of God, which is tied up with the special connection that intuitive knowledge bears to the eternity of the mind. As shown earlier, once the mind attains adequate knowledge of itself, that is, once it forms the idea of its own essence as a certain power of understanding, it knows by experience that it is eternal. Intuitive self-knowledge, in other words, consists in the mind's conceiving of its own essence “as an eternal truth, through God's nature” (EVP37D).⁷⁴ Since intuitive knowledge is thus eternal, “the intellectual love of God which arises from [this superior form of cognition] is [also] eternal” (EVP33). This aspect of intellectual love of God will be relevant as we consider its affective power in the face of the passions in the next section.

To conclude this section, Spinoza's account of the “greatest satisfaction of mind” (*summa acquiescentia*) and intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*) as arising exclusively from intuitive knowledge reflects the fact that this superior kind of cognition supplies a maximal understanding of both oneself and God. For Spinoza “the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and

⁷³ As stated in Chapter 2, not only our mind but also its knowledge of God is a part of the infinite understanding by which God knows himself. Hence, our mind's knowledge of God is the very knowledge by which God knows himself, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explained by human mind's essence. In other words, our mind's knowledge of God is the very knowledge by which God knows himself. In connection with this, the mind's intellectual love of God is part of the infinite love by which God loves himself.

⁷⁴ In EVP20S, after stating that the love of God is the most constant of the affects, Spinoza says “this love...insofar as it is related to the body cannot be destroyed, unless it is destroyed with the body itself. What the nature of this love is insofar as it is related only to the mind, we shall see later.” This passage suggests that here Spinoza is anticipating a connection between the eternity of the mind and the intellectual love of God, which he will present as arising from intuitive knowledge later in EVP33.

of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is” (EVP31S). Thanks to these two accompanying affects, intuitive knowledge provides us with the unshaken ground of blessedness (*beatitudo*)—i.e. the culmination of human perfection—which is so excellent yet so rare to attain (EVP42S). Unlike ordinary joy, which consists in the passage to a greater perfection, blessedness or perfect joy consists “in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself” (EVP33S). Transformative ascent is complete once one attains this state of highest happiness, which promises the most any finite mode can possess in this life: the peace of mind of the wise man, whom Spinoza describes as being “conscious of himself, and of God, and of things...never ceases to be, but always possesses true peace of mind” (EVP42S).

6.3. Concluding Remarks on the Ethical Implications of the Epistemological Distinction between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge

As shown earlier, since intuitive knowledge *qua* self-knowledge relates to me in a direct and intimate manner, rather than in a detached and mediated way as reason does, it results in a body of knowledge that is superior to reason not only intellectually but also affectively. Having looked at the superior affective power of intuitive knowledge in the previous sections, there is one last question that needs to be addressed: does the fact that intuitive knowledge produces a higher cognitive-affective outcome than reason guarantee that this greater power will be enough to overcome the passions? In this section, I will conclude my account of the ethical significance of intuitive knowledge by addressing this question and looking at the extent to which this superior form of cognition does a better

job in the face of the passions than reason. I will argue that the affective power of intuitive knowledge in the face of the passions is less fragile than that of reason.

As shown in Chapter 5, reason's mastery over the passions is hard-won. Whether reason or passion prevails in the affective struggle between them depends entirely upon the relative power of the rational and passionate ideas at stake. In the same chapter we saw that there are two ways in which the power of reason over the passions is limited. There are the cases of reason succumbing to passions (1) due to the fact that the passions prevent reason from functioning in the first place, and (2) that happen *despite* the fact that reason functions. The latter cases, wherein both reason and passion are fully on display, are instances of a phenomenon that lies at the center of human bondage: *akrasia*. Having reminded briefly the two ways in which the affective power of reason is limited, we will now address the question as to what extent (if any) these limits apply to intuitive knowledge.

I begin with the first limit. As shown earlier, in several places in the *Ethics* Spinoza makes it clear that we cannot completely eliminate the passions from our life.⁷⁵ Since we are finite modes that are parts of nature, we will always be affected by externally caused changes. Recall that, for Spinoza, any increase or decrease in an individual's power of acting that comes about through the action of *external* things indicates a passion. In other words, a passive affect or passion (*passio*) is a change in the

⁷⁵ Recall, for instance, EIVP4, which reads, "It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause," and its corollary: "From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires." See also the Preface to Part V.

individual's power whose adequate cause lies not in the individual itself, but partly in external things. Considering our modal status, it is impossible to imagine a scenario wherein a human being—albeit one who has achieved the transformative ascent up until to its final step—can always be the adequate cause of oneself. So, the passions will always be there and will always be to some extent efficacious even when intuitive knowledge is concerned. Even in the life of the person who has achieved the transformative ascent, there will be decreases or increases in her power of acting that stem from external factors. And these externally induced changes can sometimes prevent her from engaging in intuitive cognition. Consequently, the first limit—which can be considered as a general limit that pertains to our power of understanding in general—*also* applies to intuitive knowledge.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which this limit applies to intuitive knowledge to a *lesser* extent than it does to reason. This is because, even though the transformative ascent does not result in a change in one's modal status, it does provide an important change. As shown above, once one attains intuitive self-knowledge and thereby completes the transformative ascent, she achieves a change in perspective that involves moving away from “the viewpoint of ordinary life” and towards “the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect.”⁷⁶ The change in perspective does not completely eliminate passions in one's life. Yet it helps reorder one's desires—including, most importantly, the ones regarding external goods like honor, pleasure and wealth, the

⁷⁶ As shown earlier, even though reason is a way of knowing according to the order of the intellect, and thereby an important step in the transformative ascent, it does not, by itself, *complete* the ascent. One cannot achieve a complete change in perspective through reason alone. See the Conclusion for further elaboration on this point.

pursuit of which gives rise to the most unstable and harmful passions.⁷⁷ This change in perspective brings about a gradual change in the objects that are pursued and loved.⁷⁸ And this, in turn, results in a change in one's dispositional attitudes and makes a difference in how one confronts what comes about through the action of external things. The person who has achieved ascent will thus be much less subject to the vagaries of fortune and fluctuations arising from the pursuit of fickle and inconstant goods, even when she is not actively engaged in intuitive cognition.

This change in perspective provides a more stable state of mind, which is less likely to be acted on by harmful passive affects. This will, of course, come in degrees. According to Spinoza "The more perfection each thing has, the more it acts, and the less it is acted on; and conversely, the more it acts, the more perfect it is" (EVP40). And "the more the mind enjoys blessedness, the more it understands...that is, the greater the power it has over the affects, and...the less it is acted on by evil affects" (EVP42D). We emphasized before that, for Spinoza, virtue is its own reward. In the last proposition of the *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly connects virtue to blessedness by saying that blessedness

⁷⁷ In his paper "The Power of Reason in Spinoza," Martin Lin argues that Spinoza's techniques for moderating the passions of Part V of the *Ethics* are not promising. Lin (2009, 282-3) concludes his article as follows: "Spinoza is doomed to failure because the basic claim that he is trying to justify—that acquiring knowledge will reorder our desires—is false. Spinoza assumes that once we have tasted rational inquiry, we will, little by little, lose our appetite for external goods such as honor, pleasure and wealth. And the techniques in Part V are supposed to work as the mechanisms by which this transformation occurs." Arguing that Spinoza is wrong to assume that all adequate knowledge will have a transformative effect on everyone, Lin (ibid) suggests that Spinoza "sheds no light on the more restricted, but much more plausible claim that some kinds of knowledge has this effect on some people." As I show here, contra Lin, I do believe that Spinoza's account of intuitive knowledge allows us to make the more plausible claim that one kind of knowledge—namely, intuitive knowledge—has this affect on some people—namely, the few people who have attained intuitive knowledge. I think that Lin misses this since he overlooks the affective power of intuitive knowledge and prefers to focus only on reason instead.

⁷⁸ As stated in the previous section, since love in its ordinary form is an affect that is determined externally, it carries the risk of leading to bondage.

“is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself” (EVP42). As stated earlier, unlike ordinary joy, which consists in the passage to a greater perfection, blessedness or perfect joy consists “in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself” (EVP33S). Blessedness is a special active affect.⁷⁹ Even though it does not consist in the passage to a greater perfection in the way ordinary joy does, this perfect joy brings about an increase in our power that helps us to restrain the passive affects.⁸⁰ According to Spinoza, we do not enjoy blessedness “because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them” (ibid). The striking implication of Spinoza’s claims is that the more we enjoy blessedness, the greater our control over the passions, which implies at once a greater increase in our power and the joy arising from our awareness of this increase.

Having seen to what extent the first limit applies to intuitive knowledge, let us now turn to the second limit. Is the affective power of intuitive knowledge, like that of reason, fragile due to its susceptibility to *akrasia*? As stated in the previous chapter, Spinoza introduces his account of *akrasia* in the beginning of Part IV of the *Ethics* within

⁷⁹ As shown earlier, according to Spinoza intellectual love of God is not really distinguished from blessedness.

⁸⁰ Since Spinoza describes blessedness as consisting “in the fact that the mind is endowed with perfection itself” rather than “passage to a greater perfection” (EVP33S), there has been some discussion regarding whether blessedness is an affect or not. While Wetlesen (1979, 103) has held that blessedness is not an affect on the grounds that it excludes all transition, Scrijvers (1999, 77-8) has argued that “Spinoza’s qualification of *beatitudo* as the very possession of perfection (rather than a transition towards perfection) does not exclude, *by definition, all transition* as Wetlesen wrongly believes.” Since Spinoza clearly believes that we can restrain our lusts thanks to blessedness (EVP42), and since, for him, “an affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to and stronger than, the affect to be restrained” (EIVP7), I hold that blessedness is an affect, albeit an active one. See Jacquet (2004, 97-8) for further discussion of this subject.

the context of his discussion of “human bondage or the powers of the affects.”⁸¹ Since, for Spinoza, it is possible for the power of external causes to be greater than the power of any one individual by an indefinite degree (EIVP3), passions can easily be more powerful than rational ideas.⁸² Thus, even though both rational and passionate ideas exert power at the same time, we may end up doing what passionate ideas determine us to do. In such a situation, even though we know the better for ourselves, “we are *forced* to follow the worse” (Preface to Part IV, my italics). Can we conceive of a similar scenario, in which both an intuitive idea and a passionate idea are fully on display, and yet, somehow, intuition succumbs to passion?

Spinoza never explicitly discusses *akrasia* in relation to intuitive knowledge. But this does not, by itself, show that on Spinoza’s account *akrasia* does *not* apply to intuitive knowledge. To show that *akrasia* does not apply to intuitive knowledge, we would need to establish that we cannot conceive of a situation wherein both an intuitive idea and a passionate idea exert power at the same time, and yet we end up following the latter. Does Spinoza give us grounds for establishing this? At first blush, the answer to this question *appears* to be in the affirmative, in light of Spinoza’s account of the intellectual love of God. As seen earlier, intellectual love of God stems from intuitive knowledge, which consists in the mind’s conceiving of its own essence “as an eternal truth, through God’s nature” and thus is eternal (EVP37D). Since intuitive knowledge is eternal, the

⁸¹ Recall that this is the title of Part IV of the *Ethics*.

⁸² As shown in Chapter 5, strikingly, for Spinoza, the power of an idea does not refer to its clarity or distinctness, which means that a passionate idea can be more powerful than a rational idea, which is a clear and distinct idea.

intellectual love of God arising from this eternal cognition is also eternal.⁸³ The important consequence of the eternity of this superior form of love is that, “there is nothing in Nature which is *contrary to* this love, or which can *take it away*” (EVP37, my italics). So how does this bear on the issue of *akrasia*?

EVP37 suggests that whenever we actively engage in intuitive knowledge, this is accompanied by an active affect—the intellectual love of God—that no other affect can take away or diminish. Moreover, it *seems* that whenever this superior form of love is given, not only is it sustained, but also no contrary passion that motivates the opposite behavior can coexist with it.⁸⁴ Consequently, following EVP37, it *appears* that *akrasia* would not apply to intuitive knowledge in that we cannot even conceive of a situation wherein both intuitive and passionate ideas exert power at the same time.

This appearance, however, is misleading and does not reflect the truth in its totality. This is because EVP37 concerns the mind insofar as its eternal aspect is considered, or insofar as the mind is part of God’s infinite intellect. To the extent that the eternal aspect of the mind is concerned, there is nothing in *this part of the mind* that is contrary to intellectual love of God. Nevertheless, the mind cannot be identified solely

⁸³ Note that in the Scholium that follows EVP37, Spinoza invokes EIVA1 in order to distinguish the indestructible intellectual love of God from “singular things insofar as they are related to a certain time and place.” As we saw in Chapter 3, EIVA1 reads as follows: “There is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.”

⁸⁴ Note that according to EVA1, “If two contrary actions are aroused in the same subject, a change will have to occur, either in both of them, or in one only, until they cease to be contrary.” But if there is nothing in Nature that is contrary to intellectual love of God, how can the dynamic relation that Spinoza describes in EVA1 hold between intuitive ideas and passionate ideas? We will see shortly that such a worry need not to arise since intellectual love of God concerns solely the eternal part of the mind, not all of it.

with its eternal aspect, since—as seen earlier—the mind is just the idea of the actually existing body. Thus every human mind has also an imaginative aspect insofar as the mind is considered as a part of Nature. And passionate ideas are related to the mind “insofar as it is considered as a part of Nature which cannot be perceived clearly and distinctly through itself, without the others” (EIIIP3S). Since the mind of an intuitive knower cannot simply be identified with its eternal aspect, it is impossible to rule out situations wherein passionate ideas can be co-present with intuitive ideas in the same mind. Even if there is nothing contrary to intellectual love of God insofar as the eternal part of the mind is at stake, there can be a passion contrary to this love in the mind when the mind is considered as a part of Nature.

Given that it is impossible to discount the possibility of a passionate idea’s co-presence with an intuitive idea in the mind, the next question is this: In such a situation of co-presence, is it always intuitive ideas that “win”? Can we conceive of a situation wherein intuitive knowledge succumbs to passion? To put it in more concrete terms with an example: can we conceive of an *akratic* situation, wherein I end up feeling remorse⁸⁵ over a past event despite the fact that, at the same time, I know intuitively that this feeling is not the right or appropriate thing to feel? In other words, could I feel remorse while at the same time having intuitive knowledge that this thing that happened to *me* could not have happened otherwise—that is, I *see* that the singular thing, which I understand to follow from the necessity of the divine nature, is *me*?

⁸⁵ According to Spinoza’s definition, “remorse is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of a past thing which has turned out worse than we had hoped” (EDef.Aff. XVII).

One would be hard-pressed categorically to say ‘no’ to these questions, since there is nothing in Spinoza's system that guarantees that intuitive ideas will *never* succumb to passionate ideas with definitive certainty. In fact, as we saw, Spinoza emphasizes on several occasions that we cannot have absolute power over our passions. Since intuitive ideas are the ideas of a finite mind actually existing in time, even the intellectual love of God accompanying these ideas cannot ensure absolutely that the power of these ideas will not be overridden by passionate ideas. Given our modal status, it seems perfectly conceivable that sometimes the power of an intuitive idea can be overwhelmed by a violent passion. Therefore, it does not seem plausible to claim that *akrasia* would never apply to intuitive knowledge.

Nonetheless, it seems plausible to suggest that *akratic* situations would be less frequent in connection with intuitive knowledge than in relation to reason. We already showed how the change in perspective brought about by intuitive knowledge provides a more stable state of mind, which is less likely to be acted on by harmful passive affects. Moreover, even though both reason and intuitive knowledge are adequate ways to know things SSA, only intuitive knowledge concerns singular things directly through their essences. As shown earlier, the affective power of intuitive knowledge is significantly greater than reason, since intuitive self-knowledge has an indexical component that relates to me in a direct and intimate manner. Since, unlike reason, intuitive knowledge engages the self directly, it is likely to be much more effective in winning over passionate ideas in the situations of co-presence that I described above. Consequently, we can claim

that intuitive knowledge is more powerful than reason in the face of passions, since this superior form of cognition is less susceptible (if not absolutely invulnerable) to *akrasia*.

Having looked at the extent to which the limits of the affective power of reason apply to intuitive knowledge, we can now appreciate the full ethical import of intuitive knowledge. We can also see why Spinoza sees his ethical project as providing an account of “the mind’s power over the affects and its freedom,” to be *completed* only upon Spinoza presenting his views on the affective power of intuitive knowledge in the second half of Part V. Thanks to the affective power of intuitive knowledge, one gains greater control over one’s passive affects than reason alone would provide. The greater power of intuitive ideas consists in the fact that they are directly related to the essence of our mind, and thus involve ourselves more intimately than rational ideas, which relate to us only in a mediated and detached manner. Intuitive knowledge radically affects one’s life by way of completing the transformative ascent, which is at once an intellectual and affective experience.⁸⁶

To conclude, according to Spinoza, the highest form of happiness, perfection, freedom and virtue are all co-extensive with intuitive knowledge. Although reason serves as the basis of collaborative morality and is certainly necessary in order to lead a happy life, it cannot reach the ultimate happiness and blessedness. Where reason falls short is in failing to achieve the knowledge and peace of mind of the wise man, whom Spinoza describes as being “conscious of himself, and of God, and of things...never ceases to be,

⁸⁶ Note that unlike Broad who thinks that the experience of intuitive knowledge is a mystical experience, I interpret it as an intellectual experience through and through. Yet, as I noted several times, it is an intellectual experience that is at the same time an emotional one.

but always possesses true peace of mind.” Attaining this state of mind is extremely difficult if not impossible; but this is not surprising, given that it is the most excellent goal toward which humans can aim. As Spinoza famously concludes the *Ethics*, “all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare” (EVP42S).

Conclusion

The present dissertation addressed a fundamental but relatively unexplored question in Spinoza scholarship: Why does Spinoza consider intuition to be a more powerful and valuable form of knowledge than reason? If the account I have provided is correct, then intuitive knowledge differs from and is superior to reason not only in terms of its method, but also in terms of its content. Unlike reason, which is a “universal knowledge,” intuitive knowledge descends to a level of particularity, including the adequate knowledge of one’s own essence as it follows directly from God. By attaining this superior form of self-knowledge, intuition also ascends to a higher level of affective power that reason cannot access.

My account of the epistemological distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge showed in detail how these two kinds of adequate knowledge represent two ways of knowing according to the order of the intellect. But are these two ways of knowing at the same time “two ways of living,” as the title of this dissertation suggests? In chapters 5 and 6, I explored how the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge bears on Spinoza’s ethical theory. I concluded Chapter 6 by holding that although reason serves as the basis of collaborative morality and is necessary to lead a happy life, it cannot reach the ultimate happiness and blessedness that intuitive knowledge can reach. It is precisely in this sense that I maintain that reason and intuitive knowledge are, in fact, two ways of living.

My conception of reason and intuitive knowledge as two ways of living does not suggest that the person who has achieved intuitive knowledge would live a *totally* different kind of life than one who merely achieved knowledge of the second kind. The difference between these two ways of living consists in a difference in *degree* of freedom and power over affects, rather than a difference in kind between two radically different life-styles.

Recall that in Chapter 6, I suggested that once one attains intuitive self-knowledge and thereby completes the transformative ascent, she achieves a change in perspective that involves moving away from “the viewpoint of ordinary life” and towards “the viewpoint of my life according to the order of the intellect.” Even though reason is a way of knowing according to the order of the intellect, and thereby an important step in the transformative ascent, it does not, by itself, *complete* the ascent. Since one cannot achieve a complete change in perspective through reason alone, a person who has attained only rational knowledge will live a different life than someone who has achieved intuitive knowledge. More specifically, a person who has attained only rational knowledge will be more prone to the vagaries of fortune and to be acted on by harmful passive affects than someone who has achieved intuitive knowledge. The latter will have a far greater control over the passions and a more stable state of mind, thanks to the fact that she enjoys blessedness. As seen earlier, the more she enjoys this perfect joy, the more control she will have over her passions.

In sum, the difference between reason and intuitive knowledge as two different ways of living according to the order of the intellect is best understood on a scale of

varying degrees of perfection, freedom, and happiness. Even though the good human life for Spinoza is a life of reason, the best and the most perfect life for a human being is a life of intuitive knowledge—one that surpasses a life of reason by achieving the culmination of not only understanding but also happiness.

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