

SPINOZA'S MATERIALIST "EPISTEMOLOGY"

By

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In loving memory of my father, Thomas Henry Whitman,

and

To my wonderful mother, Seranoosh Assadurian Whitman,

Without your love and unshakeable confidence, none of this would be possible.

With all my love.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A common view among interpreters of Baruch Spinoza is that his method of knowing or epistemology is derived from René Descartes's analytic method, *mathesis universalis*. This interpretation develops from both philosophical and historical claims. The main line of argument is that since Descartes furnished modern philosophy with an analytic method based on absolute deductive mathematics and since Spinoza seemingly follows this method, particularly in the *Ethics*, then Spinoza is an adherent to Descartes's rationalism. Furthermore, because Spinoza was active in a Cartesian milieu, seventeenth century Holland,<sup>1</sup> and seems committed to Descartes's analytic method, Spinoza simply develops and goes beyond Descartes's positions to conclude that Nature is absolutely rational and necessary as expressed by Spinoza's monism. Hegel favors this interpretation, viewing Spinoza as merely borrowing analytic methods and mathematical forms from Descartes.<sup>2</sup> Leibniz also came to a similar conclusion in the *Theodicy* Part III where he describes Spinoza as a radical adherent to Descartes's method, thereby rendering Spinoza, "*un Cartésianisme outre.*"<sup>3</sup> Both Edwin Curley and Henry Allison make similar claims about Spinoza's allegiance to Cartesian methods in their respective works.<sup>4</sup> Edwin Curley notes that others such as Etienne Gilson and Roland Caillios described Spinoza as

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Mckeon gives a good account of Spinoza's intellectual milieu, seventeenth century Holland. Mckeon describes how Dutch Cartesianism was dominate at the time of Spinoza schooling as well as among any intellectual circles with which Spinoza associated himself. See Mckeon's "The Background of Spinoza" in *Spinoza—His Thought and Work*, eds. Nathan Rotenstreich and Norma Schneider, (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1983), 24-46.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Macherey's *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick, (University of Minnesota, 2011), 33.

<sup>3</sup> R.J. Delahunty's *Spinoza*, (Routledge, 1985), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Curley, "Spinoza—as an Expositor of Descartes," in *Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*, ed. Siegfried Hessing, (Routledge, 1977), 133-34 and Henry Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction*, (Yale, 1987), 33.



basically Cartesian.<sup>5</sup> Although Stuart Hampshire notes the “great divergences of Descartes and Spinoza,” he also argues that the divergence between the two occurs because Spinoza’s philosophy takes Descartes’s method to its logical extreme and produces a purer form of rationalism.<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation, I will challenge this interpretation by showing that Spinoza’s method is radically opposed to Descartes’s *mathesis universalis*.

By investigating Spinoza’s way to knowing or “epistemology” and what it entails, I will demonstrate that Spinoza’s philosophy is not a mere modification of Descartes’s work and that Spinoza is not an adherent to Cartesian rationalism as many have claimed. However, Spinoza immanently critiques Cartesian principles by working through them so as to develop and express knowledge to the benefit of a Cartesian or Modern philosopher. Keenly aware that one cannot properly do philosophy and achieve adequate knowledge without immanently critiquing one’s constitutive philosophical traditions and historical prejudices, Spinoza directly addresses Cartesian epistemology and its central tenets in order to develop his materialist way to knowing or “epistemology.”

Unlike Cartesian epistemology, which is a philosophical enterprise to establish truth, Spinoza, in his only work on the nature of knowing, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, explicitly states that his treatise is not a work of philosophy: “[...] I warn the reader that I shall not discuss the essence of each perception, and explain it by its proximate cause, because that pertains to Philosophy, but shall discuss only what the Method demands.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, Spinoza’s *Treatise* is concerned with distinguishing a true idea, that is, the best possible

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<sup>5</sup> Curley, “Spinoza—as an Expositor of Descartes,” 133.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, (Oxford, 2005), 30-32.

<sup>7</sup> *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (TdIE)* 51; numbers for *TdIE* indicate sections, not page numbers.

*perception*<sup>8</sup> of mind, from other perceptions, so that one can use the standard of a true idea to discover more truths:

[W]e learned which is the best perception, by whose aid we can reach our perfection [and] we learned which is the first path our mind must enter on to begin well—which is to proceed in its investigation according to certain laws, taking as a standard a given true idea. If this is to be done properly, the Method must, first show how to distinguish a true idea from all other perceptions [.]<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, to a person reading Spinoza through a Cartesian lens, Spinoza's previous assertions may seem paradoxical. To that reader, Spinoza's statements seem to still support the Cartesian method, in which a true idea is first established in order to ground subsequent truths—it would seem that Spinoza's treatise aims to demonstrate that we have a true idea, and thus, *the* true and perfect method. To the Cartesian reader, Spinoza's method would seem to be an activity of philosophy, that is, an activity seeking to understand the cause of and ground to all true ideas.

Yet, Spinoza denies this conclusion, explaining that method should concern itself only with the order by which an individual can know perfectly. Spinoza's engagement with a hypothetical (Cartesian) interlocutor clarifies the goals of the method:

So it may be asked whether our reasoning is good? [S]ince to begin from a given idea requires a demonstration, we must again prove our reasoning [...] and so on to infinity. To this I reply that if, by some fate, someone had proceeded in this way in investigating Nature, i.e., by acquiring other ideas in the proper order, according to the standard of the given true idea, he would never have doubted the truth he possessed (for as we have shown, the truth makes itself manifest) and also everything would have flowed to him of its own accord.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In *Ethics* II Definition 3 Explication, Spinoza clarifies his understanding of perception: “[...] the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object,” (EII Def.3, Exp.). By beginning his treatise with the aim of finding the best possible perception (a *passive* affection of mind), Spinoza implies that the method does not seek to escape concrete reality in favor of an abstract method. Method must begin in the concrete context of its generation and does not represent a universal rational perspective.

<sup>9</sup> *TdIE* 49.

<sup>10</sup> *TdIE* 43 and 44.

Whereas the imagined interlocutor argues that reality or truth can only manifest itself through an extrinsic demonstration, Spinoza argues that the order of knowing is sufficient in-itself; otherwise, truth would not manifest itself in any true encounter. Even if by chance someone were to acquire a true idea, that true idea would not manifest itself as true unless it overcame doubt through an extrinsic proof. In this case, the *perception* of a true idea, an actuality to which mind is passive, would not have any reality as a sensation or phenomenon of mind, which is absurd *prima facie*. As Spinoza notes, this would contradict the necessity of living and deny the reality or actual experience of mental phenomena:

[S]ome Skeptic [may] still doubt both the first truth itself and everything we shall deduce according to the standard of the first truth. If so, then either he will speak contrary to his own consciousness [...] (For as far as the needs of life and society are concerned necessity forces them to suppose that they exist, and to seek their own advantage, and [...] to affirm and deny many things.) For, if someone proves something to them, they do not know whether the argument is a proof or not. If they deny, grant, or oppose, they do not know that they deny, grant, or oppose. So they must be regarded as automata, completely lacking a mind.<sup>11</sup>

The very reality to which a corresponding idea might refer would be denied actuality, or more specifically, intellectual actuality. Without a mental process of verification, it would be literally unreal.

However, for Spinoza, a true idea is a perception: something that refers to and expresses an actual affect. As a result, a true idea, and subsequently, a true method, should not only manifest itself because it is real, but a true idea can become an affective standard to habituate the minds and intellects of others. As Spinoza notes, his method uses the perception of a true idea to accustom individuals to their own internal mediations:

[W]hat we cannot acquire by fate, we may still acquire by a deliberate plan [...] so that it would be evident that to prove the truth and good reasoning, we require no tools except

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<sup>11</sup> *TdIE* 47 and 48.

the truth itself and good reasoning [...] [I]n this way men become accustomed to their own internal meditations.<sup>12</sup>

The perception of a true idea not only internally justifies itself (because truth makes itself manifest without extrinsic reference), but also, a true idea *affects and restrains* the mind/intellect from the *perceptions and affects* of other confused ideas. “Method must, first, show how to distinguish a true idea from all other perceptions, and to restrain the mind from those other perceptions.”<sup>13</sup> The perception of a true idea excludes other perceptions, which indicates that the true idea is more powerful.<sup>14</sup> Through Spinoza’s method, one’s affirmations of improper ideas are *affected* and limited, and in the process, the way and desire to knowing is opened.

This habituation to knowing cannot be the direct discovery of causes or their justifications. As Spinoza notes, method does not concern the causes of things or the *convention* of reasoning by which causes are denoted. “Method must speak about Reasoning, or<sup>15</sup> about the intellection; i.e., Method is not the reasoning itself by which we understand the causes of things, much less the understanding of the causes of things.”<sup>16</sup> Instead, method provides a means to seek the causes of things and to know unknown things by the standard or perception of a true idea. “So we shall take care to explain *how* it [a true idea] is to be used, that we may understand unknown things by this *kind* of knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Spinoza’s language consistently implies that his method shows the *manner* in which true ideas are used and that knowledge of unknown things

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<sup>12</sup> *TdIE* 44 and 45.

<sup>13</sup> *TdIE* 49.

<sup>14</sup> See also section 1 where Spinoza explicitly states that he is searching for a “good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected,” (*TdIE* 1).

<sup>15</sup> According to my translation, this is an exclusive ‘or’. The latin reads: “*rursus methodus necessario debet loqui de ratiocinatione aut de intellectione.*” The latin term ‘*aut*’ can indicate an exclusive ‘or’ whereas the latin term ‘*sive*’ indicates an inclusive ‘or’. Spinoza is very fond of using ‘*sive*’ to indicate an inclusive ‘or’. So, the choice of ‘*aut*’ probably indicates ‘*aut*’ means an exclusive ‘or’: either this (reasoning) or that (intellection). For Spinoza’s original Latin texts, see Carl Gebhardt, *Spinoza Opera: Im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Vols. 1-4, (Carl Winter-Verlag, 1972).

<sup>16</sup> *TdIE* 37.

<sup>17</sup> *TdIE* 29. Emphasis added.

can only refer to a true idea as a standard by which to examine one's own understanding. The knowledge of essences and proximate causes, which have their own specific contents and orders of inquiry or causation, cannot be justified by the standard of the true idea. Since truth should make itself manifest, there cannot be a method which justifies the actual content or cause of a specific mode of inquiry. A specific inquiry depends upon specific definitions and principles.

Spinoza's method is more properly described by the Latin term '*mos*,' or convention based on habituation than a universal epistemological method: the student or learner is habituated by the perception of a true idea so that he or she may distinguish proper objects of inquiry and proceed to examine the truth of those objects without straying outside the proper limits of inquiry.

Juxtaposed with Spinoza's *Ethics*, his main work of philosophy, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is propaedeutic to that work and to Spinoza's philosophical work in general. The *Treatise* provides the habituation to knowing and a standard of knowing by which to investigate the definitions and demonstrations in the *Ethics* without straying from the content and order expressed in the *Ethics* or imposing undue prejudices onto the text. That is, the *Treatise* helps the reader to examine the causes presented in the *Ethics*, circumventing the rejection of those causes as paradoxical relative to one's prior beliefs and the assumption that Spinoza's demonstrations are absolute. Understanding the proper function of Spinoza's method allows a reader to accept the definitions and inquiry of Spinoza's philosophy as an ethical and political project to enhance human perfection, as opposed to a rigid submission to authoritative "knowledge" or absolute demonstrative certainty.<sup>18</sup> According to Spinoza's method and

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<sup>18</sup> For a good analysis of how error for Spinoza arises from improperly seeking demonstrative certainty based on the need for authority, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein's article, "The Ambiguity of the Imagination and the Ambivalence of Language in Maimonides and Spinoza," in *Maimonides and His Heritage*, ed. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Lenn E. Goodman, James Allen Grady, (SUNY Press, 2009), 98-100.

philosophy, these latter forms of “knowing” limit the achievement of human perfection or philosophical knowledge.

Nonetheless, to properly engage in philosophy and resist dogmatic adherence to an assumed (extrinsic) truth requires the ability to understand what the definitions of particular inquiries and forms of knowledge do. Understanding what a definition can do to establish an investigation into *a* truth and the limits of demonstration and language with respect to an established definition is necessary for philosophical activity. Thus, Spinoza’s discussion of method in the *Treatise* is a prerequisite for his philosophical works.

### **Terminology**

So as to avoid common misconceptions of Spinoza’s method resulting from the application of conventional meanings for terms such as ‘reality’, ‘perfection’, ‘good’, and ‘bad’, I will provide here a brief analysis of these terms from a Spinozian perspective. Following Spinoza’s own provisos in section twelve of the *TdIE* that good and bad are only said in certain respects and that perfection and imperfection cannot apply to a thing considered in its true nature or in-itself, I wish to emphasize that, for Spinoza, attributes, such as reality, perfection, or good, cannot apply directly to the thing to which they are attributed. As will be demonstrated, these properties are neither in things nor properly of things.

Spinoza’s insistence that his method will proceed assuredly as long as one attends to the thought of a thing so necessary, i.e. God,<sup>19</sup> is warranted because the concept of God clearly manifests the fact that ideas and their objects, or *ideata*, are irreducible. The idea of God shows that the order of properties or attributes cannot be identical with nor present themselves as a part

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<sup>19</sup> “[T]o restrain the mind from confusing false, fictitious, and doubtful ideas with true ones. It is my intention to explain this fully here, so as to engage my Readers in the thought of a thing so necessary [...]” (*TdIE* 50).

of that to which they are attributed. In a Letter to Simon De Vries,<sup>20</sup> Spinoza defines and demonstrates that God must be a thing conceived as having infinite attributes in order to correctly describe *or think its reality*:

But you say that I have not demonstrated that a substance (*or being*) can have more attributes than one. Perhaps you have neglected to pay attention to my demonstrations. For I have used two: *first*, that nothing is more evident to us than that we conceive each being under some attribute, and that the more reality or being a being has the more attributes must be attributed to it; so a being absolutely infinite must be defined[.]<sup>21</sup>

According to this definition and demonstration, the concept of an absolutely infinite being requires that all attributes be predicated of it, including the attribute of existence. A finite or infinite intellect would be, according to this object or *ideatum*, forced or compelled to attribute existence, perfection, absolute truth, etc. However, the idea of or attribution of God's existence cannot itself be what is affirmed of God; the *idea of existence* is not itself God's eternal existence. Thus, what is affirmed is not the idea, which indicates that the idea does not equate with or constitute a real external feature that inheres or belongs as a part of God. Properties or attributions of things do not express the things as they are but rather indicate that an attributing agent, an intellect, is compelled.<sup>22</sup> In this case, the existence of God is not a property or

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<sup>20</sup> Letter 9, also known as the "Letter on Definitions."

<sup>21</sup> Letter 9.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Rosen argues that Descartes has a similar view given his understanding and use of the ontological argument:

Assuming the validity of the ontological argument, man may be confident that there is a God. But he cannot be confident that God thinks. For Descartes, thought and extension are each attributes of substances, which, one may say, are in themselves unknowable. If thoughts are modifications of an attribute of an unknowable substance, then our conception of God as Thinking may be itself "modal" (to use a Spinozist phrase) or even illusory. What we call "thinking" may be a metaphorical or analogical term for some other power, by which God is in himself as *causa sui* (again a Spinozist expression) and cause of the visible world. Stanley Rosen, "Hegel, Descartes, and Spinoza" in *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Essays in Critical Appreciation*, ed. James B. Wilbur, (Van Gorcum, 1976), 119.

Rosen's interpretation leads him to argue that Descartes's understanding of human will cannot equate to a divine will. Human will cannot be analogically "similar" to a projected, posited, or attributed "divine will." Rather than resulting in a complete deficiency, this implies that the creative and intellectual activities of the human will are primary and can establish and/or analyze concepts. This is in no way similar to Spinoza, since Spinoza does not posit initially a separate will nor does he assume that analogical relations imply a subject-object split which would allow the detached creative and constructive capacities of a mental faculty in an idealized "space." Although Rosen

propositional claim, but rather, God's existence is a force compelling the attributions of perfection, existence, etc.

Moses Maimonides, an important predecessor to and influence on Spinoza,<sup>23</sup> makes a similar claim about God's attributes when he states:

It is clear then that an attribute may be only two things. It is either the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, in which case it is an *explanation* of a term. We in this respect do not consider it impossible to *predicate* such an attribute of God [...] Or the attribute is different from the thing of which it is predicated, being a notion superadded to that thing. This would lead to the conclusion that attribute is an *accident belonging to that essence*.<sup>24</sup>

Like Spinoza, Maimonides argues that an attribute may be a necessary expression of an object, i.e. God, in which case, it can only *explain* God's actuality.<sup>25</sup> This is because the attribute as a *product of predication* must also be considered as different from its object. As a result, the attribute is an accident or superadded notion to the thing even though it is included in an essential description.<sup>26</sup>

Immediately following his previous definition of an absolutely infinite being, Spinoza introduces another and notes that this second definition is one which he finds most compelling:

[S]econd, and the one I judge best, is that the more attributes I attribute to a being the more I am compelled to attribute existence to it; that is, the more I conceive it as true. It would be quite the contrary if I had feigned a Chimaera, or something like that.<sup>27</sup>

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does an excellent job explaining Descartes's relation to Spinoza, he wrongly assumes that Spinoza is following the "quasi-mathematical rationalism of Descartes," (ibid, 125).

<sup>23</sup> For a collection of essays detailing Maimonides's and other Jewish influences on Spinoza, see *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy*, eds. Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman, (SUNY 2002). See also Warren Zev Harvey, "A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 19, (1981), 151-172.

<sup>24</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Vol. I, trans. Shlomo Pines, (University of Chicago Press, 1963), Chapter 51, 113, Emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> I disagree with Aaron Garrett's claim that Maimonides and Gersonides did not have an influence on Spinoza's "technical" understand of definition. See Aaron Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*, (Cambridge, 2003), 152.

<sup>26</sup> For an additional analysis on the similarity between Maimonides's and Spinoza's concept of attribute, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein's article, "Maimonidean Aspects in Spinoza's Thought," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 17, (1994), 168-69.

<sup>27</sup> Letter 9.



The second definition clearly indicates that the reality of a “given” object must involve the activity of an intellect. The more an intellect *can* attribute properties to *or think about* something, the more the intellect’s activity is compelled to assert existence to the “object.” The ability of an intellect to think in-and-of itself implies an intellectual *reality* that *prima facie* does not deny existence to the object but rather affirms it so as to continually or actively think of it.<sup>28</sup> In the case of God, the ability to attribute or conceive of an intellectual reality for that object or *ideatum*, i.e. God, implies that those attributes are unending, which in turn both includes the attribute of eternal existence and simultaneously rejects it as “capturing” God’s actuality. Eternal existence is not a discovery about an external thing, God, but rather, is a “product” of an intellect affirming or expressing its power; the power of the affirming intellect is not separate from what is affirmed. Presence or absence is not an aspect of an external thing to which an idea corresponds or which it has, but “presence” is the actuality of thinking immediately involving its own cause for thinking.

When Spinoza speaks of his method as requiring a “given true idea,”<sup>29</sup> he does not intend that the necessity of ideas or properties is derived from and dependent on external things;

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<sup>28</sup> In “Essence, Existence and Power in Ethics I: The Foundations of Proposition 16,” Alexandre Matheron shows that the conceivability of God or any object requires that the mind by definition must assert existence as a condition for that idea to exist. As a result, the idea itself must be an affirmation or intellectual reality that does not exclude the reality of the object but involves that existence so as to continue in its intellectual *actuality* or affirmation. See Alexandre Matheron, “Essence, Existence and Power in Ethics I: The Foundations of Proposition 16,” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, (E.J. Brill, 1991), 26-29.

Michael della Rocca argues that Spinoza’s philosophy can be derived from the principle of sufficient reason. Della Rocca’s use of the principle of sufficient reason does have some similarity to my claim that intelligibility requires existence through which an idea must be conceived. However, della Rocca assumes that Spinoza advocates a strong rationalism and that sufficient explanations indicate corresponding intellectual realities that agree completely with reality, that is, explanations are revelations of something real, e.g. Nature’s laws. See Michael della Rocca, *Spinoza*, (Routledge, 2008), 4-12. I argue that something like the principle of sufficient reason implies that the activities of the mind are primary and cannot reduce Nature to a specific content. This entails that aspectual definitions provide the means to express (diverse) actuality so as to continually think that specific modal *actuality*.

<sup>29</sup> “From this is may be inferred that Method is nothing but a reflexive knowledge, or an idea of an idea; and because there is no idea of an idea, unless there is first an idea, there will be no Method unless there is first an idea. So that Method will be good which shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea” (*TdIE* 38). I disagree with Edwin Curley’s analysis of the phrase “a given true idea” or “*datae verae ideae*”

instead, he intends that ideas express their own reality. Thus, properties of true ideas such as perfection, good, etc. must be due to a specific intellectual respect or *mode* of thinking and do not inhere in external objects or reduce external objects to that property. This is why Spinoza says that to acquire truth or falsity must be spoken of metaphorically when applied to external things:

The first meaning of true and false seems to have had its origin in storytelling, and the tale was said to be true if it was of something that had occurred in actuality, and false if it was of something that had nowhere occurred. Later, philosophers made use of this signification to denote the agreement or disagreement of an idea with its object (*ideatum*). Therefore an idea is said to be true if it shows us the thing as it is in itself, false if it shows us the thing otherwise than as it really is. For ideas are merely mental narrations or accounts of nature. And hence these terms came to be applied *metaphorically* to lifeless things, as when we talk about true or false gold, as if the gold presented before us were telling us something about itself that either is in itself or not.<sup>30</sup>

Spinoza's examples in the *TdIE* of a true idea, such as a true idea of a circle,<sup>31</sup> indicate that what is clearly and distinctly or truly or adequately perceived of a thing can only be judged as true from that respect or according to the specific "content" expressed by the intellect, i.e. the specific *way* or *mode* of thinking. Emphasizing the activities of the intellect, Spinoza discounts the possibility that external things are in any way contingent since the properties of ideas, such as doubtfulness, cannot apply directly to "external" objects:

[*What are the properties of truth? Certainty is not in things.*] The properties of truth, or a true idea, are (1) that it is clear and distinct, (2) that it removes all doubt, or, in a word, that it is certain. Those who look for certainty in things themselves are making the same mistake as when they look for truth in things themselves. And although we may say that a thing is uncertain, we are figuratively taking the *ideatum* for the idea. In the same way we also call a thing doubtful, unless perchance in this case by uncertainty we mean contingency, or a thing that causes us uncertainty or doubt.<sup>32</sup>

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presented in a footnote to his translation of the above passage. See footnote 31 on page 19 of his translation of the *TdIE*. Instead, I agree with Koyre, with whom Curley disagrees. Koyre argues that the phrase "a given true idea" is best interpreted to mean that there is a true idea and not that we are given a true idea representing some external truth.

<sup>30</sup> *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy (CP)*, Appendix 1, Chapter 6. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> *TdIE* 33

<sup>32</sup> *CP* Appendix 1, Chapter 6.

The inability of the intellect or mind to determine real properties which inhere in external objects directly manifests that an actuality which an intellect may describe and *affirm* cannot be solely due to an intellectual criterion. As a result, the necessity or reality of Nature cannot be called contingent since Nature “within itself” must generate every actuality irrespective of flawed human attributions. As Spinoza notes:

[*The Possible and the Contingent are only the defect of our intellect.*] If anyone wishes to deny this, his error can be demonstrated to him with no trouble. For if he attends to nature and the way it depends on God, he will find nothing contingent in things, that is, nothing that can either exist or not exist on the part of the thing, or is a real contingency, as it is commonly called.<sup>33</sup>

Only when the mind or intellect has been moved to or compelled to act or express in a specific way can issues of appropriateness or adequacy be applied. Nevertheless, an appropriate or adequate idea does not and cannot express an external thing as it is in-itself so that there is no true correspondence to a correct or good reality. This is why Spinoza begins the *TdIE* with the statement: “[...] I saw that all things which were the cause or object<sup>34</sup> of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as mind was moved by them.”<sup>35</sup> The major theme of the *TdIE* is to show that moral and all strong normative categories of Nature are not only wrong, but also that by Nature, attributes should be understood in a different and more “true,” dynamic, or equivocal way than as dogmatically adhering to an absolute perspective.<sup>36</sup> How one sets the terms or defines the “object” and understands what those terms and attributes can do or “mean”

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> I find it problematic that in the above Edwin Curley translation the word ‘object’ would be introduced let alone the term ‘cause’. The original Latin text does not call for these terms; rather, this translation must be attributed to Curley’s philosophical interpretation of Spinoza. The Latin text reads: “[...] *cum viderem omnia, a quibus et quae timebam, nihil neque boni neque mali in se habere, nisi quatenus ab iis animus movebatur.*” A more literal and accurate translation would be: “Since I saw all, by which and of which I was afraid, had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as by them *animus* or mind was moved.” Nowhere in the original text are extrinsic objects or causes mentioned; in fact, the activities of the mind or *animus* are primary in this passage.

<sup>35</sup> *TdIE* 1.

<sup>36</sup> Idit Dobbs-Weinstein shows that the need to mimetically repeat dogmatic perspectives/beliefs precludes the possibility of a dynamic understanding which is based on viewing attributes as equivocal. See Dobbs-Weinstein, “The Ambiguity of the Imagination and the Ambivalence of Language in Maimonides and Spinoza,” 108-109.

in order to express a specific activity of thinking is crucial to the development of adequate and active thinking or knowing.<sup>37</sup>

### **A Way to See Spinoza's Materialist "Epistemology"**

Spinoza's method *or Mos*, by which we can set the terms for human knowing *or* perfection, cannot guarantee that truth or perfection. *Mos* is still an extrinsic or conventional practice that can lead to thinking if the learner is capable. Thus, learning or knowledge cannot be reduced to the rules or procedures which Spinoza presents. This is why throughout the text, Spinoza continually presents his convention as the best way to learning or human perfection. Human perfection manifests "itself" or can be attained from these procedures, but it is not reduced to them. "This done [the laying down rules for our perfection], the highest perfection man can reach will easily manifest itself."<sup>38</sup> Whereas Descartes proposes a method that establishes purely an epistemological criterion for knowledge, a criterion able to universally guarantee the achievement of knowledge, and which subsequently leads Descartes to advocate an intellectual "virtue" based on detached mental faculties, Spinoza's method to knowing advocates the opposite. Spinoza's method to knowing or "epistemology" requires a keen awareness that principles of knowledge are multiple and can be describe by many definitions, i.e. nominalism, and Spinoza's nominalism derives its epistemic virtue by expressing concrete material practices that generate specific forms of knowledge, i.e. materialism.

The purpose and goal of this work is to show that through an investigation of Spinoza's way to knowing or "epistemology," it is apparent that Spinoza is not aligned with Descartes's rationalist method. In fact, one will see that Spinoza's way to knowing requires a non-rationalist,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 104-106.

<sup>38</sup> *TdIE* 25. Quote modified.

materialist understanding of the source of knowledge. As a result, Spinoza's way to knowing or "epistemology" requires a nominalist understanding of method so as to properly involve unique ethical-political-material conditions.

Chapter one will show that Spinoza's understanding of definition directly eschews Cartesian assumptions of knowledge in order to show that definitions should lead to a way of knowing that is concrete, singular, and political. From this, it will be apparent that Spinoza's understanding of definition, contrary to Descartes's *concept* of definition or essence, leads to a proper expression of intellect rather than an improper concept of mind which is crucial for Descartes's epistemology.

The concrete and singular nature of adequate definitions entails, for Spinoza, an immanent involvement of material causes so that a purely intellectual/epistemological criterion for understanding is impossible. In opposition to the view that Spinoza's epistemology is deficient as from a Cartesian perspective, which, for example, Jean-Luc Marion argues, I will show in chapter two that Spinoza's understanding of knowledge is immune to Cartesian criticisms and critical of its epistemological positions. I will show that Spinoza's understanding of knowledge due to its inclusion of material causes is superior to Cartesian epistemology.

Chapter three will show how the necessity of a materialist "epistemology" requires an understanding of body in order to develop and express intellectual perfection. Rather than using a theory of materiality to argue for intellectual supremacy as Descartes does, Spinoza, starting from Cartesian principles about materiality, argues that body must express itself in human desirative, intellectual, and social activities. The nature of body, interpreted from certain Cartesian assumptions such as efficient causality, for Spinoza implies an active materiality which

expresses “itself” in many modalities and aspects, one of which is the “human” material-minded individual.

The necessary involvement of material bodies and conditions in human living translates into the registers of body and mind, both of which are necessary to human striving. As a result, chapter four will show that for Spinoza, Cartesian concepts such as freewill and intellectual indifference to sensibility cannot be really possible. For Spinoza, material involvement reveals a *necessarily* political dimension to human knowing which expresses itself in a social-political striving to “generate” knowledge. The political dimension of knowing entails an immanent critique of Cartesianism so as to generate shared knowledge and turn Cartesian critics, if possible, into allies through a philosophical-political emendation. This emendation is achieved by explaining the nature of material causes and impoverished conditions which produce Cartesian intellectual indifference.

Throughout this work Spinoza’s critique of epistemology is presented against the grain of the history of philosophy. However, Spinoza is not an ahistorical thinker—he draws on historical resources that resist the narrative of ever-increasing philosophical progress and development. Judeo-Arabic Aristotelianism, an other (materialist) Aristotelian tradition informs Spinoza’s thinking and work. Drawing on this other tradition allows Spinoza to resist early modern philosophy’s inheritance of an abstract, Christian, and metaphysical reading of Aristotle and philosophy in general. Perplexing this “neat” inheritance allows Spinoza to challenge early modern philosophy’s development from “Aristotelianism” as well as involve concrete, philosophical history against the teleological development that early modern philosophy claims to achieve, i.e. the completion and resolution of ancient philosophy and the means to resolve any future philosophical problems. I will often present Judeo-Arabic texts in this work so as to

reveal Spinoza's debt to and *shared* struggle with Judeo-Arabic philosophy's resistance to abstract, dehistoricized philosophy. Furthermore, I will present some philosophical inheritors of Spinoza's critical project so as to show how the continued struggle against abstract, dehistoricized philosophy requires a singular, continual, and historically informed critique. The introduction of works from thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno shows a counter-history and a persistent alternative philosophical tradition. The continual need to address concrete conditions with a philosophy informed by history reveals the necessary involvement of philosophical allies such as Spinoza to achieve a radical critique of idealized and idealist Western philosophy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STATUS OF DEFINITION: PRODUCT OF MIND OR ACT OF INTELLECT

As Spinoza states in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, his method for emending the intellect and achieving the way to certain knowledge requires that an individual know the conditions of a good definition:

So the right way of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition. This will proceed the more successfully and easily, the better we have defined a thing. So the chief point of this second part of the Method is concerned solely with this: knowing the conditions of a good definition.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, Spinoza claims that doubt comes about through an improper investigation of things, principally due to the improper understanding of definition.

For doubt is nothing but the suspension of the mind concerning some affirmation or negation, which it would affirm or deny if something did not occur to it, the ignorance of which must render its knowledge of the thing imperfect. From this it is inferred that doubt always arises from the fact that things are investigated without order.<sup>40</sup>

Spinoza's address of the relationship between definitions and doubt is certainly aimed at Descartes, whose entire method and philosophy is based on the use of radical doubt.

Furthermore, Spinoza faults the philosopher, i.e. Descartes, who would use doubt about Nature to establish the ultimate and secure foundation for knowledge:

From this it follows that, only so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God, can we call true ideas in doubt by supposing that perhaps some deceiving God exists, who misleads us even in the things most certain. I.e., if we attend to the knowledge we have concerning the origin of all things [...] <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *TdIE* 94.

<sup>40</sup> *TdIE* 80.

<sup>41</sup> *TdIE* 79.



In contradistinction, Spinoza claims that if an individual were to begin from proper definitions of objects, and most importantly a proper definition of Nature, he or she would proceed without any doubt and achieve the highest certainty in knowing.

Further, if someone proceeds rightly, by investigating those things which ought to be investigated first, with no interruption in the connection of things, and knows how to define problems precisely, before striving for knowledge of them, he will never have anything but the most certain ideas—i.e., clear and distinct ideas.<sup>42</sup>

Spinoza's claim that a secure method of knowing would manifest itself from a secure and proper definition directly contradicts the Cartesian method, which requires a faculty of judgment (as expressed by the *cogito*) to determine the validity of definitions. The understanding of definition is the primary point of contention between Spinoza's and Descartes's methods; definitions for Spinoza are indemonstrable principles of a particular inquiry, whereas for Descartes, they require demonstration, or at the very least, some activity of conceptualization by the mind to establish their essential foundation in subsequent deductions.

## **Descartes**

Within the Cartesian method, there are certainly definitions given of objects to be examined or analyzed by the *cogito*. In Descartes's writings, the term 'definition' more consistently translates into the terms 'nature' or 'essence.' For him, essences or definitions express the timeless nature of an object and are not subject to contingency.

We must of course distinguish between on the one hand things which by their very nature are susceptible of change—such as the fact that at present I am writing or not writing as the case may be, or the fact that one person is prudent, another imprudent—and on the other hand things which never change, such as everything which belongs to the essence of something [...] It can undoubtedly be said of contingent items that the nature of things leaves open the possibility that they may be either in one state or in a different state. [...] But when it is a question of the essence of something, it would be quite foolish and self-contradictory to say that the nature of things leaves open the possibility that the essence

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<sup>42</sup> *TdIE* 80.

of something may have a different character from the one it actually has. The impossibility of existing without a valley is part of the nature of a mountain[.]<sup>43</sup>

The definition of the mountain requires the sensible experience of a human knower to assert its essence as a timeless configuration of two terms: mountain and valley. However, this sensible experience could be a contingent fact of the universe such that it would require further principles or premises to warrant its reality. Essences, primarily material natures, require a demonstration, or at least, must be conceptualized with more secure and simple intellectual natures to justify their conceptual reality. As result, sensible experience cannot be a completely secure and self-evident basis for concepts; instead, pure intellectual intuition of other natures must provide the foundation for reasoning.

By ‘intuition’ I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding. Alternatively, and this comes to the same thing, intuition is the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason. Because it is simpler, it is more certain than deduction, though deduction, as we noted above, is not something a man can perform wrongly. Thus everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three lines, and a sphere by a single surface, and the like. Perceptions such as these are more numerous than most people realize, disdaining as they do to turn their minds to such simple matters.<sup>44</sup>

For Descartes, these simple intuitive perceptions are known through themselves, *per se nota*.<sup>45</sup>

By examining the nature or content of the perception, a mind is compelled to assert the truth of the perception. The perception of a triangle includes the boundary established by three lines. To conceive a triangle, the affirmation of three lines bounded together cannot exceed the nature of a triangle. The affirmation of three bounded lines cannot be applied to other natures and is

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<sup>43</sup> AT VIII B, 347-348.

<sup>44</sup> AT X, 368.

<sup>45</sup> Descartes describes a simple nature known *per se* as: “We should note that there are very few pure and simple natures which we can intuit straight off and *per se* (independently of any others) either in our sensory experience or by means of a light innate within us” (AT X, 383).

completely restricted to the triangle. Conversely, the concept of a triangle cannot be known or intuitively perceived without this affirmation and thus, requires a simple expression *solely* through this concept. The link between subject and predicate is eternal and requires an intuitively compelling affirmation irrespective of other external conditions, such as sensation.

As Descartes notes, there can be no room for doubt, since doubt would imply that either the nature of a triangle or the affirmation of the three bounded lines could be associated or conceived with other perceptions. In the case of sensory experience, it is easy to see that many extrinsic conditions can occur together with a perception without destroying that sensed object, and conversely, many perceptions may be removed, thereby altering the original sensation. For sensation, there is no necessity expressed through the perceptions or possible concepts dependent upon them.

For Descartes, the self-evident quality of simple natures or perceptions is not merely useful and restricted to a set of simple eternal truths, such as triangles and spheres. These self-evident truths also include inferential principles by which to establish and ground other truths.

The self-evidence and certainty of intuition is required not only for apprehending single propositions, but also for any train of reasoning whatever. Take for example, the inference that 2 plus 2 equals 3 plus 1: not only must we intuitively perceive that 2 plus 2 make 4, and that 3 plus 1 make 4, but also that the original proposition follows necessarily from the other two.<sup>46</sup>

Intuited simple natures can be compounded or comprehended with other perceptions and conceptions so as to ground the veracity and reality of these dependent concepts. As long as concepts can be clearly and firmly associated with foundational simple natures, the reality of these dependent concepts or propositions can be established as derivatively necessary. The simple and irreducible necessity of a self-evident, *per se nota*, nature establishes the reality of a distant proposition in the chain of deduction or experience. Although a particular experience or

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<sup>46</sup> AT X, 369.

proposition may be confused relative to the many extrinsic conditions and perceptions surrounding it, the irreducible simple necessity of a foundational nature once associated with the proposition or nature establishes it as real. However, reality must be determined by being reduced to or related to the static and eternal nature of a foundational truth.

These dependent truths must reflect a similar qualitative reality as the foundational truth. Descartes's famous pronouncement that "my entire physics is nothing other than geometry"<sup>47</sup> expresses this view well. Whatever dynamic and complex physical motions may be sensed can be reduced to the foundational abstract geometrical natures intuited and through which all physical understanding must be mediated. Descartes describes the process by which distant and dependent phenomena may be secured and understood through a foundational intuition with an example of proportionality:

If [...] we are asked to find the four proportionals, 3, 6, 12, 24, given any two consecutive members of the series [...] it will be a very easy task to find the others. In this case, we shall say that the proposition we are seeking is investigated in a direct way. But if two alternate numbers are given, such as 3 and 12 [...] we are to work out the others from these [...] we shall say that the problem is investigated indirectly by the first method. [...] But these points will suffice to enable the reader to see what I mean when I say that some proposition is deduced 'directly' or 'indirectly', and will suffice to make him bear in mind that on the basis of our knowledge of the most simple and primary things, we can make many discoveries, even in other disciplines, through careful reflection and discriminating inquiry.<sup>48</sup>

In this case, both direct and indirect methods to solve the problem of whether complex chains of proportions are related or equivalent depend upon how proportions are associated and equated with "simpler" proportions.<sup>49</sup> Although "derivative" proportions may be intuited themselves as self-evident, e.g. 12 and 24 are halved and doubled respectively, this reality is merely an appearance of the ratio of 1 to 2. As long as the simple ratio of 1 to 2 is intuited with other

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<sup>47</sup> AT II, 268.

<sup>48</sup> AT X, 386-387.

<sup>49</sup> Algebraically, the direct method can be represented as  $3/6 = 6/X$ , and the indirect method can be represented as  $3/X = X/12$ . In either case, the resolution is based on a more original or "simpler" ratio.

ratios *or remembered* as a reality undergirding intermediate proportions, deduced and complex proportions can be sure of their reality as a proportion (of 1 to 2). In fact, the appearance of the ratio of 1 to 2 either as an intuition or memory with a specific relation of numbers has the causal force to establish that relation as a proportion. The numbers are unreal as a proportion unless guaranteed by the appearance of a certain intuition or assured chain of deductions.<sup>50</sup> Irrespective of whether a proportion seems self-evident without the appearance of grounding simple proportions, the reality and knowledge of the “derivative” proportion is unjustified.

By wedding epistemic principles to ontological reality, Descartes insures that the way of knowing also establishes the being of objects, or at least, must secure that reality—reality being insufficient to establish itself as actual. According to Descartes’s *mathesis universalis*, the content of the objects of inquiry is unjustified/unreal unless associated with and deduced from a simple self-evident nature(s):

When I considered the matter more closely, I came to see that the exclusive concern of mathematics is with questions of order or measure and that it is irrelevant whether the measure in questions involves numbers, shapes, stars, sounds, or any other object whatever. This made me realize that there must be a general science which explains all the points that can be raised concerning order and measure irrespective of the subject-matter, and that this science should be termed *mathesis universalis*[.]<sup>51</sup>

These simple natures must be abstract since essences based on sensory phenomena are derived from concrete and specific contexts. Although the definition of a mountain and valley perfectly

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<sup>50</sup> David Lachterman notes that Descartes’s penchant for resolving complex mean-proportionals indicates that his method is one of constructing problems in order to show that problems are reducible to basic roots or simpler ratios. This example shows that Descartes relies on equations to solve unknown values. As Lachterman notes:

The discovery of one or more mean-proportionals through the appropriate association of known with unknown terms is the paradigm of ingenious discovery in the *Rules* and is at the heart of both the algebraic and the geometrical techniques deployed in the *Geometry*. So, for example, extracting a root is a matter of establishing an appropriate series (a continuous proportion) in which one or more mean-proportionals are inserted between a chosen unit and the term whose root is being sought (for example,  $1 : x :: x : x^2 :: x^2 : y$ ; therefore  $\sqrt[3]{y} = x$ . When questions or problems are "involved" or "complicated" (*involutae*), that is, when we are given the extremes and must discover certain intermediates in an inverted order (*turbato ordine*), then "the whole artifice of this topic consists in this, that by supposing the unknowns to be knowns we can prepare for ourselves an easy and direct route of investigation, no matter how intricate the difficulties are" (Rule 17). Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, (Routledge, 1989), 155.

<sup>51</sup> AT X, 377-378.

implies a simple nature, neither the mountain exceeding the conceptual affirmation of and association with a valley nor vice versa, these material essences are derived from a world of contingent and fleeting perceptions. Thus, in the order of essences or “simple” natures, abstract and purely intellectual self-evident, *per se nota*, perceptions must ground derivative “essences” or propositions.

By withdrawing the basis for definitions or essences from the sensible world, Descartes requires a mental source to secure all subsequent essences and propositions, since without such a source, material and sensible natures would be left in the dire position of skepticism. As a result, in principle, an intuitive intellectual nature must be capable of deducing *or participating* in a deduction which produces and verifies subsequent natures, i.e. material natures. In principle, even self-evident intuitions are qualitatively the same as subsequent deduced natures, or rather propositional definitions, because everything is abstract.<sup>52</sup> The difference between intuitions and deduced propositions depends upon the activity of the mind. Whether the mind has executed a conceptualization on two terms representing ideas to produce an immediate link between them determines whether the produced idea is considered an intuition or a deducible proposition. Thus, an intuition is merely a proposition which has a different position in the order of knowing (or in the execution of a mind); the difference between a deduced proposition and an intuition is primarily functional.

But if we look on deduction as a completed process, as we did in Rule Seven, then it no longer signifies a movement but rather the completion of a movement. That is why we are supposing that the deduction is made through intuition when it is simple and transparent, but not when it is complex and involved. When the latter is the case, we call it ‘enumeration’ or ‘induction’, since the intellect cannot simultaneously grasp it as a

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<sup>52</sup> Descartes notes that “[I]t is possible to have experiential knowledge which is certain only of things which are entirely simple and absolute” (AT X, 394). And given that certainty is dependent upon simple natures, Descartes states that “[t]hese considerations make it obvious why arithmetic and geometry prove to be much more certain than other disciplines: they alone are concerned with an object so pure and simple that they make no assumptions that experience might render uncertain” (AT X, 365).

whole, and its certainty in a sense depends on memory, which must retain the judgments we have made on the individual parts of the enumeration if we are to derive a single conclusion from them taken as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

In either case, the mind provides the substantial or ontological support to sustain any coherence in an essence or proposition. This is why Descartes consistently uses the language of an attentive mind.

We can best learn how mental intuition is to be employed by comparing it with ordinary vision. If one tries to look at many objects at one glance, one sees none of them distinctly. Likewise, if one is inclined to attend to many things at the same time in a single act of thought, one does so with a confused mind. Yet craftsmen who engage in delicate operations, and are used to fixing their eyes on a single point, acquire through practice the ability to make perfect distinctions between things, however minute and delicate. The same is true of those who never let their thinking be distracted by many different objects at the same time, but always devote their whole attention to the simplest and easiest of matters: they become perspicacious.<sup>54</sup>

The focus of a mind on objects of thinking discloses an intellectual faculty capable of extracting and employing the necessity and certainty present in an intuited simple nature.

Excluding *per se nota* self-evident intuitions for the moment, for Descartes the idea of intuition can be collapsed into the idea of concept, where concept indicates a holding together of terms.<sup>55</sup> Again for Descartes, the degree of coherence, immediate or mediated, indicates whether the concept should be considered an intuition or a demonstrable proposition/definition.

Furthermore, this illustrates that the source of the intellectual coherence must be placed outside the concept and in the attentiveness of the mind, a faculty of reason, combined with an intellectual self-evident ground. Rather than view the insufficiency inherent in an intuited concept as a deficiency, Descartes argues that intuitive deductions are possible from the intellectual movement proceeding from simple intuitive natures.

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<sup>53</sup> AT X, 408.

<sup>54</sup> AT X, 400-401.

<sup>55</sup> The original Latin term *conceptus* is constituted by two Latin terms: *con* and *ceptus*. *Con* means with, and *ceptus* means having been held or seized. Thus, the literal meaning of *conceptus* or concept means ideas have been seized or held together by the mind.

There may be some doubt here about our reason for suggesting another mode of knowing in addition to intuition, *viz.* deduction, by which we mean the inference of something as following necessarily from some other proposition which are known with certainty. But this distinction had to be made, since very many facts which are not self-evident are known with certainty, provided they are inferred from true and known principles through a continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought in which each individual proposition is clearly intuited. This is similar to the way in which we know that the last link in a long chain is connected to the first: even if we cannot take in at one glance all the intermediate links on which the connection depends, we can have knowledge of the connection provided we survey the links one after the other, and keep in mind that each link from first to last is attached to its neighbour.<sup>56</sup>

Descartes clearly argues that a proposition achieves its true status as a certain *fact* of the world, by being wedded to or conceived with more certain facts. This process ends with intuitive “facts” whose certainty can establish the certainty of propositions, although the latter is not self-evident. For Descartes, these deductions are justified so long as the mind or reason *attends* to conjunction of the two. This later conjunction or concept can itself be intuited; however, the facticity of the deduced proposition is not necessarily established by this derivative intuition but can be established by the memory of prior good reasoning or intuitions.

Hence we are distinguishing mental intuition from certain deduction on the grounds that we are aware of a movement or a sort of sequence in the latter but not in the former, and also because immediate self-evidence is not required for deduction, as it is for intuition; deduction in a sense gets its certainty from memory. It follows that those propositions which are immediately inferred from first principles can be said to be known in one respect through intuition, and in another respect through deduction. But the first principles themselves are known only through intuition, and the remote conclusions only through deduction.<sup>57</sup>

The discursive tendency inherent in a self-evident intuition allows a simple definition or nature to link with ever further conclusions. An intuitive definition has an inferential or propositional quality that is not different in kind from its conclusion. A definition can “transfer” its immediate properties to subsequent conclusions or links in the chain of reasoning. As Descartes notes,

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<sup>56</sup> AT X, 369-370.

<sup>57</sup> AT X, 370.



propositions can be viewed as either intuitive or demonstrable depending on whether they are seen as being a part of an immediate whole or a part of a mediated and absent totality.

In the latter case, propositions are certain *per alia* or through another. So long as one can *remember* the intuitive certainty of specific intuitions, self-evident intuitions being by nature outside of memory or time and thus capable of being associated with any derivative propositions, the known or assumed *fact* of a prior intuition can establish the fact of a deduced proposition.

However, the duality present in a concept does not allow it to achieve a completely independent existence by which it would have a power to transfer or produce subsequent conclusions and intuitions. Again, the power by which a concept coheres depends on the mind and its (willful) attention to particular mental configurations anchored ultimately by the veracity of simple self-evident natures. The chain of reasoning, whether it is seen as an immediate whole or as a sequence of links, depends on the gaze of the mind, not on the specific demands of the evident reasoning, excluding the abstract and *per se nota* simple natures. Intuition and deduction are the only two paths to certainty available to the mind as they in fact are the only two processes that allow the mind to execute its unifying power or gaze. Thus, Descartes notes:

These two ways are the most certain routes to knowledge that we have. So far as our powers of understanding are concerned, we should admit no more than these and should reject all others as suspect and liable to error. This does not preclude our believing that what has been revealed by God is more certain than any knowledge, since faith in these matters, as in anything obscure, is an act of the will rather than an act of the understanding. And if our faith has a basis in our intellect, revealed truths above all can and should be discovered by one or other of the two ways we have just described[.]<sup>58</sup>

The willful attention of a mind upon certain propositions or beliefs does not represent an unjustified act of thinking because any verification requires a faculty of reason to conceive a proposition with foundational self-evident intuitions.

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<sup>58</sup> AT X, 370.

At this point, it may seem that an intuitive science, a *mathesis universalis*, anchored on one end by self-evident simple natures and on the other by a faculty of reason properly attending to deductions and concepts produces an absolutely secure and justified knowledge. However, Descartes's understanding of demonstration is unrestricted because concepts can be in principle "self-evident" intuitions. The content of an intuition can be viewed as inert propositional information rather than as a compelling, irreducible affirmation or act of thinking. Edwin Curley notes that Descartes was probably strongly affected by Montaigne's skepticism concerning intuitions:

[...] [I]n the late 1620s Descartes came to feel the impact of Montaigne's skepticism, which did, in the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, extend even to basic principles of logic, mathematics, and metaphysics. [...] Montaigne had questioned even basic principles of logic, using the liar paradox, for example, to cast doubt on principles as evident as if p, then p: Let us take the sentence that logic itself offers us as the clearest. If you say "It is fine weather," and if you are speaking the truth, then it is fine weather. Isn't that a sure way of speaking? Still it will deceive us. To show this, let us continue the example. If you say "I lie," and if you are speaking the truth, then you lie (Montaigne 1965: 392).<sup>59</sup>

The liar's paradox implies that the true content of an intuition can entail a disassociation and denial of itself to its supposedly appropriate intellectual expression. As a result, the certainty present in self-evident intuition does not guarantee the objectivity of the intuition but may require further conceptualization to secure its reality. Descartes does not abandon the use of intuitions to justify knowledge; however, in light of the liar and other paradoxes, he devises a means to test the necessity of intuitions according to the standard of skepticism. Descartes agrees with the skeptic's claim that seemingly self-evident intuitions *may be conceived* with other causes and thus could in principle be *explained* by an intuitive link in those associations.<sup>60</sup> However, Descartes argues that any intuition that consistently asserts itself even in all possible

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<sup>59</sup> Edwin Curley, "The Cogito and the Foundations of Knowledge" in *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Stephen Gaukroger, (Blackwell, 2006), 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

skeptical formulations must be a foundational self-evident intuition. According to Descartes, the intuition of a thinking thing must be used in any possible explanation of causes, real or hypothetical.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the objectivity and necessity of the *cogito* is established not for itself but for any possible intellectual experience or deduction.

Nevertheless, within this schema, there is another intuition that must be foundational in any possible skeptical formation: the idea of a more powerful (deceiving) agent, i.e. God. As in the liar's paradox, there must be a cause that provides content that could be contrary to the dictates of reason because an individual mind would not be self-contradictory in its self-evident nature. Thus, for Descartes, there are two foundational intuitions, a (deceiving) God and an individual mind, necessary for any possible intuition and deduction proceeding therefrom.

In the process of establishing the necessity of a detached faculty of reason, Descartes must generate the concept of a detached will that is distinct from reason yet no less mental and necessary to the *cogito's* nature. As a result, occasions of certainty presented in either an intuition or demonstration are not sufficient to absolutely restrict the will to the affirmative content of those objects. The will merely orients its affirmative faculty to the intellectual content anchored in the substance of the intellect. One could say that the will really establishes the intellectual bond which allows the concept to present any manner of coherence such that, in fact, the will is a form of the intellect and vice versa. The will and intellect are functionally distinct but substantially the same; the result is a doubling in the mental faculties. The intellect reveals simple natures which, as concepts, require an affirming faculty to manifest and secure their absolute necessity.<sup>62</sup> In the process of mental objectification, the will becomes no longer a

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 37-39.

<sup>62</sup> Pierre Gassendi criticizes Descartes on this point since he, Gassendi, believes that it would entail that the mind could act on itself, and thus, would lead to an arbitrary source of knowledge: "When I think about why it is that sight does not see itself and the intellect does not understand itself, it occurs to me that nothing acts on itself. [...] Now if

passive follower of the self-evident intuitions of the intellect but a separate *evaluative* power which is detached from the actual presented value that should compel it. One could say, following Jean-Luc Marion, that simple natures are neither simple nor natures, as they seem to require mental conceptualization.<sup>63</sup> This presents a problem for Descartes, as understanding is outside itself and dependent upon an occult agency to establish knowledge: the faculty of free will.

The advantage of the primary status of free will for Descartes is that revealed knowledge is possible and can mediate itself through the intellectual processes of intuition and deduction. Furthermore, the separate faculties of intellect and will require an objective extra-intellectual world, the hidden world of God, to allow their processes to occur. Although these faculties may not truly or objectively capture the reality of the external world in an absolutely adequate concept or simple nature, the intellect and will cannot conspire to create a separate spiritual reality divorced from the posited external world. Since the will and intellect are necessary for the very conceptualization of the simple natures, their processes in a way tentatively demonstrate that the simple essence is *about* an extra-intellectual world.<sup>64</sup> The concept requires a mind and

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we are to become aware of something, it is necessary for the thing to act on the cognitive faculty by transmitting a semblance to the faculty or by informing the faculty with its semblance. Hence it seems clear that the faculty itself, not being outside itself, cannot transmit a semblance of itself to itself, and hence cannot produce any awareness of itself or, in other words, cannot perceive itself. Why do you think that the eye can see itself in a mirror although it cannot see itself in itself?," (AT VII, 292).

<sup>63</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, "Cartesian Metaphysics and the Role of Simple Natures," in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, (Cambridge, 1992), 115. However there, Marion does not emphasize how the faculty of the will grounds "simple" natures.

<sup>64</sup> Stanley Rosen describes how Descartes resolves the problem that the finite will seems God-like by tying human faculties to requisite deductive procedures:

[...] [O]ne would be tempted to say that for Descartes, freedom is the subordination of corporeal desire and passion to knowledge of the truth, understood as itself dependent upon the will of man. But here is the rub. What precisely is the status of man's will? If it is free in the sense of being prior to the intellect, then it would seem to be unintelligible. In fact, man would seem to be not *like* God but *identical* with or indistinguishable from him, and a God who is "hidden" from himself. But this alternative is not compatible with Descartes's admission of the existence and nature of extension. Man must "strain" to transform nature into his own image, which means that he cannot be totally independent of it. But the work of transforming nature or extension turns upon geometrical form and algebraic symbolization and deduction: *upon*

will to establish its expression, but will *is* the process of verification such that it does not generate *ex nihilo* the simple natures. The intellect and will are modes of *verification* about something. Many “things” can be revealed or presented to the human mind by God.

Nevertheless, the doubling of mental faculties via a reliance on the will engages the human mind in a continual process of verification, or rather, endless demonstrations/conceptualizations of simple natures to remove the inherent doubt presented by extrinsic demands for certainty. The method to establish the veracity of simple natures itself requires a method or demonstration to secure that original demonstration; the only escape is to argue that the posited external world (of God) does correspond to the simple natures. The simple natures are *about* something, yet their intellectual reality is reduced to the very methodical process inaugurated by the play between intellect and will. The Cartesian Method creates or constructs the very nature of concepts, which as constructions require continual demonstrations to secure their correspondence to the external *posited* world. The detached and evaluative agency of the will requires a firm subject-object split, and in turn, the subject-object split requires the infinite veracity of God or the posited external world to bridge its abyss.<sup>65</sup> Not only does doubt establish the modes of verification that equate to the mind, but it also forces the mind

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*necessity*. Man cannot exert his freedom of will except by means of knowledge, hence of *ratio*, and consequently through submission to necessity. Rosen, “Hegel, Descartes, and Spinoza,” 123. As Rosen rightly notes, exercising freedom requires intellectual procedures and capacities which allow the *transformation* of Nature. The transformation of Nature into an intellectual realm constitutes true freedom for Descartes.

<sup>65</sup> Viewing God merely as a posited external reality provides the basis for an analytic and non-theological reading of Descartes. The idea of God rather than providing a guarantee of external reality is solely within the mental domain. The idea of God provides an intellectual ground by which to organize intuitions and deductions and inaugurate a process of scientific/conceptual verification rather than prove metaphysical beings. Rosen notes that since Descartes “was widely regarded as a concealed atheist,” and that:

Our abstract belief in the existence of God is therefore inadequate to serve as the basis for guaranteeing the truth of clear and distinct thoughts. Cartesian science results in a sequence of finite mediations which generate knowledge of finite things. Rosen, “Hegel, Descartes, and Spinoza,” 120.

Rather than producing absolute metaphysical knowledge, Cartesian science allows for finite intellectual faculties to justify their finite results without direct appeals to posited or external metaphysical beings or realities. Cartesian science entails procedures that generate complete concepts and not absolute agreement with an external being. This will be developed further in chapter 2.

to have a confused (yet posited as objective) concept of God or Nature. At every recourse from doubt, definitions, intuitions, or any indemonstrable first principle become subsumed in a quest for certainty.

## **Spinoza**

Contrasted with Descartes, it may seem that Spinoza advocates that definitions provide direct verification of a given true object. The givenness of the definition would in some way indicate that the object as defined was necessarily present and external to the intellect. This is not so. For Spinoza, the indemonstrability of the object defined is relative to our senses and understanding.

But note that by the series of causes and of real beings I do not here understand the series of singular, changeable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things. For 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 [indefinite] circumstances in one and the same thing, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence. For their existence has no connection with their essence, *or* (as we have already said) is not an eternal truth.<sup>66</sup>

The “external” or extra-intellectual world, i.e. “the series of singular, changeable things,” is not identical to the content and causal associations expressed in ideas. Contra Descartes, definitions are not about external content. There is no absolute threshold across which ideas become ideas and before which ideas are obscure and misrepresented. The intellect does not unite with or refer itself to an objective world. Were the intellect to refer itself to an objective world, then the idea would become unable to secure certainty. The series of singular and changeable things represents a reality that does not allow any definition to establish consistency. Every attempt to secure a firm and absolute definition within this series would be immediately undermined as the object would necessarily change. The external order resists and eludes intellectual reduction as

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<sup>66</sup> *TdIE* 100, Translation modified.

their (intellectual) essences are not tied to their actual existence. Only God or Nature has an absolute and apparent connection between definition and existence. The “external” world does not depend upon a concept to produce its existence, since the external world operates by its own form of causality independent of intellectual causality. Thus, the cause of and justification for an adequate definition must be sought solely within an intellectual order.<sup>67</sup> As Spinoza notes:

But there is 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. [...]<sup>68</sup>

When an idea identifies itself with an “external” or extra-intellectual object, the idea is, in Spinozian terms, mutilated, divided and confused. If it were to rely on a non-intellectual nature, the idea would be unable to constitute a singular indivisible whole. Such an idea does not fully express its intellectual nature but rather is a product of the imagination or memory, incorporating external modes in its intellectual expression. The extrinsic relations present in such an idea indicate that its posited object may be present or absent. That is, the object *and* the idea of the object are dependent upon extrinsic vagrant occurrences; the object and the idea exist only when unknown or non-intellectual causes occur.<sup>69</sup> As a result, the idea and object are subject to the measure of time. Time indicates the contingent and continual reference of an idea to its extrinsic object. Time extrinsically and passively measures the actuality of existence, the mere presence of both idea and object.

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<sup>67</sup> Don Garrett provides a critique of Descartes’s use of clarity and distinctness to establish epistemic certainty and truth. Garrett argues that the classic problem of the Cartesian circle cannot be overcome even by relying on Descartes’s clear and distinct idea of God. This entails that an intrinsic standard of truth must be sought; according to Garrett, this standard must be based on Spinoza’s idea of God. Although Garrett highlights the way to resolve the inherent problems with Cartesian intuition via Spinoza’s philosophy, he argues that an intrinsic standard of truth still requires a correspondence or real agreement between idea and object. Garrett believes that an *ideatum* represents a real entity to which a true idea must correspond. This leads to a strong concept of an external world, one that, in my opinion, Spinoza does not accept. See “Truth and Ideas of Imagination” in *Studia Spinozana*, Vol. 2, (1986), *Spinoza’s Epistemology*, 66-68.

<sup>68</sup> *TdIE* 101.

<sup>69</sup> By the term ‘non-intellectual,’ I mean that the order of causes is unknown and unknowable.

For Spinoza, in order to express the true and inmost essence of something, the intrinsic and indivisible bond between subject and predicate, a definition cannot be about or refer to an extrinsic object. Spinoza rarely uses the terms ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’ in his works because they imply that an object and an idea exist separately. However, Spinoza uses these terms so as to critique Descartes and redeploy his idiom against conventional understanding of terms. As Spinoza notes:

For if by chance we should say that men are changed in a moment into beasts, that is said very generally, so that there is in the mind no concept, i.e., idea, *or* connection of subject and predicate. For if there were any concept, the mind would see together the means and causes, how and why such a thing was done. And one does not attend to the nature of the subject and of the predicate.”<sup>70</sup>

Thus, for Spinoza, objects and attributes do not indicate a subject awaiting a predicate since one cannot truly attend to their natures separately, *contra* Descartes. Instead, the “object” of a definition must be intellectual in nature and intrinsic to the definition. An adequate definition cannot include any extrinsic relation. The affirmation of the object’s actuality is contained, or more appropriately self-contained, in its definition. Thus, an adequate definition can never be contrary to itself. Its affirmation does not permit for another with a different nature to nullify its actuality. As seen above, the only relation that would allow such a nullification would be one in which the idea refers to an external world. In that case, the idea would *seem* to depend upon contingent causes and be divided in its nature.<sup>71</sup> Conversely, an adequate definition shows that an intellectual cause is eternally concurrent with its intellectual expression.

However, only God or Nature, properly speaking, has a truly absolute concurrence of existence and definition. Unlike for God, essences of singular things are not self-generating or

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<sup>70</sup> *TdIE* 62.

<sup>71</sup> As should be evident, nothing is properly contingent since contingency is generated by an improper “understanding” of experience due to the use of extrinsic properties or abstractions. See p. 9 concerning contingency.



self-sustaining in the intellect. Singular essences require either a finite or an infinite intellect through which to be expressed. Yet the intellectual order is neither completely isolated from the external world nor capable of radical intellectual freedom. Adequate definitions are neither detached spiritual objects nor mere intellectual creations.<sup>72</sup> The eternal affirmation in a definition does not indicate a moment of absolute will or creativity.<sup>73</sup> An absolute will does not complete a deficient beginning by creating a more inclusive intellectual concept. Relying on the faculty of will would create a scenario in which a detached subject would be confronted by a deficient object of knowledge that nonetheless places a demand for intellectual expression on the subject. The subject would then provide an appropriate intellectual expression, a more inclusive concept, for the obscure and contradictory object. Proceeding along these lines, the endless compensatory acts of the will would be the only recourse to achieve understanding of the contradiction inherent in the “non-intellectual” object.<sup>74</sup> This is not the case for Spinoza.

As stated previously, the cause of the singular essence or definition must be completely involved in and expressed by the adequate definition. As a result, there is no fixed and absolute delineation between a prior state of understanding and a present or posterior state of understanding. With a prior temporality denied the intellect, the intellect cannot be other than itself or its nature; the intellect cannot be an Other, i.e., body, non-intellect, *or* prior obscure concept—this entails that true ideas and definitions are acts of thinking and not representations

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<sup>72</sup> Genevieve Lloyd interestingly notes that Spinoza and Descartes share a common interest in not presenting definitions as merely intellectual creations. Both reject Scholastic attempts to establish the existence of abstract essences separate from actual existence. However, Lloyd notes that Descartes is unable to sustain his commitment because Descartes’s method of radical doubt allows a real distinction between essence and corresponding existent. See Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self Knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethics*, (Cornell, 1994), 112-114.

<sup>73</sup> Pierre Macherey argues that Hegel sees Spinoza’s use of definition as deficient; for Hegel, Spinoza’s definitions are merely extrinsic formulations of knowledge. According to Hegel, Spinoza does not fully realize that definitions are merely products of absolute Will; this realization would capture the truth that objects of knowledge are contradictory and dynamic because they are inherently products of the Will. See Macherey’s *Hegel or Spinoza*, particularly Chapter 4: “*Omnis Determinatio Est Negatio*.”

<sup>74</sup> Nothing is properly non-intellectual within this Hegelian scheme.

*about* something. Knowledge or understanding displays an active and continual link between what is known and knowing. The actuality of thinking, affirming an intellectual reality, cannot deny its “content” but involves and affirms it so as to continue to think it or be in that specific intellectual actuality.<sup>75</sup> The actuality and activity of thinking are inseparable and express a real, concrete necessity. Thus, any method of knowing cannot be distinct from nor guarantee the acquisition of knowledge. Instead, knowledge expresses an already *effective* and affective knowledge which is not in doubt about its effectiveness. A regress is not possible for knowledge or any method justifying the acquisition of knowledge as they are not essentially distinct.

The impossibility of prior or posterior generation of knowledge, i.e. direct knowledge from an objective world or absolute subjective will, indicates that a material or extra-intellectual force disposes the intellect to the comprehension of certain definitions over others.

So a definition either explains a thing as it is outside [extra] the intellect—and then it ought to be true and to differ from a proposition or axiom in that a definition is concerned solely with the essences of things or *of their affections* [...]<sup>76</sup>

The affections of things provide the basis by which to direct the mind and intellect to singular understanding. The essences of things are really just affections which affect the mind to the contemplation of certain configurations of images over others. Thus, an adequate definition expresses the necessity that a knower has already been and is affected; it shows that an individual is necessarily constituted by his or her material conditions. His or her knowledge is unique, singular, and necessary; it cannot be overturned or invalidated by human will. Because the way to understanding can only proceed from material affections, an individual must think from definitions that express a *specific* link to singular affections. Although singular definitions may provide concrete and necessary knowledge of affections, the intellectual order does not exhaust

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<sup>75</sup> See the *Terminology* section of the Introduction for an additional representation of this argument.

<sup>76</sup> Letter 9, Translation modified and emphasis added.

all possible definitions of Nature. As a result, a definition can also be understood as a description. That is, a definition *or* description is a singular aspect or perspective on Nature, unable to reduce Nature to a totalizing theory or intellectual system. Furthermore, the concrete conditions of an individual knower disallow the possibility that he or she could not be affected by his or her knowledge or that he or she could detach the order of knowing from those conditions. Hence, the term ‘description’ more accurately captures the sense in which the knower is affected by a particular mode of understanding which is *attributed* by the individual knower to Nature *as if* that knowledge reduces the actuality of Nature to that mode.

The descriptive or nominal relationship which a finite intellect has with an external world indicates that a finite intellect cannot bring every mode of Nature to an adequate intellectual definition. Since a definition is merely one description among the infinity of descriptions of Nature, there will always be the possibility that another object of knowledge can affect and transform a specific intellectual order. A finite mind expresses modes which it might bring to intellectual adequation, i.e. an intellectual act within and for-itself, but even if this adequation is achieved, intellect cannot reduce all other existence solely to its own activity. The “external” world expresses the reality of infinite God or Nature immediately, a reality which every mode within every attribute is actual. As a result, an individual mind must acknowledge that it will have affections which it desires to affirm via an adequate definition but must passively and inadequately represent these affections through images. As Spinoza notes:

[...] For doubt is nothing but the suspension of the mind concerning some affirmation or negation, which it would affirm or deny if something did not occur to it, the ignorance of which must render its knowledge of the thing imperfect. From this it is inferred that doubt always arises from the fact that things are investigated without order.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *TdIE* 80.

For Spinoza, doubt, thus, is the acknowledgement of an active reality (God or Nature) that the intellect is unable to express affirmatively or negatively.

An individual mind will undergo affections that will not agree with its specific intellectual definition or singular configuration. Affections by nature indicate that there are “contingent objects” or occurrences radically opposed to the intellectual causality or uninterrupted activity of a specific human intellect. These affections constitute an order of activity that may agree with the specific intellectual activity of an individual; however, the ignorance of them indicates that the infinite active intellect of God is not accessible *in toto*. As a result, an individual knower must undergo affections and arrange his or her adequate definitions and ideas of them according to a discursive or serial order.

However, the discursive or serial order of definitions does not necessitate that definitions are in some way demonstrated by extrinsic proof or by corresponding to a posited reality after the fact. Definitions express the singular intrinsic necessity of affections, so they do not require extrinsic proof. The intrinsic necessity of affections cannot be doubted or overturned by a free or detached subject as affections express the actuality of experience. Doubt only arises when a finite intellect cannot bring a singular activity into agreement with its own specific and unique intellectual activity. The realization that infinite God or Nature, the infinity of modes, cannot be brought immediately into a finite intellect indicates that the innumerable extrinsic “natures,” in order to be expressed by a correct intellectual order, must proceed via specific and intellectually accessible definitions. In this case, a “good” definition is a generative principle that allows aspects or modes of reality, affections, to agree with and express its determinate nature. A good definition is determined to be “correct” by its ability to show an aspect of inquiry; the good definition shows itself to be a useful and powerful tool of understanding. A definition’s power

will determine whether it is appropriate to a specific case and expresses how various modes can agree with its defined cause/object.

Nevertheless, the extensive power of a singular definition is not like the apparent power present in an abstract universal. The widespread applicability of a universal does not resemble the extensive power of a singular definition.<sup>78</sup> Since, for Spinoza, the intellect involves and expresses its understanding, its “objects” of knowledge must be active conditions which an intellect enacts and embodies as well. As a result, any principle which only describes how a property might be applicable in some cases in *abstracto* would indicate not only that the principle refers to the extrinsic order of seemingly “contingent” things but also that the intellect is not compelled to assert the embodied intellectual truth of that principle. The universal principle would not be a sufficient cause to *determine* the intellect to the contemplation or comprehension of one thing over another. As Spinoza notes:

Therefore, so long as we are dealing with the Investigation of things, we must never [gather] anything from abstractions, and we shall take very great care not to mix up the things that are only in the intellect with those that are real. But the best conclusion will have to be drawn from some [peculiar] affirmative essence, *or*, from a true and legitimate definition. For from universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descent to singulars, since axioms extend to infinity, and do not determine the intellect to the contemplation of one singular thing rather than another.<sup>79</sup>

The singular power expressed in a particular affirmative essence or definition, the power of continuous uninterrupted understanding, does not appear externally to the intellect. A definition does not express propositional content which may be adopted or disregarded. Thus, any compelling/powerful moment for an intellect, a noetic moment of understanding, is already

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<sup>78</sup> Willi Goetschel has an excellent account—his own work based on Etienne Balibar’s work on the subject—of how definitions for Spinoza represent a “nominalism of singularity.” This entails that nominal definitions present the singular power of Nature in opposition to abstract universals. See Willi Goetschel’s *Spinoza’s Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*, (University of Wisconsin, 2004), 42. Also, see Balibar’s “L’institution de la verite: Hobbes et Spinoza” in *Lieux et noms de la vérité.*, (Editions de l’Aube, 1994), 21-54.

<sup>79</sup> *TdIE* 93. Translation modified.

presented in the true or adequate essence/definition. The cause or power by which someone knows or agrees with an object of knowledge is *expressed* rather than presented in that knowledge. Obscure causes or posited realities not only indicate a lack of power, a reference to “contingent” things, but also a lack of power to determine the very “being” of the intellect. It must be said for Spinoza that we do not have ideas; we are our ideas. As a result, a true idea or definition provides both the reason why something is the case (for the intellect) and how it is the case. The true idea provides the how and why of an object.

We have shown that a true idea is simple or composed of simple ideas; that it shows how and why something is, or has been done; and that its objective effects proceed in the soul according to the formal nature of its object. This is the same as what the ancients said, I.e., that true knowledge proceeds from cause to effect—except that so far as I know they never conceived the soul (as we do here) as acting according to certain laws [*leges*], like a spiritual automaton.<sup>80</sup>

Since a definition can be considered as a description or aspect of Nature, true and adequate ideas can be considered as perceptions *in* the mind first, then finally, expressed *as* intellect. The perception of a true idea or definition, the perceived cause, will affect the mind/intellect determining it to the properly true effects of that perceived cause.

The laws of thinking of which Spinoza speaks should more properly be understood as the bonds or *leges* of thinking. Interpreting Spinoza’s use of the Latin term ‘*leges*’ as an expression of its traditional Roman meaning, i.e. as bonds, shows that an intellectual cause does not express an abstract unity or quality but a concrete involvement. The intellectual cause presents a force or determination that must produce effects that are intrinsically united or bound to that previous cause. This process or activity expresses an immanent linking *in* the intellect. Thus, the production and involvement of ideas does not represent an extrinsic objective reality grouped by an abstract quality but the very power of an intellect *or idea* to express and involve other ideas.

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<sup>80</sup> *TdIE* 85. Translation modified.

Spinoza argues the same point when he states that a good definition must include its proximate cause. Spinoza emphasizes the point that adequate definitions are caused by the human intellect and do not directly present the objectivity of a given entity.

[95] [...] the properties of things are not understood so long as their essences are not known. If we neglect them, we shall necessarily overturn the connection of the intellect, which ought to [*make again*] the connection of Nature [*naturae concatenationem referre*] ...]

[96] These are the requirements which must be satisfied in Definition, if we are to be free of this fault:

1. If the thing is created, the definition, as we have said, will have to include the proximate cause. E.g., according to this law, a circle would have to be defined as follows: it is the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable. This definition includes the proximate cause.
2. We require a concept, *or* definition,<sup>81</sup> of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing's properties can [follow] from it (as may be seen in this definition of the circle). For from it we clearly infer that all the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal.<sup>82</sup>

Spinoza uses the example of a created thing to stress the eternal and intrinsic power of the intellect. The proximate cause of this defined circle is a feigned cause which we know does not exist in Nature.<sup>83</sup> For Spinoza, the intellectual perception of the moving line expresses the true nature of intellect: the cause/active perception expresses itself completely and neither exceeds its effects nor do its effects exceed the affirmation in the cause. When this defined or described circle is manifested or considered alone in the mind, it proceeds to form a singular intellectual understanding which does not exist apart from its essential intellectual effects or properties. In this unfolding, the intellect understands its own singular power independently of the “accidents” of the world which are generated by an improper “understanding” based on extrinsic properties.

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<sup>81</sup> It should be remembered that by ‘definition’ Spinoza intends description.

<sup>82</sup> *TdIE*, 95-96. Translation modified.

<sup>83</sup> Spinoza provides an example of a semicircle rotated as another feigned cause that shows the intrinsic power of the intellect (or true ideas) without reference to an objective world: “[L]et us consider some true idea, of which we know most certainly that its object [*objectum*] depends on our power of thinking, and that it has no object in nature [...] to from the concept of a sphere, I feign a cause at will, say that a semicircle is rotated around a center [...] This idea, of course, is true, and even though we may know that no sphere in nature was ever produced in this way, nevertheless, this perception is true, and a very easy way of forming the concept of a sphere” (*TdIE* 72).

The intellect is distinct from the external “contingent world” and can manifest a power that does not depend on the mere passive representation of phenomena. The concurrence of intellectual cause and effect cannot exist in the changeable “external world” but must be generated through an active intellect because it is not extrinsic.

For Spinoza, definitions that presume to correspond to a specific external reality are really accidental creations of the imagination. Spinoza gives the example of knowing whether a person exists, e.g. Peter, to distinguish accidental definitions from singular ones.

As for what constitutes the form of the true, it is certain that a true thought is distinguished from a false one not only by an extrinsic, but chiefly by an intrinsic denomination. For if some architect conceives a building in an orderly fashion, then although such a building never existed, and even never will exist, still the thought of it is true, and the thought is the same, whether the building exists or not. On the other hand, if someone says, for example, that Peter exists, and nevertheless does not know that Peter exists, that thought, in respect to him is false, or, if you prefer, is not true, even though Peter really exists. Nor is this statement, Peter exists, true, except in respect to him who knows certainly that Peter exists. [...] From this it follows that there is something real in ideas, through which the true are distinguished from the false.<sup>84</sup>

In this example, the existence of Peter, i.e. the perspective or experience of seeing Peter exist, is not involved essentially in the definition. Thus, the definition accidentally describes a true reality by means of causes external to the definition, namely the experience or affection of seeing that Peter exists. Contrary to an accidental description of Peter, a true definition or knowledge of Peter’s existence follows from an intrinsic intellectual affirmation, and hence as Spinoza states, expresses something real in ideas. This is so because an intellectual reality and affirmation are not merely intellectual creations, deficient to a precise external world. Thus, a true and good intellectual definition must maintain an unbroken agreement with its intellectual, produced effects.

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<sup>84</sup> *TdIE* 69-70.



What is intrinsic to ideas by which ideas are determined as true is meaning. The truth of meaning provides an intrinsic standard of truth that does not rely on extrinsic verification. In the case of Peter, the truth of the proposition that ‘Peter exists’ is not the meaning of Peter, and the meaning of Peter is not the proposition that Peter exists, i.e. a condition or state of affairs affirmed or denied. As Spinoza notes, if someone were to assert that some name or word ‘Peter’ exists, that name or word merely referring to some extrinsic state of affairs does not establish or equate to the meaning or understanding of Peter as a particular individual. In fact, the meaning of Peter can be independently understood from a proposition affirming Peter’s existence. The proposition may affirm that Peter exists but that extrinsic state of affairs can only cause the proposition to be true and cannot establish its distinctive meaning as a true individual. As a result, to have any distinct relation between words and “referents” requires that propositions themselves must be meaningful or rely on a meaning by which they can signify some individual or thing. Propositional truth cannot be totally divorced from an immanent meaning which does not rely on extrinsic verification. The name Peter is meaningful and neither is true nor false in relation to a proposition affirming the truth or existence of Peter.

Similar to an understanding of God’s attributes as nominal, one can understand propositional truth as metaphorically related or applied to extrinsic things. Truth or existence affirmed of an individual does not itself constitute the truth or meaning of the individual such that an intrinsic cause and standard is required to understand extrinsic attributions such as existence, propositional truth, perfection, etc. How one understands and orders these meanings determines more than an extrinsic standard whether certain assertions and attributions are meaningful and subsequently true. Whenever extrinsic attributions are merely relied upon to

determine truth, things are not properly distinguished and explained but confused with others such that their existence is not properly understood as really singular.

The discovery of an intrinsic or immanent notion of truth allows Spinoza to argue that the elimination of false ideas must be primarily achieved through an understanding of meaning.<sup>85</sup> Because any particular proposition relies on an intrinsic meaning to establish an affirmation or denial of a particular state of affairs, a more precise meaning, definition, or essence will permit a more distinct affirmation, and subsequently, a more distinct possible “reference.” As Spinoza notes:

[T]he same difference that exists between the essence of one thing and the essence of another also exists between the actuality or existence of the one thing and the actuality or existence of the other. So if we wished to conceive the existence of Adam, for example, through existence in general, it would be the same as if, to conceive his essence, we attended to the nature of being, so that in the end we defined him by saying that Adam is a being. Therefore, the more generally existence is conceived, the more confusedly also it is conceived, and the more easily it can be ascribed fictitiously to anything. Conversely, the more [singularly] it is conceived, then the more clearly it is understood, and the more difficult it is for us, [even] when we do not attend to the order of Nature, to ascribe it fictitiously to anything other than the thing itself.<sup>86</sup>

By merely relying on a proposition, *or ultimately a symbol* to signify truth, one’s understanding is left with an extrinsic and purely equivocal means to represent and express the existence of an individual. The existence of the individual or signified becomes merely referential and not constitutive of what is affirmed in the proposition. As a result, the content or meaning itself must be affirmative, irrespective of the proposition, so that any later propositional claim does not contradict the affirmation present in its meaning. If one relied on propositional reference to establish truth and meaning, claims about states of affairs would contradict one another without limit and would be a completely contingent “knowledge” of the world. In this case, a

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<sup>85</sup> Marcelo Dascal provides a clear account of Spinoza’s reliance on an immanent notion of truth as opposed to any correspondence theory of truth. See Marcelo Dascal, “Leibniz and Spinoza: Language and Cognition,” in *Studia Spinozana*, Vol. 6, (1990), *Spinoza and Leibniz.*, 139-141.

<sup>86</sup> *TdIE* 55. Translation modified.

proposition's "meaning" could contradict itself potentially *ad infinitum* and manifest itself as purely equivocal or nonsensical. Because a contingent world does not exist, this implies that meaning represents an *actuality* which has already affected and affects an individual. The meaning or actuality of any particular proposition expresses a concrete reality or singular experience constitutive of an individual intellect and any attributions made by that singular mind. Thus, whenever a proposition signifies a true event or existence, that truth does not merely correspond to an objective world but to an affirmation of experience or of an actuality intrinsic to the individual's understanding. Furthermore, this indicates that false or untrue ideas are caused by a lack of meaning, concrete experience, or immanent actuality in relation to certain affirmations or attributions. False ideas represent the mind's inability to conceive of a singular actuality or meaning relative to and constitutive of one's affirmations.<sup>87</sup> The false idea merely affirms a claim which may or may not be the case, but the appearance of contingency in that idea indicates that existence signified is unknown and potentially ascribed to many other objects, or more precisely, confused with other affirmations, as when imagination and intellect are confused.<sup>88</sup>

But if a good definition is not out there in some way, it is an attribution/description by me. I hold certain attributes *as if* essential for a manifested "object." The *As If* or conditional constellation of attributes necessary for a definition, when viewed as an intellectual denotation, allows a knower to bracket the potential error of assuming that descriptions really do equate to a

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<sup>87</sup> Spinoza will develop this argument to claim that the experience of "freewill" represents both a necessary and distorted view of reality: "[...] I take as a foundation what everyone must acknowledge: that all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that they all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite. From these it follows, *first*, that men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams, of the causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant of [these causes]" (EIAppendix).

<sup>88</sup> In section 74 of the *TdIE*, Spinoza argues that confusion among the intellect and imagination "gives rise to the greatest deception" and provides an example of how the Stoics were deceived by mixing the word 'soul' with a true understanding of bodies.

world. Furthermore, it allows the intellect to constantly check the reduction of its intrinsic power by noting when the mind merely relies on abstract descriptions or names. This perspective on or definition of definition provides a critique and a demand to increase knowledge and emend error/false ideas. In this process, definitions can be viewed as conventional words with meaning that is not merely arbitrary. Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza does not endorse a nominalism in which words and definitions are merely contingent signs to be arranged in a consistent fashion so as to produce consistent thoughts. The reduction of thinking to a completely material and deductive language cannot apply to Spinoza's understanding of nominalism. Hobbes argues that thinking must be reduced to some type of material motion via the mediation of signs and language:

For Reason, in this sense, is nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the *marking* and *signifying* of our thoughts [...] The Use and End of Reason, is not the finding of the summe, and truth of one, or a few consequences, remote from the first definitions, and settled significations of names; but to begin at these; and proceed from one consequence to another.<sup>89</sup>

However, Spinoza argues that the reliance on material signs and motion produces an imperfect form of reasoning contrary to the intellect which must be a complete action without any imperfect motions:

[T]he fictitious, the false, and the other ideas have their origin in the imagination, i.e., in a certain sensation that are fortuitous, and (as it were) disconnected; since they do not arise from the very power of the mind, but from external causes, as the body (whether waking or dreaming) receives various motions. [...] [I]t [imagination] is something different from the intellect, and in which the soul has the nature of something acted on. For [...] it is something random, by which the soul is acted on, and [...] we are freed from it with the help of the intellect.<sup>90</sup>

The discursive motions present in imaginative constructions or forms of reasoning could not provide an intellectual completion which would constitute intellectual perfection and understanding. Motion by definition arises from an external cause which would submit the


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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, (Cambridge, 1996), 32-33. First Part, Chapter 5.

<sup>90</sup> *TdIE* 84.

“intellect” to a discursive process without end. Whereas Hobbes argues that such a discursive process constitutes the form of all reasoning and proof, Spinoza rejects this form of contingent nominalism as it would deny any true intellectual affirmation outside of the mere words or conventional and material processes of signification. Spinoza’s divergence from Hobbes’s position develops from Spinoza’s understanding of efficient causality in motion which is opposed to Hobbes’s mechanistic causality.

For Spinoza, *how* one understands names, definitions or descriptions determines whether “effects” proceed in the intellect in a generative manner or reduce themselves to the extrinsic denomination and discursive re-presentation/repetition of a static object. Particularly in the Letter on Definitions, Spinoza explains what he believes a good definition is and how a good nominal definition<sup>91</sup> could proceed in the intellect.

[...] I shall take Borelli’s example. Suppose someone says “Let two straight lines enclosing a space be called figurals.” If he understands by a straight line what everyone understands by a curved line, then his definition will be a good one, provided he does not subsequently understand [by it] squares and other figures. (By that definition would be understood figures like  and the like.) But if by a straight line he understands what we commonly understand, the thing is completely inconceivable. So it is no definition. Borelli, whose opinion you are inclined to embrace, confuses all these things completely.

I shall add another example, the one you bring up at the end. If I say that each substance has only one attribute, that is only a proposition and requires a demonstration. But if I say, “By substance I understand what consists of one attribute only,” that will be a good definition, provided that afterwards a being consisting of more attributes than one are designated by a word other than substance.<sup>92</sup>

Consistently throughout this correspondence, Spinoza uses phrases like, “by ‘X’ I understand,” “let it be called,” and “provided another word is used” to indicate that a generative intellectual process occurs via customary names or definitions. However, the above example utilizes a

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<sup>91</sup> Edwin Curley presents an opposite view to the nominalism that I am presenting here in his article, “Spinoza’s Geometric Method.” Curley argues that Spinoza does believe that definitions can adequately represent and conform to an external object as seen in Spinoza’s account of proper/improper definitions of God in Proposition 8 *Ethics* I; see “Spinoza’s Geometric Method,” in *Studia Spinozana*, Vol. 2 (1986), *Spinoza’s Epistemology*, 160-161.

<sup>92</sup> Letter 9.

geometric example, a form of knowledge seemingly absolute and certain, to display the intrinsic power of the intellect. Yet, Spinoza's nominalism is not meant here to show the deficient status of human language in relation to an eternally static geometric essence to which definitions must correspond to establish their certainty. Borelli's concept of definition embodies a Cartesian view in which definitions are premises that are so well-known *as fact* that they provide inferential principles to discursively demonstrate subsequent propositions. Borelli claims that a geometric construction can be generated from well-defined propositions so that knowledge will comport itself with what was initially conceived absolutely. Spinoza's interlocutor, Simon De Vries, quotes Borelli's position as:

Definitions are used in a demonstration as premises. So it is necessary for them to be known evidently, otherwise scientific, *or* very evident, knowledge cannot be acquired from them [...] The basis for a construction, or the essential, first and best known property of a subject, must be chosen, not rashly, but with the greatest care. For if the construction or the property named is impossible, then a scientific definition will not result.<sup>93</sup>

In this case, the mathematical language will mirror the deductive power of a clear and distinct idea (via an absolute foundational definition) to establish other propositions.

However, Spinoza argues that this process would assume that there must be a one-to-one correspondence between words and things thereby leading to an extrinsic verification of truths. If this were so, subsequent propositions would be constantly reduced to prior claims of reality and thus would make linguistic consistency more important than *immediate* intellectual affirmation. Although Cartesian mathematics and epistemology attempt to deny the power of linguistic constructions via the standard of clarity and distinctness, they re-inscribe their power through deduction mediated by signs. Spinoza advocates that geometric definitions should be treated as nominal; a definition as an attribution does not reduce the defined object to extrinsic

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<sup>93</sup> Letter 8.

referents. Instead, a nominal definition provides means to actively conceive an “object” via specific words. This blocks both the temptation to view absolute meaning in/by words and the temptation to view words as purely arbitrary, i.e. Hobbes. The latter position would allow pure construction due to the completely contingent nature of words. However, words as nominal attributions disallow a subjective detachment from concrete experience, history, or conventional perceptions/practices which must *in-form* intellectual affirmations.<sup>94</sup> Thus, meaning must be concrete and social because there cannot be a purely subjective representation or making of truth(s), i.e. construction. Intellectual definitions express the affirmation that a word does not reduce experience; yet, a definition cannot divorce itself from embodied practices constituting intellectual activities. Instead, words, if understood properly, open up a horizon of inquiry and expression that a knower may embody in their *actual* thinking and living, i.e. an ethical practice. Hence, when Spinoza states that a definition can be good so long as it conceivable and consistent relative to other words, this does not indicate that a rational abstract truth undergirds human cognition but that an embodied practice *expresses* itself as human intellect.<sup>95</sup> Through a proper

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<sup>94</sup> Although Aaron Garrett does a good job highlighting the differences between Hobbes and Spinoza on the issue of definition, namely that Spinoza’s nominalism is not Hobbesian, Garrett proposes that Spinoza’s nominal definitions also imply a realism based on Cartesian innatism. I disagree with Garrett’s claim that Spinoza’s definitions in anyway refer to innate ideas that somehow show us the necessary metaphysical structure of the universe. See Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 179.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Bennett incorrectly argues that Spinoza’s concept of definition and use of the geometric manner or order lacks clear goals since for Bennett a Spinozian definition seems to stipulate foundations for analyzing phenomenon as well as attempting to describe and reveal necessary qualities of the phenomenon:

As for ‘the geometrical manner’ [...] this must point to the likes of Euclid’s *Elements*, but it is not clear what its precise implications were in Spinoza’s mind, if indeed it had any. He may have been in a slight muddle about the notion of doing things geometrically. [...] ‘To them it will doubtless seem strange that I should undertake to treat men’s vices and absurdities in the geometrical manner, and that I should wish to demonstrate by sure reasoning things which they declare to be contrary to reason.’ (3 Preface at 138/6.) This seems to refer to that ‘geometrical’ demonstrative procedure which is my present topic; but the sequel shows that Spinoza chiefly has in mind his view that men’s affects can be causally explained through the laws of nature, and are therefore fit subjects for scientific study. His point, which would have been better served by a comparison with physics, has nothing to do with handling the affects through an apparatus of axioms and logical derivations. Spinoza may not have been clear about this in his own mind. Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, (Hackett, 1984), 19-20.

Bennett is firmly committed to the interpretation that Spinoza is following a “Euclidean” geometric proof which more accurately resemblances a Cartesian proof. That is, Spinoza’s reasoning must be derived from self-evident

understanding of the nature of words and definitions, one can understand intellectual affirmation neither as a verification of something nor as words establishing contingent “meaning,” but rather, as an expression of a concrete cause and conventional practice.

Geometric or mathematical definitions are intended to show that the conventional nature of definitions, that is, their ability to allow the intrinsic power of the intellect to manifest itself, constitutes the seemingly abstract and certain nature of geometry and mathematics. The concurrence of the geometric definition, or feigned cause, with its “effects” is merely the concurrence of the intellect with a name that in no way refers to (changing) Nature. The origin of the geometric determines that its certainty or concurrence will be assured and in no way indicates that an eternal or timeless nature exists separate from human endeavors. The definition of a triangle presupposes that the drawing of a triangle in some way *re-presents* and refers to an ideal meaning or intellectual fact, such as the perfect triangle. However, as Aristotle notes, the drawing of every triangle is of a specific type of triangle, i.e. equilateral, scalene, isosceles, etc., such that no pure triangle is ever expressed or manifested as a (intellectual) fact.

[T]he equilateral and the scalene are not the same triangles although, being both triangles, they are the same figure; for things are said to be the same if their differentiae do not differ, but not so if their differentiae do differ. For example, if the differentia of one triangle differs from that of another, then the two triangles are distinct; but as figures the two triangles come under one and the same differentia, and so they are not distinct figures.<sup>96</sup>

As a result, these presented triangles (imagined triangles) cannot reduce or produce the meaning of a triangle *per se* so that their individual existence is *indeterminate* relative to a meaning or practice that might generate them. In this case, there is nothing intrinsic in the meaning of a triangle which would make a specific concrete triangle except that a human practice draws a

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definitions or logically secure propositions from which dependent effects or propositions are necessarily derived. However, Spinoza’s Euclidean manner entails that definitions are not inferential principles but necessary principles of inquiry, starting points for ethical-epistemic investigation.

<sup>96</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 224a 5-10.



triangle (i.e. attributes it) approximating it to a posited meaning; this posited meaning is an indeterminate “object” or more properly, an intellectual creation.<sup>97</sup> The indeterminate is generated through the mind’s abstracting qualities for sensible perceptions. For example, the concept of the number two is generated by considering it not as two apples or two humans but as two of anything. The indeterminate two does not have a concrete cause except only by the mind’s abstraction and sheer assertion. Nevertheless, the counting off of numbers is the original practice or attribution that led to number concepts.<sup>98</sup> The idea of a triangle is *per se nota* because intellectual cause and intellectual effect are concurrent through the feigning/making activities of the mind. Initially, the human mind *attributed* an expression or generation of properties (this process denoted by a name) to a posited meaning which itself was generated in this abstraction of qualities from Nature. As a result, existence and essence are not separated in this geometric essence, so that the essence must be an eternal truth via the powers of the intellect. The idea of a triangle is similar to the idea of God in that properties ascribed to the “object” do not capture the ideal meaning but must express the force of the “object” via a specific, embodied mode of thinking. Nonetheless, geometric practices achieve this via the force of mental abstraction or

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<sup>97</sup> Elhanan Yakira notes that for both Spinoza and Leibniz, geometrical or mathematical objects are imaginative creations produced by abstracting sensible qualities from determinate things. As a result, mathematical objects are fictions of the imagination that cannot directly present a concrete or determinate thing, i.e. an individual substance. As indeterminate and imaginative objects, mathematical objects require extrinsic principles of ordering, i.e. logic/reason or intellect, to demonstrate effects or truths. For Leibniz, mathematics is the “logic of the imagination” by which indeterminate concepts are ordered by reason so as to produce further (logical) relations among these concepts, potentially *ad infinitum*. In this case, mathematics is an indefinite production of concepts whereby human inventiveness proves its reality within a formal deductive system. Whereas Leibniz utilizes mathematical abstraction to argue for a strong mathematical formalism based on human inventiveness, Spinoza argues that mathematical abstraction as an imaginative creation does not invent a real (formal) truth but in this process, must refer to a real practice/meaning generating the mathematical construct “presented” to the knower. See Yakira’s “What is a Mathematical Truth?” in *Studia Spinozana* Vol. 6 (1990), *Spinoza and Leibniz*, 73-99.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob Klein in his book, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, argues that the generation of numbers proceeds from an activity of counting, whether what is counted be sensible or purely intelligible. In either case, the activity of counting as “a definite number of definite things” is the same. “It [*arithmos*] intends the *things* insofar as they are present in this number, and cannot, at least at first, be separated from the things at all.” Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann, (Dover, 1992), 46.

making, whereas the idea of God and of modes expresses a force or cause “outside” or rather extra the intellect.

Additionally, the phenomenon of geometry seems especially assured and true because it is a social phenomenon in which many individuals by shared convention agreed that certain words would express certain practices, properties, or objects and would then hold these definitions or words consistently in the mind/intellect so as not to confuse them. But, this conventional process, which establishes consistency in terms, had the “luxury” that the political/ethical debate over terms is not an ongoing process that could generate confusions and controversies among individuals. In Proposition 47 of *Ethics* II, Spinoza shows how a process of linguistic confusion leads not only to the hindrance of knowledge via inconsistent terms among individuals but also how it can be overcome by the intellect to achieve knowledge:

And indeed, 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. If this were not so, we would not believe that they were erring, just as I did not believe that he was erring whom I recently heard cry out that his courtyard had flown into his neighbor’s hen.

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.<sup>99</sup>

Understanding that words when viewed as mere assertions cannot lead to a conceivable idea aids one to resist the temptation to reduce others’ minds to words and aids one to question whether words in general properly explain another’s idea. Thus, one must maintain a nominalist understanding of words so that a conventional practice *may be truly shared*, and intellectual

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<sup>99</sup> *Ethics* II Proposition 47 (EIIIP47).

expressions may occur. The embodied understanding of these practices cannot be reduced to signs/words but must be a cause *shared by all* which as a cause is capable of generating (intellectual/ethical) agreement.<sup>100</sup> Understanding that words are equivocal and render time and respect irrelevant, if assumed to be merely symbolic, one can use this understanding to express certain practices non-identically and express together with many singular members an ethical/intellectual practice. Since with geometry and other abstract forms of knowledge, a reference to an extrinsic order of causation is not present, these conventional expressions may seem exceedingly certain and absolute such that they could be used to claim dogmatic certainty of reality, *or* they can be seen as an embodied convention manifesting intellection. Thus, as seen above, the internal reference of geometry allows for the paradox that the tool of geometric definitions can pervert *or* aid the emendation of the intellect. A perversion occurs when mathematical objects are dogmatically assumed to refer to an ideal perfect object and that inferences from this posited object prove (ideal) reality. Conversely, an emendation occurs when mathematics is understood as a *mos* or convention expressing an embodied and ethical cause, which contrary to dogmatic certainty, opens an inquiry into the meaning of one's intellectual activities and powers.

However with natural things, there can be many perspectives because definitions of physical entities can acknowledge an extrinsic order of causality. There can be many nominal definitions of physical beings since their causal order does not completely agree with an

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<sup>100</sup> The triangle as a meaningful mathematical object must be considered necessary for any knower. As Yakira notes, mathematical "objects" are true, real or meaningful because "God thinks through us." Yakira, "What is a Mathematical Truth?" 89. That is, this type of thinking is objective or embodied in the very conceptions of mathematical knowers. Mathematics is not reduced to a merely subjective enterprise, whether Leibnizian or Hobbesian. Modes of (mathematical) thinking are not truly detached or divorced from the intellectual perceptions of human knowers. As Yakira properly notes, "'consciousness' is [not] prior to, or a condition of the possibility of, its ideas [but] consciousness is a property of Ideas." Ibid 96. As a result, *modes* of thinking can be "objectively" embodied or shared by which the generation of truths, mathematical or otherwise, can occur.

intellectual reduction of them. For Spinoza, definitions, particularly of natural things, must express an actuality of experience. As a result, many definitions may express this or their actuality lest a linguistic definition presumes to correspond to a single absolute reality or assumes a merely contingent use.

[T]o explain by an example how one and the same thing can be designated by two names [...] I offer two: (i) I say that by Israel I understand the third patriarch; I understand the same by Jacob, the name which was given him because he had seized his brother's heel[.]<sup>101</sup>

The meaning and actuality of Jacob or Israel does not reduce to either perspective so that its meaning/actuality can be *used* to generate perspectives or aspects of the thing defined; any absolute perspective would assume that it captured the reality of Jacob/Israel and could deduce absolute truths or attributes from a secure foundational perspective. Whereas when an abstract concept, such as a geometric definition, proceeds from established convention only, a definition involving a physical existing thing proceeds from the necessity of actual experience. These definitions, unlike an abstract geometric definition, have the potential to acknowledge not only that an individual generated them, but that also the generation was from a demand placed upon the knower by the concrete singular experience. That is, the knower expresses a perspective on reality yet acknowledges it as a perspective so that reality is not reduced to a totalizing static perspective. Although if an individual viewed geometry and other “abstract” systems as a descriptive or ethical practice, he or she could achieve this kind of wisdom, usually the abstract and constructed origin of these systems encloses the intellect within itself with a limited and false sense of certainty.

[95] To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing, and to take care not to use certain *propria* in its place. [...] If a circle, for example, is defined as a figure in which the lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal, no one fails to see that such a definition does not at all explain the essence of

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<sup>101</sup> Letter 9.

circle, but only a property of it. And though, as I have said, this does not matter much concerning figures and other beings of reason, it matters a great deal concerning Physical and real beings, because the properties of things are not understood so long as their essences are not known. [...]

[99] [...] From this we can see that above all it is necessary for us always to deduce all our ideas from Physical things, *or* from the real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another real being, in such a way that we do not pass over to abstractions and universals, neither [gathering] something real from them, nor [gathering] them from something real. For to do so either interferes with the true progress of the intellect.<sup>102</sup>

A good definition for a physical being should allow an individual to realize that many more affections from the thing are possible. If I attribute a good description to a thing, the attribution must be understood as a necessary experience for me but also as a generative moment from which the irreducible activity of the intellect can proceed. Thus, the aspectual nature of a definition does not limit the intellect to specific propositions *about* the world, but instead, it forces the knower to acknowledge that his or her perspectives are not separate from an active embodied reality. Generative definitions force a knower to continually inquire into a cause so that the necessary activity of the defined cause is just that, necessary and continually active. Rather than limit an individual to a purely relativistic or static position, the singular nature of a generative definition forces the knower to order and link, deduce or gather “effects” from real singular concrete causes, *moving* from one real cause to another because Nature cannot be reduced to one specific definition or aspect. If there is no “movement” or activity of thinking, then one’s perspective or definition would not express the irreducible power of the Nature but rather would privilege one *type, kind or universal* over singular causes. By claiming that one definition reduces reality to its aspect would, in fact, necessarily establish a universal type which could rule over particulars, allowing one to *judge* whether particulars are perfect or imperfect relative to this ideal standard. In this impoverished situation, the active causal order could not be

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<sup>102</sup> *TdIE* 95 and 99. Translation modified.

acknowledged as irreducible to the mental order; rather, the external order would be improperly collapsed into an abstract order and system of absolute values. Good definitions of physical beings attempt to make again the likeness of active Nature in the activity of causes expressed by intellect.

Spinoza consistently resists the reduction of thinking to an extrinsic cause or bodily source as it is in-itself and *vice versa* so that the intellectual expression of the true order of causes proceeds within the attribute of thought.<sup>103</sup> As Spinoza notes, an effect is an effect only in what it *has* from its cause. “For what is caused differs from its cause precisely in what it has from the cause. E.g., a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for the latter is an eternal truth.”<sup>104</sup> An idea cannot have anything from a material cause because each is distinct in kind. Furthermore, Spinoza states that the object, *objectum*, of the idea is not the direct cause of the idea; that cause can only be another idea or *ideatum*. “So the form of the true thought must be placed in the same thought itself without relation to other things, nor does it recognize the object as its cause, but must depend on the very power and nature of the intellect.”<sup>105</sup> This allows Spinoza to argue that more perfect knowledge of an effect is achieved by knowing the cause more perfectly: “[f]or really, knowledge of the effect is nothing but

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<sup>103</sup> Pierre Macherey expresses Spinoza’s position well:

Between ideas and things, there exists no relationship of correspondence that subordinates one to the other but rather a causal identity that establishes each one of them in the necessity of its order, or of its movement, or better still of its own process. Thus ideas are not formed in a resemblance of objects that they represent and from which they are derived as an origin, in the way that one can find in the idea that which was first given in the thing [...] But one can no longer say, inversely, that things themselves are created in the image of the idea from which they would have been formed and that they are thus its manifestation, in the fashion that we find in the thing that which is already given in the idea [...] Here Spinoza denounces two inverse errors, which are in the end equivalent because they derive from the same proposition: that of the hierarchical subordination of attributes and their affections” Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 64-65.

For Spinoza, as Macherey notes, the primary cause for the separation between thing and idea comes about by presuming that attributions or affections are irrelevant to the “discovery” of things *and* that things are manifestations of ideas.

<sup>104</sup> EIP17Schol.II

<sup>105</sup> *TdIE* 71.

acquiring a more perfect knowledge of its cause.”<sup>106</sup> Understanding how ideas are immanently involved with and expressed by others ideas produces real knowledge and the real causal order of Nature. Nevertheless, the idea cannot dissociate itself from Nature nor material modes which are its object, *objectum*, and which produce the order of causes, Nature, according to their own material laws.

Since the definition makes again the “source” in the intellect by attempting to involve and produce as many appropriate perspectives with and from it, the force of a physical “source” when expressed in the intellect displays the singular indivisible actuality of the thing. The definition of God is such an intellectual cause as it allows many other singular things to be deduced from it or led back to it.<sup>107</sup> With the definition of God, one should be able ultimately to make again the likeness of an irreducible and infinitely active Nature.

As for order, to unite and order all our perceptions, it is required, and reason demands, that we ask, as soon as possible, whether there is a certain being, and at the same time, what sort of being it is, which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence may also be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will (as we have said) [remake] Nature as much as possible.<sup>108</sup>

As Spinoza noted earlier, the more perfect, or rather more complete,<sup>109</sup> a thing is, then the more I am forced to assert its singular *indivisible* existence through my intellect by involving other ideas with it. Yet again, it must be remembered that the intellect, by expressing perspectives, even the seemingly infinite perspective of God, cannot be that reality. The idea of God does not grant immediate intellectual reduction of all of existence. Definitions are indemonstrable principles of inquiry, not of every possible mode; they express certain aspects or perspectives on reality. The

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<sup>106</sup> *TdIE* 92. See also EIAxiom4 and EIIP7.

<sup>107</sup> The Latin term, *deduco*, literally means ‘I lead from.’ *De* means from and *duco* means I lead.

<sup>108</sup> *TdIE* 99. Translation modified.

<sup>109</sup> The Latin term, *perfecto*, literally means ‘through a making or act done.’ Thus, the term ‘complete’ would be an appropriate substitute for ‘perfect’ because it indicates that no defined thing is ever ideal or absolutely finished. See Letter 9.

more inclusive of singular modes in its arrangement, the better, more powerful, and *useful* a definition may be, but it is not any more real than another singular definition.

Beset by the persistent demands of extrinsic modes for intellectual expression and denied the infinite perspective of God, i.e. an infinite intellect, a finite intellect can only produce intellectual agreement discursively or in an indefinite fashion by arranging one definition after another. Nevertheless, the finite intellect does have inclusive principles or definitions that allow for infinitely many singular things to agree with those definitions, but those inquiries are only indefinitely infinite, not immediately infinite. Thus, for Spinoza, the human intellect inquires under certain or specific aspects of eternity and not from an absolute perspective of eternity.

[108] The properties of the intellect which I have chiefly noted, and understand clearly, are these:

[...] 5. It perceives things not so much under duration as under a *certain species* [face] of eternity, and in an infinite number [.]<sup>110</sup>

Spinoza's allusion that the intellect perceives in an infinite number can be initially deceptive; Spinoza does not intend to suggest that the intellect achieves a perspective which can unify an infinity of perspectives about an object. The intellect does not in a single infinite act unify a *numerical* infinity of perspectives which constitutes the reality of an object.

For to conceive them [singular things] all at once is a task far beyond the powers of the human intellect. But to understand one before the other, the order must be sought, as we have said, not from their series of existing, nor even from the eternal things. For there, by nature, all these things are at once."<sup>111</sup>

Objects of knowledge are not phenomenological totalities.<sup>112</sup> Instead, number is wholly a construct of the imagination.<sup>113</sup> Numbers are generated by the imagination or reason when they

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<sup>110</sup> *TdIE* 108. Translation modified and emphasis added.

<sup>111</sup> *TdIE* 102.

<sup>112</sup> Descartes presents such a view in Rule Seven of the *Regulae* in which he argues that the memory of a chain of deductions can be grasped by a single unifying intuition if one practices quickly going over the individual links of deductions to arrive at a single perspective of these many subordinate deductions *or* intuitions:

If, for example, by way of separate operations, I have come to know first what the relation between the magnitudes A and B is, and then between B and C, and between C and D, and finally between D and E, that



refer quantity to an external or extra-intellectual order of nature. The divisibility necessary for numerical quantification is essentially an expression of a divided mind's reference to non-intellectual causes. Number extrinsically represents the world and indicates that a mind is passive to active Nature. As Spinoza notes in his correspondence with Meyer, when the affections of substance are really distinguished from substance itself, the abstract and imaginative concept of number can be used to measure the "quantity" which perceived objects have.

Next, from the fact that when we conceive Quantity abstracted from Substance and separate Duration from the way it flows from eternal things, we can determine them as we please, there arise Time and Measure—Time to determine Duration and Measure to determine Quantity in such a way that, so far as possible, we imagine them easily. Again, from the fact that we separate the Affections of Substance from Substance itself and reduce them to classes so that as far as possible we imagine them easily, arises Number, by which we determine.<sup>114</sup>

When perspectives or modes are assumed to be really distinct from one another and from substance, these perspectives can be numerically gathered up into a sum or immediate totality. This is possible because world and mind are radically distinct. Thus, Spinoza's use of the phrase "in an infinite number" must be ironic. Immediately after stating that the intellect perceives true ideas in an infinite number, Spinoza clarifies his meaning by adding: "[...] or rather, to perceive things, it attends neither to number nor to duration."<sup>115</sup> Instead, by "infinite number," Spinoza intends that a reference to an external world is not contained in an intellectual definition and that the intellect in no way achieves unity with all possible aspects of an object

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does not entail my seeing what the relation is between A and E; and I cannot grasp what the relation is just from those I already know, unless I recall all of them. So I shall run through them several times in a continuous movement of the imagination, simultaneously intuiting one relation and passing on to the next, until I have learnt to pass from the first to the last so swiftly that memory is left with practically no role to play, and I seem to intuit the whole thing at once, (AT X, 388).

<sup>113</sup> Martial Gueroult describes the generation of number from the imagination due to confusion among singulars. See Martial Gueroult, "Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite (Letter XII, to Louis Meyer)" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, ed. Marjorie Grene (Doubleday, 1973), 182 – 212.

<sup>114</sup> Letter 12.

<sup>115</sup> *TdIE* 108.

outside a discursive process. By “infinite number,” Spinoza intends that the irreducible affirmation of a singular reality is expressed through an intellectual act, a good definition, and that an *indefinite* intellectual activity proceeds because the intellect *is* the *active* idea. Transcendental unity with an object would constitute death and ultimate passivity. Instead, an intellect is infinite, or rather indefinite in its kind *or mode*; here, kind or mode means a horizon of inquiry established by a particular appropriate definition. The activity of an intellect is constituted not only by appropriate intellectual acts, i.e. adequate definitions, but these acts are appropriate because they overcome the persistent reference to an extrinsic order by which finite intellects are constantly affected. As a result, intellectual definitions will use references to an extrinsic order. These references are manifested by the use of words, symbols, and abstract denotations that the mind employs to represent the external world. Thus, a healthy and powerful intellect transforms passive affections, as indicated by words and symbols, to a generative indefinite intellectual activity. The intellect is these active ideas and as such must (self-) overcome the passive tendencies inherent in these ideas to exhibit continuous power.

For Spinoza, all definitions, even adequate and true intellectual ones, are errant.<sup>116</sup> The general nature of words or terms as used in a definition, or any statement, necessarily indicate that the human intellect is produced, i.e. *natura naturata*, and thus, is not absolutely prior to affections, i.e. it is not *natura naturans*. “I think I have demonstrated clearly and evidently enough that the intellect, though infinite, [refers] to *natura naturata*, not to *natura naturans*.”<sup>117</sup> Only God or Nature, i.e. *natura naturans* or *naturing nature*, exists prior to its affections and is

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<sup>116</sup> The remaining portion of this chapter is heavily indebted to the work done by Idit Dobbs-Weinstein in her article, “Maimonidean Aspects in Spinoza’s Thought.” For a further analysis of the errant nature of definitions as well as a rich analysis of Spinoza’s equivocal nominalism, see pp. 162-169 of her article.

<sup>117</sup> Letter 9. Translation modified. Sylvain Zac argues that Spinoza’s concept of a “living” or dynamic God disallows any direct relationship between man and God such that any description *or* knowledge of God/Nature must be nominal and equivocal. See Sylvain Zac, “The Relation Between Life, *Conatus*, and Virtue in Spinoza’s Philosophy” in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 19, (1996), 151-153.

absolutely infinite: an infinity without limit and an ultimate cause of every possible attribution. Attributions (made by a mind or intellect) indicate that affections occur with and within an intellectual mode and that attributions cannot present an unmediated and absolutely prior cause. Therefore, attributions, definitions, or descriptions show that a mind or intellect is historical. Since modes of thinking are *specific* intellectual actualities, which are constituted by the very actuality of a perceived “object” or ideatum, one must view the intellect as *in media res*, or in the middle of things. However, the intellect is not historical in the sense that the mind or intellect experiences fleeting affections, which it may occasionally understand through a noetic intuition, only to forget these affections as new affections replace them. Spinoza’s understanding of a historical intellect does not lead to a strong notion of historicism. The force by which an affection impresses a body or mind/intellect does not inherently dissipate. The force expresses the eternal power of Nature since the affection involves a *certain* internal and eternal relation between act and effect. The same power by which an intellect concurs with causes and effects is expressed in all modal existence. Nevertheless, the singular agreement present in specific modes, bodily, intellectual, and infinitely other modes, cannot exist prior to all affections so that eventually a more powerful affection can disrupt or destroy any stable perspective. Yet, that perspective could not be said to be an unnecessary moment since it expressed an intrinsic active cause. Many historical perspectives (or traditions) can explain their reality in an adequate and proper manner. The same necessity that caused these singular perspectives disallows an evaluative hierarchy amongst modes. According to the definition of each mode, an intellectual expression of the mode’s intrinsic power to exist, no mode could be said to be perfect or imperfect. Each mode equally involves the necessary cause or power of eternal Nature. As a result, the intellect expresses a continuous historical process of generating historical forms of

knowledge. Any progressive story that may be told about the procession of history is undermined by the eternal actuality expressed by any definition. Thus, although definitions or descriptions are born from specific historical attributions, i.e. by references to external conditions, each has a claim on the eternal reality of Nature and can be understood through the eternal causality of Nature. Fundamentally, definitions present the competing demands affecting modes: the demand to represent historical conditions and the demand to justify/explain/express the necessity of those conditions. The product of the interplay between these demands leads to the possible emendation of an intellect, an emendation that identifies when appropriate definitions occur and acknowledges the necessity that definitions will express historical processes. The historical and material production of knowledge indicates that images or passions are not entirely removed through intellectual adequation. They must be worked through the discursive moments in the imagination to arrive at a singular noetic moment of understanding. This process involves understanding the intrinsic force producing these affections by an adequate yet historical definition.

The experience of simultaneously undergoing historical affections and explaining them through intellectual expression, for Spinoza, necessitates that will and intellect are equivalent. Any affirmation or negation that an idea expresses cannot disassociate itself from prior historical actuality. This actuality is expressed both as a discursive moment among a historical tradition and as a necessary effect of an intrinsic cause which could be actively used to immanently critique dogma. Thus, any mental or intellectual affirmation as expressed by definitions, axioms, etc. indicates ethical and political conditions: an affective order of understanding. Since for humans, the historical, discursive, or extrinsic order of Nature is represented through language, conventional language *or dogma* mediates the political and ethical affects by which imagistic *or*

intellectual affirmation proceeds. The accepted and compelling forms of knowledge, or right modes of living, depend on the commonly held opinions, opinions that do not doubt their reality as historical affirmations. As a result, the status of a definition is radically different for Spinoza and Descartes. For Spinoza, definitions demonstrate themselves relevant for and *by* the intellect because they develop the historical and immanent forces present in actual material conditions. Thus, skepticism would be a bad question already based on a misrecognition and *detached* relationship to Nature or reality. The question of affirming an aspect of reality is not ultimately a matter of demonstration; an affirmation must begin with a de-finition, a de-finition can be viewed simply as a limit on the infinite. The attribute or limit does not reduce Nature to its aspect but involves Nature *as a cause* in its embodied knowing. However for Descartes, the question of affirming the reality of a definition must be resolved by an ethically detached subject; that is, by defeating radical skepticism through a management of one's will. In this case, the will of a Cartesian subject can withhold assent concerning the necessity of a (historical) reality. Historical and sensory demands can be bracketed as merely apparent and unconvincing moments in the order of knowing.

The status of definitions is particularly important for Spinoza since definitions provide the avenue to critical ethical rehabilitation. Whereas for Descartes, definitions are merely conceptual objects, for Spinoza they provide both the extrinsic *and* intrinsic emendation of an individual's intellect. How one formulates the terms of a definition determines whether the arrangement of terms merely refers to dogmatic perspectives<sup>118</sup> or critically refers to dogma *and simultaneously* to a possible immanent critique of dogma. These critical formulations set up a possible immanent dynamic by critiquing the authority of dogmatic language/perspectives.

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<sup>118</sup> Dogma can be perpetuated by seemingly apolitical and neutral positions. This is because the lack of necessity (or the lack of ethically critical necessity) present in a detached form of theorizing indicates that extrinsic modes of living dominate present social circumstances; immanent philosophical critique is not fostered in such a milieu.

However, these arrangements/orders are not sufficient by themselves to overcome prejudice; instead, they arrange dogmatic terms in a seemingly contradictory or paradoxical way in order to attempt to unleash intrinsic forces within to better understand the historical moment. Thus, first and foremost, good definitions are propaedeutic in that they provide an orientation and tools by which to achieve understanding. Yet, they do not statically present the means to emendation; they attempt to habituate individuals to certain terms and a linguistic order in order to show *how* they can proceed extrinsically according to this critical order so that eventually (immanent) understanding may occur. Thus, the order should, if the individual is *capable*, manifest noetic understanding of these “extrinsic” conditions. This noetic understanding, however, is not a transcendental moment of enlightenment but an expression of necessary historical and material conditions.

In Spinoza’s case, his use of certain definitions and specific arrangements of accepted philosophical terms, primarily Cartesian positions, attempts to address his particular philosophical and historical moment. Spinoza engages Cartesian discourse throughout his philosophical works so that the terms by which Cartesians’ affects are mediated can be read against the Cartesian grain, so to speak, in order that these terms can allow an immanent and truly philosophical moment. Spinoza engages with his Cartesian interlocutors by not only ethically/politically challenging the use of their terms but also attempting to force them to see that only a nominalist perspective on philosophical terms can achieve knowledge. Thus, Spinoza’s nominalism not only is enacted in his critical engagement with Cartesian discourse, but it also provides a “counter-Method” or *mos* (a standard/perception of truth) by which to thwart the continual desire present in Cartesian philosophy for abstract constructs. The status of definitions for Spinoza presents an opportunity not only to critique improper or overly static

philosophical language but also to see that the conditions for a good definition provides a *mos* by which to continuously emend (Cartesian) intellects. Definitions present a particular form of inquiry by which to arrange extrinsic conditions and affections, which according first to a critical extrinsic order can generate a noetic understanding, which continues to understand indefinitely, but also as nominal definitions, they express the immanent necessity of Nature which demands a general acceptance of perspectivalism.<sup>119</sup> Since for Spinoza's historical and philosophical moment, the Cartesians had already introduced an *authoritative* discourse on Method, i.e. a rejection of the certainty and priority of definitions, Spinoza had to critically appropriate their language in his own definitions and linguistic orders so as to respond to the Cartesian resolution to the problem of skepticism, i.e. the idea of a personal God. Because the Cartesian response had become the prevailing authority on the issue and the accepted philosophical *doxa* in Spinoza's historical context, his response uses their concept of God critically to generate an immanent order or critique that would resist doubt and provide a science to direct the intellect back to the necessity of Nature, i.e. perspectivalism. Thus, the definition of God, instead of becoming a metaphysical ground for Spinoza's science or philosophy, is a historical tool to emend Cartesian intellects and generate a specific science of the intellect opposite to the abstract subjectivity that undergirds Cartesian epistemology.

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<sup>119</sup> I purposefully use this Nietzschean term because I believe that Spinoza and Nietzsche share a general commitment that Nature can only be understood via perspectival or aspectival modes of knowing. Yirmiyahu Yovel provides a good and basic account of the kinship between Spinoza and Nietzsche. See Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*, (Princeton, 1989), 104-135. See also Richard Schacht, "The Spinoza-Nietzsche Problem" in *Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, Vol. 3, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, (Little Room Press, 1999), 211-234, and see Pierre-Francoise Moreau, "Spinoza's Reception and Influence" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett, (Cambridge, 1996), 423-426.

## CHAPTER III

### THE NECESSITY OF A MATERIALIST EPISTEMOLOGY

With a proper understanding of Spinoza's use of definitions, one can begin to realize that for Spinoza, a specific concrete aspect is necessary for any knowledge. In order to achieve knowledge and render a singular perspective clear and distinct, i.e. true, a knower must be understood as thoroughly concrete and actively express an embodied context. Thus, any universal abstract knowledge is a distortion of knowing. Given this requirement, epistemology cannot be a science; epistemology cannot discover or establish truth. As Spinoza notes, certainty is merely the idea *or* objective essence manifested from concrete conditions:

From this it is clear that certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself, i.e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence is certainty itself. And from this, again, it is clear that, for the certainty of truth, no other sign is needed than having a true idea. For as we have shown, in order for me to know, it is not necessary to know that I know. From which, once more, it is clear that no one can know what the highest certainty is unless he has an adequate idea or objective essence of some thing. For certainty and an objective essence are the same thing.<sup>120</sup>

Whereas Descartes uses radical doubt to establish the special and detached status of the human knower, Spinoza utilizes the concept of a reflexive idea to demonstrate how the human intellect must be a product of the world and integrated in it.

Spinoza's concept of a reflexive idea demonstrates that an idea does not require another idea of it to verify, justify, or establish its intellectual reality. Contrary to a Cartesian framework, an idea has sufficient intrinsic reality that expresses itself in a causal process or movement which generates a reflexive intellectual reality that expresses the original "content" or actuality of the

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<sup>120</sup> *TdIE* 35.



first idea as true or real. That is, the intellectual reality of a reflexive idea is the actuality of the true or real and does not need another idea to know perfectly or *completely*.

Alexandre Matheron in his article, “Ideas of Ideas and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and in the *Ethics*,” argues that the problem and possibility of an infinite regress for epistemic justifications is a question of the status of a reflexive idea.<sup>121</sup> Matheron argues that an actuality of mind, i.e. an idea, for Spinoza does not require another idea to establish the initial idea as real/true in relation to its “represented object” because the process of the initial idea’s generation is all that is required to establish its compelling and complete existence, i.e. certainty. Thus, there is no regress because the assumption that a reflexive idea must repeat and restore the posited reality of its representational content is a misrecognition of the reflexive idea’s actual (intellectual) existence.

Operating from a Cartesian framework and skeptical of Spinoza’s claims that an adequate reflexive idea can express truth, Jean-Luc Marion in his article, “*Aporias* and the Origin of Spinoza’s Theory of Adequate Ideas,” argues that since a finite intellect cannot immediately equal the potential intellectual objects representable by its power, this entails that a reflexive idea of a finite intellect is irredeemably deficient.<sup>122</sup> According to Marion, Descartes would agree with this critique of Spinoza because the restricted capacity of a finite intellect precludes it from expressing the proper or real content of an idea. The reality-in-itself of the object which the idea represents, what the idea is “truly associated with,” can never be adequate to a reflexive idea of a finite intellect. As a result, what is left to finite intellects is a form of limited knowledge, relative to which only a Cartesian method in which verifying ideas as intellectually complete could

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<sup>121</sup> Alexandre Matheron, “Ideas of Ideas and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and in the *Ethics*” in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, Vol. II, trans. Jonathan Bennett, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (E.J. Brill, 1993), 83-91.

<sup>122</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “*Aporias* and the Origin of Spinoza’s Theory of Adequate Ideas” in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, Vol. II, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (E.J. Brill, 1993), 129-158.

provide sufficient certainty. In this Cartesian response, method and the process of knowledge, or scientific verification, are extrinsic to the possible embodied conditions represented intellectually.

To understand why Spinoza advocates for an “epistemology” which must entail an embodied knower who can reflexively express adequate knowledge, it is helpful to review two Spinozian theses:

Thesis 1: To know that I know, I must first know.

Thesis 2: In order for me to know, it is not necessary to know that I know.<sup>123</sup>

As implied by the first thesis, knowledge of a *posited* something (an *objectum*) establishes or determines for the knower an idea or a perceived thing (*ideatum sive res perceptas*).<sup>124</sup> Within Spinoza’s terminology, ‘*objectum*’ denotes an actuality which an *ideatum* may properly express in the intellect; yet, the *objectum* does not refer to a potential (extrinsic) object, and consequently, a potentially true idea of it. An *objectum* is something determinate and graspable by the mind. It is the representational content of an idea,<sup>125</sup> and as such, it is what is externally projected in an idea, i.e. represented. Nevertheless, the *objectum* is not external in the same sense as it is represented in the idea. As Spinoza notes in *Ethics* II Def. 3 Explication: “[...] *the word perception seems [videtur] to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object [ab objecto]. But concept seems to express an action of the Mind.*”<sup>126</sup> What affects the mind and establishes a mental effect only *seems* to indicate an extrinsic source. The cause of the perception, or the

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<sup>123</sup> In his essay, “Ideas of Ideas and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and in the *Ethics*,” Alexandre Matheron presents these two theses, which are clearly expressed in *TdIE* section 34, as a way to show why Spinoza’s concept of certainty in the *TdIE* is consistent with its use in *Ethics* II; see page 84. Matheron argues that both texts utilize these two theses in order to show that the certainty expressed in a true idea neither requires nor logically depends on subjective reflection. Here I use these two theses to show how an individual knower must express and depend on concrete conditions to know. Much of this section is heavily indebted to Matheron’s article.

<sup>124</sup> In *Ethics* II Proposition 5, Spinoza states that “[...] ideas, both of God’s attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, [*ideatum sive res perceptas*] as their efficient cause, but God himself, insofar as he is a thinking thing” (Translation modified).

<sup>125</sup> See Matheron’s “Ideas of Ideas and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and in the *Ethics*,” 84.

<sup>126</sup> EIID3. Translation modified.

seemingly distinct *objectum*, is never really external to the effect or to the *movement* expressed through and by perception. On the other hand, the *objectum*, in order to affect an awareness of it, requires that the sensation, awareness, or idea of it be different from it—if not, then the *objectum* would be identical to what is sensed. In this situation, neither *objectum* nor mental sensation could be identified as a cause, and no true movement could occur. Instead, an infinite regress would occur whereby one would be unable to locate a true cause of the perception.<sup>127</sup> Thus, in order to have a clear movement from sensible object to sensation or awareness, there must be a perception or perceived thing not reducible to its *objectum*.<sup>128</sup>

‘*Ideatum*’ denotes an idea or perception which an individual knower experiences, a thing perceived, but an *ideatum* is not identical to or reducible to an external actuality. The perception of a stone is not reducible to a stone; yet the perception is determined by the stone and the perception *may* acquire an intellectual reality capable of cognitive effects.<sup>129</sup> Harry Wolfson argues that Spinoza retains the Aristotelian concept that a perception or idea is the form of a sensed object and not the object itself.

[...] Spinoza speaks of the object of the mind as that “which forms the *actual* being of the human mind,” that is to say, as that which is identical with the human mind, which, according to him, is always actual. This object of the knowledge of the mind which is identical with the mind itself is, furthermore, according to Aristotle, not the matter of a thing, but rather its form.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Aristotle, in *De Anima* 425a12-18, describes how vision and its object, color, could not be identical in kind and together apprehended by the same faculty, for then this would lead to another faculty to apprehend this latter faculty, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Gassendi makes a similar criticism of Descartes, that the internal processes of the Cartesian mind can act on itself in an identical way. Gassendi argues that a semblance must be transmitted to the faculty to allow for the activity and distinction of mental powers to occur. *Cf.* fn. 62.

<sup>128</sup> The interplay between *objectum* and *ideatum* has strong similarities to Aristotle’s account of how the activity of the sensible object and the activity of sensation are one the same but with different essences *or* descriptions. See *De Anima*, 425b25-426a12.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 431b25-432a1. In the case of animals, their perception cannot move to mind, or eventually express intellect, because their specific perceptions, sensation and imagination, produce sufficient movement for their “perfection” or striving.

<sup>130</sup> Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. II, (Meridian Books, 1958), 46. An important distinction must be made concerning Wolfson’s point about Spinoza’s understanding of mind as “Aristotelian” form. What Spinoza intends is not that form indicates something like Aristotelian *eidos*, or form, which may be identified with a meaning of a word or class, but rather, that form indicates something like Aristotelian *morphe*, or shape.

Thus, an *ideatum* can intellectually express an *objectum*; in the simplest case, it denotes that the *objectum* exists in the mind, e.g. there is a perception of a stone. However, since the “object” forms the *actual* being of the mind, there cannot be a potential object or intellect that is truly extrinsic. The sensed object and its sensation, an idea and an idea of idea, are aspects of the same yet differently expressed. Hence, Spinoza is adamant that the Aristotelian concept of a potential intellect is inaccurate or must be understood always to be actual: “[t]he reason why I speak here of actual intellect is not because I concede that there is any potential intellect [...]”<sup>131</sup>

The irreducibility of an *ideatum* to its *objectum* allows for *ideata* to involve themselves in an intellectual causal chain which does not equate to the actuality of external objects. As a result, an *ideatum* can become the basis for another idea. As Spinoza notes:

A true idea for we have a true idea is something different from its [*ideatum*]. For a circle is one thing, and an idea of the circle another—the idea of the circle is not something which has a circumference and a center, as the circle does [...] And since it is something different from its [*ideatum*], it will also be something intelligible through itself [...]<sup>132</sup>

The *ideatum* acquires a dual nature: the perceptual content of another idea and the necessary cause of the idea. Similar to its relationship with an *objectum*, the *ideatum* is both irreducible to its effect, the idea, and is necessarily expressed by the idea. Thus, the idea is an aspect or expression of its *ideatum*, and the *ideatum* is intelligible only through the idea, i.e. is manifested as an intellectual cause. The actuality present in an idea and its *ideatum* allows for non-existent things (e.g. geometric objects) to be expressed truthfully in the mind. Since Spinoza holds that

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*Morphe* is inseparably linked to a natural individual and how it expresses its form as a concrete expression of itself; this is similar to what Spinoza intends when he states that the object “forms the *actual* being of the human mind.” In “Aristotle’s Phenomenology of Form: The Shape of Beings that Become,” Christopher Long takes the unorthodox view that *eidos* and *morphe* are not synonymous, arguing that *morphe* is intimately linked to the expressions and activities of concrete individuals. See *Epoché*, Volume 11, Issue 2 (Spring 2007), 435–448.

<sup>131</sup> EIP31Schol.

<sup>132</sup> *TdIE* 33. Translation modified.

there can be an intrinsic notion of truth or adequacy,<sup>133</sup> so long as an idea expresses an immanent truth within its concept, then the idea will be true or adequate. For example, the idea of God must be necessarily true because the *ideatum* of God expresses absolute existence. The actuality pertaining to God's *ideatum* (which is not representable)<sup>134</sup> cannot but be conceived in a subsequent idea as true and eternal; the idea of God will *always* be expressed by an idea.

However, ideas of both existing and non-existing *modes* require that their *ideata* present an actuality that may be denied expression. Even ideas of infinite modes are limited to specific attributes, and thus are not always applicable, as they do not involve the absolute essence or existence of God. Nevertheless, the irreducibility of an *ideatum* to either its *objectum* or an idea indicates that an actuality sustains and generates the *ideatum's* cognitive existence. Although the *ideatum* of non-existing modes can be posited within an intellectual causal chain, the attribute of thought, they are mere intellectual possibilities if they are not determined by an actual *objectum*.<sup>135</sup> In the case of God or a perception of one's body, the *ideatum* can never be divorced from one's idea of the *ideatum*, but for memories or past perceptions, what sustains their cognitive experience or ideational link is the *objectum* of the human body. So long as the human body has been disposed such that it occasions specific *ideata*, then ideas of those *ideata* may express a truth or be adequate to their *ideata*. If these *ideata* express a force or cause which can be adequately conceived by an idea, then the actuality of the knower, his or her body, may be said to be actively and necessarily expressing reality, i.e. a true cause. Confused, fragmentary, or false ideas have *ideata* which are unable to wholly express themselves through their ideas and

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<sup>133</sup> In Definition 4 of *Ethics* II, Spinoza develops his concept of intrinsic truth: "By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object [*objectum*], has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea. Exp.: *I say intrinsic to exclude what is extrinsic, viz. the agreement of the idea with its object [ideatum]*" (Translation modified).

<sup>134</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>135</sup> EIIP8Schol.

refer to an *objectum* as an irreducible component to the expression of the *ideatum*. Properly speaking, false ideas are not even ideas since they have nothing positive by which to be called false: “[t]here is nothing positive in ideas that constitutes the form of falsity [...]”<sup>136</sup> More accurately, the individual knower has an inadequate perception which involves extrinsic objects and improper associations.<sup>137</sup> Mind is divided in its actuality and unable to express the true/real actuality/cause of the *ideatum* due to lack of experience, inability, confusion, prejudice, etc. In this case, the mind or “idea” does not actualize knowledge, i.e. become an active expression of the *ideatum*.

At the initial level of a perception, the *ideatum* should express knowledge to and through the individual knower. According to the second thesis (In order for me to know, it is not necessary to know that I know), knowledge should be sufficient to establish its own truth and certainty. If not, an individual would have knowledge of something which in fact was not knowledge unless a new reflexive idea verified the first idea. For example, an individual would see that the angles of a triangle must equal 180 degrees; yet this initial idea could not establish its

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<sup>136</sup> EIIP35

<sup>137</sup> Marcelo Dascal explains the opposite that adequate ideas do not depend on extrinsic sources since it would indicate that the adequate idea is lacking:

Due to its necessity dependence on a corporeal causal history, (an idea of) a bodily image necessarily has a double reference: it refers simultaneously to the body that is affected (A) and to the body that affects it (B). But this double reference must be reflected/grounded in the nature of the idea in question, i.e., that idea must *contain* a part (or at least an “aspect”) that “refers to B” and a part that “refers to A.” This means that, *qua* representation of B (or, for that matter, of A), it necessarily involves more than it should (namely, the part that “refers to A”). This extraneous element, necessarily present in all ideas (ideas of) images, prevents their being *truly* similar to what they represent. That is, it prevents their representing the *nature*, or the *essence*, of their objects. And, since there is nothing that can be done to extirpate such an extraneous element from (ideas of) images, there is no point in suggesting that they *lack* something which, if added, would yield true resemblance. [...] [T]he reference to B is not, ultimately, “irrelevant” for the idea of A, since the latter should contain everything that affects A, including its affection by B. Still, the (fortuitous) encounters of (my) body A with other bodies are only contingent, and thus do not touch the essence of my body. In that sense, they are “irrelevant” insofar as this essence is concerned—and this essence, whatever it is, is precisely what the *idea of A* is all about. Marcelo Dascal, “Unfolding the One: “Abstract Relations” in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, Vol. II, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (E.J. Brill, 1994), 179.

Ultimately, the “reference to an extrinsic body” does not indicate an actual external body as represented, but instead, serves to express an intrinsic reality which an adequate idea manifests.

truth and certainty unless there was a reflexive idea that precludes the thought of the contrary for that geometric truth.<sup>138</sup> By this logic, the individual would provide new information not contained in the original idea/perception, and that would indicate that no idea is sufficient to establish its own criteria for truth. This would lead to an infinite regress in which one could not be certain his ideas, ideas of ideas, and etc., are sound.<sup>139</sup> In order to avoid a regress, one must assume that the initial idea does not logically depend on a secondary idea.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, as the second thesis indicates, we do have reflexive ideas of our own knowledge. The very act of knowing is an *ideatum* for another idea. However, the reflexive idea may be wrongly perceived to be the level at which knowledge must express its epistemic properties. As a result, the improper interpretation that the original idea produces the awareness of its truth in a secondary idea occurs. At this conscious level, certainty in one's representation of reality would be established and used to order one's knowledge. By this logic, an individual's conscious mind would have the authority to judge correct instances of knowledge, as the initial idea is unreal/undetermined without subjective verification. However, this representation violates the second thesis; if the idea that a triangle equals 180 degrees requires a reflexive idea of the initial content to establish original idea's veracity, then the initial idea lacked the epistemic force to establish knowledge. In this case, the initial idea, although it seems certain, could not exclude other ideas or representations unless the first idea agreed with our idea of it. If so, to know would require additional information—namely, that agreement with another reflexive idea establishes knowledge.<sup>141</sup> Thus, the first thesis (To know that I know, I must first know.) must

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<sup>138</sup> Alexandre Matheron, "Ideas of Ideas and Certainty in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* and in the *Ethics*," 86.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>140</sup> Of course, an improper interpretation in which the claim "truth is its own ideas" implies a detachment of epistemic method from truth and leads to the possibility of an epistemic regress.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

not only be interpreted as entailing that a true idea does not logically depend on the reflexive idea of it, but also that a true idea wholly precedes its reflexive idea. In the previous example, the *ideatum* of the first idea was the triangle, whereas the *ideatum* of the reflexive idea was the original idea. If the *ideata* of the two ideas are conflated, then the second idea will seem to provide new information not contained in the original idea's *ideatum*, i.e. the necessity for subjective verification, and the *ideatum* of the first idea, its certainty of a truth, will seem to be displaced to a second idea.

In order to appropriately distinguish the *ideatum* of the two ideas, the first idea and reflexive idea, and uphold the epistemic force of knowledge, the first thesis should be interpreted to mean that (to know that I know) indicates that the original idea all by itself produces truth.<sup>142</sup> The original idea alone both logically and in the order of knowing is sufficient to establish truth and certainty. As a result, a reflexive idea of a true idea implicitly acknowledges that the original idea expresses knowledge and that it does not produce knowledge in addition to the prior idea. Since the original idea cannot be assumed to have changed its epistemic force and content, the reflexive idea as a separate idea simply manifests the fact of the original idea's self-sufficiency. The second idea is a testament to the force of knowledge present in the preceding true idea. In this case, to know a thing completely or perfectly is simply to have a true idea. Thus, for Spinoza, knowledge is an act of understanding and not like a static image in which the force of the initial true idea is dissociated from a representation of it. Rather, a true idea generates thoughts as a mode of its activity, and its actuality indicates its self-sufficiency and

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 86.



power. The true idea affirms its epistemic reality instead of corresponding to a reality after the fact.<sup>143</sup>

However, we do have the experience of not knowing in spite of knowing. We waver in our affirmation of a true idea because we have an imaginative preconception that disrupts the affirmative affect of a true idea.<sup>144</sup> When a true idea occurs, having been habituated, we recall the word ‘idea.’ Rather than an accurate expression of truth, this memory portrays an idea like an imaginative picture corresponding to an external reality. Thus, our bodily constitution has two conflicting affects, one true and another imaginative yet no less affective, so that we feel two conflicting emotions. Furthermore in the absence of a true idea, we recall the word ‘idea’ and its imaginative preconception to judge whether our former experience corresponded correctly to it. However this mode of judgment perpetuates the deforming habit of misrecognition.

As was shown in chapter one, in order to overcome the deforming habit of misrecognition, Spinoza attacks the habit’s conceptual edifice with a materialist epistemology. Spinoza’s theory of knowledge offers an embodied form of knowing so as to point out not only the inaccuracies of a representational form of knowledge but also to habituate an individual away

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<sup>143</sup> Elhanan Yakira describes Spinoza’s understanding of adequate ideas as a radical and strong alternative to a correspondence theory of truth, broadly construed:

Adequate ideas are not defined either by their relation to the objects they refer to (Spinoza does not have a correspondence theory of truth), or by their representative character, or by their resemblance to ideas in God’s understanding, taken to be archetype of all true ideas. Truth or adequacy is its own sign. [...] The significance of this doctrine is far-reaching, since it is based on a conception of ideas as non-representative and non-intentional entities. Strictly speaking, (adequate) ideas do not *refer* to their objects. The soul is the idea of body; but this does not mean, of course, that someone thinks the body through this idea which is the soul. The soul is the idea of the body because it is the *objective reality* of which the body is the *formal reality*. Basically, then, ideas are defined without reference to a subject; but ideas are constituents of *knowledge* and not only of *truth*. In other words, Spinoza tries to formulate an epistemology, and not a formal logic (which he abhors), where the concept of a subject does not have a constitutive role. We do not have to presuppose someone who performs the act of thinking (as Descartes and most of us do), in order to understand what thinking is. Elhanan Yakira, “Is the Rational Man Free?” in *Spinoza on Reason and the “Free Man”* Vol. IV, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (Little Room Press, 2004), 73.

Removing the requirement of correspondence or representation allows Spinoza to develop a non-intentional and thoroughly concrete epistemology.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 89.

from deforming prejudices. As a result, Spinoza understands that knowledge must lead to an ethical and political critique of the correspondence theory of knowledge. Spinoza's concept that mind is an idea of body points to a reading of the *Ethics* and Spinoza's work *in toto* as primarily political and not metaphysical.

If the concept that mind is an idea of body is understood correctly, it provides three initial and crucial conclusions to realize Spinoza's political basis:

(1) Psychological phenomena are contrary to epistemological ones. In epistemic language, to know does not require that one know that one knows. The experience of knowing resists reduction to a reflection on its knowledge. For example, the immediate experience of a pleasant object cannot be reduced to a theory of the Good that attempts to establish a universal criterion by which one could know that one knows a good experience.

(2) Nonetheless, psychological phenomena justify epistemological phenomena, albeit in epistemic terms. How one knows that one knows or how one conceptually orders truths requires that one posit that one's reflexive knowledge extends to a prior state in which conceptual awareness was not present. A psychological disposition and its appearance remain preconscious and precognitive to representation. Thus, the prior state can only be represented by universal concepts which claim to express the essence of the prior state. However, the ultimate justification of whether a particular concept is correct must be posited in the prior unknown state. For example, the appearance of a pleasant object presents itself in a preconceptual image, but when one explains why the pleasant object produced this perception, one assumes that certain traits such as symmetry, beauty, etc., were essentially present in the object. These traits are presented as ahistorical and immaterial features which constitute the existence of the object and

similar objects; nonetheless, the existence of these traits *requires* a prior state to justify the actuality of the conceptual claim.

(3) Despite the seemingly secure nature of the epistemic content, the content established must rely on an implicit origin and support. In the structure of reflexive knowledge, an implicit idea is assumed to be already formed in a specific way such that it will validate one's present knowledge. The acknowledgement of the need to account for what was before reveals that an unconscious force is affecting and disposing one to his or her specific thoughts. However, one's immediate perceptions cannot have the property of being universal nor can one's epistemic content have an immediate experience of reality. Given that the first two elements constituting the concept of mind as idea of body cannot account for the unconscious and generative force, the only recourse is to locate the cause of idea of body in an inconceivable yet already known source, i.e. a concrete body. A body allows for both a coming to thought and the condition for an acknowledgement that discloses thought's emergence from materiality. Thus, a bodily foundation is already taken up in perceptions and conceptual thought but does not disclose a purely unknown and separate substratum (Being), but rather, exhibits an active concrete body *(in)forming* thought.

Although I believe that Spinoza is clear that an idea must be an affection of God<sup>145</sup> and thus is unable to be removed from the causal necessity present in and through all attributes, there is a common misunderstanding of Spinoza's use and understanding of body. Since mind is the idea of body, body seems distinct from the order of affections of thought, i.e. the formal nature of thought explains God's efficient causality only from the perspective of thought.<sup>146</sup> As a result, ideas seem to be disassociated from the actuality of bodies and their causal order. Bodily

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<sup>145</sup> EIIIP12.

<sup>146</sup> EIIIP5.

interactions operate within extension and do not involve thinking. Hence when Spinoza states that mind is nothing but the idea of body,<sup>147</sup> the actuality of a human mind is necessarily divided as it cannot express body; in this case, body *does not constitute* the actuality of mind. I believe that this misconception can be tracked ultimately to a misunderstanding of Aristotle. If one assumes that the potential intellect, which indicates *potential* knowables, is radically distinct from the activity of thinking (for humans), then it seems that the agent intellect, the eternal actuality of thinking, is also radically separate from present acts of thinking. The disassociation of idea and potential object allows for a soul or *mens* to be separable from the material world (its potential objects of cognition). Only in a divine and separate agent intellect can one believe that the actuality of thinking agrees completely with the supposed potential knowables. As seen earlier, Spinoza rejects any concept of a potential intellect; all ideas are affections of God, i.e. necessarily affecting/active. Nevertheless, Descartes adopts this basic (mis)understanding of intellectual agreement and reality to offer a modern alternative to a materialist “epistemology,” whether Aristotelian or Spinozian.

From a Cartesian perspective, Spinoza’s incorporation of body into knowledge would seem naïve and presumptuous. Jean-Luc Marion<sup>148</sup> presents a criticism of Spinoza’s epistemology along similar lines, both providing a seemingly valid Cartesian alternative to Spinoza’s epistemology and questioning the success of assuming embodied knowledge according to Spinoza’s own “criterion.”<sup>149</sup> I will present a detailed analysis of Marion’s misunderstanding of Spinoza’s idea that the mind is the idea of body to highlight how this common misreading of Spinoza occurs and how one can avoid it.

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<sup>147</sup> EIIP13.

<sup>148</sup> Marion, “*Aporias* and the Origin of Spinoza’s Theory of Adequate Ideas,” 129-158.

<sup>149</sup> Of course, Spinoza’s criterion is inappropriately colored by Marion’s Cartesianism.

## Marion's (Mis)Reading

For Marion, Spinoza's materialist epistemology may indicate an embodied knower, but two serious questions persist for Marion: whether another epistemology, i.e. Cartesian, could explain knowledge without necessarily relying on the knower's material existence and whether Spinoza's view is profitable on its own terms. A Cartesian epistemology provides direct opposition to Spinoza's materialist epistemology and questions the necessity of Spinoza's embodied knower. According to a Cartesian epistemology, the detached rational faculties of a finite individual are sufficient to establish certain knowledge and evade the insurmountable difficulties of adequate knowledge of body.

Marion argues that Spinoza's understanding of the interplay among *objectum*, *ideatum*, and *idea* traps Spinoza's epistemology in a quasi-solipsism. The embodied knower cannot be certain of or adequately know bodily *objecti* as their *objecti* are not equivalent to *ideata* or ideas. Only God's infinite intellect is capable of having its *objecti*, *ideata*, and ideas as equivalent because God's intellect is always active and unlimited. A finite human intellect must acknowledge that the separability of an *ideatum* from its *objectum* entails that that *ideatum* may be denied expression. Nevertheless, perception through the senses, imagination, and memory indicates that these *ideata* are sustained by the *objectum* of the human body. As a result, the human mind can only know itself through ideas of its body.

This produces a quasi-solipsism where the human mind can only know the mind produced by its body but cannot know external *objecti* unmediated by its specific body-mind unity. Furthermore, the *objectum* of the human body has infinite connections with other bodies which cannot be expressed by the human mind so that the human mind is not the adequate idea of its body *in toto*. Nonetheless, the human does have an idea of its mind as a mind of this body

which body cannot be known. The mind knows itself,<sup>150</sup> i.e. it is an idea of a body, but simultaneously does not know itself because its *objectum*, the body, is not completely expressed by its mind. The human mind adequately knows its inadequate knowledge; it knows that mind is nothing but an idea of body.

The seeming inadequacy inherent in Spinoza's epistemology allows his critics to claim that the bar for knowledge is set impossibly high for any finite intellect. According to Marion, the infinite number of bodies that interact with and constitute the human body cannot be adequately expressed by the finite human intellect:

Inadequacy resides in the most intimate point, the junction between the body and the mind. It is within its body that each thinking mode experiences the disagreement of its ideas of extended modes with these modes themselves, which it nevertheless refers to as its body. "The human Mind does not involve adequate knowledge of the parts composing the human Body" (EIIp24). The innumerable ways in which my body is affected by other bodies leads me back, according to the laws of the communication of movements, to other modes external to my body.<sup>151</sup>

According to Marion, an infinite intellectual activity is required to adequately know the human body and only God's intellectual activity is eternal and unlimited. Thus, God's idea of the human body can properly express body because by knowing the infinite modifications and parts of the human body, God's idea of human body simultaneously knows the infinite parts and interactions in the universe.

As Marion notes:

"Indeed, God's idea of my body implies, by means of a single infinite deduction, the idea of each and every mode of extension which affects my body. [...] Consequently, if God has an (evidently adequate) idea of my body, it is because, far from having the idea which I have of it, he has the idea that I do not have; he possesses knowledge of the parts that comprise my body (and the modes that affect it) only "insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things, and not insofar as he has only the idea of the human Body"

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<sup>150</sup> I contest this view that mind is a reflection on or has knowledge of ideas as in any way applying to Spinoza's views. Nevertheless, this is an important assumption which Marion makes and by which to understand Marion's interpretation.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 129.

(EIIp24d). [...] Only God, whose infinite intellect entertains the thought of an infinite number of bodies other than mine, and is thus not limited to having an idea of only my body, has an adequate idea of it, which is nevertheless my body alone. As for my mind, it does not have adequate knowledge of its own body precisely because it has the idea of only this body.”<sup>152</sup>

God’s ability to adequately know every knowable provides it with the ability to know the human body. The requirement for adequately knowing the human body is to actually know the entire universe as God does. This standard for adequate knowledge of the human body, and subsequently the human mind, proves to be impossibly high for any finite human intellect.

Whereas God and its intellect can adequately know all bodily affections due to its infinite intellectual activity, the scope of knowledge for the human intellect is limited to the human body such that the *objectum* of an external body must be represented as contingent to an individual’s material existence. Whereas God’s “*objectum*,” the universe, can be expressed by God’s intellect, as they are equivalent, the human body is limited in its ability to incorporate external parts and bodies. This limitation forces the human intellect to generate the concept of externality. As a result, external *objecti* must be intellectually represented as contingent. Contingency indicates that the *ideatum* of external objects may be denied expression within the human intellect because its body does not truly incorporate their nature. Nevertheless, the representation of an external body in the human mind requires that the *objectum* of the human body sustains any continual perception or contemplation of these external bodies.

[M]y mind cannot have access to the idea of another body, especially one that affects my body, except through the idea of my body and its affections, that is to say, indirectly and therefore incorrectly. Here we see the full consequences of the principle posited above, according to which “the idea which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies” (EIIp16c2). Thus, when Paul perceives the idea of Peter, he has a better knowledge of the constitution of his own body than of Peter’s nature (EIIp17s). Even if I know the other, and thus escape strict solipsism, the circumstances of my knowledge affect its object to the point where I

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 129-30.

recognize myself more in it than I know the other. In consequence, a quasi-solipsism is achieved[.]<sup>153</sup>

As the continuation of the human body is a requirement for the human mind, it cannot be contingent to the human mind. Body is the necessary condition for and constitutes the nature of the human mind. However, the essential nature of the human mind is to know a limited *objectum* which manifests the intellect's lack of power to represent adequately the nature of external objects/parts. Through the act of re-presenting external objects, the individual realizes its own actuality as not equivalent and inadequate to those external objects. Nevertheless, the presentation of inadequacy shows that the human body is the ultimate arbiter of sensory/mental experience. The dispositions of the human body will determine which images, ideas, memories, concepts occur. Thus, the human body over-determines the epistemic claims of any mental judgment. Any experience of seemingly external or different objects indicates more properly the constitution of the human body than the reality-in-itself of extrinsic bodies/objects. Yet, the human body does not become the sole determining source of every experience. The externality present in the representation of our body and other bodies indicates that there are other forces that interact with and compel us to inadequately and indirectly consider their existence/affection. The human body-mind does not have the power to create *ex nihilo* a solipsistic world. Instead, it suffers the affections of external bodies through the affections of their natures on our own. Passivity indicates the necessary inadequacy of the human body to incorporate external objects and the inability to adequately express their natures in the human mind. In this arrangement, the human body-mind is compelled by extrinsic forces, aware of its impotency to determine external objects according to its nature.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 130.



The necessary reliance on the human body for the awareness of the human mind eliminates any intentional knowledge of external objects. External objects cannot represent actual objects of knowledge for the human intellect.

Contrary to intentional knowledge, which is always the awareness of something, namely, of something different from itself, the Spinozistic *mens* is awareness of itself alone and of nothing else. [...] [I]t is awareness of itself only by means of the idea of its body, or rather of the affections of its body. [...] [B]ut it does not know these adequately, for: “[T]he idea of the affections of the human Body, insofar as they are related only to the human Mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused” (EIIp28). [...] Knowledge by means of an inadequate idea, downgraded at first by reference to the (imaginative) knowledge of external bodies, is made to cover the entire epistemic field without any limitations, to the point where it invades the knowledge of one’s own body, and, in particular, to the point where it disqualifies what is indubitable *par excellence*, the supposedly rational knowledge of oneself by oneself[.]<sup>154</sup>

The appearance of external objects reveals the fact that the human mind can only be aware of the human body, which is inadequate to the human mind, as the body’s nature is divided by extrinsic natures. But the division of the human body expressed by its passivity does not indicate that consciousness could ever be extended beyond awareness of this human body-mind. Not only does a reference to an external world establish the inadequacy of the human body to different bodies, its inadequacy expresses a more severe point, that it lacks the power required to know every part of the human body affected by external bodies. This, in turn, shows that the parts of human body cannot be intentional objects of knowledge as well. The human body *in toto* becomes an amorphous notion rather than a secure object of intentional knowledge. As a result, the Cartesian claim that I can know my existence with certainty through my rational investigation of my mind becomes impossible. Instead, the knower is left with complete uncertainty and insecurity of his or her (mental) existence.

Descartes experiences a similar problem of adequacy in his epistemology. As Marion notes:

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 130-31.

The question of the possibility of having adequate knowledge of oneself and one's body first emerged in Descartes. [...] That question was: How can I who discovers that it exists as a "thinking thing" pretend, from *Meditations* II on, to truly distinguish itself from and exist unrelated to the "extended thing?" For, "the fact that I doubt about body or deny that body exists, does not bring it about that no body exists" (*Reply to the Fourth Set of Objections*, HR II, p. 80). Undoubtedly, in establishing rules governing the equivalence between distinction in reason and distinction in reality, once the hyperbolic doubt has been overcome, Descartes bases himself on the correspondence between the ego which is "capable of perceptions" and God, who is "capable of production" (AT VII, 71/13-20). Here it should be reiterated that Descartes did not establish this correspondence until after he had overcome the hyperbolic doubt, and could not therefore pride himself on it from *Meditations* II on.<sup>155</sup>

In this case, adequate knowledge requires knowledge of every interconnection and infinitely many possible objects of knowledge. Whereas God's intellect can know every possible object of knowledge since its intellect is infinite, unlimited, and always active, the human intellect must have a finite and restricted perspective. The human mind must experience externality and contingency for itself and within itself. Descartes's great insight is that the existential condition of uncertainty for the human intellect can be developed into a method of hyperbolic doubt, which can be used to raze any positive content presented to the intellect. This allows Descartes to claim that the human intellect at least can make a negative distinction between itself and the (external) world. By establishing the detached, special, and essentially negative nature of the human intellect, according to Marion, Descartes is not required to give a rigorous defense of the positive capabilities of the human intellect.

By having a negative distinction between mind and object of mind, Descartes can claim that knowledge of the mind is restricted to the field of investigation appropriate to the mental. Intellectual reality can be determined by a wholly intellectual criterion. This criterion should be apparent through the ideas themselves, i.e. *per se notum*. In this account, true knowledge can be discovered through intellectual or rational relationships rather than through any adequate

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 132-33.

reference to an extrinsic object of knowledge. The only account of true knowledge available to Descartes is intellectual completion, that is, whether ideas can be sufficient to determine intellectual consistency and self-sufficiency. As Marion notes:

[T]he Cartesian thesis [is that] true knowledge requires completion rather than adequacy; the *res cogitans* of the second Meditation does not lack adequacy because it does not aim at achieving it, and it does not aim at achieving it because it does not require it to truly know itself. What true knowledge seeks is a formalized and ordered finite non-inadequacy, which is not at all equivalent to inadequacy. More accurately, Descartes argues that what is in question is not whether the final outcome is clear and distinct knowledge of reality (*revera*), for such knowledge is guaranteed by God, but rather how to determine under what conditions knowledge in general is true. In the case of the *res cogitans*, it is sufficient that it exist by itself in order to be a truly distinct substance, for its existence defines it as substance. Since sufficiency defines it as a *res completa*, it is not necessary to possess adequate knowledge in order to arrive at a substance that is a complete thing: “For I do not think that an adequate knowledge of the thing is, in this case, required.”<sup>156</sup>

Descartes eschews an account of adequacy for the justification and discovery of knowledge. For Descartes, the mind can know itself because the thinking I must be an intellectual concept that cannot be eliminated from intellectual reality. Ideas must be conceived with the foundational thinking substance of the *cogito*.

Nevertheless, the success of Descartes’s hyperbolic doubt, like Spinoza’s concept of mind as nothing but the idea of body, over-determines every epistemic claim to the point that formal distinctions made by the intellect are suspect. The very act of doubt can itself become questionable for the finite intellect. Thus, the doubt about external objects and one’s own body is neither sufficient to establish the non-existence of bodies nor establish a real distinction between mind and body. As a result, the possibility that body essentially constitutes mind cannot be excluded. Although the mind, via negation, may nonetheless make formal distinctions, those distinctions in reason do not translate necessarily into real distinctions. According to Marion, Descartes is left in a similar position as Spinoza; formal/mental distinctions are not equivalent or

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 134-35. Translation modified.

adequate to real distinctions such that an infinite intellect is required to bridge the gap and secure real and certain knowledge. Complete knowledge of every possible object would seem to be required to establish certainty about the epistemic judgments of specific objects.

[...] [T]he distance between God's "immense potency" and the human mind is the same as that between the infinite and the finite, one must conclude that "[T]here is none but God who knows that He has adequate cognition of all things" (AT VII, 220/10-11), and that "[A] created mind... can never know that this [i.e., an adequate notion of things] is in its possession unless God gives it a private revelation of the fact" (AT VII, 220, 12-14). From this there follows a clear-cut division: on the one hand, the human is limited to its own special power of knowing and cannot arrive at truly adequate knowledge, and on the other hand, only God or someone who possesses the divine point of view has adequate knowledge.<sup>157</sup>

Adequate cognition would seem to make completeness and adequacy synonymous. As the mind may abstract and separate certain properties from an object, in the process, it acknowledges that those properties constituted a prior unity. However, that unity cannot be completely or adequately known, due to the possibility of abstraction, unless an idea represents all the appropriate configuration of properties distinctly. That is, it knows when those properties occur only for that object and for not others. But as noted previously, an adequate and complete idea would be possible only from the perspective of an infinite intellect. Thus, a complete and adequate idea would not only express all the appropriate properties of an object of knowledge, but simultaneously, would refer the object's idea to its non-mental object with which it adequately agrees.

Descartes recognizes that the finite intellect would have an impossible demand placed upon it if it were required to be adequate to objects in order to establish certainty and knowledge. Instead, Descartes prudently separates the concept of completeness from adequacy in order argue that a finite intellect may have *a form of certainty* and knowledge through complete concepts rather than adequation. Whereas previously Descartes showed how ideas could be divided and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 135-36.

abstracted from others to demonstrate that hyperbolic doubt could invalidate all mental phenomena, Descartes now uses abstraction to illustrate how ideas can be complete and necessary without relying on any external or material support.

By averring the factual impossibility that adequate knowledge can be achieved by the “created mind” (fourth Reply, HR II, p. 97; AT VII, 220/12), Descartes concludes that such knowledge is not required (AT VII, 220/26). [...] [I]n the realm of the finite, we can never be certain of the adequacy of our knowledge of a thing – which could only be achieved if we had adequate knowledge of God’s creative power with regard to that thing. However, even though entirely adequate (*plane adaequata*) knowledge is impossible, it is still permissible to envisage knowledge that has “sufficient adequacy to let us see that we have not rendered it inadequate by an intellectual abstraction” (HR II, p. 98, AT VII, 221/6, 9-10). Indeed, while our finite understanding cannot verify adequacy, it can validate its non-inadequacy.<sup>158</sup>

In any act of abstraction, derivative ideas are generated by extracting them from a prior unity. A necessary condition for abstraction is that some prior unity, whether accidental or necessary, is assumed to provide the actuality to be divided. By examining whether the separation or abstraction compels these derivative ideas to constantly refer back to that prior unity or produce disunity among those derivative ideas (a conflict, such as a contradiction or imprecise idea), one can determine the derivative concept as an incomplete idea.

Descartes explains his doctrine clearly in a letter to Gibieuf: “In order to know whether my idea is not rendered incomplete or inadequate through some abstraction of my mind, I must only be certain that I have not derived it ... from some other idea which is fuller or more complete than that which I have in myself.” Two cases present themselves at this point: (1) In the act of abstracting, two ideas that are in reality inseparable are being separated from each other. Thus, the separation of the idea of a figure from substance or extension results from abstraction, whereas in reality the very nature of a figure presupposes the nature of extension and substantiality (or existence). Thus the idea of a figure is bound to appear inadequate in theoretical discourse, as it is incapable of providing an account of the attributes which it nevertheless implies. But its separation from these attributes is merely an abstraction; it is either temporary or false due to its incompleteness. (2) An idea can separate *itself* from another idea by distinguishing itself from the other idea, thus accounting for all its implications. Thus, “the idea of a substance which is extended and has a shape is complete, because I can conceive it by

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 137.

itself and deny its connection with all other things of which I have ideas”; Similarly, “the idea that I have of a thinking substance is thus complete.”<sup>159</sup>

As Descartes argues, if the abstracted idea can maintain a sufficient unity, then it is a complete idea requiring no intellectual support from other concepts. In the case of thinking substance, separating or abstracting it retains a unity that can be complete to and entirely expressed by its idea. *Res cogitans* can sustain itself through every abstraction or rather through the infinitely rigorous application of hyperbolic doubt. Yet as established earlier, an idea’s apparent completeness cannot exhaust every possible attribute for its object. Intellectual completeness may seem to establish a necessary agreement between an idea and its (non-mental) object, but a further criterion for adequacy is required: it is necessary that one know that one’s knowledge is an adequate cognition for that object. That is, the first order level of adequacy, the complete idea of an object, must itself be an object of adequate knowledge. That initial act of cognition must be known completely, so as to exclude the possibility that God has put anything in the object above or exceeding our first-order knowledge, and even God’s knowledge, since God would experience a similar fate without second-order adequacy. As a result, only a divine perspective could establish both first order adequacy, i.e., the idea’s agreement with an object’s necessary properties, and second order adequacy, i.e. the adequate idea cannot be exceeded by a more adequate idea; it corresponds to the thing-in-itself. The unavailability of second-order adequacy for the finite human intellect means that only through some sort of private revelation of this fact, the idea’s ontological agreement with the object, could the human intellect know its ideas adequately corresponded to reality.

Nevertheless, a finite or created intellect has the power to know whether its complete ideas are not rendered inadequate by rational abstraction. If ideas pass the test that abstraction or

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 137-38.

separability does not make them incomplete, and thus inadequate, through this procedure the human intellect can be *certain* that specific ideas are not as yet falsifiable. But more importantly, the intellect can develop procedures by which to falsify many ideas: imprecise ideas, contradictions, etc. The human intellect has the ability to make tentative distinctions, and thus, provide itself with a deductive/rational method by which to validate certain ideas as non-inadequate or as necessarily inadequate, incomplete, and invalid. Thus, the human intellect would then be certain that specific ideas are provisionally true and complete by which it could direct a rough scientific method to continually test the falsifiability of these “secure” ideas.

An idea establishes itself as complete not in virtue of an adequacy in principle which is based on God, but through the permanent control of procedures of falsification, procedures which at best still assure us that it is not inadequate. Admitting the finitude of human intellect, and renouncing the adequacy reserved for an infinite intellect, Descartes frees finite rationality from the need to render itself adequate to God’s power or to his infinite intellect. By recognizing that it is limited, finitude can reveal itself without any reference to absolute science, and proceed by means of auto-verification and auto-validation. Thus, with the aid of the paradigm of complete notion, Descartes arrives at – or at the very least provides us with a sketch of – the very modern definition of scientific truth: a truth that is certain though not absolute, that is verified because it is provisional.<sup>160</sup>

Descartes proposes a modest approach that the finite intellect can achieve knowledge and certainty through finite non-inadequacy. This position is a compromise where certainty is achieved through the falsification of definitely inadequate ideas and the establishment of definite rules governing falsification. No longer can the human intellect expect to achieve a second-order adequacy with God’s perspective because this could only be achieved through revelation.

Given Descartes’s reconfiguration of knowledge, Marion asks why Spinoza equates knowledge and certainty with adequacy? Furthermore, what would be profitable in this equivalence if the standard of second-order adequacy is so impossibly high? Spinoza definitely accepts the possibility of first-order adequacy—that an idea may equate to or agree with an

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 138.

object/*ideatum* by expressing all its appropriate properties. However, since the human mind is nothing but an idea of body, any adequate idea which constitutes the human Mind would seem to fall into the trap of quasi-solipsism. The adequate idea constituting a human mind would be relevant only for that specific body-mind perspective so that that mind/idea could not exclude every other affection-idea that might *really* be appropriate for that idea. Adequate ideas constituting some finite mind would need to be equivalent to a divine mind's idea of that very object. What would be required is that our ideas as experienced by us (*in mens humana*) are the same as God's experience of those ideas.

[I]n contradistinction to that of Descartes, Spinoza's thesis requires the existence of a vast conceptual field and involves positing not one but two adequacies. For the first adequacy, that of ideas to their *ideata*, implies another: that between the "human Mind" and God. Although in EIIp32 Spinoza based the truth of ideas on their being referred to God – "All ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true" – this reference necessarily presupposes that the finite mind has access to God, that is, that the human mind can attain adequate knowledge. It is this that accounts for his extraordinary audacity in EIIp47: "The human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence." In short, in order to ensure epistemological adequacy, Spinoza must arrive at an unequivocal theological adequacy.<sup>161</sup>

On this reading, the stipulation that our ideas are God's ideas would exclude an intrinsic standard of truth, intellectual agreement, in favor of an extrinsic standard, correspondence with God's mind. The ultimate reliance on God's mind/reality as the guarantee for intrinsic conceptual adequacy raises the question as to why Spinoza holds that adequacy is a sufficient and profitable view to establish true and adequate deductions. As Marion notes:

[...] [I]f truth results from ascribing ideas to God, can we also ascribe our own ideas – those of a *mens humana* which is finite – to him? And, inversely, if "there are no inadequate or confused ideas except insofar as they are related to the singular Mind of someone" (EIIp36d), is it even thinkable that such reference to God will simply reinstate their being ideas of the human mind? Can the same ideas change their ascription without changing their very nature? In any case, the indeterminacy of the formula "in the Mind"

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 138-39.



(EIIp39-40) renders it incapable of either explaining or justifying the reference of the finite mind to the infinite intellect.<sup>162</sup>

The projection of our ideas onto God provides no relief from the actual inadequacy present in certain *human* ideas. The ability to conceive that certain “adequate” ideas are possibly in God’s intellect does not ensure they are necessarily adequate. The threat of inadequacy resides in every human idea since the finite intellect cannot have access to the infinite intellect.

According to Marion, Spinoza’s best defense is that adequate intellectual deductions should proceed from complete or simple natures.

[...] [C]onsidered formally, true knowledge differs from false knowledge “not only by an extrinsic, but chiefly by an intrinsic denomination” (TIE 69). Thus, when an artisan conceives of a manufactured object according to the correct order, even when this manufactured object does not yet exist, it already counts (in essence) as a “true thought.” And the opposite is true as well: in order to count as a true thought, a proposition concerning an essence endowed with existence (for instance, “Paul exists”) must formally imply the existence outside of thought. As a result, truth consists of “something real” in the idea (TIE 70). In defining truth as “the standard both of itself and of the false” (EIIp43s), *Ethics* II echoes this thesis in part. From there on, knowledge means deducing from a true idea, which thus becomes the norm of truth and of its deployment, what it already comprises in itself *objectively* – according to the double meaning of this notion: what it comprises by representation, as well as comprises as principle and cause, itself cause-less (TIE 71).<sup>163</sup>

These intellectual objects should wholly contain and express their properties, and thereby indicate that they are a causeless intellectual force. These objects and their expressions reciprocally imply one another, and thus, these objects will never become incomplete abstractions or intellectual affirmations. The eternal intellectual affirmations present in these simple objects provide an occasion to ask whether certain intellectual deductions could be claimed to be always affirmative in any mind. The idea of God is such an idea. The idea of God shows that there can be an intellectual reality that is always operative and establishes a reality through itself. According to Marion, the example of God’s intellect prior to creation shows that

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 139-40.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 143-44.

there can be a proper adequate order of thinking without external correspondence playing a fundamental role in establishing *objective* truth in an intellectual reality.<sup>164</sup>

Truth “without relation to other things” (TIE 71) appears in two instances: (1) TIE 71 assumes first “the intellect” and then the divine intellect that existed prior to the creation of the world (“as some conceive God’s intellect”). If one conceives of some new entity (*ens aliquod novum*) that does not exist outside one’s thought, and if one correctly deduces (*deducere*) other thoughts from this thought, the truth of the whole will not depend on any existing external object, but only on the power of the intellect. (2) TIE 72 generalizes this outcome, referring it not only to the divine intellect, but also to us, provided that we “consider some true idea” that is independent of every object in nature.<sup>165</sup>

Whether creation occurred is unimportant to the point that every finite and limited mode, thinking or otherwise, would require a cause to actualize its existence and that this necessary precondition would show that the actuality of thought can be sufficient to establish the *objectivity* of specific thoughts. A divine intellect could deduce directly adequate and true ideas from the idea of itself, i.e. an idea as always existing, so that if one conceives of a new entity “before creation” it would nevertheless be real and adequate by following the causal chain within thought, the power of the intellect. Furthermore, it shows that our experience of producing the proper ordering of certain constructions can be similarly valid and adequate to reality.

A deduction is correct only insofar as true ideas imply each other reciprocally; falsity consists only in this: “that something is affirmed of a thing that is not contained in the concept we have formed of the thing” (TIE 72). A deduction must affirm of a thing only that which its idea already comprises.<sup>166</sup>

The actuality present in an idea and as expressed by a mind (mind is the idea of X) must agree completely with and establish the reality of the mind. Since the idea of the mind must be posited in the reality of God’s intellect, this true idea will be manifested or expressed as a mind. The mind is true or real and thereby *is* knowledge.

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<sup>164</sup> Marion’s misunderstand Spinoza’s concept of infinity and wrongly assumes that it is potentially temporal. Thus, Marion misinterprets Spinoza’s claim about God’s intellect being prior to “created” things.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 144-45.

Yet, Marion argues that the finite intellect is restricted in its intellectual power so that seeing the possibility of an eternal intellectual deduction does not make it actual since the finite intellect, given its limited power, must create deductions and mental affirmations that exceed or violate the appropriate order. The finite intellect cannot always *produce* adequate agreements as it is a part of divine intellect and requires passivity in its thinking.

One must decide “by what power our mind can form these [... ideas]” (TIE 73), that is to say, to recognize that this power “does not extend to infinity” (TIE 73). This “defect of our perception” (TIE 73) makes it inevitable that our deduction will occasionally result in abstract and truncated ideas. For, since our thought is finite, it fails to produce all ideas adequately, the inadequacy indicating through negation another thinking being: “[I]t is certain that inadequate ideas arise in us only from the fact that we are a part of a thinking being, of which some thoughts wholly constitute our mind, while others do so only in part” (TIE 73).<sup>167</sup>

This passivity or externality necessarily leads to abstractions, imprecise ideas, contradictions, or generally, inadequate ideas. Thus, the question again can be raised: how does an appropriate order of deduction for the human mind equate to God’s infinite intellectual order of deduction? The adequate experience of a singular object requires an infinite intellect which can form every possible interrelation that its object would have *ad infinitum*.<sup>168</sup> As a result, a true intellectual agreement would require an infinite and instantaneous deduction produced by an infinitely active intellect. Although one may assert that for an infinite intellect there is real adequacy and hence certain truth, this position provides no real benefit to the skepticism that befalls the finite human intellect. The embodied intellect advocated by Spinoza seems to be beset with insecurity, passivity, intermittent deductions, and necessarily inadequate ideas. According to Marion, acknowledging the deficiency that a finite intellect has in relation to the infinite intellect secures no apparent profit for Spinoza.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>168</sup> This of course is false for Spinoza; however, it may appropriately describe Leibniz’s position.

[...] [The] definition of self-sufficiency [of an adequate idea] is preceded by the traditional extrinsic definition – “A true idea must agree with its object [*ideatum*]” (EIIax6) – and it is precisely to this axiom that Spinoza turns to finally establish the possibility of relating all our ideas to God: “For all ideas which are in God agree entirely with their objects (P7C), and so (by IA6) they are all true” (EIIp32d). We cannot help but be astonished that, at the same solemn moment at which the *aporia*, which has been a stumbling block in the TIE, is overcome for the first time, Spinoza does not employ the same definition of truth that he prefers to the exclusion of any other. Nor can we avoid a consideration of the conjunction of these two innovations: our ideas become God’s own ideas, but intrinsic truth becomes extrinsic. In short, we can only suspect that the loss of self-sufficient adequacy is the price that must be paid in order to achieve epistemological univocity. [...] There is of course no doubt that falsity does not constitute a positive reality. But this is a banal statement that has been repeated over and over again in this philosophical tradition, and to which Spinoza adds nothing at all.<sup>169</sup>

Reliance on the infinite is not sufficient to generate secure knowledge for the finite intellect; knowing that something is true does not produce the whatness of that truth. Only the infinite *productive* intellect, an intellect that must comprise all adequate ideas, can truly or adequately/intrinsically know the eternal nature of things. Whereas a finite intellect may know that adequacy is necessary, its productive power to manifest true ideas is limited. A finite individual’s response to this limitation must be to recognize that only a limited epistemology is possible, i.e. Cartesian, or to believe unwarrantedly that one’s true ideas are equivalent to God’s ideas.

By presenting a modest and seemingly valid Cartesian alternative to and highlighting the apparent unprofitability of adequacy within Spinoza’s epistemology, Marion provides a serious challenge to the philosophical necessity and practicality of Spinoza’s materialist epistemology. According to Marion, Spinoza could only hold his epistemological positions if he had non-philosophical commitments:

The motive behind this is obvious: this method, particular with regard to the adequate, intrinsically true, idea, owes a heavy debt to the Cartesian theme, namely, the transcendental abyss between the finite and the infinite, the *Ethics* having no other purpose than to fill it up. What the *Ethics* attempts to achieve rationally is precisely the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 148-49. Quote modified.

same as what Descartes believed to be inaccessible to human reason – “unless God give it a private revelation of the fact” (fourth Reply, HR II, p. 97), “unless it were revealed by God” (ibid., HR II, p. 98) – in short, without “some extraordinary assistance from above and [from a being] more than a mere man” (*Discourse on Method*, HR I, p. 85). A strange hypothesis seems to emerge in light of this rapprochement with Descartes: it seems that Spinozist doctrine of the adequate idea attempts to accomplish on the strict “level of reason” what would have been accomplished in the theological sphere through Grace and private revelation.<sup>170</sup>

It is Marion’s contention that Spinoza has purely theological concerns advocating the position that adequate ideas in the finite human intellect could adequately agree with adequate ideas in the infinite intellect. Marion argues that Spinoza’s position reflects his deep desire to remove the possibility of revelation and the personal, interested God that is attached to it. Marion claims that Spinoza’s insistence on the foundational position that finite, adequate ideas are true eliminates the metaphysical space in which divine grace would be posited and forces human beings to constantly seek truth in practical and material activities. Although Marion may be correct that Spinoza’s general objective in advocating an embodied knower is to challenge theological responses to skepticism, I argue that Spinoza uses the adequacy of God’s ideas as a means to secure the adequacy of human adequate ideas. The motive behind Spinoza’s presentation of finite adequacy equating to divine adequacy is based on epistemological, ethical, and political concerns.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 149. This interpretation of Spinoza is entirely false. From a Judeo-Islamicate Aristotelian tradition, one from which I would argue Spinoza develops his philosophy, the order of the created finite world, or sublunar world, does not require a radical separation between God’s intellect and the becoming of the world. For philosophers in this other tradition, such as Averroes and Gersonides, the Agent Intellect does not transcend or merely emanates the created world, but rather, it is the *immanent active* order of the sublunar world.

## A Spinozian Response

Spinoza argues that true ideas related to or in God must agree with their *ideata*.<sup>171</sup> According to Spinoza, this guarantees that the intrinsic agreement we experience in an adequate idea will be equal to “God’s experience” when God so constitutes the human Mind, i.e. is the same adequate idea. Our thinking is a *part* of the intellectual real, or God’s intellect,<sup>172</sup> and as such, that intellectual reality must agree with itself. When we have an intellectual agreement, a thought in the infinite intellect, it cannot exceed that reality but truly expresses it. Thus, adequate ideas cannot exceed the real with which they agree. The inability to exceed intellectual agreements indicates that the human intellect cannot form abstractions from its adequate ideas or entertain doubts as to whether its adequate ideas are true.

Agreement with an *ideatum* also entails that true ideas cannot be radically different affirmations or alternative versions of themselves. That is, the intellectual “content” or expression that one presently experiences in his or her idea must be equivalent to the same idea if that “content” or affirmation is really true. For the sake of argument, if one could conceive of an idea as potentially true and adequate,<sup>173</sup> even in this case, that idea must posit or at least give preference to its intellectual affirmation as existing in that way. So when a true idea “occurs,” the true idea presents no radically new content that might be hidden from an *actual* idea or present affirmation.

To have a true idea implies via its very conception that there will be a cause for that true idea. Since by conceiving an idea there is at least a positing or preference for an existential condition of its expression, this indicates that any real or adequate knowledge of this effect, the idea, will involve a more adequate understanding of the idea’s cause. Knowing the effect

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<sup>171</sup> EIP32.

<sup>172</sup> EIP11Cor.

<sup>173</sup> This is impossible for Spinoza because possibility is a fiction.

implies that the effect can be conceived through causal conditions that *must* manifest themselves in this effect or idea in that very way and with no content removed or hidden from the effect or idea. The existence of a caused idea should be posited within and deduced from the causal necessity of a more powerful and real idea such that there will be necessarily a cause producing this idea by which it is *rendered* a true idea.

This cause cannot be merely subjective or generated solipistically because it would make the true idea or caused idea unreal according to its own standard. The idea would both posit itself and deny its own actuality in the process of attempting to affirm its existence within a more real causal condition. In fact, both the more powerful cause and the effect would be limited according to their own natures. The cause would not bring into reality, a reality it already has and should have, i.e. an effect of that reality, and so, an effect would not refer to and deduce itself from a real condition that actualizes and “justifies” its affirmation of existence, which existence it should already have. To be a cause is to be a cause of an effect; they are concurrent because they are correlatives. Proceeding along these lines, there must be one actuality or reality which has an infinite causal power, i.e. one substance or Nature, to generate all “possible” determinate effects or modes expressing this power and through which they must be adequately conceived. That is, these determinate intellectual modes, or ideas, must express singular adequate agreements by which they are *constituted* as real, not deficient, expressions of God’s reality. Given the infinite causal power of God or Nature, there can be an infinite or indefinite “number” of actual modes, each expressing a singular and real aspect of Nature. These expressions as actualized and singular expressions have an equal claim on the actuality of Nature, being real expressions of Nature, so that they cannot doubt their reality nor rely on

extrinsic references or modes and an inclusion of lacking properties to render them secure and real.

According to *Ethics* II Proposition 7 and *Ethics* I Axiom 4,<sup>174</sup> the knowledge of an effect requires knowledge of its cause so that the order of knowledge must have the same order of causes or things. An idea's cause or *ideatum* must provide a basis by which the effect or idea can conceive or truly understand itself through the *ideatum*. Thus, as the *ideatum really* interacts with other ideas or determinate modes, so this order of interaction plays itself out in the subsequent knowledge which is *generated* by such interaction. Conversely, *how* the mind or intellect can *determine itself* intellectually (i.e. according to common notions and intellectual agreements) must be deduced or directly lead back to the generation from and as an expression of the causal order or affects. Yet, this production of the intellect is not static and does not refer to a static object to which it corresponds. As Spinoza notes in *TdIE* 41:

[...] [T]he idea is objectively in the same way as its object [*ideatum*] is really. So if there were something in Nature that did not interact with other things, and if there were an objective essence of that thing which would have to agree completely with its formal essence, then that objective essence would not interact with other ideas, i.e., we could not infer [or gather] anything about it. And conversely, those things that do interact with other things (as everything that exists in Nature does) will be understood [*intelligentur*], and their objective essences will also have the same interaction, i.e. other ideas will be deduced from [or led back to] them, and these again will interact with other ideas, and so the tools for proceeding further will increase[.]<sup>175</sup>

Since every idea, and especially every true idea, must agree with the formal essence of its object or *ideatum*, an object or *ideatum* that did not have any actual causal interactions with other modes could not produce an idea of it. That is, any static identity between idea and *ideatum* or

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<sup>174</sup> Spinoza in EIIP7 states: “*The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.* Dem.: This is clear from IA4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect. Cor.: From this it follows that God’s power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting. [...]” This proposition and argument clearly relies, as Spinoza notes, on EIAx. 4: “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.”

<sup>175</sup> *TdIE* 41. Translation modified.



effect and cause could not constitute truth or reality, but in fact, would deny the *productive* making of truth. A static cause or *ideatum* itself could not provide the causal reality *by which* to allow an effect to be actually conceived in it—the order of understanding should eventually end with God’s reality as “first” and most perfect cause. Ideas that are identically their *ideata* deny a causal condition *rich enough* to provide *actual* reasons to know the productive object or *ideatum*. Furthermore, this shows that the *ideatum* or cause cannot be exhaustively known by an idea of it because that would deny the *ideatum*’s reality to constitute this idea or effect. Thus, we must assume that the causal power or interactions which an *ideatum actually* has cannot be reduced by an idea and because of this allows us to gather or infer *specific* knowledge about this object. Nevertheless, the many actual aspects of an *ideatum* not reduced to one single idea manifest the fact that things, or ultimately Nature, has an indefinite power to generate many forms of true knowledge. Thus, Spinoza is correct to say that all things that interact within Nature will be understood or will become intelligible [*intelligentur*] because they already have the sufficient power as an actual reason. However, this does not indicate that a specific form of knowledge of a mode requires a single infinite deduction of the entire universe to be known as Marion contends.

The “potential cause” and movement from *perceived* potentiality to actuality cannot be identical to the actual form expressed in an idea. If there were an identity, it would be both in the same respect and at the same time, which is manifestly false by the very production of knowledge. Identity between a potential cause and actual effect would disallow the production of knowledge and force knowledge to rest in an eternal state of potentiality. Instead, it is more appropriate to consider the cause and effect of knowledge as same yet in different respects, or that the same is always already the different. Thus, adequate agreement in a true idea is not a

reduction of its object or a form of transparency of the object. Knowledge as an active cause or productive force is neither atemporal nor an eternally static transcendent state of truth. Thus, actual knowledge can in no way be classified as unilinear (as an infinite deduction would entail).

Knowledge of a mode through an *ideatum* not only implies that the mode's power has many unknown interactions, other "extrinsic" ideas or parts involved in it, but also that there must be specific determinate forms that constitute the idea of it. These determinate forms are not deficient in relation to the true idea but actually make it true as a productive force expressing itself within Nature and as Nature. Additionally, these determinate forms or possibilities are not reduced to a set number of eternally true attributes. The ability of these specific concrete conditions to *make* a singular true idea is appropriate or *adequate* to a singular intellect. In Aristotelian idiom, there is not one potential intellect that must be identical to the Agent Intellect; instead, there are many acquired intellects via the actualized activities of many potential/material intellects whose truth originates in the Agent Intellect.<sup>176</sup> Thus, the *human* mind or intellect must be constituted by specific determinate modes, ideas and ideas of bodies, and the human individual must be constituted by *specific modes* of extension and thought.

The composite nature of the human intellect and individual illuminates why attributes by a specific human individual-mind<sup>177</sup> must be tentative or "as if" constituting reality in itself. Any attribution of truth, perfection, or good, etc., to an object must be, as Spinoza states, *metaphorically* in the thing.<sup>178</sup> The activity of the thing exceeds extrinsic denominations. As

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<sup>176</sup> See Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Gersonides's Radically Modern Understanding of the Agent Intellect," in *Meeting of the Minds: The Relations Between Medieval and Classical Modern European Philosophy*, ed. Stephen F. Brown, (Brepols, 1999), 203-204.

<sup>177</sup> The attribution of a human type of mind-body itself is problematic because there are no real essences that reduce individuals to exactly the same types. There are no real universal essences in Nature, no human nature among and constituting "human" individuals. My emphasis of the term human in the text is meant to indicate that singular minds are *specific to interacting "objects," which are of a determinate "nature," which in turn allow social-political affections*. Thus, these types are not pre-given or predetermined in Nature.

<sup>178</sup> See pp. 7-8 and CPAppendix I Chapter 6.

shown earlier in this chapter, the interplay between an *objectum*, *ideatum*, and idea does not represent an appropriate ascription of properties to an object but the very power of a concrete individual forming singular, adequate knowledge. The interplay among these three concepts shows that the activity of an *objectum* expresses itself in an *ideatum*, and the *ideatum*'s activity<sup>179</sup> is objectively expressed in an idea so that the original cause or mover cannot be reduced to a discrete external object since the mover or determining cause is the individual's intellect producing knowledge. The individual and its intellect express compelling forces or motions and by expressing these forces constitute the individual's mind and its power to know *or* even exist as a human minded-body. To be able to exist as a specific compelling force indicates that the individual mind expresses the very causal power of Nature in a certain and determinate way. This determinate way, the individual mind actively makes/is because the mind is compelled by Nature to produce effects as a necessary aspect of Nature's infinite causal power.<sup>180</sup> The intellectual determinations a mind makes according to its power manifest an inborn ability to express Nature and to agree with real aspects of Nature capable of perfecting<sup>181</sup> the individual's existence. How the mind objectively proceeds according to its intellectual agreements "translates" into how other modes constituting the same individual are acting within their causal order. Thus, the more capable and powerful an intellect is (power based on the intellectual tools generating effects, i.e. generative definitions), so the more capable body acts as well. The body is the same as mind because mind is nothing but the idea of a composite body.

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<sup>179</sup> In reality, these activities are not separate.

<sup>180</sup> EIP36.

<sup>181</sup> That is, make it complete. This should not be construed as any ontological perfection. The Latin term '*perfectum*' means 'made finished.'

As Spinoza claims, the idea of the human body is constituted by an infinite number of other ideas of the parts of the human body.<sup>182</sup> However, to focus on the inadequacy inherent in the knowledge of the human body/mind, as Marion does, diminishes the *reality* of the agreements that constitute the human body and produce adequate ideas. Marion misses the point of Spinoza's concept of a composite body and ontologizes the human body as a discrete object of knowledge. Marion imports a standard of knowledge which assumes that a finite mode such as the human body/mind must include every part in its nature to be adequately known. To assume that a finite mode contains a determined rather than determinate set of adequate attributes would be to establish an independent whole within Nature which is contrary to the causal dialectic between Nature and mode. The dialectic between Nature and mode only allows one "independent" *complex* whole, Nature, which is oddly the most singular or unique. Although an opponent may claim that greater knowledge of agreements and oppositions constitutes a more true knowledge of an individual body/mind, this would still suggest that there is only one absolutely true form for specific individuals. One could just as easily say that adequate knowledge constitutes a nominal definition of an "individual" which expresses appropriate agreements and distinctions at that singular moment. The nominal yet appropriate definition would constitute a specific singular adequate aspect/idea for that moment or the conditions that sustain it. Instead of reifying individuals into discrete finite wholes, a state within a state, Spinoza maintains the dialectical tension between adequate knowledge of individuals as "discrete" individuals and adequate knowledge of individuals as integrated in Nature. This dialectical tension becomes a productive *aporia* within Spinoza's materialist epistemology, but it does not constitute an outright logical deficiency as Marion would argue requiring, theological commitments to justify its presentation.

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<sup>182</sup> EIP15.

The unwillingness to resolve the tension present in the concept of an adequate idea provides Spinoza with a reflective attitude to the production of knowledge. As Willi Goetschel notes in *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*:

Spinoza's approach suggests a reflective attitude toward what the procedure of the production of knowledge involves. His postulate to consider things "sub quadam specie aeternitatis" requires thought to remain within the limits of the human condition it wishes to transcend. This heuristic postulate acknowledges the problematic structure of the epistemological aporia in which the Spinozian narrator finds himself caught. This impossibility of ever reaching an ideal vantage point that would secure limitless access to knowledge "sub quadam specie aeternitatis" is already contemplated in the ontological framework. By consistently rejecting any hierarchical structure, Spinoza consequently rules out any privileged position of an epistemological vantage point, as it were, self-contained as a "state in a state." The cautionary reservation expressed in the consequent use of *quadam* ("as it were") signals a crucial difference from the Cartesian concept of the ego. With the idea of understanding operating "under the aspect, as it were, of eternity," Spinoza articulates a sense of reflexivity that allows him to theorize the epistemological function itself as emerging from an ontological situation that remains constitutive. In contrast to Descartes, the ego represents for Spinoza, an always already precarious epistemological vehicle.<sup>183</sup>

Spinoza's postulate that reason or knowledge must be viewed under the aspect of eternity, "*sub quadam specie aeternitatis*," acknowledges the fact that any adequate idea must be constituted by agreements and oppositions singular to that moment. An adequate idea of a finite mode cannot achieve the perspective of an eternal god, and thus, secure limitless access to knowledge. Instead, the demand to view ideas under the aspect of eternity forces every idea to acknowledge its production from appropriate concrete, historical conditions. The heuristic method of relating ideas to God's perspective does not indicate that finite ideas are always irredeemably deficient in relation to God's intellect, but rather, that they should not presume to achieve any radical separability from the "totality" of extrinsic and intrinsic conditions constituting it. What this means is that the assumption that there is an object of knowledge capable of a single discrete representation in the human or God's intellect is impossible. Instead, adequate ideas represent

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<sup>183</sup> Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*, 36-37.

constellations of agreements and oppositions not reducible to a finite set of attributes or primary qualities. Adequation does not mean equaling the object out there with a static representational model but means expressing through nominal definitions appropriate agreements and oppositions, i.e. expressing present material conditions.

Spinoza's approach rejects any hierarchical standard of knowledge. There are not more true ideas relative to a specific adequate idea or perspective; this would indicate that an adequate idea may deficiently represent a discrete object of knowledge, thereby allowing the threat of skepticism to inject itself. However, this does not exclude the possibility that there can be more adequate or profitable ideas or perspectives that express more agreement to specific and necessary material conditions. For Spinoza there is no privileged epistemic position outside the specific agreements and oppositions present in an adequate idea. If this were not the case, there could be an ideal epistemological vantage point which could verify every idea, but in the process this position would become radically separate, a state within a state. In order to achieve an absolute guarantee, a knower would have to be discrete from the constitutive parts that he or she is reflectively examining, but this would entail that the parts are not constitutive of its nature or unity. Not even the complex whole of God or Nature is divorced from its parts in such a manner. To achieve an ideal epistemological vantage point would require assuming that a specific mode could discretely separate itself from the infinite order of interconnection in Nature to determine whether certain agreements were not contaminated by hidden parts or requiring additional supplements. This mode of analysis not only inappropriately reduces Nature to discrete, static objects of knowledge but rends the knower from his or her "place" in the integrated whole of Nature.

By constantly relating the knower and his or her ideas to the perspective of eternity, Spinoza forces the knower to reflexively acknowledge the concrete and embodied conditions for his or her knowledge. The individual's knowledge is a product of his or her "place or places" within a whole rather than a vehicle to produce or secure rational propositions about the posited object-world. The epistemological function so well employed by Descartes, whereby the non-inadequacy of provisional truths is established, becomes a dissociated illusion dependent upon specific concrete social-political conditions. With his heuristic approach, Spinoza is able to theorize about how certain epistemes are products of specific conditions which the individual inhabits. Epistemological functions or perspectives become products or manifestations of material conditions rather than epistemological functions justifying the appropriateness of specific material conditions or knowledge claims.

Rather than becoming a secure vehicle to establish truths, the Cartesian ego represents for Spinoza a precarious and untenable position. Any product of knowledge mediated through the presumed secure foundation of the Cartesian ego would have to separate truths from their standard:

For an approach that reduces method to just an epistemological device, the treatise suggests, creates more problems than it can ultimately solve. The clear-cut distinction between truth and its standard, which Descartes hoped to establish with recourse to a doubt-free *fundamentum inconcussim* ("irreversible foundation") with his concept of the ego, leads, as the treatise shows, into a spiral of infinite regress. The moment a criterion for certainty is introduced, the epistemological problem simply shifts to the question of the grounds for legitimation of the criterion itself. As a result, an infinite regress is initiated that can only be brought to an arbitrary halt.<sup>184</sup>

A tension must arise within Cartesian epistemology: a truth cannot determine itself as a truth unless there is a criterion of truth. However, that criterion cannot justify itself as a truth unless there is another criterion which secures its foundational position. For the Cartesian ego, an

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 37-38.

infinite regress occurs when the ego attempts to secure its criterion for certainty via another superior criterion, unifying principle, or epistemological whole. Hyperbolic doubt may seem to provide a foundational position where no positive mental content is secure on its own terms—one can be secure in his or her insecurity—but it proves to obliterate any functional or apparently situated criterion of truth.

Spinoza gives the historical example of forging a hammer to illustrate how absurd and impractical a method of knowing based on doubt and the Cartesian ego would be.<sup>185</sup>

[...] Spinoza uses the example of a speculative history of the production of a basic tool. In order to produce a hammer, iron needs to be forged. However, to do this, we, in turn, need a hammer. As a result, one could argue, it is impossible to forge iron and therefore produce a hammer. The production of cognitive tools that Spinoza calls *instrumenta intellectualia*, necessary for knowledge, is not very different. They emerge over time by themselves free of any outside assistance, by virtue of their intrinsic development alone. Such a view also provides the possibility for a historical understanding of knowledge as a slowly emerging process, a process whose result can nevertheless be described in terms self-determined praxis.<sup>186</sup>

To forge a hammer one must forge iron, which requires a hammer, so that any forging of a hammer or iron would be impossible. By relying on extrinsic criteria to justify the appearance of each phenomenon, Spinoza proves that the appearance of these phenomena would be impossible and rendered non-existent. Contrary to an extrinsic standard of justification, Spinoza advocates an intrinsic standard whereby the appearances of phenomena would in some sense always bring principles of their own understanding or justification. In the case of a hammer, there can be intermediate or continual development on the way to the “perfect hammer” without an absolute qualitative acceptance or rejection of the activity of hammering. Knowledge for Spinoza can be a historical and gradual process that supplies its own principles of functionality. As a result, ideas themselves can become tools for the development of other more functional or *powerful*

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<sup>185</sup> *TdIE*, 30.

<sup>186</sup> Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*, 38.



ideas. These “initial or intermediate” ideas can be a basis for another more complete idea. However, this is not to say that Spinoza has a teleological concept of knowledge in which ideas are completed by succeeding ideas. Rather, adequate ideas are aspectival themselves in that they represent the adequate expression of conditions at that moment. An historical process expressing specific forms of knowledge does not represent a universal and absolutely complete perspective by which the knower can judge intellectual success through a determined set of attributes—this would repeat the failure of Cartesian epistemology. The knower is an embodied agent such that any historical emergence of knowledge cannot be dissociated from his or her own *utility*. An adequate or more powerful idea is in fact the expression of the knower’s embodiment of adequate material and historical conditions. Therefore, adequate ideas express certainty with their very appearance; as Spinoza notes, adequate ideas are the *objective* essence of a thing itself.

Adequate ideas, certainty, or truth do not require a sign to indicate they adequately represent a posited object of knowledge. Contrary to Descartes’s method of knowing, Spinoza argues that the more a knower is able to materially agree with different conditions and concretely involve him or herself effectively in different situations, the more their powers to know themselves and Nature increases.

As a consequence, Spinoza conceives certainty in the context of determining what an adequate idea is, which is defined by the “*objective* essence of a thing” (Section 35). This means that truth has no need of a sign other than itself (Section 36). Method is thus recast as reflexive knowledge (*cognition reflexiva*), that is, as the ideas of an idea (*idea ideae* [Section 38]). The Cartesian and Hobbesian models episteme are in this way replaced by one that introduces a gradual or continuous rather than a discrete or principal quality into the process of knowledge production. It is a model that emphasizes the continuous nature of knowledge, whose reflexive character does not permit a closure caused by extrinsic reasons. Truth is thus conceived in terms of a process. The dynamic and processual aspect is what defines the crucial moment of this new understanding of method.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 38.

Method constituted by Spinoza's famous dictum of an idea of idea represents the demand that knowledge constantly orient itself to the conditions that are shared between knower and known—this process cannot be brought to halt by agreeing with extrinsic properties. The more knowables with which a knower can agree constitutes a process or way of knowing by which the knower can increase his or her knowledge. Whereas for Descartes epistemology is a procedure of verification, Spinoza's method or way of knowing orients the knower towards a path by which he or she can increase their knowledge and agree with or express the power of Nature: "the more the mind knows, the better it understands its own powers and the order of Nature...In these things...the whole of Method consists."<sup>188</sup>

### **The Necessity of a Materialist Epistemology**

Spinoza's "Method" to know as much of Nature as is possible and to achieve a nature in which "knowledge of the union the mind has with the whole of Nature"<sup>189</sup> is understood clearly indicates that engaging the world through reason or intellect itself is an expression of *Nature generating* that knowledge. From the attribute of thought, a mind or idea is an expression of thought so that an idea must share certain causal features or characteristics by which to understand itself adequately in its cause—Nature as explained by thinking. Charles Huenemann argues that Spinoza must accept some form of causal consistency because:

[...] [E]ach mind is substantially identical with God's thought, though it is limited and made particular in a specific way; that is, each mind is a *mode* of God's thought. Since it is substantially identical with thought, the mind bears the central features of thought: features which pertain to the mind as a *thinking* thing.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> *TdIE* 40.

<sup>189</sup> *TdIE* 13.

<sup>190</sup> Charlie Huenemann, "Epistemic Autonomy in Spinoza" in *Interpreting Spinoza*, ed. Charlie Huenemann, (Cambridge, 2008), 96.

However, inadequate knowledge comes about from imagining an *external* body with one's senses or bodily organs; that is, representing it *as if* it is identical to one's sensation.

Spinoza calls an idea *inadequate* if it is a confused representation of both an external object and the state of one's body. Every instance of sense perception yields ideas that are inadequate in this way, since each sensation is as much about an object as it is about the state of the sensing organ.<sup>191</sup>

In the case of an inadequate idea, knowledge is only achieved when the proper understanding of sensation's activity occurs, an understanding that the sensation comes about from certain intrinsic powers and shared features of the idea as body.

The adequate and active determination of an individual mind cannot arise from the object posited in sense perception but only from an innate power and common notions intrinsic to thinking; these notions can be utilized by a mind to generate effects. Effects proceed adequately because the mind has full access to these ideas, i.e. it agrees with these ideas and these ideas wholly *constitute* it.<sup>192</sup> By framing sensations, imaginations, and any *objectum* as an affection of Nature under the attribute of thought, i.e. affections that can be understood by the *activity* of thinking, the belief that thinking must correspond to a discrete object or static truth should dissipate or at least be weakened. By expressing the immanent causal order of Nature through the activity of thinking, which requires sensation and imagination, one can express adequate and active knowledge as one's own intellect.

Yet this power must be generated itself from many determinate interactions,<sup>193</sup> modes, and compositions so that the more reality or perfection (possibilities of making complete) a body-mind has is derived from bodily interactions which express themselves in perceptions. That is, the more interactions there are, the more perceptions. In turn, more perceptions lead to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>193</sup> *TdIE*, 41.

many ideas which can become adequate ideas via the singular power and common notions by which our determinate mind or idea can act.

[...] [T]he idea of the human body is “more excellent” and “contains more reality” than does the idea of the carrot. In general, says Spinoza, “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” (2P13S). And so presumably the human mind is more excellent than the “mind” of the carrot because the human body is capable of building a more complex internal model of its environment, and is capable of a wider range of responses to its environment.<sup>194</sup>

Within the complex interactions of a human body are many potential causes of knowledge for the human individual. Once these “possible” causes or affections are properly understood, they generate actualities that allow a human mind to respond and embody as properly as possible the forces affecting it. Since a human mind or idea as body agrees with yet cannot reduce the causal order of Nature, the more self-determined a mind is, then the more self-determining its body is. As Spinoza argues in EIP13Schol: “[i]n 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.”<sup>195</sup> However, the body and mind can be improved in its power, activity and knowledge by the striving of the same individual to gain and acquire adequate knowledge. Adequate knowledge would express both the actualized capacities of mind and body together as the same. To perfect our natures require a better and *more involved* understanding of the causes of body.

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<sup>194</sup> Huenemann, “Epistemic Autonomy in Spinoza” in *Interpreting Spinoza*, 100. The phrase ““mind” of a carrot” should not be interpreted to mean that there is objectively a mind of a carrot which thinks. The scare quotes indicate that only equivocally can one apply the term ‘mind’ to a carrot. Carrots do not think, and Spinoza does not advocate panpsychism. Only from a human’s thinking capabilities can he or she attribute and express “reality.” Furthermore, there can be no parallelism in which there would be a firm correspondence between ideas and bodies. The lack of parallelism between mind and body reveals that there cannot be a hierarchy of objective states of perfection or reality. The human mind does not incorporate subordinate parts and ideas of those parts more perfectly than a carrot; reality and perfection are specific to the activities of a human mode thinking since it does not have direct access to external bodies/natures. These arguments will be developed in chapter three.

<sup>195</sup> EIP13Schol

Spinoza's demand for an investigation of bodily and material affects as if it were like geometric knowledge<sup>196</sup> entails that a materialist epistemology is not only required but necessary to the virtue or the living well of a human intellect. The investigation of body and its causal features as they inform and are involved in mental processes leads to a deep appreciation of the body's powers, motion, sensation, imagination, and eventually, to a robust psychology. Whereas a Cartesian would view the body as a distraction and hindrance to knowledge, if not totally inaccessible to the *cogito*, Spinoza acknowledges the body's necessary role of informing the thinking capabilities and actualities of a knower. Huenemann argues that when we reason about body in some way, the body is activating features it has in common with all other bodies.

[...] [S]ince the body has features in common with all other bodies the mind has ideas in common with all minds, and it is in virtue of these [...] commonalities that the mind is able to reason adequately about the true nature of extended things. [...] [W]hen we reason, the body is somehow activating those features it has in common with all other bodies. [...] [I]f we ask what the body is doing when we reason, the answer is that it is somehow engaging with the facts that it is extended, and is capable of motion, and so on.<sup>197</sup>

This bodily activity allows mind to perceive and understand bodily causes within the common notions and activities of the mind. Subsequently, these ideas actualize the intellectual nature of the human individual and lead it to a more perfect active nature. Thus, furthering the acquisition of adequate knowledge requires involving bodily causes and understanding their *natures* according to our powers of thinking.

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<sup>196</sup> EIII Preface.

<sup>197</sup> Huenemann, "Epistemic Autonomy in Spinoza" in *Interpreting Spinoza*, 104, Quote modified. In the original text, Huenemann uses the phrase "parallel commonalities." I have chosen to omit the term 'parallel' since it would evoke the idea that body and mind are two separate and parallel realms, i.e. parallelism. There are not two realms, mind and extension, in which there are facts associated with one another. Instead, body and its activities are the same activities of mind since they express the same affections of the modal order of Nature. There are "commonalities" "between" mind and body because the activities of body express determining affections which the mind involves and expresses in the causal order of thinking; these affections are not facts that are involved in a logical scheme as it might be suggested by Huenemann's language. These positions will be developed in chapter three. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use Huenemann's text because it provides an accessible interpretation of key points within Spinoza's "epistemology" which I will modify and develop in chapter three.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATERIAL “BEGINNINGS”

In the previous chapters, we saw that Spinoza’s understanding of definition entailed an embodied understanding that did not require complete knowledge of an infinite intellect or the universe. Spinoza’s understanding of definition necessitates that knowledge must be concerned with concrete singulars, Nature being the ultimate singular for knowledge. To express the singularity of Nature, Spinoza utilizes an equivocal language nominalism that indicates that political critique is central to any epistemic analysis.

In chapter two, we saw that embodied knowledge relies on the material origin of the human body to ground epistemic certainty. Contrary to Marion’s claims, Spinoza’s incorporation of a bodily source in his epistemology is neither ineffectual nor imposes an impossibly high standard for knowledge. Spinoza’s incorporation of material conditions in his epistemology is not subject to these criticisms because the incorporation of body in his epistemology does not aim at complete conjunction with body and all its extrinsic relations, i.e. Nature. Instead, Spinoza’s incorporation of body aims to bring forward the question of the generation of knowledge, pointing to a concept of knowledge as materially generated and a concept of body as essential to true knowledge, i.e. knowledge as singular and necessary.

In response to these necessities (that knowledge must be concerned only with singulars and that it must rely on an embodied context), Spinoza addresses the generation of the intellect from bodily causes. Without a proper investigation of physics and its relation to human thinking, Spinoza’s epistemology would at best note a vague material condition for knowledge or worse,

indicate that true intellectual achievement is wholly abstracted from material conditions that are merely accidental to the purely intellectual experience of true knowledge.

Spinoza's investigation of physics or bodily causes cannot merely treat these causes as extrinsic objects to thinking which may occasion intellectual acquisition; his analysis of physics and body is not, as it has been called, a "Physical Digression." The notion that Spinoza's analysis of body is a digression would only make sense if one believes that Spinoza's theory of knowledge is only concerned with and based upon abstract mental concepts and wholly metaphysical truths. In order to discount the claim that Spinoza's investigation of physics is merely a digression, the extrinsic order of the material sensible world or "[...] the series of singular, changeable things"<sup>198</sup> must be incorporated into the generation of the intelligible order of knowledge. The incorporation of the extrinsic objects of sense provides an immanent causal link between body and mind and establishes the necessity of bodily causes for the intelligible singular order of intellect. This immanent link with body shows that the intellect is grounded in an actual and definite cause, and the necessary involvement of body in intellectual activity blocks the temptation to view extrinsic material conditions as merely accidental and apparent causes.

Spinoza's understanding of the interplay between body and mind, how knowledge is generated from specific material causes, and how knowledge explains or expresses material causes in an intelligible order allows him to further ground knowledge in concrete, historical causes. By showing how material affect and intellectual idea are two aspects of the same cause, Spinoza further develops and enriches the investigation into how the motion of bodies, specifically human animate bodies, must be included in intellectual generation and continuation. A more robust account of how specific physical principles and causes generate and express

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<sup>198</sup> *TdIE* 100.

themselves in intellectual phenomena allows Spinoza to shift focus to how intellectual perspectives may reflexively express human desirative processes, which are rooted in human animate motion. The shift to and development of appetitive thinking from materiality allows one to argue that Spinoza's concept of knowledge and his philosophy is thoroughly material and political. His philosophy must be concerned with affecting epistemic change, that is, a generation or destruction of concepts, within specific historical, political, and material conditions. By addressing the necessity of material motion, the movement from "potential" to actual, in producing intellectual perspectives Spinoza does not merely expound on his materialist epistemology but also enacts a material and political critique of Cartesian and theological positions. The development of his aspectual view of materiality and thought in his epistemology directly undercuts and challenges a view of subjectivity that is purely immaterial and detached from constitutive material influence. In the process of deploying his arguments, Spinoza dislodges the religious and Cartesian concepts of human will, motivation, action, passion, and ethical evaluation. Overturning these concepts allows Spinoza to address the psychological causes why particular ideas and opinions are pleasing despite rational demonstration.

In this chapter, I assume certain general principles which I believe are clearly discernible in Spinoza's works, particularly in *Ethics* II, to argue that for Spinoza, the acquisition of intellectual ideas directly involves and expresses bodily causes. The principles that I will assume are:

- a. Nature does not create extraneous or superfluous things. That is, nothing is truly contingent when considered in itself.
- b. Spinoza adopts the new physics and its major tenet, that efficient causality is primary in material motion. Thus, changes in motion are dependent upon extrinsic movers. The



extrinsic source of motion means that any movement from potentiality to actuality is already real.<sup>199</sup>

- c. There are no causes out there in some unmediated form; causes are dependent upon the aspect in which their causality can be conceived. An explanation of a cause is always *by reason* or *by cause* of some attribute or definition.
- d. Spinoza adopts a radically new idea of definition or essence that is specific to both the conception and existence of singular things.
- e. A ratio of bodies (motion/rest) establishes an individual or a singular thing in body. Ratio indicates the singular and distinctive existence of an individual conceived through the attribute of extension so that bodies/individuals have real quantitative existence resisting and involving other bodies, yet are not subject to a universal attribution or abstract quantity.

With these principles, I will show how for Spinoza, material causes generate intellectual effects and must do so for the human animate body.

### **Nature Does Nothing in Vain,<sup>200</sup> or God is Not Contingent.**

For Spinoza, the idea that there are extraneous or contingent things in nature can only make sense if God or some author of the universe is like a human authority, for example, a king:

By God's power ordinary people understand God's free will and his right over all things which are, things which on that account are commonly considered contingent. For they say that God has the power of destroying all things and reducing them to nothing.<sup>201</sup>

A God similar to a human king would have the power to make or rescind prescriptions or prohibitions because acts and objects of authority are separate from the intention of the authority.

The acts and objects of authority do not essentially constitute the will or intention of authority so

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<sup>199</sup> For Spinoza, given the efficient causality of matter, there can be no emanation as in medieval conceptions of material creation. Thus, for Spinoza, there is no hierarchy of causes as in the traditional medieval conceptions of emanation, where intellectual causes are primary and superior to secondary material ones. Apart from a rejection of emanation on the grounds of efficient causality, Harry Wolfson aptly notes that Spinoza's heretical position that God is an extended thing or that God is not separate from the natural world entails a rejection of emanation. "The refutation of this view is given in Proposition III [EI]. Spinoza seems to be challenging the mediaevals in the following words: If you say that the divine nature is absolutely different from the nature of the world, how then can you interpret your traditional creation, as most of you do, in terms of emanation and call your creative God an emanative cause?" Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 88.

<sup>200</sup> The principle of natural necessity which Spinoza employs can be traced ultimately to Aristotle's concept that Nature does not produce accidental things, "[...] nature does nothing in vain and leaves out nothing which is necessary [...]." *De Anima* III, 9, 432b21-22.

<sup>201</sup> EIP3Schol.

that they can be reduced or destroyed without diminishing the reality of the author. However, in the case of all-encompassing God, the contingent nature of God's objects could diminish the reality of God if those objects are destroyed or essentially changed. God conceived as an actual cause must "bring into" existence or produce reality, i.e. its very own reality; otherwise, God would be deficient in relation to its conceived power and actuality. God must give all it has to its effects.<sup>202</sup> Thus, God's eternally actual power should not be considered as contingent or like a kingly or human power; chance cannot be a part of or enter into the understanding of God. The understanding of God, including God's mind or possible "intentions,"<sup>203</sup> requires that these aspects of God are eternally actual with God and not accidental to God's conception.

The necessity of God or Nature is dependent upon the definition of God. By God, one understands a cause equal to its (conceptual) effect. The conception of God or Nature does not exceed God or Nature and *vice versa*. The definition of God is much like the concept of the Agent Intellect.<sup>204</sup> The Agent Intellect is defined as the eternal sameness of the known and the act of knowing, i.e. true actual knowledge. Intellectual cause and effect are concurrent. Similarly, what God is is its definition, i.e. a primary cause *and* immediate effect. The proper definition of God should be eternally actual. Thus, the definition of God is not dependent on an extrinsic cause, and by extension, whatever is *conceivable* in God *must be conceived* as necessary:

[...] from the given divine nature both the essence of the things and their existence must necessarily be inferred; and in a word, God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> EIP11Dem.

<sup>203</sup> The term 'intentions' must be understood equivocally. For Spinoza, God does not have a *telos* by which actions are judged.

<sup>204</sup> Idit Dobbs-Weinstein shows a strong similarity between medieval Aristotelian conceptions of the Agent Intellect and Spinoza's definition of God. See Dobbs-Weinstein, "Gersonides's Radically Modern Understanding of the Agent Intellect," 191-213.

<sup>205</sup> EIP25Schol.

Through the established definition and meaning of God, God can be *called or named* the cause of all things in the same *sense* as cause of itself. That is, the meaning of God or Nature will contain the meaning of finite things so that these things cannot be dissociated from God or Nature as contingent or accidental in thought. Thus, since the sense or meaning of God does not allow a contingency, it will be a cause for finite things because they will refer to God's meaning in their own meaning, and so, God can be named a cause for them.

The manner in which a particular mode exists cannot be conceived otherwise than it is actually. A being or mode conceived in the definition of God must be conceived as necessary and actual. As a part of the definition of God or Nature, the particular being or mode, both its manner of (i.e. essence) and actuality of existing, must be considered as necessary by extension.<sup>206</sup> Thus, a mode's existence, both the way of and actuality of existing, is not accidental, changeable, or contingent. Any effects or order of existing which is expressed by a mode must be considered necessary. As Spinoza notes:

[...] Whatever is, is in God (by P15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. [...] God is the cause of these modes not only insofar as they simply exist (by P24C), but also (by P26) insofar as they are considered to be determined to produce an effect. For if they have not been determined by God, then (by P26) it is impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves.<sup>207</sup>

Unable to remove themselves from the causal force of God (Nature or Substance), modes must, within their own orders of determinate causes and effects, produce necessary and actual results.

An alternative proof of the necessity of the modal order can be made through the knowledge of particular modes. The knowledge of any particular mode indicates that what is known, the mode, is identical to the knower. The knower is not identically the same as the known but rather an active expression of the known. The intelligible or idea of the mode is the

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<sup>206</sup> EIP26.

<sup>207</sup> EIP29

very act of intellection or thinking so that any sense of particularity or contingency is removed from this knowledge. Knowledge of the mode must be eternally actual or express truth. Thus, since God is the ultimate ground or cause for any singular agreement between a particular act of thinking, i.e. the known becoming the same as the knowing, the singular acts of knowledge must be the *same* in the conception of an active God. Since God or Nature is the ground for every singular act of knowledge, God must think everything itself or cause the knowledge of every act of thinking; singular acts of thinking refer to God as the ultimate cause *in which* they exist without any possible alteration. As Spinoza describes in *Ethics* II Proposition1:

[...] Singular thoughts, *or* this or that thought, are modes that express God's nature in a certain and determinate way (by IP25C). Therefore (by ID5) there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular thoughts involve, and through which they are conceived. [...] This Proposition is also evident from the fact that we can conceive an infinite thinking being. For the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, *or* perfection, we conceive it to contain.<sup>208</sup>

God's perfection, more properly understood as complete reality,<sup>209</sup> must express infinitely many thoughts by thinking all thoughts or by being an infinitely perfect thinking thing. However, the intellectual perfection that is *attributed to* God arises because we, human thinkers, attribute that complete perfection to God so as to posit or refer to a *richer* cause from which our thinking, our modality, derives its actuality/activity. Since thoughts are modes which *must* be and be conceived through another,<sup>210</sup> they require a reality both actual and formal from which to deduce their intellectual reality. As a result, the reality of particular thoughts "refers" itself to the reality of God, and thus, "makes" God a thinking thing or thinking reality. The aspect of reality through which a mode involves itself in the reality of God thereby implies that God is a thinking type of reality. God is conceived through the attribute of thinking as a perfect thing; however, this does

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<sup>208</sup> EIP1.

<sup>209</sup> "D6: By reality and perfection I understand the same." EIID6.

<sup>210</sup> EID5.

not imply that thinking constitutes the reality of God. It only indicates that God is perfect or complete for all thinking modes as the ultimate cause for those singular modes.

The possible causal orders among modes, the movements from “potential” cause to actual effects, depend upon the absolute singular agreement between cause and effect represented in the definition of God. The concurrence of cause and effect expressed in the definition of God is not restricted to any particular form of causality, such as thinking or extension. Every order or attribute equally expresses the singular concurrence conceived in God. Thus, any specific cause must be conceived through the formal character of the specific type of causality or attribute considered. This is not to say that attributes exist; only substance and modes exist.<sup>211</sup> Although attributes are absolutely determined as expressions of God, they do not provide a specific determination to singular modes. A singular mode, such as thinking, requires a cause to determine their specific modality; however, the attribute of thought is merely the projected concept by which all singular thoughts may causally interact. Since an attribute is involved in the concepts of any mode explained by it, an attribute cannot constitute or make a specific mode; instead, the determination of a mode must come from another mode which involves a shared type or attribute with the first. Being conceived through a particular attribute, modes do not require an extrinsic cause from another type or attribute to exist. Their own attributes allow a causal interaction to occur between two existing modes of this specific type, i.e. modes determined and possibly conceived through one another. As a result, the objects perceived by ideas, i.e. bodies, are not the cause by which intellectual effects are generated.<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, thoughts cannot generate material effects, but material effects are produced under a different attribute,

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<sup>211</sup> EIP4Dem.

<sup>212</sup> “[...] [A mode of thinking] 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, etc., q.e.d.” EIIP5.

extension.<sup>213</sup> Thoughts are neither patterns nor forms that bring about the actuality of material bodies; nor are thoughts the appropriate explanations of how bodies interact with and generate one another. Because no attribute can be conceived to be primary to another, a prior temporality cannot be ascribed to a specific attribute, such as thought, since each attribute refers to and involves the eternal actuality represented in the definition of God equally and simultaneously.<sup>214</sup>

The eternal and singular necessity of God, Nature, or Substance does not exclude the actuality of modes. Singular acts of thought or body are not unreal or accidental (the Many) to the unique singular actuality of God (the One). Since no attribute can totally express God or Nature, attributes are only aspects or explanations of God. Each attribute expresses and explains the same singular causality of God. As Spinoza argues in *Ethics* II Proposition 7:

[...] [W]hatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as [*if*] constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. [...] 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. [...] So of things as they are in themselves, God is really the cause insofar as he consists of infinite attributes.<sup>215</sup>

The “things-in-themselves” or the singular causal order are not dependent upon attributes to exist. Instead, attributes do not exist and require singular existing things to express themselves within certain attributes.<sup>216</sup> Attributes are not real and merely provide a perspective on the singular causality of things or Nature. This is not to say that the “things-in-themselves” are pre-given objects or absolute individuals devoid of properties. Since the causality present in the interaction of singular modes must be active, there cannot be a static object. Rather, attributes

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<sup>213</sup> “From this it follows that the formal being of things which are not modes of thinking does not follow from the divine nature because [God] has first known the things [...]” EIIIP6Cor.

<sup>214</sup> Since God or Substance is extended there can be no creation or emanation. *Cf.* f n. 199.

<sup>215</sup> EIIIP7, Emphasis added and modified translation.

<sup>216</sup> It is imperative to remember that the singular causes act by expressing themselves in attributes and do not exist *a priori* as unmediated objects. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

manifest how many singulars may express themselves in an indefinite causal scheme. In order to be active, singular modes must be conceived and determined through other modes of a specific attribute: this implies that modes and individuals are interacting with others *ad infinitum*. This reality of composite interactions in essence is God as the most composite and active individual. There can be only one true individual in Nature which is an active God. I believe that Spinoza uses the term, 'the things-in-themselves' subtly and ironically to indicate that there are no modes or individuals which are purely in-themselves. Individuals or "things-in-themselves" can have infinite attributes to describe them, and thus, there is no absolute perspective of them. As individuals involving two types of modes (body and mind), we must attribute which modalities are affecting our reality or the causes that affect and determine us, namely extension and thought. Given the indefinite or infinite causality among modes, each attribute expresses the infinite cause of God *as if* it were that type of causality. Thus, an attribution would cease if substance or things were removed; however, an attribute would not destroy a thing if it were removed.

Gersonides, an important predecessor to and influence on Spinoza, describes how an attribute can explain individual things but is not required for sustaining those things. In his *Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima*, Gersonides describes how a white color is apprehended essentially by vision, but the privation of white indicates only that a thing of a certain figure exists.<sup>217</sup> The specific thing implied by the attribute is sufficient to establish its existence. In the case of Spinoza's primary attributes, thinking a thought, for example, can be *essential* to an intellect; however, the termination of thinking does not destroy the thing thought. The termination of thinking indicates that what is thought does not require thinking *per se* to

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<sup>217</sup> See Jesse Stephen Mashbaum, "Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides' Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses," (Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 1981), 144. For a good discussion of Gersonides's influence on Spinoza, see Julie Klein, "Spinoza's Debt to Gersonides" in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Vol. 24, (2003), 19-43.

exist as it does. Instead, the termination of thinking implies a thinking *thing does exist or acts*. Spinoza's use of the word 'thing' to describe how Substance is expressed by the attributes, specifically that God is a thinking thing or extended thing,<sup>218</sup> indicates that attributes only explain the activity of a singular thing, God or Substance, and do not determine it absolutely. Spinoza deploys the common idiom of 'res' or 'thing' differently. This allows Spinoza to attack Descartes's position that there are two substances expressed by the attributes extension and thought. Attributes do not *constitute* two self-enclosed substances as the individuals and modes explained by these attributes are "in-themselves" necessarily active. This is so because modes must be determined by the active power of God to determine each other *ad infinitum* without a predetermined limit.

Spinoza's concept of Substance as an eternal thing is analogous to Aristotle's concept of the Agent Intellect. The Agent Intellect represents the eternal agreement between known and knower, true actual knowledge, so that any acquisition of knowledge by an individual mind refers to and expresses that eternal actuality. Nevertheless, if an individual act of knowledge is not intellected, it does not indicate that the Agent Intellect is somehow unreal or not eternally active:<sup>219</sup> this raises the question as to whether the Agent Intellect is actually eternal as a specific form of thinking. That is, the *thing* thought *is* specifically the thoughts of that type attributed to it; I would argue that the things are not actual in an identical sense as the currently intellected ideas. Our specific thoughts cannot reduce the nature of thinking to its supposed representational

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<sup>218</sup> See EIIP1 and 2.

<sup>219</sup> Gersonides argues that the Agent Intellect must always exist whether we think it or not because it is the *form* of theoretical intelligibles. Quoting Averroes, Gersonides argues that "[a]s for the thing analogous to form in these intelligibles," namely the Agent Intellect [...] "when it is understood, it will be apparent that it is not subject to generation nor dissolution," [...] "We say that these forms, which are the forms of the theoretical intelligibles, ought to be immaterial, because they constitute an intellect themselves, whether or not we think them." It follows that that which is analogous to the form of these intelligibles, namely the Agent Intellect, ought to be immaterial, since it is an intellect in itself." Mashbaum, "Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides' Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses," 114-15.



content. Moses Maimonides argues a similar point when he claims that the essence of a particular thing is not enhanced or revealed by a current description. Instead, the current description merely *explains* the essence of the thing.<sup>220</sup> This leads Maimonides to ultimately argue that the essence of God is not reducible to our description of God but is merely *explained* by our attributes of existence, thought, etc.<sup>221</sup> I believe that Spinoza has Maimonides, and to some extent Gersonides, in mind when he argues the same point:

So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same, but expressed in two ways. Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God's intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.<sup>222</sup>

Thus, for Spinoza, the actuality of God or Substance does not identically reduce to the actuality of thinking as thinking. Furthermore, the order of thinking or God's intellect does not express the actuality of God exhaustively, so that the actuality of God can express itself in other attributes such as extension. Nonetheless, the actuality resides in the thing thought or extended. The thing thought or extended should not be considered as a substratum that receives the particular forms represented by attributes; instead, what is thought or extended is Nature expressing itself actively through the attributes.

In terms of the existence or actuality of Substance or affections of Substance, modes, and attributes do not add anything. The actuality of Substance and modes, singular individuals, are sufficient to provide their distinct individuality or reality apart from the attribution under which they are conceived. Spinoza argues in the corollary to EIIP8 that:

[...] From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, their objective being, *or* ideas, do not exist except insofar as God's infinite idea exists. 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

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<sup>220</sup> See Chapter 51 of Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Vol. 1.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> EIIP7Schol.

said to have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.<sup>223</sup>

The intent of Spinoza's argument is clear that no attribute has the force to establish, constitute, or *determine* the actuality of an idea or the actuality of an object within any other attribute. As a result, the actuality presented or expressed in a singular individual must be intrinsic to that individual. Furthermore, this indicates that the actuality *expressed* in attributes, for example, a real idea in thought, produces the attributed reality or distinction in the attribution. The individual produces the order expressed in the attribute (of thought) and not conversely. The primary status of individuals generates the natures attributed to them so that some modes can be *called* minded bodies or thinking things.

Infinite God or Nature cannot be the direct cause of singular individuals or actions because singular acts are conceived through the definition of God which contains its cause.<sup>224</sup> If God's form, which is existence, is given to a particular individual, then there would be two substances that could not be conceived through one another.<sup>225</sup> A causal distinction based upon a substantial distinction would not allow a mode to cause, effect, or share any actuality with other modes.<sup>226</sup> Thus, in order to be *conceived* as having a cause, a singular individual or act must not only be conceived in God, but also, the individual must have conceived a singular cause under a specific attribute. The causality conceived under a specific attribute allows for an *infinite or indefinite*<sup>227</sup> causality to express itself in a particular conception, aspect, or perspective. Modal causality requires that there be relations among individuals, and by

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<sup>223</sup> EIP8Cor.

<sup>224</sup> EIP9.

<sup>225</sup> EIP5.

<sup>226</sup> EIP6.

<sup>227</sup> As will be argued later in the chapter, the infinite *or* indefinite causality represented and expressed by attributes allows for the possibility of indefinite immanent relations to occur amongst the modes; the attributes express an immanent order that is indefinite in its kind.

definition, God cannot have an analogous relation with its modes. However, modes cannot be individual substances, and as a result, they must be referred to a named thing: the name represents an attribute and the thing God. Properly speaking, God is a nameless reality, but if God is conceived under an attribute, modes can have causal relationships that express actual Nature through that description of Nature. Whenever two things have a relationship or stand together, it indicates that there is some presumed homogeneity that allows the relation to be applicable. Yet, this homogeneity cannot be substantial; only under different perspectives are modes said to interact with one another. Thus, the type of interaction or causality is equally important to the “nature” of the modal interaction because there are no absolutely discrete pre-given individuals that undergird one fixed, causal order.

A classic example of the necessity of presumed homogeneity within a relation of two is the Dyad. The Dyad expresses a relation between two “things,” but the Dyad does not use number, i.e. two, to discretely represent the relations between the given “things.” It allows the manner of relation to express itself according to the type of “individuality” presented by the “objects” or “agreed upon” by minds reflecting upon them. David Lachterman argues that modern geometers are unable to see the pre-technical aspect of geometric objects presented in mathematical or quantitative relations. According to Lachterman, Euclid and other Greek philosophers/mathematicians see relations as expressive of pre-technical or common-life objects; these objects can only be *explained by* the presented mathematical or quantitative relations. As Lachterman notes:

Euclid's unique "definition" of a logos/ratio as "a sort of relation [*poia schesis*] in respect of size [*kata pelikoteta*] between two magnitudes of the same kind [*dya megethon homogenon*] "has long been the target of a certain mockery; Heath (ad loc.) quotes Barrow (1666) as saying that the definition is "metaphysical . . . and not, properly speaking, mathematical, since nothing depends on it"[.] [...] Euclid (or, Eudoxus himself) appears to be appealing to the readers' familiarity with a "well-known term of common

life" [...] C. S. Peirce found more than one occasion to reflect on the authorial "style" of the *Elements*, especially Book 1, and his reflections perhaps buttress one's initial sense that much is happening beneath the surface or between the lines. "They [Greek writers] took it for granted that the reader would actively think; and the writer's sentences were to serve merely as so many blazes to enable him to follow the track of that writer's thought." While in the first two definitions of Book 5 metrical language is emphatic (*katametrei*; *katametretai*), in Definition 3 this language is deliberately suppressed [...] Significantly, in the slave-boy episode in *Meno* the root of this neologism (*pelikos*) appears three times, always in such a way as to suggest a feature common to commensurable and incommensurable "magnitudes." Accordingly, as Heath convincingly argues against de Morgan, the abstract substantive in Euclid does not signify "quantuplicity," -that is, "the number of times one magnitude is contained in the other"-but something non-metrical or non-mathematical such as "size." Similarly, *poia schesis* is an "abstract substantive" capturing in a loose but quite general manner the verbal clause *hos a echei pros B* (as a stands in relation to B), without further indication of the quantitative character of that relation. (It is not until Definition 4 that the relevant indication is supplied, when we learn that two magnitudes have a logos when (in case  $a = Fb$ ) there is some positive natural number such that  $ma > b$  or  $a < mb$ ; but, the natural numbers introduced here and in the following definition of "being in the same logos/ratio" are to be understood as auxiliary operators or "test numbers.")<sup>228</sup>

Thus, mathematical texts such as Euclid's *Elements* serve to teach the student an explicit comportment or ethical practice as a practicing geometer. The explicit mathematical explanations presented do not establish/generate the objects or their relations: these objects are pre-theoretical and establish a context or mode of interaction prior to abstract descriptions.

Aristotle argues a similar point when he contrasts an appropriate understanding of mathematical or quantitative relation that requires pre-theoretical concrete "objects" with the Platonists' view that Number and the numerical relations established by number are real and constitutive to what they relate.

Again, of the most accurate statements, some posit Ideas of relations, yet we deny that a genus of relations exists by itself, and others speak of the *third man*. And in general, the statements concerning the Forms discard those things whose existence we prefer to the existence of the Ideas; for what follows is that Number is first and not the *Dyad*, that the relative is prior to that which exists by itself, and all other conclusions which, drawn by some believers in the doctrine of Ideas, are contrary to the principles of that doctrine.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, 30-31. Emphasis added.

<sup>229</sup> *Metaphysics* 990b 29-33.

As Aristotle notes, the only thing that can possibly exist by itself is a determinate object/practice which does not rely on an abstract relational system. Relations by themselves cannot establish a definite reality that exists by itself; instead, by definition, a relation requires extrinsic objects to sustain its existence—only those things which it relates exist.

Since explicit technical relations are unable to reduce the nature or essence of the objects that they relate, there must be a presumed and prior consistency that allows for this relational explanation. Homogeneity allows for individuals and parts to express a whole that must be completely relational. Lachterman argues that homogeneity among related parts does not transfer to the shared relation. The shared relation or whole does not have the same qualities as the parts; the relation by merely ordering parts does not become equivalent with or similar to its parts. Thus, a ratio or relation between quantities does not itself have a quantity by which it could engage in operations functional for its parts. As Lachterman notes:

[...] A ratio for Euclid, as I have already stressed, is a relation between magnitudes; it is not a magnitude or a quantity in its own right. (Hence, it is most emphatically not a "rational number" [...]) Therefore, operations to which magnitudes are "naturally" subject (such as addition of line-segments, multiplication of numbers and its geometrical counterpart [...]) would appear to be alien intruders once transplanted to the domain of ratios (or, indeed, the domain of proportions, as will happen in algebra when equations are added to, or multiplied by, one another, and so on).<sup>230</sup>

The inability of a ratio or a whole to dictate the type of interaction necessary for the homogeneous interaction among its parts has serious ramifications. If a ratio, relation, or whole cannot absolutely determine the mode of interaction of its related parts, then the unique existence of and specific types of parts are necessary for the aspect or perspective of a whole to express itself. The whole or relation becomes dependent on the appropriate circumstances and cannot be understood as a universal, objective reality indiscriminately applied. Lachterman describes this phenomenon as it occurs in of geometry:

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<sup>230</sup> Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*, 38.

[W]hat would seem to be at least part of the "natural" understanding:

We have to speak of homogeneous [magnitudes] because magnitudes which are not homogeneous have no ratio to one another. For a line no more stands in a ratio to a plane-surface than a plane-surface does to a body; however, a line is comparable to a line and two plane-surfaces also have a ratio to one another.

That is, the necessary condition for having a ratio at all is either that the items belong to the same genus or, as the scholiast implies, that they be of the same "dimension." The second interpretation, however, seems too liberal, since a square and a circle are of the same dimension (2) but do not belong to the same genus and, indeed, do not have a ratio to one another, for Euclid. Furthermore, although Euclid, following the Pythagorean tradition, is prepared to talk of "linear" and "plane" and "solid" numbers, the suggestion of dimensionality *sensu stricto* is out of place here, since no number qua number has a ratio to a line, plane-figure or solid. Numbers and geometrical magnitudes are, then, heterogeneous. Hence, it looks as though a pretechnical understanding of what items fall into which genera is a prerequisite for our grasping the force and scope of Definition 3!<sup>231</sup>

In his analysis of Euclid, Lachterman keenly observes that the genera necessary for the mathematical relations describing geometry cannot escape into the general category of dimensionality. Instead, all mathematical ratios are specific to appropriate genera and are perspectives appropriate to those individuals.

A similar line of argument can apply to the presumed totality of God in Spinoza's philosophy. God does not identically involve itself in modes and constitute a whole which comprises the modes. The relative causal orders among modes of different attributes exclude a pantheistic interpretation of Spinoza. Given that singular individuals or modes can only be conceived as such under specific attributes, the reality of modes is in some sense "established by" the *shared* attribute. However, the shared concept precludes the direct involvement of God in the conception of the mode's particular modal reality or individuality. Thus, the claim that God is everything is either false or equivocal because God can neither be an individual under an attribute nor can it be exhaustively expressed by an attribute.

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 34.

In a similar manner, parallelism between attributes must be rejected.<sup>232</sup> Since an attribute depends upon the activity or actuality of individuals for its description, attributes cannot dictate an order that has any correspondence to another attribute. Although in one sense individuals are said to exist, prior to their attribution, this does not thereby indicate that there is a specific ontological and pre-conceptual order of individuals that attributes refer to in a one-to-one manner. Instead, since an individual idea must be conceived through the conceptual agreement of thinking, its form of individuality and interaction must be radically different from the individuality “generated” or expressed in extension. In both cases, the individuals *that happen be* bodied and minded express themselves through those attributes, neither relying on the attributes absolutely nor requiring the attributes for their specific actuality.<sup>233</sup> As a result, there can be no absolutely secure relation between individuals in one attribute and individuals in another.

The dynamic and relative expression of modal reality through the attributes does not imply that God or Substance can exist without these effects. If modal reality could be divorced from God or Substance, this would imply that another substance could be conceived without God. Thus, God would not be substance because there would be two substances contrary to the nature of substance as cause of itself. Instead, God or Substance must exist as is, and the modes must exist in it as is without any true contingency. Although modes require extrinsic causes, the

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<sup>232</sup> For someone who argues for epistemological and ontological parallelism in Spinoza, see Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, (Zone Books, 1990), 113-128.

<sup>233</sup> Spinoza utilizes a similar argument when discussing the differences between modal types such as human and animal. (See EIIP57) Differences among individuals as they express themselves in their relative modal natures shows that any real analogy or relationship of essential interaction between them is completely equivocal, or more properly, non-existent. Only under and among a certain expressed type can humans “essentially” interact—this type is always contested—so that the generation of agreement and knowledge of that agreement is thoroughly political and historical. See Etienne Balibar’s *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowden, (Verso, 1998). See especially chapter 4: *The Ethics: A Political Anthropology*. In this chapter, Balibar argues that reason does not have the capacity to define human nature essentially, and thus, it cannot advance an uncontested civic or political good. Individuals determine their goods and virtues by which they form associations and create concepts determining abstract natures.

conception of their causality must be comprehended as necessary since it expresses an actual order of active God or Nature.

In this sense, Spinoza can be said to follow certain radical, medieval Jewish-Arabic theories of knowledge that argue that eternal knowledge is immanent to the acquired intellectual order. Similar to a radical, medieval Jewish-Arabic understanding of the Agent Intellect as *existing as* the order of the sublunar world, Spinoza argues that God explained by the attribute of thought can be understood as the order of the modal universe through thought.<sup>234</sup> This radical understanding interprets the Agent Intellect—actual, eternal knowledge—as expressing itself in acquired intellects; however, the acquired intellect represents a movement to thinking via the material intellect. Thus, the Agent Intellect perfects or makes real the acquired intellect(s) that express that *complete* reality; however, the acquired intellects do not exhaust the Agent Intellect’s activity so as to generate a closed reality. As a mode of the Agent Intellect, the acquired intellect expresses the actuality of that intellect and at the same time, expresses the causal force *or* order of the Agent Intellect only *through* the modes of intellection.

In Spinoza’s terminology, God as a thinking thing is absolutely perfect or complete, and as a result, every mode of thinking must refer to and involve the attribute of thought in its objective being. The objective being of ideas expresses the perfect actuality of thought by actually thinking. Therefore, there must be an objective idea that expresses all thoughts perfectly; this objective idea is God’s intellect. Nevertheless, God’s intellect is an actual intellect or infinite *mode* of thought so that it must not only refer its actuality to a thinking thing but can

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<sup>234</sup> Dobbs-Weinstein argues that Gersonides’s understanding of the Agent Intellect’s relation to the order in the sublunar world is strikingly similar to Spinoza’s understanding of the relation between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. That is, for Gersonides the eternal actuality of the Agent Intellect is the actual order of the sublunar world and for Spinoza, the eternal actuality of *Natura naturans* expresses itself in every modal order, *Natura naturata*, including the modal order of thinking. For Dobbs-Weinstein, the term “agent” is equivalent to the terms “actual” and “active,” and vice versa. This entails that every aspect of reality must be always active and actual without an agent or subject potentially inactive or initiating effects. See Dobbs-Weinstein, “Gersonides’s Radically Modern Understanding of the Agent Intellect,” 192.



only express that thinking thing perfectly or really by *expressing* that infinite reality through the *actual order* of thought. The shared concept, which all ideas involve, allows a thinking thing to be perfect or complete through the modes of that attribute which actually express the thing in that specific manner. Consequently, the shared actuality and its indefinite expression of thought allow the reality of the thought (thing), God, to be real or perfect.

In this regard, Spinoza is more radical than his medieval predecessors because on his view, the perfection of God's intellect is itself dependent upon God or Nature. God or Nature does not require thinking to be the primary reality for the modal universe. Nevertheless, the intellectual order does express an actual order of Nature, albeit it does not reduce reality to that intellectual order. The intellectual order expressed by specific intellects does have real or actual knowledge that should be compelling and express the causal *force and order* of Nature.<sup>235</sup> Nonetheless, this causal order still requires the activities of individuals expressing themselves through that attribute and perhaps others. Humans involve the actual causal orders of two attributes, mind and body, indicating that humans are minded-bodied individuals that express their reality or perfection of nature through those modal forms. Whatever perfections are possible for human individuals they must be specific to these particular activities and are not universal perfections applicable to the universe *in toto*.

Not only does God or Nature *simpliciter* lack contingency, but also, through God's actual necessity, modes must involve and express that necessity. Their expression of that necessity differs greatly from God; however, that difference allows the modes and the attributes under which modes are conceived to have a different form of actuality or necessity. Their form of necessity or actuality, rather than divorcing modes from God, allows God, conceived through a particular attribute, to perfectly or completely express itself indefinitely in a particular and actual

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<sup>235</sup> See chapter 1, concerning how Descartes loses the *force* of intellectual truth.

causal order. Nevertheless, the causal order among individuals is specific to the individuals expressing that attribute so that modes are actual perspectives on Nature. These perspectives involve and express attributes in particular ways by which not only their individuality is constituted in the attribute, but an individual's nature(s) develops from specific modal effects in one or many attributes. A human being is one such individual that happens to be a specific minded-body. Therefore, a bodily dimension to human existence and perfection must be accounted for, as it is a necessary aspect to human striving.

### **Spinoza Adopts the New Physics' Foundational Principle of Efficient Causality.**

Spinoza adopts efficient causality as the primary and only cause of material change. Following his general view of causality among modes and through specific attributes, Spinoza applies the extrinsic causality necessary for the actuality of individuals to material individuals and their generation and destruction.

The manner in which material individuals must be *conceived* to cause and destroy other material modes is *by reason* of motion and rest.<sup>236</sup> Since motion and rest can be *conceived* to maintain a particular state in a body, or a body, considered alone, maintains a particular state of motion or rest, the only conceivable cause capable of altering this bodily state will be another *extrinsic* body.<sup>237</sup> Specific thoughts or ideas could not alter the conceived material states because they could not provide a compatible conception or type of cause to remove the previous state. Simple bodies and their simple states of motion and rest are the ultimate conceivable basis

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<sup>236</sup> "L1: *Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance.*" EIP13Schol. L1. Emphasis added.

<sup>237</sup> EIP13Schol. L3.

for specific material change.<sup>238</sup> Simple bodies provide the shared conceptual framework by which to generate composite, material individuals and the mechanism by which material individuals interact to sustain and affect change. Only after Spinoza describes the nature of simple bodies and begins a discussion concerning the nature of composite bodies does he use the term ‘individual’ to describe material bodies.<sup>239</sup> Thus, for Spinoza, material individuality only occurs at the composite level; simple bodies are not individuals with discernible material identity. Relations between material individuals can only occur through extension and its foundational concept of motion and rest among simple bodies; however, these simple bodies are only a conceptual ground by which to describe the actuality of extension through composite modes. There are no discrete ontological pieces or indivisible atoms that are rearranged to produce material reality—extension is infinitely divisible.<sup>240</sup>

The exact physical nature of the simple bodies, whether they are identified as atoms, corpuscles, or anything else, does not seem to me relevant to the understanding of material Nature. Instead, I agree with Lachterman that Spinoza introduces simple bodies to achieve a proper conceptual understanding of material change or change among composite individuals.

[...] [I]t seems to me that Spinoza is principally concerned to introduce certain “theoretical entities” whose main, if not unique, explanatory burden is to anchor subsequent complex systems to the most elementary features of entities devoid of complexity and exhibiting distinctiveness only *via* their immediately comprehensible relations of motion and rest. In other words, Spinoza’s *corpora simplicissima* can be, for the purposes at hand, understood in functional terms; for example, they and they alone fulfill the Cartesian law of inertia.”<sup>241</sup>

*Corpora simplicissima* or the “simplest bodies” represent the conceptual ground where the laws of motion and rest, the fundamental qualities of extension, may be conceived to operate in their

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<sup>238</sup> EIP13 Schol. L3 Cor. A1’’ and A2’’.

<sup>239</sup> See the transition from EIP13 Schol. L3 Cor. A2’’ to the Definition before A3’’.

<sup>240</sup> See Axiom 9 and 10, *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, and see Chapter II What God Is, *The Short Treatise on God*. pp. 43-44.

<sup>241</sup> David Lachterman, “The Physics of Spinoza’s Ethics,” in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and J.I. Biro, (University of Oklahoma, 1978), 81.

simplest form.<sup>242</sup> However at the simplest form, the level of simplest bodies, extension cannot be conceived to be active unless composite interactions and forms necessarily follow or are deduced from this simplest level. Instead of reducing Nature to a set of simple atoms, the *concept* of simplest bodies, or *corpora simplicissima*, demands the production or unfolding of an active, composite universe.<sup>243</sup>

Since material modifications are a part of God or Nature and thus, *conceived* through God's ultimate singular causality, the causal order of materiality must be eternally actual. Therefore, the "total quantity"<sup>244</sup> of motion and rest cannot change, and there can be no vacuum or void in material Nature.<sup>245</sup> One body cannot radically destroy another body, and since extension is equally dense with actuality, neither can one body occupy more or less space. Given that there is a "fixed" amount of actuality in Nature, there can be no creation *ex nihilo* in extension.

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<sup>242</sup> Similar to Lachterman, Etienne Balibar describes *corpora simplicissima* as a boundary concept that allows physical individuation to be explained; see Etienne Balibar's, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," in *Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis*, Vol. 71, (1995), 8. Pierre Macherey also in his book, *Hegel or Spinoza*, argues that the simplest elements of physical individuation are tentative concepts used to understand composite individuals; see p. 177. Additionally, Genevieve Lloyd notes in her book, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics*, that Spinoza's simplest bodies are determined by simple motion and rest to infinity so that individual distinctions must occur at the composite level without any simple bodies existing as such; see p. 11.

<sup>243</sup> Warren Montag argues that the lack of simple bodies or unities implies that the universe envisioned by Spinoza can only properly be described by nominalism:

A rigorous nominalism (as expressed in *Ethics*, Part II Proposition 13) can take no entity as an irreducible unity; there are nothing more than 'assemblages' (to use Macherey's phrase) each made of parts, themselves composed of parts ad infinitum. From this perspective, the individual is no more an organic whole than 'society' or 'the community'. At the same time, to conceive of the individual as a composite entity formed out of 'the encounter of singular beings' is to abolish a general essence of humankind [...] And just as there is no downward limit to the beings that compose beings, that is, there are no 'atoms' from which all more complex beings would be assembled, so there is no upper limit. Thus groups, collectivities, societies, themselves comprise individuals, or singularities, that are no less real than human individuals [...] The conjunctural agreement of complex elements that defines the specific 'character' or complexion of an individual (Spinoza employs the Latin term *ingenium*) is found on a larger scale in the collective forms of human existence: couples, masses, nations all have a specific *ingenium* that makes them what they are and no other. Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses and Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries*, (Verso, 1999), 69.

Montag's analysis shows that Spinoza's physics has direct relevance to Spinoza's critique of essential relations, which might order and group singular modes, whether they be considered from a material, cultural, or political perspective. As a result, a rigorous nominalism which should apply itself to every possible description of reality is necessary.

<sup>244</sup> As will be shown later, quantity should not be considered as numerical.

<sup>245</sup> Spinoza explicitly states several times in his works that there cannot be a vacuum in nature because it would entail a contradiction. See EIP15Schol. and CP Part 2 Prop3.

Lachterman argues that Spinoza saves Cartesian arguments for a homogenous material universe, one based on the principle of inertia and the infinite circulation of bodies, because Spinoza does not separate kinematics from dynamics as Descartes had done. According to Lachterman, Descartes reduces material change and inertia to simple bodies satisfying rectilinear motion. This reduction leads invariably to the problem that composite bodies lack any singular principle by which to move or orient their composite motion. Whereas simple bodies considered in themselves can only satisfy the criteria of rectilinear motion, quantitative continuance, or resistance, composite bodies are merely symptoms of subordinate bodies moving together. The lack of an internal principle of change entails that composite bodies do not have a dynamic quantitative force by which to establish their material position, existence and affect other composite bodies. The principle of change would have to be located in an external agent, ultimately God. Spinoza resolves this problem because he merges kinematics with dynamics.

Lachterman develops this line of reasoning further in his article, "Laying Down the Law: The Theological-Political Matrix in Spinoza's Physics,"<sup>246</sup> to argue that the separation of kinematics and dynamics requires a new conception of law (natural or political) to resolve Cartesian problems with individuation. According to Lachterman, whereas Descartes may tolerate the separation of kinematics from dynamics, since it indicates that extension is infinitely divisible and requires an extrinsic and indivisible principle of regulation/individuation such as mind, Spinoza argues that any necessary determination of a material mode, i.e. by a law, must be intrinsic to the mode.<sup>247</sup> Spinoza's concept of law is unlike a Cartesian law, which is an abstract formal law that extrinsically governs its objects as a king might govern his subjects. Descartes's understanding of matter would inevitably fall under this conception as God is the external agent

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<sup>246</sup> David Lachterman, "Laying Down the Law: The Theologico-Political Matrix in Spinoza's Physics" in *Leo Strauss's Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement*, ed. Alan Udoff, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), 123-154.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, see pp. 126-136.

that maintains lawful consistency in matter. Instead, Spinoza's concept of law should be understood more as the Latin term '*leges*', which means bonds. Any extrinsic determination of a mode must be immanent and productive, involving the actual singular existence of the mode. If not, physical determinations would be merely dependent on abstract universal, formal principles, which cannot individuate and productively engender themselves and other singular modes.

Since simple bodies are conceptual devices to explain the material force and change of material Nature, Spinoza cannot treat the motion of simple bodies as qualitatively distinct from composite bodies. The addition of simple bodies to create a composite body produces different types of motion, and the type of communication of motion determines exchanges of material force and change.<sup>248</sup> Although directly produced by another singular mode, the generation of material modes does not indicate substantial change.<sup>249</sup> Having a potential cause for its individual generation does not indicate that a material mode was at a prior moment unreal, or that once it is generated, it is separable from the actuality of God. As a result, the impossibility of real division forces the quantity of extension to be directly conceived through God's substantial infinity.

Infinity must be conceived as quantitative in a different sense than as a collection of truly separate units. Since infinity is an expression of Nature's singular concurrence of cause and effect (i.e. infinite power), the changes in the states or quantities of motion and rest must be conceived through or explained by that infinite concurrence or power. Like God's Intellect, the *infinite mode* of "the *Face* of the Whole Universe" represents the complete reality or perfection of extension expressed indefinitely by motion and rest.<sup>250</sup> All "possible" modal expressions of motion and rest are expressed in this actual infinite mode, the face of the universe being the most

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<sup>248</sup> Lachterman, "The Physics of Spinoza's Ethics," 82-90.

<sup>249</sup> EIP15.

<sup>250</sup> "*facies totius Universi*" Letter 64.

perfect material reality. Similar to the concurrence expressed by God's Intellect, the face<sup>251</sup> of the whole universe expresses the immediate actuality of cause and effect as a unity of motion and rest.

This unity expresses itself in every actual mode of materiality as the actual manner by which bodies are moved and at rest at the same time. The face of the material universe expresses the absolute and immediate circulation of bodies whereby when one body moves another, and that other moves another, which in turn moves the original. Spinoza uses the example of a circular movement of several bodies to illustrate immediate motion and rest:<sup>252</sup>

By a circle of moving bodies we understand only a formation where the last body, in motion because of the impulse of another body, *immediately* touches the first of the moving bodies, even though the figure formed by all the bodies together through the impulse of a single motion may be very contorted.<sup>253</sup>

The power or actuality of the face of the material universe comes about from its ability to express motion and rest immediately among all the bodies comprising it—i.e. its ability to concur with all bodies. This is not to say that the universe is one enormous displacement machine in which when one body moves, another body moves, so that there is equivalence of positions. What Spinoza intends by the previous example, as opposed to Descartes's position that the material universe is one totalized system best explained by analytic geometry, is that from the perspective of a "higher" form or whole there can be *indefinite* changes to its parts while nevertheless, the form of the whole remains.<sup>254</sup> In fact, the whole or higher form must be

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<sup>251</sup> Face means aspect or perspective.

<sup>252</sup> See also *CP* Part 2 Prop. 8.

<sup>253</sup> *CP* Part 2 Def. 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>254</sup> Hans Jonas rightly notes that Spinoza diverges from Descartes's position that parts can be mechanically ordered. For Jonas, Descartes's position implies that parts could be arranged in a machine in which the function of the mechanism would complete and provide a *telos* to its parts. In the case of Spinoza, parts associate in diverse ways so that no *telos* can be fabricated. However, Jonas argues that parts for Spinoza can form individuals with varying degrees of integration and involvement such that their individuality and power can be ranked. I disagree with this latter position because this would reinsert a hierarchy and final principle of unity in Spinoza's physics. See Hans

immediately produced by the changes of its parts. For Spinoza, motion and rest can represent an immediate expression of a particular modal order, and this does not reduce to a mediated temporal finite order. Although motion and rest seem to us as linear and reduced to essential concepts such as distance and time by which we judge their change, for Spinoza, motion and rest can express an immediate infinite order or unity because they are correlatives—all contraries are correlatives. As a result, the immediate motion and rest expressed by the reality of the material universe cannot occupy space or have a set place from and to which motion occurs. The circulation of motion in the universe and among bodies must be considered as a communication of agreements and resistances. Different bodies under different aspects have the ability or power to communicate their motion; the universe can communicate or express the reality of motion and rest in every mode or aspect of extension. The face of the material universe has an infinite or indefinite power to express itself in every actual perspective so that particular local motions<sup>255</sup> express the material universe in their specific acts as well. The actuality or quantitative force by which the material universe expresses its power is actually expressed in every particular motion(s) and types of motion(s).

The reality or perfection (for these term signify the same)<sup>256</sup> present in a particular motion or body does not reduce to the addition of atoms but represents the power of a body to agree or resist many different bodies in many different ways. Similar to the power of the material universe to express itself through all perspectives of motion and rest, a finite body which has the ability to agree with and interact with many different types of motions is more powerful than

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Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 269-270.

<sup>255</sup> For Spinoza, likewise for Descartes, all motion is local motion; bodies can only be distinguished from other contiguous bodies by moving away or towards them. Spinoza defines local motions as "[...] the transfer of one part of matter, or of one body, from the vicinity of those bodies that are immediately contiguous and are regarded as at rest, to the vicinity of other bodies. This is the definition used by Descartes to explain local motion." *CP* Part 2 Def. 8.

<sup>256</sup> EIID6.



others whose ability is lesser. However, this is not to say that the power of an individual can be absolutely or truly perfect. In fact, for Spinoza, there can be no real objective standard of perfection<sup>257</sup> since every mode of extension does not merely exist but acts or causes its reality to express itself. Material individuals or particular, composite expressions of motion and rest *must actively produce* their individuality or reality<sup>258</sup> because there can be no pre-given atoms or simplest bodies to measure a hierarchy of integration, ultimately ending with a perfect totalizing God.<sup>259</sup> Conversely, God or Nature does not represent a teleologically perfect form or goal in which all motion must be unified as identically it, but rather, represents the active, indefinite, and highly complex power of God to express itself through the attribute of extension.<sup>260</sup>

Furthermore, by definition, simple bodies *cannot* be conceived to have any perspectives since they are only distinguished by simple motion or rest; they do not exist *per se*. If they were posited as distinct individual beings, this would lead to the contradictory result that they would

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<sup>257</sup> Spinoza notes: “[...] *perfection may be ascribed in a relative way, and [...] it may be ascribed absolutely.* Furthermore, just as good and bad are only relative terms, so too is perfection, except when we take perfection to mean the very essence of a thing,” *CP*, Appendix Part 1 Chap. 6, Translation modified.

<sup>258</sup> Etienne Balibar argues that for Spinoza:

An individual is a unity, which means that it is always *composed* of some parts and it can never be thought of as an "atom", be it physical or spiritual (therefore the *corpora simplicissima* are no individuals, and they have no separate existence). But this is only the first step in our understanding of how individuals actually exist. Individuals are neither a given matter (a "subject" in the traditional sense) nor a perfect form or *telos* organizing an amorphous matter. Just as *natura naturata* (which could be described as the set of all individuals) is second to *natura naturans*, every individual (including human individuals) is an effect of, or a moment in a more general, and more flexible, process of *individuation* and *individualization*.

Individuation as individualization is what actually takes place, giving rise to individuals. [...] Since they are not "given", individuals are constructed (or produced); and since they are not "perfect" in a final sense, they are active, or productive[.]” Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality,” 8-9.

<sup>259</sup> This account of the activity of individuals creating and maintaining their specific actuality has strong similarities to Aristotle’s account of *entelecheia*.

<sup>260</sup> Balibar notes that a whole in which parts may be integrated is itself a theoretical or boundary concept because no “higher” individual essentially unifies its part: “[n]ature as a whole (*tota Natura*), considered here under the attribute of extension, is the only "absolute." Whole or Individual (which I think should be understood as a boundary concept, just as the *corpora simplicissima* is a boundary concept at the other end.” Ibid 17.

Alan Gabbey argues that Spinoza’s remarks in Letter 32 seem to indicate that the essences of individuals attempt to accommodate themselves to one another in order to establish a stable whole. This accommodation would seem to indicate that there is some finalism in Spinoza’s physics since more agreement indicates more appropriate, real or perfect. However, given the account of Spinoza’s physics presented by me in this section, there cannot be an absolute state or perspective in which all of reality would harmoniously agree. See Alan Gabbey, “Spinoza’s Natural Science and Methodology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett, (Cambridge, 1996), 164.

have equal power to every other simple body, which would undermine any productive activity. The level at which any material perspectives must concur is at the level of composite bodies. An example of simple motion illustrates this point: since simple bodies are defined as equal in their quantity of power, one simple body cannot communicate its motion or power to another and change the other's direction to agree with its direction or form a simple relationship of agreement. The only manner in which simple bodies can form an individual or composite body is if they are *constrained* by many other ("simple") bodies to form an agreement and resistance to other bodies.<sup>261</sup> This would produce a composite body with a larger quantity of power and thus a greater ability to agree or resist other bodies. For example, if a body A has twice as much power as body B and strikes it, body A will carry body B along with it; however, body A will travel at a slower speed as body B communicates a resistance or motion as well to body A.<sup>262</sup> The more power a body has the greater capacity it has to communicate its motion *in more ways* than as a simple affect and refraction from other equal bodies. These perspectives are not merely an addition of simple forces but are expressions of extension which happen to use the explanation of motion and rest to interact. The complex properties of water or animals, e.g. fluidity or digestion, are not reduced to the basic rectilinear forces of atoms comprising them. The shared or contrary natures of the material composite individuals have to be involved in the type of material interaction. The *explanation by* motion and rest describes how individuals express that type of interaction, i.e. compatible or contrary motion. As a result, composite bodies or individuals must be conceived to have *material form* which form is conceived through an actual quantitative amount of force for that nature. This is the reality or "perfection" of that individual.

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<sup>261</sup> See EIIP13 Definition after A2''.

<sup>262</sup> See CP Part 2 Prop. 22.

This amount of force does not represent a force separate from Nature but the amount of force of Nature as expressed through extension and modal causality by which this particular form *may* act and continue in Nature.<sup>263</sup> The amount indicates a particular individual whose form or ratio may continue despite infinite or indefinite changes in motion(s) to *and* within it. This quantity of force cannot be isolated within a discrete individual. Any action or determination also affects the determining agent so that the agent undergoes continuous interactions and indefinite perspectives in which its force is involved in other individuals. Motion is always communicated *internally*; a movement away from something imparts motion and rest to the remaining body and vice versa. Spinoza illustrates this counterintuitive point with an example that seems to indicate a clear linear transfer of motion:

[...] [t]herefore, when bodies separate from one another, if we were to attribute to them without qualification equal motions in opposite directions, refusing to regard one of them as at rest simply on the grounds that there is the same action in the one case as in the other, then we should also be compelled to attribute to bodies that are universally regarded as at rest (e.g., the sand from which the boat is separated) the same amount of motion as to the moving bodies. For, as we have shown, the same action is required on the one side as on the other, and the transfer is reciprocal.<sup>264</sup>

The activity and continuation of motion is dependent upon the perspectives in which and through which the body may express itself. However, there is no sum total of perspectives that reduces the nature of an individual to an ideal type or potentiality. The force by which perspectives are expressed is dependent upon an individual that *happens to express* that nature. A modal individual in whichever attribute expresses perspectives which in turn are attributed to it and used to describe its activity.

The ratio or proportion of an individual represents and is *explained by* an actual concurrence of singular causes and effects which generates an individual capable of acting despite and

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<sup>263</sup> No modal individual has the form of substance through which eternal existence is guaranteed. EIIP13 L4 and EIIP10.

<sup>264</sup> CP Part 2 Def. 8.4.

because of motions within it. A clear linear distinction between cause and effects ascribed to the individual is not possible since the individual is constituted by and constitutes its essential concurrence.<sup>265</sup> The (material) individual that expresses itself through the motion/rest of bodies also involves those bodies in its conception of activity/individuality— in this case, under the perspective of extension or matter. Thus, the ratio of an individual body can be conceived as the reason or essential aspect of a particular body's existence. As long as the *communication* of motions “within”<sup>266</sup> its body continue, that is, as a singular ratio or concurrence of causes-effects, the individual acts singularly. Thus, the power or ability to be affected and affect material change is dependent on the agreement of the many motions involved in the individual.<sup>267</sup>

The indefinite duration or continuation of specific material forms represents the principle of inertia for not only simple bodies but also composite bodies. Given a material individual's determinate definition in relation to God's power, the individual cannot be directly or absolutely

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<sup>265</sup> Genevieve Lloyd in her book, *Part of Nature*, claims that due to the impossibility of an act being separable from the agent in Spinoza's physics, an indiscernibility between cause and effect is necessary. Lloyd argues that there is no subject doing the action, but the subject is constituted as acting in certain ways or manners. Thus, a ratio is an essential expression of an individual or “subject” and is the individual or “subject” as well. See Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 14-15.

<sup>266</sup> Properly speaking in this instance there is no inside or outside of body or the individual since the concurrence expresses the individual, or conversely, the individual expresses the concurrence of motions.

<sup>267</sup> The properties of hardness, softness and fluidity are dependent on how constitutive or simple bodies within a composite body resist or accept change to the ratio of that individual. However, these properties are not representative of the reason or cause by which a body in extension exists, but rather, they describe properties of certain perceived ratios/material individuals in relation to the forces of other local bodies. The appearance of hardness for certain bodies occurs to us because these bodies resist the motion of our hands or bodily forces. Thus, a large hard body can in relation to a greater force be moved in relation to other bodies such that it would seem that it were a part of a fluid motion (e.g. a celestial vortex). In relation to the material universe, everything would seem to be in motion.

Gersonides argues a similar point concerning Aristotle's notion of heaviness. For Gersonides, it is incorrect to assume that the heaviness or weight of a particular body is constitutive of or necessary for the form of that body. Instead, weight is merely an instrument to the perfection of a specific body; that is, weight aids bodies to achieve their proper place. Once in their proper place, weight is not constitutive of the individual's identity. See Mashbaum, “Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides' Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses,” 65. Spinoza mentions the hard, soft, and fluid parts of the human body in order to make the same point that parts of the human body aid the achievement and continuance of the ratio necessary for a human individual. The ratio of an individual is not reduced to the types and number of parts. See EIIP13 A3” and Postulates 1, 2 and 3 after EIIP13.

caused by God nor can its efficient cause, God through a specific singular mode of an attribute, be conceived to produce the mode eternally. The concurrence of causes and effects does not involve God's concurrence (i.e. the mode is not a substance), nor does the mode's specific existence as a singular concurrence/ratio deny that form as it is a force/power of God. Thus, the mode's order of existing and acting cannot be determined as eternal/necessary, nor is it ephemeral, but the mode retains its power so long as it is a concurrence of bodies.

In order to maintain a concurrence of bodies, the individual will have its body and the bodies within it impart motion to it such that the said body and bodies form, *via their* "compatible natures,"<sup>268</sup> a shared agreement or common expression of motion (with many aspects between these subordinate motions). Since the composite is a higher "state" or power, it must be affected so that it does not dissolve into the equilibrium of simple body interactions.<sup>269</sup> Simple bodies can *only be distinguished* by motion and rest and are equal in power; however, a composite individual, *in order to be distinguished*, must agree with many simpler motions or parts in many different ways so that its action can occur despite simpler and other<sup>270</sup> resistances. Thus, bodies are always affected from outside (and inside) because the circulation of motion is eternal, and so, there is a constant influx of compatible bodies or redirection of contrary bodies.<sup>271</sup> The power of an individual to maintain its form requires that it and its parts redirect contrary forces internally

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<sup>268</sup> Since these bodies already agree in motion and general direction they have a compatible form already; although, it is not such until it acts as an individual such that the direction and communication is not merely accidental.

<sup>269</sup> Balibar, borrowing from the work of Gilbert Simonodon, describes Spinozian individuals as metastable equilibria which actively distinguish themselves from a lower stable equilibrium of simpler units: "a new *general* concept of ontogeny [shows] that stable forms (which reduce the potential energy to a minimum) are less important in natural processes than *metastable* equilibria (requiring an elevation of potential energy which has to be preserved, generally in the form of a polarity of the individual and the environment)." Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," 11. Quote modified.

<sup>270</sup> Lesser, equivalent or greater forces.

<sup>271</sup> As Balibar notes: "[a]ny individual's conservation (or stability, therefore identity) must be compatible with a "continuous regeneration" of its constituent parts, i.e. what in modern terms we would call a regulated inward and outward flow, or material exchange with other individuals." Ibid, 18. Quote modified.

or externally so that those forces/bodies do not destroy or become a true contrary of the body or ratio.

Since every body or material individual is *distinguished* by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness and not by substance,<sup>272</sup> there cannot be an individual which is truly static or isolated in its relations to other bodies. The quantity of force of a material individual indicates a relative expression of distinction from other, lesser or equivalent, bodily forces. The infinite divisibility of extension does not merely indicate that there are lesser or greater quantitative divisions in matter but also that these “states,” in order to express difference, must have a *qualitative* difference so that *certain* motions or resistances may occur. The addition of simple bodies as simple bodies does not generate the complex varieties or aspects of motion.<sup>273</sup> In order to generate a particular, distinct motion, bodies must act together and continue a ratio not reduced to atoms and which is distinct from other contraries. Thus, there are only relative aspects in motion whereby some bodies seem to be in motion at one time and rest at the same time relative to other bodies. So long as a part is not *divided* from another individual, it can act with the individual through a shared power or appear at rest within a specific context; however,

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<sup>272</sup> Although not directly a reason by which a body can be defined, density represents the level of division by which motion and rest occurs among bodies. The amount of simple bodies or constituents divided and capable of bearing a quantity of force, i.e. motion or rest, indicates a level of material interaction possible for a composite individual. Thus, bodies with unequal densities, with parts unable to engage in productive and numerous exchanges of force, lead to either a one-sided, limited, or uneventful encounter. However, the property of density can only be attributed to a body relative to other bodies.

<sup>273</sup> Gersonides makes a similar point that simple bodies or elements cannot exist bare without some form by which to interact with other elements in a contrary way and in the process generate many higher material forms.

“That which distinguishes the simple forms,” namely the forms of the elements, “is that their matter is not devoid of one of the two opposing forms, like heat or cold and wetness and dryness.” For it is impossible for prime matter to be devoid of these forms by means of these simple forms [...] If it were possible for prime matter to be devoid of these simple forms, it would exist bare of any form at all. This is however absurd[.] Mashbaum, “Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides’ Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses,” 66.

If there were not qualitative changes among simple bodies and the composite forms they produce by their interactions, matter would exist as an inert being. In order to maintain the homogeneity *and activity* of a material universe, one must assume that the generation of forms occurs throughout and cannot be anchored by inert bodies. In Spinoza’s case, the “simple bodies” contest and interact with one another via motion and rest and not by Aristotelian elements. Nevertheless, in both cases, it is *by reason* of these bodies that material change and generation of forms can be conceived.

if the part is divided, it can itself become an individual by which to affect changes relative to other bodies. The limitless aspects generated from conceivable divisions in extension indicate that *everything is in motion*. The singular cause-effect of God, absolute concurrence, produces infinite cause-effect(s) all active only relatively. Furthermore, this absolute concurrence implies that nothing is really distinct from any other thing. Power is merely how many aspects or Faces a thing/individual may express. Thus, God or Nature as an absolute power “contains” everything.

Nevertheless, the “continuum” of Nature does not represent a field of forces<sup>274</sup> in which a particular position or functional relationship represents a particular individual or amount of potential energy. For Spinoza, everything is actual and relations are not ideal. Relations are

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<sup>274</sup> Mendel Sachs argues that both Maimonides and Spinoza adopt a field theory to explain human and material phenomena. Sachs argues that Maimonides and Spinoza adopt a concept of field to explain how immaterial phenomena may influence the actions and potential actions of bodies. See Mendel Sachs, “Maimonides, Spinoza and the Field Concept in Physics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 37 (1976), 125-131. Lachterman, with whom I agree, rejects the applicability of the field concept to Spinoza’s physics (and by extension his philosophy) because for Spinoza, all material actions are actual and cannot be properly explained by potential energy discovered by test body experiments:

Nor, finally, is rest for Spinoza a protoform of “potential energy,” as Pollock, Wolf and Roth maintained. It is not the anachronistic use of “energy” that misleads here, but, rather, the notion of potentiality, which goes against the grain of Spinoza’s basic conviction that essence and power are identical, hence, that there is no power which is not actualized. Lachterman, “The Physics of Spinoza,” 100-101.

Lachterman, nevertheless, sees the lure of treating Spinoza’s physics as dependent on field equations because field equations allow relative changes to be expressed. Bodies and their motions become unified in field equations so that they are active relative to any possible changes in the field:

[...] As we have seen, Spinoza closes the gap between bodies and motion and rest in KV, perhaps less hesitantly than he does in the *Ethics*. However this issue is to be resolved, it would be a deliciously seductive anachronism to see Spinoza, moving toward the notion of a field of force, or, more venturesomely, toward a geometro-dynamical theory in which material bodies (*Natura naturata*) are a dependent function of the geometry of space, while that geometry is, in turn, a *function of the play of forces*. Ibid, 103. Emphasis added.

The close unity between motion and bodies in field equations nevertheless cannot represent the unity of (actual) motion and bodies present in Spinoza’s physics. It would be too anachronistic, as Lachterman notes. Nevertheless, one can interestingly venture the idea that since Spinoza’s physics generates geometric and relational causal schemes *by which to explain* the actuality of bodies, one can argue that the geometry or causality present in physics can be continually contested. Thus, the play of forces of actual bodies can translate or express itself in the continual renegotiations of the geometry of space. This would lead to a completely aspectual view of physics and dynamic causal forces.

Additionally, in his article, “Einstein and Spinoza,” Michel Paty much like Mendel Sachs argues that Einstein and Spinoza share a concept of determinism rooted in a field of force conception. Michel Paty, “Einstein and Spinoza,” in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, ed. Majorie Grene and Debra Nails, (D. Reidel Publishing, 1986), 267-302. However, following Lachterman’s criticism, this theory projected back onto Spinoza would be anachronistic as well.

only the products of real concrete interaction between individuals.<sup>275</sup> The natures of individuals are not determined extrinsically, for example by field equations.<sup>276</sup> Rather, these natures are produced by an actual contestation of forces which express the natures of different individuals in a given moment. The source of any relation or attribution always resides in the actuality of individual(s).<sup>277</sup> Thus, whichever relations exist between them considered merely as relations or properties among many individuals are not real but relative. For Spinoza, no position, not even conceived as a functional position relative to other functional amounts or inputs, e.g. a space-time continuum/field, could adequately represent the actual forces present in the interaction between bodies in motion.

Instead, for Spinoza, all motion is local motion. Local motion, rather than entailing discrete positions from which and to which bodies move, entails that the force of one body affects or communicates its force to another so that the body alters its own and the other's motion. Spinoza gives several examples to illustrate this point. A boat lodged on a sand bank requires not only motion to be imparted to it to move, but counter-intuitively, also an equal amount imparted to the sand bank so that there is separation. This motion imparted overcomes the amount of rest or resistance already present in the sand bank. Furthermore, a body B with ten times the motion as another body C will communicate its greater motion to body C, but also, body C will communicate its rest or resistant motion to body B at the same time. On the other hand, if the

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<sup>275</sup> Cf. fn. 233.

<sup>276</sup> Pierre Macherey shows that Spinoza's physics cannot be related to a Kantian system of reciprocal forces, i.e. attraction and repulsion. Whereas Kant utilizes the concepts of attraction and repulsion to systematize the appropriate *representation* of material forces, Spinoza argues that the *actuality* of a body cannot include nor be explained by a relational scheme. For Macherey, Kant deduces the real from his material scheme, or the possible; this cannot be so for Spinoza, since the real excludes all negativity and is purely positive. Real distinctions determine themselves and additionally others not for the sake of a logical equivalence. See Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 185-202.

<sup>277</sup> Lee Rice argues that although Spinoza's concept of an invariant quantity of motion and rest in the universe seems to imply an analytic understanding of physics, fundamental to Spinoza's physics is an empirical dimension in which experience is primary. See Lee Rice, "Spinoza on Individuation" in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, eds. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman, (Open Court, 1975), 198.



weaker body C impacts the original more powerful body B at certain angles, there will be no alteration in the motion of body B (i.e. there will be refraction) so that there is no communication. In this case, the impact of body C on body B cannot be understood through B because there was no shared ratio (of motion and rest) as an effect. There was no true interaction or exchange of forces (i.e. a contestation) by which an actual relational understanding (or ratio) could be formed. Thus, Spinoza aptly notes, that the forms of communication and not merely the amount or position of force determines material alterations:

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, so that one and the same body may be moved differently according to the *differences* in the nature of the bodies moving it. And conversely, different bodies may be moved differently by one and the same body.<sup>278</sup>

Only in certain respects are affects and effects capable. Any relational understanding or common ratio generated must occur because the actual interacting bodies have and had communicated themselves to one another.

The communication of forces which *has occurred* between two bodies must leave a continual trace of that affection so long as that affected body continues in that ratio. All bodies having been affected by external bodies will retain traces of these interactions by being internally altered. These traces form the interaction of different natures/modes that are not essentially contrary but leave an impact on a part (capable of receiving that motion) of the body such that the impact is retained in the continuance of the individual ratio. This can be illustrated with an impact transfer between two bodies; there is always an exchange. The altered body or motion indicates that the affected individual is a product of both the external and its internal constitution. There can be no clear delineation between internal and external boundaries as not only is an individual ratio constantly affected by extrinsic bodies, but also the affection of those bodies

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<sup>278</sup> EIP13 A1''. Emphasis added.

produce the current motion of the individual. Thus, for Spinoza, there is no mechanical causality in which an extrinsic force or cause transfers an amount of energy to an already established discrete point or body. By witnessing an effect produced in a body, an affect is necessarily implied which must involve both the affected and affecting bodies in a shared ratio. Their singular natures must be factored into how the ratio continues or exists. Any dissociation of cause from effect or affecting body from affected body due to functional position, whether it is due to a field concept or mechanical causal relation, will misunderstand and undermine the force of singular interactions.

### **There are No Unmediated Causes.**

It should be apparent by now from the claim that “of things as they are in themselves, God is really the cause insofar as he consists of infinite attributes”<sup>279</sup> that Spinoza rejects the possibility of an unmediated, objective world. For Spinoza, there is no context-free objective world, such as an objective world inhabited by Kantian *das Dinge an sich*. Spinoza’s reference to the things-in-themselves critically undoes this meaning by entailing that any assumed objective thing must express itself through attributes, infinite attributes if necessary. Since God or Nature must be actual and expressed through an infinite number of attributes, singular modes or individuals must be by extension *described* by attributes, infinite if the *actual* “natures” of modes/individual express themselves through them. Real individuals can have infinite, some, or a few attributes/relations as long as those interactions occur because of the expressed “natures” of these individuals. These natures, attributes, or relations merely describe the actuality of the

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<sup>279</sup> EIP7.

individual(s), but this does not entail that these descriptions are unnecessary, as the individual must *effect* those perspectives.

Unless there is an actual effect explained through a shared ratio, there can be no causal scheme or cause identified for an effect. The ability to identify a cause indicates that an actual contestation/interaction which produces an agreement is/has taken place. This agreement among individuals is a common power as it is actual and involves (both internally and externally) many forces. This common power is not a universal because it does not have particulars which represent its power. Whereas a universal has an indiscriminate scope of application represented by certain particulars, the common power expressed is an actual force connected to specific individuals. A common universal is merely an abstract property/relation that has no force to generate individual changes. A common ratio expresses the power of many individuals to express a shared dynamic that may actually express itself in many different explanations/aspects.

The knowledge of bodily change requires not only a common ratio by which individuals can be conceived through one another but also that this ratio or knowledge of the ratio is generated in this very act. Prior to the act of exchange or the expression of the amount of force, there can be no abstract universal fields or properties with predetermined transfers of energy which determine specific, bodily change. Relations are products of actuality. Thus, the relational poles of cause and effect external and internal dissolve. There can be no clear conception of what causes another as the common power and explanation of two bodies interacting requires the involvement of both in that relation or shared power producing that relational aspect/definition. There can be no absolute functional input-output system that is logically consistent and generates abstract material positions, states, or natures of particular bodies. For Spinoza, there can be no fields, no mechanical causal scheme, or mathematical physics in general. The knowledge of

interacting bodies cannot be discretely mapped onto an assumed reality; there is no correspondence between formal patterns of thinking and bodily contestations.

Nevertheless, the *actual* contestation must be explained by shared ratios, explanations, and ultimately, extension. This indicates that individuals must conceive themselves through an attribute, but the expression is dependent upon the individual aspects that it can communicate. The types of communication expressed do in some way indicate or “constitute” the individual, but those aspects must be discovered by action and by being enacted. In the case of extension, this attribute does indicate the action of singular God by expressing it *indefinitely* in different aspects, but the actuality of God’s nature is expressed through those actual modes. Although modes are mediated through aspects, this “dependency” on an aspect does not indicate that abstract natures undergird attribution but rather indicates the actuality of individuals as expression of God’s active power. Thus, the more forms of communication by which an individual can express its force or actuality, then, the more power an individual has over and with other individuals.<sup>280</sup>

The communicative dimension to bodily interaction indicates that an active power is always involved in the mode’s material inertia or, in certain cases, knowledge of prior activity. Unless there is a trace imparted to a body, there can be no actual force for continuing in that type of motion.<sup>281</sup> Thus, effects always have a reflexive dimension, and in the case of sentient beings, such as humans, the reflexive effect, consciousness, conceives its actuality through a cause, a body, and the cause must be necessary to it, i.e. as a *human* body. Having a reflexive dimension

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<sup>280</sup> I believe that Nietzsche shares a strong affinity with Spinoza on the issue of power as can be seen in the following quote from Nietzsche: “What is good? All that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? All that is born of weakness. What is happiness? The feeling that power is growing, that *resistance is overcome*.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Section 2 in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Penguin Books 1990), p. 127. Emphasis added. Yirmiyahu Yovel describes the affinities between Spinoza and Nietzsche on the issue of power. See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*, 110-113.

<sup>281</sup> See EIIP13 A1”, Postulate 5 after EIIP13, and EIIP16.

to its actuality allows an effect to enact the continuing force of a cause and to indicate that the cause is specific and necessary for it. The reflexive dimension blocks the temptation to view certain effects as accidental. Although effects may seem accidental to certain projected causes, in the order of Nature, every effect has an appropriate cause. Conversely, it can be said that effects themselves are causes<sup>282</sup> by appropriately expressing a cause. In the case of bodies, interaction requires a contestation through which both *actual* parties express an actuality necessary to them both at that singular moment (i.e. they exist *only* together through a shared interaction). As a result, the melding or linking of certain “causes and effects” into a concept can indicate a necessary and appropriate essence for singular occurrences or concurrences.

### **Spinoza Adopts a Radically New Understanding of Essence.**

Spinoza’s definition of essence articulated early in *Ethics* II restricts essences to specific, well-defined causes because it ties any possible conception to a particular thing and *vice versa*.

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.<sup>283</sup>

The intimate relationship between an individual and its conception through certain modal aspects requires that the destruction of an individual destroys its appropriate essence and vice versa.

This ontological relationship between individual and individual’s essence can be represented logically by *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*: if X then Y, and if not Y then not X. Whenever individuals are appropriately described by an essence or definition by passing the logical requirements of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, then, the appropriate threshold for an essence is met. These dual requirements of an essence allow one to determine when certain perceived or

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<sup>282</sup> Spinoza explicitly develops this concept in the first three definitions of *Ethics* III.

<sup>283</sup> EIID2.

claimed causes (such as motion) must be retained for the conceptual description or explanation of a thing. Additionally, Spinoza's definition of essence allows things or individuals to be taken away from another without necessarily impairing the essential expression of that thing. As Spinoza notes, "[w]hatever can be taken away from a thing without impairing its integrity does not constitute the thing's essence. But that whose removal destroys a thing constitutes its essence."<sup>284</sup> What is unique about Spinoza's formulation of and requirements for a thing's essence is that it illustrates that two "orders" are necessary for the understanding and actuality of a thing: a singular essential or intrinsic order and a mediated extrinsic order of *existing* individuals.

According to the singular essence of any thing, a thing's essence cannot both affirm and deny its existence and nature as this would be contradictory and impossible.<sup>285</sup> Instead, a singular mode, for example a material mode, must affirm its nature and exist indefinitely or by its own definition cannot deny this actuality.<sup>286</sup> Within itself and from itself, the singular essence of a thing must be absolutely affirmative and cannot but give all that it has so as to be actual. The mode as a necessary effect of God or Nature, an effect of God's actuality, must express itself because whatever cause exists for the effect will give the effect all that it has, i.e. its active existence or actuality; otherwise, the cause would be deficient and contingent. No mode can undetermine itself since this would destroy its necessary essence as well as invalidate and contravene the eternal necessity of God's nature. Spinoza notes that a singular mode must,

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<sup>284</sup> CP2Ax2.

<sup>285</sup> EIIIP4. See also EIP27 in which Spinoza explains that a thing determined cannot undetermine itself.

<sup>286</sup> As Spinoza explains in EIIP13L3Cor: "[...] From this it follows that a body in motion moves until it is determined by another body to rest; and that a body at rest also remains at rest until it is determined to motion by another. This is also known through itself. For when I suppose that body A, say, is at rest, and do not attend to any other body in motion, I can say nothing about body A except that it is at rest."

*quantum se est*, insofar as it is, affirm its existence.<sup>287</sup> Conversely, the effect must be concurrent with its cause and provide a necessary expression so that the cause can manifest itself as a cause through the effect.

However, the conditions through which the “effect” or singular mode may generate or produce its existence cannot be wholly within its power, i.e. the mode (its essence and existence) is not God.<sup>288</sup> Thus, the mode must be determined from another *extrinsic* singular thing.<sup>289</sup> In the case of material individuals and modes, another body can be the only *cause* for a *determination* or change in the affected body. Only bodies agree with one another in a specific way or through the attribute of extension so that singular determinations may occur.<sup>290</sup> However, the agreement is not a reduction to the first mode nor constitutive of the affected mode’s uniqueness since the affecting mode *determines* the affected mode in a specific manner *outside* of the affected mode’s intrinsic definition.<sup>291</sup> As a result, every determination is a negation, or *omnis determinatio est negatio*. The affirmative and intrinsically indefinite expression of a mode becomes definite through the extrinsic forces that *constrain* it and act upon it. This is not to say that these determinations are merely accidental but rather that they constitute the determination of the very singularity of the affected body and its individuality. Thus, there is also a positive sense of determination in which the affections of Substance affirm their ability to exist as an active tendency in Nature. Singularity would be inert without an active expression of itself

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<sup>287</sup> See EIIP6D in which Spinoza argues that: “[...] no thing has anything in itself by which it can be destroyed, or which takes its existence away (by P4). On the contrary, it is opposed to everything which can take its existence away (by P5). Therefore, as far as it can, and it lies in itself, it strives to persevere in its being, q.e.d.”

<sup>288</sup> An example of this can be seen in the case of human modal existence. “*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 pertained to the essence of man, then substance being given, man would necessarily be given (by D2), and consequently man would exist necessarily,” EIIP10.

<sup>289</sup> See EIP28, EIIP9, and EIIP13Lemma3.

<sup>290</sup> EIIP13Lemma2.

<sup>291</sup> This description, once again, displays that attributes do not exist and cannot determine a mode to be actual through the shared concept of an attribute.

through an individual that interacts with certain extrinsic conditions for its very existence, thereby manifesting an intrinsic unique expression of activity in Nature, a striving to continue one's active/moving existence—a causing, affecting, and determining existence itself.<sup>292</sup>

Spinoza's concept of positive determination demonstrates how Spinoza's philosophy is a radical alternative and anomaly to modern philosophy and its commitment to rationalism.

Furthermore, through an understanding of Spinoza's concept of positive determination, one can see how later philosophers, such as Hegel, misinterpret Spinoza by assuming Spinoza supported rationalist's conceptions, such as a concept of negation based on formal principles of logic.<sup>293</sup>

Pierre Macherey notes that Hegel wrongly interpreted Spinoza as advocating what Hegel calls "finite negativity"<sup>294</sup> and that Hegel stressed this interpretation so as to further his development of the concept of negation as an essential feature to every existing individual:

[...] Hegel's interpretation [...] shows that Spinoza remains attached to the classical concept of a "finite negative," an external negation that suppresses and excludes, outside all immanent discursivity or work of the negative, which returns to itself, precisely to constitute an essence.<sup>295</sup>

As a result, Hegel continually criticized Spinoza's concept of determination or "negation" so as to highlight its seeming impotence to adequately think a "productive" negativity. However, Macherey describes Spinoza's understanding of an affirmative determination or "negation" contrary to Hegel's interpretation:

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<sup>292</sup> In EIIP8, Spinoza argues that nonexistent modes cannot involve a necessary distinction in their singularity without an involvement of an extrinsic determination, i.e. existence.

<sup>293</sup> From this basic misunderstanding of Spinoza, many philosophers even today portray Spinoza as Hegel did. For example, Heidi Ravven presents Slavoj Žižek's "old-fashioned Hegelian reading of Spinoza." However, Ravven shows that this Hegelian caricature serves only to distort the insights and developments of Spinoza. See Heidi M. Ravven, "Hegel's Epistemic Turn—Or Spinoza's" in *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 33, (2003), 195-202.

<sup>294</sup> For another account of how Hegel misreads Spinoza, see Errol E. Harris's, "The Concept of Substance in Spinoza and Hegel," in *Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza*, ed. Emilia Giancotti, (Bibliopolis, 1985), 51-70. For an account of how Macherey might have misread Hegel, see George L. Kline, "Pierre Macherey's *Hegel ou Spinoza*" in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, eds. Edwin Curley and Pierre-Francoise Moreau, (E.J. Brill, 1990), 298-305.

<sup>295</sup> Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 171-172.



In addition, Hegel's reasoning is undermined on another point, because the movement through which a thing tends to conserve its own being is exactly its actual essence, or again, as Spinoza writes elsewhere, its "singular essence," which causes it to exist, not absolutely as only substance is able, but in a certain and determined manner, as a particular affection of substance, expressed in one of its kinds. The notion of *conatus* thus refers directly to that of determination, from which it removes all internal negativity: to the extent that a thing is determined as such (*quantum in se est*) through its immanent relation to substance, of which it is an affection, it opposes itself *tendentally* to all that limits its reality, by threatening to destroy it. It is thus certain that the determination is not *in itself* a negation but in contrast an affirmation; thus Hegel's argument, according to which Spinoza thinks of determination only through a lack, and thus as ineffective, withers like a leaf in fall.<sup>296</sup>

Spinoza's conception of contradiction or negation bears no resemblance either to a formal or logical principle, such as Descartes's, or to a dialectical version, such as Hegel's, but Spinoza's conception places negation outside any essential constitution of singular modes. As Macherey notes:

[...] For Spinoza, nothing is intrinsically determined by its contradictions, exactly as Hegel has noted; in this sense, the dialectic is effectively absent from Spinozism. But we must insist on the fact that, in the same instance, the contradiction has lost its negative power of refutation from which it derives, again for Descartes, an essentially logical function: not so much that it does not establish a being in its reality, it does not even allow it to refuse a reality, because its discourse is completely outside the essence of things.<sup>297</sup>

The principle of positive determination and lack of true contradiction and finite negation allows one to see how Spinoza's physics requires a fully actual reality which is nevertheless immanently involved with infinitely other singular modes and necessarily expressive of Nature.

As each mode must affirm itself, *quantum in se est*, the principle of contradiction cannot apply to the singular order. From the perspective of a singular mode, there can be no true contrary within itself since it naturally excludes all negation from its active principle or tendency to exist. True contradictories and contraries only occur in the extrinsic order of mediated things, the order of *existing individuals*. Since a singular mode cannot envelop the existence and nature

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 184.

of another mode, which is nonetheless necessary for its determination, an extrinsic order of causation is necessary for the original mode's existence and nature. At this level, extrinsic determinations occur such that the appearances of individuals may be generated or destroyed. Individuals represent a unity through extrinsic determinations or constraints (i.e. ratios) that nonetheless can be destroyed by extrinsic, overpowering forces. However, extrinsic forces cannot determine an individual in a merely mechanistic or immediately fleeting manner—transferring all their force into another. If this were so, it would lead to affections being unreal and unable to establish any identity or determination.<sup>298</sup> “Bodies” would be infinitely determining each other without any individual formations, i.e. Descartes's Plenum. Individuals themselves are singular modes according to their own natures.<sup>299</sup> Because a singular mode cannot envelop the nature and existence of another necessary affecting mode(s), we must grant that the affecting mode is real, existing with its own singular essence and determined existence. The extrinsic formulation of individuals cannot directly undermine the intrinsic singular *nature* of the individual, but the external world equally and neutrally provides conditions so as to preserve in existence and forces leading to destruction. As a result, the natures of individuals are *not* necessarily related to an individual's essence in an essentially positive or negative way.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Balibar notes that unless there is some intrinsic action to a determinate individual, affections would bring only death and dissolution to the individual. “If there were no adequate ideas, and no actions which Man causes “by his own nature”, his affections would simply lead to his destruction or death. A concrete concept of transindividuality therefore implies that relationships between individuals, or parts of the individuals' Minds and Bodies”; see Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individual to Transindividuality,” 31.

<sup>299</sup> Edwin Curley in his translation of Spinoza's definition of a singular thing, EIID7, notes in a footnote, that individuals can express a double translation which would indicate “individuals *or singulars*.” Accordingly, the original translation would be modified to: “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of Individuals [*or singulars*] 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,” EIID7, Translation modified. Jeffrey Alan Bernstein makes the insight about this possible double translation; see Jeffrey Alan Bernstein, “Spinoza's Thinking of Freedom and Its Reception in Subsequent European Philosophy,” (Ph.D. Diss., Vanderbilt University, 1998), 95-96.

<sup>300</sup> The lack of essential relationships allows Spinoza to argue that human values such as sympathy and antipathy are absent in all natural individuals. “Because the parts of matter are in reality distinct from one another (Art. 61 Principia Part I), one can exist without another (Cor. Prop. 7 Part I), and they do not depend on one another. So all

Nature is not for or against humans. Extrinsic individuals are not intrinsically destined to be good or evil in relation to human essential well-being. In fact, given the lack of pre-given natures for extrinsic individuals as they relate to a “human”<sup>301</sup> mode, for example, there can be no necessary moral categories applied to individuals nor can there be a teleological principle by which extrinsic individuals are appropriately incorporated into the human or any universal good. The lack of a pre-given principle(s) ordering and differentiating prior individuals or an assumed *telos* that can *harmonize* all individuals<sup>302</sup> into a synthesis entails that a singular mode *must produce or make* its individual existence on its own terms and through its own powers interacting with the conditions “externally” provided to it.<sup>303</sup> A singular mode is a striving and producing thing without any predetermined metaphysical limit or ordering. The lack of a pre-given metaphysical nature for an individual indicates that any ordering which seeks to reduce the causes of things to a single order must be equivocal and nominal. Therefore, proceeding from effects to causes, there cannot be an inference to origins<sup>304</sup> by which one could reduce the cause

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those fictions about Sympathy and Antipathy must be rejected as false. Furthermore, because the cause of an effect must always be positive (Ax. 8 Part I), it must never be said that a body moves to avoid there being a vacuum. It moves only through the impulse of another body,” *CPPart2, Prop9Schol.*

<sup>301</sup> As should be apparent by now, a human nature in general does not exist since “natures” only pertain to the activity of composite individuals. The individual’s activity does not reduce parts or prior individuals to an essential nature, since with their own “nature” these prior individuals or parts can be separated from the composite without necessarily destroying the composite individual. See *EIIP24*.

<sup>302</sup> Macherey argues that Hegel’s conception of negation requires that a subject must be assumed to resolve the contradiction perceived in the interaction between individuals. A subject as substance provides a (free) will which must give purpose, or a final end, that then constitutes the active development or process of individual identity. Hegel’s view and teleological process is contrary to Spinoza’s understanding as it treats the causes of individuals as totally insufficient to generate their identity. The foundation of Hegel’s view can be represented by Spinoza’s account of an individual unable to accept that a chain of causes could generate a particular event. For this individual, any causal explanation can be undermined by assuming there are unknown causes that might really justify the event. Ignorance of “all” causes deceives one into believing that a harmonizing and final principle can unify the disparate events perceived by the individual. See Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 173-174.

<sup>303</sup> Nothing is truly extrinsic or intrinsic in this case.

<sup>304</sup> Idit Dobbs-Weinstein provides an interesting and similar account of the impossibility of an inference to origins in Maimonides’s analysis of creation:

[...] The mistake of many philosophers and Mutakallimun had been to infer what is possible about creation from the nature of what exists *in its formed and stable state*. The former have inferred necessity and eternity from the stability of what is, once it had been actualized and had become stable, whereas the latter have inferred the possibility of creation and hence, the fact of creation from it. Maimonides denies the

to a certain kind, usually a projected affect derived from the imagination. Thus, for Spinoza, all relations, even causal relations, are fictional because the effect cannot reduce the cause identically and because prior individuals are *extrinsically* related to the essence of the present individual. An ordering of causes, rather than revealing a single metaphysical order or universal nature to things, is an ethical-political convention which accentuates certain imported *values* over others because they are useful for the modality and existence of an individual.

This is why any causal scheme or narrative that seeks to argue that extrinsic individuals are *essentially related* to the human good, let alone “human nature”, ultimately must rely on ignorance to bolster their claims. Ignorance perversely plays on the indifference of Nature and extrinsic individuals therein to argue that there must be a harmonizing principle that will resolve the *perceived* contradiction an individual experiences.<sup>305</sup> If one understands that contradiction is not an intrinsic principle to individuals but rather is projected onto metaphysical subjects<sup>306</sup>

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validity of both inferences [...] Maimonides [suggests] that, in natural science, the domain of demonstrative reason, the order of knowledge corresponds to the order of existence but is inverse to the order of being, or metaphysics. He is also suggesting that the less evident or familiar something is, the less it lends itself to discursive reason. The laws constituting the logic of possibility are an abstraction from the repetitive regularity in the order of existence, of which they are not the cause. That is, Maimonides is pointing out that human knowledge of the natural universe not only originates in sensible experience, but also is never independent of the imagination, and hence, the observed actualized event or existent does not furnish sufficient grounds for demonstration. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, (SUNY, 1995), 70-71.

<sup>305</sup> Spinoza explains how ignorance of causes can lead to reinforcing *and justifying* one’s lack of knowledge: “[F]or there is no end to the questions which can be asked [...] And so they will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, i.e., the sanctuary of ignorance. Similarly, when they see the structure of the human body, they are struck by a foolish wonder, and because they do not know the causes of so great an art, they infer that it is constructed, not by mechanical, but by divine, or supernatural art, and constitute in such a way that one part does not injure another,” EIAppendix.

<sup>306</sup> Spinoza rejects any notion of a subject as it would allow individuals to be intrinsically related to one another so as to create abstract relations and fictional metaphysical orders. As Spinoza states:

*What are Opposition, Order, Agreement, Difference, Subject, Adjunct, etc.* From our comparing things with one another there arise certain notions that are nevertheless nothing outside things themselves but modes of thinking. This is shown by the fact that if we wish to consider them as things having a place outside thought, we immediately render confused the otherwise clear conception we have of them. Such notions are opposition, order, agreement, difference, subject, adjunct, etc., and any others like these. These notions, I say, are quite clearly perceived by us insofar as we conceive them not as something different from the essences of the things that are opposed, ordered, etc., but merely as modes of thinking whereby we more easily retain or imagine the things themselves,” CPAppendix1, Chap. 5.

which are assumed to underlie individuals, then he or she can critique metaphysical principles of ordering as fictions that undermine a real productive engagement with Nature, primarily the productive engagement with human individuals in a social-ethical-political community.<sup>307</sup>

The lack of any intrinsic relation and harmony between individuals shows that the singular modes can undergo change without necessarily leading to real contradiction. Following Aristotle, Spinoza argues that a true contrary or contradiction can only occur in the same respect and at the same time.<sup>308</sup> As negations can only occur in the mediated, extrinsic world of existing individuals, these negations do not necessarily obviate the singular essence or definition of a mode. Individuals and extrinsic determinations can be removed from a singular mode, through extrinsic forces and determinations, and nevertheless, their removal does not destroy the mode at every occasion.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the singular mode can be determined in many ways or from many respects which are aspectival and not essentially contrary to the mode. A mode can only be said to involve a contradiction when it is in the same respect and at the same time; this is impossible because it leads to an intrinsic positing and negating at the same time. Moments of contradiction are moments of unintelligibility in which the mode is unable to conceive itself and be within its cause. In other occasions, “contradictions” or contraries are due to the respect in which an

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<sup>307</sup> Etienne Balibar develops the concept of synergy to describe the mutual aid individuals may provide one another without collapsing into an organic or holistic model which would harmonize individuals to one another:

The usual way of understanding it is that Spinoza is contrasting situations in which we are dependent on other people and situations in which we are independent, acting on our own. But the argument I have sketched is pointing towards a quite different understanding (less "individualistic"): to be active or to be an adequate cause is *also* to establish a relationship with others, albeit not one of dependency (not even "mutual" dependency) but of *convenientia* or synergy." See Balibar, "Spinoza: Individuality to Transindividuality," 23-24.

The lack of essential harmony between individuals allows Balibar to argue that Spinoza is one of the first philosophers to conceive of human interaction in terms of the multitude or mass. See Etienne Balibar, "Spinoza, The Anti-Orwell," in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, (Routledge, 1994), 4-9. Genevieve Lloyd in her attempt to understand extrinsic conditions as non-holistic yet potentially beneficial to an individual develops the concept of an ecosystem. The ecosystem does not necessarily entail intrinsic relations of dependence and essential goods outside an individual's nature but a form of individuality in which a mode is necessarily integrated. See Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 12.

<sup>308</sup> *Metaphysics*, 1005b19-20.

<sup>309</sup> EIIP13Lemma4 and EIIP24.

individual may affect a mode; yet, this affection is not essentially negative as the individual is not essentially related, either positively or negatively, to the intrinsic essence of the mode. Thus, a mode may undergo and experience many changes, and nevertheless, retain its activity or form.

However, a mode does not merely erase the affections of its individuality. Once an affection has occurred, it does not merely become an accidental determination that can be completely left behind or *willed away* by the powers of the mode. Since the extrinsic individual that affects the mode/individual is both extrinsic to the affected mode by essence and existence, the extrinsic determination does not become accessible to the existence and essence of the affected mode by which it could alter that affect at its pleasure. The determination must be retained as a trace on the affected mode/individual because the extrinsic mode is neither unreal nor essentially related to the nature of the affected mode. The causal involvement between both modes is not merely a contingent factor but necessary for both the existence and determination of the affected singular mode. As a result, a singular mode must have a causal history, memory, social involvement, etc. which cannot be merely obviated by the affected individual. In fact, these affections constitute a necessary individual history which distinguishes the individual within Nature as a unique individual. However, the affections and parts that determine and make up an individual cannot be separated as *discrete individuals* from the individual. From the perspective of the individual, parts are not essentially a specific, discrete nature, as this nature is inaccessible to the individual.<sup>310</sup> The individual only perceives how the parts are determining and useful for its existence and perspective. These parts and determinations are *perceived* to

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<sup>310</sup> As Spinoza notes in EIIP24D: “The parts composing the human Body pertain to the essence of the Body itself only insofar as they communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed manner [...] and not insofar as they can be considered as Individuals, without relation to the human Body.” Macherey argues that parts “can be considered in two ways: as the elements that coexist in it and together form its global organization, and as they are themselves, independent individuals, which exist themselves in their own entirety, making an abstraction of their belonging to the human body.” Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 177. Spinoza clearly supports the first interpretation.

have existence only insofar as they can function and agree with the individual in an extrinsic manner. Thus, the parts and affections must be *retained* (perceived as existing) as long as the individual exists because the extrinsic agreement or relation can only be limited or removed by another extrinsic affection or force. Existence can only be perceived or possibly known if an individual has been affected.<sup>311</sup> For example, if a human body has not been affected then the perception, image, or memory of a “separate” individual would not exist or be retained for that affected individual. Furthermore, since the indefinite and affirmative nature of the affected mode cannot involve intrinsic negation, these historical affects must be expressed as a necessary aspect to the individuality and singularity of a mode. The primary result is that the individual and mode is constituted by a living memory that cannot be willed away by intrinsic powers, but must be affected by social-political forces so as to constitute a new individuality.

The necessary involvement of both affecting and affected individuals as well as the impossibility of a clear and distinct ontological separation between them shows that attributes, common notions, axioms, and any principle of similarity must be formal principles of explanation.<sup>312</sup> Attributes, common notions, axioms, etc., merely show and explain an

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<sup>311</sup> EIIP19

<sup>312</sup> Elhanan Yakira makes an important distinction between attributes, “good” common notions and universals which imply classes of objects. Yakira uses the example of bodies interacting to show this:

They [bodies] agree primarily because the concepts of these bodies are related to the concept of extension—they *involve* it. The concept of the attribute is not a general concept, and all bodies (or their concepts) are not subsumed under it as its extension. This holds also for *common notions*: the objects they refer to are not their extensions. The fact that these notions commonly refer to them does not group them in classes, and common notions are not names of classes. Classes do not exist, except in the imagination of human beings; and our talk of things as members of classes is epistemologically deficient or, more precisely, inadequate. [...] General notions refer to objects semiotically; since we cannot properly know many things at once, we designate them by certain linguistic signs which are cognitively poor. Since Spinoza saw no role for syntax and form in the constitution of knowledge and meaning, he had very little taste for semiotics and did not assign much epistemological value to knowledge through signs. Whatever value they have is due to their conceptual or representational content; but, as they are the outcome of processes of abstraction, their content is diluted in proportion to the advancement of the abstracting process. The further away we are from singular concrete things, the greater the number of things we refer to, and the poorer is the content of our discourse. Yakira, “Is the Rational Man Free?”, 74. Quote modified.

Attributes, such as extension, and good common notions do not enter into a formal logical or syntactical system in which meaning would be universally established. In this system, meaning would be generated by rules which form

engagement between two or more concrete individuals. Since extrinsic individuals and parts are not related essentially to a perceiving individual, my affections, for example, are there to show my intrinsic powers to explain the object through generative definitions or useful ideas, which cannot be reduced essentially to extrinsic affections. As a result, there can be no inference to a specific, universal origin by which all individuals and modes can be reduced to ideal types.

The necessity of two orders for conceiving of identity, singular and mediated, allows Spinoza to argue that universal attributes or perspectives provide no specific conceptual benefit for a particular (material) thing. Nevertheless, this does not mean that certain attributes are not used in the conception of specific things. It only means that essences must not be vague but specifically determined by specific (bodily or mental) causes. The result is that an *existing* cause<sup>313</sup> must be utilized in any concept/definition of a singular thing and that definitions are of singulars. If not, definitions would be abstract and without determination. Thus, when one designates or attributes a name or description to a thing, the act of designating indicates that an essence or definition does not necessarily equate to its external existence but rather expresses an actual perspective. Conversely, a perspective is not possible unless an actual individual exists.

Individuals must exist to distinguish themselves from a general attribute in which they may be considered as indeterminate parts. In the *Ethics* II Proposition 8, an example of a circle containing infinite rectangles is used to show that individual rectangles in a circle must involve individual existence in their definition to distinguish their individual natures from other rectangles and the circle as well. However, what is especially interesting about this example is that the rectangles are “said to have duration” or existence since they are abstract geometric

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well-formed statements and thereby make meaning dependent upon logical form and derivations. Instead, for Spinoza, attributes and common notions must be viewed as means to conceive concrete singular truths generated by *determinations*.

<sup>313</sup> EIIIP8.



entities. The “said to have duration” qualification indicates that certain mental abstractions can present an order of conceiving/causality similar to a physical order. Truth, thus, can mean an agreement with appropriate meanings and distinctions. This is a further indication that truth is not based on correspondence with an *a priori* reality. Instead, individuals distinguish themselves from some form/type of conceiving which type treats them as *already valid* individuals (i.e. through certain immanent aspects, ratios, agreements or *conventions*). In the case of convention, whether the specific conventions or publicly agreed aspects are practiced determines the appropriate distinction for those feigned individuals defined.<sup>314</sup>

Nevertheless, any definition with a number of individuals, e.g. a number of humans, indicates that the cause cannot be merely in the abstract definition (of humanity). Neither does it indicate that a specific man, for example, or a number of them can have a cause internally restricted to that number of men and no more. Since a cause should be actual and express a real determination, the scope of its determination cannot make itself less determined than it is. Yet, in the case of individuals, their nature, definition or conceived determination is separate from its existence, i.e. considered only as a meaning or definition, so that any association of the definition with an individual must change due to extrinsic changes.<sup>315</sup> The scope of the definition must be

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<sup>314</sup> In his essay, “Ideas of Nonexistent Modes: *Ethics* II Proposition 8, its Corollary and Scholium,” Elhanan Yakira does an excellent job at demonstrating that for Spinoza truth must be intensional so that relevant extensional objects by which we demonstrate truth are determined by prior intellectual concerns or practices. Yakira notes that Spinoza’s example of a circle in Proposition 8 EII must utilize specific geometric objects, i.e. an infinite number of rectangles, as relevant to the concept of a circle intersected by two lines. There can be an infinite number of conceptual possibilities within the circle, infinite number of faces, triangles, etc.; this cannot be judged by an extensional criterion but only by an intensional criterion, i.e. why these objects are meaningful, must dictate the relevant objects, i.e. rectangles. See Elhanan Yakira, “Ideas of Nonexistent Modes: *Ethics* II Proposition 8, its Corollary and Scholium,” *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, Vol. 2, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (E.J. Brill, 1993), 159-169.

<sup>315</sup> Gersonides argues this point by refuting the theory of metempsychosis. See Mashbaum, “Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides’ Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses,” 73-74. His main argument is that an effect considered as merely a meaning or conceptual identity would encounter the problem of lacking individual meaning if detached from existing individual causes. For example, if the soul of a particular body could only designate a conceptual meaning or term in-itself, then the soul could be said to be a separate individual, not absolutely determined by a specific body. However, in this case, the soul could not take on properties by which

prevented by another existing individual. Otherwise, when the number of individuals is conceived through their nature there would be a lack in their nature that restricts their actuality, contrary to their very posited reality.

Spinoza develops the exact chain of reasoning in Propositions 8 and 11 of *Ethics* I. In Proposition 8, Spinoza argues that since a definition only expresses absolute affirmation and indefinite nature, the definition cannot generate a specific number of individuals from its indefinite determination. Thus, if 20 men are conceived to exist, their cause for existence must be provided by a cause outside the general nature of their humanity. The actuality of the cause, however, must be coextensive with the exact number and cannot exceed that number. If not, then the cause does not specifically generate the actuality of that specified number. As a result, in Proposition 11 Spinoza argues that the specified cause must be prevented by an external cause from expressing itself more than its present actuality. Since the cause is actual, it should involve no intrinsic negation. If there were an internal negative principle, then the actuality of an individual thing would involve a possible contradiction: the individual thing could be said to be both existing and non-existing at the same time. In the case of a contradiction, this involves no dilemma because a square-circle should contain a reason to exclude its very positing; however, for a number of men, their actuality should express itself without internal limit. The limited or restricted scope of their actuality must be due to an external cause. In a general way, this affirms the actuality of God since God's actuality expressed through modes does not entail true inaction

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the soul could move to other places or alter itself in different contexts because the soul lacking distinction *initially* would not have any more distinction moving to another place than its "original" place. The purely universal character of this individual implies that any place or context is equally as good as any other determination so that no determination has the force to make the detached universality specific and truly constituted by real individual causes. Spinoza alludes to this kind of reasoning in EIP8 Schol. 2 as a confusion of natural created things with divine eternal things: "So it happens that they fictitiously ascribe to substances the beginning which they see that natural things have; for those who do not know the true causes of things confuse everything and without any conflict of mind feign that both trees and men speak, imagine that men are formed both from stones and from seed, and that any form whatever is changed into any other." EIP8Schol.2

or existential lack but merely the denial of modal expression. The determination must be a positive in-itself singular cause that generates that specific number and no more but through an actuality and not an intrinsic lack or negation. Individuals cannot be essentially related to other individuals such that they would forgo their existence for another individual. Natures, although potentially general, must be *singularly expressed*; otherwise, an individual's existence would involve an intrinsic negation.

The problem of universal "individuals" or ideal types is that they rely on their universality to seem as necessary and actual beings; however, when they are "determined" by another universal property it cannot make them concrete individuals as they are assumed to be universals in some way.<sup>316</sup> The addition of universals to universals cannot produce individuals

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<sup>316</sup> Jacob Klein in his analysis of Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic principle of *chorismos*, the separability and indifference of noetic objects from and to sensation, argues that although universal pure numbers are not ontologically detached from ordinary sensible objects, there can, nonetheless, be an apodeictic or demonstrative science of pure numbers. Numbers can be studied as exact, well-defined objects and capable of producing or demonstrating arithmetic relations. That is, the number 1 and 6 can count or produce the number 7. However, the arithmetic product of 1 and 6, 7, does not itself constitute a true indivisible whole, an eidetic form/number. Klein utilizing Aristotle's analysis argues that a pure number must be considered an assemblage or multitude of monads or ones:

"For number is a multitude measured by a unit." A number must be a heap of indivisible forms or abstract units. The indeterminacy and detachment from sensible change or division of an abstract form or universal cannot become a part with other numbers to determine another abstract number, an abstract whole. Instead, matter or sensible objects provide the productive force to generate an indivisible whole as a concrete this. The distinction between particular numbers comes about because they represent a *counting practice* which utilizes the measure of one. The very fact of a specific multitude requires an indivisible unit or measure to make the distinction of many ones or more than one. Thus, the one establishes the base for number but that one must first be an abstraction, definition or measure of a specific sensible object, e.g. one apple, human, etc.: [Number] is *kept together by a common measure*, namely a particular unit which has become the basis of the count; this common measure first enables "many ones" to become "many": "For each number is 'many' because each is [made up of] 'ones' and because each is measured by [its own] 'one.'" At the initial level of abstraction, definition, indifference to or arresting of sensible change/division, there can be no falsification of the measure because it does not enter into a contrary relationship with matter. By this measure, one can proceed to prove whether one could count particular sensible or noetic phenomena by this unit. The interest both in the generation of the abstract measure (*monas*) and the count of objects produces an apodeictic science relevant to a sensing knower. Through the realization that a count or counting *practice* determines the whatness or distinction of a number or indivisible unity, allows one to understand that the unity of number is not by *eidos* or form but from a practice relevant to specific perspectives attempting to render practices intelligible. The analysis of the *eidos* of numbers is applicable to any abstract measure or definition such as human: "For a human being as a human being is a thing one and indivisible; but [the arithmetician] has already posited the indivisible one [namely the "detached" *monas*], and then sees later what belongs to a human being that would make him indivisible" [i.e., what makes him subject to being counted or reckoned with as a 'unit']. [...] And exactly the same may clearly be said of

but merely projected no-things. Thus, individuals are indefinite because their boundaries cannot be discovered by the intellect<sup>317</sup> which is concerned with concurrence and not extrinsic agreement. Concerns about extrinsic agreement involve the applicability of a definition to reality or its reference to individuals already outside its defined scope, that is, whether the definition can designate an individual within the actuality of God or Nature. Nevertheless, a specific and adequate definition should *already* indicate a true, well-defined cause from which to describe reality. Otherwise, it would *initially* be indeterminate and fall into the problem of universal indeterminacy.

The inability of singular essences to be determined or constituted directly by substance or by an eternal cause entails that singulars only have modal distinctions. Because God or Nature is the only substance, all modes must be *equally* aspects or expressions of God so that they cannot be radically distinct and self-originating.<sup>318</sup> Conversely, since nothing is external to God, modes are not substantially different from God so that there is no ontological priority of God over modes.<sup>319</sup> God is not eminently first but is the immanent and efficient cause of every mode, providing the productive actuality expressed by each mode according to its specific reality.

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any countable being whatsoever. See chapter 8, “*The Aristotelian critique and the possibility of a theoretical logistic*,” in Jacob Klein’s book, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, 100-113.

<sup>317</sup> “The indefinite is that whose bounds, if it has any, cannot be discovered by human intellect.” *CP*, Def. 4.

<sup>318</sup> As Spinoza notes in EIP36D: “Whatever exists expresses the nature, *or* essence of God in a certain and determinate way (byP25C), i.e. (by P34), whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things. So (by P16), from [a mode] some effect must follow” Translation modified.

<sup>319</sup> Macherey claims that the immediate ontological relation of mode to substance and vice versa disallows any logical scheme that could represent a linear progression from cause to effect. Instead, cause and effect, substance and modes, are immediately concurrent and absolutely positive:

With Spinoza, by contrast, the conatus that constitutes a singular essence unites it without intermediary to infinite substance that expresses itself within it, in a determination that is at the same time finite and infinite, and cannot therefore be restrained by the conditions of possible knowledge. [...] Substance does not precede its modes or lie behind their apparent reality, as a metaphysical foundation or rational condition, but, in its absolute immanence, it is nothing other than the act of expressing itself immediately in all its modes, an act that is not itself determined through the relations of modes to each other but that is on the contrary their effective cause. There is therefore nothing more, nothing less either, in substance than in its affections: it is that which expresses the immediate identity between the unity of nature and the infinite multiplicity of beings that constitute it without “composing” it, and it is irreducible to the formal principle of an order. Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 200.

Thus, ideas and bodies are merely modes or aspects of God and cannot be distinct from the unique existence of God. Modes do not have an absolute discrete identity but represent an involvement in the infinite activity and productivity of Nature. Properly speaking, Nature is the only individual; yet, its individuality is infinitely complex and productive according to whichever attribute is used to explain it. Modes are not individuals with a firm boundary, a state within a state, but are actual explanations or definitions (or determinations) expressing the modal activity of God. Since nothing is external to the power of God, all distinctions are modal distinctions in which modes express the same, i.e. God, but non-identically. Strict identity is not possible because each mode must be conceived through the necessity of God so that each mode has its own existence and unique action. God, in turn, must produce every determination because it is infinitely productive. If God were a self-identical ontological ground, modes or affections of God would merely be contingent and apparent aspects of the real One. Modes could not through themselves, *per se*, express an intrinsic cause or determination. Their existence would not have any reason or necessary cause to produce and justify it; likewise, God would be completely indifferent and impotent to necessarily generate these modes, i.e. aspects belonging to its reality. In order to allow for the reality of modes and God's reality immediately expressed in modes, the same must be always already the different, but the difference of a mode constitutes a singular identity unique to a specific individual.

Unable to totalize its identity, a singular mode must involve extrinsic affections through which individuality and a productive striving occurs. Singularity is a productive tendency and requires affections. However, affections do not represent a detachment from Nature but how Nature is expressed in these affections. Thus, a mental mode and material mode do not represent two ontological distinct substances, but Nature expressing the same singular causes through

specific modes. A mental mode and a material mode do not represent firm discrete beings but a *direct* involvement with other modes/individuals. For a material mode, bodies are mixed, and for a mental mode, ideas are a direct awareness of or involvement with ideas, a mixing with other ideas: a necessary confusion of ideas.<sup>320</sup> Neither mode constitutes a unity of their respective affects except to form a productive and intrinsic expression that is necessary for the mode but not for the individuals presented by the affections. Nevertheless, the more a mode undergoes extrinsic affections/conditions, the more determinations it has for its singular activity—its ability to generate or affect itself. Through this involvement, the mode must manifest its singular reality or perfection; the mode must bring into or produce “its” reality. Furthermore, since *no effect can undetermine itself* due to God’s eternal nature,<sup>321</sup> *the more you can undergo*, the more you can generate and form self-determining actions. This is not merely a production of effects (*operari*),<sup>322</sup> but a singular and unique expression of one’s power as a necessary expression of God’s power. Nevertheless, the production of effects and the involvement of other’s effects can never be overcome due to the necessity of extrinsic interactions. As a result, a singular activity requires an “ordering” and arranging of extrinsic conditions/individuals to produce and/or promote singular activity. This may lead to a synergy

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<sup>320</sup> Genevieve Lloyd describes the necessary confusion present in bodies and minds:

A mind knows itself only through being aware of bodily modifications, because it is in fact nothing but the idea of such modifications—the expression under the attribute of thought of the same reality that is expressed also as body. It follows that self-knowledge must share the inevitable confusion of bodily awareness. It can never be complete, for our bodies are part of nature and our minds cannot grasp all their interconnections. The mind has only fragmentary inadequate understanding of body and hence only an inadequate understanding of itself. Its knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies is “confuse” and mutilated” (IIP29C). Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 20.

<sup>321</sup> EIP27.

<sup>322</sup> Pierre Macherey highlights Spinoza’s use of two Latin terms to conceive an action that determines. According to Macherey, the Latin term ‘agere’ denotes an intrinsic and self-determining action of a mode whereas the Latin term ‘operari’ denotes the extrinsic forces which determine a mode to produce effects not essentially tied to its immanent activity. Nevertheless, both terms signify the necessity of Nature as conceived through these two different perspectives. See Pierre Macherey, “From Action to Production of Effects: Observations on the Ethical Significance of *Ethics I*” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (E.J. Brill, 1991), 161-180.

of forces to generate activity in many respective modes. Subsequently, the “joining” together of these modes leads to a greater and more powerful singularity that can express itself as knowledge in a human political community.

In the case of humans, bodily affections are *perceived* by minds because neither can reduce the other; minds do not have ideas because neither ideas nor bodies are discrete objects. Additionally, these ideas or perceptions as affections *determine other ideas* and provide a direct involvement and awareness for the ideas of ideas. Only at this last “stage” can affects become intrinsic causes in which their determinations produce *necessary agreement* and actions; at this moment, it can be said that the individual is free as it has *determined* itself.<sup>323</sup> Nevertheless, affections are required to provide the basis of involving an effect itself in a cause. Thus, the greater number of affections and aspects of bodily force indicates a greater “perfection or reality” in the mind.<sup>324</sup> However, perfection and reality can only be specific to the affective conditions

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<sup>323</sup> As Spinoza states in EID7: “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act [*agere*] by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect [*operandum*] in a certain and determinate manner,” translation modified.

<sup>324</sup> This indicates that bodies of animals have radically different minds, if they have anything remotely similar to human minds, so that the equating of animal mind to human mind is completely equivocal. As Spinoza argues in EIIP13, the minds of certain objects have more animate reality than the minds of other objects:

[...] For 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. And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human Body must also be said of the idea of any thing.

However, we also cannot deny that ideas differ among themselves, as the objects themselves do, and that one 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, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human Body. EIIP13 Schol.

Each mind or idea constitutes a specific perfection which is appropriate to that object and indicates that certain powers express themselves through the activities of that object.

Not only are human minds different from animal minds in the sense that humans can express greater animate reality via their material body, but human minds can only be appropriate to a specific object, the human body, so that there cannot be any equivalence between human and animal minds. As a Spinoza notes in EIIP57 Schol.:

[...] [T]he 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 natures differs from human nature. Both the horse and the man are driven by a Lust to procreate; but the one is driven by equine Lust, the other by a human Lust. So also the Lusts and Appetites of Insects, fish,

that *solely* produce this individual and none other. Perfection cannot relate to levels of unity or integration since all of modal existence expresses the necessity of God equally. As an expression of Nature's reality, if the formal being of a mode did not give or produce its effect, it would undermine its reality and *active* nature. A greater or more "real" mind has an equally powerful body which "perfects" the mind and vice versa. Therefore, the essence of a mind/body individual must produce effects external to it. A powerful body *will* express more effects by which a mind *will* perceive them and itself as cause. As many bodies can concur in the cause or object of the definition produces as many affections/effects (in that object) and details how much power or more capable a thing is relative to their individual perfection or reality, i.e. its singular activity or actuality. To reiterate, hierarchical relations of perfection must be fictions.

### **A Ratio of Bodies Establishes An Individual or A Singular Thing in Body.**

The reality of a singular body/mind, a human mode, requires affections by which to generate effects and to act (*agere*). An individual must be determined to in turn express: the more affections undergone, the more active results are possible. Nevertheless, the extrinsic determinations or the order of extrinsic "causes" must determine the mode to produce effects (*operari*) and undergo affections that do not necessarily involve the internal and singular activity of body/mind (not as a singular human mode which has been determined to act, *agendum*). The affects of "*operari*" do not *necessitate* action, but they may give rise to or entail subsequent activity. Given the infinite power of God, these extrinsic affections can be limitless or indefinite.

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and birds must vary. Therefore, though each individual lives content with his own nature, by which he is constituted, and is glad of it, nevertheless that life with which each one is content, and that gladness of the one differs in nature from the gladness of the other as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other.

Finally, from P57 it follows that there is no small difference between the gladness by which a drunk is led and the gladness a Philosopher possesses. EIIP57Schol. In accordance with his doctrine that all ideas express the reality *or* perfection of their specific objects, certain human minds have great differences among them as well as radically different pleasures so that the philosopher and the drunk can be considered to some as alien to one another.



The indefinite affections of body, for example, disallow the (human) body from forming an isolated whole. Instead, the individual *composite* body must be a ratio of motion and rest or “parts” of extension. An individual body is determined extrinsically by other bodies and by these constraints to generate an individual existence. Through this interaction, it may happen that a singular unique ratio manifests an individual which strives to preserve in existence as that ratio. The ratio can express an immanent productive action and not merely an extrinsic assemblage.<sup>325</sup> Since bodily affections are not merely mechanistic or merely means to an end as it would seem according to the perspective of the imagination, “extrinsic” and affecting individuals are themselves singulars and therefore necessary expressions of God which can generate through their agreements another mode. Since there cannot be a “perspective” from the simplest bodies, there cannot be given atoms so that the “elements” or “parts” of a ratio must be immanently productive *for that specific* ratio, and in that case, *do not depend on* extrinsic determinations. Although extrinsic determinations or formations may explain a body’s necessary constraints or determination (ratio) through a common notion, axiom, or universal causal rule, the immanent determination is irreducible and unique. As a result, the productive aspect of the “elements” or “parts” of a ratio cannot immediately totalize the affections which may affect or determine the

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<sup>325</sup> Jacqueline Lagree provides an important development to Macherey’s insight concerning Spinoza’s use of *agere* and *operari*. She argues that *agere* implies a necessary political dimension to Spinoza’s understanding of freedom and knowledge:

[...] [T]here can be forms of freedom that are partial and relative to other things, and man in particular may be said to be more or less free, depending on the extent to which he is determined by the laws of his nature to produce effects, or that he is compelled to do so by external things. The freedom of finite modes is not immediate or given, but is achieved as a result of a process of liberation *which cannot be in us without us, and which can only derive from us*. Otherwise we have an untenable paradox: the very act of liberation would not be a free act. Jacqueline Lagree, “From External Compulsion to Liberating Cooperation,” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, (E.J. Brill 1991), 187.

Rather than being solely determined by and reduced to external laws and causal operations, Lagree rightly describes how a finite (human) mode can express external conditions as a necessary expression of its own singular necessity which implies the individual is necessary to and involved in this process. This process of free and singular activity requires mutual use: what Spinoza describes as “*convenientia*.” Spinoza’s understanding of *convenientia* will be developed in chapter four.

parts themselves<sup>326</sup> so that the ratio is not a reduction of Nature/extension, but an active singular perspective involving the infinite power of Nature in its production. This allows the active power of a mode or its perfection to incorporate and express Nature in its ratio, that is, indefinitely in its striving to exist.

From the perspective of an idea, a bodily ratio which is expressed simultaneously as an idea, i.e. direct bodily awareness, must involve prior activities irreducible to a universal or strict identity. An intellectual perspective must involve *ideas of prior activities*, themselves singular intellectual activities, *through which* the affections in a bodily ratio express themselves. If not, an idea would essentialize its bodily “object,” and the “object” would become identical to the idea dissolving into a *mere conceptual identity*. Thus, the bodily “object” must be infinitely “divisible” with different aspects perceived, and these aspects must interact and change one another lest it become a static universal identity. For the idea/definition of a bodily ratio, the incorporated parts must be perceived as active *for those* ideas, i.e. these affections constitute the “object” of that mind *and* the mind itself:<sup>327</sup> the mind being itself an individual undergoing many different mental/psychological affections determining its active, singular idea which *modally expresses* these affections active in its bodily ratio. Contrary to Hegel’s understanding, these parts must be non-identical or non-ideal to the idea so that they are not merely abstract. Material modes provide the affections<sup>328</sup> through which an idea can express and act as an individual mind

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<sup>326</sup> As Spinoza notes in Postulates 1 and 3 after EIIP13: “I. The human Body is composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite [...] III. The individuals composing the human Body, and consequently, the human Body itself, are affected by external bodies in very many ways” (EIIP13Postulates 1 and 3).

<sup>327</sup> See EIIP12 and EIIP13.

<sup>328</sup> According to this logic and interplay between idea and body, there can be no pure, discrete material objects separate from their affection on human mind/body. This again raises the serious issue as to whether there is an unmediated, objective material world that does not involve the awareness of human knowers and their historical, material, and political interests in knowledge and convention. Opinion must have equivalent power as bodily imagination and help constitute it and its pleasures and force of striving. I believe that viewed from this perspective, Spinoza’s subtle language concerning the reality of external objects indicates that external objects must be related

and determinate intellectual mode, the idea itself being affected and productive as a singular activity.

Within the operations of the body, extrinsic bodily affections may limit a body, but since the affected body is not obliterated or dissolved into an indistinct play of contrary/contradictory forces, the body involves actual *specific* parts from the material environment. These involved causal and material factors are separate and singular individuals because the body must have a *relation* to prior and actual individuals.<sup>329</sup> That is, via a relation individuals do not constitute each other. The body agrees with the prior individual through a *common relation of affectivity* without reducing it; the relation can be theirs and ours, so to speak. The relation allows both at once so that more things in common, then more power/perception-knowledge. The ratio that constitutes the active individual body is a composite “union” constraining simpler and different bodies which cannot be simple, perspective-less bodies but only *specific*, actual “parts.” Yet, these involved bodies must be reciprocal to one another because the parts *establish* a shared communication of power/force that is itself determining of the (useful/vital) “parts” *as well as* determining of the active ratio communicated to the “whole” individual. The “parts” as actual

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directly to the individual’s interests and capacities to sense. Throughout EIIP17, Spinoza continually undermines the concept of an external objective actuality:

*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. [...] For so long as the human Body is so affected, the human Mind (by P12) will regard this affection of the body, i.e. (by P16), it will have the idea of a mode that actually exists, an idea that involves the nature of the external body, i.e., an idea that does not exclude, but posits, the existence or presence of the nature of the external body. And so the Mind (by P16C1) will regard the external body as actually existing, or as present, until it is affected[.] [...] Although the external bodies by which the human body has once been affected neither exist nor are present, the mind will still be able to regard them as if they were present. EIIP13. Emphasis added.*

Within this passage, I believe that Spinoza cleverly sets the foundation to argue that psychological interests can trump “reality” concerns. That is, individual “knowers” can engage in deluded self-aggrandizing thinking and seem to be rationally justified.

<sup>329</sup> Etienne Balibar describes how an individual can only have an active individuality and identity if they are productively related to *other* actual individuals: “[s]ince they are not “given”, individuals are constructed (or produced); and since they are not “perfect” in a final sense, they are active, or productive. But their construction as well as their activity always involves a previous, originary connexion with *other individuals*.” Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality,” 9.

and productive actively produce the ratio's intrinsic tendency/activity themselves (they are active under this ratio *and* with their own singular modality as well).<sup>330</sup> Being constrained but *not indifferent*, the parts "unified" in a ratio of activity communicate an *immediate* and intrinsically shared reciprocal relation of force such that the *parts are shared productively*, i.e., they are *quantitative* material forces/parts *making* this existence *solely*, and thus must be "homogeneous" at some "basic" level of agreement/measure to each other.<sup>331</sup> Thus, the ratio of 1 to 3, for

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<sup>330</sup> Balibar argues that the singular uniqueness of any mode and individuality requires that it involve other separate, singular causes. Rather than undermining and reducing the singularity of cause and effect to each other, both cause (a mode) and effect (another mode/individual) affirm their singularity in this interaction between modally distinct things. This interaction manifests a productive and absolutely necessary immanent logic of involvement and expression that intimately binds cause and effect (all modes) with one another. As Balibar notes:

Any individual becomes (and remains, during a certain time) separated and unique because other individuals become (and remain) separated and unique in their own way, in other words because the processes which lead to separated singularities are not themselves separated. This is but another name for "necessity", or the negation of contingency, as it is expressed in E1P29, which must be understood in a strong sense: if *in rerum natura nullum datur contingens; sed omnia ex necessitate divinae naturae determinata sunt ad certo modo existendum et operandum*, then nothing can be isolated, moreover nothing can be connected *a posteriori*, from "outside". Precisely because the results are individuals which tend to indefinitely increase their degree of autonomy, or to act adequately (cf. E3D2), the very idea of isolated processes of individuation is properly unthinkable." Ibid, 9.

<sup>331</sup> See pp. 124-126 of this chapter. This perhaps sheds some light as to why Spinoza uses the term 'size' to describe bodies in the same ratio in EIIP13A2Definition. The term 'size' indicates that they are quantitative yet not numerical. The use of the term 'number' to describe parts of a ratio would indicate that the numbers are context independent and thus would not be productive *per se* for one's specific ratio. In a similar vein, Balibar argues that Spinoza is an extremely original thinker in that he argues that "homogeneity" or agreement between individuals requires similar "parts" exchanged that are relatively productive for these individuals and their unique modalities. As Balibar notes:

Of course, to say that the exchange is "regulated" means that it results from a relationship of forces (*potentiae*), or a balanced equilibrium between destructive and constructive effects of the exchange. But there is more to be said. We cannot be content with the idea that "exchanges" take place between different individuals: we must indicate *what is actually exchanged*. Spinoza's idea is simple, but daring: what is exchanged are parts of the individuals under consideration, that is, "regeneration" means that a given individual (let's call it "I") continuously abandons some *part(s) of itself*, while at the same time continuously incorporating some *part(s) of others* (let's call them "they"), provided this substitution leaves a certain "proportion" (or essence) invariant. Clearly, "I" preserve my essence provided the dynamic proportion which defines me as an individual is preserved, independent from the fact that it preserves the essential proportion of others: "my" preservation can mean "their" destruction. But the reverse is also true: since the whole process can be considered from the point of view of any natural individual involved, "their" preservation can also mean "my" destruction. Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," 17.

Balibar aptly notes that the "whatness" of the "parts" exchanged or their shared specificity or measure allows for a specific ratio of motion and rest, a body. As a result, a ratio is never an exhaustive relationship between given "parts" but is operative within a range that expresses an equilibrium of *forces*—these forces, however, are never left behind or resolved in the process:

example, can be represented as an extrinsic determination (i.e. through a causal rule) but also intrinsically “part 1” can be immanently productive with 3 as 1+1+1, but without these measures requiring discrete and absolute ideal identity because 1 and 3 are related reciprocally and communicate<sup>332</sup> their specific motion-rest (their activity and passivity as a mode) internally, which is neither an indifferent assemblage nor a transitory expression, a momentary stage for another more complete result. Instead, the ratio is an affecting, determining, striving activity *in* existence/Nature producing itself through its “own terms” and *its own* necessary bodily agreements.

Any singular individual (material or intellectual) is only singular and unique because it is generated from and by other singular and unique individuals irreducible to the produced individual’s activity. Nonetheless, these other and prior individuals are necessary in their own unique actions *to produce* this individual. The uniqueness of causal forces, rather than leading to an indifferent collection of atomistic individuals, leads to an indefinite *and necessary* production of other unique individuals themselves necessarily produced—what Spinoza means by the denial of contingency—since all individuals are intimately linked and involved in one another’s

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But the more important fact is that, for any individual, its identity (or its remaining "itself") should be explained by some constant proportion at one level, whereas its variations should be explained by some constant proportion (or invariant) at another level.” However this level of stability and integration is not based on a hierarchy of integration in which the “elements” require a form to organize and complete their actions. Ibid.

Balibar notes that “[...] this presentation is not quite satisfying. Although including the "dynamic" concept of proportions of motion and rest, it remains dependent on a static (and also, ultimately, finalistic) representation of Nature as a given hierarchy of forms, or a general order of subsumption of individuals within one another, according to their degree of complexity (the multiplicity of their elements). Ibid. Spinoza denies this possibility because for him, a mode must express itself, *quantum in se est*, and thereby, express itself as a unique act *of God* and its eternal necessity.

<sup>332</sup> Alexandre Matheron argues that through a common measure a ratio or logos can be defined in-itself as one part productively communicating itself within another. See Alexandre Matheron, “Spinoza and Euclidean Arithmetic: The Example of the Fourth Proportional,” *Spinoza and the Sciences*, ed. Majorie Grene and Debra Nails, (D. Reidel Publishing, 1986), 126-27.

production and operation.<sup>333</sup> The singular and unique material and *quantitative* force of a body, for example, rather than enclosing on itself becomes a cause, generating and *communicating* itself to and with other individuals to constitute an immanent, singular, and unique act. Yet this singular “part” can only communicate itself to other individuals if there is a shared and reciprocal relation of force that allows for an immediate action, which activity is indefinite because of the continual, productive, and irreducible activities in and of Nature. Singulars interacting with one another must only have a modal distinction or relation since every interaction produces a necessary expression immanently linked to all the appropriate causes and ultimately God. However, these causes can be misrepresented if the idea(s) of this involvement is improperly related to or not expressive of the affections (if the idea assumes that the affections are absolutely external).

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<sup>333</sup> Balibar describes this causal process which intrinsically links and generates individuals as transindividuality: [T]he essential *conatus* of the individual, which by definition is a self-affirmation, should also immediately mean a resistance to its potential destruction by other things, therefore intrinsically requiring a combination or coalition with some other "similar" or "convenient" things against other things which are "adverse" [...] Nevertheless, the astonishing logic of *coincidentia oppositorum* (better said: the logic of simultaneous rejection of abstract opposites) which is at work in these arguments calls for a special terminology. The best term I can find is *transindividuality*. Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," 9. Transindividuality as a logical and immanently productive scheme necessitates that individuation must be a process of individualization. In order to separate or individuate themselves from an environment, individuals require an involvement, *relation*, and intake of *other* individuals so as to produce one's *own uniqueness*. As Balibar notes: By *individuation* I mean that individuals become *separated* from the environment — which indeed is made of other individuals; by *individualization* I mean that every individual is unique, or that no such thing as "indiscernible" individuals can exist (an idea which is shared by Spinoza, for whom it is a physical necessity, and Leibniz, for whom it is a logical one) [...] This leads us to another idea common to Spinoza and Leibniz, which can account for our difficulties in understanding them nowadays: in both cases a construction of the individual should also give an account of its being necessarily related to other individuals, with an evaluation of its degree of autonomy as a consequence. Spinoza and Leibniz, each in his own way, discovered that it is impossible strictly speaking to have a strong notion of singularity without at the same time having a notion of the interaction and interdependence of individuals. Right from the beginning, the Leibnizian and Spinozistic theories imply that singularities are interconnected, building up a "network" or a "system". We may conclude that in these doctrines the real "object of thought" are not so much, in reality, the classical *extrema* (the Whole and the Element, or the Part), but rather the *reciprocal* viewpoints of unity and multiplicity, and the *relative* character of such notions as "whole" and "parts." Ibid, 9-10.

I would argue that the processes that Balibar describes as transindividual share a strong similarity to David Lachterman's interpretation of Spinoza's concept of law as *leges*. See pp. 134-35.

According to the processes of the mind, these affections are felt; the human mind directly feels modes of body and of thinking.<sup>334</sup> Mind is confused with bodily “states” and has images as an expression of this confusion with other modes. Mind as direct awareness indicates that the idea of a ratio is a *communication* of parts and that these individual parts are *productively* shared or communicated within/through the idea of the ratio so that whenever the parts are affected contrary to that ratio, the idea of the ratio experiences dissolution, pain, or passivity. Since the mind involves the ideas of its affections, the mind is mixed with other ideas (confused or shared “states”) that *may* productively express its/their ratio *and* simultaneously produce this shared ratio *or* destructively “draw” the mind to passivity in which the represented affections are not productive internally for the idea of the ratio. An idea of causes or primary generative activities of a mode, for it to be shared, communicated, and involved/expressed as an idea of an effect (i.e. actively explaining it) requires a singular *reflexive* idea of that intrinsic movement/striving to produce itself. This idea affirms its productive activity and does not “disassemble” with any minor change.<sup>335</sup> As bodies are communicated, so are images and ideas that might understand these images, thus, the passivity of images may be turned into activity of understanding if the

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<sup>334</sup> EIIAx4.

<sup>335</sup> Balibar notes that the ratio of a body must be conceived to have a virtual existence that is not unreal yet undergoes active decomposition and regeneration. As a result, the ratio must express a viewpoint on its regulated actuality so that this activity may continue and resist a collapse into other “indistinct” modalities:

[C]oncerning "virtual" and "actual" existence in Spinoza, [i]t seems to me that *virtuality* has to be admitted as a valid Spinozistic notion, but is not synonymous with either fiction or possibility. It is a question of the *viewpoint* which is adopted, but this viewpoint is real, or objective (which Spinoza expresses by saying that its idea is in God). "Parts of the Human Body" must be considered both from the viewpoint of their belonging to its essence (*quatenus motus suos certa quadam ratione invicem communicant*) and from a different viewpoint, inasmuch as they individually or separately relate to external objects (*quatenus ut Individua, absque relatione ad humanum Corpus*). I suggest that the corresponding reality is an unstable equilibrium between these two modes of existence — once again corresponding to passivity and activity. The question therefore becomes how such equilibrium practically evolves. Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," 20.

communicated parts of a ratio are internally disposed and expressed as an immanent explanation in thought.<sup>336</sup>

Jeffrey Bernstein notes that in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza argues that a bodily ratio of 1 to 3 not only applies to the forces in the body, but since the body is modally distinct from the mind, the mind as well must *feel* those variations and dynamic forces actively contesting one another in the body.<sup>337</sup> As a result, the activity of bodily ratios must be applied not just to body but to modal existence as a whole. Although I hesitate to use the *Short Treatise*, given that it is an early and undeveloped text written in Dutch and intended for “popular” consumption, Spinoza in Appendix II of the *Short Treatise* claims that the difference in the proportions of motion and rest in a body translates into a difference of feelings such that, for example, if an individual experiences a “loss” of heat but is restored to a previous proportion of motion and rest, then he or she will feel joy. However in this same passage, what is most tellingly is that Spinoza states that this dynamism expressed in body and psychical feeling proves that we must have an *Idea Reflexiva* by which to have experience *and* reasoning.

And, again, if the change which occurs in a part restores it to its first proportion of motion and rest, there arises from this that joy which we call repose, pleasurable activity, and cheerfulness. Lastly, now that we have explained what feeling is, we can easily see how this gives rise to an *Idea reflexiva*, or the knowledge of oneself, Experience and Reasoning.<sup>338</sup>

Given that the affections or feelings of mind are themselves “parts” for an idea of a ratio that without a reflexive affirmation of the *communication* of the ratio as a whole (i.e. affirming or representing that the parts immanently and productively are shared/*sharing themselves* according to some basic ratio), then there would be only disparate feelings and contrary/contradictory

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<sup>336</sup> [...] [S]o long as it [Mind] perceives things from the common order of nature, i.e., 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[.]” EIIP29Schol. Emphasis added.

<sup>337</sup> Jeffrey Bernstein, “The Ethics of Spinoza’s Physics” in *NASS Monograph*, Vol. 10, (2001), 10.

<sup>338</sup> *Short Treatise*, Appendix II, p. 107.



effects. That is, the psychological and mental “unity” of an individual would dissipate, correlating with the lack of bodily integrity, which integrity is *only for* that mind.

Summarizing the previous discussion, every material mode must be a ratio of actual incorporated parts or else a definition would not have actuality to assert conceptual and actual existence of an individual. The ratio is the non-conceptual or non-ideal existence for the individual and expresses the conceptual *explanation* of *immanent* motion and rest to present an individual as material. From this perspective, “immanent” indicates an intrinsic yet specific “division” and distinctiveness in body that produces its own material individuals and forces which perpetually transform material modes in the process. This is a true indefinite in its kind. It does not present the indefinite as a projection merely extrinsic to individual and other expressions/types they might enact. Indefinite in its activity, which means incorporating constantly the eternal actuality of Nature, the limits of a mode or individual are not discovered by the intellect so that the intellect requires both actual non-ideal object *and* the *perspective* of the definition or concept to express the thatness or fact of existing of the individual. Ratio indicates an aspectival and explanatory perspective of a non-ideal actuality. It is aspectival in the sense that the idea is not the *ideatum*, or the ratio is the body and idea of the ratio is not body; however, both are only *modally distinct*. The idea expresses the ratio in thought and indicates by expressing the ratio that the individual is necessary and actual. The perceived necessity of the material individual indicates a beginning to sensation. As a new object of awareness, the perceived ratio must be distinguished from the general relations of extension and can only effect that determination via an actual force. This determination can only occur if the force of the ratio can affect the force, both agreement and resistance, of the impacted body/mind. The perception of the impacted body/mind implies a necessary perspective perceiving an “extrinsic” individual.

This perceived “object” of the mind is an *ideatum* of an idea. Within this dialectical relationship, the *ideatum* is not exhaustive of an extrinsic reality, and the individual perceiver is not identical to the *ideatum*.

The *ideatum* of a ratio and a body as an actual thing, compelling sensual perception and intellectual attribution, indicates that the conceptual/sensual has as much “*divisibility*” or perspectival affirmations<sup>339</sup> as bodily existence; mind can perceive/feel as many bodies as expressed by the idea. The mind is nothing but the idea of body; however, the idea does not totalize the body and thus does not secure absolute identity. The idea is not the body, but by not being it, it shows that body is “divisible” in the *concept* so that no ideal concept can adequate an *essential objectivity*, an objectivity that would *be universal* or perspective-independent. The idea does not enter into a contrary relationship with body in which one must be removed with the positing of the other.<sup>340</sup> Rather, a perspective on a divisible body *incorporates* the ratio without essentializing it or making it a static object which would thwart or stop the many *dynamic* affections/causes or ratios “from” the body expressed as nothing but the mind—many ratios are not for our mind and necessarily so, given God’s infinite activity. Thus, the activity of the mind

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<sup>339</sup> EIIIP16

<sup>340</sup> This can be proven as well from Spinoza’s denial of psychophysical parallelism. For Spinoza, there are not two separate and coordinated substances, extension and thought, but both are together at once, only modally distinct from one another. Furthermore, the necessity that attributes are conceived through themselves does not imply ontological exclusion, i.e. extension at one time excluding thinking, as Hegel assumed of Spinoza. This misrepresentation is due to the fact, as Macherey notes, that Hegel assumed that Spinoza intended that a subject is confronting an object, God, to be represented in his intellect such that the attributes are subjective responses and thereby are contingent and unreal attributions. Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 79. However, attributes are not separate domains of intellectual conception but immediate and direct expressions of God’s eternal actuality which cannot be reduced to two attributes (see EIP11). This entails that attributes are not subjectively irrelevant constructions but rather are necessary *explanations* of the modal production. Yet, attributes themselves are not that activity so thereby they do not exist as such, i.e. as existing individuals, but they are not intellectually irrelevant or completely fictional.

Warren Kessler provides a brief but helpful analysis of the subjectivist and objectivist understanding of Spinoza’s attributes. See Warren Kessler, “A Note on Spinoza’s Concept of Attributes” in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, eds. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman, (Open Court, 1975), 191-194. I do not believe that the understanding of attributes so neatly falls into either camp. Instead, I agree with Thomas Carson Mark that Spinoza’s understanding of attributes is insufficiently explained by either interpretation. See Thomas Carson Mark, “The Spinozistic Attributes” in *Philosophia*, Vol. 7, (1977), 55-82.

requires a bodily ratio to generate perspectives, a more capable body than a more capable mind. This generative process indicates that the body is acted upon, acts on, and with other bodies. The sensed body has a capacity or power which is born out in its material agreements and oppositions. These material activities indicate that ideas also act on and interact with one another according to their dynamic contraries. Ideas which express dynamic powers of body (many agreements, oppositions, and relations at once) have a greater force and can remove/alter *to some extent*<sup>341</sup> “weaker” or passive ideas. As a result, the possibility of active sensation requires active bodily movement to sensation, from “potential” to actual, to represent/express the *actuality* of body.

The “potentiality” of perceived bodies indicates that there is a power by which a passion or affection can become an action. However, the potentiality of the sensible cannot be truly contingent because an “object” or sensible “assumed” to be actual does not await actualization, as this would contravene God’s productive necessity. Furthermore, its actuality does not require a completion in the effect (the subjective perception or concept) as the prior, affecting individual “object” or sensible is not *essentially* related to the impacted/sensing individual and his or her perspective *or* knowledge of the object. Thus, we can say that the possible representation of experience does not provide truth about the object, contra Kant. The inaccessibility of the object and our only nominal or aspectival relation to its existence again disallows an inference to origins which origin could validate and *prove* our definition contra Descartes and other rationalists/idealists such as Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. Conversely, the lack of an essential relation between “subject” and “object” denies a possible final resolution or absolute *telos* which would manifest completion in *our* knowledge. The perceiver or “potential” knower can express

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<sup>341</sup> That is, to *moderate*, *modify*, or *modulate* them according to one’s powers/modality. Nevertheless, Part IV of the *Ethics* shows that this ability is limited, and Part IV details how the passions or inadequate ideas are never progressively removed.

its dynamic expression (actions) only by undergoing bodies which must be “assumed as potential” relative to it (i.e. “divided” from it); otherwise, these bodies would be reduced to a static, universal identity or objective world. Nevertheless, the potentiality of the sense to express itself requires that potential objects of sense are actual for it; otherwise, they would be indeterminate sensations once actualized, or rather, never actualized *as a sensation* present in that undergone/perceiving body.<sup>342</sup> Yet, the inability to be sensed does not indicate that these objects are unreal, but only that they must be conceived through God’s infinity and beyond the perceiver’s capacities. That is, they cannot be incorporated into one’s ratio, i.e., there is no involvement. Thus, the activity of the sensing body or knower is a crucial determining factor in what can and will be perceived and known as an act of sense/knowledge and represents the appropriate perfections or real acts necessary for its very existence. Thus, if a human individual is not affected by a particular sensible body, then there can be no possibility of an intelligible being generated from it. Conceived through the individual’s ratio, the individual’s perfection or complete activity is an eternal “moment,” or rather, it represents an amount of actual force which is conceived through God’s essence/actuality and thus must be eternal.

The *actuality* of body in relation to mind shows which type of bodies generate sensation and thinking. Those bodies that merely act to complete their movement (i.e. from the “potential” to the actual) in sensation show an actuality that expresses the interaction with or effect of other bodies on the immediate sensing body. Alternatively, this can be conceived as a material contestation between two “natures” which produces an agreement or sensation. Thus, the distinction between external thing and internal sensation does not indicate that there are two ontological beings or agents with discrete natures. The affection representing an external body does not indicate a totally extrinsic being as every individual is a composite of forces and effects.

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<sup>342</sup> See Chapter two pp. 67-69.

In this case, the relation of the “external” sensed object to sensing body displays that this relation is *produced by a shared actuality*. Since relations for Spinoza do not represent or correspond to an external reality but rather are products of acting individuals, the relations express a perspective on a shared actuality. The action of sensible thing to sensing (awareness) represents an indiscernible, concurrent movement. The seamless expression of sensation described in Spinoza’s epistemology, his rejection of faculty psychology, distinguishes him from his materialist Aristotelian predecessors such as Maimonides and Gersonides.

A bodily act that expresses movement from an immediate affection to (a) sensed actuality can be characterized as imagination. Imagination represents as present a posited “external object,” which according to this representation, should have a “consistent” projected nature and extrinsic actuality by which it can be represented in another sensation; an image indicates a *power* (of something) that is operative without immediate body. However, the projected “something” considered as operative without the affected body is impossible because this would imply that the “thing” is accidentally or contingently related to its own actions. An image, *prima facie*, expresses an actual determination and force so that it cannot be dismissed as contingent and unreal in relation to a more real source. In fact, the more real source would lack actuality if it did not in some way provide a causal basis to conceive its effect through it. This is why in EIIP17 Spinoza states that an image cannot explicate the essence of an individual but is merely dependent on the bodily operations and activities of another:

Furthermore [...], we clearly understand what is the difference between the idea of, say, Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter’s mind, and the idea of Peter which is in another man, say in Paul. For the former directly explains the essence of Peter’s body, and does not involve existence, except so long as Peter exists; but the latter indicates the condition of Paul’s body more than Peter’s nature, and therefore, while that condition of Paul’s body lasts, Paul’s Mind will still regard Peter as present to itself, even though Peter does not exist.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> EIIP17Schol.

For Spinoza, memory and imagination are aspects of the same power of imagination to express the force (of a thing) beyond the immediate impact on the perceiving body. Memory expresses the causal order of the affected body, retaining material traces, of course, as non-identically the same, i.e. modally. Modal distinction implies that the affected body cannot reduce affects, even in one's own ratio or absolutely according to one's ratio, since there is always a uniqueness in production. The imagination implies a compelling force which must *attempt* to complete itself in an act of striving, seeking, or desire. Thus, the affected bodily ratio maintains the material trace or force of the image because the ratio affected also is a cause and continues the force/image as important for its very *individuality/perfection*.

Similar to the relation between sensible and sensation, the relation between cause of image and imagination is an aspectual one and not based on separate faculties/powers. Images express a singular determining force under two aspects. The force of the image is appropriate to the individual's material existence/ratio, either as beneficial or harmful to its dynamic power and not merely as a parallel reflection on or mere mental symptom of material determination. Because there are neither discrete bodies of force nor a one-to-one correspondence between ideas and bodies or ideas and bodily changes, there can be no attainment of an objective perspective. There can be no neutral conditions for an objective state of awareness; the bodily conditions are contested so that one embodied perspective may dominate another and "secure" conditions for its continuance. As a result, an image cannot be recalled at will because only a more powerful affect can overpower and destroy an image which presents itself as an actual existant; there is no will or faculty which can objectively manage the imagination (*or* memory affects) because a finite mode's affects constitutes one's active existence. As Spinoza notes:

[...] [C]reated things [...] are all determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way. To understand this clearly, let us take a very simple example. A stone receives from the impulsion of an external cause a fixed quantity of motion whereby it will necessarily continue to move when the impulsion of the external cause has ceased. The stone's continuance in motion is constrained, not because it is necessary, but because it must be defined by the impulsion received from the external cause. What here applies to the stone must be understood of every individual thing, however complex its structure and various its functions. For every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way. Furthermore, conceive, if you please, that while continuing in motion the stone thinks, and knows that it is endeavouring, as far as in it lies, to continue in motion. Now this stone, since it is conscious only of its endeavour and *is not at all indifferent*, will surely think it is completely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wishes. This, then, is that human freedom which all men boast of possessing, and which consists solely in this, that men are conscious of their desire and unaware of the causes by which they are determined. [...] For although experience teaches us again and again that nothing is less within men's power than to control their appetites, and that frequently, when subject to conflicting emotions, they see the better course and pursue the worse [...]<sup>344</sup>

An image has a value that indicates whether it is to be or not be preserved *in* existence or is appropriate to “its” conditions. However, the affective value<sup>345</sup> is not something which an individual wills to bring about but is the very activity of its striving to exist; the freedom of the will only seems to exist because an individual is ignorant of his or her constitutive, material causes which are necessarily inaccessible *in toto*. Since the “potentiality of extrinsic bodies” expressed in images expresses the indefinite nature of extension, the image can affect a material mode *only* with *certain* or specific material determinations or in a fixed and determinate manner.

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<sup>344</sup> Letter 58. Here indifferent can be understood as waiting for change, i.e. a mechanistic scheme, whereas not being indifferent means an organized striving which is not dissolute and has an interest in that specific ratio or activity.

<sup>345</sup> Etienne Balibar argues that all values of good and bad require an imaginative value to include or exclude affects which enhance or harm individual striving:

[...] [T]he representation of Good and Evil (the idea of an end, or finalistic idea, can never be “neutral”: it is necessarily the imagination of something that should be sought *or* avoided [...] the knowledge of Good and Evil [...] is expressedly identified with the idea of a joyful *or* sad affection of the Body. But since there is no affection of the Body which is not *either* joyful *or* sad, this amounts to saying that the knowledge of Good and Evil is nothing else than the conscious affect in general[.] Etienne Balibar, “A Note on “Consciousness/Conscience” in the *Ethics*,” in *Studia Spinozana*, Vol. 8, (1992), 45-46.

According to Balibar, for Spinoza, all conscious values do not represent a neutral assessment of values, but rather they indicate the affective and active attempt of Body and Mind concurrent striving to express existence with and against other individuals.

For images to be images requires that they are able to affect a bodily ratio's present activity or existence. If understood properly, this limits the misrepresentation of objectivity *and* neutrality assumed of things. That is, to have any perceived affect already requires an agreement or shared interaction to determine oneself. However, these determinations do not absolutely reduce or aid the activity of the human body, as it is a highly composite individual<sup>346</sup> with indefinitely many relations, both sensory and imaginary. Thus, the composite human individual can have conflicting memories and images at different times.

Jean-Marie Beyssade argues in his article, "*Nostris Corporis Affectus: Can an Affect in Spinoza be 'of the body'?*"<sup>347</sup> that Robert Misrahi's argument for and traditional translation of 'affect' as requiring consciousness undermines Spinoza's deeper understanding of affect as originally of the body. As "originally" of body, no "object" awaits to be transparent in a specific consciousness. Although many propositions from *Ethics* II onward seem to imply that an affect is only a conscious awareness of bodily affections, unified in a mental idea, Beyssade argues that these propositions are concerned with the ethical dimension of affect as already relevant to human knowledge and freedom. Since the mind is the proper place for human perfection and freedom, affects of the mind are appropriately privileged in the latter books of the *Ethics*. However, Beyssade keenly observes that Spinoza's introduction of the term 'affect' in *Ethics* II is equivalent to bodily dispositions. Beyssade notes that "[in] EIIp16c2: "*corporis constitutio seu affectus* [the constitution of the body or affect]." The affect is here clearly characterized as an affect of the body: "the *constitutio* of the body, connected to its being-affected (*affici*) by external bodies, is of the same nature, whether it involves a variation of the power of acting (in

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<sup>346</sup> Postulate 1 after EIIP13 and EIIP16.

<sup>347</sup> Jean-Marie Beyssade, "*Nostris Corporis Affectus: Can an Affect in Spinoza be 'of the body'?*" in *Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, Vol. III, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, (Little Room Press, 1999), 113-128.



which case it is an affect of the body).”<sup>348</sup> A body’s own nature does not need or is not *related* to a consciousness for its determination.<sup>349</sup> According to Beyssade, the term ‘affect’, much like the term ‘conatus’, transfers its meaning to the registers of both body and mind so that an affect of the body has an affective *character* or value capable of mental expression. The character or value indicates that a bodily constitution should be *in* existence as a striving, actual force. Thus, one could not say that an affect of a body is merely an affection or determination of body, but rather that it expresses a constitutive interest for the minded-body individual. In the broadest sense, any affection of a human body is mediated through the interests of that minded-body thing so that affections are not accidental to the possible perfections for and striving of that individual. Because an affect/affection cannot be wholly detached or irrelevant, the relations of uniqueness

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>349</sup> Myriam Revault d’Allonnes develops Beyssade’s position and argues that if consciousness were a necessary quality of affections, it would be contradictory:

The idea of body is not, therefore, the unifying awareness the mind has of the diversity of corporeal affections. One should observe, furthermore, that if the mind—or consciousness—‘adds’ something to the affections or modifications of the body, this something is necessarily thought as the unity of a multiplicity. Therefore, it would be contradictory to conceive of an *original* structure of consciousness in the affect and in the *conatus*, to which a sort of ‘supplement of mind’ is added, permitting us to gain access to the existential [...] it reintroduces transcendence vis-à-vis a quasi-empirical spontaneity, and it subsumes the multiplicity of the affections under the unifying dimension of consciousness. Myriam Revault d’Allonnes, “Affects of the Body and Socialization,” in *Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, Vol. III, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel, (Little Room Press, 1999), 184.

Although, d’Allonnes’s language seems to indicate that consciousness is a unity, her argument clearly shows that not only can we not think of affections unified by consciousness, but also, consciousness is never a pure unity or simple idea. The idea of body is itself composed of many ideas; see EIIP14. As a result, a specific idea of body has an affective value in that that specific body-mind strives to persevere in its existence opposing and incorporating other affections. In this case, integration encompasses both conflict and utility. D’Allonnes develops the social-political implications of such a view:

Every spontaneity is opposed by the resistance of the other spontaneities. To persevere [...] is both to increase one’s power to act and to resist the opposition that arises from what is outside (i.e. from the other finite modes). The reflexivity induced by the *perseverare suo esse* has nothing to do with the realm of consciousness (in Misrahi’s sense) or of the subject; [...] The double dimension of the *perseverare suo esse* indicates that a finite being that expresses infinite power in a modal manner becomes related to other finite beings that necessarily have something in common with it, since they limit and oppose it. One must therefore conceive of a logic of constitution or socialization of the affects that integrates both dimensions of sharing and of exteriority or alterity. Of course, as Spinoza makes clear, this exteriority is not that of a juridical formalism of the law that would impose a transcendental normativity. It is the exteriority induced by modal existence itself: the essence of a finite thing does not imply its existence[.] Ibid, 185.

The link between affects and socialization that D’allonnes establishes shows that much like a consciousness that would unify errant material affections, juridical formalism assumes that it can unify diverse (social) affects according to a universal law. However, for Spinoza, no unifying consciousness or law can reduce the singular diversity of the affects.

or singularity cannot be dissociating or unifying. The “object” is not as one’s subjective perspective demands or reduces it *nor* is the “object” presented as an objective datum to be accessible or inaccessible, i.e. contingent on dispassionate and neutral awareness. Beyssade argues that “since [a human’s essence] is power, every affection of the body is *de jure* an affect (*donec corpus afficiatur affectu*, EIIp17). This establishes a broad sense of the word *affectus*—in fact, its broadest sense.”<sup>350</sup> But, since these affects are not dependent on consciousness for existence, their affective character or values can contest, resist, or elude conscious reduction and present the possibility of other minded-body interests, i.e. a new minded identity.<sup>351</sup>

The final, most complete, or real bodily sensual/mental motion is one where the act does not refer to a specific sensation or projected images but to the singular perspective generated from these bodily affections, viewed as necessarily other singular activities. As Balibar notes:

In Reason the Other is conceived as useful not in spite of his singularity or difference, but because this singularity is implied by the general laws of human nature. As a consequence, there is no question of reducing the qualities of each individual (his opinions, his way of life, or even his appearance) to those of the rest. This is what makes all the difference between *convenientia* and *similitudo*, "friendship" and "ambition" or even "humanity" (E4P37S1, E4P70). But with this consequence, we are in fact considering Reason, not as a "Second", but already as a "Third Kind of Knowledge", in which singularities as such are known as necessary.<sup>352</sup>

An intellectual act shows that it cannot express the external as it is materially in-itself but only as a unique perspective which is necessarily produced both by and for affecting and affected mode. The perceived “divisibility” of extension can ultimately be seen to be in the service of establishing a truly indivisible perspective which is generated through the divisibility of its affections. Yet the perspective’s “detachment” does not guarantee a purely subjective knowledge nor does it imply an ideal abstract world/Truth. The ratio and bodily parts are

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<sup>350</sup> Beyssade, “*Nostris Corporis Affectus*: Can an Affect in Spinoza be ‘of the body’?,” 123.

<sup>351</sup> In chapter four, I will use Beyssade’s interpretation to argue that Spinoza’s understanding of affect has strong similarities to Freud’s understanding of affect and unconscious forces.

<sup>352</sup> Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality,” 29-30.

needed; this shows that a metaphysical confrontation between object and subject is impossible. Instead, this process indicates the necessity of bodily acts leading to the acquisition of compelling ideas that are immanently linked to body and to as many as possible true ideas or perspectives (of body).

A prime example of the compelling power and necessity of a true perspective or idea (of an active object) can be seen in Spinoza's analysis of the interplay between the *ideatum* and idea of God's existence. Spinoza argues that in the attribution of eternal existence to the idea of God, the *ideatum* (God) does not equate to what is affirmed in the idea of God, nor does the idea of God actually equate to eternal existence, which is properly affirmed to be of God. What must be assumed as the necessary cause of this attribution is that this idea of God constitutes the intellect and understanding of the attributing agent. By constituting the attributing activity or power of the individual mind, it is in one respect the same as that individual's mind and thus establishes its necessity for that attribution. As of a posited "external" object, the content of a bodily image does not indicate an active cause; however, as a presented content it nonetheless indicates that an intrinsic power affects this experience.<sup>353</sup> Body perceived as active can be expressed concurrently in an intellect's reflexive necessity, a necessity that embodies the ratio of the material agent. The immanent expression of "both" causes involves an eternal act or unbroken *actuality*. Therefore, the eternal act present in a true or adequate perspective (on body) cannot be a state because a state would imply a universal static identity or image posited to represent an extrinsic self-consistent thing. The compelling nature of the adequate perspective is generated by the active and necessarily continuing<sup>354</sup> attributing perspective *or* body/mind.

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<sup>353</sup> Everything has an adequate idea since there is no defect in Nature. See EIII Preface.

<sup>354</sup> The meaning of continuance here is equivocal as it is not meant to indicate "persists in duration," which is an aspect of imagination/images. Time utilizes the divisibility and contraries of material images to indicate temporal

Unable to be conceived as an eternal state, the intellect cannot be said to have innate ideas or a set amount of true ideas which would show a radically separate intellect or faculty. Instead, the embodied activity of adequate ideas implies that the intellect may express indefinitely many true ideas. As an aspectual expression of the same individual, body/mind shows the *power* of (human) bodies to generate actual knowledge, not mixed directly with body but not based on ideal definitions which would essentialize bodies as specific, inert universals *or* identities. However, knowledge generated from dynamic human bodies does not indicate that a particular true idea somehow expresses a perspective *waiting* to be adopted or enacted. True ideas or knowledge do not align themselves with *a priori* objective perspectives because the present intellect and its unique, embodied conditions are necessary for the generation of that singular knowledge or true idea. From the perspective of present knowledge, the knower must assume that their material conditions and actual, reflexive ideas are responsible for necessary agreements presented in their true knowledge. At no point can an intellectual perspective or truth be dissociated from the activity and material conditions of activity present in the knower's unique, embodied existence.

### **Summary and Importance of the Previous Principles**

The principles that I have assumed demonstrate clearly that for Spinoza, intellectual phenomena directly involve and express material causes. These principles show in some manner that the material “domain” cannot be separated from intellectual phenomena. Each principle

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movement. Relying on material images in this way produces a quantitative description of existence. An intellectual description of existence expresses an indivisible and eternally *actual* perspective. As Spinoza notes in EIIP45Schol.:  
By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., 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 modes (see IP16). 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.

shows either how positing an external, material domain undermines appropriate conceptions of body and/or mind or they demonstrate how bodily activities must directly constitute and express themselves in a mental register.

The first principle establishes a causal order which is necessary for any conceivable causal chain or attribute. This indicates that the necessity of Nature is always applicable to whatever mode actually expresses it. Bodily activities, thus, are not irrelevant or unreal to intellectual reality. Yet, Spinoza makes the stronger claim that the necessity of Nature involves an actuality that is not dependent on or constituted by attributes or abstract relations. The reality of Nature and by extension, modes or individuals of Nature, is not determined by intellectual relations or definitions.

The second principle shows how the causal order of body represents an endless series of extrinsic but actual causes that entail an absolutely concrete, immersed individual. Material individuals are not separated from the continual interaction of forces present in (material) Nature. As a result, cause and effect cannot be abstractly conceived to represent discrete agents or objects. In Spinoza's physics, a material cause involves the conceptions of diverse natures or forces so that no abstract or intelligible explanation can provide a neutral and objective representation of their interaction.

The lack of an absolute perspective on body implies that Nature in general does not produce pure unmediated individuals. The third principle illustrates how the attributes do not correspond to or predicate discrete subjects. There are no metaphysical or ontological individuals or causes by which reality is structured. Instead, the expression of individuals is dependent on many different modal agreements or shared forces. Nevertheless, these shared agreements are not universal properties but represent the actuality of individuals expressing

themselves through their attributes. The shared expression of interaction is a product of actual interactions among individuals. Therefore, a relational explanation describing the interaction among individuals, i.e. knowledge, must itself involve and express that actuality.

The fourth principle develops the third by demonstrating that any knowledge of an individual involves the actuality or existence of that individual. Yet, in order to retain the aspectual relation between cause and effect, their immanent concurrence, Spinoza argues as well that knowledge or the definition of an individual cannot exist as definite thing in a separate intellectual realm. Without the actuality of an individual involved in the knowledge or definition of that individual, there can be no specific determination *or* intelligibility asserted of the individual. Thus, the activity of the individual, i.e. the object of an idea, must be incorporated in the intelligibility and understanding of the individual. Activity of object and activity of idea are two aspects of the same. In the case of human beings, their constitutive object is a body which involves and expresses itself in the idea of that body, i.e. a human mind.

The aspectual interplay between body and mind requires that the activities of body are generative of specific minds. The activities of body, its very existence as a material individual, require that it can express itself as an understandable “object” in mind. The fifth principle shows that a ratio expressed by a body provides an aspect on body by which it can express itself as an individual idea. Nevertheless, the material ratio is not subordinate to the understanding of mind but rather expresses ideas through its ratio of motion and rest—as *a force or an actuality*, ratio generates ideas. As a result, specific types of bodily activity express specific mental activities or minds such as sensation, imagination, or intellect. In turn, the types of minds generated reflexively express the material interests, drives, and force of body so that even intellect is intimately connected with the activities of body.

All of these principles are in the service of linking material causes with the generation of intellectual ideas.

## CHAPTER V

### LACKING INDIFFERENCE: A CRITIQUE OF CARTESIAN INTELLECTUAL INDIFFERENCE

Given that the transindividual<sup>355</sup> nature of causality in Spinoza's philosophy, as expressed in his conception of law or *leges*, requires an immanent involvement of other singular modes, affections and images are necessary for intellectual expression. We saw in chapter three how this causal process translates into both registers of thought and body and how this process expresses the necessity of both thought and body at once. Individuals expressed as both body and mind must involve extrinsic determinations, which in turn intrinsically express an individual's specific determinate nature or identity—mind expresses bodily affections through the ideas of these affections, which in turn generates a specific idea of body capable of action. Developing this immanent or transindividual process further, one can demonstrate that other reciprocal concepts, such as necessity and freedom, passion and action, known and knower, and learning and learner, must be concurrent so that, for example, the expression of learning or the expression of human intellectual ability, actuality, or virtue cannot be reductive and transcendental. In the case of intellectual activity, passionate desire must be necessary *and* concurrent with it. As a result, thinking desire or thinking the embodied determinations/strivings at once and immanently more accurately represents knowing. From a Spinozian perspective, Cartesian intellectual indifference cannot be an accurate representation of the achievement of knowledge. Passion and desire are never removed from thinking; material powers and motion

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<sup>355</sup> As should be abundantly clear by now, transindividual does not entail any sense of transcendence. Transindividual processes are completely material and immanent.



are necessary for intellectual activity. Intellect arises from the intrinsic duality of image: image under the aspect of intellect. This duality disallows a transcendental move that would be based on a linear progression to a higher power, i.e. a mental faculty, an objective state of awareness, or a disembodied free subject which escapes Nature. Consequently, learning must be an actualization of determinate “potentialities” that manifests as a unique activity of the learner in relation to a convention or tradition. Rather than knowledge being proven by the methods, symbols, and images of that convention or tradition, a knower expresses unique and necessary singular knowledge. Learning comprehends the diaphanous nature of the image and habituation<sup>356</sup> to express the uniqueness and necessity of knowledge.

An epistemology based on Cartesian indifference is in opposition to Spinoza’s philosophy of knowing. Cartesian indifference affirms the subject’s ability to divorce his or her mind essentially from the world and establish purely mental and transcendental criteria of knowledge, such as intellectual and logical completeness.<sup>357</sup> Cartesian indifference is the basis for voluntaristic concepts such as free-will, metaphysical objects of value, etc. Given Spinoza’s materialism, these concepts must be critically emended by Spinoza’s philosophy of knowing.

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<sup>356</sup> Building on Aristotle’s analysis of the role of images or phantasms in mathematical proof and learning, David Lachterman argues that the drawn image for geometric learning or the phantasm “standing in for” geometric truths does not prove the objective existence of mathematical ideal types. Instead, the concrete and discernible image viewed from the aspect of intellect reveals a habitual/ethical comportment to the practice of geometric knowledge which is continuously active/generative and which is thereby ceaseless and placeless, i.e. eternal. As Lachterman notes:

*Nous* desires, so to speak, to appreciate quality as the immediate, indivisible unity of a category (see *Metaph. Eta6*. 1045b 1-7); nonetheless, a quantitative and quantitatively determinate phantasm insinuates itself between noetic desire and its desideratum, since “no thinking takes place without a phantasm.” We now have the perplexing situation in which the lucidity of the phantasm occludes the “object” of noetic desire so long as we do not know how to negotiate the *qua* so as to render that phantasm diaphanous. When we do know how to negotiate the *qua* in this way, the “imagined” triangle of such-and-such determinate size and angles lets something else (the indeterminate triangle) shine through. And this means that there is no generality or universality in the phantasm as such; thinking it as indeterminate when it is in truth unavoidably determinate is the work of *nous*, not of *phantasm*. Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry*, 83.

The concrete and material image is never removed from thinking but as a concrete affection it provides the actual determinations through which to glimpse the aspectival and necessarily activity of eternal thinking.

<sup>357</sup> See chapter 2.

According to Spinoza's understanding, the desire to move and act cannot be purely intellectual; as a result, there is never a leaving behind of affections but rather a thinking with that desirative activity. This desirative activity is grounded in the images and bodily contestations that are necessary to and expressions of the *striving* of one's *individual* existence. One's existence is an active exclusion of other individuals, and one seeks the removal/destruction of these individuals. Yet, their incorporation or *convenientia* is equally necessary for activity. Given these competing *and* necessary demands, a critical emendation of the material philosophical-social tradition of Cartesianism must generate thinking and political thriving through this inherited canon and not merely repress or replace Cartesian epistemology.

Spinoza's concept of "method"/*methodos* (being on the way to knowing) and his understanding of the necessity and role of embodiment requires a redefinition and challenge to the Cartesian appropriation of knowledge and a political reformation of its authority. This is so for Spinoza because knowledge cannot be merely an awareness or rational rearticulation of historical affections, but knowledge requires passion and hence a material challenge to change one's intellect. Established intellectual traditions and inquiry must be involved in any critical expression so that Cartesian authority must be immanently and materially critiqued. In this chapter, I will show how Spinoza's materialist causal account has the force to immanently critique key Cartesian voluntarist concepts such as a disembodied human subject, free-will, and ethical evaluations conceived as metaphysical objects rather than as conventional products. This, once again, shows that Spinoza's philosophy is not a mere modification of Descartes's and that Spinoza's philosophy, definitions, and materialism require a critique and emendation of accepted Cartesian principles in order to generate social/political reform. I will show how "human" material interests determine "human" intellectual perfections. Thought not only expresses

material forces but as a mode itself thought actively seeks knowledge rooted in material conditions for its perfection. We will see that material conditions extend well beyond the simple posited identity of a single individual knower. These conditions extend beyond one's imagistic and discrete representation of individuality to indicate an immanent and dynamically involved reality. These conditions involve and express natural, social-political, historical, and psychological determinations necessary to intellectual perfection. We will see that a human's material condition expresses all these aspects such that one cannot be extracted from the others without distortion and misunderstanding. As a result, Spinoza's critique of a Cartesian disembodied mind and its ability to exercise freewill must be grounded in these material interests against Cartesian intellectual indifference.

### **Embodied Thinking**

The material interests of a human knower must be an essential factor to the actualization and generation of knowledge. Without material conditions expressed through sensation and imagination, the intellect would not have a drive or desire to express a determinate actuality, that is, an actual force because of *and despite* these "extrinsic" conditions. For example, the destruction of imagination is thinking: the power of knowledge "over" an image. Without a sensible, there can be no animate motion or striving.<sup>358</sup> Additionally, an imaginative form presents externals as desirable and "possibly" beneficial to one's imagined success or striving. More accurately, images present "extrinsic" determinations which attempt/strive to communicate

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<sup>358</sup> Idit Dobbs-Weinstein details how for both Spinoza and Gersonides material sensation is necessary for intellect and that intellect would be meaningless and superfluous without an involvement of concrete material conditions. See Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Thinking Desire in Gersonides and Spinoza," in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, (Indiana University Press, 2004), 51-77, esp. 62-69.

their forces beyond simple sensation and manifest the affective value within images.<sup>359</sup> For humans, the desire to assert a material force expresses itself through an image which in turn provides the determination or power necessary to assert any “additional” force or intellectual reality, i.e. intellect. The movement to intellection is not a linear process to a higher state but a realization of the self-sameness and modal distinction between imagination and intellect.<sup>360</sup>

Intellect expresses an immanent power involving images and *prior* conditions/drives.<sup>361</sup> This involvement expressed as intellect produces a divine-like reality without any passivity, duration, and true contrary. However, this quality of absolute necessity must be related to an immanent causal or transindividual process so that immanence should not be understood as a reference to a self-identical ground or perspective awaiting actualization through accidental and

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<sup>359</sup> See last two sections of Chapter 3.

<sup>360</sup> Lachterman describes a similar understanding at work in Aristotle’s refusal to allow images or *phantasia* to create intelligible forms:

[...] Proclus is the first "modern" precisely because of his exaltation of *phantasia* as form-giving or, as Becker is even willing to say, "creative." Aristotle is another matter, as his painstaking efforts in *De anima* to associate and to dissociate movement and *noesis* remind us. If any movement is an imperfect performance (*energeia ateles*), while thinking is the very perfection of performance (see *De an.* 3.7.431a1-7), then our understanding of *noesis* remains moored to our experience of movement and alteration, especially in sensation or perception, until we come to see that in those cases, too, actualization is more truly an advance into selfsameness than a becoming-other (*De an.* 2.5.417b6-7: *eis auto . . . he epidosis*). We can also remind ourselves that on Aristotle’s test for the interchangeability of verbal aspects (tenses), "to be seeing" and "to have seen," "to be thinking" and "to have thought" mean the same. (Compare *EN* 10.4.1174b12-13, where the act of seeing, a point and a monad are allied as not admitting any coming-to-be.) Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry*, 90.

Rather than viewing motion or movement as completing itself in a final stage, a becoming other so as to resolve initial deficiencies, knowledge and intellect view actualization from the perspective of self-sameness in order to see the necessity of activity, including “discursive” motion.

<sup>361</sup> What I intend here is very similar to Gersonides’s description of how the Agent Intellect must know the sublunar world in a “unified” or complete manner because the material parts of the sublunar universe through their own activities generate a specific “unity” which is actual and necessary via this immanent causal process:

The primary matter is affected by the Agent Intellect in such a way that it receives the various perfections by gradations; i.e., it receives some of them via others and some for the sake of others, so that ultimately the final perfection is attained for which it was potentially receptive. To this perfection all the others are subordinate. It is clear, therefore, the whole process of generation in the primary matter is a unified affair, since one goal is set for it. Accordingly, the agent responsible for these perfections must know them as a unitary system; in this way the whole generation is directed towards its goal. Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, Vol. 1, trans. Seymour Feldman, (The Jewish Publication Society of American, 1984), 151-152.

It is interesting to see that for Gersonides, the Agent Intellect as a “unified final perfection” requires (infinitely) many generations in primary matter to produce perfections for the Agent Intellect to actualize itself and “understand” them. In a similar manner, animate processes and motions produce a specific human intellect for Spinoza through their own separate singular activities.

apparent sensibles/sensations. Intellectual “clarity” is not obscured by “unreal” material appearances. Thus, any reality expressed in an idea or perspective must involve the reality present in “its object.” The bodily object which constitutes the human<sup>362</sup> mind does have a determining reality or force in the attribute of extension. Bodies capable of overcoming resistances (effecting change) and affecting many different bodies (through many types of material communication, i.e. shared ratios) have greater material power *for their specific reality*. An individual body which can bring another mode into a relation with its ratio expresses an agreement of power, and more “extrinsic” relationships equals more power for the individual; however, this is not an essential or necessary agreement between individuals but *convenientia*. Thus, the immanent power of intellect must express itself beyond imagistic and discrete forms by an immediate idea or perspective of these many relations of body: their “agreements, oppositions and differences.” Spinoza describes the power of intellect in contrast to an individual mind’s power of representation:

I say expressly that the Mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused knowledge, of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of nature, i.e., 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.<sup>363</sup>

Rather than presenting an object to be represented, a powerful bodily “object” provides more forceful dispositions to be “internally determined” or to *regard* the external affections at once or immanently in an idea. More determinations equal more common relations of affectivity at once and thus more affirmation of a singular unique power. Nevertheless, the affections or formed dispositions of bodily power are already actual initially and do not require an idea in order to

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<sup>362</sup> This is not properly a human type or nature because bodies/objects generate abstract essences or relations which may then describe them.

<sup>363</sup> EIIP29Schol.

interact with other bodies. There are many bodies that are unknowable to the human mind. Furthermore, the laws of the body are not determined by the mind, so we need to understand their causes materially. This can be clearly demonstrated in the example of sleepwalkers:

For no one has yet come to know the structure of the Body so accurately that he could explain all its functions—not to mention that many things are observed in the lower Animals that far surpass human ingenuity, and that sleepwalkers do a great many things in their sleep that they would not dare to awake. This shows well enough that the Body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its Mind wonders at.<sup>364</sup>

Nevertheless, material actuality is the same as the actuality of its idea since both are an immediate expression of God's actuality.

Under the aspect of intellect, the many relations express a more powerful body-mind or minded-body individual. The many aspects to an individual's bodily ratio show greater agreement in and with many aspects of the ultimately infinite singular thing, God or Nature. Yet, these aspects are constituted by agreements, oppositions, and differences from the perspective of a specific embodied individual. Thus, any notion that an idea expresses a context-free perspective which could indicate a hierarchy of good perspectives or wholes must be rejected. There are no predetermined levels of emergence or more powerful objective aspects to Nature. Spinoza radically opposes scientific knowledge such as Francis Bacon's project of *una scientia universalis* in which greater degrees of knowledge correspond to higher levels of rational incorporation. If Nature were governed by a set hierarchy of emergent or enlightened states, this would undermine the individuality of actual body/minds. Instead, the immanent aspects expressed in a powerful idea express individualized material dispositions, interests, and desires of a body to assert a specific immanent reality with other individuals *and* to overcome

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<sup>364</sup> EIIP2Schol.

their oppositions.<sup>365</sup> A powerful idea represents a contestation of body/minds in order to express an immanent reality in a specific context and with specific material interests, a constellation of material and intellectual interests. The overcoming of opposition allows the generation of shared *productive* social arrangement (*convenientia*) which becomes itself a (political) singular.<sup>366</sup> The “otherness” of opposing individuals can be used to produce both at once my and my society’s productive uniqueness and singularity. Thus, for Spinoza, intellect must be political through and through. It is political both in the sense of shared utility and in the sense of reforming concrete

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<sup>365</sup> Pierre Macherey notes that Theodor Adorno shares a similar view with Spinoza that a “whole” in which an individual is involved cannot represent a given total reality but rather active, *specific* conditions that are continually communicated among individuals:

The essence or the whole only appears by disappearing, that is, by being concealed, since, being given only under particular perspectives, it is distorted or decomposed by being communicated. This idea also expresses a paradoxical formula, which is found in paragraph 29 of the first part of *Minima Moralia*: “The whole is the non-true.” [...] Now this reasoning is not unrelated to what is at stake in propositions 20 to 22 of part IV of the *Ethics* [...] What Adorno seeks to make understood is that since the essence to which every phenomenon is dialectically related is not a totality objectively given in the form of positive existence, it is thereby irreducible to any immediate apprehension: it is therefore ruled out that essence finds its source in the individual consciousness, on the basis of which it is expressed, or to which it is addressed as a legislative reason; but, in relation to the lessons of this consciousness, essence must be held perpetually behind and in default; and this is why essence can itself only be aimed at according to a critical perspective which tries to destabilize every factual form of existence, regarding which essence appears as “non-true,” and which, reciprocally, appears with respect to essence as unworthy of being maintained and preserved. Macherey, “Spinoza’s Philosophical Actuality (Heidegger, Adorno, Foucault),” in *In a Materialist Way: Selected Essays by Pierre Macherey*, trans. Ted Stolze, ed. Warren Montag, (Verso, 1998), 131.

The lack of a pre-given existence or essential guarantees indicates that both for Adorno and Spinoza there can be no pure individual consciousness nor can there be “factual forms of existence.” As a result, a critical perspective must be maintained in which ideal essences and brute facts are challenged and critiqued.

<sup>366</sup> Etienne Balibar describes this reciprocal involvement between individual and community which leads to both becoming more powerful and singular in their actions:

[...] [T]he aim of Spinoza’s naturalism is to define the way of a “becoming necessary” of freedom itself: the very “law” of this process being that the liberation of the individual actually multiplies collective power, just as collective freedom multiplies the individual power. [...] Spinoza’s philosophy, and this is certainly not by chance, aims at a construction of democracy in which the freedom of expression would be constitutive, more generally, the diversity of individual opinions and the free communication between individuals would appear as a necessary condition of existence for the State itself. To be sure, there can be no pre-established harmony between the increasing power of the individuals and that of the community. Their agreement must remain a fragile achievement of fortune (i.e. of causes which are seldom acting together and easily counteracted). Nevertheless they can in no way be considered contraries. Therefore Matheron and others are correct in explaining that although Spinoza comes closer than any of the classical metaphysicians to picturing society as a “market”, he does not take the path of what would become “liberalism”; provided they establish certain rules, individual *potentiae* are virtually complementary. But this complementarity always relies upon their own activity; it has to be constructed. Balibar, “Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality,” 34.

The “natural state” of an individual, rather than indicating an asocial or pure subject, implies a necessary involvement of society which itself must involve citizens to increase its existence and singular power.

conditions to produce a specific “shared” intellect. In order to reform a society and produce a generative/productive singular intellect, there must be a suffering of “otherness,” i.e. passions are never removed, so as to form/generate a new singular community. This shows that Spinoza’s understanding of the intellect is radically political and sheds light on Spinoza’s claim that any true knowledge must be politically active and involve political motivations. As Spinoza says in *TdIE*, he takes pains on himself so that others may understand *and desire* as he does:

This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand, so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. To do this it is necessary, *first* to understand as much of Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature; *next*, to form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible.<sup>367</sup>

The institution of a shared intellectual and political community requires the direct rehabilitation of individual bodies and minds. The initial desire to critique and advance social living is rooted in true active striving or knowledge which must be social and political.

Without an objective state of enlightenment to occupy,<sup>368</sup> an intellect must strive to express the action of (human) bodily processes, organic and social. This “process” cannot mimic something like a Cartesian *mathesis universalis* because there cannot be a first truth or grounding definition which would unify subsequent deductions in a totalizing intuition *or* infinite deductive

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<sup>367</sup> *TdIE* 14.

<sup>368</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that science or knowledge conceived as a series of objective levels of universality represents a totalitarian and anthropomorphic desire to eliminate and appropriate difference. The justification of this universalizing reduction is that particular and embodied experiences are mythic and irrational, thereby requiring enlightened science to interpret mythic experience according to rational concepts.

Whatever myths the resistance may appeal to, by virtue of the very fact that they become arguments in the process of opposition, they acknowledge the principle of dissolvent rationality for which they reproach the Enlightenment. Enlightenment is totalitarian. [...] [T]he structure of scientific unity has always been the same. Bacon’s postulate of *una scientia universalis*, whatever the number of fields of research, is as inimical to the unassignable as Leibniz’s *mathematical universalis* is to discontinuity. [...] According to Bacon, too, degrees of universality provide an unequivocal logical connection between first principles and observational judgments. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (Continuum, 1972), 6-7.

The desire to reduce all phenomena to a well-defined position in relation to an objective unifying perspective is directly opposed to Spinoza’s concrete epistemology.



chain. Following a project such as *mathesis universalis* would only lead to reason being granted absolute authority to dissolve *alternative* perspectives in the name of universal enlightenment or absolute first causes. Contrary to this program, Spinoza uses his understanding of law as *leges* to argue that an objective state of enlightenment cannot occur because *alternative* perspectives, prior historical affects, and unique individuals are necessary for intellectual activity and “perfection.” Rather than undermining intellectual certainty and reality, these “resistant” and irrational affects or passions provide actual determinate motions and affective value that moves or generates intellectual activity.

The necessary involvement of irrational passions shows that there can be no faculty psychology in Spinoza’s philosophy. The inability to detach concrete experience from experience excludes a separate faculty of judgment or will. Situating Spinoza’s work within a materialist Aristotelian tradition supports and furthers this interpretation. A materialist Aristotelian reading of Spinoza, following the work of Idit Dobbs-Weinstein,<sup>369</sup> makes possible a radical critique of Cartesian dualism. Aligning Spinoza with a radical materialist reading of Aristotle and Judeo-Arabic Aristotelians shows a shared critique between Spinoza and his Aristotelian predecessors of disembodied and abstract epistemologies. According to this reading, Spinoza must be interpreted as having no faculty psychology, and similar arguments by philosophers such as Averroes, Maimonides and Gersonides undermine claims that they advocate faculty psychology. Spinoza and these medieval Judeo-Arabic philosophers challenge faculty psychology by interpreting intellect as an embodied, practical, and active expression.

Spinoza’s concept of intellect can be well described by reference to the Aristotelian concept of desiring intellect or thinking desire. Concerning desiring intellect, Aristotle notes that:

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<sup>369</sup> Cf. fn. 358.

It is not *thought* as such that can move anything, but *thought* which is the sake of something and is practical, for it is this that rules productive *thought* also; for he who produces does so for the sake of something, though a product is not an end without qualification but is relative to something else and is a qualified end. But an object of *action*, for a good *action* is an end, and this is what we desire. Hence intention is either a desiring intellect or a *thinking* desire, and such a principle is a man.<sup>370</sup>

Given that an intellectual perspective as such is not reduced to material acts, the intellectual perspective must align with practical or material interests by *expressing* them in order to continually assert the true and undivided reality of an individual. The *striving* to know requires a material individual “providing” active conditions and demands to know. However, appropriate or adequate ideas express an *actuality* that is continuous and indivisible, lacking any immanent contrary or contradiction in an essential intellectual expression. Thus, there can be no greater perfection or good for the minded-body individual, i.e. human. Spinoza’s “desiring intellect” represents the movement to eternal actuality *through* the capacities of a human body and its perfections. This eternality represents the self-motion or self-determining activities of a human intellect which must be conceived as necessary and determining as a modal expression of God.

However, in order to express Nature, this intellectual mode must involve Nature and other singular modes so that any self-motion or self-action must express an “initial” undergoing of forces or affections, other expressions of God’s reality. A desiring intellect or thinking desire cannot absolutely divorce itself or its activity from the senses and prior actions of mind/body since they express necessary acts/passions for the mind to express “greater” actuality and power of the desiring human body. Once an individual mind has undergone these modal affections, it can express a “greater” actuality or have more power to determine other modes or oneself, either in an extrinsic manner or immanently in an adequate idea. Nevertheless, the ability or power to achieve greater power or affective expression must be rooted in the active “object” of one’s idea.

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<sup>370</sup> *De Anima*, 1139a35-b6.

Thus, whenever a body concurs less with other bodies in action, it has a more distinctive nature as a cause because it does not involve an extrinsic nature(s) in its action. As Spinoza notes:

[...] Nevertheless, 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 we can know the excellence of one mind over the others, and also see the cause why we have a completely confused knowledge of our Body, and many other things which I shall deduce from them in the following.<sup>371</sup>

A more powerful material mode is able to productively share similar parts with other affecting modes so that it can intrinsically express an action. By only referring to or involving other agents *with different natures*, a body would not have a clear and distinct expression of its individuality in the play of forces affecting it. However, if a body expresses an intrinsic power and necessary disposition, it will have a clear expression of itself which then expresses itself in an adequate idea. Furthermore, if the body has many perceptions and relations with extrinsic bodies and parts by which it can form an idea of itself as a cause, it will express its individuality together with and through these conditions and not refer to them as extrinsic and confused conditions. An adequate idea can see its nature (a *specific* mind/body) in the conditions generating it so that there is no truly extrinsic force within its *unique* immanent expression. It will see itself as a cause through this intellectual act or perfection. More powerful ideas express the greater involvement of Nature in an individual's desirative expression of its individuality. Thus, a desiring intellect represents an individual attempting to acquire as many powerful and adequate ideas of its existence as possible. The more knowledge an individual acquires the more reality it "acquires"/expresses for its individual perfection. Perfection must be understood as a complete act or a reality that is necessary rather than an achievement of something distinct or the

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<sup>371</sup> EIP13Schol.

union of deficient parts and antecedents. Thus, the intellect cannot represent an indifferent faculty, but the very expression of body/minds expressing “greater” reality or power for themselves in relation to their organic, historical, and social material conditions. As a result, innate ideas are not possible because the realities of true ideas are generated and not merely adopted from a prior storehouse of ideas. Intellectual activity can never be finished but exhibits the persistent demand for thinking, philosophy, and politics.

Since the intellect can become all intelligibles, is not mixed with and following sensation and imagination, it can present the *form* of a thing, or rather, it can express the formal cause or explanation why a thing is the case. The intellect is not mixed with material sensations or imagination in the sense that the uniqueness of prior parts/affections and singular modalities cannot be directly identical to one’s intellectual expression. Parts or affections are only aspectively related to one’s idea. Thus, qua intellect, intellect can express the necessity of the “extrinsic” (a seemingly random) order as intrinsically necessary. That is, this order generates ideas, and in turn, ideas as modes of thinking generate ideas. By presenting the formal explanation of a thing, intellect will thus agree with or seem equivalent to what for the medieval Aristotelian Judeo-Arabic tradition is the Agent Intellect or actuality producing the order and necessity of the thing. The seeming equivalence between current intellect and prior Agent Intellect does not indicate that the Agent Intellect is absolutely prior to the present true idea. The present true idea must be necessary to the causal order, which must be conceived as eternal, given that an individual’s perspective must be an essential factor to whether the expressed order is compelling and necessary for the present idea. A present true idea or intellect, thus, seems equivalent to a prior objective intellectual order represented by the Agent Intellect. An adequate idea expresses the always-ness necessary to the reality involved in the idea so that it must be

concurrent with the known and embody the knowing. The equivalence between the *distinctiveness* of the knower (a unique mind or intellectual perspective) and the known (a unique determination/force) shows that the knower or mind is constituted by the known or intelligible “object” and thus cannot deny the known’s eternal actuality. Denial or doubt of this “prior” actuality would literally undo one’s thinking activity *through and from* these conditions. Within the indefinitely many perspectives an intellect *may* express because of the activities of its object, i.e. “human” body, there *may* be adequate perspectives for the human knower since intellect will embody ideas striving to be appropriate to its (human) perfection.<sup>372</sup> Therefore, singular ideas or formal explanations express the necessity of an order *for* the knower. These appropriate forms or adequate ideas/explanations show the cause why an object *must* be necessary for the very existence of that mind/body so that no contrary perspective is possible except with the destruction of the embodiment of that individuality.

Whenever an individual generates active principles of knowledge, they engage in an intellectual pursuit or activity appropriate to the perfection and enhancement of their existence. They express the highest virtue, blessedness or living-well (*eudemonia*) of their specific bodies.<sup>373</sup> Knowledge is the highest virtue *or power* in the sense that when passions and affections are aspectively viewed as singular and active for one’s individuality, they become generative and necessary conditions specific to and lacking any true contrary for that “individual.” From this aspect, one’s individuality is no more. Generative principles, explanations, descriptions or definitions provide a mode by which the individual can always express itself by being an active (intellectual) power. These principles represent the individual

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<sup>372</sup> The term ‘human’ must be taken equivocally since there are no abstract essences in Nature.

<sup>373</sup> This explains why Spinoza begins *Ethics* II with an investigation of the origin and nature of the human mind and its highest blessedness. See beginning of EII.

knower striving to agree with and understand “external,” vagrant, or errant<sup>374</sup> reality by these embodied active principles. Generative definitions open up a horizon of inquiry by which the knower strives to understand the indefinitely many of errant “external” reality by a singular intellectual perspective. This is not to say that our minds are detached faculties investigating and verifying represented objects, i.e. the indefinite *data* of Nature. Nor are there faculties that allow us to form universals by rational *constructive* capacities. These generative definitions or perspectives must be principles of knowledge specific to the appropriate phenomena which they attempt to describe *or express*. Definitions cannot be universal objective principles. The generative activity enabled by adequate definitions has no essential termination to its activity (i.e. a true contrary) because it is the very *actuality* of concrete material conditions striving to be the same through indefinitely different interactions. This activity expresses the power of the individual/material conditions to be the same (form) given incessant changes to it and leading from it.<sup>375</sup> However, identity cannot be absolute, but rather, it depends on different aspects and concrete practices. For adequate principles or explanations, the (active) same is already the different, and these principles do not attempt to make the different identical to a projected image or static identity.

Doubt or the interruption of eternal intellectual activity represents the suspension of adequate thinking or an inadequate agreement with the conditions for thinking.<sup>376</sup> This occurs when the mind refers to or the individual involves an external image or “cause” in its explanation or action. However, this involvement does not indicate that a mental faculty has a defective

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<sup>374</sup> This is really any phenomena or objects considered as possible or “resistant” in relation to one’s specific knowledge/perspective.

<sup>375</sup> Body can undergo infinitely many changes and still retain its form or power. See Lemmas 4 to 7 after EIIP13Schol.

<sup>376</sup> This defect or blockage can be due to an intrinsic resistance to experience, i.e. by prejudice—not merely an extrinsic resistance to thinking.

relation to external conditions. The confusion which a singular mind experiences and expresses is an actual affection and not merely a mistake or defect of a faculty of judgment or will.

Adequate agreement with one's conditions for thinking is not a voluntary matter achieved by merely reorienting one's mental attunement.

In *Ethics* II Proposition 40, Spinoza explains how common relations of affectivity can both provide a basis for adequate reasoning as well as generate transcendental words *or* universal images that obscure and prevent adequate, singular thinking:

But not to omit anything it is necessary to know, I shall briefly add something about the causes from which the terms called Transcendental have had their origin—I mean terms like Being, Thing and something. These terms arise from the fact that the human Body, being limited, is capable of forming distinctly only a certain number of images at the same time (I have explained what an image is in P17S). If that number is exceeded, the images will begin to be confused; and if the number of images the Body is capable of forming distinctly in itself at once is greatly exceeded, they will all be completely confused with one another.<sup>377</sup>

The common relations of affectivity between modes that allows for agreement (shared ratios) also entails that over-determining forces can obscure adequate expressions of singular determinations. Universals represent images that express the most enfeebled power of body-mind. *Having been affected* in some way by many overpowering singulars, a mind will form a common image in order to describe their “individuality” and by extension, how the attributing mind expresses their confused perception and expression. This confusion is expressed by mind and body at once because they are not separate substances. A common image represents a dehistoricized abstract “being” with no perceived and specific determinations by which *to determine* the mind to think it. That is, the determinate power of the individual is rendered as indeterminate as possible by its conditions and affective relation to its conditions. In this case, material conditions affecting the individual *exclude* one another through extrinsic forces so that

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<sup>377</sup> EIP40Schol.

only a general image or universal notion can express an abstract relation of affectivity. The capability of body to express a determinate number of images, which could provide determinations by which to think adequately and singularly, is exceeded so that a universal forms. Nevertheless, a body-mind has been affected by many singulars so some expression or “determination” occurs. As Spinoza notes:

Those notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, etc., have arisen from similar causes, viz. because so many images (e.g. of men) are formed at one time in the human Body that they surpass the power of imaging—not entirely, of course, but still to the point where the Mind can imagine neither slight differences of the singular [men] (such as the color and size of each one, etc.) nor their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body. For body has been affected most by [what is common], *since each singular has affected it*. And expresses this by the word *man*, and predicates it of infinitely many singulars. For as we have said, it cannot imagine a determinate number of singulars.<sup>378</sup>

Transcendental words or universal images seemingly express a common reality among individuals, when in fact, they express the inability of an individual to convert many actual affections into singular expressions. The “activity,” or rather, passivity present in a universal represents an impoverished condition for the individual knower’s (essential) actuality and a reduced possibility for knowing one’s conditions adequately.

However, adequate common notions *determine* the intellect of an individual to the comprehension of specific shared ratios or conditions that constitute the interaction among bodies to which this knowing individual belongs and by which the individual must be constituted. Although involved in the very activity and being of a singular mind, thereby constituting its intellectual existence to some degree, these conditions do not constitute its individual distinctive force as a unique minded-body. In order to achieve the highest intellectual adequation and perfection, an individual intellect must express the necessity of its singular existence in an appropriately “clear and distinct” explanation or adequate idea.

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<sup>378</sup> EIP40Schol. Emphasis added.



So long as a mind forms explanations that are not abstract universals and express the mind's embodied necessity as either a common notion or real singular determination, the mind will become intellect and as intellect express a primary cause(s) not specific to any bodily-minded individual. As Spinoza notes: "[t]he connection of ideas which happens according to the order of the intellect, by which the Mind perceives things through their first causes, [...] is the same in all men."<sup>379</sup> The logic of singular affectivity and the *placeless-ness* of singular activity proceeds as follows:

- 1) Viewed under the aspect of first causes, mind and body together express the necessity of Nature as they are *determinate* modes of it and cannot be divorced from Nature.
- 2) No mode can be denoted as Nature or Substance; there can be no individual substances.
- 3) Substance or Nature cannot be affected by, "impacted," or undergo modes as it is absolute activity; thus, no thing or individual can be *extrinsically denoted* as substance.
- 4) Nevertheless, an intellectual mode, for example, must express Substance, but it cannot think Substance as such or discretely "capture" it according to the extrinsic representations of the imagination.
- 5) Thus, modes as affections of Substance or determinate undergoings of Substance continually remain; that is, modes of Substance "remain" or act but their actions cannot be wedded to a specific mind. Instead, they must generate and exceed *individual* intellectual existence.

An adequate true idea represents the embodied necessity of intellectual truth, which implies that it can be "shared" or "acquired" by all in the sense that intellectual modes must continually express Substance through their determinate activities affecting one another. The actuality or

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<sup>379</sup> EIP18Schol.

power of a true idea indicates a ceaseless intellectual activity with no intrinsic termination or negation. As a result, there can be no *determined place* or specific idea or universal/abstract representation in which reality must rest. Whenever I understand, it is not just my knowledge but everyone's knowledge. If not, my knowledge would imply *individual* ownership which in the play of extrinsic forces affecting modes could be limited, removed, or destroyed. Intellect "reveals" or manifests the infinitely and immanently productive process or *leges* generating singulars. Clearly this idea or knowledge can affect other minds through a shared ratio or body that can produce such a view, although not as identically mine; this would undermine its power. Furthermore, the generation of "my" knowledge implies that it came from a prior actual source that determined my embodied perspective and knowledge. This source must be from a prior tradition which involves material, cultural, and social conditions by which and through which this knowledge generates "my" knowledge.<sup>380</sup> Personal immortality is not possible because properly there is only one intellect: one intellectual activity that produces many singular modes of thinking which are necessary expressions of this eternal actuality or activity.

Within Descartes's philosophy, the possibility of individual immortality is tied to his treatment of imagination. Though imagination can be conceived as deriving from affective material conditions or impressions, imagination for Descartes ultimately serves the purpose of allowing for the construction of solely mental concepts and deductions which must involve freewill as a stabilizing and detached faculty, which implies a separate, eternal thinking substance. Descartes is at pains to distinguish imagination conceived as *ingenium* from imagination conceived as phantasm. Phantasm is tied to affective and material impressions, and

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<sup>380</sup> All knowledge begins from prior opinions. This is similar to Aristotle's formulation in the *Posterior Analytics* that "[a]ll teaching and all learning through discourse proceed from previous knowledge. [...] Previous knowledge must be of two kinds. For, (1) if it is of a fact, one must have previous belief of it, but (2) if it is a spoken expression, one should have an *understanding* of it [...]" 71a1 and 71a12-13. Furthermore, this shows that there is a continual contestation for the opinions and images that express the conditions of all and their historical moment.

thus, depends upon an extrinsic source for ordering. However, *ingenium* implies that images can be ordered solely by the creative capacities of freewill and an inventive mind. Spinoza does not nor needs to make this distinction in imagination since he ties imagination (phantasm), mind, intellect to bodily affections.

For Spinoza, the acquisition of intellectual truths must involve bodily affections; otherwise, intellectual truth could be a direct intellectual revelation and would show that mind is not an expression of the dynamic/actual affections of body. As a result, the acquisition of intellectual truth is still mediated through a contestation of material interests and expresses knowledge of concrete body. Otherwise, material conditions or body would be accidental to a real, direct mental reality rather than a necessary condition for a productive dialectic between the two. Intellectual truth should not be considered as a transcendental being because a transcendental is a universal image that views external particulars as indeterminate in relation to its projection *or* projected power. Additionally, memory cannot be willed or detached from and subject to a faculty of free-will. Memory as an expression of bodily traces must affect immediately because they constitute the singularity of the individual as well. Affections express the indefinite and aspectual contest of forces. The dynamic interplay of bodily forces and traces present in memories indicates that a discrete stable subjective identity is impossible, as the same “subject” can be conceived/constituted as radically different under different material aspects. This implies that direct intellectual revelation which could suppress the contingency and passivity of bodily affects is impossible. Body conceived as passive is already in the service of a conception of pure intellect as active. For example, the former conception of body allows

Descartes to argue that only mental activity can express unity and necessity which in turn manifests reality.<sup>381</sup>

Beyssade's analysis of affect in Spinoza's philosophy as presented in chapter three shows that Spinoza's view of body has strong affinities with Sigmund Freud's analysis of repression's relation to the unconscious.<sup>382</sup> For Freud, repression does not abrogate the ideational content of the repressed unconscious idea but rather withholds it from becoming conscious. While unconscious, ideas can have effects not unified by an individual's conscious mind. These effects include parapraxes (word slips), dreams, etc. The interpretation of bodily affect in Spinoza as minded and with affective value has similarities with Freud's argument that somatic or material determinations cannot account for unconscious ideas and their effects. These physical determinations cannot be an adequate explanation or cause by which to bring back mental effects to consciousness. Instead, physical processes must be considered with affective value such that their mere bodily distinction becomes ineffectual for a psychological investigation:

We then encounter the objection that these latent recollections can no longer be described as mental processes from which something mental can once more proceed. The obvious answer to this should be that a latent memory is, on the contrary, indubitably a residuum of a mental process. But it is more important to make clear to our own minds that this objection is based on the identification [...] of conscious and mental. This identification is either a *petitio principia* and begs the question whether all that is mental is also necessarily conscious, or else it is a matter of convention, of nomenclature. [...] [T]he conventional identification of the mental with the conscious is thoroughly impractical. It breaks up all mental continuity, plunges us into the insoluble difficulties of psychophysical parallelism[...] [...] [W]hether the latent states of mental life, whose

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<sup>381</sup> This is evident in *Meditations* II where Descartes argues that only through mental scrutiny can the perception of a piece of wax have coherent sensation or presentation for the mind.

<sup>382</sup> For an interpretation that opposes my claim about the affinity between Spinoza and Freud, see Cornelis de Deugd, "Spinoza and Freud: An Old Myth Revisited," *Spinoza on Reason and the "Free Man,"* Vol. 4, eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal, (Little Room Press, 2004), 227-249. For interpretations that argue for a strong similarity between Freud and Spinoza, see Walter Bernard, "Psychotherapeutic Principles in Spinoza's *Ethics*" in *Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*, ed. Siegfried Hessing, (Routledge and Kegan, 1977), 63-80; see Lothar Bickel, "On the Relationships between Psychoanalysis and a Dynamic Psychology" in *Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*, ed. Siegfried Hessing, (Routledge and Kegan, 1977), 81-89, and see Siegfried Hessing, "Freud's relation with Spinoza" *Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*, ed. Siegfried Hessing, (Routledge and Kegan, 1977), 224-239.

existence is undeniable, are to be conceived as unconscious mental states or physical ones—threatens to resolve itself into a war of words [...] as far as their physical characteristics are concerned, they are totally inaccessible to us, no physiological conception [...] can give us any notion of their nature. On the other hand, we know for certain that they have abundant points of contact with conscious mental processes; on being submitted to a certain method of operation they may be transformed into or replaced by conscious processes, and all the categories which we employ to describe conscious mental acts, such as ideas, purposes, resolutions and so forth, can be applied to them.<sup>383</sup>

For Spinoza, the ability to equally “translate” an affect into bodily and/or mental registers allows it to represent a concrete psychophysical individual whose *many* ethical perfections can be analyzed. For Freud, the nominalism of mental or physical expressions, “their war of words,” allows for a robust and broad psychological investigation which could resolve conflict between conscious and unconscious interests.

Within Spinoza’s and Freud’s understanding, bodily affects can indefinitely express themselves with infinitely many other determinations, many of them being accidental to an initial ratio constituting an individual body and force. There would be no “it” or identifiable individual if a ratio of bodies is destroyed. However, as a dynamic and striving force a ratio of composite bodies can undergo and express many different determinations and identities. As a highly composite individual, a human being undergoes indefinitely various affections with many contrary relations such that when some beneficial or harmful affections occur, there will be other affections present not constitutive of the ratio or particular essential form of striving peculiar to the individual. As a result, many affections or determinations of an individual may accidentally agree with core beneficial or harmful affections or determinations. By this very fact, these “accidental” affections will now *determine* the individual to certain emotions, e.g. pleasure or pain. Whenever the individual conceives of him or herself, he or she will be determined by not

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<sup>383</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious” in *General Psychological Theory*, trans. Cecil M. Baines, ed. Philip Rieff, (Touchstone Books, 1997), 117-118.

only core or foundational affects (historically or materially primary affects), but also by accidental affects (later formations or associations of originary affects/emotions).<sup>384</sup>

The historical contestation of material affects present in Spinoza's understanding of imagination and individual identity bears a remarkable resemblance to Freud's account of the vicissitudes of the instincts. For Freud, every human has instincts that indicate an organic being's self-originating affective force. Instincts compel irrespective of the presence of external stimuli. Freud does not posit that the individual is a pre-given but allows for historical affects to modify the instincts constitutive of an individual (internal) existence. Thus, like Spinoza, Freud allows affects to *determine* the individual natures via a contestation of material forces. Individuality is not ontological but historical. Yet, individuals achieve power/pleasure when they are able to only conceive of or perceive their individual existence. In Spinoza's language, the individual is determined by no other extrinsic nature, and in Freud's language, external stimulation is removed.<sup>385</sup> However, in both cases, self-originating determinations, forces, compulsions, or needs cannot be absolutely satisfied nor can external forces be removed from finite organic beings. As a result, secondary affections or determinations can be used by an individual to *re-present* pleasurable and beneficial conditions for satisfaction. According to Freud, the activity of instincts to achieve satisfaction (which is continuous or *always* occurring) displaces itself onto any affective means amenable to that process. The striving to present internal dominance or affective dominance of particular material interests leads to the process of displacement.<sup>386</sup> Furthermore, these conflicting forces and images may achieve a certain

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<sup>384</sup> See EIIP15.

<sup>385</sup> See Chapter 1 of Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (W.W. Norton, 1961), 3-9.

<sup>386</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in *General Psychological Theory*, trans. Cecil M. Baines, ed. Philip Rieff, (Touchstone Books, 1997), 83-103. Yirmiyahu Yovel makes an interesting connection between Spinoza's concept of individual drive, the conatus, and Freud's concept of libido. See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*, Vol. 2, 145-147. See also EIIP15.

equilibrium of forces in a single compromising image after a contestation of competing interests/images has occurred/occurs. Nonetheless, these bodily images can be altered or destroyed by a stronger material force. Only in this way can their nature be considered “contingent” because contingency neither is essential to Nature (for Spinoza) nor to the Unconscious (for Freud).

For Spinoza, mind has no power over affects in the sense of having the capacity to negate bodily affects or rule their perceived passivity, but instead, as a dynamic expression of bodily affective power, intellect has the power potentially of “destroying the existence” of images as mere images. Intellect can show that images as mere images are not intellectual ideas, or more properly, they are not necessary for *and expressive of* one’s dynamic body. These images do not explain/express the essential activity, striving, or existence of an individual. Images or passions as affective conditions are indeed necessary; however, if one is unable to express adequate ideas or generate further determinate powers and expressions, these passions, images, or material conditions are inadequate to the *individual’s specific and essential striving*. These images, passions, or inadequate ideas are not generative or necessary to one’s individual virtue and power. On the contrary, intellect expresses the dynamism of body striving because it is a necessary generation from those conditions and *generative itself*, adequately explaining or expressing greater determinate powers. As a result, images that claim authority as true reality may be destroyed as standards of truth for the perfection and generative activity of body *and* mind.

Whereas intellect must be “independent” of specific individual minds and *always* generative, the broken temporality *passively perceived* in images exhibits infrequent thinking. If intellect or intellectual truth were specific to individual minds or thoughts, intellectual truth

could be destroyed when someone ceased thinking those true thoughts. Not only with their death would intellectual truth be destroyed, but in cases where the thinker ceased intellectual activities, and later, recollected those prior thoughts, it would be implied that truth changed with this new thinking.<sup>387</sup>

The placeless-ness of affectivity and of singular activity (modes) shows that Nature's eternal activity as expressed by thinking cannot be reduced completely to passivity or to individuality in the modal order of causation. Intellect is essentially aspectival and dynamic so that it cannot be reduced to perceived static and discrete content. Nevertheless, there must be an interactive community and communication of thinking through many minds expressing this generative and eternal/ceaseless activity. These minds or modes are *affected* by an intellectual tradition and by other minds which may further and improve determinations *and* expressions of a singularly produced activity (intellect). Within a community of thinkers, understanding *reduced to specific* minds would imply that when one person understands, others do not nor could achieve the same wisdom. The attainment of truth would be impossible were it solely dependent on individual mental activity. Intellectual activity must be "greater" and more powerful than any one individual mind or mode so that it may be continuously generative. Properly speaking, there can be only one intellectual and immortal thing, the Agent Intellect or Nature as a thinking thing.<sup>388</sup> As an expression of this eternal mode, an intellectual idea must be a complete actual reality that necessarily involves bodily affections and ideas of these affections but shows a necessity that can be shared by all without indicating that their thinking is somehow transcendental. Since the affirmation of an idea is not dependent on a subject which can affirm

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<sup>387</sup> See Mashbaum, "Chapters 9-12 Of Gersonides' Supercommentary on Averroes Epitome of the De Anima: The Internal Senses," 62.

<sup>388</sup> This does not imply that only God's eternality is only possible in thought. God's absolute and eternal nature is expressed in every modal order.



or deny in virtue of a detached faculty of free-will, the affirmation of a true idea is intrinsic to the idea and must be common to all minds in that each may singularly express it as a unique individual mode of that determining activity. The idea as actual or truly affirming is always. This affirmation of truth is not mediated through doubt contra Descartes. Nevertheless, the material traditions, histories, and genealogies which generate and sustain a mode of knowing can be destroyed by political and material annihilation.<sup>389</sup> Knowledge can be destroyed by political authority and the elimination of traditions and people.

### **“Voluntary Thinking”**

In the service of protecting a philosophical-political tradition which rejects the foundational Christian subject, i.e., materialist Judeo-Islamic Aristotelianism, Spinoza does not merely expound an alternative theory of knowledge using material embodiment.<sup>390</sup> Instead, by developing his materialism and its involvement in knowing, Spinoza resists the material/philosophical eradication of (his) tradition by Christian authority as it is represented philosophically by Cartesianism. Spinoza’s resistance to Christian intellectual hegemony primarily focuses on dislodging the privileged status of freewill, the foundation of a disembodied soul. By subverting the philosophical worthiness of the central Cartesian concept of freewill, Spinoza can critique the philosophical authority which justifies a Christian totalization of knowledge. Spinoza’s philosophy can politically subvert the apparent universality and certainty “intrinsic” to the Cartesian system and potentially perplex its self-evidence to political-religious prejudices. Lacking material and political resources to overturn the material/social conditions of

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<sup>389</sup> Cf. fn. 366.

<sup>390</sup> For an account of how Spinoza’s critique of religion reveals his alignment with a Judeo-Islamicate tradition, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “Whose History? Spinoza’s Critique of Religion as an Other Modernity” in *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 33, (2003), 219-235.

Western Christendom,<sup>391</sup> Spinoza had to forgo direct civil engagement so as to employ a politics of ideas, which is nonetheless very material. Spinoza's critique and dislodgment of Cartesian concepts such as will, action/passion, and morality allows him to raise the question of the continuance of these conceptual justifications for Christianity and an investigation of their

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<sup>391</sup> This is not to say that Spinoza advocates an installation of new dogmas through mere violence and external structures of control. I would argue that a similar analysis of violence in relation to socio-political structures can be seen in Walter Benjamin's essay, "Critique of Violence." Benjamin presents two accounts for the justification of violence: natural and positive law. Both accounts, however, for Benjamin are subsumed into the general function of all violence "[...] as a means [for] either lawmaking or law-preserving." See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (1913-1926), trans. Edmund Jephcott, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Belknap Harvard Press, 1996), 247. However, Benjamin keenly observes that justified (violent) means relies on justified ends and justified ends rely on appropriate means:

How would it be, therefore, if all violence imposed on fate, using justified means, were of itself in irreconcilable conflict with just ends, and if at the same time, a different kind of violence arose that certainly could be either the justified or the unjustified means to those ends but was not related to them as means at all but in some different way? Ibid.

Violence in relation to fate or the necessity of nature manifests a paradox because practical violence would reject natural justification, the ultimate resolution for any end, and any projected ends would inappropriately assume its violence as sanctioned by a potentially indifferent natural means. Benjamin's logic mirrors Spinoza's critique of teleology and the impossibility of organizing individual natures or parts into an essential progression or unity and vice versa. Thus, those structures relying on the pervasive use or threat of (extrinsic) violence to maintain *their pleasing* (socio-political) determinations represent totalitarian domination. Instead, Benjamin argues, following my interpretation of Spinoza's relation to violence, that:

The critique of violence is the philosophy of its history—the "philosophy" of this history [i.e. historical liberal views of the distinction between positive and natural law] because only the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating, and decisive approach to its temporal data. A gaze directed only at what is close at hand can at most perceive a dialectical rising and falling in the lawmaking and law-preserving forms of violence. Ibid, 251. Quote modified.

In order to critically resist and *understand* violence, both Spinoza and Benjamin advocate structures that are educative, attempting to improve political conditions allowing for many democratic and indefinitely singular expressions that are not necessarily constituted by a strict static law/history but are dynamic relative to natural diversity. As Benjamin argues, an educative power accepts divine/natural necessity as a form for the sake of living *simpliciter*:

Mythic violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake; divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of living. The first demands sacrifice; the second accepts. This divine power is not only attested by religious tradition but is also found in present-day life in at least one sanctioned manifestation. The educative power, which in its perfected form stands outside the law, is one of its manifestations. These are defined, therefore, not by miracles directly performed by God but by the expiating moment in them that strikes without bloodshed, and, finally, by the absence of all lawmaking. To this extent it is justifiable to call this violence, too, annihilating; but it is so only relatively, with regard to goods, rights, life, and suchlike, never absolutely, with regard to the soul of living. Ibid, 250.

Mythic violence representing political structures that assume an originary and complete moment for all human living require the violent sacrifice of other individuals to preserve their exclusionary tradition and projected *telos*, whereas divine and educative power overcomes resistance by incorporation and active understanding. Divine power or the absolute expressive power of Nature is without exception generative of all actual modes and thus must be for the sake of living *simpliciter*.

As an interesting side note, at the beginning of this essay, "Critique of Violence," Benjamin presents Spinoza's political philosophy as squarely in the camp of natural law; however, after a more careful analysis, one should see this as a caricature.

causes. For Spinoza, these Cartesian concepts are mere images, so the question of their continuance must be raised in order that an adequate explanation of their production can be understood. In this double movement, Spinoza shows that Cartesian ideas are *mere images* in order to adequately understand the material-social conditions that led to these expressions. Yet, the understanding achieved by critiquing Cartesian concepts and understanding their production is not an impotent form of resignation to the appearance of these material conditions/affectations. Instead, the knowledge of these historical-political-material images generates a power by which to orient and resist the disempowering effects of an impoverished material/social condition. Even so, Spinoza's critical approach is not a subjective strategy to divest oneself of affectations, such as it is for Stoics.<sup>392</sup> Spinoza is keenly aware that one must passionately undergo affectations and that one's power to modify them to one's benefit or for one's continual striving equally implies the possibility of destructive tendencies and results. The awareness that thinking must go through (i.e. involve and express) passions and dogmatic determinations, social-political formations, and genealogies requires thinking to be responsive to these historical affects and never absolutely dissociated from them. Thus, this power or knowledge to modify the affects and material conditions (to some extent) is a psychology of the affects historically determined through Cartesian egocentric concepts such as (free) will, action/passion, and absolute moral categories.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> For an account of Spinoza's similarities and differences to the Stoics, see Firmin DeBrabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics*, (Continuum, 2007). For an interpretation which argues that Spinoza agrees with Stoic indifference to passions, contrary to my claims, see Derk Pereboom, "Stoic Psychotherapy in Descartes and Spinoza" in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 11, (1994), 594-625.

<sup>393</sup> Marx Wartofsky examines the impetus behind Spinoza's construction of a scientific psychology. Wartofsky shows why Spinoza modified Cartesian concepts, primarily action and passion, to unify psychological phenomena with a deterministic metaphysics. The general structure of Wartofsky's analysis is correct; however, it is essentially too metaphysical. Wartofsky assumes that Spinoza's use of metaphysics, his methodological monism, actually implies a substance differentiating itself into specific modifications, a form of pantheism. Instead, God or substance for Spinoza provides an epistemic and material ground by which to demand and achieve adequate singular knowledge of actual material-psychological-social conditions—singular knowledge(s) expressing many aspects.

Essential to a Cartesian and Christian subject is the disembodiment achieved by the separation of mental action and bodily passion. On the basis of Princess Elizabeth's criticism in her correspondence with Descartes, Genevieve Lloyd notes that Descartes has a tension within his concepts of passion and image:

[The] mind-body union as a causal relation between two different kinds of thing is of course not unproblematic, as has been pointed out by Princess Elizabeth, at the time, and by many since. At the point of connection, identified by Descartes as the pineal gland, the causal model seems to break down. Either we are left with a mysterious interaction between two kinds of substance with supposedly nothing in common, or we must at this point regard the mind as having a direct, nonmediated awareness of the state of the pineal gland. [...] This view seems implicit in the *Passions of the Soul* account of the mind's relations with the pineal gland, an account that exists in some tension with the causal interaction model.<sup>394</sup>

For Descartes, images and passions seem to be something non-mental, resisting mental properties, and at other times in his writings, they are merely confused ideas still within the province of a mental analysis and verification. That is, these images/passions are easily understood as contradictory ideas if properly investigated by the Cartesian method. Lloyd cites Descartes's commitment to the separation of mental substance and its intellectual self-subsistence as the reason why Descartes cannot allow an extra-mental intrusion to undermine the purity of an intellectual domain capable of pure action:

For Descartes [...] [s]ensation involved the mind's turning toward body—a relationship between two supposedly distinct things. The Cartesian mind, intent on knowing how things really are, must shed the intrusions of the senses and imagination to devote itself to purely intellectual, clear, and distinct ideas.<sup>395</sup>

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Wartofsky's methodological monism assumes all experiences can be placed within a strict consistent system via the presumed ontological ground of God. See Marx Wartofsky, "Action and Passion: Spinoza's Construction of a Scientific Psychology" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 329-353. See also Wartofsky's "Nature, Number and Individuals: Motive and Method in Spinoza's Philosophy" in *Models: Representation and the Scientific Understanding Series: Boston Studies in the Philosophy and History of Science*, Vol. 48, ed. Robert S. Cohen, (1979), 255-276. In this article, Wartofsky explicitly develops his interpretation of methodological monism.

<sup>394</sup> Lloyd, *Part of Nature*, 19.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

Mental action represents the mind's ability to determine itself without an immediate prior determinate cause. Whereas for Descartes bodies are conceived as passive and completely divided objects which must undergo efficient serial causes to determine specific alterations, mental actions represent an undivided pure actuality that cannot be reduced to specific determinations.<sup>396</sup> For Descartes, freewill represents a purely mental unhindered faculty or power which may assent to the truth or reality of concepts.

Spinoza directly opposes all of these properties on the ground that freewill represents an indeterminate universal image generated by impoverished material conditions and *common* misconceptions, or commonly circulated and *authorized* words. Spinoza describes this in his correspondence with Meyer:

[...] [T]he will differs from this or that volition in the same way as whiteness differs from this or that white thing, or humanity differs from this or that man. So it is as impossible to conceive that humanity is the cause of this or that volition as to conceive that humanity is the cause of Peter and Paul [...] [T]he will, then, is nothing more than a being of reason and ought not in any way be called a cause of this or that volition, since particular volitions cannot be called free (because they require a cause in order to exist) but must be as their causes have determined them to be[.]<sup>397</sup>

For Spinoza, a universal term such as Will or freewill expresses a relation to one's conditions such that individual determinations are irrelevant and deficient to a posited transcendental and univocal ground. All expressions of affirmation or denial, *particular* volitions, become univocal expressions of a pure primary will that subsumes these effects; this is similar to the relation between the One and the Many. All particulars become real only in relation to a truer original

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<sup>396</sup> See *Passions of the Soul*, Part II Article 147, AT XI 441. In this article, Descartes attempts to show that humans have internal emotions generated only from the mind and that there can be emotions not tied essentially to bodily passions and the emotions produced from these passions. For a further discussion concerning how Descartes's understanding of internal emotion influences Spinoza, see Jean-Marie Beysade, "De l'emotion interieure chez Descartes a l'affect actif spinoziste" in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, eds. Edwin Curley and Pierre-Francoise Moreau, (E.J. Brill, 1990), 176-90, and see Margaret Wilson, "Comments on J.-M. Beysade: 'De l'emotion interieure chez Descartes a l'affect actif spinoziste'" in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, eds. Edwin Curley and Pierre-Francoise Moreau, (E.J. Brill, 1990), 191-195.

<sup>397</sup> Letter 2.

source which produces them and grounds them; time and respect become irrelevant to the “existence” of a particular. Contrary to a univocal understanding of ‘will,’ Spinoza argues that any individual expression of ‘will’ or ‘humanity’ or ‘whiteness’ is equivocal since these terms do not refer to a pure ontological source but express the indefinite actions and determinations of modes that *may be described* by these terms. The singularity of acts of will is determined by the specific concrete conditions that are necessary for that individual expression and constitute its generative essence and existence. The singular nature of specific acts of will must be produced by unique conditions which cannot be subsumed as particulars into the nature of a universal. As a result, universal terms which attempt to signify a truer reality and relate individuals to this posited object merely show an “understanding” unable to adequately express one’s necessary and generative conditions. The mere identity, which universal terms express, allows one to believe that many individuals are unified by a single reality; however, a univocal representation of one’s (necessary) conditions merely manifests an inability to express and understand the singular and modal activity of one’s existence. Furthermore, the mere identity represented in universals both aids and produces the seeming certainty and authority of these terms. Without singular understanding of certain conditions or affections, universal terms can seem applicable to many individuals and thus can seem to be able to be commonly or “identically” communicated to others. Additionally, those terms that have been most used by a community and in the process, most determining of many speakers and their conventions/habits, become authorized words so as to reduce individuals to particulars subsumed by these universal images. Spinoza describes the formation of familiar and authorized words in EIIP40:

For body has been affected by [what is common], since each singular has affected it. And expresses this by the word *man*, and predicates it of infinitely many singulars. For as we have said, it cannot imagine a determinate number of singulars. But 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—e.g., that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal.<sup>398</sup>

In the case of freewill, the word 'will' can be attached to many individual expressions of affirmation and denial thereby obscuring their singular natures and expressions. This distortion aids the perception that will can be free and irreducible to concrete conditions, and thus, can be perceived as an indeterminate universal "faculty."

Spinoza's understanding of the interplay between singular and individual expressions allows one to see how Spinoza attempts to emend errors due to confusions. For Spinoza, any image or mental affection requires that its essence, when considered alone, must imply that the affect or presented "thing" will in-itself, or *quantum in se est*, preserve its existence. Thus, individual images, memory traces, and volitions (affirmations or denials) which have no similar affect are singular and necessary. As Spinoza notes:

[...] [T]he imagination [...] is affected by some singular corporeal thing. I say *singular*, for the imagination is affected only by singular things. If someone, e.g., has read only one Comedy, he will retain it best so long as he does not read several others of that kind, for then it will flourish in isolation in the imagination. But if there are several of the same kind, we imagine them all together and they are easily confused.<sup>399</sup>

However, when the ability of imagining a single expression is overpowered by *extrinsic* forces, the existence of the *individual* expression becomes *confused with other* "things" or affections. As a result, a general image or word can only express the individual's and the "similar" others' existences. This abstraction inadequately represents the conditions that generate these individuals/affections and their singular essences. Individual expression in this case implies that extrinsic affections *operate on (operari)* and determine a "thing." Individuality necessarily

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<sup>398</sup> EIP40Schol.

<sup>399</sup> *TdIE* 82. Quote modified.

entails extrinsic relations and mediation in the order of existence. This necessary confusion and extrinsic relationality among individuals, affections, and material conditions leads to concrete individuality, but it does not entail that specific conditions for an individual expression are abstract. Spinoza also describes how the conditions for an individual expression, such as an individual perception and volition (affirmation or denial), must be singular; otherwise, understanding would be purely *ad hoc* and unable to determine the intellect to true affirmations:

[...] [T]he same difference that exists between the essence of one thing and the essence of another also exists between the actuality or existence of the one thing and the actuality or existence of the other. So if we wished to conceive the existence of Adam, for example, through existence in general, it would be the same as if, to conceive his essence, we attended to the nature of being, so that in the end we defined him by saying that Adam is a being. Therefore, the more generally existence is conceived, the more confusedly also it is conceived, and the more easily it can be ascribed fictitiously to anything. Conversely, the more [singularly] it is conceived, then the more clearly it is understood, and the more difficult it is for us, [even] when we do not attend to the order of Nature, to ascribe it fictitiously to anything other than the thing itself.<sup>400</sup>

Nevertheless, singular understanding of an individual expression does not imply that that understanding somehow represents the *external* existence of an individual. Understanding cannot equate to an extrinsic individual, thereby implying one correct reality, but intellect expresses the (many) descriptions by which an intellect can affirm singular truths concerning an existing individual. However, the attribution of existence and singular meaning must be uniquely affirmative of the understood individual and resist artificial, abstract application of meaning to many other individuals.

Following his logic concerning images, an image, for Spinoza, presents a reality *as if* it is present and possibly operative without immediate sensation (or a sensing body) such that it

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<sup>400</sup> *TdIE* 55. Quote modified. Spinoza relates the perception of individual existence and the volitions of affirmation and denial more explicitly in *TdIE* 57: “[T]he mind directs itself toward sole contemplation of the candle, considered in itself alone, so that afterwards it infers that the candle has no cause for its destruction [...] this candle, and its flame, would remain immutable and the like. Here, then, there is no fiction, but true and sheer assertions” (ibid, quote modified).



seems capable of identical repetition and objective existence. However, the (material) force present in images *seems* to the perceiver to lack an intrinsic coherence since it can be removed or destroyed by other (material) images and sensations. An image is perceived as not intrinsically generative and productive; it is determined to *operate* (*operari*) extrinsically on other individuals and to be determined by the operations of others. Descartes seems to resolve the perceived contingency of images by arguing that truth must be immaterial and undetermined. Recalling that will becomes possible for Descartes since the mental agent can only re-present the image because the image or memory would lack coherence without organizing, free, and pure mental actions.<sup>401</sup> Without a detached will and mental faculty, there would be for Descartes no coherence to the image. The image would be material through and through, completely indeterminate, infinitely divided, and acted upon by chaotic extrinsic forces. It is further proof for Descartes that the number of clear and distinct ideas does not equal the number of bodily images/perceptions. As a result, this mismatch entails the Cartesian position that a purely disembodied faculty of will wrongly asserts or improperly attends to errant images. Spinoza describes the Cartesian position:

[...] [T]hey think it clear that the will extends more widely than the intellect, and so is different from the intellect. The reason why they think the will extends more widely than the intellect is that they say they know by experience that they do not require a greater faculty of assenting, or affirming, and denying, than we already have, in order to assent to infinitely many other things which we do not perceive—but they do require a greater faculty of understanding. The will, therefore, is distinguished from the intellect because the intellect is finite and the will is infinite.<sup>402</sup>

Error, for Descartes, becomes the improper use of the will. For Spinoza, the problem with Descartes's solution is that the will/mental assertion becomes only associated with the

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<sup>401</sup> See *Passions of the Soul*, Part I, Article 42, AT XI 360.

<sup>402</sup> EIP49Schol.

representational content present in images.<sup>403</sup> Thought is conceived as a static picture that may corresponds to an objective world or a mental construction which requires a faculty by which “true images” or “complete” concepts coherently subsist in intellectual actuality. Spinoza describes the generation of such notions:

Indeed, those who think that ideas consist in images which are formed in us from encounters with bodies, are convinced that those ideas of things of which we can form no similar image are not ideas, but only fictions which we feign from a free choice of the will. They look on ideas, therefore, as mute pictures on a panel[.]<sup>404</sup>

The insistence on a subject-object split whereby mind as a radically distinct entity or substance encounters material passions through images/representations leads to a privileging of mental powers and a misunderstanding of material activity.

However, all images may express the *perceived* contingency *seemingly* inherent in material forces so that for Spinoza, any free faculty of will really expresses affections determining an enfeebled mind. The “inherent contingency” of images, their materially destructible quality, is the only perceived property because the perceiver has been determined and overpowered by so many individual affects *or* has been effectively habituated by authoritative conventions which block active involvement. The forces of these unique affects

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<sup>403</sup> One can make a strong case that Descartes is not concerned with any one-to-one correspondence between idea and body or external object. Following the line of argument presented in chapter two by Marion, Descartes is more concerned with mental completeness and rational procedures that secure this result. Thus, Descartes in many ways is unconcerned with agreement between passions and mind, for example, so long as absolute skepticism caused by (bodily) confusion is kept at bay. Nevertheless, given how Descartes conceives idea as presenting propositional truths or inferential foundations, an idea must be conceived as having some representational quality. Marcelo Dascal describes Descartes’s understanding of idea and/or image as contrasted with Spinoza’s understanding:

Descartes can discern an analogy between (clear and distinct) ideas and images because the latter, though not necessarily truly similar to their objects, *may* turn out to preserve the required resemblance. Conversely, they are disanalogous because images *may* induce false resemblance (though they need not do so), *in spite of* their faultless causal history. For Spinoza, the disanalogy is mandatory and complete because images *necessarily* imply inadequacy. There is nothing that can be “added” to them; there is no way they can be “improved” in order to make them adequate ideas. Dascal, “Unfolding the One: “Abstract Relations” in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” 179.

For Descartes, the inherent nature and purpose of an idea or image is to resemble another object, whereas for Spinoza, ideas and images are not in any way representative.

<sup>404</sup> EIP49Schol.

exceeds the power of the perceiver's imagination such that he or she can only perceive these affects through general properties. However, this type of enfeebled mind does not necessarily have to be produced by originary natural causes; the mind is *not* preordained to be deficient and irredeemable to the natural world. As a result, original sin or any foundational myth of human intellectual deficiency merely derives its imaginary expression from the inadequate and overpowering relation to natural affects. On the other hand, passions and affections cannot be overcome or superseded by mind since they are necessary conditions by which any thinking or mental striving can occur. Every human mind/body strives to express its dynamic perfections, but inadequate ideas (and potentially an extremely enfeebled mind) are generated by conditions/conventions that block the diverse dynamic material affections as constitutive of an intellect or adequate ideas. The many different natures, affections, motions, memories, etc. that constitute body are reduced by a prejudice that conceives ideas as merely static contingent images—all images lacking affective force for this mind are apprehended only through their apparent passive "contingency." But for Spinoza, these affections are very real passions that cannot be overcome by words, imaginative or rational formulations.

The central prejudice of Christian religious dogma is belief in a disembodied soul. The disembodied soul seems to be an indubitable concept in Cartesian philosophy. Since Cartesian ideas can be translated into a chain of deductions, even if they are clear and distinct ideas, i.e. *per se nota* intuitions, a detached faculty of freewill (a soul) is indispensable to validate and sustain that order. The involvement of memory and discursive associations leaves every idea subject to radical doubt. Thus, the shared or universal property of *perceived* contingency becomes a requisite reality for Cartesian philosophy by which the mass of individuals who "think" with this basic imagistic form can be regularly affected and can have their religious-political prejudice of a

disembodied soul reinforced. The result is that the embodied affirmation of ideas remains at the most common indeterminate level and is sustained by a universal image, a subject perceived as a projected power only capable of awareness of and re-presenting passive affections. The diversity of experience and assertions expressing these unique definite affections is reduced by impoverished material-social conditions.

In contrast, for Spinoza, an image presents a force that has *determined* the knower such that he or she can embody and express the determination as an active perspective involving the reality of body. This is not to say that there is an absolutely free choice or adoption of the determinations which one might embody and express. Nor does Spinoza suggest that every force or possible determination can be appropriately embodied as such; there are some things we cannot know.<sup>405</sup> As Spinoza states in EIIP14 and 15, we are constituted by many bodies that cannot be known as such by our minds; their determinations of one another are not essential determinations to our intellectual perfection or actuality. They do not nor can they constitute our minds. The diversity of Nature as expressed through the attribute of extension causes the alterations in “human” body such that different singular natures and motions (qualitatively different “objects” for singular intellectual inquiries) are embodied as necessary expressions/perspectives, when viewed under the aspect of intellect. Since there can be no foundational definition which could reduce all of science, there are different lines of inquiry. Universal images have the problem as do all transcendental beings or beings of reason; they are unable to determine the mind of someone to the apprehension of one image over another. As univocal expressions of a posited reality, they lift singular expressions outside of time and

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<sup>405</sup> See EIIP24. Also, see Gersonides’s Chapter XII, “The Impossibility of Material Intellect Apprehending the Agent Intellect Such That They Become Numerically Identical,” in Gersonides’s *The Wars of the Lord*, Vol. 1, and see Maimonides’s Chapter 31 of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Vol. 1 for a similar account.

respect and reduce singular modes to mere particulars awaiting resolution and completion in that posited ground.

Since the primary characteristic of a Cartesian idea is to represent an object *or* to present propositional content, the universal concept (or image for Spinoza) denoting freewill has no more cause or reason to apprehend one idea over another because they are equally true or false when viewed as inert representations. At best, Descartes can give a negative criterion which describes when the will has not erred in asserting a false idea or in associating imprecise ideas with a clear and distinct idea.<sup>406</sup> However, this cedes authority, ultimate truth or falsity, to external sources, thereby undermining the capacity and authority of will to be an unfettered universal power. Why does the will affirm or deny one thing if it must wait for a perception or an idea?<sup>407</sup> The lack of distinction among acts of will, an extreme equivalence between all individual acts of will, forces one to conceive the faculty of freewill as an infinitely present faculty. But this implies that the power of the infinite will cannot equal the understanding, even if understanding is considered itself as coextensively infinite. That is, the capacity to assent to infinitely many ideas that may *never* be presented to or thought by a finite intellect does not imply a possible infinite intellect. To achieve an expression of these potential assertions requires that God by his grace bestow a correspondingly powerful and immediate intellect, i.e. God's intellect. As Spinoza notes:

If they say that there are infinitely many things which we cannot perceive, I reply that we cannot reach them by any thought, and consequently, not by any faculty of willing. But, they say, if God willed to bring it about that we should perceive them also, he would have to give us a greater faculty of perceiving, but not a greater faculty of willing than he has given us. This is the same as if they said that, if God should will to bring it about that we understood infinitely many other beings, it would indeed be necessary for him to give us

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<sup>406</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>407</sup> *Cf.* fn. 64.

a greater intellect, but not a more universal idea of being, in order for us to embrace the same infinity of beings.<sup>408</sup>

An infinitely empowered intellect would imply that its understanding would be coextensive with an infinitely projected will. Unfortunately, this would make the intellect an indeterminate projection equal to the indeterminacy of its coextensive will, lacking the determination necessary for knowledge as a singular compelling truth. The will would not have a vested interest in a specific truth and vice versa. The only conceivable “intellect” would be an infinite intellect which would be a-temporal and completely removed from any sensibility: an “Agent Intellect” completely divorced from sensibility and statically transcendent. In contrast, Spinoza argues that it is better to assume initially that the intellect and will are actual in relation to many individuals since they are immediate expressions of those individuals.

[...] And indeed, I do not see why the faculty of willing should be called infinite, when the faculty of sensing is not. For just as we can affirm infinitely many things by the same faculty of willing (but one after another, for we cannot affirm infinitely many things at once), so also we can sense, *or* perceive, infinitely many bodies by the same faculty of sensing (*viz.* one after another).<sup>409</sup>

As the immediate expressions of singulars, will must express serial compelling ideas.

However, in a Cartesian scheme, the authority which orients the faculty of freewill *for a finite individual* and its finite intellect must be derived from a posited superior and external intellect, i.e. God’s intellect; otherwise, the faculty of will would not be able to sustain doubt through the Cartesian method, since any equivalence between the two, will and intellect, would make both indeterminate and make the very method of doubt irrelevant to verifying clear and distinct ideas. The indeterminate nature of freewill would cloud the clear and distinct reality of true ideas contrary to the Cartesian method of not allowing knowledge to exceed clear and distinct ideas.

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<sup>408</sup> EIP49Schol.

<sup>409</sup> EIP49Schol.

Nevertheless for Cartesian philosophy, the faculty of freewill seems to have a divine and infinite power that does not restrict itself to experiences and allows for a constructive power to generate associations from past perceived objects. Yet, constructions have a problem concerning existence in that the assumption of existence for the constructed mental object implies a contradiction. For Spinoza, the very process of construction, rather than revealing the necessity of a logical or conceptual arrangement, casts doubt onto its initial reality. In general, for a Cartesian scheme, the will should affirm an idea's content; however, if the affirmation is based on a suspension of affirming the idea's reality, then the existence of the idea is also denied as *actually* determining the intellect. Spinoza uses an example of imagining a winged horse to illustrate this defect:

[...] To understand this clearly, let us conceive a child imagining a winged horse, and not perceiving anything else. Since this imagination involves the existence of the horse (by P17C), and the child does not perceive anything else that excludes the existence of the horse, he will necessarily regard the horse as present. Nor will he be able to doubt its existence, though he will not be certain of it. [...] I grant that the imaginations of the Mind, considered in themselves, involve no error. But I deny that a man affirms nothing insofar as he perceives. For what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of a horse? 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.<sup>410</sup>

When someone imagines a winged horse, they affirm wings of a horse; yet, in order to do so by the nature of this process, the constructed horse is denied, or at the very least bracketed from, physical *and* intellectual reality. Even if one can claim that the horse is an entertained construction of the mind, the fantastical "nature" by definition has no power to determine the mind given the initial assumptions of Cartesian analysis. The constructed image lacks existence and is contradictory in that it bears an exclusion of existence in its very idea; whereas for

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<sup>410</sup> EIP49Schol.

Spinoza, the fiction or constructed image has already determined mind, since it is a passion or affection. Its fantastical nature or representation must be due to an inability to express and think existing causes. Nevertheless, the fiction or image as a passion must be posited as existing; it is an effect of something through which any knowledge of its proper cause might be derived. The image, thus, is a beginning point of an investigation of essential causes and not an accidental stage for Cartesian verification of abstract concepts.

To avoid the contradictory Cartesian position of positing and suspending intellectual objects at the same time, the ability of a mind to affirm intellectual content must be limited to those actual ideas and associations. There is no need to posit a constructive capacity to freewill, as it will involve a contradiction. This locates the generation of fantastical images in the affections and associations that *have determined* a body and that are indicative of the body's continuing interests/desires. If the power of construction were actual, as advocated in a Cartesian philosophy, the reality present in true ideas would be undermined. The content of a true idea should be independent of any specific mind; a true idea's actuality should affirm itself irrespective of "voluntary" perceptions and representations of ideas. However, if the appropriate affirmation of a true idea were dependent on an extrinsic posterior knower (as a Cartesian would assert), then the prior reality of the idea becomes subject to contingent expression dependent upon subjective revisions. This implies that the essence of a true idea has a negation or lacks actuality. In this case, rather than being in the service of guaranteeing a prior reality, doubt marks the true idea as insufficient on its own terms or through-itself.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> See Chapter 2



According to Spinoza, individual acts of volition must be essentially wedded to their ideational “content”.<sup>412</sup>

[...] [T]he affirmation, whose adequate essence, therefore, insofar as it is thus conceived abstractly, must be in each idea, and in this way only must be the same in all, but not insofar as it is considered to constitute the idea’s essence; for in that regard the singular affirmations differ from one another as much as the ideas themselves do. For example, the affirmation that the idea of a circle involves differs from that which the idea of a triangle involves as much as the idea of the circle differs from the idea of the triangle.<sup>413</sup>

If acts of will are not determined by specific affections *and* affirmations, these acts of will would collapse into an indeterminate universality and would be unable to determine themselves without further compensatory acts of volition. Additional acts of the will are not sufficient to determine the prior acts of the will and keep them logically consistent for subsequent deductions or effects. For example, feigning that a winged horse exists does not make the winged horse become more real or determined even if subsequent acts of the will treat that initial affirmation as consistent with other later constructions. As Spinoza notes:

Someone, perhaps, will think that fiction is limited by fiction but not by intellection. That is, after I have feigned something, and will by a certain freedom to assent that it exists in nature in this way, this has the consequence that I cannot afterwards think it in any other way. [...] Evidently, they say that the soul can sense and perceive in many ways, not itself, nor the things that exist, but only those things that are neither in itself nor anywhere; that is, the soul can, by its own force alone, create sensations or ideas, which are not of things; so they consider it, to some extent, as like God. Next, they say that we, or our soul, has such a freedom that it compels us, or itself, indeed its own freedom. For after it has feigned something, and offered its assent to it, it cannot think or feign it in any other way, and is also compelled by that fiction so that even other things are thought in such a way as not to conflict with the first fiction, just as here too because of their own fiction, they are forced to admit the absurdities which I review here, and which we shall not bother to refute with any demonstrations.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> The term ‘content’ should not be interpreted to mean representational content; instead, the idea’s “content” is also an active condition for the expression of thinking. How thinking expresses this actuality cannot be identically the same but affirms/generates the diversity of “possible” singular expressions from this active condition.

<sup>413</sup> EIP49Schol.

<sup>414</sup> *TdIE* 59 and 60.

Constructing a consistent system based on prior fantastical or feigned objects does not establish or validate that prior object and affirmation of its existence. In either case, the prior affirmation is rendered indeterminate, since it cannot properly determine one resulting idea to the exclusion of another without assuming an *unconditioned* will, and deductions derived from the initial assumption are accidental without the tacit assumption of the supporting agency of a detached will. Within any construction, a disembodied and *detached* will with no particular vested interest in the determination of one idea over another must be assumed to sustain the relational system of truth. However, this constructed system collapses on itself because the assumed agency of the will is universal and indeterminate. Thus, for Spinoza, the individuality of a specific volition would be indeterminate or nonexistent unless essentially tied to specific ideational “content” or generative conditions. In order to meet the criteria set by Descartes (that knowledge is necessary and the will must properly “align with” or express true ideas), Spinoza argues that “objects” of or conditions for knowledge are constitutive of mental or intellectual reality.<sup>415</sup>

Although Spinoza does retain the Cartesian general notion that conditions for affirmation may have more perfection or reality than other conditions,<sup>416</sup> this does not imply that ideational

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<sup>415</sup> “This affirmation [of a triangle] involves the concept, or idea, of the triangle, i.e., 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, this affirmation (by A3) also cannot be without the idea of the triangle. Therefore, this affirmation can neither be nor be conceived without the triangle.

Next, this idea of the triangle must involve this same affirmation, viz. 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.

So (by D2) this affirmation pertains to the essence of the idea of the triangle, and is nothing beyond it. And what we have said concerning this volition (since we have selected it at random), must also be said concerning any volition, viz. that it is nothing apart from the idea, q.e.d.” EIIP49Schol.

<sup>416</sup> “Thirdly, it can be objected that one affirmation does not seem to contain more reality than another, i.e., we do not seem to require a greater power to affirm that what is true, is true, than to affirm that something false is true. But we perceive that one idea has more reality, or perfection, than another. As some objects are more excellent than others, so also some ideas of objects are more perfect than others. This also seems to establish a difference between the will and the intellect. [...] As for the third objection, I think what has been said will be an answer to it too: viz. the affirmation, whose adequate essence, therefore, insofar as it is thus conceived abstractly, must be in each idea, and in this way only must be the same in all, but not insofar as it is considered to constitute the idea’s essence; for in that regard the singular affirmations differ from one another as much as the ideas themselves do. For example, the

“content” is equally asserted by indifferent minds or that acts of the will are equal in strength. Given the previous argument concerning the indeterminacy of freewill, Spinoza argues that the force or real determination of the ideational “content” determines a specific mental reality by excluding and incorporating other modes to the benefit or harm of that specific reflexive and expressive form of thinking. Conversely, the “subjective”<sup>417</sup> affirmation itself must be essentially tied to that ideational content and express it as such; otherwise, it would lose determinacy. Thus, as Spinoza argues, will and intellect must be considered essential aspects of a singular reality, just as an individual’s essence and its existence are two aspects of a singular individual:

And what we have said concerning this volition (since we have selected it at random), must also be said concerning any volition, viz. that it is nothing apart from the idea [...] Cor.: The will and intellect are one and the same. Dem.: The will and the intellect are nothing apart from the singular volitions and ideas themselves (by P48 and P48S). But the singular volitions and ideas are one and the same (by P49). Therefore the will and the intellect are one and the same, q.e.d.<sup>418</sup>

The reality or active expression of an idea determines the individual perceiver to the contemplation of certain ideas over others; this furthermore entails that the “subject” cannot be indifferent. The activity and perfections “appropriate to” certain embodied knowers express the affects of certain images or ideas over and to the exclusion of others.

Nonetheless, the Cartesian position assumes that the faculty of freewill can at the very least indicate a mental subject which *could* distance itself from material interests and activities. It seems that a disembodied subject could assuredly determine itself on occasions of equal desire *or* with objects of equal force or determination. The example of Buridan’s Ass illustrates this

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affirmation that the idea of a circle involves differs from that which the idea of a triangle involves as much as the idea of the circle differs from the idea of the triangle.” EIIP40Schol.

<sup>417</sup> The term ‘subjective’ cannot imply an internal and separate mental realm since it is aspectually related to “extrinsic” conditions or affections that generate this specific form of mental expression. Extrinsic and intrinsic do not represent separate causal schemes or inverse relations of passion and action.

<sup>418</sup> EIIP49Schol.

position: if an ass were presented with equal objects to satisfy equal desires, e.g. sufficient amounts of water for thirst and sufficient amounts of food for hunger, at equal distances, the ass would perish unless an undetermined will, capable of self-originating action, was assumed:

[I]t can be objected that if man does not act from freedom of the will, what will happen if he is in a state of equilibrium, like Buridan's ass? Will he perish of hunger and of thirst? If I concede that he will, I would seem to conceive an ass, or a statue of a man, not a man. But if I deny that he will, then he will determine himself, and consequently have the faculty of going where he wills and doing what he wills.<sup>419</sup>

Spinoza does agree that equal force “presented in objects” or expressed by (desirative) affections would entail a physics of affects that produces vacillation, a lack of firm direction or decision for the organic knower: “[f]inally, as far as the fourth objection is concerned, I say that I grant entirely that a man placed in such an equilibrium (viz. who perceives nothing but thirst and hunger, and such food and drink as are equally distant from him) will perish of hunger and thirst.”<sup>420</sup> Nonetheless, the vacillation is dependent upon the constitutive nature of the individual organic being. The appearance of contrary affects that lead to the dissolution of an intellectual affirmation is not directly reduced to forces represented or consciously perceived in the “object” or affection. If viewed under different respects *and/or for* different perceiving individuals, certain affections may produce irreconcilable tension or possibly death. The example of suicide, for Spinoza, indicates that affects and their sensed affirmations are expressions of a particular individual constitution. Spinoza notes that the affects are specific to an individual who might vacillate concerning a decision or one who might kill himself due to specific passions:

If they ask me whether such a man should not be thought an ass, rather than a man, I say that I do not know—just as I also do not know how highly we should esteem one who hangs himself, or children, fools, and madman, etc.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

The conscious effect presented in an image displays the symptom of material forces battling to produce some agreement for conscious sensation. Accordingly, Spinoza asks why someone would kill himself; *we*, as beings with different and diverse striving dispositions, do not know what to think of him because sad passions are specific to that individual and his affective history.<sup>422</sup> The constitution of voluntary equilibrium is *not natural* nor a pathology.

This is not to say there is no communication and identification between individuals. Since every individual involves parts and partial causes for its continuing existence/striving, there are social affects (traditions, conventions, etc.) that continually affect diverse individuals. Nonetheless, the “circulation” of affections produces singular minds and specific psychologies irreducible to other individuals. Thus, “equal affects” or “objective mental content” are not the same for every individual since they are singularly expressed by unique modes.<sup>423</sup>

The valuations of whether certain “objects” are good or bad are determined by mediated conditions which express themselves uniquely in different “wills.” Inherited and defining traditions generate specific “wills” or affirmations/denials, which are unique expressions of this material-social-historical process and activity, i.e. individual psychological dispositions. As a result, the disembodied Cartesian subject cannot remove itself from the constitutive and highly diverse affections of material-historical Nature which generates these singular active perspectives and in turn generates perceiving “individuals.” All knowers, as Spinoza notes,

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<sup>422</sup> Steve Barbone and Lee Rice appropriately show that for Spinoza, suicide is not a minor issue or contradictory in opposition to Wallace Matson’s and Alan Donagan’s claims. However, Barbone and Rice do not describe sufficiently the unconscious and historical aspect of affects which lead to a specific act of suicide which I describe here. See Steve Barbone and Lee Rice, “Spinoza and the Problem of Suicide” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 34,(June 1994), 229-241. See also Wallace Matson, “Death and Destruction in Spinoza’s *Ethics*,” in *Inquiry* 20 (1977), 403 and Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 146-56.

<sup>423</sup> Spinoza advocates a strong ahumanism and claims that Nature must only create individuals. “[S]urely nature creates individuals, not nations, and it is only difference of language, of laws, and of established customs that divides individuals into nations. And only the last two, laws and customs, can be the source of the particular character, the particular mode of life, the particular set of attitudes that signalise each nation.” *TTP* Chapter 17, p. 548.

share in, or more properly, involve the common thing or Nature and are multiple active expressions of that thing: “we act only from God’s command, [and] we share in the divine nature, and the more we do this, the more perfect our actions are, and the more and more we understand God.”<sup>424</sup> Given the involvement of Nature, the actions of individuals should not be held as discrete ontological or substantial acts that are metaphysically and objectively valued as good or evil. Individuals are highly composite through the diverse powers and actions of Nature, and thus, as Spinoza claims, should not be disesteemed nor ridiculed nor condemned as sinners from a universal metaphysical perspective:

[...] 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. [...] This doctrine contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things, and should be helpful to his neighbor, not from unmanly compassion, partiality, or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand.<sup>425</sup>

Absolute moral categories such as good, evil, perfect, and imperfect can be warranted only if the Christian subject really entails a disembodied entity that represents an eternally detached mental actuality radically distinct from bodily passion.

Spinoza rightly notes that this absolute separation and evaluation in fact is a perception or inadequate expression of material conditions:

[...] I reply by denying that we have a free power of suspending judgment. For when we say that someone suspends judgment, we are saying nothing but that he does not perceive the thing adequately. Suspension of judgment, therefore, is really a perception, not free will.<sup>426</sup>

Spinoza uses the example of dreams in relation to cognition to brilliantly undermine this radical dualism. For Spinoza, dreams clearly indicate that images of bodily affections, i.e. presented

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<sup>424</sup> EIP49Schol.

<sup>425</sup> EIP49Schol.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

mental content, can be generated by body without consciousness and disembodied reflection. The phenomenon of dreaming demonstrates the presence of animate human bodily activities without mind's governance, but also, dreaming demonstrates mind's intimate "union"<sup>427</sup> or involvement with body (because mind is nothing but the idea of body). That is, affections and determinations translate into both registers and express the same individual at once. Given that there can be only one substance which is infinitely active and involved in every mode, body cannot be at complete rest; an absolute relation between passive body and active mind is impossible. If there were a passion/action scheme alternating between body and mind, it would reinscribe an *undetermined* Cartesian subject and undermine the necessity of Nature's modal orders. By exhibiting mental phenomenon while at rest, dreams show that mental processes are not inactive during sleep or *un-conscious* states. Mental activity does not have an exact correspondence with consciousness. As a result, dreams exhibit that body considered as a posited simple discrete identity is not unified to a specific discrete mind. Within dreams, multiple bodily desires or affections produce contradictory and diverse mental expressions of these incompatible material interests. Dream decisions and affirmations are chaotic; yet nonetheless, they are bodily determined: specific and capable of (material) conflict. Thus, any discrete will capable of affirming a single unified perspective is undermined in dreams. The will's lack of stable authority, as manifested in dream decisions, shows by extension that mental decisions are unfree and subject to material generation explicitly evident in dreams.

Any semblance of the faculty of will appearing stable, discrete, and detached from chaotic bodily interests is removed by the phenomenon of dreaming that one dreams:

We find this daily in our dreams, and I do not believe there is anyone who thinks that while he is dreaming he has a free power of suspending judgment concerning the things

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<sup>427</sup> 'Union' should not be interpreted to mean a joining of two distinct individuals or substances but rather that both mind and body are immediate aspects of the same individual.

he dreams, and of bringing it about that he does not dream the things he dreams he sees. Nevertheless, it happens that even in dreams we suspend judgment, viz. when we dream that we dream.<sup>428</sup>

As Spinoza claims, this phenomenon directly indicates that the suspension of will or doubt does not belong solely to the province of an immaterial mind. Dreaming that one dreams shows that the experience of doubt or suspending an affirmation is solely within the domain of bodily unconscious activities. Whereas a Cartesian may concede that certain affirmations are errant applications of the will influenced by bodily appearances, the evidence that the “*corrective*” aspect of suspending judgment is itself unconsciously and materially produced in dream states implies that immaterial mind has no special reflective status as it does for a Cartesian. There is no recourse from bodily passions via the activity of a faculty of freewill because the procedure of “correcting” bodily errancy by suspending judgment in conscious life can be reproduced in dreams. Therefore, in order to have explanatory coherence between suspending judgment in conscious and dream life, Spinoza argues that bodily causes and interactions produce the phenomenon present in both forms of life.

Suspension of mental affirmation or judgment is an inadequate expression of prior material conditions/interests.<sup>429</sup> In the case of dreams, even while a mind seems most disinterested or detached from bodily activity, i.e. immobilized in resting dream-states, the mind

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Dobbs-Weinstein describes Gersonides’s kinship with Spinoza’s understanding of doubt through Gersonides’s concept of paralysis:

[As Gersonides describes in] the *Supercommentary on the de Anima*.

Then, when there are an imaginative form and appetite which are not followed by motion, this must necessarily be due to the absence of that concord between the imaginative form and the appetitive one by which movement is perfected. “The failure of the appetitive soul to receive movement from the imaginative form is called paralysis.” (Mashbaum, 183; quotation modified)

There is a performative dimension to this ending, an ending in paralysis that enacts what is essential about the soul as a principle of motion whose cession, a cessation of appetite, is the termination of life. Dobbs-Weinstein, “Thinking Desire in Gersonides and Spinoza,” 65. Quote modified.

Without a concord between “prior” active conditions and a “present” expression as mind, the affirmation and certainty of one’s existence/living *becomes* doubtful rather than merely a mental exercise questioning perceived data.



is forced to affirm conflicting bodily expressions without the capacity to remove itself from bodily immobility, i.e. by moving body or bringing itself to consciousness at will.<sup>430</sup> Thus, the suspension of will expresses bodily interests that cannot overcome one another by motility or through perceptual domination or exclusion. Dream images show a contrary or conflicting relation or resistance among many conditions striving to be expressed but unable to achieve supremacy because body *considered solely as a whole individual* is in a state of rest. At no point during sleep can mind alleviate the play and contestation of desires or material interests in dreams since it must express these forces. Mind's inability to resolve dream decisions indicates that at rest there is even more conflict demanded from the individual.<sup>431</sup>

Within dreams, a resolution by conscious motor activity is denied so that the exclusion of conflicting affects by "external" causes or *agreement with reality*, i.e. expression, is non-existent. Furthermore, repressed affects that are *per se* unresolvable once brought to the level of any awareness must maintain their unreality. That is, certain affects or denied wishes must be considered unreal/fantastical; otherwise, they would disrupt affects capable of *consistent and*

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<sup>430</sup> Freud has a similar view of affect within dreams:

Now just as in the state of sleep the sending out of motor impulses towards the external world appears to be suspended, so it may be that the centrifugal calling up of affects by unconscious thinking may become more difficult during sleep. In that case the affective impulses occurring during the course of the dream-thoughts would from their very nature be weak impulses, and consequently those which found their way into the dream would be no less weak. On this view, then, the 'suppression of affect' would not in any way be the consequence of the dream-work but would result from the state of sleep. This may be true, but it cannot be the whole truth. We must also bear in mind that any relatively complex dream turns out to be a compromise produced by a conflict between psychological forces. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (Avon Books, 1998), 505.

The affect is both limited by sleep immobility and limited by other opposing affects within the dream. There is perpetual affective conflict within a dream.

<sup>431</sup> Freud notes that unresolved affects of daytime processes cannot achieve (conscious) resolution through dreams:

There is no need to underestimate the importance of the psychological intensities which are introduced into the state of sleep by these residues of daytime life, and particularly of those in the group of unsolved problems. It is certain that these excitations continue to struggle for expression during the night; and we may assume with equal certainty that the state of sleep makes it impossible for the excitatory process to be pursued in the habitual manner in the preconscious and brought to an end by becoming conscious. In so far as our thought-processes are able to become conscious in the normal way at night, we are simply not asleep. Ibid, 593.

The activation of consciousness *and* motility immediately entails an end to "chaotic" dream affects as they are unable to be utilized consistently and habitually for actions.

*habitual* expression of or interaction with “external” causes. This sheds light on Spinoza’s claim that error, or a false idea, is a fictitious idea that is asserted to be real or exist:

Note that the fiction, considered in itself, does not differ much from the dream, except that the causes which appear to the waking by the aid of the senses, and from which they infer that those presentations are not presented at that time by things placed outside them, do not appear in dreams. But, error, as will be evident immediately, is dreaming while awake. And if it is very obvious, it is called madness.<sup>432</sup>

*By definition*, a false idea *should not* be considered anything but a feigned idea, fantasy, or dream. By analyzing ideas to determine whether their natures or meanings entail a fictitious or fantastic nature, one is enabled to determine the truth or reality *for and of a specific individual* more appropriately than through an extensional criterion or by reference. Nevertheless, the modification of “reality” by action does change the conditions by which to determine meanings. For example, fantastical meanings circulated and enacted by a community allow social delusions to persist to an extent contrary to knowledge. When fictitious or fantastical ideas are enacted, they produce inadequate knowledge; nonetheless, this “knowledge” pleases. For Freud, the reality principle blocks the activity of the Id, repressed fantastical wishes, which attempts to express itself always and in every possible circumstance. This is necessary because the Id entails inappropriate or inadequate formulations for *actuality*, i.e. ideas that are fantastical by nature. It should be noted that the reality *principle* is just a principle and does not entail an agreement with an objective world but only indicates effective expressions of instinctual drives and wishes. Psychological expressions are mediated through certain “appropriate” and consistently functional and authorized concepts and meanings. Likewise, for Spinoza, an analysis of meaning and an intensional criterion provides the needed resistance to false and fantastical ideas. By understanding whether an idea by definition or essentially is inappropriate for *consistent and habitual* expression of “external” causes and agreement with “reality,” one can determine its

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<sup>432</sup> *TdIE* 64 Footnote b.

“reality” status. For both Spinoza and Freud, the organic individual, at least in a conscious state, is forced by its sensory affections to “choose” or to affirm definite realities and exclude others, if madness has not become immune to those affects.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Freud’s account aligns with Spinoza’s in that “reality” or “external” causes force an end to affective wishing by forcing a determination, although this “external” force is no less a determining factor of the initial wish. Freud notes that:

But all the complicated thought-activity which is spun out from the mnemonic image to the moment at which the perceptual identity is established by the external world—all this activity of thought merely constitutes a roundabout path to wish-fulfillment which has been made necessary by experience. Thought is after all nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish; and it is self-evident that dreams must be wish-fulfillments, since nothing but a wish can set our mental apparatus at work. Dreams, which fulfill their wishes along the short path of regression, have merely preserved for us in that respect a sample of the psychical apparatus’s primary method of working, a method which was abandoned as being inefficient. [...] The unconscious wishful impulses clearly try to make themselves effective in daytime as well, and the fact of transference, as well as the psychoses, show us that they endeavour to force their way by way of the preconscious system into consciousness and to obtain control of the power of movement. Thus the censorship between the Ucs. and the Pcs., the assumption of whose existence is positively forced upon us by dreams, deserves to be recognized and respected as the *watchman of our mental health*. [...] For even though this critical watchman goes to rest—and we have proof that it slumbers are not deep—it also shuts the door upon the power of movement.—No matter what impulses from the normally inhibited Ucs. may prance upon the stage, we need feel no concern; they remain harmless, since they are unable to set in motion the *motor apparatus* by which alone *they might modify the external world*. The state of sleep guarantees the security of the citadel that must be guarded. The position is less harmless when what brings about the displacement of forces is not the nightly relaxation in the critical censorship’s output of force, but a pathological reduction in that force or a pathological intensification of the unconscious excitations while the preconscious is still cathected and the gateway to the power of movement stands open. When this is so, the watchman is overpowered, the unconscious excitations overwhelm the Pcs., and thence obtain control over our speech and actions; or they forcibly bring about *hallucinatory regression* and direct the course of the apparatus (*which was not designed for their use*) by virtue of the *attraction* exercised by perceptions on the distribution of our psychical energy. To this state of things we give the name of psychosis. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 605-607. Emphasis added.

The reality principle or the incorporation of the “external” world into the expression of instinctual and primal affects allows for a determination of the instinctual wishes as a possible active reality *for that individual*. Thought, and eventually intellect, represent the desiring aspects of a specific individual’s material determinations as agreeing with other “external” forces. Nevertheless, the chaotic and fantastical nature of instinctual wishes, as embodied by the Id, are just that and cannot appropriately hijack perceptual and motor functions that are not suited or *habituated* to their expression. In dreams, fortunately, this follows the path of simplest regression, an early primary line of activity which has since been abandoned because it cannot agree well with reality and/or society.

I would argue that Freud’s analysis of the generation of psychosis clearly mirrors not only Spinoza’s understanding of madness in waking life but also parallels Gersonides’s, and prior to him Averroes’s, understanding of concord. Quoting Averroes approvingly, Gersonides asserts that:

“However when this imaginative form and the appetite do not have this relation, then there is no concord between them in the movement of that animal.” And when the concord is lacking, there is no motion; “for the imaginative form exists in an animal only for the purpose of motion,” since that is the benefit it provides the animal. When, then, there are an imaginative form and appetite which are not followed by motion, this must necessarily be due to the absence of that concord between the imaginative form and appetitive (faculty) by which movement is perfected. “The failure of the appetitive soul to receive movement from the imaginative form is called ‘paralysis,’ and slow reception” of this affection “is called ‘laziness’[.]” Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, Vol. 1, 183.

Nevertheless, conscious reality does not escape the material process generating mental phenomena present in dreams and must be explained by similar processes. Madness, extreme error, *or* “dreaming with one’s eyes open” as Spinoza calls it, shows that fantastical desires *peculiar to* the constitution of singular individuals can affect their conscious reality. Dreaming with one’s eyes open indicates that error comes from an improper relation to, perception of, or undergoing of compelling material conditions.<sup>434</sup> False ideas have had no *exclusion* of their inappropriate determination. An individual feels *and* believes that the “other” is statically out there and cannot be denied its objective status when in fact, this passion should generate aspectual expressions since it is a *modal* activity. As a result, falsity allows the affirmation of particular images over the affective force of truer or more powerful/useful ideas. Spinoza describes the delusional aspect of thinking as an improper relation to reality:

[66] With these matters thus understood, let us pass now to the investigation of the false idea so that we may see what it is concerned with, and how we can take care not to fall into false perceptions. Neither of these will be difficult for us now, after our investigation of the fictitious idea. For between fictitious and false ideas there is no other difference except that the latter suppose assent; i.e. (as we have already noted), while the presentations appear to him [who has the false idea], there appear no causes from which he can infer (as he who is feigning can) that they do not arise from things outside him. And this is hardly anything but dreaming with open eyes, *or* while we are awake. Therefore the false idea is concerned with, or (to put it better) is related to the existence of a thing whose essence is known, *or* to an essence, in the same way as a fictitious idea.<sup>435</sup>

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For Gersonides, when *one’s* natural heat (in Freudian language, their internal auto-affective instincts) is presented with imaginative forms that cannot achieve active motor expression, the lack of concord results in paralysis. Those imaginative forms that by definition are fictitious in Spinoza’s language and can be analyzed as such cannot provide an appropriate means to active expression. The desirative determinations/dispositions for Spinoza, or the appetitive soul for Gersonides, have not been habituated to allow this functioning to proceed. Of course, there are some ethical habits that are “imperfect” as such, or have been proven to be ineffectual, such as regressive pathways inherited from childhood, if one were to view it from a Freudian perspective. Conversely, there are other habits that provide more dynamic expressions; for both Spinoza and Gersonides, the philosopher should embody such dispositions, transforming intellect *in habitu* into *in actu*. However, embodying an agent or active intellect, the philosopher-psychologist must be aware of the different pleasures/practices that constitute other individuals, such as the drunk, so as to politically engage with them in an appropriately educative manner *if possible*.

<sup>434</sup> Julie Klein provides an excellent analysis of dreams in Spinoza’s work and how, for Spinoza, falsehoods and fictions are due to an improper relation to affective conditions and images. See Julie R. Klein, “Dreaming with Open Eyes: Cartesian Dreams, Spinozan Analyses” in *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 33, (2003), 155.

<sup>435</sup> *TdIE* 66.

Nonetheless, an individual must be receptive to and expressive of those “external” causes so as to develop a true philosophical understanding. Contrary to the notion that a truly detached knower always governs perceptual living, madness indicates that suppressed material interests or desires can overcome “appropriate” perceptions and activities to assert a fictitious good *specific to* an individual’s circumstances and constitution. Whereas dreams always express the fantastical desires of a body unable to bring certain conditions to consciousness or to an embodied active expression/perspective, acts of conscious volition express those same concerns and activities to varying degrees. Thus, doubt is an inadequate perception only and can only seem to produce the apparent freedom or indeterminacy that is eventually lauded as a disembodied Christian ego. Nevertheless, suppressed material interests are in-themselves actual with their own existence and do not require knowledge or consciousness to make them real. These material embodied activities have their own affective value and do not await human awareness to verify and make real their actualities. Thus, any belief that they must be freely affirmed by a disembodied mind is a form of madness, which results from an inability to perceive adequately these many singular activities, whether through lack of power or prejudice. From this perspective, there is a simple and easy transition from impotence to an indifferent Cartesian/Christian form of subjectivity.

Using this line of reasoning, one can come to the conclusion that Christianity (or any other dualist religion) is a form of madness. Central to the seemingly unlimited agency of a disembodied (Christian) subject is the use of contrary words as sufficiently capable to affect material change. As Spinoza notes:

And then, those who confuse words with the idea, or with the very affirmation that the idea involves, think that they can will something contrary to what they are aware of, when they only affirm or deny with words something contrary to what they are aware of.

But these prejudices can easily be put aside by anyone who attends to the nature of thought, which does not at all involve the concept of extension. He will then understand clearly that an idea (since it is a mode of thinking) consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words. For the essence of words and of images is constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought.<sup>436</sup>

Abstract words and invocations present a deluded “conscious” attempt to modify unknown, unresolved, and feared material interests/affections. Yet, the analysis of dreams shows that at every level the expressions of will are materially determined and can only be emended by material-intellectual means/critique. In order to have adequate knowledge and express one’s historical-social affections, he or she must see the material affection and image as essential and intimately involved in thinking; passions are never removed nor can they be detached. Adequate understanding requires that the image *be viewed* not as a static detached entity but as a necessary determination which generates the determinate powers and expression of the thinking human individual. Under the aspect of eternity, the material affection (or body) is not viewed as an accidental intrusion but rather as a necessary singular activity which through its own unique powers is involved in the unique generation and expression of a thinking individual: individuation through individualization.

Spinoza’s thorough critique of Cartesian indifference and its relation to disembodied, abstract forms of thinking, such as religion and superstition, provides a direct and intense challenge to Cartesian critics by which to emend their intellects. Forcing the Cartesian critic to address paradoxes to their epistemic claims while at the same time providing alternative critical tools to appropriately address and involve material and psychological affects allows Spinoza to open a space for philosophical expression. Spinoza not only provides tools to understand material and psychological affects, but by working through the Cartesian’s understanding of his or her own unique historical and philosophical problems, he discloses a shared philosophical

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<sup>436</sup> EIP49Schol.

community which may together address philosophical problems constitutive of their shared modern age. Cartesian concepts that seem to be self-evident and neutral means to generate or construct knowledge turn out to be abstract illusions, which once uncovered and challenged, require a rigorous and critical discussion among philosophers. The communal endeavor among philosophers then must seek to foster the many singular expressions of understanding from concrete material and social forces without reducing individual thinkers to mere repetitions of an abstract ideal and epistemic method. Strict adherence to Cartesianism and its neutral, objective, epistemic method turns out to generate philosophical construction indifferent to individual/social knowledge and living rather than producing singular understanding; the latter requires political critique.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE END OF *ETHICS* II, A POLITICAL CONCLUSION

It may seem curious that at the end of *Ethics* II, after Spinoza's main exposition of mind and its origin, Spinoza would casually remark that his doctrine concerning mind would be very useful for social and political life:

Finally, this doctrine also contributes, to no small extent, to the common society insofar as it teaches how citizens are to be governed and led, not so that they may be slaves, but that they may do freely the things that are best.<sup>437</sup>

This comment can make sense only if Spinoza believes that, rather than producing a metaphysical or purely epistemological theory, an adequate understanding of mind directly undermines theories of mind that eschew political interests. Additionally, Spinoza's summary of the social and political uses of his epistemology comes immediately after he refutes Cartesian arguments for a disembodied will. After his lengthy critique of freewill in the last proposition of *Ethics* II, Proposition 49, Spinoza ends Book II with an enumeration of the social-political uses of his "epistemology." I would interpret this to mean that Spinoza's understanding of mind resists an abstract (Cartesian) epistemology and his epistemology attempts to materially emend Cartesian/Christian political interests. Rather than replacing Cartesian epistemology with another abstract model of knowledge, for Spinoza, Cartesian philosophy must be adequately understood, i.e. explained through material and psychological conditions. In this way, Spinoza follows his general principle that everything in Nature can be understood. Furthermore, since imagination provides *necessary* affections for unique singular thoughts, these conditions must have a social-political dimension. That is, imagination becomes mind when there is a proper

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid.



relation of *convenientia*. In this case, the social-material involvement is seen as necessary for one's intellectual expression because the intellect is aspectively the same by being both expressive and an expression of those conditions. An adequate understanding shows that the perceived "other" becomes necessary for thinking. By acknowledging and involving the other's *own* necessity as an expression of Nature, intellect or understanding may generate actual knowledge, which itself becomes necessarily productive. At the root of this process is the *communication* of useful affections (*convenientia*). Through a communication of generative affections, a singular community of thinking is produced. This community is by no means guaranteed to exist given the ambivalence inherent in affections and social-political forces. As a result, Spinoza presents his "epistemology" or understanding of mind not as an indifferent awareness of objective data but as a *striving* to emend historical (Christian) dogma and political practices so as to produce human flourishing.

Given Spinoza's perceptive understanding of the force and necessity of material conditions, Cartesian doubt must have a place in an investigation and achievement of one's perfection, blessedness, or *eudemonia*.<sup>438</sup> Both as a historical-material condition and as an epistemic demand to understand, doubt represents for an individual in the post-Cartesian Christian milieu insufficient justifications for particular practices, usually prejudicial practices. By subverting Cartesian terms to change the perspective on doubt and its philosophical role, Spinoza can change the radical Cartesian skeptic or perplexed inquirer into a critical ally.

Maimonides makes a similar claim regarding the perplexed inquirer in the *The Guide of the Perplexed*. In the dedicatory letter to this work, Maimonides explains why he had written his guide for an eager student. He notes that:

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<sup>438</sup> I would translate Spinoza's Latin term '*beatitudo*' as equivalent to the Greek term '*eudemonia*'.

As I also saw, you had already acquired some smattering of this subject from other people than myself; you were perplexed, as stupefaction had come over you; your noble soul demanded of you to *find out acceptable words*. Yet I did not cease dissuading you from this and enjoining upon you to approach matters in an orderly manner. My purpose in this was that the truth should be established in your [intellect] according to proper methods and that certainty should not come to you by accident.<sup>439</sup>

In this respect Spinoza is Maimonides's true heir in that he develops Maimonides's understanding that others' words and images provide inappropriate orientation for one's striving to know one's specific conditions. These words or images are superficial and lack distinction. As a result, the learner has a discord between her dynamic desires/experiences and her words. This results in stupefaction, vacillation, paralysis, or doubt; there is inability to generate animate motion. Thus, the strength, virtue, or nobility of certain individuals demands more distinguished words or singular concepts, but this raises the question of the value of and efficacy of words for intellection since words are common by definition.<sup>440</sup> Aptly, Maimonides notes that an order of investigation cannot be through superficial extrinsic means, which are achieved by the mere application of words, because this would lead to the acquisition of certainty by accident. However, the inquirer also cannot dispense with words, convention, and social-historical conditions; their conventional ordering should be to generate intellection rather than reference. A learner must be affectively habituated so that his or her embodied desire for knowledge

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<sup>439</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Vol. 1, 4.

<sup>440</sup> David Savan provides a good account of the many occasions in which Spinoza notes that words or language are unable to express intellection. Savan argues that for Spinoza words are by definition common so that they are unable to express the singular concrete nature of individuals and of knowledge. See David Savan, "Spinoza and Language" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Majorie Grene, (University of Notre Dame, 1979), 60-72. Opposed to Savan, G.H.R. Parkinson argues that Spinoza does believe words appropriately express knowledge since Spinoza nowhere states explicitly that words are inherently deficient or analogical. See G.H.R. Parkinson, "Language and Knowledge in Spinoza" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Majorie Grene, (University of Notre Dame, 1979), 73-100. However, I agree with Savan's account since I believe that Spinoza clearly states that words are deficient and nominal albeit not deficient in relation to a posited external or metaphysical object. See also Guttorm Floistad, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge in the *Ethics*" in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Majorie Grene, (University of Notre Dame, 1979), 101-130. Floistad argues against Savan and supports Parkinson.

produces true intellection whereby knower and known are immediately the same. This is an ethical and political matter.

Through the affect and experience of doubt, Spinoza can possibly affect the skeptic so that she will see that doubt as viewed against the Cartesian grain, so to speak, is to her advantage. That is, by utilizing a prior affection of and disposition towards Cartesian/Christian philosophy to access these individuals' philosophical sensibilities, Spinoza can forward a mode of philosophical inquiry or living by which these individuals can have greater perfection or (intellectual) health, that is, the generation of singular philosophical knowledge. However, Spinoza does not demand an adherence to a dogmatic replacement of Cartesian philosophy which would only establish a shared repressive convention. Instead, going through Cartesianism and radical doubt, Spinoza affects, if possible, individuals so that they may perceive a mode of striving to better their concrete knowledge with "clear and distinct ideas" or adequate idea expressive of their conditions. This invariably entails undergoing and understanding the multiplicity of experience in contradistinction to a unifying foundational truth or prejudice, such as the prejudice of freewill.<sup>441</sup>

Spinoza states frequently that individuals are unable to remove themselves from passion and are continuously subject to fear which in turn fosters the perpetual development and creation

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<sup>441</sup> Dobbs-Weinstein notes that Spinoza's dynamic naturalism/materialism requires a politics which involves many material and concrete modes, i.e. diverse minds, beliefs, and practices, in order to be *actually* effective: [...] Spinoza's politics is thoroughly informed by his natural philosophy or materialism and is incomprehensible without it. For Spinoza's repeated attempts to argue for freedom of judgment and belief, i.e., for the separation of religion and politics as well as his advocacy of democracy, are based on his understanding of the indefinitely many ways in which beliefs/minds come to be, to have, and to exercise force. That is why in his political writings Spinoza attempts to demonstrate both the absurdity of basing politics on an abstract ideal of the human being [...] and the inefficacy (disadvantage) of a political regime that attempts to repress the passions by fear, persecution or execution. Dobbs-Weinstein, "Thinking Desire in Gersonides and Spinoza," 72.

Thus, a unifying prejudice such as freewill would be absurd for Spinoza as it would both attempt to escape Nature and provide justification for repressing and ignoring the necessity of bodily passions.

of superstitions to reinforce this inadequate response.<sup>442</sup> Nevertheless, these affections should not be interpreted to mean an accidental context which the subject must inhabit. Instead, individuals are constituted by those affective conditions as well so that there are no absolute vices or sin by which upright philosophical thinkers may disdain lesser individuals. Each individual's unique passions, which are generated from and by material-social conditions, individuates their own psyche and mind. Given the constitutive nature of passion, there can be no freedom from fear, and passions must express themselves in specific judgments and constitute an individual's unique interests. An individual judgment cannot be a universalizable belief which any individual could adopt or reject. A politics that claims to repress the diverse and chaotic passions of its citizens so as to establish a unified state merely expresses an inadequate and dangerous political arrangement. No tyrant is capable of restraining fear *solely* by threats and neither can a theocratic leader do the same by using a teleological reward, which would transcend and escape (passionate) Nature. Both types of control are unable to reduce the singular expressions of individuals to an identical expression, a dogmatic adherence to a single repressive belief.<sup>443</sup> As Spinoza argues, a direct political tyranny not only instills fear in the masses but multiplies the fears of the tyrant:

If the strongest dominion were held by those who are most feared, then it would assuredly be held by the tyrant's subjects, for they are most feared by their tyrants [...] If minds could be easily controlled as tongues, every government would be secure in its rule [...] But we have already explained [...] that it is impossible for the mind to be completely under another's control; for no one is able to transfer to another his natural right or faculty to reason freely and to form his own judgment on any matters whatsoever, nor can he be compelled to do so.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> See Preface to Part IV of *The Ethics* and preface to *Theological-political Treatise*.

<sup>443</sup> Andre Tosel explains how inevitably juridical-political and ecclesiastical authorities collude to produce stable repressive nations. See Andre Tosel, "Superstition and Reading" in *The New Spinoza*, trans. Ted Stolze, eds. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 146-167.

<sup>444</sup> *TTP*. Ch. 17 and 20.

Nor can an indirect form of tyranny which involves religious submission suppress the diverse passions and natural rights<sup>445</sup> of individuals since its institution would undermine the concrete singular existence of each citizen:

Philosophers look upon the passions by which we are assailed as vices, into which men fall through their own fault. So it is their custom to deride, bewail, berate them, or, if their purpose is to appear more zealous than others, to execrate them. They believe that they are thus performing a sacred duty, and that they are attaining the summit of wisdom when they have learnt how to shower extravagant praise on a human nature that nowhere exists and to revile that which exists in actuality. The fact is that they conceive men not as they are, but as they would like them to be. As a result, for the most part it is not ethics they have written, but satire; and they have never worked out a political theory that can have practical application, only one that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia or in that golden age of the poets where there would *naturally be no need of such*.<sup>446</sup>

Only a politics which understands the constitutive nature of passions, habits, and ethics-politics can utilize their necessity, *if possible*, given appropriate material conditions and reformed prejudices, to enhance individual expression and social involvement. This kind of true democratic politics uses generative social-political and appropriately historical institutions to provide a convenient and productive communication (*convenientia*) between many modes *freely* expressing their intrinsic powers together with others. Individual freedom represents the ability to live by one's own unique activity that is generated from the necessity of social/material conditions. Thus, by viewing Cartesian dogma not as an established doctrine to be either adopted or rejected, but rather as a historical-material-social condition that generates passions and philosophical prejudices, one can redeploy this convention so as to generate knowledge and emend practices; this process rehabilitates but never eradicates passion in a *continual striving* for knowledge. Spinoza's *Mos* or convention of inquiry entails going through present, actual material conditions so as to disclose an actual intellectual power immanent in these conditions.

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<sup>445</sup> 'Natural right' should not be understood to mean a pre-social or pre-given state of autonomy as it does in the classical liberal tradition.

<sup>446</sup> *TP*, Ch. 1. Emphasis added.

As a result, a useful *Mos* cannot be a dismissal and going beyond passions but must work from and through them to generate singular knowledge.

When sufficiently and appropriately habituated to perceiving Spinoza's understanding and mode of philosophy to their advantage, Cartesians can ally themselves with a mode of living that attempts to block material disempowering affects which impoverish the majority of minds, and through this critical process, they may redirect these affects or passions so that affects become (thoughtful) actions. Certainly this manner of understanding one's historical-material conditions requires an essential political dimension. It is crucial to Spinoza's understanding that all modes, particularly human individuals, share in Nature—they express the perpetual power and actuality of Nature. Therefore, each mode or individual cannot be said to be deficient or morally defective relative to an arbitrary standard. Standards of judgment, particularly moral categories, represent limited perspectives *or* universal projections that reduce the singular multiplicities of Nature, i.e. Nature's absolute power expressed in every modal order. However, given Spinoza's arguments that epistemic justification can only be real for an embodied historical knower/tradition, there can be no universal perspective of Nature that is apolitical and prior to sociability. A state of Nature or existence prior to historical-political experiences would reinsert a metaphysical Christian subject that would be undetermined by singular material forces and traditions. An apolitical and ahistorical ground would also undermine a concrete individual's desires and striving for particular goods and *prima facie* invalidate any specific psycho-physical movements, rendering them unreal and unnecessary for one's unique identity. The reliance on an absolute foundation would thwart living, which should be motivated by specific goods that move animate individuals such as humans to "perfect" their generative conditions and activity. A reference to an original subjectivity would also create a myth of

Man<sup>447</sup> in which Man could resist his powerlessness to affects and potentially could escape Nature's continual affections. An original moment presupposes a unifying cause and pure ground underlying change to which one may return or that one may achieve. As a result, commonly held opinions and prejudices perversely are strengthened by this view of human nature because it entails that no *rational* demonstration can simply overturn and replace cherished opinions. However, given Spinoza's analysis, neither can affections be easily overcome by "returning" to or transcending to a pure, simpler state since an individual is generated from complex and composite conditions that express his or her singularity. The perceived need for a return to origins provides cover for the perpetuation of inadequate and harmful prejudices. In order to emend prejudices and inadequate affections, rather than projecting an ideal and pure state/subjectivity by which an individual can escape Nature or reclaim an ideal agency, a Spinozian position understands that common concrete opinions and prejudices are constitutive of individual activities and unique identities. Spinoza argues that we must realize or know that we a part of common thing, Nature, which is primarily expressed by human communal involvement:

Insofar as [our knowledge] teaches that we act only from God's command, that we share in the divine nature, and that we do this the more, the more perfect our actions are, and the more and more we understand God.<sup>448</sup>

This entails that vulgar and mass practices/beliefs are never left behind but are necessary to the generation and generative activities of individuals and the singular knowledge that they may express, albeit not as a vindication and identical repetition of those vulgar and mass beliefs.

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<sup>447</sup> Etienne Balibar provides an interesting analysis which shows that Descartes and Hobbes, two philosophers who are the foundations of modern liberal subjectivity, rather than being opposed, establish a myth of *Human* subjectivity/*nature* that compliments an interior mental existence. Both establish a primary myth or natural basis justifying human freedom or self-originating action which in turn demands/requires continual construction and self-mastery. See Etienne Balibar's "What is 'Man' in Seventeenth Century Philosophy? Subject, Individual, Citizen," in *The Individual in Political Theory and Practice*, ed. Janet Coleman, (Oxford, 1996), 216-225.

<sup>448</sup> EIIP49Schol. Quote modified.

Thus, there can be no absolute scientific theory of and relief from the affects that is able to escape their constitutive influence. That is, there can be no objective vantage point outside constitutive passions and affects, and there can be no scientific liberation from affects.

In the conclusion to *Ethics II*, Spinoza expresses keen awareness that his exposition on the nature of thinking must, by the necessity of his asserted arguments concerning embodied conditions, challenge political associations or shared interactions that treat their citizens as passive slaves rather than as free citizens capable of self-actualization. The beginning of individual and political freedom must come from a challenge to extrinsic standards of good:<sup>449</sup>

[...] This doctrine, then, in addition to giving us complete peace of mind, also teaches us wherein our greatest happiness, *or* blessedness, consists: viz. in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise. From this we clearly understand how far they stray from the true valuation of virtue, who expect to be honored by God with the greatest rewards for their virtue and best actions, as for the greatest bondage—as if virtue itself, and the service of God, were not happiness itself, and the greatest freedom.<sup>450</sup>

States that impoverish the social-political-material conditions so that citizens are unable to actualize themselves and understand their immanent conditions produce slaves (i.e. produce alienation) that passively or indifferently await an “extrinsic” good or truth to rectify their experienced impoverished circumstances. Spinoza notes that his philosophy of knowing resists such denigration: “[f]inally, this doctrine also contributes, to no small extent, to the common society insofar as it teaches how citizens are to be governed and led, not so that they may be slaves, but that they may do freely the things that are best.”<sup>451</sup> Passivity to posited external conditions believed to be “adequate” generates a teleological structure for thinking in which a

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<sup>449</sup> Leo Strauss argues that for Spinoza the ultimate extrinsic standard of good, *lex divina* or divine law, which one may use to judge and regulate all of (human) existence cannot apply to human values since it would undermine the freedom and *beatitudo* (flourishing) of a natural individual. Only in a society can values such as praise and blame, piety and sin, and good and evil apply. See Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E.M. Sinclair, (Schocken Books, 1982), 170-173.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.



future non-realized reality “compels” one to value that good over pressing material concerns. The future good as an expression of (material) contingency<sup>452</sup> deceptively presents itself as capable of alleviating one’s present inadequate situation/experience by relying on the possibility of contingent future (material) images which may eradicate present (material) harms. The very nature of a projected future good is an image in which the conditions for its realization and activity are denied so that the image’s placeless quality and *possible* duration, rather than promising a future real good and imminent resolution, indicate a denied activity unable to directly lead to generative and necessary singular existence. The nature of futurity in turn establishes and supports the persistence of superstition. Superstition is the handmaiden of teleology, so to speak, in that superstition presents a projected subject capable of willing the removal of material harms through commands or extrinsic signs if this subject is appropriately pleased by symbolic acts. Within a political economy, superstition leads to the enslavement of the consciousness of citizens in that it enforces and reinforces their passivity to present material conditions which are generated by dogmatic and political violence for the interests of an authoritative few. The elite’s specific material interests are enforced to the detriment of a disempowered mass whose citizens are unable to express their diverse and singular modes of existence. In contrast, states that empower their citizens with means, both material and intellectual, by which they can actualize their immanent individual conditions produce free, intelligent citizens. These citizens have the ability to redirect and orient passive affects into individual and political actions so that conditions for individual *and* political living are improved, i.e. made more powerful. Knowledge produced in this process realizes that it is embodied and thus is ethical and political.

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<sup>452</sup> Only from this respect can Nature be perceived as contingent; within themselves material modes are necessary and actual.

In order to emend the political conditions generating Cartesianism, Spinoza must provide Cartesians or Moderns with means to understand *or* undergo their material conditions. Again, Spinoza's emendation is not a dogmatic revolution based on pure violence and prejudice, but is an attempt to open political dynamism, and subsequently, natural dynamism.<sup>453</sup> Thus, Spinoza develops a materialist *methodos*, an inquiry into material causes which is a being on the way to knowledge, to directly focus on undermining political prejudices of the modern impoverished social-political condition. Spinoza provides a means to understand one's unique conditions, by expressing singular knowledge *if possible*. There is no pure overcoming of prejudice, but its resistance must be understood and worked through. Following Spinoza's philosophy, we can properly form reasons and justification as to why these prejudicial and resistant conditions occur and why they affect us in a way that is self-reproducing. We can understand why they are pleasing to us and consequently, how they are a part of our individual existence and striving. Spinoza's method of emendation cannot be an indifferent enterprise since Spinoza's critique of Cartesian indifference, rather than promoting an alternative neutral theory to Cartesianism, demonstrates the impossibility of affective indifference and requires ethical-political involvement to generate singular knowledge. Thus, desire for knowledge must be an expression of embodied conditions and their inclusion so as to improve and generate more knowledge. Knowledge is not only a desirative activity but a social-political activity by which greater inclusion of Nature produces more thinking for individuals but also a more powerful and free

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<sup>453</sup> Antonio Negri presents a view similar to mine:

[...] Spinoza shows that the history of metaphysics comprehends radical alternatives. Metaphysics, as the highest form of organization of Modern thought, is not a unitary whole. It comprehends the alternatives that the history of class struggle produces. There exists an "other" history of metaphysics, the blessed history against the damned. And we should not forget that it is still only in the complexity of metaphysics that the Modern age can be read. Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt, (University of Minnesota, 1991), xix.

However Negri's focus is on the dynamism of Spinoza's "metaphysics" whereas I am concerned with how "epistemic" dynamism may achieve similar results.

community. Spinoza's *methodos* provides an aspect by which to involve (Cartesian) historical affects and *produce* or generate thinking if possible. Nevertheless, Spinoza is keenly aware that passions, prejudices, and vulgar beliefs are never removed, but that there must be a *striving* together with others to achieve and express knowledge.

In this work, I have used Spinoza's epistemology in a critical way to open up a necessary project and discussion for our contemporary philosophical community. Resisting and challenging prejudices that seek not only to reduce Spinoza's work to one correct interpretation but also to situate him within a Cartesian framework and epistemology, I have sought to reveal Spinoza's complex and rich critiques of that very Cartesian project. Showing that Spinoza's way to knowing and overall philosophical work require a non-rationalist, nominalist basis discloses Spinoza's refusal to disengage from and to deny material, political, historical, and psychological causes in the production of knowledge. The result is that Spinoza's materialist "epistemology" demands a continual critique of abstract knowledge and idealist positions. The inherited Cartesian prejudices and modern philosophical interpretations of Spinoza, and proper philosophy in general, must be, according to Spinoza's work, radically and continually critiqued in order to express the living, material, and social conditions that produce singular knowledge. As a result, critically engaging with Spinoza's materialist "epistemology" allows us to address similar dehistoricizing and immanent concerns we face as heirs to post-Cartesian prejudices. Through a critical analysis of Spinoza's work, I hope that we may begin to adequately address some of our social-political conditions so that this effort may generate philosophical knowledge and continual philosophical engagement for us. Nevertheless, given the persistence of prejudices and the inability to eradicate passions, there can be no escape from our material history and philosophical tradition to some golden age of thinking. This project is rooted in the material and

political world and therefore is subject to the passions and concrete resistances such that it always risks marginalization and elimination. Spinoza's view on the efficacy of his own *magnus opus*, the *Ethics*, stated at the very end of that work, equally and aptly applies to this work:

For if salvation [*salus*] were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things are difficult as they are rare.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> EVP42Schol. Quote modified. The term 'salvation' should be interpreted as the Latin term '*salus*', which Spinoza uses in the original text. '*Salus*' means health or flourishing which is immanent to activity rather than awaiting extrinsic salvation.

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