Spinoza's Ethology: Recognizing Dynamic Transitions Between Imagination, Reason, and Intuition

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SPINOZA’S ETHOLOGY:
RECOGNIZING DYNAMIC TRANSITIONS BETWEEN
IMAGINATION, REASON, AND INTUITION

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By
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ABSTRACT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Daniel J. Selcer

Seventeenth Century lens grinder and Dutch philosopher, Benedictus Spinoza, illuminates a rigorous and dynamic theory of knowledge and action in his major system the \textit{Ethics}. What we adequately understand by learning Spinoza’s epistemology is that within it is a proto-physics of ideational force between the three kinds of knowledge expressed by the attribute of thought and, simultaneously, expressed as ratios of motion and rest, speed and slowness, intensity and transformation by the attribute of extension. Such dynamic processes or \textit{ways} lead to one’s capacity for increased rational thought and action, increased uses of creativity, and the enhanced ability to join with others in powerfully effective, affirmative ways. This is Spinoza’s proto-physics of force. The outcome of the enhanced ideational force and extensive action includes an increase in one’s overall singular \textit{conatus}, the capacity for continuous understanding, and perseverance, joy and energy, not only for oneself but also for the benefit of all of Nature. In
the end, Spinoza rigorously demonstrates that all of Nature is one organic substance with infinite varieties of expressive power. We are singular, conscious expressions of that power in our own determinate ways. Our mind does not have ideas, it is ideas, and our ratios of motion and rest expressed in extension are multiple yet maintain a homeostatic balance for bodily integrity and comportment. Combined, the two attributes create affects that influence the increases and decreases in our power of continued thought and action. Affects cannot be explained by any theory of representation. Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology requires such an understanding.

In the end, Spinoza’s ethology involves an enhancement in our ability for creativity and experimentation as well. Such expressions and affects are not possible without other minds and bodies, but they are also not possible without a singular power and enhanced capacity for increasing ideational power and rational conscious reflection. As Paulo Freire writes, “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information.”¹ For Spinoza, acts of enhanced cognition (and thus action) are increases in our overall conatus through continued understanding of natural phenomena. Our love of Nature (or God) is transformed into actions of real living experiences, joy and levity, peace of mind, and an acute interest in all expressions of the laws of Nature. Still, we cannot possibly approach or exhaust the totality of causal processes and effects in Nature. In our awareness of this fact, we are transformed to create and understand our individual human affects and relations with other bodies in our environments towards freedom of thought, happiness, and safety while living amidst a diversity of interests.

DEDICATION

To all who inspired, motivated, questioned, and moved me over the past decade.

And for you...pen pals of planet artist.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My passion for deep speculative thought has been sculpted over decades in different ways. It began when an uncle asked me, at the young age of five, “Do you know who Plato was?” It also began when my father, a comedian, questioned all seriousness in life, yet received honorable discharge from the Navy in order to enter a custody battle for his children when I was six years old. My philosophical interests continued with a science fair project on the life of Confucius in the Seventh grade and led to undergraduate and graduate studies in both psychology and philosophy at the university level. In this vein, I want to first thank the departments of Philosophy at Kutztown University and West Chester University for my continued education, especially Manos Akillas, Allen and Phila Back, John Lizza, Helen Schroepfer, Tom Platt, Anthony Nicastro, and, especially, Paul Streveler, who once saved my sanity in 2003. All of these individuals are amazing philosophers and friends.

My interest in and completion of a doctoral degree in philosophy would not have been born of existence without the instruction, guidance, and dedication of many at Duquesne University, especially my mentor Daniel Selcer. In 2004, I had the opportunity to finish a Master’s degree from West Chester University at Duquesne University. The possibility arose when my friend, Tom Sparrow, was admitted into their Ph.D. program. We moved to Pittsburgh where we lived for many years together. I signed up for two doctoral courses, Gilles Deleuze’s A Thousand Plateaus with Fred Evans and Spinoza’s Ethics with Dan Selcer. Both of these classes and instructors gave me a taste of what it is to do more challenging and rigorously systematic, enjoyable, professional philosophy. With their support, as well as encouragement from students who I had the opportunity to teach, I was admitted into the doctoral program at Duquesne in
2006. I made my intention clear. I wanted to work on Spinoza’s *Ethics*. I would have never made it through the program without the careful attention, care, hard work, and infinite patience given to my continued education by Dr. Selcer. There are no words to paraphrase one’s gratitude when a teacher goes beyond what is required in order to guarantee that substantial learning and personal development occur in their students in the spirit of continuous understanding. I am not only an improved thinker, writer, student of philosophy, and creative teacher, but I am also a better human being because of Dan’s guidance. I would not have made it through such trying, at times incomprehensible and traumatic, experiences during my graduate career (and learned many life lessons) without the encouragement, tireless support, and creativity of such a mentor. This is also true of my other mentors, George Yancy, Jennifer Bates, and Jim Swindal specifically, also at Duquesne University. Without you all I would not have made it to the next chapters…

Dr. Yancy taught me how to be a philosopher in the face of oppression, relentless rumors, constant critique, and how to ignore the negative opinions of others while trying to finish the doctoral program. It wasn’t easy, but George always had an optimistic outlook. Both Dan and George taught me that caring for each other truly requires going beyond the temporary, institutional classroom. George also helped me initiate the Duquesne Women in Philosophy, a group that unconditionally supports the philosophy careers of female graduates. Jennifer Bates taught me to push through the tough times as well, to try and stay focused, and to meditate. As all of these individuals are, Dr. Bates is an example of what it is to inspire hard work in oneself and in others, but not without maintaining a sense of humor and compassion. Jim Swindal showed me grace and what it takes to truly support someone through both the good and bad amidst extreme outside pressures and immense responsibilities that often take him in other directions. Not an easy task, and one Dr. Selcer also managed to endure; a fine use of power.
I thank all four of these mentors, as well as fellow philosophers and friends Tom Sparrow, Joshua Paruch, Joe and Renee Cimakasky, Marilynn Lawrence (friend and editor!), Debadeepta Dey, Eric and Holly Mohr, Jim Bahoh, Ryan Pfahl, Gina Angelotti, Jay Lampert, Lis Paquette, Neal Grossman, Sam Noll (another friend and editor!), Piet Steenbakkers, Nic Rescher, and my greatest pen pal DJH… You have all stood by me from the beginning one creative way or another. I am eternally grateful to you, existing with infinite bliss and gratitude because of your many kindnesses and conversations over the years. I have learned more than I can say from each of you. Daniellea, you are the greatest, most creative, brilliant (dare I say it dag!), and caring comrade I have ever had. Thanks for the love and letters. I am the monad kitty!

Although I often felt like an orphan or nomad due to moving a lot over time, my biological parents, Dan and Diane, only adolescents when I was born, tried to understand how to raise a child as best they knew how in the 1970s. I thank my father, Dan Rawls, for all he had to go through in order to make sure that at a young age I was safe and cared for, and all he tried to do for all of his other children while struggling so often. I thank my siblings, especially Tommy and Amy, for the love and fun we have shared when we could in our separate lives. I love you both so much, as I do my sisters Carolann and Samantha. I thank all four of my grandparents, whose care, homes, and financial support allowed me to find ways to reach my goals repeatedly. Marilynn and Bill brought me home safely from Europe at a time when my life was in danger and I lost everything, and Marie showed unconditional love and provided a home in those dangerous and hard times to follow. There are also several aunts and uncles who supported me so that I could continue to strive towards my goals, especially Robin and Charlie Crawford, from when I was very young to the start of college many different times. Robin, Charlie, and Lauren, their brilliant daughter, brought me home on many occasions where I could rest and grow. Thank
you, Lauren, for sharing living and your family with me at such a young age when you deserved to have more of the attention on you. I love you like a sister and will always be here for you.

All four of my grandparents and my Aunt Robin encouraged me to go to college. Robin and my paternal grandmother, Marilynn, are true examples of women’s liberation in history. One woman going to college at the age of 16 in the 1940s as the only female in all her science classes, and one who broke the glass ceiling at Mack Trucks and Volvo and who also took in her brother’s child to help raise when needed from my birth through my undergraduate education.

I am immensely honored to have a few special particularly spiritual friends, Carol Everhart Wills (“mom,” friend, teacher, pen pal), Dorothenia Nicolson, Kathleen Cotter Lloyd (without you specifically I would never have made it), Neal Grossman, and Dani again. Their gifts from my young childhood to present, their unconditional love without judgment, our laughter, immense art and even larger wisdom over many years have saved my life and heart repeatedly, and filled my soul with the infinite. Carol, thank you for holding me and my family in your heart, especially as a little girl who needed to learn how to give and receive hugs (and who helped my younger siblings stay in touch with their family). Thank you for holding on.

Finally, I am incredibly grateful for the new friends in my life lately, Michael Eng, Dianna Taylor, and Patrick Mooney, as well as the continued support and friendship of Kevin, Ava, Amy, and Dave Daily, all incredibly supportive during my years of dissertation research and writing. Thank you Kevin and Ava for our years of happiness, warmth, learning, and love. We laughed, cried, played, drank, argued, ate, talked around the campfire, planted gardens, learned how to read and write, read bedtime stories without missing a day, and sang many songs. We loved well and we always danced! I know that you, Ava-bird, with such a strong, beautiful character, mind, and heart, will be an incredible human being whose love for all animals,
compassionate instincts, and creative spirit will contribute to making the world a better place…as artists always do! Don’t forget that women can become anything they want and to never let anyone be left out of those playtime circles. Always stay compassionate. You don’t have to win or be in first place, you don’t even have to be liked by others, to be worthy of yourself. You only have to listen to your heart and remember to have some fun. I will always carry you with me little one. Don’t you know yet kid? You already have your wings…

“This, I think, is the ethical sentiment psychologically consonant with a vigorous materialism: sympathy with the movement of things, interest in the rising wave, delight at the foam it bursts into, before it sinks again. Nature does not distinguish the better from the worse, but the lover of nature does. He calls better what, being analogous to his own life, enhances his vitality and probably possesses some vitality of its own. This is the ethical feeling of Spinoza, the greatest of modern naturalists in philosophy…”

George Santayana
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS


The following are abbreviations for Spinoza’s collection of works and letters:

G    Carl Gebhardt, Spinoza Opera

KV   Korte Verhandling van God, de Mensch, en deszelfs Welstand (Short Treatist on God, Man, and his Well-being)

PPC  Principia Philosophiae Cartesianaec (Principles of Descartes’s Philosophy)

TIE  Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione (Treatise on the Emmendation of the Intellect)

TP   Tractatus Politicus (Political Treatise)

TTP  Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Theological Political Treatise)

E    Ethics

Spinoza also wrote many letters. Each reference to a letter will read, for example, “Letter 56” accordingly. References to many passages in the Ethics and other works will be abbreviated, with Arabic numerals referring to the Book of the Ethics in which they occur, plus one or more of the following letters or abbreviations:
Example: E1p11s = *Ethics*, Book 1, proposition 11, scholium
INTRODUCTION

SPINOZA’S ETHOLOGY

“Free of metaphor and myth, he grinds a stubborn crystal:
the infinite map of the One who is all His stars.”
-Jorge Luis Borges

In Seventeenth Century Dutch philosopher and lens grinder, Benedictus Spinoza’s, magnum opus, the Ethics, we read, “An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.”\(^1\) Forming and arranging more powerful chains of clear and distinct ideas are what Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology strives to accomplish in its readers. In this way we can say that we create various ways of knowing. Yet, Spinoza’s theory of knowledge is composed of more than our striving for clear and distinct knowledge. Spinoza’s method also includes strengthening certain kinds of imaginative knowledge, and putting all three kinds of ideas we are capable of, imaginative, rational, and intuitive, to use in effective, efficient, and creative ways. In my reading, the entirety of the Ethics requires that our understanding of its dynamic epistemology must repeatedly include reflecting on propositions and demonstrations regarding human affects specifically, as well as singular conscious transformation, and not only on abstract laws of Nature. Affects are the combination of thought and extension into an experience we can reflect on which increase or decrease our conatus, our perseverance and our tendencies.

This thesis examines how singular, human consciousness and reflection play a foundational role in the development of affirmative thought and extension, as well as how to adequately understand Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. My reading demonstrates that there is a

theory and practice of an ideational proto-physics of force and motion in Spinoza’s *Ethics*. This force is expressed simultaneously along with continually shifting ratios of motion and rest in extension. The result is more or less powerful transformations in one’s *conatus*, as well as how much we can be affected by other ideas and actions or motions of bodies in our environment. In the end, what one discovers is that Spinoza’s epistemology emphasizes the methods of reasoning that strengthen understanding and the capacity to act with more rational and imaginative power, bodily motion, creativity, and effectiveness. For Spinoza, truth is not a measure of adequate knowledge. Adequate thinking is a power of its own kind, and all of its expressions are eternal.

To adequately understand myself as the cause of arranging kinds of knowledge as expressions in order to manipulate the laws of thought and extension to my benefit and the benefit of the greater whole is what I am capable of as a human mind and body. Spinoza also notes that we do not know all of what bodies can do. This enhanced awareness brings me eternal joy and types of creative expressions that can be shared with other human minds and bodies. Such expressions include the increasing perfection of the expressions of substance, which is always in existence. All of substance is one organic and interconnected whole with infinite attributes of which human beings know and use only two. Nonetheless, the two attributes we express, thought and extension, can be separately expressed in infinite ways. Where they come together is in the experience of our affects. It is our affects that give or take away our power.

Friendship and love of one’s neighbor, tolerance of diverse opinions, freedom of thought and of speech, radical democracy, and the enhancement of singular and collective reasoning in powerfully imaginative ways are at the forefront of Spinoza’s philosophy. In an early letter to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza writes that all good friends who share the same purpose should share
everything, especially spiritual things. In this and other ways, Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology cannot be divorced from his monist ontology and the intellectual love of God or Nature. We are finite, but as we learn about the laws of thought and extension we understand how all of Nature’s expressions are perfect and eternal, even if only partial in their force of power. What we learn is that we are not separate from Nature or God, but are expressions of Nature at every turn. Therefore, we are God, as is everything else to varying degrees of power.

One application of learning in this way is the production of new knowledge and further understanding, but also greater uses of creativity. In the preface to his translation of Spinoza’s collected works, Samuel Shirley writes, “Can the essence of God be seen as the source of the ill-understood phenomena that we call artistic creativity? In the ‘conatus’ of human beings, a conatus that derives from God’s potential, do we see a shadow, an image, of God’s creativity, finding expression most markedly in the process of artistic creativity?” So one can ask: what might we do if we had access to using Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology in creative new ways both philosophically and practically in the everyday? What could be generated?

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2 Spinoza, Letter 2, trans. Sam Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 761. It should be noted that Steve Nadler, in his biography of Spinoza, translates this letter as saying friends should share all things spiritual, but Sam Shirley makes it a point to translate the same passage as “…especially when I reflect that between friends all things, and particularly things of the spirit, should be shared…” This, of course, is a very different meaning than Nadler’s and the difference should be taken into serious consideration. All things of the human spirit are not all things spiritual.

CHAPTER ONE

SPINOZA ON THE FREEDOM TO PHILOSOPHIZE:
A NEW SCIENCE OF THOUGHT AND ACTION

“Probably no philosopher of repute has been worse served by his expositors and commentators than Spinoza. Monist, pantheist, atheist, acosmist, ethical nihilist, mechanist, mystic, and even dialectical materialist, are among the epithets more or less commonly used to describe and pigeon-hole a doctrine which, nevertheless, though neglected, misinterpreted, and deplored, has never been despised as a mere curiosity of philosophical history.”
- H. F. Hallett

“Spinoza's world is motion, and motion once more.”
- W. Klever

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze once wrote to Reda Bensmaia about Seventeenth Century philosopher and lens grinder, Benedictus Spinoza:

The *Ethics* is a book of concepts...but of affects...and percepts...too...Thus the paradox in Spinoza is that he's the most philosophical of philosophers...but also the one who more than any other addresses nonphilosophers and calls forth the most intense nonphilosophical understanding. This is why absolutely anyone can read Spinoza, and be very moved, or see things differently afterward, even if they can hardly understand Spinoza's concepts...²

Other contemporary Seventeenth Century scholarship on Spinoza aligns with Deleuze's claim. For example, Julie Klein writes that today “Spinoza's readers are numerous and diverse, and their interpretations of his work follow suit.” Klein continues, “...a reasonably comprehensive list would include the Cartesian-Spinoza, the Hobbesian Spinoza, the Judaeo-Islamic Spinoza, the Protestant Spinoza, the atheist and pantheist Spinoza, the neoplatonist or idealist Spinoza...”³ The list grows with several more legitimate categories of interpretation, including a work of public art

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¹ Old Dutch saying: “No heretic without a book.”
in the Netherlands by Thomas Hirschhorn titled *Spinoza Monument*.

My interpretation in this thesis is, therefore, merely one exercise, an experiment, a singular reading and example that is most closely aligned with the sentiments of Gilles Deleuze above. I write to further support what such a system as Spinoza's found in the *Ethics* and other works can accomplish in its readers on a transformational level, that is, how it is still relevant today and what it can do to affect its readers. We read in Letter 37 among Spinoza's correspondence with other scientists, friends, and thinkers of his time, “...there is needed constant meditation and a most steadfast mind and purpose, to acquire which it is most important to establish a fixed way and manner of life, and to have a definite aim in view.” As Eugene Marshall has recently pointed out, “…if David Hume can be considered ‘the Newton of the mind,’ then Spinoza is its Galileo.”

This chapter focuses on how Spinoza was influenced by specific theories of knowledge and systems of philosophy immediately prior to his own. In his original system, Spinoza was interested in teaching us how to better reflect on which type of knowledge we are relying on in order to enhance our power of thought, action, and overall sense of joy, well-being, activity, creativity, and peace of mind. This is a type of philosophical reflection which enhances the power of our affirmative affects as well. For Spinoza, *true philosophical reflection never begins with conjectures*:

> In the common round of life we have to follow what is probable, but in speculative thought we have to follow what is true. A man would perish of hunger and thirst if he refused to eat or drink until he had obtained perfect proof that food and drink would be good for him, but this does not hold in the field of contemplation... When one false proposition is allowed entry, innumerable others follow...  

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5 Eugene Marshall, *The Spiritual Automaton: Spinoza’s Science of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3. This is a recent work which deserves much attention. Unfortunately, it does not emphasize the importance of imaginative knowledge in adequately understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology in any real depth.
6 Spinoza, Letter 56: 904.
The Seventeenth Century was a time of profound and diverse change, with significant developments in science, religion, education, literature, nautical navigation and trade, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy, to name a few. With the proliferation of pamphlets and books through modern advancements such as the availability of printing presses, publishers, book stores, and increased means for trading between countries, various attempts at censorship also became more prevalent. The Pauline, Tridentine, and Clementine Indexes, for example, were put into place by the Catholic Church in Rome during the Renaissance, banning hundreds of books in science, philosophy, politics, medicine, and other religious texts. Poetry and literary works were deemed especially troublesome. In addition, anyone who wrote against the Church put their lives at risk while their works were labeled heretical. “Political dissent was one thing, heresy another... Heresy threatened the souls of believer and nonbeliever alike as well as the fabric of society itself... The Index condemned heretical religious works and attacks on the papacy.”7 Spinoza’s works would also be condemned.

Catholics were not the only religion to ban new research or divergent opinions. “Professors and university students were expected to conform outwardly to the local religion... Intellectuals might hold any heterodox conclusions they wished privately, but could not articulate them in lecture hall or in print without risk or dismissal or worse.”8 Just about everyone conformed outwardly, but, despite the influence (and violence) of organized religion, some secret societies and marginal scholarly groups continued to explore every area of existence in every way they could, like a planet all their own in the ultimate glass bead game. “Nevertheless, men found ways to circumvent censorship. The philosophical heritage of an

7 Paul Grendler, “Printing and Censorship,” in Cambridge History to Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Charles Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1988), 42, 47. The primary Index was not abolished until 1966!
8 Ibid. 51.
optimistic view of man's potentiality favoured an open search for learning...”

Although the practice of a true and open freedom of inquiry “did not exist” during the Renaissance, by the end of the Sixteenth Century the ability to read what one desired to read (should they have the time and means to do so that is), study new areas, have more publication possibilities, and find environments for new inventions or experiments became more and more prevalent. By the end of the Seventeenth Century, scholars and scientists, at the least, were afforded much more freedom of inquiry than ever before. None-the-less, many other people and cultures of individuals were left out of such privileges and freedoms, especially all women.

With these transformations came radical changes in the social, economic, and overall psychological development of individuals and cultures. Seventeenth Century Europe in particular gained increased tolerance for diverse religious practices, and weakened the dominion and influence of religious leaders over large masses of individual beliefs. More democratic ideals and diverse scientific practices (a general respect for science) seeped into new forms of politics, law, education, and philosophy. An increase in tolerance for diverse ideas and cultural practices took shape. Academia too was under attack and radically transforming, both internally and from non-academic circles. “The attack on scholasticism's barbarous jargon and the argument that its dialectic was irrelevant to genuine human concerns were also assertions of a different way of thinking; one that promoted the arts useful to civic life and made them central to education and the basis for training new intellectual classes outside traditional academic hierarchies.”

Spinoza was not a professional academic.

One problem is that we may think we have true knowledge and act on it accordingly, when, in fact, we are in error (with an inability to recognize our errors) in reasoning. The

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9 Grendler, “Printing and Censorship,” 53.
ability to reason well with ideational force is not the same as simply having the ability to reason. It is one thing to be able to use reason, to have the right to do something because one has the power to do so, but it is something else all-together to be able to use reason well, efficiently, and in creative ways which affect multiple individuals and not only ourselves. As Spinoza writes in the TP:

We are not asserting that everything that is done by right is also done in the best way, it is one thing to till a field by right, another thing to till it in the best way. It is one thing, I say, to defend oneself, to preserve oneself, to give judgment, etc., by right, another thing to defend and preserve oneself in the best way and to give the best judgment.\(^{11}\)

In many ways, most individuals use reasoning daily in trying to persevere in their existence. One way to enhance the capacity to reason well would be to learn about how adequate knowledge is generated and recognized. This call to enhancement includes the ability to recognize that we are embodied individuals embedded within a social context and community of which we can be affected by other bodies and ideas continuously. This kind of learning is complex and more difficult, but it is one that involves a proto-physics of force and motion in producing powerful, singular effects.\(^{12}\) The Ethics 4p37s2 and Letter 50 are good examples which demonstrate that seeking your own advantage for preservation is only compatible to your survival and experience of joy if, and only if, others around you are acting rationally.\(^{13}\) Therefore, the more we surround ourselves with others who value the use of rationality, the more we have a better chance of not only surviving, but also ensuring that we are living in the best ways possible. There is a better way to preserve oneself by using rational power regularly.

The discovery of, and empirical evidence for, various laws of nature changed the face of


\(^{12}\) Spinoza was very interested in physics, evident by his deep concentration on Rene Descartes’ work in PP.

\(^{13}\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p37s2: 135-136. This is also one reason why some who have written on Spinoza found ways to justify acts of suicide, such as A. Kiarina Kordela argues in *Spinoza Now* (2011). I have an alternate reading that does not allow for suicide as a rational choice as easily and point to Spinoza’s demonstrations in E4p18s and 4p20s for support.
science and philosophy at this time. As Early Modern historian, Stephen Gaukroger, writes, within philosophical circles there was a pressing need to address the difference between natural and supernatural knowledge and experiences in particular. The more specific issue was how to better understand the relation between activity and matter. If one could not show how matter and activity truly go together, as the Aristotelian doctrine was deemed no longer adequate enough to fit with the new science of the times, then one would have to resort to more supernatural explanations.

The Netherlands (Holland) experienced the most of every type of change in all domains. Spinoza was born into, and fully immersed within, many of these developments. He would be condemned as a heretic by his young twenties for reasons still not completely known, and was born within the same years as the papal condemnation of Galileo. It is in the 1630s that the doctrines of Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes, among others, were being read widely, and, as a result, causing tremendous turmoil among various intellectual, theological, and political circles. In less than a decade the world would change forever. In addition, the notions of cause and effect in scientific, mathematical, and philosophical circles became much more

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15 It is my belief that the final blow that caused Spinoza’s excommunication was the help he was giving the Society of Friends, today known as the Quakers. In 1655 through 1657, Amsterdam witnessed Quaker missionaries sent from England by the one of the founders of the Quakers, Margaret Askew Fell Fox. They were sent to have her pamphlet, *A Loving Salutation*, translated from English into both Dutch and Hebrew. Spinoza had many friends who were both Quaker missionaries and of the Mennonite religion. He also befriended several Quaker missionaries. In 1656, the year Spinoza would be excommunicated, it was well known that the new religion of the Quakers were preparing to distribute their literature widely, literature which included many details of living which were against Jewish doctrine. By 1657, over seventy translated Quaker pamphlets (in Hebrew) were distributed throughout Amsterdam. To date, no scholar knows why Spinoza was excommunicated with any certainty so my interpretation is as viable as others.
16 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 582-583. Israel writes, “Dutch freedom was real but had stringent limits.” In an article from 2009, Simon Duffy writes, “What Israel contends is that the Enlightenment should be understood as a series of protracted struggles between a host of political and religious authorities, on the one hand, and four competing philosophical systems – Cartesianism, Newtonianism, Leibnizian-Wolffism, and Spinozist-radicalism – on the other. The spectre of Spinozist radicalism at the center of European culture in this period is treated by Israel not only as an immanent intellectual danger but also as an active philosophical movement.”
pressing. As Jonathan Israel writes:

The mechanistic world-view, a mode of abstraction whereby all worldly reality is reducible to terms of extension, mass, and movement which can be expressed mathematically, first emerged in the years around 1630 in the minds of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and [Isaac] Beeckman [In Holland]...The war of Cartesianism and Aristotelianism now pervaded not only the whole of Dutch science, philosophy, and theology but was beginning to invade civic politics and the confrontation of party-factions, not only within city council, and university, but also the States, consistory, and beyond... Cartesianism was thus now inseparable from the general ideological and political battle in progress in Utrecht and therefore the Republic.  

Everyone had to take a stand on what part of Cartesianism they either agreed or disagreed with during the very years Spinoza was a child and adolescent. Cartesianism was everywhere.

Spinoza relied on a version of Euclidean geometry as a respected method of doing philosophy to write the Ethics and had a rather nice library, including many books in the history of philosophy, theology, and science. There is considerable debate as to what his use of the geometric method entails specifically, as well as how he altered this method and incorporated algebraic thinking developed by Descartes into this system. Benno Artmann has complicated this issue, writing that the name Euclid is ambiguous: “On the one hand, it means the author of the Elements who lived about 300 B.C.E. On the other hand, 'Euclid' stands for a collection of mostly unknown Greek mathematicians who lived between 500 and 300 B.C.E. And contributed most of the material contained in the Elements...” Further, Artmann references a statement by Proclus that the author(s) of the Elements “avoided proportion.”

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17 Israel, The Dutch Republic, 583, 585. Nature cannot be explained by only mathematics for Spinoza because its combinations and expressions are infinite, as one example. In the Appendix to E1 he writes, “And besides mathematics, we can assign other causes also...”


19 Ibid. 141. Artmann also writes, “It has always been a mystery why Euclid started all over again in Book VII with a theory of proportion for numbers (p. 130).” Considering the definitions of Book V of Euclid’s, a book that is considered very different from all the other books (“Book V is much more abstract... Its propositions apply to various kinds of magnitudes like lines, surfaces, solids...”), it is fun to wonder if what Spinoza meant by ratio was something other than logos, something closer to a magnitude between equal values of force or power which can then be measured as proportions? One reason is because of how difficult it would be to measure any continually shifting
If this is true, then it is another way to show that, although Spinoza may have relied on a Euclidean geometric method in ways later influenced by Galen (emphasizing definition, analysis, and synthesis), it was not his intention to rely solely on a form of geometry as the only means for the deductive, synthetic force of his arguments.

What Spinoza seems to have appreciated was the axiomatic method of definition used by Euclid, but only as a starting point. One cannot mathematize human creativity and novelty, for example. Therefore, some form of genetic definitions is required. Ursula Renz supports this view when, in a 2012 interview, she comments:

Spinoza is always very clear about the implications of a certain claim for claims in other fields. Hence I do not think that the systematicity of Spinoza’s works is simply due to his usage of the geometrical method. On the contrary, his usage of the geometrical method is, in my view, a matter of the exposition of this systematicity, rather than of proof. Still, his usage of this method shows that he had a firm idea of how things cohere with each other.20

How things cohere with each other is an element of demonstration and clarity that we can also find, in certain respects, in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics and in Cicero, both who also influenced Spinoza to some degree. Nonetheless, as Gilles Deleuze has written, Spinoza's geometric method produces a sort of immanent methodology because words, being a part of imaginative partial knowledge, are not themselves representative of reality as much as they are a way reality is expressed. This is why some believe Spinoza is a productive nominalist. Consider how far Christopher Long takes this in a 2001 essay when he concludes:

The geometrical mode of presentation lends an aura of necessity to the systematic strategy and tends to eclipse the rhetorical strategy that functions as a critique of

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Cartesian dualism. To this extent, the systematic strategy itself functions rhetorically. On the other hand, to the extent that any seventeenth-century attempt to establish a monistic system would inevitably have had to involve a critique of Cartesian dualism, the rhetorical strategy itself functions systematically. Thus, although two distinct strategies are simultaneously discernible in the opening passages of the *Ethics*, the two work together, each arguing on a different front, to establish Spinoza’s monism. By focusing on the rhetorical side of this double strategy, the underlying nature of Spinoza’s critique of Descartes can be clarified and certain gaps in the systematic, geometrical argument for monism can be explained.  

We might ask what the metaphysical status of language is in the *Ethics* if words are a part of imaginative knowledge and cannot be said to “represent” reality. It seems the content of the definitions must be capable of being demonstrated in a deductive manner, but what is the nature of this level of demonstration when the knowledge we acquire is also being expressed corporeally through the use of words? It seems the process of adequate concept construction and our understanding of the causal processes and natural phenomena involved are profoundly intertwined. In this way, different definitions of causality have room to logically emerge. This is, as we will read, exactly what Spinoza asks us to consider, to approach ever closer to adequately understanding more and more natural phenomena. It is of our essence to generate more powerful, useful, and creatively intense knowledge in this way. That knowledge, in turn, is also a real experience and, therefore, an expression of natural phenomena, including the joy and pleasure such knowledge produces.

This is a good place to consider other important figures from the history of philosophy

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22 Spinoza, *TIE*, trans. Sam Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 25-26. In the *KV* (part 1), we read, “First of all, then, they say that a correct definition must consist of a ‘genus’ and ‘differentia.’” Now, although all the Logicians admit this, I do not know where they get it from. And, to be sure, if this must be true, then we can know nothing whatever. For if it is through a definition consisting of genus and differentia that we can first get to know a thing perfectly, then we can never know perfectly the highest genus, which has no genus above it. Now then: If the highest genus, which is the cause of all our knowledge of all other things, is not known, much less, then, can the other things be understood or known which are explained by that genus...” As we will read in chapter two, language is part of imaginative, partial knowledge. We use language to formulate definitions for our understanding. If we classify things according to genus, Spinoza is worried, then we will have to logically admit there is a highest genus yet we will not be able to define or understand it even when named. This is a significant logical inconsistency for Spinoza.
with which Spinoza was familiar. His system differs in significant ways from Aristotle's natural philosophy and theory of substantial forms, as well as the relation of natural philosophy to human motivation, knowledge, and ethics, as is evident in comments made in the *PPD* and preface to the *TTP*.\(^{23}\) In addition, for Aristotle, a scientific explanation about the structure of nature that relies on a discourse common to all would be more about metaphysics than physics.\(^{24}\) This is not the case for Spinoza. This is indeed the shift we see in vocabulary in the Seventeenth Century, a shift away from more metaphysical definitions to those of natural science and terms of the new physics. Dan Selcer notes the transition from the meaning of the terms in the metaphysics of Scholasticism to new meanings of the same terms in the Early Modern period combining metaphysics with physics:

> As the Scholastic-Aristotelian language of *potentia* and *dynamis* is reinscribed within a vocabulary of force and power organized by the newly emerging science of dynamics, a fundamental metaphysical shift takes place. While several terms of the vocabulary remain the same, their significations change. What for the Scholastics designated the essential passivity of matter in contrast to its activated form or the various modalities of its operation, becomes a systematic language for describing a world of bodies in motion that is fundamentally and fully active. This transformation of vocabulary means that seventeenth-century materialisms writ large...do not seek to escape from metaphysics as such, but rather to transform it.\(^{25}\)

According to Peg Rawes, Spinoza's system also differs from Greek philosophies, particularly from the Stoics, in two significant ways: “first, because it is an ontology of absolute affirmation, and second, because nature is not just subsumed to intellectual forms of discursivity. Spinoza therefore transforms the disembodied Stoic forms of intellectual geometric knowledge into embodied geometric figures (that is, bodies, emotions and corporeal

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\(^{23}\) See Spinoza's Appendix to the *PPD* and Letter 56 for additional support as well. Unlike Aristotle, Spinoza did not believe common notions arise from a character of our soul as another example.


\(^{25}\) Dan Selcer, *Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 103. Dr. Selcer used Spinoza’s system to affect and alter my education and intellectual development as I will demonstrate in the following chapters. Learning Spinoza with good teachers can affirmatively change lives.
experience) so that both the human subject and the geometric figure are understood to be *nature in process.*”

In the geometric style of the *Ethics,* Spinoza employs some of Euclid's method but not the exact form. This coheres logically if the above observations are correct. Euclid, for example, believed that beginning with general definitions is not adequate enough and could weaken a system, whereas for Spinoza this type of beginning is permissible. There is some evidence for Spinoza's critique of Euclid's method in his dismissal of those who believe the latter's proofs substantially influence complete measurements found in E2p40s2. Then again, Piet Steenbakkers writes, in reference to a passage in the *TEI* on reflexive knowledge and method (including a footnote that the terms geometry and mathematics are *not* interchangeable):

... virtually all seem to agree that the geometrical (or mathematical) order is to be understood as a *method,* rather than as a *form.* I would suggest here that it is expedient to distinguish between Spinoza's method on the one hand, and the geometrical form he gave to some of his writings on the other... Method, as a technical term, has a history of its own in early modern philosophy and science... For an understanding of Spinoza's notion of method, we must take into account the crucial Cartesian development of this theme. It is in this climate that Spinoza's conception of method is to be situated.

I will return to the important question of method throughout the thesis.

By his young twenties, Spinoza was highly versed in several of the new works in science, theology, mathematics, and philosophy. He had inherited and then abandoned his father's shipping business, began writing original works of philosophy as well as theological and political criticism, and became known by 1661 not only for his expert lens grinding, but also as

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27 Spinoza, *Ethics,* 2p40s2, 57.
Steenbakkers continues, “In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the concept of method is determined by the central position of the twin concepts analysis and synthesis.”
someone building actual microscopes and telescopes.\textsuperscript{29} By this time he was also condemned as a heretic by the Jewish community surrounding him, but “Spinoza was always deeply offended by the accusation that he was an atheist.”\textsuperscript{30} The condemnation would not stop Spinoza from investigating the truth. Ken Clatterbaugh notes, “Spinoza’s views were well known in Europe by 1665.”\textsuperscript{31} The concept of atheism in the Seventeenth Century “has no bearing on the existence of or belief in God which is rather the content of the contemporary idea of atheism. When the theologians of the seventeenth century speak of atheism, they are not referring to someone who doesn't believe in God... They are referring rather to someone who does not believe in the God of revelation...”\textsuperscript{32} The decade following his ex-communication was the beginning of a lifelong productive period. Benedictus, the heretic, kept busy.

Many other important thinkers of this time period had access to libraries, publishers, and circles of friends to compare ideas with, but not everyone was as fortunate. What became so important for Spinoza was to create a system that was not only a new way of thinking about essence, existence, man, and nature, or all that is as natural, but to include in such a system that which can assist us in the increased capacity to think for ourselves by learning how to recognize types of knowledge with more logical force and efficiency. In this way, Spinoza was significantly influenced by Descartes’ methods. For example, as Dan Selcer writes:

Descartes’ claim is not merely that we can be aware of our own ignorance, but that this ignorance is a decisive and definitive aspect of methodological thinking in general...the subordination of limitation and finitude to method does more than this. It also instantiates the necessity by which methodological thinking turns back on itself; reflexively inventoring its own capacity for thought, method's first task soon becomes

\textsuperscript{29} Steven Nadler, \textit{Spinoza: A Life} (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1999), 182. Nadler’s is the most extensive and accurate biography of Spinoza to date.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 246. “Spinoza's sensitivity to the charge of atheism was one of the motivating factors behind his decision to put aside the \textit{Ethics} for a while in order to compose a treatise on theological and political matters (246).”
\textsuperscript{31} Ken Clatterbaugh, \textit{The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy} 1637-1739 (London: Routledge, 1999), 130.
its self-articulation. As I will demonstrate, Spinoza's dynamic epistemology also emphasizes method, learning how to develop and better recognize the power of reflexive knowledge between the three types of knowledge we are capable of having (imaginative, rational, intuitive).

For Spinoza there are no simple ideas, but only relations between combinations of types of ideas. As Alexandre Lefebvre writes, “For Spinoza there are no simple (i.e., noncomposite) bodies; likewise, thanks to his doctrine of parallelism, there are no simple noncomposite minds or ideas.” One can turn to E1a3 for support. As social beings, we need other ideas and interactions in order for our finite ideas and actions to unfold or be fully comprehended. This does not entail that we all have the same innate ideas. Descartes' influence on Spinoza is, at times, a difficult subject to address adequately, but Ursula Renz sums up that influence nicely:

Descartes is an epistemological fundamentalist, and his rationalism is tied up with what is also called ‘innativism’. He thinks that in order to acquire true knowledge we have to rebuild the whole system of knowledge. In doing this, we have to rely on a few indubitable ideas, so called ‘innate ideas’ which are essentially distinct from ideas which are either acquired or fictitious. In his early works Spinoza seemed to be impressed by Descartes’ epistemology, but later he rejected the idea that we can separate innate ideas from acquired or fictitious ideas. Finally, there are differences in their theories of emotions which are too numerous to be dealt with here. Nonetheless, we should not merely focus on the differences between Descartes and Spinoza, there is also much continuity. Many of the differences just mentioned grew out of Spinoza’s attempts to further develop Cartesian concepts.

In the TTP and throughout his correspondences, Spinoza demonstrates differences from both

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33 Selcer, Philosophy and the Book, 147. “Thus, those capable of striving after good thinking (bona mens) - and this includes everyone, according to Descartes - are already locked within an ordered and rule-governed structure of thought.” This ordered and rule-governed structure includes errors in reasoning and recognizing those errors as well.
34 Alexander Lefebvre, The Image of Law: Deleuze, Bergson, Spinoza (Stanford: Stanford, 2008), 203
Thomas Hobbes and Descartes in various places.\textsuperscript{36} In the last year of his life, in a letter to Tschirnhaus, Spinoza writes, “That is why Descartes is wrong in defining matter through Extension; it must necessarily be explicated through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence.”\textsuperscript{37}

One example of where Spinoza agrees with Hobbes can be found in Chapter 16 of the *TP*. He writes:

Furthermore, there is nobody who does not desire to live in safety free from fear, as far as possible. But this cannot come about as long as every individual is permitted to do just as he pleases, and reason can claim no more right than hatred or anger. For there is no one whose life is free from anxiety in the midst of feuds...[as] it will become quite clear to us, in order to achieve a secure and good life, men had necessarily to unite in one body.\textsuperscript{38}

This is what Spinoza calls “the best way” among rational humans. We can read his epistemology as the ways in which we understand things and act accordingly. Theo Verbeeck and Dimitris Vardoulakis have also argued that Spinoza's *TP* is influenced in significant ways by Hobbes, and, at times, is a direct response to Hobbes.\textsuperscript{39}

Another important place where Hobbes and Spinoza are similar is in their conception of constructive, generative definitions, that is, how definitions must act as efficient causes for our chains of rational, adequate ideas.\textsuperscript{40} The reason I note their similarity here is because the next chapters of my thesis will deal with the methodological importance of definitions in Spinoza’s

\textsuperscript{36} There are important debates regarding Spinoza’s debt to Hobbes, especially regarding what is found in the second half of the *TP*. A good example is a 2013 conference panel on this influence between Susan James and Dimitris Vardoulakis in the resources of the *Spinoza Research Network*.

\textsuperscript{37} Spinoza, Letter 83, 958. As Pierre Macherey also writes, “We see then how laughable it is to present the Spinozist ‘monism’ as a supersession of Cartesian dualism: the mode of thought put to work by Spinoza produces its effects on a completely different terrain, where these old questions of philosophy are simply invalid (106).” This reading includes understanding the dynamic epistemology in the form of ‘ways’ of knowing.

\textsuperscript{38} Spinoza, *TP*, 16: 528.


\textsuperscript{40} See, for example, Letter 60. In the Sam Shirley translation we read in a footnote that, for Spinoza, definitions are constructive. We also read, “Spinoza's understanding of geometrical construction follows closely that of Thomas Hobbes (913).” In Hobbes see *De Corpore*, 1.vi.13.
epistemology, but I will not return to the specific influence of Hobbes. It is sufficient enough to point to where that influence can be found. In Letter 34, for example, Spinoza is clear how his conception of definition functions:

1. The true definition of each single thing includes nothing other than the simple nature of the thing defined. Hence it follows that:
2. No definition involves or expresses a plurality, or a fixed number of individuals, since it involves and expresses only the nature of the thing as it is in itself...
3. There must necessarily be a positive cause of each thing, through which it exists.
4. This cause must either be placed in the nature and definition of the thing itself (because in effect existence belongs to its nature or is necessarily included in it) or outside the thing.\(^{41}\)

Spinoza's ideas about types of definitions are also made clear in Letter 9 to Simon de Vries in 1663. There, he distinguishes between two forms a definition can take. One form is for a definition to describe the *essence* of something real and, therefore, will automatically be true. The other form is what one may start with to make clear what they are *about to* prove or demonstrate after the definition of a thing is hypothesized. Spinoza uses the nature of definition to distinguish between *formal* and *objective* reality, as Descartes had done before him. We read:

> Therefore a definition either explicates a thing as it exists outside the intellect – and then it should be a true definition, differing from a proposition or axiom only in that the former is concerned only with the essences of things or the essences of the affections of things, whereas the latter has a wider scope, extending also to eternal truths – or it explicates a thing as it is conceived by us, or can be conceived. And in that case it also differs from an axiom and proposition in requiring merely that it be conceived, not conceived as true, as in the case of an axiom.\(^ {42}\)

Spinoza differentiates himself from the Scholastic view of definitions with regard to scholasticism's dependence on proximate genus and specific difference (as already noted in a footnote above). He argues that one cannot define the highest genus of Being (this is an

\(^{41}\) Spinoza, Letter 34, 854. Keep in mind that all attributes express substance for Spinoza, and substance is eternal.

\(^{42}\) Spinoza, Letter 9, 781-782. Further, Spinoza writes, in Chapter Seven of the *TTP*, “Nature does not give us definitions of natural things...the definitions of natural things must be inferred from the diverse actions of nature.” Letter 10 is key to understanding the requirements of definitions, which I will return in the next chapter, but it is good to recall that our “freedom” is “a mode of affirmation or denial.” The less indifference, the more we are free.
impossibility), which also has no differentiation, at least any we can be aware of with certainty. We must begin with an approximation of Being (a general definition not in axiomatic or propositional form). We begin this way because Being is something complex and perfect knowledge of it may not be possible, especially not at the start of our contemplative processes. Nonetheless, our knowledge of Being is generative, even if proximate at the start. This is because our knowledge of Being, according to Spinoza, is expressive in its existence while we gather more true knowledge about it. This includes learning the procedures of adequate knowing which are discussed throughout the rest of this thesis.

The main point is that Spinoza's definitions are affirmative. True definitions relate to both Being and particular affirmative essences (i.e. my adequate knowledge which increases my conatus). Therefore, they cannot be conceived as negative in any sense, such as the nature of specific difference can be. We cannot grasp particulars at the start, but we learn that God or Nature, as self-caused and self-causing, generates and expresses those particulars as part of its (and our) nature. We learn to understand that our thought is, in some way, inseparable from Being and its expressions. As I write in later chapters, Spinoza introduces proximate cause to account for the properties of other created things because only Nature (or God), by definition, can be both the cause of itself and include its own essence.

Definitions must be capable of producing all the properties of the thing in question, that is, they can also be seen as a cause of ideational effects and corporeal expressions because of their force of truth, as well as being expressions of fixed natural laws. As I discuss in the following chapters, a system like Spinoza's requires concepts found within metaphysics because the system provides our point of departure in order to reach further points of understanding about Nature. To deny this is to deny the intelligibility of Being. That which is
immanent cannot be understood by using equations of transcendence or teleology, and, therefore, the infinite and the finite are one and the same thing. An expression of substance can never be a privation for Spinoza because its essence is to always be in existence. That which is expressing itself must be in existence. As finite modes of substance (modifications), we are always expressing ourselves. When we cease to exist as the combination that we are now (in finite death) we simply take on a new combination of expressions of substance.

The above is a definitive break with both Descartes and Hobbes. We also witness some of the more specific differences between Hobbes and Spinoza clearly in Letters 21 and 50 of Spinoza’s correspondence. In Letter 50 Spinoza writes the following very important conceptual distinction when thinking about God or Nature as the same thing:

...that God can only improperly be called one or single, I reply that a thing can be called one or single only in respect of its existence, not of its essence. For we do not conceive things under the category of numbers unless they are included in a common class. For example, he who holds in his hand a penny and a dollar will not think of the number two unless he can apply a common name to the penny and dollar... Hence it is clear that a thing can not be called one or single unless another thing has been conceived which, as I have said, agrees with it. Now since the existence of God is his very essence, it is certain that he who calls God one or single has no true idea of God...matter in its totality, considered without limitation, can have no figure...

Spinoza’s ontology is one of immanence, but to classify it as “one” of anything (substance included) is to rely on ideas of number. Such numerical ideas are an aspect of imaginative (partial) knowledge as we will read in Chapter Two of this thesis next. The ontological truth

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43 There is much to be said about some overlaps with Neoplatonic emanationist metaphysics and its influence, regions of being, and relations to the finite that thinks Being immanently. Yet, Seventeenth Century thinkers created new definitions for terms that cannot be used in direct comparison with older systems. It was the age of rigorous scientific thought and Spinoza was at the forefront of creating a bridge between elements of the physics of ideational and physical force with a system that included the expression of Nature in each finite modal modification. There is nothing negative and there is no privation in his system. God (or Nature) is an immanent cause and not a transitive one for Spinoza, that is, a cause that remains in its effects (as in “involves”) but is not exhausted by them.

44 Spinoza, Letter 50, 892.

45 As Pierre Macherey writes in his work Hegel or Spinoza, “To say there is a single substance is to speak from the imagination that can only consider the absolute negativity, from nothingness, that is from the part of the possible which it envelops (104).”
concerns the nature of thought and extension (the attributes in their essence) to perceive the nature of Being in its expressions. Thus, the truth we express and seek is something other than that which is representational in the form of ideas. That is, our ideas are not representations of reality. Our ideas are reality in the ways in which they are expressed. I briefly mention this here because it is one of the central concerns of Chapter Four of my thesis.

Letter 64 from Spinoza to Schuler confirms this ontological thesis when Spinoza cites E1p10s and how it is related only to the idea we can have of “an absolutely infinite Entity, and not from the fact that there are, or may be, entities having three, four, or more attributes.”46 One absolute (infinite) entity is an affirmative concept without any lack or measure and, therefore, such concepts cannot be applied to it. To posit the lack of any one thing requires a sufficient reason why it is lacking this or that. This also coheres with the idea that the attributes, which are substance, are frameworks for thinking through and expressing substance and not properties or qualities of substance. I mention this here briefly because it is one main point about different kinds of definitions that I was referring to above.47

It is clear that Spinoza was influenced by both Descartes and Hobbes in certain respects, but the former had a unique philosophy of his own. Another way to demonstrate this is by pointing to a place where Spinoza differs from Hobbes in other unique ways. Early Modern scholar Warren Montag, for example, has written on the similarities and differences between Hobbes and Spinoza, particularly regarding their respective views on theological matters and textual interpretation. In his work Bodies, Masses, Power, Montag writes that both

46 Spinoza, Letter 64, 919.
47 As we read in E1p15s, “…there is no vacuum in Nature…all its parts must so concur that there is no vacuum…corporeal substance, insofar as it is a substance, cannot be divided (12).” According to Harold Skulsky, the concept of a unified monist ontology without real parts of any significant, logical distinction was made by two pre-Socratic thinkers: Melissus of Samos and Parmenides, as well as can be found briefly in Plato's Theaetetus, but it is not clear they can be related to Spinoza's conception as a proto-physics of force using his new definitions.
thinkers wrote on Scripture in order to rationally flatten any attempts by religious institutions to use such things against the people of a civil and free society. He also writes, “But there the similarity ends. Hobbes...spent the last forty years of his life defending absolute monarchy. ...Hobbes's discussion of religious matters, both doctrinal and institutional, occupies fully half of Leviathan, a fact until very recently ignored by commentators...”48

Montag continues to address the importance of mystery and its role in interpreting Scripture for Hobbes, something also different from Spinoza: “...not only is it wrong to interpret the Bible [for Hobbes], it is strictly speaking impossible to do so.”51 Whereas, for Spinoza, this is completely the opposite, as is evident in the TTP. The only exception is that Spinoza is clear throughout his works that one can only understand a text if they are familiar with the language and/or correct definitions of the terms being used by the author of the text. Interpreting any text, including the Bible, is possible for Spinoza if one addresses the literal textual meanings of what is written: “Thus, to return to the theme with which we began our discussion of Spinoza's interpretive procedure, the 'parallelism' of nature and Scripture...we see an abandonment of the theme, essential to any hermeneutic, or the interior and exterior of Scripture. There is no reserve meaning, no residue beyond its surface. Meaning and form coincide exactly in the graphic materiality apart from which Scripture has no existence.”49 This is further evidence of the collapse of method and form and ontology and epistemology.

When we consider Descartes' influence on Spinoza the matter becomes more nuanced, especially in light of the method of approaching a text and reading/writing in its materiality and corporeality. As for this latter topic, Spinoza and Descartes might have more in common than was previously believed in many respects. Daniel Selcer writes, “In the Cartesian context, we

49 Ibid. 19-20.
need God to create matter, set it in motion, and establish the laws of nature governing motion... Natural order need not be due to the perfection of the created world...all we need is extended matter in motion and the persistence of 'ordinary laws of nature.' Together these generate an orderly and regular world.”

As already noted, Spinoza's system is a response to Cartesianism, but, as Steven Nadler writes, Spinoza was too original a thinker to be an “uncritical follower” of Cartesianism. He was well versed in Descartes' philosophy by the 1650s and found the latter's work “liberating” in many ways. In the preface of the *PPD*, Spinoza held Descartes' intellectual capacities in high regard early in his life, being influenced by the totality of Descartes' system. Nadler continues, “The new dualistic metaphysical picture of the world that, with the complete separation of the mental from the material, provided the foundations for a purely mechanistic physics would allow for fruitful, clear, and nonabstruse explanations of the phenomena of nature... The unity of the Cartesian scientific enterprise...would promote the quest for certainty in various disciplines.”

As chapters Three and Four of this thesis will demonstrate, we can start to recognize a type of physical mechanics and proto-physics of ideational force in Spinoza’s system if we conceive of the mechanics between actions and ideas as those *effects* which are produced by organic combinations of bodies in interaction with each other. We also accomplish this if we conceive of physics as those continuous microscopic and macroscopic interactions between parts of bodies (and certain kinds of ideas) which create the larger organic arrangements of mechanics in expression. It is not hard to consider Spinoza’s scientific mind when we read what Ken Clatterbaugh writes when he notes, “Like Descartes, Spinoza was a serious scientist; his work in optics was both theoretical and practical. Spinoza was widely respected by his

51 Nadler, *Spinoza*, 166, 167.
contemporaries for the microscopes and telescopes that he constructed.”

Consider what Helen Hattab writes about the renewed study of mechanistic principles of nature in the Renaissance leading up to the Early Modern period: “In recasting mechanics as a science between mathematics and physics as opposed to an art, these commentators brought to the foreground a form of explanation that combined geometrical principles with considerations regarding the physical causes of motion.” This is yet another reason why I categorize Spinoza's system as a type of philosophical physics. Gordon Chalmers writes, “In 1649 Pierre Gassendi was to rationalize the new experiments of all sciences under the complete atomic system of Epicurus.” It is unclear how influential Pierre Gassendi's texts were on Spinoza, but we do know the latter greatly admired Greek atomism, including *De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius.

Jumping ahead to the movements of the new Western scientific method, in Francis Bacon we find the beginning of a formal scientific method and many references to what it is to think about true knowledge of the world in a scientific manner. According to Bacon, knowledge is power. Gaining true knowledge involves an increase in our intellectual and material power. Gassendi, on the other hand, challenges Aristotle's definition “*quatens in potential*” for it was

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52 Clatterbaugh, *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy*, 129-130. Clatterbaugh continues, “Spinoza went beyond the construction of scientific instruments and employed them to observe astronomical bodies as well as small bodies in the human blood.”

53 Helen Hattab, “From Mechanics to Mechanism: The *Quaestiones Mechanicae* and Descartes’ Physics,” in *The Science of Nature in the Seventeenth Century*, ed., Peter Anstey et al. (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 100. There are interesting debates about Greek origins in mathematics and the methods employed by philosophers then and now. For example, Benno Artmann, in his work on Euclidean geometry, writes, “Mathematicians tend to stress isomorphisms; they like to see the same structure in different guises. By contrast, a philologist puts great value on expression and literary form. Mathematicians are accustomed to separating the content of a proposition from its form of expression, whereas philologists are likely to stress the particularity of different forms of expression (pp. 146-147).”

54 Gordon Chalmers, “The Loadstone and the Understanding of Matter…,” *Philosophy of Science* 4, no. 1 (1937), 75-95.

55 It might be noted here that Robert Boyle’s work *The Origin of Forms and Qualities* re-introduced mechanical philosophy with force, including “the belief that changes in the physical realm are best understood in terms of matter (corpuscles) in motion and that the physical world is a well-ordered machine.” Ken Clatterbaugh, *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy* 1637-1739, 157-158.
not logical to him. One reason I mention this brief historical point is because there are continuous debates within Spinoza scholarship on both the influence of atomism on his systematic philosophy and because of debates regarding how similar to (or different from) Spinoza was with Aristotelian philosophy. Again, Spinoza’s system is unique and occurs within the context of both the new scientific method, as well as versions of scholastic vocabulary that he alters.

Within philosophical circles in the Seventeenth Century novel debates on the nature of causality, force, and motion arose with fervor. Ken Clatterbaugh writes, “Aristotle's views on causation had a far-reaching effect in the causation debate of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries... [His] idea that the efficient cause is a particular substance creates considerable mischief throughout much of the debate, since it runs counter to modern scientific explanations that typically identify states of substances as the (efficient) cause.”

The topic of causality and matter in motion dominated science and philosophy throughout the Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries. As Clatterbaugh notes, Descartes “represents the beginnings of the modern concern about causation, and he makes a conscious effort to transform philosophical thinking about causation. Hume, on the other hand, represents the culmination of several tendencies in the debate...”

Where Descartes made cause an eternal truth of the universe and the idea of God understood as the first cause to which all else are effects, Spinoza's system has several variations of ways to think about causality as we will read in the following chapters. More

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56 This particular reference to Gassendi is referenced by D. Des Chene in Chapter 2 of the work *Physiologia...* Des Chene also calls Aristotle's definition *actus entis in potentia* “mysterious” at best.
58 Ibid, 2-3. Of course, arguments about and systems which rely on issues of causality do not culminate in David Hume’s philosophy at all, as is evident in the work of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and even current debates in quantum physics as just a few examples.
importantly, Spinoza believes that substance, God, nature, and modal expressions of the laws of nature are all immanent in their unfolding; they vary only in their expressions of perfection and degrees of power. After, G. W. Leibniz deemed causality a “self-evident logical law” and David Hume demonstrated how issues of causation are products of a sensing, perceiving human mind (of which real cause and effect processes are, in the end, necessary fictions of the imagination). Of course, Immanuel Kant attempted to provide us with a combination of these necessary empirical and automatically rational processes of the creation of concepts. Later, G. W. F. Hegel would expand our definition of cause and effect to include and subsume each other within their otherwise respective definitions, and Bertrand Russell argued in 1913 that advanced sciences never employ the term in any seriously useful manner in the contemporary world. For Spinoza, every effect involves its cause(s). In addition, as we understand our own power of thought and action as an adequate cause, the meaning and definitions of human powered causes and effects can alter.

Two fundamental notions that must be properly understood as always in connection to each other in order to consider Spinoza's proto-physics of force and motion are the concepts of “cause” and “conatus.” As Ed Curley writes, “...unraveling Spinoza's concept of causation is absolutely fundamental to understanding his philosophy...the crucial notion for understanding Spinoza's concept of causation is that of a law of nature.”59 As we will read in this thesis, we can add to our understanding of causality as well. Curley continues:

Ordinary thinking about causality identifies the event instantiating the antecedent as the cause of the effect. Spinoza's conception of causality regards it as only a partial cause and insists that we regard the aspect of reality which the law of nature describes as (at least) equally necessary to the occurrence of the effect and, hence (at least) equally entitled to be regarded as a cause...Spinoza regarded the series of fixed and eternal

59 Ed Curley, “Donagan's Spinoza,” Ethics 4, no. 1 (1993): 114-134. Curley believes Spinoza's definition of Nature can be explained as something more than “the totality of finite things,” but does not go so far as to believe in an atomistic conception of Nature. This last conclusion is debatable.
things as really a more fundamental cause than the series of singular, changeable things...\(^{60}\)

God is not a concept which stands alone (as a real thing) causing all other things to occur unless the added concept of one organic whole ("Nature") is paired with it at all times. This is Spinoza’s monism. The effects and expressions we find as nature involve their cause, but an eternal undivided substance does not fall under a category of numerical distinction.

One of his primary goals incorporates the new scientific understanding of the universe with the structures of human knowledge and actions as laws of Nature. In one of his letters we read about his dedication to scientific and philosophical thought, “Deep speculative thought, in my view, has nothing to do with Scripture.”\(^{61}\) And, as Herman De Dijn writes, “For a seventeenth-century thinker like Spinoza, philosophy was fundamentally the same as science.”\(^{62}\) The problem becomes what concept of “God” is best to use with the concept of “cause?” How would they both work alongside laws of Nature and the dynamics of human psychology at the same time, especially if such a system is absent of teleology or an anthropomorphic God? This is not a new concern in the history of philosophy, but how Spinoza handles it is novel. Steven Nadler writes:

> Questions about the nature of causal relations occupy a central position in early modern philosophy. The prominence of this topic in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century thought can, in large measure, be traced to a specific historical problem: the need to reconcile an emerging scientific view of the natural world – mechanistic physics – with traditional beliefs about the relation between God and his creation.\(^{63}\)

The order we find in Nature, for Spinoza, will include what it is for finite individuals to

\(^{60}\) Curley, “Donagan's Spinoza,” 126.

\(^{61}\) Spinoza, Letter 21, 827.


\(^{63}\) Steven Nadler, Causation in Early Modern Philosophy (State College: PSU, 1993), introduction. Spinoza seems to have believed the same. As we read in Chapter 6 of the TTP, “…God's decrees and commandments, and consequently God's providence, are in truth nothing but Nature's order; that is to say, when Scripture tells us that this or that was accomplished by God or by God's will, nothing more is intended than that it came about by accordance with Nature's law and order…”
gain and express clear and distinct knowledge with increasing force and activity. This is only possible, at least at first, if one develops the ability to think axiomatically (analytically and synthetically) in a deductive manner about the definitions of God, Nature, attribute, mode, human essence, and perseverance. Spinoza writes in the *TTP* that an idea about God's existence “is not self-evident,” and, therefore, axiomatic truths of logical deduction are necessary for a finite mind to adequately understand both the essence and existence of God (as Nature). Axiomatic truths of logical deduction are necessary, and these truths and deductions are “so firm and incontrovertible that there can neither be, nor be conceived, any power that could call them into question.”64 At first glance, this sounds like an appeal to a type of mathematical certainty, but how can one put human passions and the imagination into an exact mathematical formula? As this thesis will discuss, we become the adequate causes of our transformations if we understand these relations in the right way, but we are neither completely free of the passions nor of imaginative knowledge (as sense perception, language, memory etc.). In E4p4, for example, we read, “The power by which singular things (and consequently any man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, or Nature (by 1P24C), not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence (by 3P7). The man's power, therefore...is part of God's or Nature's infinite power, that is (by 1P34), of its essence.”65 In other words, God is Nature.

Because the actions of thought (intellectual affections and patterns) and extension (ratios of motion and rest) are simultaneous for Spinoza, and because our understanding of what definitions constitute is involved in how we continue to comprehend cause and effect, what becomes important to focus on is how we understand enduring patterns of motion and

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rest in our habits of both thought and extension. This understanding increases or decreases our power to exist and thrive (our *conatus*). Thus, our understanding of the ontological and the epistemological collapse can be understood adequately as one organic whole, especially if our only reference in the attribute of thought are our own singular chains of ideas.

If there is no real concept of causality except that which is applicable to particular things (because of the collapse of ontology with epistemology), then Spinoza's insistence that there is no causality between the attributes (which are fixed, eternal expressions of natural laws) becomes intriguing. I address why exactly in the following chapters in depth. This insight is especially important in light of the Dutch translation used during Spinoza's life of *inblijvende oorzaak* for *causa immanens* –“a cause which remains in its effects” – if particular (singular) things and their essence are understood as the effects of Nature's laws. If these effects are our knowledge (and what we gather other forms of knowledge from), then one *cannot* conclude that Spinoza was an epistemological naturalist (or that he was not one).

Spinoza extracts and produces real knowledge using experience (imagination) and combining it with knowledge from reason (second kind of knowing) into one formulation of conceptual force. And, although each kind of knowledge is distinct, they are combined to create more powerful effects if one understands how to apply such combinations with more force and creativity or efficiency. Concepts are never simple. They are complex combinations and arrangements of various types of knowledge at once. To be an epistemical naturalist, Spinoza would have to reduce all knowledge claims to scientific fact. As much as his system was influenced by both mathematics and the scientific method, he does not reduce all human knowledge and experience to scientific fact alone.

To combine cause with conatus in the way Spinoza does is an original contribution to
philosophy, as I will demonstrate in chapters Three through Five. His notion of conatus and the
affects are central to the Ethics. In addition, his doctrine of the passions and their balance with
reasoning capacities is also unique, although influenced by Descartes’ category of the passions
specifically. Spinoza seems to have interpreted Descartes’s work with his own system already in
mind, yet is very clear in the PPD that he feels he understands Descartes correctly. One
significant claim that Spinoza will continue to work with (although alter) which is also found in
Descartes’s system includes that the “chief rule [for Descartes] was to enumerate the simple
ideas out of which all others are compounded and to scrutinize each one separately. For when he
could perceive simple ideas clearly and distinctly, he would doubtless understand with the same
clarity and distinctness all the other ideas compounded from those simple ideas.”

What a “clear and distinct idea” is defined and understood as in the Early Modern period
seems to shift in description from earlier philosophical systems. According to Stephen
Gaukroger, for Descartes, the better we become at intuitive knowing (which includes a form of
strong image-making coupled with an analysis of rational deductions), the more reliable our
deductive processes will be as a result. This sounds very similar to what we find in Spinoza,
but in a completely different material expression of force between types of knowing. That is,
Spinoza defines substance very differently from Descartes. Ideas are not expressions of matter
in the material sense but are of “substance” conceived as force and motion occurring
simultaneously among respective attributes. Clear and distinct ideas in Descartes, according to
Gaukroger, are not to be understood in relation to their external causes, though this is not true
for Spinoza in the same way. Where these two thinkers truly differ is on the definition of matter
and the expression of matter in motion. Yet, both overlap in their epistemological agreement to

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66 Spinoza, PPD, 1: 121.
some degree. For example, they agree that we must find the best way that we are capable of by recognizing not only the simplest elements of things in our most powerful, deductive ideas, but also discovering the best method for gaining true knowledge.\textsuperscript{68} The topic of method is crucial because, for example, in Spinoza’s epistemology we discover that our mind does not have ideas, it is ideas. Therefore, having only one single (simple) idea without any other ideas accompanying it is an impossibility in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology.

Further, in Spinoza we find that the internal/external distinction, especially where it involves the nature of which cause is responsible for which effect, will dissipate. Laws of Nature include external causes, but they also include what we might think of as internal causes as well, yet all is one substance. For Descartes, we are to focus on strengthening our personal, internal method of the most efficient analysis of information. In Spinoza, by contrast, we learn that with an increased power of rational thought we are able to become more aware of the chains of causal connections between our ideas with more force. The awareness of rational force is a kind of vividness or distinctness in recognition and power. It is a synthesis of types of knowledge. As I explore in later chapters, Spinoza is much more interested in what it means to synthesize knowledge in order to create larger, more powerful bodies of ideas. He uses the term “bodies,” but this notion is not meant to designate material borders of separate entities (although it can mean this when needed as well). The concept of “body,” among other things, designates constant transformations of ratios of motion and rest between varying interactions in Nature and different kinds of bodies. Further, without ideational synthesis between types of knowledge, the increased power of rational thought is not possible. The synthesis itself creates more power because it is a combination of increasingly adequate knowledge into one body of homeostatic

\textsuperscript{68} Gaukroger, Descartes: an intellectual biography, 114. Gaukroger notes that Descartes is clear about this in Rule 6 of the Regulae.
expression continually in motion with greater force.

In this and other ways, Spinoza’s system is not a historical continuation of the unfolding of rationality from Descartes’ system to his own. Still, Spinoza did refine and respond to Descartes’ epistemology, as did many of his time. As Pierre Macherey writes:

The geometric 'translation' that Spinoza gives Cartesian philosophy is thus not a way of saying the same thing in another way: it is even then a way of taking a position to distance himself in relation to it. The Ethics, in which Spinoza develops a philosophical content completely different from that of the Cartesian system, is itself ordine geometrico demonstrata, that is, argued synthetically, in a progression that goes from cause to effects.69

If we are speaking about only “method,” then they both believe in synthesis through analysis, but, as Gaukroger writes, Descartes's rejection of deductive synthesis was specific to that Aristotelian tradition passed down to him of using a certain kind of syllogistic logic in order to produce and convince oneself of their clear and distinct knowledge:

Syllogistic [reasoning] relies on rules imposed from the outside, in Descartes' view, whereas his rules are designed to capture an internal process which operates with a criterion of truth and falsity that is beyond question. This is that we accept as true all and only that of which we have a 'clear and distinct' perception... Descartes' advocacy of analysis at the expense of synthesis is an extremely important feature of his method, for it amounts to the advocacy of a problem-solving approach as the method of discovery, and the rejection of a deductive approach... Synthesis, on the other hand, shows how a solution is to be derived from first principles...70

The question of the production of certain knowledge is what is at issue above. There is a difference between learning the rules for expressing and demonstrating what one knows as compared to what it is to produce something well. Spinoza's method is more about synthesis between types of knowledge and their corresponding motions or arrangements in ways that enhance one's capacity for more adequate knowing and more intense forms of expression.71

70 Gaukroger, Descartes..., 117, 124, 125.
71 For similarities between the two on the importance of the method of analysis and synthesis see Dan Selcer's work Philosophy and the Book... already noted in this chapter.
There are other major differences from Descartes that should be addressed in this opening chapter. Spinoza, unlike Descartes, does not have a notion of substance dualism in any respect. Free will and the soul are illusions for him as well, but “free necessity” is something that is what all of Nature does: “…that thing is free which exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature... So you see that I place freedom, not in free decision, but in free necessity.”\(^72\) He differs starkly from Descartes in this respect. “Descartes, for example, believed that if the freedom of the human being is to be preserved, the soul must be exempt from the kind of deterministic laws that rule over the material universe.”\(^73\) In a letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza writes that “the will differs from this or that volition in the same way as...humanity differs from this or that human being...the will is nothing more than a mental construction (\textit{ens rationis}), it can in no way be said to be the cause of this or that volition. Particular volitions, since they need a cause to exist, cannot be said to be free...”\(^74\)

As well, Spinoza’s concept of the first kind of knowledge of the imagination must be classified as real ideas, however partial or inadequate. This is not always the case for Descartes according to certain interpretations. In addition, Richard Popkin writes that although Spinoza was influenced by Descartes, they differ greatly on the nature of essence (and substance) in particular.\(^75\) Our mind, for example, is not an independent substance for Spinoza, as it is for Descartes. Our mind (as ideas) is \textit{about} our body and its affections, but this interaction of concepts and processes (as an affect) will result in that which is also in relation to our adequate

\(^72\) Spinoza, Letter 58, 908, 909. We can also point here to E1Def7 and 1p17 for more support, as well as Chapter 20 of the \textit{TTP} where Spinoza writes that being human includes making judgments, and having the capacity to make judgments is itself a virtue. It may be “free necessity,” but there are still infinite variations in how singular expressions of the laws of Nature of thought and extension can be expressed.

\(^73\) Nadler, \textit{Spinoza}, 237.

\(^74\) Spinoza, Letter 2, 763. Also, see E1p32 for more support.

conception of God and Nature in original ways.\textsuperscript{76} Spinoza is clear how he feels about Descartes in this respect in a letter to Oldenburg in late 1661:

Secondly, you ask me what errors I see in the philosophy of Descartes and Bacon. In this request, too, I shall try to oblige you, although it is not my custom to expose the errors of others. The first and most important error is this, that they have gone far astray from knowledge of the first cause and origin of all things. Second, they have failed to understand the true nature of the human mind. Thirdly, they have never grasped the true cause of error. Only those who are completely destitute of all learning and scholarship can fail to see the critical importance of true knowledge of these three points.\textsuperscript{77}

Clearly Spinoza was interested in demonstrating how the concept of substance can act as a first cause for all effects to follow, but first causes are not the issue. The point is that Spinoza felt his understanding and development of a theory of knowledge was novel in comparison to some of the influential epistemological systems of his time.

How, then, can Spinoza incorporate any metaphysics into his otherwise substance monism which is one organic, infinitely moving and transforming whole? What this metaphysics is understood as is still an important debate in Early Modern scholarship. Is it pantheism, as so many have claimed, or something more spiritually related? Spinoza notes specifically in Letter 73 that he is \textit{not} a pantheist. He writes that his treatise on theology and politics (the \textit{TTP}) does not identify God with Nature, by which his critics of such claims tended to includes “mass-matter disposed into bodies…” On this assumption, Spinoza writes, “they have gone totally astray.”\textsuperscript{78} These are absolutely telling passages for understanding all of Spinoza's works. He is clearly stating that he is \textit{not} a materialist. That is, his concept of substance cannot be defined as (or reduced to) actual physical matter.

Spinoza's materially dynamic system of motion and force (as a system of effects) continues to be relevant for our understanding of Nature, including human nature, today. We

\textsuperscript{76} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p11: 13. Also, for his argument against dualism one can see E2p7 and 3p2.

\textsuperscript{77} Spinoza, Letter 2, 762.

\textsuperscript{78} Spinoza, Letter 73, 942.
can achieve more adequate understanding with the support of the most recent interdisciplinary scholarship on what it is to learn something, as well as what it is to use the imagination in increasingly powerful and rationally productive ways. In Chapter 4 of the TTP we read, “...everything in Nature involves and expresses the conception of God in proportion to its essence and perfection; and therefore we acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena.”79 The more we learn about Nature and ourselves as natural phenomena the more we gain perfect knowledge of God. The more we gain perfect knowledge of God, the more we are expressing God's (and Nature's) power at that moment. There is a distinctly non-teleological, yet metaphysical character in all of Spinoza's epistemology. As Beth Lord writes, “...to call Spinoza a materialist would ignore the central place of immaterial ideas in his system.”80

Dan Selcer agrees, writing that Spinoza's conception of materiality includes understanding that “...in the physical, metaphysical, and political registers materiality must be understood as a dynamic, dispositional theory of constitutive motion rather than as a straightforward thesis of the reducibility of sensible entities to their micro-level physical constituents.” Selcer continues that Spinoza's dynamic materialism includes:

…the position that nature may be explicated by reference to bodies conceived as complex patterns of movement as well as equally complex and constantly mutating articulations of a power or force to act and to exist... It does not dispense with immaterial objects such as ideas and minds, but it does involve the claim that nature (or being) is fully explicable from the perspective of matter conceived as productive power.81

The above sentiment is carried on throughout the rest of the TTP and several of Spinoza's other works. It is also consistent with what is found in the Ethics more systematically as I will

79 Spinoza, TTP, 4:429.
demonstrate in the following chapters. In a footnote to Chapter 6 of the *TTP*, Spinoza reminds us, “Here, by Nature, I do not mean simply matter and its modifications, but infinite other things besides matter.”\(^82\) Clearly Spinoza's notion of substance is not restricted to ideas about matter as material/physical substance, but is more about the relationships between bodies in motion (physics) and the production of adequate forms and uses of knowledge (ideas as effects). Even more intriguing is a comment Spinoza makes in Letter 75 in 1675 (two years before his death) to Henry Oldenburg when he writes, “...do we petty men have such an understanding of Nature that we can determine how far its force and power extend, and what is beyond its power?”\(^83\) Spinoza wanted us to interpret his system according to the language most relied on by philosophers and scientists of his day only, including the new ways various terms (such as “substance”) could be re-defined.

Descartes, for example, in his efforts to transform our thinking about causation, seems to be very clear about the power of the intellect and use of rationality in his conclusions in the third meditation of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and in his replies to Arnauld's objections of his system. Descartes' position on the nature of all ideas includes:

...the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively <or representatively> in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing. And although the reality which I am considering in my ideas is merely objective reality, I must not on that account suppose that the same reality need not exist formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is enough for it to be present in them objectively... And although one idea may perhaps originate from another, there cannot be an infinite regress here; eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally <and in fact> all the reality <or perfection> which is present only objectively <or representatively> in the idea. So it is clear to me...that the ideas in me are like <pictures or> images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken...\(^84\)

\(^82\) Spinoza, *TTP*, 6: 446.
\(^83\) Spinoza, Letter 75, 946.
\(^84\) Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham et al. (New York: Cambridge, 1984), 3:29. In *Meditation Six*, Descartes also writes, “…for by ‘nature,’ taken generally, I understand nothing other than God himself or the ordered network of created things which was instituted by God.”
It is clear in this passage that Descartes is distinguishing between the ideas he has about things and the perfection of things themselves. He is using a concept of representation in a way Spinoza does not use. We can have an adequate idea, for example, of what an infinite mode is in Spinoza's system, and this idea cannot possibly be an image. Ed Curley writes, “It is a striking feature of Spinoza's ontology that his infinite modes seem to have no analogue in Cartesian ontology... [Descartes] makes no distinction between infinite and finite modes.”

The above passage shows that Descartes believed our modes of finite thinking (in the form of ideas) are imperfect in some way, but that they have derived from a perfect “primary idea” whose formal essence is in them objectively. Yet, can we conclude that Descartes and Spinoza differ here completely? In some ways I think we can. Take, for example, what Spinoza writes about modes in the opening of the Ethics. In 1p8s2 he is clear:

> But if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of P7 [that it pertains to the nature of substance to exist]. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone, and would be numbered among the common notions. For by substance they would understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that the knowledge of which does not require the knowledge of any other thing. But by modifications they would understand what is in another, those things whose concept is formed from the concept of the thing in which they are.

In Descartes we find that there are images of sense data that are corporeal and there are images of ideas. But what is an image of an idea exactly? This question is important to consider in Spinoza and for the rest of this thesis as well. Detlev Patzold writes that, for Descartes, “...imagination works with 'pictures' in the sense of mental images. They are mental or inner psychological images of ideas, to be distinguished from images of sense perception. The latter

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85 Curley, “Donagan’s Spinoza,” 127.
86 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p8s2: 4.
have a more direct connection to external objects, of which they are representations...”87 Ideas for Descartes are never true nor false in-themselves, but, as we will read in later chapters, for Spinoza adequate ideas are always true in-themselves. The point is that, for Spinoza, imaginative ideas are more than just images, one of the three kinds of thought we are capable of. In other words, for Spinoza imaginative ideas can be images (in identity), but they can also be something else too. I elaborate on this in depth in Chapter Two next.

Regarding the distinction from Descartes here, Pierre Macherey writes, “...taken as themselves, ideas are nothing but passive representations. They are neither true nor false; truth is a function of judgment, which animate ideas through the intermediary of will.”88 As noted above, Spinoza, unlike Descartes, does not believe in real free will but only free necessity. For Spinoza, the parallelism between thought and extension is more important anyway. Some aspects of imaginative knowledge are connected to external objects in the form of sense perceptions, which are experienced internally as one's mind and are about the affections of our body. But the images of the imagination are also the product and production of one's memories and language use, the latter of which makes the issues of both imaginative knowledge and representation much more complex.

For Spinoza, the question remains if ideas are representations of their objects (as images or otherwise) or are they singular things in-themselves that cannot be defined as or reduced to mere representations? This will be the case, for example, if he can demonstrate that our ideas can also be adequately understood as affects. If so, and if it is the case that we can increase and decrease our conatus according to the force of our affects, then we are no longer talking about only types of ideas and their content or perfection. To speak about affects in Spinoza is to

understand both types of knowledge (ideas) and the affections they are coupled with at all times. I demonstrate the importance of this in chapters Three and Four specifically.

In a similar way, I demonstrate in later chapters that just because we need and rely upon reflexive knowledge in order to increase our power of thought and action does not entail that all ideas and knowledge can be defined as representations of reality. On the contrary, reflexive knowing can produce new knowledge as an effect(s). The new combination of ideas hold the increased levels of ideational and corporeal power. Truth is not a measure of adequacy, in other words; it is adequacy and power itself. Reflexive knowing does not mean that we are relying on ideas as representational for the sole reason that, in reflection, we produce new ideas and new information that we did not have before. Further, as William Sacksteder writes, “The logic of each concept presupposes relation to other things: they (with whatever self so views them) are necessarily more than one.”

There are other ways in which Descartes' writings affected Spinoza's development, one of which is the way Descartes continues to prioritize the nature of our ideas about the power and reality of substance. He writes, “...I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself.” I find a parallel here with the very first proposition of Spinoza's Ethics that is striking. In E1p1 we read, “A substance is prior in nature to its affections.” In fact, this proposition must be conceptually prior in our understanding in order for the logic of the axiomatic method to work in producing new knowledge. The idea of my body is the primary idea that I am aware of, but I learn that my

90 Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, 31.
91 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p1: 2.
ideas and ratios of motion and rest are also expressions of one unified substance. As I demonstrate in chapters three and four, when I learn this I also learn that the affect becomes the perceived cause of my new ideas. To perceive myself as a (proximate) cause is to perceive substance in its essence for Spinoza. The former is a modal modification as an expression of substance and the latter is substance itself. They are, of course, “one and the same thing” expressed in different ways. As Nadler writes, this too relates to Descartes in a sense because Spinoza found “that within a basically Cartesian framework he could begin to pursue his own philosophical agenda...”92 Piet Steenbakkers writes that Spinoza's “mature doctrine is original and cannot be reduced to its Cartesian context.”93 Spinoza's own writings support this conclusion. For example, at the end of Letter 58, late in Spinoza's young life, he writes that his system is not Cartesian, as well as that his ideas on both necessity and free will are logically consistent throughout his work: “If you will examine my opinions attentively, you will see that they are quite consistent.”94

For both Descartes and Spinoza, the first and true idea we are aware of is that we have a body and that we are thinking. We are aware that there is something doing the thinking and that we are having ideas about the ways in which our mind and body are affected as an organic whole. The difference, for Spinoza, is that our mind is ideas, instead of being understood as a separate entity or container that has ideas. We continuously reflect on our interactions with others and with our own ideas. Both Descartes and Spinoza each turn their focus to the awareness that one is having thoughts, ideas about other ideas, ideas about one's environment, ideas of sense perception, and ideas about the ways our bodies are affected by other bodies. Spinoza writes that a mind cannot conceive anything unless it also perceives itself as having the

94 Spinoza, Letter 58, 910.
ability to have ideas about the world. In other words, to have ideas about things in the world is to already understand a certain type of ideational force about singular causes and effects.

In the following chapters I will argue for a type of proto-physics of ideational force and motion found in Spinoza’s *Ethics* specifically. Perhaps he does not have a system of physics as we would define it today, but it certainly was, in its time, a new system of philosophy concerned with principles of motion, rest, matter, change, proportion, and dynamics of force between ideas and actions. In addition, Spinoza's notion of substance can be understood epistemologically and ontologically as immanent. As we will read, Spinoza's system is a truly dynamic, vibrant, and deductively lucid philosophy if you can tolerate the strict axiomatic format it uses to create real material and ideational effects in its readers. Nadler writes:

Spinoza's conception of adequate knowledge reveals an unrivaled optimism in the cognitive powers of the human being. Not even Descartes believed that we could know all of Nature and its innermost secrets with the degree of depth and certainty that Spinoza thought possible... Most remarkably, because Spinoza thought that the adequate knowledge of any object, and of Nature as whole, involves a thorough knowledge of God...he also had no scruples about claiming that we can, at least in principle, know God perfectly and adequately.  

Although this is true, Spinoza also felt that it would be ignorant to believe that we can know about all of Nature, for there are infinite ways in which it can be expressed.

As noted above, Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology includes three types of knowledge, imaginative, adequate (rational), and intuitive. We are seeking adequate knowledge about the laws of thought and extension, which includes what he calls the *intellectual love of God*. Adequate knowledge for a finite individual is knowledge (common notions) about laws of Nature and the common properties between things. Adequate ideas can include knowledge of both universals and particulars at once. For example, in E1ax5 we read, “Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the

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95 Nadler, *Spinoza*, 236, 237.
concept of one does not involve the concept of the other.”96 There is a question as to how much Spinoza was influenced by Euclid's use of common notions. Euclid’s common notions have been defined as “axioms about the behavior of general magnitudes, not only geometric objects.”97 The idea of magnitude can be assessed in Spinoza in relation to his concept of the proportions and ratios of motion and rest, as well as in relation to the force between types of ideas. I take up this topic specifically in Chapter Three.

Intuitive knowledge is more efficient knowledge of singular activity and essences, where one is certain that this activity increases the power of Nature in some way. This latter type of knowledge is the only kind that Spinoza felt could be called the intellectual love of God. I discuss all three types of knowledge (or ways of knowing) separately in chapters Two through Five. I take up the nature of ideational force between types of ideas, the production of affects, and the problem of representation in chapter Four specifically.

This brings up an important epistemological point about the nature of how we define what an idea or concept is, how ideas can be used, and how ideas can be transformed or combined to create ever more powerfully clear and distinct singular effects. As Hasana Sharp writes, “Importantly, [for Spinoza] our ideas are no less natural than our bodies. Being parts of nature, our ideas encounter resistance and assistance to their thriving from nonhuman as well as human sources.”98 Although this is true, in a letter dated 1666, Spinoza also writes:

...there must necessarily be a method whereby we can direct and interconnect our clear and distinct perceptions, and that the intellect is not, like the body, at the mercy of chance... Indeed, all the clear and distinct perceptions that we form can arise only from other clear and distinct perceptions which are in us, and they acknowledge no other cause outside us.99

96 Spinoza, Ethics, 1ax5:2.
97 Artmann, Euclid, 19.
99 Spinoza, Letter 37, 861.
If this is true then how can we find any similarities between the parallelism of thought and extension at all? I will demonstrate in Chapter Four that it is through understanding the combination of the two attributes into affects that allow us to adequately reflect on our ideas and actions. I believe this is Spinoza’s point about method in the above citation.

Spinoza's concentration on how to recognize and reflect upon dynamic transitions between types of ideas *is* how we can enhance our power of comprehension in reflective awareness and “control our evaluations.” When our power of comprehension is enhanced, our power of acting in affirmative, rational, and creative ways is simultaneously also enhanced.

Spinoza asks us to consider the “best ways” to use reason. As found in chapters Three and Five of the *TP*, to conclude that a people (or nation) are not at war is one thing, but to say they are enjoying peace is quite another matter. In other words, one does not automatically follow from the other when we are reasoning well. I realize this might include drawing some consistency between Spinoza’s many works that could be problematic. There are better ways for reason to continue to enhance its power. This includes creating real effects in which we are truly experiencing joy from our ideas. Rational actions will involve learning what the best ways are for our understanding to thrive. As I demonstrate in the next chapter and in my conclusion, this is why learning how reason can enhance certain elements of imaginative knowledge is so important.

I read Spinoza's second kind of knowledge to include a proto-physics of force between types of ideas, as well as of the perpetuation of adequate understanding and joy. Beth Lord writes, “When the mind considers its power of thinking, it is necessarily active, and so we feel joy...”\(^{100}\) This type of joy has multiple dimensions, some of which directly involve an educated

imagination which is capable of using more powerful and affirmative imaginings (memories, words, images etc.) over those ideas that are less powerful or reduce our power. An informed use of the imagination only produces stronger imaginings, which reason understands and uses to its benefit. This takes practice, habit formation in recognizing idea-types that we are relying on (and why we are relying on them), and enhanced attention in conscious reflection.

In summary, the main point is that the use of rationality plays a distinctive role in shaping its discriminative powers. How we reflect on what we are thinking about, especially in more trying times, becomes particularly important. Included in this are the possible differences in the level of power of our imagination based on cultural conditioning and the environments in which we learn. This is not just a matter of recognizing that a better education is good for us. It is a matter of truly comprehending how the attributes of thought and extension behave according to respective laws of Nature, yet act in parallel to each other in a combined way as affects. These affects are what increase or decrease our power to think well, creatively with more force, and, therefore, to act with more reason and power as well.

When the intellect educates itself about how to eliminate reactions and passions that diminish its power or the power of others, and instead consider everything that is occurring according to the laws of thought and extension, then we can understand with more deductive force to our benefit. What we recognize is that the logic involved in understanding how laws of Nature work proves what is already necessarily the case, as well as what then can result from that level of understanding as ideational effects, physical behaviors, and the power of the two combined as affects. This is why I take up the power of imaginative knowledge and the topic of racism in the conclusion of this thesis. Spinoza can be read as a white ally in this history of Western philosophy because, as one example, his system teaches us how to better recognize when our
imaginative (partial) knowledge is decreasing our power to thrive. If our rational adequate knowledge and actions can help transform passive imaginative ideas, the errors in our knowledge and reflective power will diminish. As Beth Lord notes, we are not “defined by” our rationality: “Affectivity means we are intermeshed with things outside our physical and mental boundaries – things that affect and change us constantly.”\(^\text{101}\) I use Spinoza’s theory of affectivity and dynamic epistemology to demonstrate, in the end, that such a system can eliminate racist ideas and notions.

The joy we experience from our increased power of thought and action is a force which propels us. Yet, as we read in Chapter 16 of the \textit{TTP}, “...Nature's bounds are not set by the laws of human reason which aim only at man's true interest and his preservation, but by infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of Nature, of which man is but a particle.”\(^\text{102}\) To “think in Spinoza” is to think about the infinity of an organic substance with finite modal modifications and the essence of singular things, and to do so in a way that allows for the rational comprehension of what it is to be a finite expression of substance with greater individual and collective vitality. The next chapter evaluates the nature of imaginative knowledge specifically and describes how to better recognize and use the ideas of the imagination in order to strengthen our capacities to reason with more force.

\(^{101}\) Lord, \textit{Spinoza Beyond Philosophy}, 7.
\(^{102}\) Spinoza, \textit{TTP}, 16: 528.
CHAPTER TWO
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMAGINATIVE KNOWLEDGE
IN SPINOZA’S DYNAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

“What is now proved was once only imagined...”
-William Blake

“Without fantasy, reality itself disintegrates, and the subject confronts the Real as a traumatic and incomprehensible force.” -Japhy Wilson

Introduction and History of the Concept of Imaginative Knowledge

Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology found in his magnum opus, the Ethics, includes only three types of ideas or kinds of knowledge: imaginative, rational common notions, and intuitive. This chapter focuses solely on imaginative, partial knowledge, or what Spinoza calls “inadequate” ideas. The first half of the chapter specifically focuses on summarizing the nature of imaginative knowledge as Spinoza defines it. The second half focuses on the specific mechanisms from the Ethics that demonstrate how imaginative knowledge works in conjunction with other types of knowledge to create greater affects. Human affects are a combination of both ideas (thought) and affections (ratios of motion and rest in extension) for Spinoza.¹

Imaginative ideas are defined as ideas about sense data and image making, but they are also defined as all language, memory, fantasy, and errors in reasoning. They can either strengthen or weaken our conatus (our tendency towards persevering in existence). As Beth Lord writes, “...conatus is what makes each particular thing what it is.”² Understanding imaginative knowledge and how it operates according to its own laws of nature is not only crucial to

¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 3D3: 70.
adequately comprehending Spinoza’s epistemological system, but such understanding aids reason and creates more affirmative and powerful affects, increasing our conatus. When truly grasping Spinoza’s epistemology one discovers that certain types of imaginative knowledge are as important as ideas of reason for strengthening our power to produce affirmative affects.

In many areas of our lives, the use of the imagination is something positive, inspirational, creative, enlightening, capable of sudden insight, experimental, and the one way to convey all those subtleties and practically unnamable experiences of life which we encounter in the ontology of the everyday. Although Spinoza spent much of his short life attempting to deductively prove that imaginative knowledge can result in error, falsity, confusion, and anthropomorphic, teleological conceptions of nature, the implications of which create human pain and suffering, this chapter demonstrates that he also felt ideas of the imagination can be transformative and empowering when those ideas are arranged in ways reason can recognize and use to its benefit.

In the end, it is clear that Spinoza felt certain aspects of imaginative knowing are a part of how reason can develop more beneficially and joyously. He writes, “...an imagination is an idea which indicates the present constitution of the human body... [imaginings] are not contrary to the true, and do not disappear on its presence.” What we will read about next includes how one can join an image with both another imaginative idea and with adequate ideas of reason to transform an affect we are experiencing from something passive to that which is more active when we comprehend and reflect on the kinds of knowledge we are using.

Rationally understood, certain ideas of the imagination can contribute to the development

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3 This is a phrase I will refer to often and is used by Clair Colebrook in “The Politics and Potential of Everyday Life: On the very concept of everyday,” New Literary History, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Autumn 2002) pp. 687-706.
4 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p1s, 117. Moira Gatens opens her work Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality, a work on the practical applications of Spinoza’s system for feminism and philosophy today, with this citation.
5 Ibid. 5p10s, 167.
of reason. This capacity can then move us with real joy and power in our thoughts and actions to create other ideas and actions with more strength. This occurs not only in the effectiveness of our actions, but also in the creative force of our understanding. Imaginative ideas can be experimented with in an enjoyable, informed manner, and re-arranged or re-imagined to our benefit and to the benefit of others. The production of images are defined by or as corporeal motions in relation to sense data and memory, for example.  

That words are part of the imagination becomes a particularly interesting problem when one uses rational knowledge and language to construct an explanation or description about what one understands. The first kind of knowledge is also the only source of falsity or error, that is, of privation: “And indeed, most errors consist only in our not rightly applying names to things.” Yet, language consists of both images of letters and the memory of meaning, both a part of imaginative knowledge. Spinoza goes so far as to say, “So if something in Nature appears to us as ridiculous, absurd, or evil, this is due to the fact that our knowledge is only partial, that we are for the most part ignorant of the order and coherence of Nature as a whole, and that we want all things to be directed as our reason prescribes.” In other words, when we do not understand something and judge it as absurd, we are relying more heavily on partial, imaginative knowledge (ideas which are incomplete) than on reason and understanding. Imaginative knowledge includes ideas which are incomplete or partial. It is in this way that they are defined as “inadequate.”

There are many important references to *imaginari, imaginatio, imago, and imaginarius* in the *Ethics* throughout all five books, but some references include in the preface of part 3, 3p2s, p9, p12, p15, p16, p18s, p25, p27, p28, p30, p31, p32, p34, p42, p49, p52, p53, p58, the

6 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40, 55. This is the proposition that clearly names all three types of knowledge and is contested in its interpretation throughout Spinoza scholarship. I believe human beings imagine, whereas pebbles do not.

7 Ibid. 2p47s, 61.

8 Spinoza, *TP*, 2: 685.
opening definitions and axioms of part 4, 4p1, p11, p59, 4 Appendix, and 5p3, p5, p10, p13, p14, p20s, p28, p34, and p40c (among many other places). There is an even more extensive use and reliance on understanding imaginative knowing in Book Two of the Ethics of which I will concentrate on specifically throughout this chapter. Imaginative ideas work in conjunction with the understanding throughout the Ethics. Therefore, to ignore the importance of imaginative knowledge in this system is to misunderstand Spinoza’s epistemology. Spinoza scholar, Piet Steenbakkers, notes that there are 232 references to the imagination in Book Three of the Ethics alone.9

The mind does not cause the body to act and the body does not cause ideas in the mind in Spinoza’s system. The attributes of thought and extension run parallel with each other. They are both expressions of one substance (God or Nature). The relations (connections) we rely upon between finite ideas about the laws of thought are how we form a more adequate understanding about the imagination and its power. Spinoza’s system emphasizes understanding the structures of all three types of knowledge we are capable of in order to strengthen both the force and joy of our ideas and the power of our motions and actions. Because of this, any reading that labels his system as strictly “rationalist” is inaccurate. As Spinoza scholar Ed Curley writes, “The view that Spinoza was a rationalist...is not just mildly inaccurate, it is wildly inaccurate. Experience has a much greater role to play in Spinoza's theory of knowledge than this view can allow for.”10 As we will read next, we require imaginative knowledge in order to process all of our experiences.

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As a flexible form of more certain knowledge, reason can understand with fluidity how the imagination can create stronger, more useful ideas that are productive and creative. This type of understanding and practical application is not a causal interaction in the usual sense that we understand cause and effect. Adequate ideas can only cause other adequate ideas, imaginative ideas cause other imaginative ideas. The effect of understanding the causes of our ideas is that we tend towards more adequate conceptions of both how to think well and with more force. When the intellect understands and recognizes its own flexibility between varying forces of types of ideas, the imagination can produce stronger ideas (and better descriptions) that cooperate with what reason already knows to be true in increasing its power. One benefit of this increased strength in the capacity to use types of ideas is the increase in varieties of expression of those ideas. As a result of such a combination in stronger idea types, an increase in our power of thought and action occur by the necessity of the laws of thought and extension.

As Beth Lord writes, “Imagination has a central role to play [for Spinoza], in building true understanding, in representing it, and in limiting and obfuscating it.11 Yet, as with anything in Nature, too much power can be destructive.12 If the mind has too many imaginative ideas or too many ideas of a conflicting nature, the mind will become more and more confused. What we will learn is that the proportional power between ideas of reason and ideas of the imagination will include those ideational effects which enhance rational

11 Lord, Spinoza Beyond Philosophy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 4. Lord continues, “Through and in philosophical thinking, multiple other ways of thinking come to be. This is what emerges in Spinoza’s major work, the Ethics, where ‘pure’ philosophical thinking about being becomes, through an inner necessity, thinking about scientific knowledge and imaginative fiction, embodiment, relations to other things, and the complex systems of relations that are ethics and politics.”

12 Consider what Spinoza writes in Chapter 2 of the TP: “So from the fact that the power of natural things by which they exist and act is the very power of God, we can readily understand what is the right of Nature… By the right of Nature, then, I understand the laws or rules of Nature…that is, the very power of Nature. So the natural right of Nature as a whole, and consequently the natural right of every individual, is coextensive with its power. Consequently, whatever each man does from the laws of his own nature, he does by the sovereign right of Nature, and he has as much right over Nature as his power extends… But men are led by blind desire more than by reason, and therefore their natural power or right must be defined not by reason but by any appetite by which they may be determined to act and by which they try to preserve themselves.”
capacities and affirmative bodily actions simultaneously if the laws of thought are understood with respect to the three idea types. Therefore, the application of the law of proportion, as we will read about in the next chapter on reason, is extremely important for how ideas can influence each other. In Chapter Two of the TTP Spinoza writes:

Those with a more powerful imagination are less fitted for purely intellectual activity, while those who devote themselves to the cultivation of their more powerful intellect, keep their imagination under greater control and restraint, and they hold it in rein, as it were, so that it should not invade the province of intellect... Imagination by itself, unlike every clear and distinct idea, does not of its own nature carry certainty with it. In order that we may attain certainty of what we image, there has to be something in addition to imagination, namely, reasoning.¹³

The mind must find ways to be certain of what it is imagining (along with true causes) and not only that it is imagining. A common notion of reason and an image can surely co-exist in the mind at one time. Reason can identify the type of imaging one is doing, for example, with rational reflection about the structure of different types of the three kinds of ideas we can have. Spinoza deduces, “By idea I understand a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing.”¹⁴ Note that Spinoza does not say that ideas are images. They are concepts. This will become more important as we proceed. Understanding how the imagination and its laws operate produces greater effects and joy within reasoning capacities. As we will read next in chapter three, greater joy and power produced by our ideas simultaneously runs parallel to an increase in power and capacities for actions which benefit both ourselves and all of Nature. When we learn about how the mind works by necessity, for example, we learn how to joyfully and rationally manipulate its structure to our benefit and the benefit of others. Experiencing a cause is involving that cause in its effect (which is expression).

Because of Spinoza’s parallelism between the attributes, it is important to incorporate an

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¹³ Spinoza, *TTP*, 2: 404, 405, emphasis added.
understanding of what a “body” is in his dynamic epistemology. He writes, “By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (see 1p25c).”\textsuperscript{15} All of our bodily actions, both internal and external, express God’s (Nature’s) essence but in the form of modal modifications of substance (modes). This is exactly why Spinoza writes that the content of a text, including his own, is not as important in its intention (mathematical or otherwise) as is its power to move us with love and joy: “As Spinoza remarked of Scripture, a text is to be judged sacred and profane, good or evil, not by virtue of what it says, or even its truth, but by its power to move people to mutual love and support. A philosophical work is thus always an intervention in a concrete situation and is to be judged by the effects it produces in this situation.”\textsuperscript{16} In this vein, the reader of Spinoza’s work and of this thesis will find continual references to what it is to increase our capacities for power, joy, and more understanding as these affects relate to the necessary processes of the laws of Nature of the attributes of thought and extension. Thus, as we learn about the structure and power of our ideas, we experience both intellectual and physical pleasure simultaneously. As Stuart Hampshire summarizes, “Reason by itself cannot move to action without the motive force of passion, but we can become passionately reasonable...and reasonably passionate... When on reflection a person perceives the inadequacy, the emotion is immediately changed.”\textsuperscript{17}

Before learning more about the mechanics of this dynamic epistemology, a little more on the history of the concept of the imagination in Western philosophy is needed. The imagination has often been understood in the history of Western philosophy (particularly for Rene Descartes

\textsuperscript{15} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2D1: 31.
\textsuperscript{16} Warren Montag, preface to \textit{Spinoza and Politics}, Etienne Balibar (New York: Verso, 2008), xi. As Beth Lord also notes in \textit{Spinoza Beyond Philosophy}, “Spinoza reflected on the affective power of his own texts because he is fascinated by the power of texts – particularly the Bible – to determine feelings and actions.” Because of this, as Dan Selcer has also written about, Spinoza is acutely aware of the force between ideas if expressed in powerful ways. His system in the \textit{Ethics} can affect us with lasting effects if understood and applied correctly.
for example) as a mediator between the senses and the understanding. Detlev Patzold, in an essay titled “Imagination in Descartes's *Meditations,*” writes that the imagination “continues to play an active and cognitive role” in Descartes's philosophy, especially in his mature work, and functions as a “mediating principle between sense perception and pure understanding.”18 As in Descartes, the mark of a true idea for Spinoza is clarity and distinctness, which I discuss in more depth in the next chapter. Each type of knowledge in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology includes what it is we are thinking about; sensations, images, memories, common notions, the cause of our ideas, or the essence of singular things, for example. Piet Steenbakkers writes, “Without the imagination, the mind would be deprived of all knowledge of its body and of external things. This knowledge is essential for interacting with the world around us and thus forms part of our essential striving to maintain our existence... The power to imagine is proportional to the degree of complexity of the individual body...”19 In Spinoza, imaginative knowledge is not only defined as images.

The use of the imagination both appealed to and terrified religious leaders, while at the same time fascinated those who sought political power. On the development of the Early Modern imagination in Europe, Todd Butler writes, “What is thereby revealed is a society deeply concerned and fascinated with the fundamentally imaginative nature of politics, for to understand – let alone to employ – the imagination was to gain access to a power that modern critics of the period have too often ignored.”20 It was organized religion, though, that fundamentally wanted to control what the masses believed *about* the employment of their own imaginative ideas and images, and this was done by generating other images which produced fear and submission. This was the motivation for Spinoza writing the *TTP,* where he evaluates the intersection between religion, politics, and the use of imaginative ideas, and calls for greater separation and structural

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understanding of each through the strengthening of reasoning capacities. As Spinoza writes, the prophets of dominant religious texts and circles “were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagination.”21 He intends this sentiment in the negative sense. Those who confuse imaginative images with the use of reason were not able to imagine themselves as causes of their own actions, actions without teleological or transcendental ends or purposes. They were also not able to imagine all of Nature as eternal and perfect, nor as self-causing. In addition, Spinoza may have been responding to the Early Modern obsession with angels, miracles, and various other anthropomorphic notions about the divine. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* was very influential at the time, for example, and both public circles and those more educated had a tendency to talk about transcendent entities. Almost everyone believed in a God of some kind, but Spinoza was tolerant of diversity in human belief system nonetheless. In Book Three of the *Ethics*, when listing the multiple types of affects we can have and why, Spinoza writes, “Experience itself also confirms this. For not everyone has the same custom and religion, and reason understands this. What among some is holy, among others is unholy; and what among some is honorable, among others is dishonorable. Hence, according as each one has been educated, so he either repents of a deed or exults at being esteemed for it.”22

There has been extensive work done on the history of the concept of the imagination from a more philosophical perspective, such as by Eva Brann and Murry Bundy, for example.23 In many of these works, Spinoza's actual contribution to this topic is rarely recognized, minimally referenced, or poorly understood. Under the heading “Juvenile Thinking: The Rationalist Tradition and Spinoza,” Brann concludes, “Spinoza furnishes a prime example of a

certain intellectual contempt for the imagination.” 24 This assessment could not be further from a correct and examined understanding of Spinoza's epistemological system. In his work on the history of the concept of the imagination in Western philosophy and culture, Richard Kearney mentions Spinoza's system in reference to the inferiority of ideas of the imaginative sort, stating that Spinoza believed these types of ideas were only about that which is wholly contingent, and therefore completely insignificant. 25 This is a completely inaccurate interpretation.

An accurate English translation of Spinoza's works did not appear until the nineteenth century. Only recently, in 2010, have we discovered the earliest known copy of the Ethics tucked neatly away in the Vatican for centuries. 26 Although some early interpretations made genuine and systematic attempts at understanding Spinoza's system, nonetheless quite a few are riddled with error and contributed to overlooking the importance of the first kind of knowledge. C. De Deugd, in his extensive treatment about the significance of imaginative knowledge in Spinoza, noted as early as 1966 that the otherwise indispensable bibliography of Spinoza scholarship collected by Adolph Oko, which includes over seven thousand entries, “does not have so much as a separate heading for ‘imagination.’” 27 The point is, how is this possible? It is a real problem in the scholarship. De Deugd devoted all of his energy to demonstrating the significance of imaginative knowledge in conjunction with reasoning adequately in Spinoza’s system. He demonstrates this to such an extent as to conclude “that none of the ideas of the imagination are pseudo-knowledge.” 28

De Deugd is the best work to date on the importance of imaginative knowledge in

27 De Deugd, The Significance of Spinoza's First Kind of Knowledge (Van Gorcum, 1966), introduction.
Spinoza, but he gives more credit to G. H. R. Parkinson, whose work on Spinoza's theory of knowledge from 1954 is also significant in this regard. Included in these rare interpretations is also the 1957 publication by H. F. Hallett, who described Spinoza's first kind of knowledge as crucial to understanding his overall epistemological system on several occasions. Parkinson particularly references Spinoza's own use of Descartes' system in the CM and PDP on this matter, citing Descartes' insistence about the use of hypotheses as an aid to reasoning processes. This works only as long as the individual is aware that they are relying upon imaginative ideas heavily or that they are doing so for a certain reason (such as the suspension of judgment, for example, as we will read about later in the chapter). After several examples of this kind, Hallett concludes, “Thus true knowledge of the world may be embodied in a fictional account of its genesis and history – a fiction that differs from the truth only in the order in which the forms of things appear. And in that case, 'there is no fear of error from a false hypothesis.'”\(^\text{29}\) The key term in this statement is “order” because it is the recognition of the order and causes of our idea types which can increase our conatus.

In 1973, as a part of a collection of critical essays on Spinoza edited by Marjorie Grene, R. G. Blair writes, “Spinoza's [epistemological] system cannot teach us much today if it is taken as a whole.”\(^\text{30}\) Yet, in 1985, R. J. Delahunty wrote that it may be of significant importance to investigate what Spinoza truly intends in his epistemological system; “The result is far from clear what [Spinoza] means to be saying when he alleges that imaginations regarded in themselves are free from error.”\(^\text{31}\) In 1988, although only briefly stated, Ed Curley concludes that the imagination, in all its ways of expression, is an integral part of Spinoza's system:

...what Spinoza wishes chiefly to emphasize is that the mind's knowledge of other things -
its knowledge of bodies other than its own in sense perception (P16), its memory of the
past (P18), its knowledge of itself (PP20-23), its knowledge of the common properties of
all material objects (PP37-39), even its knowledge of the essence of God (PP45-47) – all
of these depend on the fact that it first has knowledge of its own body... So imagination
(P17), too, is explained as a function of the mind's knowledge of the states of its own
body. It is hard to see how any philosopher could give a greater priority to knowledge of
the body than Spinoza has.\textsuperscript{32}

In addition, for Spinoza, using reason well is not an automatic capacity or inclination for
everyone. He believes we are \textit{not} naturally inclined to use reason in a continuous and regular
manner. We may desire to know more, and many are born with the faculty to reason, but it takes
\textit{learning} how adequate ideas and common notions are produced by necessary laws of Nature in
order to be capable of using this faculty and all types of knowledge in the best way. As we will
read in Chapter Three next, adequate common notions are shared by all because they are eternal
truths about the properties of things, but imaginative ideas are distinctly singular. Our sense
experiences are our own. At the very least, we can mimic the habits of others who are rational. At
our very best, we can use the ideas of all three types of knowledge in their affirmative capacities
more regularly, experimenting with new arrangements of knowledge and their expression.

This observation distinguishes Spinoza from other rationalist or idealist systems that
place only reasoning capacities as the foundation of the highest qualitative human experience. In
other words, reasoning well is not our only desire. We also desire to persevere and thrive in
existence regardless of reason, to stay alive. If it were common for everyone to reason well on a
regular basis, society “would stand in no need of any laws.”\textsuperscript{33} Human beings, by nature, desire
more than only to reason, and even less of us will be capable of maintaining a continuous
rational disposition in the shifting external influences of the ontology of the everyday. Spinoza
writes that human nature, for most, is “far differently constituted” than that which acts from

\textsuperscript{33} Spinoza, \textit{TTP}, 5: 438.
reason alone. In the *TTP* he concludes, “All men do, indeed, seek their own advantage, but by no means from the dictates of sound reason.”

**Understanding the Power of Imaginative Knowledge**

The key for using reason well is to be able to “justify” our percepts through ordered rational processes, which work as (and can be understood as) the laws of Nature of the attributes of thought and extension. Developing rational capacities will include not only a desire to understand how the imagination works, but the developed ability to recognize imaginative ideas that can be used in conjunction with reason, strengthening our knowledge and diversifying our experiences and our joy and creativity. This type of recognition uses and requires both imaginative and rational ideas. This aspect of my thesis is the most original element because this is an interpretation of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology most commentators do not allow. As Steenbakkers writes, “Because Spinoza labels imagination or opinion as the lowest kind of cognition and the sole source of inadequate ideas, commentators have inferred that he despised it and was interested exclusively in the higher levels of cognition. In view of the importance Spinoza attaches to the imagination, however, this interpretation is hardly tenable.”

Consider, for example, what we read in E3p12: “The mind as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting.” Imagining our power to act includes, among other things, imagining what is involved in building our capacities to reason (and experimenting with both types of knowledge). This level of imagining involves our experiencing pleasure and joy. Joy, as pleasure (*laetitia*), can occur because of a passion. It can

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35 As we’ll read in later chapters, this deductive conclusion will be helpful for furthering certain elements of philosophy found in critical race theory. Spinoza can be read as a white ally, for example.
37 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p12: 77. He continues, “Hence, so long as the mind imagines those things that increase or aid our body's power of acting, the body is affected with modes that increase or aid its power of acting…and consequently (by P11) the mind’s power of thinking is increased or aided.”
be the result of an increase in our power of thinking, acting, and recognizing the causes of our adequately powerful sets of notions. Joy can also be interpreted as *elation* and not mere pleasure, just as pain or a lesser perfection (*tristitia*) can be interpreted as *dejection*. Thus, the topic of joy, including intellectual joy, is highly complex in its relations between ideas.\(^{38}\)

The imagination is much more than a series of passive sensations or collections of flickering images. It has the power to inspire greatness as much as cripple us, and there are elements of it that are not composed of images at all. For example, when we use language to speak with each other. In the conversation we are not necessarily using or having images, but we are using language to understand each other. Language is always imaginative knowledge for Spinoza. Our uses of language are inherently only partial knowledge.

The imagination is a critical, often beautiful aspect of human experience and thought. It also has an extensive and complicated history as a concept in philosophy and otherwise. “One may think of magic, the vernacular literary traditions, the use of the imagination in mathematics and science, imagination used in the composition of works of art, or terminological and more linguistic questions about the relationship between *imaginatio* and *phantasia*, and other related concepts in the vernacular such as 'fancy' and 'fantaisie.' Indeed, there is no lack of literature on the theme.”\(^{39}\)

In Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, *affects* are not something which mediate between sense perception and the understanding in the same way as they do for Descartes. Affects include the affections of our bodies (corporeal motions) along with the *idea* of the affection that we are

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\(^{38}\) I will include the difference between joyful passive affections and passionate joys, the latter of which is closer to an accurate interpretation of the relation between passive affections and joy within Spinoza's dynamic epistemology, later in this chapter and again in other chapters in this thesis.

\(^{39}\) Nauta Patzold, *Imagination in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, introduction. Spinoza's philosophy has inspired many artistic endeavors, such as can be found in the writing of William Wordsworth, William Blake, Samuel Coleridge, and George Elliot, to name only a few novelists who relied on Spinoza’s system and incorporated it into their artistic work.
having in conscious awareness.\textsuperscript{40} Affects are not reducible by definition to our affections. They are also not defined as emotions nor as special kinds of ideas. Some bodily affections are passive and some are active, but all expressions are also affirmiative modes of the existence of substance. We are not consciously aware of all the affections of our body, but the mind can only be aware of its body through the affects it is having which it is aware of. The idea of an affection we are aware of which is adequately conceived is a part of a more powerful or active affect. As a result, the ideas about our affections that are active affects can produce more chains of adequate ideas and joyous experiences as a result. This effect of more powerful affects reduces the proportion and power of the weaker chains of imaginative ideas that could possibly overpower reason. Alexandre Lefebvre summarizes Spinoza’s epistemology well, “If we suffer affections [affectio] that we neither determine nor understand, we experience a separation from our powers and become sad; if, on the other hand, we experience affections of which we are the cause or of which we know the cause, we experience a connection to our powers and become joyful. Existence, in this sense, is an effort to experience a maximum of active affections.”\textsuperscript{41}

Affects are also both uniquely singular and a part of any combined collective. My affects are experienced by me on a singular level, but your ideas and actions can affect me. If we are adequately understanding something, then our mind is active and our singular awareness and body experiences joy because of the increase in our power. Yet, if we understand how to create stronger, more useful ideas in the imagination, then our minds automatically have an increased capacity for thought and are more active, although this activity, as we will read in Chapter Three next, may vary. Caroline Williams writes, “As transitive links between states of affairs, affects

\textsuperscript{40} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 3D3: 70.

\textsuperscript{41} Alexandre Lefebvre, \textit{The Image of Law: Deleuze, Bergson, Spinoza} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 221. Lefebvre continues, “For Spinoza, it is fundamental that the experience of a composition, the discovery of a power, and the formation of an adequate idea (all these things go together) always provoke an affect [affectus] of joy… A finite mode at once exists in a continuous variation of its power given the encounters it experiences, and these variations of power find a continuous psychical expression in an affective flow of becoming joyful and becoming sad.”
pass through subjects communicating and unfolding images and intensities.”

In part 2 of the KV, Spinoza distinguishes between what he calls opinion (error, falsity), experience (a type of combination of reason along with experimentation), true belief (that which requires outside reasons in order to be known), and clear knowledge (a way we can have knowledge in and through the things themselves in reflective awareness). Some of these distinctions get collapsed in many respects in his later works. What he develops in his later work is the concept that the imagination can be transformed, at least those elements of it that are beyond passive sense data; it can be transformed through our understanding of the laws of the attribute of thought, such as how ideas of the first kind are generated and operate. The mind, in understanding that it is nothing but ideas and desiring to increase its power, can (in conscious reflection about the laws of thought) have better ideas that act as aids to the imagination (auxilia imaginationis).

The imagination, although incomplete and fragmented knowledge, is not wholly inadequate for Spinoza. The associations we make between ideas are largely based on memory, experience, experiment, and learning. Although our memories can also be in error or influence other finite ideas in ways that decrease our power, there is a crucial role which memory plays in Spinoza's entire epistemology. If this is true, then certain aspects or elements of imaginative knowledge are as important for the development of strong common notions as reason is. Spinoza writes, “For there is something else I wish particularly to note here, that we can do nothing from a decision of the mind unless we recollect it...” Recollection is an element of imaginative knowledge, but learning is a part of both the imagination and reasoning. We cannot learn and strengthen our capacity to reason with force if we cannot recollect or imagine. As we will read in

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42 Caroline Williams, “Subjectivity Without a Subject,” in Spinoza Beyond Philosophy, 18.
43 Spinoza, KV, trans. Sam Shirley, 2:1, 2, 60-63.
44 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p2s: 73.
Chapter Five, active ideas of the imagination that are useful for reason come together with the most force in intuitive knowledge. Etienne Balibar, noting that reading Spinoza's doctrine of the first kind of knowledge as that which is merely passive and riddled with only error is problematic, writes:

However, if we look more closely at the argument of the Ethics and the TTP, we will see that this simple presentation is too mechanical. In reality, all men live in both the world of the imagination and that of reason. In every man there is already some reason (that is, some true ideas and some joyful passions), if only because of the partial knowledge he has of his own usefulness; and in every man there is some imagination...if only because of his own inability to dominate all external causes...45

Learning about the laws of thought, reason can transform some aspects of imaginative knowledge to its benefit and greater use. Although reason can evaluate ideas of the imaginative sort, the same process does not occur for those who rely upon only imaginative ideas. In such a disposition our capacity to reason well is diminished in intensity and the imagination dominates in proportion between our chains of ideas. In other words, we are not thinking rationally as much as we could be in such a state and we might not have the rational power to recognize this fact.

Imaginative ideas should only occupy the “smallest part of our mind.”46 Spinoza deals in ratios of motion and rest as the structure of the attribute of extension, something I examine in more detail in the next chapters. Yet, due to the parallelism between thought and extension, when the body's ratio of motion increases in activity, the mind simultaneously increases in its force of activity. We should consider what ideas one focuses on in reflective awareness. If thought is relying upon rational common notions, the body has more power to act, and act with more diversity and creativity. There is an identity between the attributes of thought and extension. The identity is only that both are expressions of one substance, as is clear in E3p2 and elsewhere.47

45 Balibar, Spinoza and Politics, 109-110.
46 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p20s: 170.
47 Ibid. 3p2s, 71.
Spinoza’s monism is not a cosmological constant. Although all is one substance, Spinoza’s substance is dynamic in its varying transformations and animated expressions. Dynamism and transformations are occurring continuously and in infinite ways. The interactions between our three kinds of knowledge are transformed by way of arrangement and dispositions taken, producing more forceful or less forceful rational thought and action.

There are many ways to categorize the types of inadequate ideas in Spinoza's epistemology, specifically found within certain parts of the *Ethics*, the *TIE*, the *KV*, and especially the *TTP*. Errol Harris clearly explains that there are at least three types of inadequate ideas in Spinoza: those that are considered *fictions*, those that are categorized as *errors*, and ideas that are a part of a method of *doubt*. But we might add another, namely that this type of knowledge can be understood as *partial*. The words we use to create language, for example, are an aspect of imaginative knowledge because they could not possibly capture what we adequately conceive with clarity and certainty in its totality. This aspect of an epistemological system will complicate how we then conceive of our explanations for what we know using reason. Yet, we might ask if imaginative ideas can be experimented with on the level of operational knowledge, and, if so, then can we find increasingly affective and rationally powerful ways to use the imagination?

Each type of inadequate idea has its own level of power in association with other ideas, and one type does not necessarily involve all of the other types. As Harris notes regarding ideas of fiction, for example, “they do not necessarily involve any error.”[^48] This is true particularly if reason already understands that they are fictions. This level of recognition occurs with intuitive knowing also, as we will read more about in Chapter Five. Spinoza discusses briefly how this recognition occurs in Chapter 15 of part 2 of the *KV*, but did not fully develop that concept.

[^48]: Errol Harris, *Spinoza’s Philosophy: An Outline* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999), 44.
Harris continues, “The capacity to imagine things that do not exist, as long as we know that they do not exist, may be considered an accomplishment rather than a defect of mind…”

Spinoza confirms this in various works noting how important singular conscious reflection is in this regard. An inadequate idea is often in error not because of what is stated in the idea, but because of “what it leaves out,” which is a clear and distinct conception of the adequate cause of the object of the idea (ideatum). This is also why the first kind of knowledge is “inadequate.”

I argue that these claims are consistent both in the definitions of inadequate knowledge in the *Ethics* and in other works where Spinoza discusses the imagination. Note, for example, the large problem Spinoza discovers between memory and language cited in Chapter 6 of the *TTP*. All too often “chronicles and histories reflect the writer's own beliefs rather than the actual facts, and one and the same occurrence is so differently related by two men holding different beliefs that they seem to be speaking of two different events…”

As Harris recognizes, ideas of doubt are the real problem for partial knowledge because such ideas lead to the vacillation of the mind. They lack certain knowledge about the essence of things and their true causes. Vacillation of the mind decreases its power to think well. In the *TIE* Spinoza emphasizes that if we do not use the right method of consciously distinguishing between how we form types of knowledge (and also remain aware of which type of idea we are relying on and why), we will confuse ourselves, as well as possibly harbor doubts about true ideas! For these reasons Herman De Dijn emphasizes a specific passage from the *TIE*:

> Let us begin, therefore, from the first part of the Method, which is, as we have said, to distinguish and separate true ideas from all other perceptions, and to 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,

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49 Harris, *Spinoza’s Philosophy*, 45.
and also because there are many who doubt even true ideas, from not attending to the distinction between a true perception and all others.\textsuperscript{51}

The problem of the vacillation of the mind is also directly related to the temporal sense in which we consider our ideas. If we conceive our ideas in relation to the past or future, we fall into more inadequate thinking for Spinoza, that is, we compare things to (and about) our duration and doubt the necessary knowledge we are considering.\textsuperscript{52} On the other hand, if we conceive things from a certain species of eternity (\textit{sub specie aeternitatus}) and as expressions of laws of Nature, then we can understand more adequately. This leads to the production of more adequate ideas.\textsuperscript{53}

Ideas of sense and their expression in words can be false or lead us to doubt, but they can \textit{also} be sources of inspiration, adequate explanation, and pleasure, particularly when combined with ideas of reason. Errol Harris writes, “The greater part of human experience is confined to what Spinoza calls \textit{imaginatio}... In fact, the truth is already implicit in our imaginal ideas because their positive content is in God, their causes are available to our kin, and their relations to other ideas are not altogether hidden but can be developed by thinking in the right order.”\textsuperscript{54}

There are subtle differences regarding the nature and validity of experience as it pertains to true knowledge. As Spinoza writes in the \textit{KV}, opinion can be distinguished from experience in that the latter can take up \textit{experimentation} in order to \textit{discover more reasons} for ways of understanding. The former, by contrast, does not typically take up experimenting in order to demonstrate what is thought to be known, and opinion is often the product of imaginative beliefs based on the senses and conditioned by external causes.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} Herman De Dijn, \textit{Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom}, 93.
\textsuperscript{52} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 3p18s: 80-81.
\textsuperscript{53} I demonstrate the mechanics of adequate knowledge in chapters Three and Four of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{54} Harris, \textit{Spinoza's Philosophy}, 46.
Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology is also about modal modifications of substance (modes) in the form of finite ideas and actions, including ideas conceived as actions. Note what Charles Huenemann observes regarding Spinoza’s system of necessity in relation to ideas of the first kind of knowledge: “...Spinoza's commentators agree that Spinoza thought all things were necessary, in some sense... Commentators disagree, however, about the status of finite modes.” What is important to reflect on is the logic involved in thinking about things that we feel as affections of one's body only, as Spinoza notes in E2p28 for example. To reflect on only our affections and not understand the underlying structure and causes of our affects is to have only partial knowledge. It is also problematic to think about things only in relation to our own ideas, as is evident throughout Book Two of the *Ethics*. We should think of things in their differences and agreements as they are internally determined and as they are understood in relation to Nature as the immanent cause of all things. These are two separate processes of thought which can run parallel to each other, yet that can also work in conjunction with each other. These cognitive processes involve a high level of reflective awareness and rational capacities to compare sets of ideas between types of knowledge. In this way we can experience joy that accompanies our stronger imaginings.

In the *Ethics* we read that there is nothing in Nature that is truly contingent, although there are degrees of contingency within the first kind of knowledge when understood modally. For example, the degree of contingency is illustrated in the ways in which we can imagine “particular things.” Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p31c: 52 Because ideas can be conceived as types of knowledge and events (actions) of conscious reflection, ideas of the imagination of finite individuals must be capable of being conceived as necessary in some sense (because these ideas are an expression of Nature). In addition, certain types of imaginative ideas can bring us great joy, combining with reason to

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56 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p31c: 52
create stronger bodies of knowledge and power. For Spinoza, what we can truly enjoy and feel in the intellectual love of Nature and its laws while increasing our power to exist is based on the ideas we imagine and rationally understand together. As we read in Book Two of the Ethics, falsity involves the privation of knowledge, but all ideas conceived through the understanding of or related to God as first cause and as self-causing are always true, and can exist in each of us conceived as internally determined. In E2p36, Spinoza writes, “Inadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas.”

Within our environment we are conscious of our striving, but with attention we can become more reflective about the ability to embrace our power to exist with increasing joy and energy beyond mere survival. In E3p9 Spinoza writes, “But since the mind (by 2p23) is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the body's affections, the mind (by p7) is conscious of its striving...” In 3p9 we continue to read about both rationally understood and imaginative knowledge: “The mind, both insofar as it has clear and distinct ideas and also insofar as it has confused ideas, strives to persevere in being; it does so for an indefinite duration; and it is conscious of this, its striving.”

Spinoza defines “appetite” as the conscious consideration of both our ideas and our bodily actions together (affects), and appetite is “nothing but the very essence of man.” In one way, appetite can be defined as the mind being conscious of its striving through its ideas. But in another way, Spinoza writes that appetite can also be “devoid of reason.”

If our appetite can be devoid of reason, then the adequate understanding of our conatus must include elements in addition to defining it as appetite that incorporates the best

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57 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p36: 54. As will become more important later, Spinoza also writes earlier in 2p10, “The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.”
58 Ibid. 3p9s: 76.
59 Ibid. 3p9: 76.
60 Ibid. 3p9, 76.
61 See footnote 9 of the TP.
ways to use both imaginative knowledge and reflective reasoning. Even so, this interpretation does not contradict what we understand about Nature’s order (all expressions are ruled by laws of Nature) but conforms to it in a certain way and as expressed by a certain disposition.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{TP}, 2: 688.}

Our sense of free will is also a product of the imagination, but Spinoza's system of necessity does not eliminate the psychological experience of deliberation and personal freedom. In fact, in the \textit{TP} he writes that the strength of mind is “freedom of spirit.”\footnote{Ibid. 1: 682. Spinoza writes, “Freedom of spirit or strength of mind is the virtue of a private citizen: the virtue of a state is its security.”} As we will read in the next three chapters and the conclusion of this thesis, if our sense of freedom of spirit arises with an increasing strength of mind (understanding about how to combine idea types), then learning how to enhance our series of ideas is the logical aim a creatively rational mind will automatically have as an effect. The imagination plays a vital role in how we approach our sense of free will. The real joy, though, is in rationally understanding that we are an expression of Nature (God, substance), and that all of Nature is an expression of its own laws by necessity. Not only do we experience joy on this level of understanding, but this joy is both a feeling and an idea together (\textit{idea reflexiva}). This is a feeling of being capable of a certain level of understanding about Nature and one's perseverance.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{KV}, 2:22, footnote 22, 93.} In other words, it is an affect where what we are reflecting on is our increasing, rationally joyous \textit{conatus}. As we will read in Chapter Three and Four next, these reflexive affects exist according to the order of our adequate ideas and are, therefore, virtuous: “Freedom, in fact, is virtue or perfection; so anything that signifies weakness in man cannot be referred to his freedom.”\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{TP}, 2: 685. If our experience of our freedom of spirit is an element of our rational strength of mind, and if this is also an element of awareness within our imaginative knowledge, then our use of imaginative ideas in this way can never be said to be a weakness.}
Spinoza understood that some individuals suffer from extreme conditions of the imagination that decrease their power to exist and live well. As noted in E2p39c, the more properties of things that are common to both oneself and other bodies, the more ideas we are singularly capable of conceiving adequately as a result. If our mind takes on “another nature” from what it is capable of, the mind does not lose its singular access to personal memories and sense experiences. Yet, according to 4p39s, when we take on completely new ratios of increasing motion and rest our old self no longer exists in any substantial sense. Spinoza writes, “But here it should be noted that I understand the body to die when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another.” Later in the same proposition he continues to explain that a human body which changes in these ways “[can] be changed into another nature entirely different from its own.”

Spinoza relies heavily on the principle of non-contradiction throughout the Ethics. For him, there are real differences between logical contradictions, true opposition between relations, and negative ontological determination. Each of these distinctions requires its own definition and each is related to the inherent truth as common notions in different ways. They each maintain their own distinct difference that cannot be collapsed into any of the other two. They can be held as separate adequate concepts and each has a separate epistemological function. I return to the necessity of these distinctions in chapters Three and Four, but for now what is important to understand is that imaginative ideas (even if they are, in part, negations) are ways for the attribute of thought of an eternally existing substance to express itself (in infinite ways).

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66 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p39c: 55. Spinoza writes, “From this it follows that the mind is the more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its body has many things in common with other bodies.”
67 Ibid. 4p39s: 137.
68 Ibid. 4p39s: 138.
Imaginative ideas are not parts of substance but are modal modifications (modes) of the attribute of thought according to its laws. Everything that can be said of Spinoza's monism is not categorized as a part of the whole; it is understood as an expression of power and a degree or ratio of motion and rest. This interpretation, noted extensively in Letter 32 written by Spinoza and addressed to Henry Oldenburg of the Royal Society in England in 1665, includes our understanding of how “the least possible opposition” exists between things in relation to each other as to create a stronger force as one body together.69 For Spinoza, difference is a part of Nature and we use it to compare ideas that are in opposition to each other, but true negation is an idea of the imagination (because substance as always in existence is an absolute affirmation). This distinction is closely related to the ways in which we use words and form definitions, as well as how we understand the productive uses of imaginative knowledge.

For ideas to be defined or understood as opposites does not also include those concepts negating each other. The understanding of opposites and our ability to compare and contrast ideas is necessary for the success of a logically deductive method, but the point is that if their power were equal and they were truly opposites, they would cancel each other or negate their own power. They would, as it were, be at a standstill. This capacity of recognition is also critical to the ways in which we draw new associations, compare images, and re-arrange our descriptions of things in order to enhance our capacities for thought and action. As Spinoza concludes in Chapter Seven, Twelve, and Fourteen of the TTP, the ways in which we formulate our descriptions of things is largely based on what we have both experienced and what we have learned: “Words acquire a fixed meaning solely from their use...”70 The use of common terms and definitions is a form of repetition. This is something which takes both understanding of how

69 Spinoza, Letter 32, 848-851.
70 Spinoza, TTP, 12: 146.
these practices shape reason and control our passions in conscious awareness, but also how such repetition shapes our memory in the re-formulation of our habit(s) in action and thought in the ontology of the everyday.

Certain imaginative ideas can have a different relation to ideas of reason depending on the object of the adequate idea being reflected upon. Although opposites, imaginative ideas do not contradict reason as much as they can overpower reason if the majority of our thoughts (our mind as we are aware of it) are composed of more ideas of the first kind. It is interesting to consider that which is known in the literature as passive or inadequate as being capable of overpowering ideas of reason, but that is exactly why power and reason are two very different concepts in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. All things strive to exist or persist, even our ideas regardless of type. In other words, there are moments reason and power can differ in definition.

Certain types of imaginative ideas are indispensable for enhancing the powers of reason. In other words, the different kinds of knowledge are not necessarily in opposition to each other in an equal way or they would cancel each other out. Imaginative ideas, although often “fleeting and inconsistent,” are not strictly opposed to reason. They are just of a different kind of knowledge. Our capacity to reason includes within its nature the rational ability to distinguish between ideas of different kinds of knowledge. Something that is active moves with more speed or intensity (and fluidity or more easily). That which is more passive (striving with less force) decreases in its intensity in proportion to the increases in activity to the things it is in relation to elsewhere. If two things are in relation to each other and one of them speeds up in its force, the other may either also speed up because its relationship is enhanced or it might slow down as a result if the relationship is between two things which are opposite. That is, the slowness or rest in effect cannot be conceived as a negation of one thing over another. Rather, the relationship
should be understood as a relation between two levels of intensity which separate functions within their own type (in this case, within their own idea type) where one has more force and, therefore, can move more readily. Therefore, as Beth Lord writes, negation “cannot be the basis of agreement” with relations between things for Spinoza’s ontology or epistemology.

A finite individual in this system is defined by, in part, those interactions and relations to other finite modes of thought and other finite bodies, in a way that is mediated, qua modal, yet distinctly causal within each respective attribute. Moira Gatens writes, “Each individual body exerts a causal force on others, and each is in turn constantly impinged on by others.”71 We exist as expressions of substance, and this can be adequately understood as patterns of ratios of motion and rest and ideational powers that combine to create greater affects. We cannot possibly conceive of the totality of all causes and effects that occur in a monist system such as Spinoza’s that exists in the form of infinite combinations of expressions. Therefore, the rational deduction is that we can conceive what applies to all of Nature in our own determinate way only, that is, as witness to our singular associations, experiences of power, ideational force, and patterns of action (motion and rest) if we are paying attention. As we will read in the next two chapters, this is why human conscious reflection is a necessary element of correctly interpreting Spinoza.

The Mechanics of Ideational Force as Imaginative Knowledge

There is a force between our thoughts, an actual intellectual power, although Spinoza does not define this in the same manner as the motion of extension. In the attribute of thinking, the effects of our ideas have the power to produce other ideas and associations between them, including an increased awareness of the transition and intensity that is possible between ideas. In reference to E2p13 L7s, Gatens writes:

On this model the human body is understood to be a relatively complex individual, made up of a number of other bodies. The body’s identity cannot be viewed as a final or finished product because it is a body whose constituent parts are in constant interchange with its environment. The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed, and decomposed by other bodies.\textsuperscript{72}

Our ideas can also be compared, combined, and recomposed, just like the combinations of motion and rest of our bodies in our actions and with other bodies. Fully comprehending all of one’s imaginative ideas is impossible, but adequately comprehending the structures of how imaginative ideas work and using this to one’s advantage is possible. In his introduction to the recent anthology \textit{Spinoza Now}, Dimitris Vardoulakis (in discussing the work of Warren Montag) writes, “There is no independent space of reason that remains outside a causality that includes the imagination and all the faults that characterize the human's mind and actions.”\textsuperscript{73} The result is that we cannot ever escape imaginative knowledge regardless of how well we use reason.

A more in depth analysis of Books Two and Three of the \textit{Ethics} is required to understand the mechanics of the first kind of knowledge. This is where Spinoza defines imaginative knowledge in detail. Recall that he writes, “By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (see 1p25c).”\textsuperscript{74} All bodies express God’s essence, but only when understood as modal modifications of substance. Our bodies express God's (Nature’s) essence in their own determinate manner. There is no lack or negation in Nature’s necessary and continual existence. Therefore, our bodies cannot be said to be acting teleologically in any way because substance is eternally perfect and expresses itself according to its attributes of thought and extension (the only two attributes we have access to). In addition, as noted above, a modal modification of substance cannot be

\textsuperscript{72} Moira Gatens, \textit{Feminist Interpretations of Benedictus Spinoza} (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 191.
\textsuperscript{73} Dimetris Vardoulakis, \textit{Spinoza Now} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), introduction.
\textsuperscript{74} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2D1: 31.
adequately conceived as the essence of substance because it is conceived through something else, namely, the attributes.

We can reflect on ideas as true in several different respects. Common notions are universal truths that exist regardless of the existence of our bodies, yet the first idea of a human mind is that it has a body. Therefore, imaginative knowledge can be understood as experienced singularly in our own determinate but unique ways. An object of an idea can also be another idea. Beth Lord writes, “Each idea in the infinite intellect is a true idea of some object (see IA6). But it is not their correspondence to an object that makes ideas true...”75 They are already eternally true ideas. Our adequate ideas are not representations of eternity, they are eternal, necessary, and perfect. They express the eternal laws of Nature to varying degrees of power in their own determinate ways. Learning about idea types enhances our capacities for reflective awareness and our conatus. Stuart Hampshire writes:

I come to realize that all my knowledge of causes in the common order of Nature is to some degree fragmented and partial, and that I concentrate irrationally on only a few proximate causal factors. So a balance between the active and the passive in the mind characterizes my empirical knowledge...which Spinoza characterizes as the level of imagination. The laws of thought operating at this level are both the laws of logic and the laws of the association of ideas, one pressing against the other...76

I will now turn to a more specific demonstration of the nature of imaginative knowledge and how it can strengthen our capacity to reason. Realizing that I discuss the other two types of knowledge in later chapters, it is still necessary to discuss reasoning and reflective awareness in order to understand how imaginative knowledge shapes itself according to necessary laws.

Spinoza opens the Ethics with eight “metaphysical” definitions. What we later learn is that we are to return to them after we finish all five books in order to more adequately understand how important definitions operate to structure deductive logic. This too is an

75 Beth Lord, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, 73. Lord is referencing E2p4 specifically.
76 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 9, emphasis added.
effective method of repetition and a place for adequate knowing to work on strengthening its capacities. Many other demonstrations will be needed to prove their logical connections. This will also aid the force of rationally comprehending the ways in which imaginative knowledge works.

Recall that in E3p9 Spinoza defined the striving of all types of our knowledge as part of our appetite and *conatus*, that this is also something we can be aware of and that occurs as an “indefinite duration.” The idea of the “indefinite” is not the same as “indeterminate,” nor is it the same as some limited sense of a contained whole. The consequence of duration being included in striving to exist includes an element of the undeetermined, and, therefore, of the possibility of a novel arrangement which did not exist before as one acts. The structures for this possible novel arrangement of ideas and actions are determined, they are expressions of the laws of thought and extension, but the arrangement itself is undetermined until it is in action. The power to live well, for example, will automatically enhance our power to survive, which, by necessity, will enhance our imaginative capacities with more affirmative and creative force in conjunction with reason. How else do we imagine possibilities that have never existed before?

The first place I find a significant need to rationally reflect on imaginative knowledge occurs early in Book One of the *Ethics* in 1p8. This is missed in the secondary literature. In 1p8, under the rubric of demonstrating how substance is infinite due to its self-causing and unlimited essence, Spinoza writes that “confused” knowledge occurs when one cannot distinguish between *substance* itself (attributes) and the *modifications of substance* (modes) in their singular ordering of ideas. In other words, we instantly have confused, partial knowledge when we are not aware that our *conatus* as increases or decreases in our power differ from that which is conceived as only a modification in substance. In this proposition Spinoza starts, “Every *substance* is

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77 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p8: 4. Spinoza also notes a similar idea in the *KV*. 
necessarily infinite.” We, along with everything else, are substance, therefore, we are also infinite in some way. Yet, our personal, subjective affects cannot be conceived as infinite in the exact same logical way. So, already at the start of the Ethics we are asked to consider the nature of the imagination and its differences from common notions in their strength and possibilities.

One of Spinoza’s more well-known deductions appears in this part of the Ethics when he writes that “being finite is really, in part, a negation, and being infinite is an absolute affirmation of the existence of some nature…”78 As we conceive more adequately (as our conatus increases), we become closer to an absolute affirmation of our existence in its largest possible magnitude and proportion of power. Modifications of substance include every event, every effect, every intensity, every transition, and the myriad of infinite causal connections in all directions, but our singular affects include the types of ideas we are aware of in consciousness.

In E1p8, Spinoza will include those ideas whose objects do not exist outside the intellect and are in need of other, clearer concepts in order to be truly understood. But substance is conceived through itself and does not need any other concept in order to exist. In other words, depending on the object of our idea (substance or singular affects), the proper logical deductions should follow respectively if one is thinking clearly and distinctly. Spinoza writes that this confusion is one of the easiest ways to have partial knowledge, when we do not keep these two separate categories of logical deductions clear in our direct awareness while contemplating new ideas and experiences.

The deductions Spinoza draws from E1p8 will continue to play a major deductive role throughout the Ethics and is why I feel we should pay close attention to his emphasis on imaginative knowledge early in this work. The point is that we have to investigate and examine how we apply “first causes,” and not only what they may be for our understanding. In other

78 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p8s2: 4.
words, we need a *method* for reflecting on our ideas – included within that method must be the awareness of how we distinguish between substance and its modifications. This is apparent as early as 1p8. If we work through the *Ethics* from beginning to end, building deductively upon what we understand, learning which methods to use that lead to certain knowledge, we will not “fictitiously ascribe to substances the beginning which [we] see that natural things have...”\(^7^9\) The same is true for ascribing teleological ends to substance. Ascribing a beginning or end to all of substance as the same kind as occur to our senses or as observed in Nature is an aspect of imaginative knowledge. An eternal and perfect substance does not logically have a beginning or an end. This was already noted earlier in the chapter, but deserves to be repeated as we proceed further. We are not only expressions of finite modal modifications. We are also expressions of a perfect, infinite substance.

As E1p8s proceeds, we learn that substance exists by necessity, which is the deductive consequence of all propositions and definitions up to this point (especially E1p7) and can be classified as a common notion, but *only* if we understand the proper order and *method* of discovering first causes as the way to gain adequate knowledge and distinguish it from confused ideas. One cannot adequately grasp the nature of human imaginative knowledge without first understanding the difference between thinking about the nature of substance and modal modifications, and some of the differences between rationality and causality. At times, Spinoza will equate causes with reasons, such as within 1p7 and 1p8, and particularly in 1p11 which reads, “But this reason, *or* cause, must either be contained in the nature of the thing, or be outside it.”\(^8^0\) Yet, to truly understand what Spinoza is deducing here, a difference between causal

\(^7^9\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p8s2: 4. This is also a clear place where we learn that, for Spinoza, there is a difference between what we experience through the senses of natural phenomena compared to what the mind can adequately deduce is true about all of Nature (the latter of which is also an expression of natural phenomena).

\(^8^0\) Ibid. 1p11: 7.
processes in Nature (Nature as a unified, eternal substance) and types of human ideas as expressions of natural laws must be understood separately. If so, rationality and causality can never be reduced to identical concepts. I return to the importance of this distinction and its implications in Chapter Four. For now, we can keep our new order of ideas about types of knowledge and the nature of substance in order so far. To search for and have confirmation from only external causes in Nature will be part of empirical experience, and thus will include more inadequate than adequate knowledge.

Working through Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology involves a proto-physics of force and motion. What we acquire is a set of tools which become a method for better recognizing what ideas we are affirming and/or denying. Considering we are looking for the least amount of opposition between any two or more things so to enhance the overall power and force of the collection of bodies (or ideas), we are looking for those actions and ideas which are affirmative and can be combined. The effectiveness of our ideas is directly correlated with (proportional to) our understanding of the laws of thought and extension, including either knowing or imagining the causes of those effects. Spinoza emphasizes this deduction repeatedly throughout his works, including later in 4p9 and p10, for example. A theory of subjectivity and conscious awareness is necessary for truly understanding Spinoza's ontological and epistemological systems. Therefore, there is a reading of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology that includes understanding imaginative knowledge as an inescapable element of our affects in increasing or decreasing our conatus.

Some ideas, both imaginative and rational, are more perfect than others. Furthermore, some imaginative ideas about the affections of our bodies can be more perfect than others, such as passionate joys that are understood by reason. Reasoning well is having adequate ideas (recall

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8¹ As Spinoza writes in E2p49 Dem 2, IIIA (iii), “As some objects are more excellent than others, so also some ideas of objects are more perfect than others.”
that our mind does not have ideas, it is ideas), and this can also include having adequate ideas about the laws of thought both in memory and in its application. It includes being able to think about our deductive chains of ideas and what they affirm or deny in association with types of knowledge. The right method can enhance our rational capacities to access imaginative knowledge in powerful ways that continue to give us joy and aid reasoning further. This level of awareness can enhance the use of both the imagination and reason in ways that increase our conatus. This includes a rational influence over our dispositions, habits, and ideas that we affirm.

This type of comprehension expresses perfection with more power, as is evident in the logic of substance discussed in E1p17c: “From this it follows, first, that there is no cause, either extrinsically or intrinsically, which prompts God to action, except the perfection of his nature.”82 Notice the shift in the logic of causality here between an ontological reality and the ways in which a finite mind can access such truths with their own laws of logic depending on which series of ideas are strongest in the mind in proportion. Our essence has the capacity to increase its power. In the Appendix to part 1 of the Ethics, we also read, “For the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men's senses, or because they are of use to, or incompatible with, human nature.”83 This particular aspect of Spinoza's ontological system can be demonstrated to be intimately connected to the levels of power in our thinking as reflective awareness. Recall that at the start of the Ethics substance is described as eternal and as perfect. All expressions of Nature involve varying degrees of perfection to greater or lesser degrees and we are expressions of Nature. Thus, perfecting our understanding is our only singular cause we can enact ideationally.

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82 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p17c: 13.
83 Ibid. E1 App: 31.
We are expressing substance to its most power as we are capable, which one finite, modal ratio of unified modifications can express. Spinoza reminds us of this continually. In E2p1 we read: “For the more things a thinking being can think, the more reality, or perfection, we conceive it to contain.”

This applies to any thinking being, whether a finite human being or God conceived as a thinking thing. We can singularly and collectively think and use more powerful ideas and actions, arranging them in an affirmative, creative order in ways that enhance not only our individual power to exist, but also for those around us. The transition to greater perfection will, in the end, be understood as love, or the intellectual love of God (Nature). The emphasis is on the order and arrangement of certain knowledge, and not on how many ideas we can think at once in a spatial sense. As noted in E2p40, Spinoza is clear that having too many images in one's mind at once can be a source of great confusion, especially if some of those ideas have been contrary and appeared before in connection to one another inadequately (as evident in 3p14). It is not the quantity of ideas we can have, but the quality and power of arranging our ideas according to certain common notions regarding the laws of a self-caused substance.

Although memories can be highly problematic, striving to recollect certain types of ideas can also help us increase our power to exist. Spinoza writes in 3p13 about the importance of this imaginative exercise, which is one of the most cited propositions in the Ethics. We learn that we also strive to recollect only things that “exclude” the existence of other things that diminish our power. The use of imaginative ideas in this respect is incredibly important.

Another early reference to the importance of imaginative knowledge occurs in 1p15. This proposition specifically discusses the difference between thinking about the concept of

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84 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p1: 33.
85 Ibid. 3p13: 78. The most cited proposition that Spinoza repeatedly refers back to is 2p17. He uses it a total of 37 times throughout the Ethics. 2p17 is important for this thesis in Chapter Three specifically.
86 Ibid. 1p15: 10-13.
“quantity” as an imaginative idea as compared to thinking about “quantity” using reason. Spinoza writes that all abstract thinking is part of imaginative knowledge. It is imaginative knowledge because it is partially constructed and all properties of the thing being abstracted about are not (or cannot be) known. The concept of “quantity,” which can be thought about as either “one” or “many,” as a whole or as parts, is placed in direct relation to the concept of substance in E1p15. When reason realizes this type of identity, the realization in our awareness is using common notions (and not the imagination): “So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens with great difficulty, then...it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.”

Substance understood through the intellect is “everywhere the same” and it is dynamic. Substance conceived through the imagination is separated into what it is to express singular modes and is an abstract concept. This opening to the rest of the Ethics is one place where the concept of modal distinction becomes apparent, as he claims that to think of things in parts is to think of them as modally distinct. To think of things as parts is to use abstractions because all is, in actuality, one, unified substance. To think of things modally, though, is helpful because it includes the understanding that substance can “be affected in different ways” even though it is “everywhere the same.” All finite ideas, for Spinoza, are modal modifications of substance and so can be thought of as separate entities of their own which can combine to create larger bodies of ideas. Yet, if so, then to adequately think about modes as distinct “things” is to use the imagination and reason together while reflecting on different types of knowledge (as we are doing right now in order to understand these deductions). To adequately conceive of our

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87 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p15s: 12.
88 Ibid. 1p15s: 12.
personal knowledge as expressing eternal common notions is to think of substance expressing itself. I return to these conclusions throughout this thesis.

At this point, Spinoza illustrates his intention deductively through the use of an analogy about water and water drops. To conceive of water as containing only parts (drops) is an aspect of the imagination, and it is to miss that it is, in its unity and essence, one substance: “For insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. Again, water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted.”  

The distinction between types of knowledge we can have about the same thing is clear in this example. To conceive the concept of a first cause of all of Nature adequately is to pair ideas about one organic substance that is self-causing and eternal. Yet, to conceive of things as parts of Nature is to understand these things as in relation with other things in Nature in a direct causal manner. Nonetheless, imaginative knowledge is important because we do, at times, think about water as simply water. I am refreshed when I drink a glass of water as a singular experience. We can also gather a drop of water or many drops, but we cannot gather all of substance. Here is the crux of the situation: once we have understood the difference between these factors, we can encounter everything in relation to the adequate ideas about the laws of one whole, eternal, perfect substance, instead of as distinct parts of substance. To conceive of modes of substance as expressions to varying degrees of intensity of a unified whole (Nature) is to conceive both the laws of the attributes and modal modifications more adequately. To think with more adequate force, as we will read about in detail in the next two chapters, is to increase our power for action, additional levels of comprehensive and affirmative imaginative and rational power.

The concepts of essence and existence play an important role in our adequately understanding the difference between imaginative and rational ideas in similar ways. They

89 Spinoza, Ethics, Ip15s: 12. In this proposition Spinoza writes, “…matter is everywhere the same.”
involve our logical understanding of the difference between that which is created and that which is generated, including new knowledge acquired, for example. The true causes of each will depend on the order of ideas one is arranging. In other words, a cause cannot be truly conceived without its effects for Spinoza, including first causes, although they are distinctly different expressions with different definitions.  

We also cannot know anything with certainty without knowing both the causes and identifying the effects of those causes as adequately (deductively) as possible. In this way, as we will read about in Chapter Three, all effects “involve” their cause. When a system is understood as immanent, a cause cannot logically be external to its effects. If one substance is immanent, everything you can conceive adequately is an expression of it. Substance is its own efficient cause, but all of substance can be understood as immanent. This is its essence. Human essence is defined as desire (appetite with consciousness of this appetite), and we increase our power to exist through understanding how the laws of motion, force, and power occur. But, there are other ways in which our power to act is neither increased nor diminished. 

Spinoza wants us to understand that if we consider things using the concept of “creation,” then we are relying on abstract, imaginative knowledge, but if conceived as expressions of an immanent and eternal substance (which is its own efficient cause), then we are conceiving adequate ideas.

Book Two of the *Ethics* proceeds with the consequences (effects) of the above deductive common notions. The distinction drawn between parts and the whole continues to play a role in our descriptions about how ideas and bodies interact with one another, both internal and external to us. This practical way of understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology will alter as we comprehend more about the whole of Nature. The end of 2p13 goes into detail about how we

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91 Ibid. 3 Post1: 70.
maintain our nature in its whole, in its homeostasis and conatus, while continually shifting motions internal and external to us are interacting and influencing one another by communicating their ratios of speed and rest. This is another place where I read Spinoza’s system as a proto-physics of force. He demonstrates how “a composite individual can be affected in many ways,” and yet “still preserve its nature.”92 This claim applies to both individuals (human beings for example) and all of Nature, but in different, determinate ways. Understanding such deductive conclusions about substance and its modal modifications is crucial for further adequately comprehending that we are able to order our ideas as that which are conceived through something else (as all modes are by necessity). There are other times when we are to order our ideas based on the common notion of substance as self-caused and self-causing, and, therefore, is the cause of all that is expressed by it as universally true and “prior in nature to its affections.”93 Spinoza focuses on how to better produce adequate chains of ideas, a topic I explore in depth in the next two chapters. What is important for this chapter is realizing, as Spinoza writes, “And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change to the whole individual.”94

We continue to deductively learn at this point in the Ethics that the more ideas a thinking thing can think (compare, contrast, and powerfully combine), the more perfection (reality) and power one expresses: “The human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways.”95 In this recognition (by the laws of thought), along with what we have learned in 2p1, more will be produced, or rather,

92 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p13 L7: 43.
93 Spinoza repeatedly draws our attention to this distinction throughout his works, as well as here in E2p13 L4. Also, as one may recall, Nature is prior to its affections is the opening proposition of Book One of the Ethics.
94 Ibid. 2p13 L7s: 43.
95 Ibid. 2p14: 44.
more ways of expression will be accessible to us. As each effect *involves* its cause, nonetheless, our understanding of causality is not a linear one at this point. A linear concept of causality would require temporality (time) as something other than what it is for Spinoza, which is a concept of duration. Duration is a part of our imaginative knowledge because it involves being directly related to the nature of modal modifications and not attributes in their laws. I return to these distinctions in the next two chapters. To perceive one’s duration is to use the imagination, but to conceive of the laws of thought as that which do not require finite temporality in order to be true is an aspect of adequate thinking and an expression of that law.

Imagineative ideas, therefore, can be conceived as *modes* of expression if adequately understood according to the right series of ideas about substance, its attributes which we have access to (as the affections of substance), and its modal modifications. They are not entirely reducible to representations, although there are elements that can be described as representational within the imagination. The power of our affects is wholly dependent not only on our developed adequate understanding, but also on our ability to *imagine the cause of the effect (of the idea) present in our awareness even when reason knows it is being imagined*. This is a type of “intellectual affection,” as Y. Yovel has explained in some of his writings.⁹⁶ Images are pictures, representations of something else expressed in their own way, but imaginative knowledge is defined as a *way of knowing something*, and not as merely an image. We can learn how to create certain types of effects for any given cause if we can adequately identify the real cause of a given event *as* God (or Nature, Substance), and *also* understand it as a modal modification when identifying ourselves as internally determined on a singular level. Beth Lord writes:

The power of an affect also varies depending on whether we *imagine* its cause to be present, future or past...and on whether we imagine it to be necessary, contingent or

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possible... The intensity of the affects is tied to the intensity of the images connected to them: as things are more present to mind, we are more strongly affected by them; and as their presence fades, the affects fade too.\footnote{Lord, \textit{Spinoza’s Ethics}, 109, emphasis added.}

The power of joy and understanding we are rationally capable depends on having \textit{both} adequate chains of ideas about laws of Nature on a singular level (recognizable by both the imagination and reason together) \textit{and} common notions about universal truths (which apply to all of Nature). This also includes imagining God (substance or nature) as the continual cause of all things in their necessity through eternity, even though an actual image of such a thing is not possible. Joy includes the affect of an awareness that our mind and body have increased in its natural power to thrive, move, and think.

Some of our adequately understanding the laws of thought will lead, by necessity, to stronger, affirmatively powerful imaginings which increase our power to exist. Although imaginative knowledge is partial and of a distinctly singular nature, it’s laws are universal. In E1p16 we read:

\begin{quote}
…the intellect infers from a given definition of any thing a number of properties that really do follow necessarily from it (that is, from the very essence of the thing); and that it infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, that is, the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves... From this it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p16: 13.}
\end{quote}

Spinoza repeatedly places the concepts of essence, existence, reality, definition, modal modifications as expressions, and the infinite intellect together. One of the reasons he does this is because his dynamic epistemology includes that knowledge is \textit{felt} as part of our affects. The more reality we understand, the more reality we express. The more reality we express, the more power, joy, and motion we feel, have access to, and can generate in relations to others and all of Nature. Beth Lord writes, “True knowledge as such has no power to overcome these affects; only
insofar as that true knowledge is *felt* as an essential desire that is more powerful than other affects will it be able to overcome them (P14).” Imaginative ideas can be rationally understood, applied, and, therefore, felt with increasing power and joy. We feel knowledge, we are affected by it (in conscious awareness and bodily).

In E1p28 and later in 2p13 and 2p16, we read again that each singular thing is determined to motion or rest by another singular thing. In our increased understanding of the three kinds of knowledge, we are singular subjects, equipped with individual, creative power in thought and action. When Spinoza speaks of affects and dispositions, who is he referring to if not human individuals? When he speaks about consciousness, he is discussing all animate things in their degrees of varying expression, but we too are included in these varying degrees of expression in our own determinate ways. Pebbles may be animated in this system, rocks can be said to have a type of consciousness to some degree, that is, they are in relation and subject to their environment and laws of Nature. Yet, they cannot be said to have thought in the same way we do because we express human thinking according to the attribute of thought in our own determinate ways. Therefore, such a system cannot be reduced to a pantheist definition only. That order of our personal ideas is never fixed, but it does monitor its homeostasis and is influenced by the proportion of idea types occurring. Piet Steenbakkers concludes:

The mind will try to imagine things which increase the body's power to act, and it will try to avoid imagining things which diminish that power... The only way to control an imagination is by directing it by means of other, stronger imaginations... That we are able to do anything at all against the affects is an asset we owe to the imagination, more particularly to the ability to combine imagination and reason.

The term used in the above reference of “directing” intimately involves the use of our rational understanding about the laws of thought. The ordering is not the type of causality that includes a

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99 Lord, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, 110. Lord’s reference here is to E4p14. She then writes, “Our feelings are the barometer of the well-being that we desire to enhance.” That being said, affects cannot be defined as feelings or emotions.
one-to-one correspondence because imaginative ideas only produce other imaginative ideas. This level of understanding is a type of rational force. The result (effect) of that force is the re-arranging of imaginative knowledge where possible. It is not the re-arranging of all imaginative knowledge (which would be impossible), but the rational awareness and conscious reflection on certain types of ideas and associations placed together in ways which are already understood to increase the power of both thought and action.

Missing from the dominant secondary scholarship are references to this type of rational force, and how it works in conjunction with ideas of the imagination, especially in its effects as increasing other capacities to think and to act with more force and joy. The conclusion is that Spinoza scholarship cannot ignore an in-depth analysis of imaginative knowledge and its power to strengthen reason. Not only can certain kinds of imaginative ideas aid reason, but they can strengthen it. It is essential to demonstrate both the importance of the ordering of ideas and how understanding these processes are pragmatic and beneficial. These new conditions automatically lead to new possibilities of actions and combinations of action among a set or group of collective ideas that carry more force. We can control, therefore, some of our imaginative knowledge to our joyous benefit. Imaginative ideas are certainly not insignificant. Therefore, a theory of human (singular) consciousness is also a necessary part of adequately understanding Spinoza’s system.

It becomes important to be able to compare opposite types of ideas because of this awareness. This is accomplished by consciously noting not only our method of understanding, but also which effects we are focusing on when re-arranging our ideas. The mechanics of perspective become more important at this point. It is crucial that we learn how to recognize what we are consciously aware of, particularly when we are experiencing a powerful external cause. *When we cause our own ideas, that is, when we conceive of ourselves as expressions of*
substance, and, therefore, as expressing an adequate cause, we effect our own actions and perspective about our experiences; but we can only arrange or re-arrange our ideas if we are consciously aware in reflection how various types of ideas are constructed and interact as laws of Nature. It is not that the ideas are different, but only that they are in relation to each other in ways which vary by their degree of force and type. The key is to reflect on the true cause(s) of our increase or decrease in power. We cannot know all of the causes occurring in Nature that affect us, but we can know the adequate (proximate) cause of our immediate ideas in our reflective awareness and in relation to our affections (as affects). Spinoza notes, “So desire can be defined as Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite.”100 Thus, desire, or conatus, is appetite, but appetite needs the consciousness of our affections as affects – the consciousness of our striving in body and mind together. The rational reconstruction and use of imaginative knowledge in productive ways is part of our overall increase in rational understanding. In her recent work, Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization, Hasana Sharp writes, “Power (potentia) should be understood as the capacity, vitality, or ‘force of existing’ that belongs to ideas as much as to bodies.”101 As we will read in the next two chapters, this definition of power allows for a principle of conservation in Spinoza’s theory of human consciousness.102

Spinoza makes the above reference to the ways we can increase our power clearer in E3p7. As we increase our adequate understanding and motion or activity in extension, the power we have to be affected and affect others is enhanced. In our enhanced striving we recognize more of our own essence, that is, of some of the infinite ways in which substance can

100 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p9s: 76.
102 Galen Strawson, philosopher of mind, released a lively article on consciousness in 2006 which was published in the Journal of Consciousness Studies. It re-started discussions about materialism, new materialisms, and systems of physics which include that electrons are “conscious” in some way because they “experience” the world and its laws. This sounds very Spinozistic to me.
be expressed with power. Already noted in this chapter, in 3p9s we read, “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.” As we will read in Chapter Five of this thesis, the recognition and understanding of the essence of singular things is the most powerful and joyous (intellectually enjoyable) kind of knowledge we can achieve.

What is even more intriguing is that Spinoza relates the conclusion of the above propositions to several others throughout the Ethics, including much later in E5p9, which he also uses as support for 2p11 and 3p7. In all of these propositions, the message is clear. The more adequate ideas we can have at once about the myriad of things that contribute to an event, including its true first cause as substance with its fixed and eternal laws, the less we will be affected in a “harmful” manner by any one event. This level of comprehension is not possible without imaginative knowledge. E5p9 reads, “Next, because the mind's essence, that is, power (by 3p7) consists only in thought (by 2p11), the mind is less acted on by an affect which determines it to consider many things together than by an equally great affect which keeps the mind engaged solely in considering one or a few objects.”

The type of conceptual focus required to order one's idea types when thinking through the connections between concepts and their varying power involves an increase in the body's power to act in direct proportion with the power of thinking, habit, and reflection if thinking adequately. To be aware of an idea in reflection, despite its truth or falsity in content, is, nonetheless, real for the person experiencing it. Hasana Sharp writes, “The force of an idea is experienced affectively, by the whole individual, such that Spinoza ultimately assimilates judgment to affect. Affect is, therefore, not opposed to reason. Instead, reason names an active

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103 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p7: 75.
104 Ibid. 5p9: 166.
affect, an action (EVp3).”¹⁰⁵ This experience includes having reflective ideas about other ideas that we are learning or experiencing. In the TTP, Spinoza writes, “So when something in Nature appears to us as ridiculous, absurd or evil, this is due to the fact that our knowledge is only partial, that we are largely ignorant of the order and coherence of the whole of Nature and want all things to be arranged to suit our reason.”¹⁰⁶

This is an important insight that Spinoza was already ready for us to consider rationally at the end of Book One of the Ethics. He asks us to consider our reliance on imaginative knowledge when we believe that things in Nature were made for us. He observes:

The other notions are also nothing but modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected; and yet the ignorant consider them the chief attributes of things, because as we have already said, they believe all things have been made for their sake, and call a thing good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it... All of these things show sufficiently that each one has judged things according to the disposition of his brain; or rather, has accepted affections of the imagination as things... For although human bodies agree in many things, they still differ in very many. And for that reason what seems good to one, seems bad to another; what seems ordered to one, seems confused to another; what seems pleasing to one, seems displeasing to another, and so on. ...men judge things according to the disposition of their brain, and imagine, rather than understand them... We see, therefore, that all the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain Nature are only modes of imagining, and do not indicate the nature of anything, only the constitution of the imagination.¹⁰⁷

Because gaining knowledge, including learning about how reflexive knowledge enhances itself, involves a radical conception of the singularity of conscious awareness, Steenbakkers writes, “Subjectivity plays an important role in Spinoza's theory of the passions, too, viz. in the insistence on the imaginatio...”¹⁰⁸ Steenbakkers believes there is the concept of a human

¹⁰⁶ Spinoza, TTP, 16: 175.
¹⁰⁷ Spinoza, Ethics, 1 App: 30. Piet Steenbakkers notes, “Although Spinoza's argument in the appendix of part 1 nowhere explicitly develops a theory of the imagination, the second corollary to proposition 16 of part 2 shows that he thought of this appendix as an integral part of such a theory.”
“subject” to be found in Spinoza's system. What we singularly strive to accomplish is not only more rational thinking. It is also “a new form...of appropriation' of one's imaginary life, a new grasp of the peculiar force of ideas, the way that we live and have our being in 'the attribute' of thought.”109 Recall that it is ok to imagine something that does not exist as long as we know we are only imagining such a thing. This is not an error in reasoning if one is aware that they are imagining. Therefore, in reference to the longer citation above, we imagine that there is order in Nature and there are many good reasons why we need to imagine an ordered world, but reason understands such singular uses of imaginative knowledge. It is not, in other words, an error that decreases our power to exist if reason is aware of such imaginings as singular however false. It is in this way also that one can access their imagination with rational force to create something artistic, novel, etc.

Spinoza writes that we often prefer our imaginative ideas because they are easier to maintain an awareness of, such as any given sense experience we decide to focus on which we are having. Our senses as ordered ideas are partially constructed and this allows us to remember only those aspects of our sense encounters that directly caused us some pleasure or pain. Yet, the order of our ideas is the order of things as we know them. As there is no true order in Nature, it is still apparent that we can learn to order our ideas according to those ideas which are rational, joyous, affirmative, powerful, and contribute to our and others' power to exist because of how the laws of Nature operate with necessity. We automatically increase our desire for more understanding and affirmative, efficient, and creative action that benefits all of Nature.

When we become inclined to desire more true understanding of things, however complex, we shift the types of pleasures we can experience (and the intensity of those pleasures), including the intellectual love of Nature. Thus, we can alter the intensity of both our order of ideas and

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subsequently of our affects, if not regularly then at least more consistently in order to “learn the true way of life and acquire a virtuous disposition.” This takes transformations from one using their power to merely survive based on their appetites to using their power to enhance reason and combine with others who are disposed to use reasoning more regularly. Affects can be conceived as actions if the affects are ideas that can cause other ideas with more rational force. As Genevieve Lloyd writes, “Spinoza's account of imagination...takes very seriously that level at which all knowledge starts – that immediate awareness of what is happening to one's body. And it's only on the basis of that that we get to the point of becoming rational. The level of imagination is never transcended in Spinoza. It's always there as the base of knowledge, even when knowledge becomes adequate.”

Some scholars, such as Theo Verbeek, have recently written about how the mind can perceive itself thinking. In order to recognize when one is relying on the common notions of rationality without too easily transitioning to ideas of the first kind, one's mind must perceive itself in reflection. Therefore, ideas of the imagination cannot be merely reduced to descriptions as “perceptions” alone. Adequate ideas are immediately true in Spinoza's system, that is, they are self-evidently known when comprehended. When we reflect on which kind of knowledge we are relying on, we can understand which combination of types of knowledge work with the most affirmative and powerful effects. This is a form of operational knowledge, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five on intuitive knowledge.

We learn in E2p7 not only that “the order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things,” but that there are modes of thinking which must be conceived through

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other modes of thinking.\textsuperscript{113} This is one way reason can understand how to better recognize what type of ideas are being relied on, how they are processed or associated, and how they are then categorized. Although what a body can do is \textit{as} important for Spinoza as what a mind can do, it is again interesting to remind ourselves that “so long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of Nature, or the connection of causes, through the attribute of thought alone.”\textsuperscript{114} Again, we see that this identification is important for truly applying a method to thought construction, which guarantees an increase in our power to think and act. To think about ideas or actions as only modes would be to try and conceive of the whole of Nature (which is impossible), but to adequately understand our affects helps us distinguish between types of knowledge we are relying on and what each type can tell us about the laws of thought and extension. In other words, although thinking only about our modes of thought is problematic in some ways, to understand more about our affects will, in turn, strengthen our capacity to better recognize which type of knowledge we are relying on and how these ideas are increasing or decreasing our \textit{conatus} modally. Although the human mind may be understood as “part of the infinite intellect,” to think of things in parts can be problematic, as noted above. This includes thinking of every aspect of thought and extension in modal terms \textit{if} modes are conceived as singular ways of expressing substance as conceived through something else (namely, the attributes), and not as expressions of substance directly. This is similar to the problem of thinking about expressions of Nature in the form of duration.\textsuperscript{115}

\textit{On Method and What a Body Can Do}

I will spend the remaining pages of this chapter explaining exactly how my interpretation is accurate by closely examining several more specific propositions of Spinoza’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p7: 35.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid. 2p7s: 35.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 2p11c: 39.
\end{itemize}
**Ethics.** The brief extension of this chapter is necessary due to the lack of scholarship on the importance of imaginative knowledge in Spinoza’s system. For example, as we move from E2p9 through 2p19, especially 2p12 (which the scholarship does tend to focus on), Spinoza asks us to suspend judgment about some of the conclusions being drawn deductively until we understand more about how the new propositions can be added to all of Book One. It is not the kind of knowledge that will become immediately apparent to us, but will take the force of further deductive proofs.

When we are learning we use memory, our senses, and language (all imaginative knowledge). As Spinoza writes, we will not be capable of understanding adequate (“distinct”) knowledge unless we first understand “adequately the nature of our body.” 116 We are asked to focus on a combination of our knowledge about the affections of our body, or, in other words, we are asked to focus on our affects. E2p11 states, “The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the *idea* of a singular thing which actually exists.” 117 As the mind is its ideas, the ordering of ideas will involve the intellect, but the ordering that occurs as imaginative knowledge will also include the ordering of sensations, at least those we are aware of. I delayed emphasizing this aspect of Book Two until now because of the importance on method by Spinoza and how one cannot grasp what it is to order their sensations (affections) until they first understand the ways in which the laws of the attribute of thought operate. The rational ordering of our affects is possible the more we can reflect on the types of ideas we are having and their relations to each other. In effect, we can enhance the power of our personal affects.

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117 Ibid. 2p11: 38, emphasis added.
To understand ourselves and the laws of thought and extension is to understand Nature as best we can, but this is a complex deductive move because, as Spinoza also writes, there is no true order in Nature: “Since order does not exist outside the imagination, there is no such thing as order in the universe."\(^{118}\) Thus, if “the order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things,” and if true order does not exist outside the imagination and what adequate thinking knows about the laws of thought, ideas of the first kind of knowledge, however partial, are absolutely necessary for truly comprehending all of Spinoza’s ontology and epistemology.

Better understanding the structure of imaginative knowledge not only strengthens the capacity to reason well, but it includes adequate knowledge about more natural phenomena.\(^{119}\) As mentioned briefly and will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, recall that it is not enough to adequately understand the rule of proportion. It has to be applied well and with force. When one applies such a rule with both imaginative and rational force is when we are truly engaged in using what we know about such a law. This applies specifically to imaginative knowledge because Spinoza asks us to imagine those things that increase our power even when they are not present. As our affects are a combination of both thought and extension, what we are trying to understand and apply with more force includes increasing our ratios of motion and rest to our benefit, but also for others. In Chapter 7 of the \textit{TTP} Spinoza writes, “Now in examining natural phenomena we first of all try to discover those features that are the most universal and common to the whole of Nature, to wit, motion-and-rest...”\(^{120}\) In other words, what we discover are laws of physics (and no one man can change those).

There are passages like this throughout the \textit{TTP} and they are consistent with what is deduced in Book Two of the \textit{Ethics}. If we are consciously reflecting on our affects then we can

\(^{118}\) Steenbakkers, “Spinoza and the Imagination,” 179.
\(^{120}\) Ibid. \textit{TTP}, 7: 460.
take other ideas about the structures of thought as the object of our reflections. In doing so, because thought and extension run parallel to each other, to increase the power of thought through understanding how our ideas operate is to increase the power of actions possible. These levels of increase in the proto-physics of force add to our capacities for conscious reflection. Beth Lord writes, “Self-consciousness increases with our bodily capabilities.”  

The result is an element of proto-physics or chains of actions of force and motion within each respective attribute that increases power for both, or what a body can do. The precise way to understand our increase in power is by more easily recognizing with efficiency exactly what series of ideas we are relying on, the cause of those ideas, the strength of imaginative ideas as compared to the ratio of adequate conceptions, and what, in total, our resulting affects are. This is also the way affects can transition to a more affirmative experience.

E2p13 is one of the longest propositions in all the Ethics, covering 5 pages for its demonstration and explanation. I concentrate on it here because we learn that the human body exists “as we sense it.” It is important to recognize that our power to exist increases when we are aware of the true cause of the object of our ideas, which can include ourselves as an adequate cause. A simple way to state this is that we experience the bodily and intellectual joys which accompany thinking well and acting with more energy and vivacity for living as both a singular and social being. As E2A4 notes, we feel that our bodies are or can be affected in multiple ways. Although they are related, to think about bodies is to think about modes of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not about substance. In other words, we enact imaginative portioning when we focus on only bodies and not some of the common notions about the larger, organic whole of which we are subject. Modes (even when understood as ideas) cannot be

121 Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 67.  
122 Spinoza, Ethics, 2Ax4: 32.
adequately understood on their own, such as that which is merely a deterministic modification of substance, but must involve the concept of the attribute of which they are a part (and all the other dimensions of attributes being logically true that this involves). This particular aspect of Spinoza's argument is important. The argument demonstrates that the affections of bodies can be understood as ratios of motion and rest that can be ordered by understanding the laws of proportion. By contrast, when we comprehend the first cause of Nature as a whole (substance as self-caused in its essence of existing), we are to think of the definition of substance understood through the attribute of thought alone and proceed accordingly. In other words, to achieve the latter we are to adequately comprehend the laws of thought as an expression of one substance, but to adequately understand ideas as modal expressions of substance is to include our singular ways of imagining what can increase our power to exist with more force (according to what we have access to personally). Again, in 2p49 we read:

In the mind there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea... So a false idea, insofar as it is false, does not involve certainty. When we say that a man rests in false ideas, and does not doubt them, we do not, on that account, say that he is certain, but only that he does not doubt, or that he rests in false ideas because there are no causes to bring it about that his imagination wavers... For by certainty we understand something positive... I begin, therefore, by warning my readers, first, to distinguish accurately between an idea, or concept, of the mind, and the images of things which we imagine. And then it is necessary to distinguish between ideas and the words by which we signify things. ...an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation... [We] 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. ...we perceive that one idea has more reality, or perfection, than another...\textsuperscript{123}

Certainty is always an absolute affirmation. The above quotation is used only to demonstrate that when we are relying on a series of false ideas without doubting such ideas, we are relying on ideas that are in no way adequate knowledge. Nonetheless, such ideas can become

\textsuperscript{123} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p49: 63-65, emphasis added.
so strong as to overpower reason. The point is that images are not concepts that we can rely on like we do with concepts as common notions with certainty. For example, we cannot imagine eternal substance as an image, but we can understand such a concept in a rational deduction. In Letter 17 of his correspondence Spinoza also describes images as “effects” of imaginative knowledge.\(^{124}\) To adequately understand effects is something entirely different, at times, from what it is to adequately conceive of causes. Imaginative knowledge can add to our greater perfection when reason better recognizes these distinctions and the laws of thought and uses the imagination to its benefit.

Laws of Nature are today classified as \textit{forces} and, thus, as properties of physics. As an expression of substance in our own unique combination, what we express is the whole of Nature by being subject to its laws, though we do this according to our own varying degrees of ideational and bodily power. The emphasis on the motion and rest between and within bodies is crucial. \textit{The way to increase our power in action is to understand how that power of action can be increased as a law of Nature.} This understanding can produce more adequate ideas, which, in turn, simultaneously produces more powerful actions. As Spinoza notes, a body in motion stays in motion unless it is determined by another body to rest or to slow in its own motion. This is demonstrated in E2p13 L3c and occurs in history well before Issac Newton ever stated the same formula.\(^{125}\) But, as an external type of description of what occurs between two or more bodies that causally come into contact with one another, it is not a description of material substances. It is not a description about matter. Consider what is written earlier in 2p13 on what is true about a human body as it is applied to ideas: “For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of

\(^{124}\) Spinoza, Letter 17, 803. Spinoza also writes, “The effects of the imagination arise from the constitution of body or of mind.”

\(^{125}\) Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p13 L3c: 41.
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 anything."

When we speak about proportion and laws of Nature, it is not the “quantity” of ideas that is important, but the power of our thinking and how our adequate understanding can enhance our capability for powerfully rational and creative thought *patterns*. In addition, as explained in E2p16, what we perceive includes many external bodies and their motions simultaneously with our own ideas and motions of speed and rest. In the next two propositions of Book Two, in a lucid moment of what is now considered early neuroscience, Spinoza deduces that when a mind and body (in their more fluid aspects) have been influenced by other bodies, the mind will retain this impression in its memory. When the body acts in the same way as it once did (when it was affected by something that left such an impression), the mind will have an idea of the thing that affected it *as present to it*. It is not “present” in the sense that the actual thing that affected us is truly present before us. It is present in the sense that the mind drew an association of the thing as it affected us in the form of an idea as an *affect*. It is the affect that leaves an impression.

This type of regular occurrence is what Spinoza calls an “image” in E2p17s and p18s, one that is retained in the mind. The reason I did not mention this sooner is that Spinoza wants us to work through the logical deductions of the *Ethics* up to this point before we actually try to understand what a finite, human image in the mind might actually be. The more the mind thinks clearly about laws of Nature that are universal and thus outside of concepts of time, the more it will have stronger affects which are based in rationality and can overcome other weaker affects.

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127 Ibid. 2p16c1: 45.
128 For the current neuroscientific applications of Spinoza’s system see Antonio Damasio’s work *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Harcourt, 2003).
129 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p17s, p18s: 45-47.
which are based on past memories, future fantasies, and present dispositions (all a part of imaginative knowledge).

E2p40 is considered the most famous proposition about the three types of knowledge described in Spinoza’s system. I reference it in more depth in the last pages of this chapter because the deductions prior to this proposition are important for truly understanding the import of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology (or he would have written about them sooner). In 2p40, we learn about the three kinds of knowledge we can have, but also about more specifics in how we error in thought. We can make errors in reasoning if we are: 1) not aware of the laws of thought; 2) not aware of the true causes of the object of our ideas; 3) overcome by stronger passive notions or sense experiencing without realizing that we are overcome, all of which continually reduces our power to thrive.

This problem is demonstrated more forcefully in 2p17s: “...the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, though they do not reproduce the [external] figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.”130 Note that our images “do not reproduce” what we sense, that is, they do not represent what we sense exactly, but are combined with singular, personal memories and other ideas. This would mean that every person’s images of things must be different to some extent in how they are experienced on a singular level. What is striking is in what follows next. As our personal imaginings and remembered images do not “reproduce the [external] figures of things,” it is clear that imaginative knowledge cannot be said to lack anything. Further, recall that to understand something as a lack is to understand it negatively, but to understand something as partial is to have at least some real knowledge.

130 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p17s: 45-46.
Some of these images tell us how we are affected by external things and how we then combine what affects us with past memories and language (meaning). It is within our power to imagine those things that we know will increase our conatus. This is the point of learning how to use a forceful method when reflecting on idea types. The activity of the imagination involves memory directly. As Steenbakkers writes, “In order to remember something, we must be able to imagine it, to think of it as present to us even if it does not exist any longer. The link we thus establish between ideas is not determined by the things themselves, but reflects the way our body has been affected by earlier experiences.” In addition, notice that to imagine something which one knows is not present any longer while understanding the laws of thought is to use reason to help strengthen more helpful imaginative knowledge by proportion and patterning. It is to knowingly have a false impression that is, nonetheless, creating and contributing to real affects for a singular body and mind.

The implications of this set of propositions in Book Two of the Ethics are great. The links we establish between types of ideas can be re-arranged to better pattern what we know to be true about the laws of thought and extension. As a result, as an effect of such increased use of certain kinds of imaginative knowledge, reason can enhance our understanding of the capacity of our mind and body, increasing the power and creativity of both kinds of knowledge. We can combine both ideas of the imagination and of reason with more force, but what we desire by understanding the laws of thought is to increase our adequate chains of common notions. This is clear when Spinoza writes next that “the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack an idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to it. For if the mind, while it imagined nonexistent things as present to it, at the same time knew that those did not exist, it

would, of course, attribute this power of imagining to a virtue of its nature, not a vice...” Our power to use imaginative ideas well can become a virtue! Steenbakkers writes, “The imagination is a power (and hence a virtue) in itself, since it is an expression of God's [Nature's] power.” If we cannot better recognize which type of knowledge we are more heavily relying on we are stuck within what Spinoza calls a vice. To pattern our reflective thoughts on the real causes of our ideas, which are the laws of thought and how to manipulate them to our benefit, is to increase our capacity for thinking and acting with more power.

The effects of this level of understanding includes that the imagination itself can override ideas which decrease our power to exist by imagining those things which we know will increase our power to exist. Even though we are imagining fictions, reason recognizes the patterning of ideas that the imagination is capable of as a force that can enhance its own capacities. Steenbakkers concludes:

...all the imaginations the mind is subject to are not at odds with the truth, nor are they dispelled by the appearance of the truth. The ethical perspective here is that imaginations that make us suffer cannot be cured simply by confronting the real state of affairs: they require something that excludes their presence in the mind. This may well be another [stronger] imagination. Knowing the truth is not enough to override powerful imaginative ideas, although it is a great start. What we can do is put our rational knowledge of the processes of the first kind of knowledge into action, creating stronger, more affirmative imaginings which benefit us. In understanding how imaginative knowledge is formed and influences us, we can better order and arrange the ideas our mind reflects on, produces, and associates. This is not an act of free will because all of thought and extension operates according to fixed and necessary laws. The key is understanding how to manipulate those laws to our benefit and, therefore, the benefit of all of

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134 Ibid. 184. I dedicate this insight to my philosophy buddy and friend, Josh Paruch.
Nature. In 2p18s we read, “From this we clearly [i.e. adequately] understand what memory is. For it is nothing other than a certain connection of ideas involving the nature of things which are outside the human body – a connection which is in the mind according to the order and connection of affections of the human body.”135 Steenbakkers concludes, “The originality resides not in the link as such [between imagination and memory], but in [Spinoza's] view of the imagination as a concatenation of ideas reflecting an identical concatenation of corporeal affections.”136

In E2p21 Spinoza concludes that the mind and the body “are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension. So the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, thought.”137 Brain processes are an expression of the attribute of extension. The combination of thought and extension come together in our affects. It is important for us to keep these series of adequate ideas about thought and extension readily apparent to our memory. The form of an idea in its associations with other ideas that have caused it is significant when understanding the idea as a mode or modification of substance. But when the mind is conceived as an idea that God is having as a thinking thing, the way we think about our ideas alters. This alteration includes how we conceive of imaginative ideas and their power as well.

By the time we deductively reach E2p22, a proposition that includes more detail about the nature of affects, we also realize that theories of representation about Spinoza’s epistemology will not suffice. I take up the exact reasons why in Chapter Four. One reason, though, is because the adequate understanding of the causes of our ideas and the nature of our

135 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p18s: 47.
137 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p21s: 48.
attributes as expressions of substance places together both ontology and epistemology for Spinoza in a way that cannot be separated. Yet, this system can still include a theory of human consciousness as well. Our series of adequate ideas that include God (substance) as the cause deductively, proximally or otherwise, cannot be explained or reduced to categories about bodily affections alone. Theories of representation which claim Spinoza’s epistemology is about having ideas that are representations of bodily affections will, therefore, not be accurate enough. Spinoza is clear about why this is the case from 2p22 onward. In 2p23 we learn that the mind’s ideas “involve” the nature of the body, but due to the identity of substance, the affections of the body agree with the nature of the mind as one and the same thing: “So knowledge of these ideas will necessarily involve knowledge of the mind. But (by P22) knowledge of these ideas is in the human mind itself. Therefore, the human mind, to that extent only, knows itself...”138 In other words, anything which is adequately understood as the same thing cannot include a theory of representation between two things.

The use of deductive reasoning allows us to increase the force of our adequate thinking, including about the laws of thought. Spinoza clarifies this in 2p25 through 2p29 next, as well as in 2p40. As noted above, the method and informed order of our reflections becomes very important, particularly because the ideas we have of our affections do not “involve adequate knowledge of the human body itself.”139 I discuss this aspect of adequate knowledge in Chapter Three next, but what we are learning is that we cannot have complete adequate knowledge of our body because that kind of more scientific knowledge would include being aware of all the actual physical processes and operations internal to us. Again, we can only be aware of our affects. This may seem confusing at first, which is why we need to track the order

138 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p23: 49.
139 Ibid. 2p27: 50.
of what we have understood thus far in its deductive force. Simply stated, an epistemic agent does not have complete knowledge about every one of the multitude of interactions occurring in the body that are in conjunction with all other parts which constitute one singular organism. How we order our affects will include what we have already adequately understood about the causes of our ideas, the laws of thought, and the power of expression of both thought and extension together as one unified force. This is a combination of continually shifting affections of which I have ideas that I can re-arrange or re-order to create more affirmatively powerful, useful, and joyous affects. Yet, such understanding can be used to manipulate singular, imaginative ideas in ways that can create stronger imaginings that aid reason further. As Pierre Macherey also writes, the “privation of knowledge” is not something negative, “to the contrary…it cannot be constituted except in relation to knowledge, for which it is a ‘mode.’ The inadequate idea is an incomplete idea, to the extent that we cannot grasp it except by mutilating it. In itself, in God, it is adequate, but by understanding it in a partial manner, we are prevented from perceiving the necessity within it…”140 This is also what makes it distinctly one’s own, the singularity of its particular partiality.

E2p40 is considered one of the most important propositions about Spinoza’s version of epistemology, as noted above, and we have been building to it deductively using a specific type of deductive method.141 I would like to conclude by examining a few other propositions that lead to 2p40. The focus of the propositions leading to E2p40, including E2p36, often discuss the nature of confusion. Our daily lives are continuously affected by imaginative knowledge, thus confused and fragmented ideas are a regular part of the ontology of the everyday. If we

140 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 67-68.
141 Notice that Spinoza’s use of the geometric method and our first reading of the *Ethics* is similar to our learning how the laws of proportion work. As we proceed, or perhaps on a second of third reading, we can actually apply the laws of thought and what we have learned with more force as we proceed.
only take into consideration our own ideas without understanding the laws of thought and extension (as adequate knowledge which can be applied to all minds), we will remain confused. It is to our benefit to combine ideas with others who are also thinking rationally. We must both understand what it is to be an expression of a self-causing substance and what it is for our ideas to be affected by other ideas in a singular way. The more we surround ourselves with others who understand this, the stronger we are as a group (of ideas, of actions, etc.). It is of the most importance that we learn how to recognize the difference between being affected by external causes or becoming the adequate cause of our own series of ideas and, therefore, affects. This is a heightened level of conscious awareness that is capable of rationally reflecting back on the types of knowledge one is relying on and the causes of that knowledge. This is not an act of free will. It is the necessary result of understanding how the laws of thought work. In other words, the newly strengthened capacity to reflect on what types of knowledge we are relying on more heavily and why is an act of adequate, rational knowing and the power of the second kind of knowledge. E2p29s makes this clearer:

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, that is, so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For so often as it is disposed internally, in this or another way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly...142

What becomes interesting is tracking exactly where Spinoza references imaginative knowledge for the rest of the Ethics. By the time we get to 2p40s2 defining the three types of knowledge specifically, Spinoza focuses on what deductive force (as a real force in Nature) can do for increasing the power of rational thinking up to that point. Citing Euclid again (although this time in a positive manner), Spinoza’s emphasis is on what can be understood about “the

142 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p29s: 52.
common property of proportionals.” We can be aware of what the law or rule of proportion is, but we can also be capable of applying it immediately to our various series of ideas and different types of knowledge. Naturally, it is helpful if we can do this easily so to more efficiently regulate the proportion and magnitude of idea types we are directly aware of and relying on.

Coupled with 2p43, we learn about a more nuanced difference between a method of reason that is immediate and one which only mimicks reason. If we employ “the proper order of philosophizing,” we cannot doubt a true idea when we have one, but we need to know what the proper order of causes are first:

> And so he who has an adequate idea, or (by p34) who knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, or true knowledge, of his own knowledge... For no one who has a true idea is unaware that it is a true idea other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way. And of course no one can doubt this unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, namely, the very [act of] understanding.

Ideas are not mute, they are not pictures, they are modes of thinking, actions of understanding. This is the specific emphasis of Chapters Three and Four next.

It is not that an idea must agree with its object, but that we understand how ideas can be conceived as modes of thinking which are intrinsically determined according to the type of knowledge they are. This level of recognition (conscious reflection) has nothing to do with free will. As Book Two moves into Book Three of the _Ethics_, from the nature of the mind to the nature of the affects, what we are focusing on is not the body as much as on the associations we draw between series of ideas, and in ways in which we realize that we are not freely associating ideas either. This is not possible unless a singular individual is aware that they are consciously reflecting on the order and type of ideas they are having (i.e. of their own power of

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143 Spinoza, _Ethics_, 2p40s2: 57.
144 Ibid. 2p43, 2p43s: 58, emphasis added.
understanding). As noted above, the ability to be able to suspend judgment until more knowledge is gained is important. Spinoza writes, “For when we say that someone suspends judgment, we are saying nothing but that he sees that he does not perceive the thing adequately. Suspension of judgment, therefore, is really a perception, not [an act] of free will.”  

Suspension of judgment includes knowing when to suspend judgment even though one might be experiencing strong imaginative ideas and images which leave impressions.

The recognition of such importance is adequate knowledge about the attribute of thought which creates an affect of joy and understanding. The suspension is an affirmative action for the mind while recognizing that it is relying on the imagination, something otherwise considered to be passive and inadequate. Spinoza writes, “The affects...considered in themselves, follow with the same necessity and force of Nature as the other singular things. And therefore they acknowledge certain causes, through which they are understood, and have certain properties, as worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing, by the mere contemplation of which we are pleased.”

I spent a good deal of time discussing Book Two of the *Ethics* in this chapter because of its importance for adequately understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. I end with an emphasis on Book Three because of how often Spinoza references the opening eleven propositions of Book Two in order to support his next deductive moves in Book Three. As we will read in the next chapters, understanding Book Five and intuitive knowledge is also not possible without pairing it with Book Two specifically.

E3p2s, for example, draws on the connection between ideas (their associations or connections), as well as the order in which we understand anything in Nature. What we learn

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146 Ibid. 3 preface: 69.
next is that the ontological collapses within the epistemological. God is conceived as the adequate cause of the effects of God as a thinking thing (under the attribute of thought). We can then understand ourselves as a proximate cause in this respect, but also as an adequate cause if we understand the laws of thought and extension (which together create singular affects) and how to order our ideas with more force. The discussion turns to what it is to conceive of oneself as an adequate cause because we can then understand how adequate thinking can produce more and more powerful effects (ideas as actions which also become effects). As a result, an adequate idea can be understood as both a cause and as an effect depending on in what order of ideas about the causes of the knowledge one is consciously reflecting on.

The result (effect), to which I have been building in this chapter, of this level of understanding is striking. Our affects can be conceived as actions if the affections of our bodies are understood as the effects of our understanding being conceived (and thus operating) as an adequate cause of its own ideas. This is not a causal effect between mind and body as there is a causal barrier between attributes (each one is still of the same substance). In order to fully grasp the power of this conclusion and action of understanding we will have to go into more depth about the structure of common notions and the affects in the next two chapters. What is important to start to understand is that rationality needs certain elements of imaginative knowledge in order to strengthen itself and cause more intellectual joy, and that this process is intimately related to the power of our affects and overall conatus. In this way, Book Three is directly connected to Book Five of the Ethics and not only Books One and Two. The intellectual love of God (or Nature) causes us to strive to exist with more power and with an enhanced capacity to use both reason and the imagination with a stronger combined force. This
is why I continually emphasize that Spinoza’s epistemology is a type of proto-physics of force and motion. This level of awareness involves the “art of thinking” as it is more rationally construed:

All of these things, indeed, show clearly that both the decision of the mind and the appetite and the determination of the body by nature exist together – or rather are one and the same thing, which we call a decision when it is considered under, and explained through, the attribute of thought, and which we call a determination when it is considered under the attribute of extension and deduced from the laws of motion and rest.147

Piet Steenbakkers concludes that the power of the imagination in its affirmative capacities is directly proportional to an increase in our understanding; the more we understand about our affects, affections, and the power of the three types of knowledge, the more we use them to produce more understanding, joy, motivation, love, and pleasure as powerfully combined affects. Our power to act depends on our body's complexity, yet what this is remains nothing other than “reason's capacity of knowledge and action;” and, as it increases, so too does “the power of the imagination.”148 The conclusion is that understanding the laws of thought will automatically produce a series of effects that include a more active use of both imaginative and rational knowledge together. This includes our understanding the attribute of extension as well.149

When the force of rationality increases in its ability to understand the true causes of any one encounter, the body's complexity increases because the options available are clearer and more diverse. We comprehend ourselves as an adequate cause. By E3p53, Spinoza begins to directly and regularly identify ideas of the imagination with our power to act. He writes, “When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more, the more

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147 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p2s: 73.
149 Recall 3p2 in the Ethics here. Spinoza directly references E2p7 as support for this conclusion: “The order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things.”
distinctly it *imagines* itself and its power of acting.”\(^{150}\) Ideas of the first kind (our partial, inadequate ideas) can be the very source of our joy when we imagine our power of acting and what it would take to increase our power of acting.

As affects “always operate through the medium of the imagination,” then, as noted in E3p37, the desire that results from our joys or from our love will be greater *in proportion to* how strong the affect is.\(^ {151}\) Affects are not special kinds of ideas. Affects are felt affections of the body and ideas of the mind in awareness that cause impressions or move us in certain directions. True joy increases our power of acting. Joy, as an element of a powerful affect, is directly related to ideas of the imagination. What brings us joy can result from learning how joy is created, and the variety of types of true joys that exist and increase our power to exist. *Imagining what brings us joy must involve a transition to a reliance on ideas of reason if we are to understand the true causes of our joy and of Nature.* These transitions between idea types can only be recognized by a singular mind in conscious reflection, including with the awareness and knowledge of what the three different types of knowledge that we can have are. They are also what can motivate us, give us energy, and, therefore, can be conceived as a type of physical and ideational force.

According to E3p37, when we experience great joy, we desire to preserve it. Virtue, as we will read about next, is also identified with both reason and power (as identical) in Spinoza’s system. This level of understanding is applied knowledge about how to use ideas of the first kind of knowledge with more affirmative and effective force. “An affect will be stronger if we imagine its cause to be present than if we imagine it to be absent...an affect will

\(^{150}\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p53: 98, emphasis added. See also E3p54.

\(^{151}\) Ibid. 3p37: 89.
be more intense if we imagine its object to be possible rather than contingent."\textsuperscript{152} The use of imaginative knowledge for strengthening a positive affect is, therefore, critical.

Each of us has a personal lens through which we filter everything. The importance of imaginative knowledge as Spinoza defines it adds to our learning about the richness and variety of human experience, even while understanding that we are driven by laws of Nature. Spinoza's ontological formulations may not allow for a complete theory of subjectivity or consciousness that would satisfy everyone in philosophy, psychology, and science, but his epistemological foundations do allow for what it is to be a singular individual with reflective awareness and a unique perspective. The fact that we need other ideas and other bodies in order to both survive and to thrive does not eliminate the reality of singular conscious experience in Spinoza’s system. How else can one understand or imagine themselves as the adequate cause of their ideas and actions? How else can one rationally suspend judgment while knowingly relying on better imaginative ideas until more adequate knowledge is acquired?

As we read in E3p5, we learn that it is impossible for two things that are equally powerful yet contrary to each other to co-exist.\textsuperscript{153} Similar to the laws of physics, if one thing is more powerful than another it will be able to overpower it. The same is true for types of ideas, as well as the proportion and magnitude of ideas in association with the affects they are a part of. If they were equally contrary, they would destroy or cancel each other out. In the same way, one affect must be more powerful than another for it to take over in force. Spinoza writes, “If two contrary actions are aroused in the same subject, a change will have to occur, either in both of them, or in only one, until they cease to be contrary.”\textsuperscript{154} This is also in line with what was

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{152} Steenbakers, “Spinoza and the Imagination,” 192.
\textsuperscript{153} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 3p5:
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid. 5 Ax 1: 162.
\end{footnotesize}
noted earlier that two things in relation with each other will look for the “least possible resistance.”

The question remains: How exactly are mental events efficacious without causally interacting with, nor being able to be reduced to, their biological or physical counterparts in explanation? Put bluntly, does Spinoza's epistemology account for how one's ideas transition exactly, through reflective awareness but without free will, from a passive state into an active one? As Theo Verbeek writes, “...the author of the Ethics cannot but see the notion of truth and reason as part of a psychological and genetic theory of mind.”155 But I wonder if we are asking the wrong question? That is, if imaginative ideas only produce other imaginative ideas, then asking what the underlying mechanics of the transition between types of knowledge are is an impossible and illogical question. When Spinoza speaks of transition, as we will read in the next chapters, he speaks about transformations from lesser to greater perfection. When this occurs, if it is significant, our old “self” dies and a new combination and expression of ideas and motion occurs.

One of the only ways to enhance our affects and increase our power of thought and action is to understand how the laws of thought and extension operate (so to be capable of better identifying the true causes of our ideas). When we conceive of ourselves as the adequate cause of our transitions to greater power, we experience great joy and understanding about laws of Nature and ourselves as more powerful expressions of those laws. This is what it means to become free from bondage for Spinoza. In an interview with Susan James, Moira Gatens concludes, “And if you take the view, as I do here, that for Spinoza subjectivity is always a becoming, and the identity of an individual is always a process which is in turn very

much affected by the context in which the individual becomes, then that sort of base-line political theory...allows a possibility for the development of reason and freedom.”

We are _determinate modes_ of existence, but I do not believe we can categorize this determination as a determinate mode of “objective” substance in any sense, which will be explained in more detail in Chapter Three. Ideas of the imagination are not opposite those of reason and intuition; they are just different from them in _kind_, and need to be understood using their own relations to logic that differ from the way we understand the logic of ideas of reason. As Pierre Macherey writes, “To represent reality through the imagination and to know it adequately are two entirely different things. And yet, even in an imaginary representation...there must be something adequate, something true.”

Moira Gatens and Genevive Lloyd conclude:

> Imagination thus has for Spinoza a powerful ontological dimension – a direct and strong contact with bodily reality. On the other hand, Spinoza's version of the imagination involves an equally strong emphasis on the reality of the mental... The figments of the imagination are just as real – just as appropriate as objects of systematic investigation – as the modifications of matter.

This is a political and social consideration, and not only an epistemological or ontological one, because to increase our power to exist is to increase the power to exist of others: “The idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind's power of thinking.” This applies to all human beings.

Our environment _cannot_ limit the ways in which we imagine ourselves as free, nor can it limit the ways in which we try to understand any given situation as an effect of a law of Nature, nor the creative ways in which we find to live and tolerate any given circumstance through acquiring more adequate knowledge of natural phenomena. These are deeply existential

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157 Macherey, _Hegel or Spinoza_, 68.
159 Spinoza, _Ethics_, 3p11: 76.
insights. In this way, we are transformed. Spinoza certainly understood how to tolerate the limited and punishing circumstances during his lifetime in various creative, intelligent, and joyous ways. Next, I explore the mechanics of the second kind of knowledge we can have, rational common notions, in Chapter Three, and how this level of knowledge cannot be reduced to an epistemological theory of representation in Chapter Four. What we will learn is that Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology is about the understanding and development of human affects.

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160 Simon Duffy notes in a 2009 essay on Spinoza scholarship referenced in the next chapter that the French collection of essays edited by C. Lazzeri Spinoza: puissance et impuissance de la raison (Paris 1999) is an excellent resource for understanding “how the intensity of passions is implicated in the function and power of reason in Spinoza.”
CHAPTER THREE

THE POWER OF STRIVING FOR CONTINUOUS UNDERSTANDING

“What distinguishes imaginary representation from true knowledge? It is the point of view from which this knowledge originates, and with it our mode of knowledge.”

-Pierre Macherey

“Learning to think provides necessary if not sufficient conditions for being genuinely virtuous; for learning to be a person. Learning to be a person is intimately bound to the idea of self-reflection, moral agency and responsibility. The test of a decent moralist...as of a decent scientist, is that she recognizes that her knowledge is incomplete, her theories tentative, and yet does not despair.”

-Gillian Howie

The Force of Adequate Understanding as a Law of Nature

There is nothing static about Spinoza’s philosophy. To think and act with force, creative efficiency, and continuous understanding while using both imaginative and rational ideas is, for Spinoza, immanently dynamic. To adequately understand how to use our ideas and actions with increased rational force is to experience the infinite enjoyment of existence. As Stuart Hampshire writes in the introduction to Ed Curley’s translation of the Ethics, Spinoza “consistently argued that everyone should try to create the conditions for security, peace of mind and for the active enjoyment of one’s own powers, physical and mental… In a person as a thinking subject, the levels of complexity are levels of reflexiveness, of thoughts about thoughts…”¹ The more one can think, according to Spinoza, the more one can do. Yet, if we are not able to clearly identify which types of knowledge we are using, that is, which disposition we are taking up and why, our acts of reasoning can fall into error quite easily. As

Spinoza notes, “the path taught by reason is a very difficult one...”\(^2\) The mechanics of reasoning well, while using methods of reflection which guarantee we have not fallen into error, is the focus of this chapter. In this process of combined affects, our capacity to thrive is enhanced.

In this chapter, I first establish the nature of adequate ideas in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology and the structure of the second kind of knowledge. Secondly, I demonstrate how the knowledge of reasoning (common notions) is strengthened by human reflection and certain kinds of singular, imaginative ideas. The mechanics of such force require that we include and define the nature of singular, human consciousness. Lastly, I demonstrate how understanding the second kind of knowledge automatically enhances our rational reflective capacities for a more creative and affirmative use of imaginative knowledge. In conjunction with the effects of stronger rational capacities, our resulting actions of thought lead to the limitless enjoyment of human expression in its increased capacities. As an effect of conceiving oneself as adequately causing one’s own knowledge to express more rational and affirmatively imaginative force, we experience increases in our *conatus* and, simultaneously, add to the power of all of Nature. That is, by understanding how to adequately conceive of oneself as the adequate cause of one’s power, the more one can maneuver and transform that power for still greater effects and enjoyment which benefit all of Nature. As noted in E3p7, the essence of a human being is its *conatus*, which is the tendency towards both self-preservation and increases in power.\(^3\) It is important to begin to understand the nature of human striving as our essence or *conatus*. For example, it involves “indefinite time” and is not related to what we typically understand as “finite time,” the latter of which is durational for Spinoza – therefore always an aspect of


\(^3\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p7: 75. Spinoza writes, “The striving by which each thing strives to preserve in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.”
contingency by definition. As we will learn in this chapter, adequate reasoning does not recognize contingency, only necessity. *Conatus* is the source of both our singular passions and our rational actions and understanding, as is evident in E5p4s.4 *Conatus* is also a singular desire for self-preservation. This is stated clearly in 3p6: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.”5

In developing our rational capacities through understanding the laws of thought by working through Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which is a deliberate element of the text, we learn that our methods of reflection on what we learn are a direct expression of the disposition we take as we use ideas of the imagination and of reason. In this way, working through Spinoza’s dynamic system, a way in which one learns how to strengthen one’s individual capacity to think with more force while combining types of knowledge, is beneficial both individually and collectively. Spinoza is not trying to get us to see order and harmony in Nature. We can only perceive natural phenomena through human experiences and we can only conceive natural phenomena through human ideas and their force of expression. He demonstrates how the laws of thought and extension operate according to the cause and effects of force and motion. This is Spinoza’s epistemological and ontological proto-physics of force. The order of coherence that we perceive in Nature is due, in part, to our imagination. In the *TP*, we read, “This is not surprising, for Nature’s bounds are set not by the laws of human reason whose aim is only man’s true interest and preservation, but by infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of Nature, of which man is but a tiny part.”6 In other words, Spinoza’s

4 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p4s: 164. Spinoza writes, “We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things which it perceives clearly and distinctly, and with which it is fully satisfied, and so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause and joined to true thoughts.” I will return to this in Chapter Four.
5 Ibid 3p6: 75. In addition, 3p8 demonstrates, with 3p6, that an affirmative concept of destruction is not possible when conceiving Nature and its *conatus* adequately.
system is not a continuation of the physics of either Aristotle or Descartes. Dan Garber writes, “According to Aristotelian physics, each kind of thing has its own substantial form, and it was through this that the basic property of things were to be explained. And so fire rises and stones fall because of their forms…” This is not the case for Spinoza. Conatus is not a form.

Recall from the introduction of this thesis that Spinoza is not talking solely about physical matter and its modifications when he defines “substance,” but infinite other types of expressions or attributes. This is another reason why it is important to track not only what type of knowledge we are focusing on but also which series of adequate ideas we are relating to one other. As we have already read, this is because Spinoza will specify what it is for substance to express itself as an attribute as compared to what it is to be a modal modification of substance in our singular expressions. As substance is eternal, we cannot, for example, conceive of it as being destroyed. That is an impossible thought for Spinoza. As early as 1661, Spinoza writes that if any part of matter is destroyed, so too would all of the attribute of extension, for his monism is without distinct parts or objectively real space and time. A monist system that is eternally unifying infinite attributes with infinite expressions includes the logical deduction that each attribute (eygenschappen) “must be conceived through itself.” Otherwise, there would be no way to conceive of distinct expressions of different kinds.

Although all of Spinoza’s substance is animate, his philosophical system cannot be reduced to one of panpsychism. As we read in E2p13c, all of substance strives toward preservation in existence with increasing and decreasing powers of expression. Although each attribute’s expressions are conceived through itself, the modifications of each attribute

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7 Daniel Garber, “Descartes and Occasionalism,” 12. See also Steve Nadler’s edited volume Causality in Early Modern Philosophy for more on the non-teleology of Spinoza’s system and related.
8 Spinoza, Letter 4, 767.
9 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p7-p11: 4-7.
10 Ibid. 2p13c: 40.
can be conceived as eternal by understanding how attributes are eternal (as modes are conceived through something else, namely, always their respective attribute). As we know, we only have access to the attributes of thought and extension. These attributes do not influence each other causally in any manner. Each effect created by a force, action, motion, or expression of an attribute is caused by a connected expression from the same attribute.\textsuperscript{11} As adequate knowledge includes true ideas about the properties of things, in our conscious awareness we learn how to focus and reflect on the object of our ideas and what type of knowledge we are relying upon heavily. In the \textit{KV}, Spinoza writes, “For we have said that the object is the cause of what is affirmed or denied thereof, be it true or false: falsity arising thus, namely, because, when we happen to know something or a part of an object, we imagine that the object (although we know very little of it) nevertheless affirms or denies that of itself as a whole…”\textsuperscript{12}

The two attributes we express are identical in their power simultaneously with each other, although Spinoza draws an important distinction between thought and extension in E4p35c2.\textsuperscript{13} In this proposition we learn that the two attributes share many descriptive commonalities but they are not to be conceived as identical. The only identity they share is that they are both expressions of one, organically unified and eternal substance. An example one can use to understand the difference is the adequate idea that we are both finite as modal modifications of the attributes of thought and extension, and we will perish in our human ratio of motion and rest at some point. This ending of our human conscious finiteness, nonetheless, is also an expression of eternal substance; when we die we simply change or transition into another ratio of motion and rest which does not include the expressions of a singular, human substance.

\textsuperscript{11} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1D6, 1p10, 1p16, 2p1, 2p2. These are some of the deductions Spinoza uses to draw the conclusions noted above. E1p16 is especially important.
\textsuperscript{12} Spinoza, \textit{KV}, 2:83 (footnote 16).
\textsuperscript{13} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p35c2: 132-133.
consciousness and our current homeostatic form of a singular body. The adequate understanding of this difference is the attribute of thought expressing eternal common notions about laws of Nature with more force. Those ideas about the affections of our bodies include both what it is to have and express a finite body and what it is to be a modal modification of eternal substance. We can hold both ideas as adequate in our understanding simultaneously, and we experience this understanding as part of our affects. The bodily experience (affection) as the equivalent of this series of adequate ideas involves an increase in our capacities for actions and bodily expressions that are more powerful and joyous (pleasurable). In addition, as we will read about shortly, adequate ideas about other ideas are not always in need of perfect agreement with any actual physical object in order to be true (as understood). This is why, as we will see in Chapter Four, theories of cognitive representation cannot adequately address every aspect of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. The object of one idea can be another idea. As Gilles Deleuze writes, “In Spinoza the term ‘adequate’ never signifies the correspondence of an idea and the object it represents or indicates, but the internal conformity of the idea with something it expresses [i.e. namely, substance].”\(^\text{14}\)

Because each attribute can be expressed in infinite ways, Spinoza deduces how adequate knowledge can eliminate problematic concepts of both geometric space and linear time. He does this by including our experience of human duration, something that is always an expression of imaginative (singular) knowledge. The concept of something thought about as a “part” can be replaced, at times, with the concept of the motion of composite bodies, as argued in 2p13L7s where we learn that each collection of bodily compositions and variation occurs in

a multiplicity of ways “without any change to the whole individual.”¹⁵ A new “individual” or composite body can be understood as expressing itself with new ratios of motion and rest which continue to alter and are in relation to every other element of what that body (and mind) are in contact with or being influenced by. These compositions or expressions are continually shifting variations (increases and decreases) in power and force. Spinoza replaces the concepts of physical space and time with logical deductions about infinity. By the concept of “eternity,” Spinoza intends not only that which is infinite, but the concept of “existence itself.”¹⁶ The necessary and sufficient condition (adequate knowledge) that supports the infinite as real and as that which we can express as a real element of Nature, includes, by necessity, that all of substance is always in existence. I return to this important deduction throughout the rest of the thesis, but for now we need to examine the nature of proximate causes in this system.

To demonstrate what kind of order and connection in Nature we are capable of describing with accuracy, while also expressing and describing modes as modes (wyzen), requires an understanding of proximate causes. In relation to the definition of substance, proximate causes in Spinoza’s system include adequate ideas about how cause and effect operate from the perspective of infinite attributes with infinite effects. Substance is self-caused and, as Spinoza writes in Chapters One and Two of the KV, that which is nothing cannot be said to have any attributes, but that which is one eternal whole can be deduced to have all

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¹⁵ Spinoza, Ethics, 2p13L7s: 43. What we learn at this point in the Ethics is that there are various things which can speed up or slow down the communication of motion between aggregates of interactions and relations of any one body, composition of bodies, or substance as one whole.

¹⁶ Ibid. 1D8: 2. Spinoza writes, “By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing. For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time…”
attributes possible. A self-caused and self-causing substance “must have all attributes…so that which is Something has attributes because it is Something.”\textsuperscript{17}

That which exists is defined as that which exists eternally because the definition of existence can never include that the thing being defined does not or cannot exist, nor that it has attributes which can cease to exist. This deduction states, therefore, that the attributes of substance must exist by necessity and can never not exist. Therefore, Spinoza’s system can have a dual sense of causality. Efficient and material causation (\textit{beginnende oorzaak}) can only be conceived \textit{in relation to} the concept of modes, as noted in 1p28; this is true even when we understand that God (substance, Nature) is the immanent cause (\textit{inblyvende oorzaak}) of all of Nature’s effects.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, Spinoza is clear in other places that we should not prefer to take up the disposition of conceiving things in this way. If substance and its attributes are immanent and inseparable conceptually, and if modes are expressions of substance whose essence is immanently in and conceived through the attributes, then we can conceive of things as modal modifications of substance \textit{or} we can conceive of things as substance and its effects (as self-caused). Each identification of the actions of substance carries different series of adequately understood relations and definitions. It is the alteration in our disposition and resulting force of action that matters. Finite ideas are modes, but an adequate idea about what modes are can also be taken as an object of thought, and this changes how we conceive of both substance and modes. The nature and relationship of substance and its effects is that, as its own cause, it must be understood as \textit{involved} in its effects. This concept of immanence is not the typical (linear) conception of causality (for one, substance has infinite attributes which are all creating effects eternally), but it does involve such a concept when considering the logic of a human mind in its

\textsuperscript{17} Spinoza, \textit{KV}, 2: 40 (footnote 6). In footnote 8 we read, “…for the nature of a thing can require nothing while it does not exist.”

\textsuperscript{18} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p28: 19-20, among other places.
adequate chain of other adequate ideas, for example. To reason well is not to cause something by necessity as much as to cause is not to reason. When ideas of imaginative knowledge affect other ideas of imaginative knowledge, the notion of causality is altered, and it is not the same as what occurs when adequate ideas cause other adequate ideas. If it were the same effect, then imaginative ideas would not be so potentially dangerous in decreasing conatus. Yet, all ideas can also be understood as acts of some kind. Pierre Macherey writes, “Ideas, all ideas, are acts, that is, they always affirm something in themselves, according to a modality that returns to their cause...”19 Even the suspension of judgment is an action of knowledge. The action of understanding, as an expression of adequate knowledge when we suspend judgment, means we are aware we are not perceiving or conceiving something as completely as we can. We are aware that we have partial knowledge (as an experience) of the thing we are trying to understand. The object of our ideas at this point is not the thing we are trying to understand, but the awareness of our process of adequate understanding in action.20

Adequate ideas always increase our conatus. When we reflect on and recognize that we are not yet fully understanding, we also recognize that we affirm our capacity to reason well. Spinoza affirms this process in Letter 21 when he writes, “…if only you pay attention to your nature, you experience the ability to suspend judgment.”21 The effects of our ideas as effects, related to their cause as other ideas, can be understood both as singular expressions of adequate knowledge and as substance itself expressing more power in its eternal truth of how the attribute of thought operates according to its necessary laws. Imaginative ideas cannot be conceived in this way. They are singular in nature, even if they are still an aspect of the modal expression of substance in its power as ways. What is at stake is the object of our ideas and the

19 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 63.
20 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49s IIB (ii), IIB (iii): 66-67.
21 Spinoza, Letter 21, 826.
disposition we take up. To think as a conscious human being with the capacity to reflect on what is being thought about is more than only reasoning. Therefore, our expression of substance understood as substance must differ from our singular powers of reasoning in their varieties of expressiveness. The relation between substance and mode is an organic whole. Modes are simply the ways in which substance can be and are expressed, including as combinations between ideas. Taking up a rational disposition in reflected awareness is what we know will allow us to generate new knowledge and more diverse experiences.

What we are learning about in Spinoza’s Ethics (adequate reasoning with deductive conclusions) are the necessary effects of such causes (both material and efficient). From the beginning of the Ethics, we learn that the knowledge of effects depends on the knowledge of causes. Therefore, you will not adequately understand the power of your understanding (as effects of other ideas) unless you rationally comprehend how that understanding was caused by other adequate ideas (both your own and derived from external sources). The ocean is continually animated, it has motion, power, and force. All its elements are connected organically in extension, yet we cannot say that the ocean has reflective ideas and actions in the same way that humans do. The definition of cause and effect, in other words, will vary depending on what kind of cause one is trying to understand. As Stephen Connelly writes, substance, for Spinoza, may be analogous to an infinite ocean and its waves, where we are a moving metronome on a moving ship on a moving ocean; but in some real sense the motion of the ocean’s waves will be built into our own otherwise particular motion and understanding of motion. They are separate motions, but they are inseparable. How can something be both a

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22 Spinoza, Ethics, 1A4: 2.
23 See http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/06/14/power-potentia-notes-on-the-thought-of-spinoza. Connolly also published a 2011 article on Aristotle’s influence on Spinoza which can be found in the Utrecht Law Review. Aristotle’s works (as they were preserved and passed down) had a minimal influence on Spinoza.
part of one whole substance yet separate in its own determinate way? This is the problem Spinoza’s *Ethics* solves. As Pierre Macherey summarizes:

In axiom 5 of book I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza affirms the agreement [conventia] of the true idea with its object. This proposition, which is not a definition, does not express the intrinsic character of the true idea: it does not constitute an idea starting from its cause but characterizes it only a posteriori through one of its properties as is confirmed by definition 4 in book II, which distinguishes the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of a true idea. The notion of conventia, which relates the idea to an object that is outside it, evidently designates an extrinsic quality. By contrast, the causal definition of the true idea determines it through its *ad equatio*; it is this concept, which is essential for Spinoza and which marks its rupture with the traditional conception of knowledge. In effect, by *ad equatio* we must think of exactly the opposite of that which reveals itself as conventia. *Adequatio* is the intrinsic determination of the true idea, that is, that which produces its truth in the idea… The essential function of the category of *adequatio* is to break with the conception of knowledge as representation that continues to dominate Cartesianism… The *adequatio* is thus the key to truth, because it expresses this intrinsic relationship of the idea to itself.  

The encounter with ideas (our own and from others) produce real effects. As every effect involves its cause, this aspect of Spinoza’s system does not say that effects can be reduced to their cause in definition or explanation. As our ideas cannot be reduced to our bodily affections and sensations, they can, nonetheless, be understood as real entities which we encounter and which have degrees of force and intensity. The affects of which we are aware are a combination of both attributes. E1p25c defines a “body” as a real “singular” thing, a particular expression of substance in its own determinate way. A body is not, in other words, only defined as a singular human (physical) body. A body can be the combination of many bodies into one force, for example, such as the State. To understand Spinoza’s proto-physics of the force of bodies together, we can refer to Letter 58:

A stone receives from the impulsion of an external cause a fixed quantity of motion whereby it will continue necessarily 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 an external cause. What here applies to the stone must be understood of every individual thing,

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24 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 60, 63. See also Letter 60 in Spinoza’s correspondence to Tschirnhaus.
However complex its structure and varied its functions. For every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way.\textsuperscript{25} Whatever follows or is caused by an attribute of substance is always necessarily infinite. In this way, as this chapter will demonstrate, our expressions of the force of adequate understanding are also eternal. In E1p18 through 1p21, we read, “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things,” and that all of God’s (Nature’s) attributes are eternal because “God’s existence and his essence are one and the same.”\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, anything that follows from the absolute nature of God’s attributes is also infinite. Although our essence conceived as an expression of substance (God, Nature) is eternal, our individual expressions of conatus can also be conceived as modal modifications of substance (modes), and, therefore, vary in their intensities and force of expression according to continually shifting ratios of motion and rest in extension. My force of expression of my conatus is different from my neighbor’s expression of their conatus or of any singular thing in its own determinate expression of its conatus. As noted in 1p25c and 1p28, modes “are nothing but the affections of God’s attributes.”\textsuperscript{27}

Laws of Nature are forces that produce effects and relations of increasing or decreasing power, transformations, re-configurations, and new arrangements.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, because we are a continuous expression of extension, identifying a beginning or ending point of any one series of actions is logically impossible. The language of “beginning” and “ending” is, therefore, often a part of imaginative (singular) knowledge. Thus, to adequately conceive the causality of effects that are involved in their causes will not include explanations from a static point A to a static

\textsuperscript{25} Spinoza, Letter 58, 909, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{26} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. 19. Along with E1p1 we understand that substance as self-causing is always the cause of its own effects. 1p21 is also about our expression of what is affirmatively infinite.
\textsuperscript{28} Later in the chapter I will reference Nancy Cartwright’s insights on the laws of physics that do not address all phenomenological experiences of human existence. She writes, “We have detailed expertise for testing the claim of physics about what happens in concrete situations. When we look to the real implications of our fundamental laws, they do not meet these ordinary standards.”
point B. The nature of the ways in which we can adequately understand causality, for Spinoza, will logically alter depending on if we are describing the expressions of attributes or the effects and expressions of modes. Affections of substance cannot be located ‘in time.’

Certain aspects of the essence of modes are composed of parts because imaginative knowledge is an aspect of what it is to be a modal modification of substance. Our conceiving of anything as a “part,” as we read in Chapter Two, is always an expression of imaginative knowledge. In addition, not all modes are finite, some are infinite and immediate, for example. Yet, any finite expression, if described as an aspect of what it is to be finite, can be logically conceived as a mode. Among the three types of modes (finite, immediate and infinite, and mediate and infinite), their combination in expression as a human mind and body. They are an expression of both imaginative knowledge (in its singularity) and of the adequate knowledge (as common notions which are eternal and necessarily true). In Letter 12, Spinoza writes, “The affections of Substance I call Modes. The definition of Modes, insofar as it is not itself a definition of Substance, cannot involve existence… From this it further follows that when we have regard only to the essence of Modes and not to the order of Nature as a whole, we cannot deduce from their present existence that they will or will not exist in the future or that they did or did not exist in the past.”29 Thus, it is not a logical contradiction to talk about the essence of modes in duration (finite human bodies die, for example) or to explain the same action of modal modification understood more adequately as an expression of an eternal law of Nature.

Therefore, our ideas can be understood as expressions of the power of our conatus and not as in existence or not in existence (that is, as having beginning and ending points). This is also why, as we will read later in this chapter and in Chapter Four, understanding the nature of the power of our affects becomes crucial to adequately comprehending Spinoza’s dynamic

29 Spinoza, Letter 12, 788. We can also reference E1p21 for more support on the infinite and the finite again.
epistemology. The letter noted above was written in 1663, but ten years later, in the unfinished

*TP*, Spinoza reaffirms the same conclusion. He writes:

> Therefore, just as the coming into existence of natural things cannot be concluded from their definition, so neither can their perseverance in existing, for *their essence in the form of ideas* is the same after they have begun to exist as it was before they existed… The same power that they need in order to begin to exist, they also need in order to continue to exist. Hence it follows that the power of natural things by which they exist, and consequently by which they act, can be no other than the eternal power of God… By the right of Nature, then, I understand the laws or rules of Nature in accordance with which all things come to be; that is, the very power of Nature…

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In this way, I conceive of my ideas and actions as both adequately caused by the proto-physics of force and motion on a singular level, and as caused by the laws of Nature. It depends on which disposition of series of ideas I assume as my conscious mind. The existence of natural things or phenomena cannot be deduced from their definition (explanation) alone, but have to be understood according to their relation to the “eternal power of God” and the laws of Nature of the two attributes we express. Perhaps more importantly, whatever power was in the essence of a thing when it started to exist (as noted in several passages above about the physics of force within and between real things) will be required as a bare minimum in order for it to continue to exist. Yet, that level of power can increase in both force and expression when combined with other things which enhance our power to exist, such as adequately understanding how the laws of the attributes operate, and the enjoyment of our singular existence in its variety of expressive possibilities. As we will read about in Chapter Five, the third kind of knowledge we are capable of, intuitive understanding and expression, involves the adequate comprehension and application of all three types of knowledge and the essence of singular things.

It will be helpful to refresh our memory and consider what is said above in relation to Chapter One about the nature of definition, using support from Spinoza’s Letter 9 addressed to

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30 Spinoza, *TP*, 2: 683. Note that our essence as *conatus* can be understood as “the form of an idea.”
Simon de Vries. In this letter, Spinoza writes about two types of definition. He informs de Vries that the latter’s difficulties in understanding the nature of definition are due to his “failure to distinguish between two types of definition. There is the definition that serves to explicate a thing whose essence is in question and the subject of doubt, and there is the definition which is put forward simply for examination. The former, since it has a determinate object, must be a true definition, while this need not be so in the latter case.”\(^{31}\) A definition put forward for evaluation does not make what is evaluated eternally true; however, the structures of reasoning used and required in order to evaluate its truth or falsity are an eternal expression of the attribute of adequate ideas. If the definition is not true as a common notion, then we can include some of our ideas about it as part of imaginary knowledge but not necessarily an error in reasoning. This is why it is important to have the rational capacity to reflect on what kinds of ideas we are considering, as well as their objects, and then suspend further judgment as needed.

Letter 9 also includes references to why Spinoza equates the definition of “substance” and that of “attribute” when logic requires it as an aspect of series of adequate ideas. The definition of substance and of modes, on the other hand, are very different kinds of definitions. Learning how to recognize in conscious reflection which types of knowledge we are relying on and why, as well as what effects in the form of ideas they produce with more force, becomes crucial in understanding more about the expression of substance (Nature, God) as compared to the expressions of modal modifications of substance with lesser degrees of force and animation. Modes are never (adequately) conceived as contrary to substance or they would destroy each other, as Spinoza notes in E3p5 and 3p6; they are modifications (affections) of substance.\(^ {32}\) All singular things are modes, and every affection of substance is also a modal

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\(^{31}\) Spinoza, Letter 9, 781.

Every real thing is always opposed to that “which can take its existence away…” This deduction is forcefully consistent. In 3p7 we learn that our striving for continued existence, therefore, must involve the concept of indefinite time.

What we learn is not only the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, but that we also perceive “nothing more clearly” than the intellect and its processes (as conscious awareness), especially when we are reflecting on the laws of thought. Spinoza writes that because the intellect is conceived as an expression of an attribute of substance, it must, therefore, also include what it is for that attribute to have infinite modifications in expression of itself as itself. He writes, “By intellect (as is known through itself) we understand not absolute thought, but only a certain mode of thinking, which mode differs from the others, such as desire, love, and the like, and so (by D5) must be conceived through absolute thought, that is (by P15 and D6), it must be so conceived through an attribute of God, which expresses the eternal and infinite essence of thought…” We learn that we can adequately understand not God or Substance or all of Nature itself but a certain modal modification of the expression of the attribute of thought in its laws by necessity. The laws of expression are the same for all who express the attribute of thought, but their specific determinate expressions are infinite – and in that realization we understand still more about the laws of thought. As such, we express the eternal nature of the attribute of thought in its essence.

As we can “understand nothing that does not lead to more perfect knowledge of the intellection,” continued understanding, conscious reflection, and an enhancement in the power of thought and action are intimately connected. Adequate knowing will always use concepts (common notions) which are derived from reasoning, and, as we read in the last chapter, this

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34 Ibid. 1p31: 21, emphasis added. This position is key to understanding Spinoza’s system.
can include understanding how certain imaginative ideas can aid reasoning and understanding. For Spinoza, “what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in Nature;” therefore, our true ideas are as much an expression of God (Nature) as everything else. In accordance with E1ax5, Pierre Macherey writes, “The true idea is not adequate to its object because it corresponds to it; one must say, quite the contrary, that it corresponds to it because it is adequate, that is to say determined in itself, in a necessary fashion.”

This coheres with Spinoza’s explanation of the first kind of definition above. We understand that more chains of common notions are produced as the effect of an increase in adequate knowledge and the laws of thought as cause. In short, the more our mind and body learn how to move in different ways with more power, that is, to have more diverse encounters with increased understanding and efficient and joyous experiences, the more we are able to produce different kinds of effects and new combinations of ideas which are powerfully rational and effective.

Letters 6 and 12 add support to Spinoza’s conclusion that true ideas are real things expressed by Nature and that which the attribute of thought expresses in its essence. In Letter 6, in a section on fluidity, Spinoza writes, “In my view, notions which derive from popular usage, or which explicate Nature not as it is in itself but as it is related to human senses, should certainly not be regarded as concepts of the highest generality, nor should they be mixed (not to say confused) with notions that are pure and which explicate Nature as it is in itself. Of the latter kind are motion, rest, and their laws…” Ratios of motion and rest are the ways in which the attribute of extension expresses itself, but our adequate understanding of this are the natural expressions of true ideas and the essence of the laws of thought. The same sentiment is

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36 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 66. He continues, “The active character of knowledge does not depend on the initiative of a free subject; rather, it is the idea itself that is active, insofar as it expresses in a singular fashion the infinite causality of substance.”

37 Spinoza, Letter 6: 773. The use of the term “pure” in this letter is problematic, but was acceptable for Spinoza.
expressed elsewhere, such as in E1p15s and Letter 12 on the infinite. We learn that we can experience things around us by way of the imagination (through sense data, a feeling of duration and, therefore, of that which is contingent) or we can conceive of such things as expressions of one organic substance. If the latter, then we deduce that such expressions are of one substance with everything else, infinite as expressions of laws of Nature, and indivisible.38

Spinoza’s work emphasizes what it is to increase our ratios of motion in ways where more aspects of our human, singular extension combines in active, powerful ways. Learning what a body can do using adequate knowledge simultaneously combines with feelings of pleasure, joy, and energy in extension. The individual that I am currently will end in its ratios of motion and rest upon my finite death, for example, but the adequate ideas that I am expressing (and their power to effect ideas in other minds) will continue in new expressions after my death. It is in this way that adequate ideas can also be understood as eternal in essence. The ratios of my motion and rest will also alter to combine with other expressions of extension (such as the deterioration of my physical body and its combination with the earth to create dust and dirt as new forms of an energy resource) and combine to become new ratios.

Spinoza’s system is not devoid of its own method of measurement. Efraim Shmueli writes, “Spinoza’s system was understood, or rather, misunderstood as an anticoncept, not determinative of any real objects.”39 His system is as much about true ideas with content as real expressions of Nature that are infinite in essence as it is about singular experiences as a real expression of Nature as well. Both are required for such a system, which is why Spinoza had to

38 Spinoza, Letter 12: 787-791 and Ethics 1p15s: 10-13. Spinoza writes in Letter 12A that 1p15 should be referred to when trying to understand “all modes of thinking.” I referred to this particular proposition as crucial regularly.
39 Efraim Shmueli, “Hegel’s Interpretation of Spinoza’s Concept of Substance,” 180. Shmueli’s work is interested in demonstrating how the philosopher Hegel misunderstood Spinoza’s system as void of content. He writes, “Hegel’s concern with Spinoza’s concepts was thoroughly influenced by his struggle for the justification or validation of his own method…” The point is only that many Spinoza scholars feel Hegel read Spinoza incorrectly.
break his deductions down to include both eternal attributes with their laws and modal modifications and their three types or kinds of expression. In such a system, the “logic of each concept presupposes relation to other things…Claims to unity for either part or whole are spurious. Or at least it is attained by absorption into some more adequate unit.”40 In my singular expression of ratios of motion and rest I am transformed continually, while also maintaining a homeostatic balance towards self-preservation, perseverance, and, if reflecting on and using adequate knowledge, expressing thought and extension with increased force. All things express extension in its laws of motion and rest. In this way, my pen can be described as an expression of God or Nature as much as a rolling motorcycle, recipe, lake, rotting animal, laughter, a prayer, notes on a musical scale, metaphor, or a piece of metal.

To put it another way, Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology cannot be reduced to a human system of neurons and material substance or inert matter. His proto-physics of force in thought and extension can be better understood as expressions of real things and not mere mental constructs. As Spinoza writes in Letter 27, the understanding of his system “must be based on metaphysics and physics.”41 As Hsana Sharp concludes, “Thought, which is not equivalent to the symbolic, is its own peculiar reality rather than a reflection other than itself.”42 To think of such a system as that which uses representations (as I will discuss in Chapter Four on Michael Della Rocca’s interpretation) is to reduce it to symbols, reflections, and images or correspondences. My ideas do not correspond to reality in the form of only representations. They are reality in the determinate expression of the force of the laws of the attribute of thought. The ideas of the attribute of thought, in other words, do not represent the actions of the attribute of extension because attributes are “one and the same thing” in Spinoza’s

41 Spinoza, Letter 27: 839.
understanding of substance. Something that is one and the same thing cannot be said to have some parts that represent other parts of itself. All expressions are immanent expressions of itself as itself in their own ways.\textsuperscript{43} A good example is that if a word appears on a shirt in a foreign language that both has a literal meaning in that language which does not fully represent the term proudly shown on the tee-shirt, and the English translation also does not fully account for the term used in definition either, the word (language) on the shirt is not a representation of the real meaning in its totality. For Spinoza, it depends on how the term is used and repeated, what context it is applied to, and, therefore, the term in definition is something different from the term on the shirt and the way it is used on the shirt. One meaning does not represent the other meaning, even if the “image” of the term in both instances is identical in some way.

\textit{The Expression and Definition of Attributes and Modes as Substance}

The problem of how to understand and define the attributes of Spinoza’s substance is a highly controversial area of debate within the scholarship. As A. Wolf writes, “The only difference between the Attributes and Substance is that our intellect can be an act of abstraction thinking of one of the Attributes apart from the rest, whereas in reality all Attributes are inseparably together.”\textsuperscript{44} How to adequately conceive of substance and the attributes, therefore, requires more explanation and demonstration. E1p11 reads, “God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.”\textsuperscript{45}

In 1974, Ed Curley wrote on this interpretive problem in response to the extensive treatment of Spinoza’s system by Martial Gueroult. I believe some of Curley’s conclusions summarize the interpretation of such an ontological problem as noted above nicely. He writes:

\textsuperscript{43} See E1p4 where Spinoza identifies substance with the attributes and 1p19 where he writes how the attributes are eternal expressions of substance, as well as 2p21s. Letters 2, 4, and 9 also support this position.
\textsuperscript{44} A. Wolf, “Spinoza’s Conception of the Attributes of Substance,” 2.
\textsuperscript{45} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p11: 7.
Gueroult's own interpretation conceives Spinoza's substance as a complex whole whose essence is constituted by an infinity of really distinct elements, the attributes, each of which satisfies in its own right the definition of substance. So substance is identical with the totality of its attributes, and each attribute both exists in itself and is conceived through itself. This is very similar to a position I have argued for myself... As Gueroult points out, a good many objections to Spinozism can be shown to rest on a misunderstanding if this interpretation is accepted... But once we conceive the idea of an ens realissimum, of a being whose nature it is to consist of infinitely many attributes and whose existence follows from that nature, then we are obliged to conceive of the attributes as constituents of one being and not as a mere collection of substances. God's existence does not result from the necessary existence of each of the elements which constitute his nature. It is rather their existence together which results from his necessary existence... 

The evidence to support Curley’s reading is ample in Spinoza’s work, particularly in E1p29s that is cited by both Curley and Gueroult. I also find more support for the reality of the attributes (where each expresses itself infinitely and uniquely) in 1p10 and 1p11. To understand how to solve some of the problems that arise from such a construction, Spinoza writes in 1665 that some solutions “cannot be grasped without first understanding the necessity of things.” We have already worked through 1p8s2 and 1p9 that demonstrate that attributes are not modifications of substance, as that would involve their concept employing another concept in order to be true. As we have already read, attributes are conceived through themselves. In 1p9, Spinoza simply writes that the more reality “or being” a thing has, the more attributes it will have by necessity. It is at this point where Spinoza includes a discussion about signs and the ways in which we try to recognize Nature as one substance, that is, as all connected by necessity and not as numerically one thing. As noted above, the concept of number is not logically required for conceiving substance as having infinite attributes that express themselves in infinite ways. He writes that we will search in vain if we are looking for signs in Nature for proof of the diversity of substances. He also notes within this proposition

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48 Ibid. 1p9: 4. E1p10 shows why, therefore, each attribute must be conceived through itself.
that “it is evident that although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct...we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances.”\textsuperscript{49} The deduction that attributes are real but are not separate substances, therefore, is a conceptual distinction between what it is to conceive real things through themselves and to do so logically in a certain determinate way. In other words, Spinoza is not concluding what we might find in Aristotle about substance and its attributes, nor can we compare the two systems as similar on the nature of singular expressions of each attribute either.

The above emphasis on how to logically conceive of distinct things that are real expressions of Nature as one whole is also found in Chapter Four of the \textit{TTP}. For something to be really distinct is for it to be conceived through itself without the need for another true concept in order for it to be true. As early as 1661 and 1663, Spinoza writes about how to understand what this entails in Letter 2 and Letter 9. What matters in our conceptual distinctions is what each definition being relied on is in relation to by necessity. Noting the definition he already ascribed to Substance, Spinoza writes, “I understand the same by attribute, except that attribute is so called in respect to the intellect... This definition, I repeat, explains clearly what I mean by substance and attribute...”\textsuperscript{50}

In other words, substance and attribute can be conceived as the same thing because both can be conceived through themselves. But their concept must be used differently when required in order for our singular minds to adequately comprehend what it is for something which is self-caused and self-causing with infinite expressions to encompass the totality of Nature (for example, one singular thought of such a thing is not possible so our conceptions must shift in order to understand what Nature is defined as). Spinoza writes, “For it is of the nature of a

\textsuperscript{49} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p10s: 6.
\textsuperscript{50} Spinoza, Letter 9: 782.
substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself, since all the attributes it has have always been in it together…each expresses the reality, or being of substance.”

Consider what appears in a footnote of the KV as well: “The [attributes] following are called Propria, because they are only Adjectives, which cannot be understood without their Substantives. That is to say, without them God would indeed be no God, but still it is not that they constitute God; for they reveal nothing of the character of a Substance, through which God exists.”

And still further, if we turn to Chapter Four of the TTP we read, “To put it another way, since the knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing other than the knowledge of a property of that cause, the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of God’s essence, which is the cause of all things.”

Clearly, an attribute can be understood as a property of substance, but only in the sense of what it is to conceive of Nature as self-caused and self-causing, and how, therefore, the effects or expressions of Nature always involve their cause (and its essence as the essence of Nature). The essence of God, Nature, or Substance (however you name it) is that it is eternal with infinite attributes expressed in infinite ways. In other words, a human mind must understand the attributes of thought and extension as expressions of natural phenomena and laws of Nature conceived through themselves! Otherwise, substance and its attributes can also be understood as the same thing and there would be no way to logically understand how our singular expressions can be truly distinct and yet of one and the same thing. The above references demonstrate how and why Spinoza equates God with Nature or Substance, or that, as Letter 9 continues, “one and the same thing can be signified by two names.”

Yet, attributes are not properties of substance. In Letter 10,
Spinoza writes to Simon de Vries, “So since the existence of attributes does not differ from their essence [as conceived through itself directly], we shall not be able to apprehend it by any experience…” In other words, some other causal notion is required to explain how singular things do express substance as substance, or what we know of as *modes*.

The mind does not have ideas, as already noted. The mind *is* ideas. Thus, we cannot say that we “experience” reason as something distinct from our thoughts about it. To think using the second kind of knowledge is to reason. Our strength of reasoning will always be in relation to increases and decreases in expressions and proportions of our essence. Anthony Paul Smith writes, “Spinoza allows us to see that reason is not an absolute; it is placed within a wider relationship, and it is often strongly directed by the affect it relates to at any given time.” As we also learn in Letter 6, philosophical investigations must examine individual differences and similarities between real, distinct things of Nature, which also applies to Spinoza’s system as a logical explanation of everyone as one substance. But this system is dialectically material, at least in the sense that it does not end in a type of empiricism that endlessly attempts to evaluate and hold up particulars alone (an impossible task when speaking about all of Nature). I will return to the reasons why later in the thesis.

As a result, we need another concept in order to explain the many different and determinate ways the attributes of thought and extension can be expressed by individuals who also differ in their degrees of power of expression. My choice of terms to describe what it is I am understanding rationally involves my singular imaginative knowledge, but the power expressed is determined by the necessity of the ways in which laws of Nature work. Modes, as modifications (affections) of substance, are conceived through something else, that is, through

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55 Spinoza, Letter 10: 783.
and involving the necessary concept of their respective attributes which is defined in E1D5.  

In 3p6, we read, “For singular things are modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by 1P25C), that is (by 1P34), things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God’s power, by which God is and acts.”  

This type of necessity is not any different from the freedom of spirit Spinoza speaks of, which we experience when we reflect on what it is to be a modal expression of eternal substance and increase our power of expression: “For freedom…does not remove the necessity of action, but imposes it.”

As noted earlier and will be addressed at length in this chapter and the next, affects are key to understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology and proto-physics of force adequately. They are not special kinds of ideas. They are expressions of substance that are not void of content because they include both affections and ideas paired together into one experience. What we reflect on will depend on which affect we are experiencing. As Dan Selcer writes, affects are:

a transition to a greater or lesser state of perfection, which means a modulation of the power of a singular thing to act and to exist. Affect is thus an expression of power…a unification (across attributes) of corporeal affections with the ideas of those affections to which they ontologically correspond under the identity of the order of ideas with the order of things… Affect is thus a concept describing the regular distribution, arrangement, or configuration of a dynamic system.

In conscious reflection we are configured by our affects and our understanding in its power depending on which type of knowledge is proportionally relied on more heavily. The order of things we encounter is understood according to the order of ideas we are paying attention to or using. Spinoza writes, “I think I have demonstrated with sufficient clarity and certainty that the

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57 Spinoza, Ethics, 1D5: 1.
58 Ibid. 3p6: 75.
59 Spinoza, TP, 686.
60 Dan Selcer, Philosophy and the Book... 190.
intellect, even though infinite, belongs to *Natura naturata*, not to *Natura naturans*.”

Our affects are important for us to learn how to understand and reflect upon because they “constitute sites of transition.” As that which are connected to all three types of knowledge we are capable of, they are “particularly dynamic ways in which nature is expressed…” Transitions, for Spinoza, are like limits. Transitions between ideas can be understood as immediately proportional to the type of ideas that have more power, which is referenced in Letter 12. These limits and their overcoming and recognition are transformations in power and joy where passionate joys and joyous passions are also possible. Beth Lord writes:

> When we have an adequate idea we know that we know it, and the mind necessarily considers its own power of thinking, leading to joy (P53). Furthermore, those desires through which we strive to persevere in our being do not come from experience or imagination, but from our very essence. As we are more active, our essence flourishes and those essential desires are intensified. The joy and desire that are related to our activity are different from the joy and desire that arise from our passivity.

This interpretation of Spinoza is supported by his references in Letter 23. There, Spinoza writes that although a mouse and an angel are both dependent on God’s laws in the same way, one can hardly be said to be like the other, just as we cannot say that sorrow is similar to joy in any way. Sorrow, as a passion, relies on ideas of the imagination and, therefore, decreases our *conatus*. On the other hand, passionate joys are rationally understood ideas as part of an affect which is only partially involved in imaginative knowledge as experience, and are, therefore, ideas about other ideas, such as how we can separate sorrow from joy as elements of our affects in continuous understanding.

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61 Spinoza, Letter 9: 782. See also E1p29s for more support.
62 Peg Rawes, “Spinoza’s architectural passages: drawing out geometric comportments,” Spinoza Research Network, *Spinoza and Texts*, June 2010. Rawes writes, “…the sequence of their transition are their duration is always different…the movement between them is itself a kind of geometric reasoning, expressed in the dynamic nature of our emotional lives.”
63 Beth Lord, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, 101. Letter 21 also confirms this.
64 Spinoza, Letter 23: 833.
Spinoza believes that adequate knowledge includes knowledge about true causes and their effects. Recognizing, understanding, experiencing, or knowing in any way all the causes of Nature is an absolute impossibility. Therefore, what we learn we can understand truly is how we express laws of Nature in thought and extension with varying degrees of animation and force. As C. De Deugd writes, any aspect of that which is contingent, or of what we experience as contingent, is a part of imaginative knowledge: “Reason does not recognize contingency.”

This gives depth of meaning to a crucial aspect of all of Spinoza’s system that is *causa immanens*, or in the Dutch *inblijvende oorzaak*, a cause that remains in its effects. If the cause remains an element of its effects, then one cannot categorize all causes and effects as wholly distinct from each other. Yet, there is a limit to what sense experience can add to reasoning. This is why – in Letter 10 to Simone de Vries on empirical experience – Spinoza writes, “To this I reply that we need experience only in the case of those things that cannot be deduced from the definition of a thing, as, for instance, the existence of modes… We do not need experience in the case of those things whose existence is not distinguished from their essence and therefore deduced from their definition…*for experience does not teach us the essence of things*.”

This passage is telling because Spinoza reminds us when we can conceptually collapse essence, existence, and definition, as well as when experience and the idea of the modal expression of substance become distinct. It also relates to what we read in E3D1 on adequate causes (because it is a cause we rely on to clearly and distinctly perceive an effect).

To summarize thus far, adequate knowledge is that of *common notions* understood as the second kind of knowledge (adequate ideas). It is the kind of knowledge that is in relation to our affects and their transitions, including being aware that we will reason with increasing and

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65 C. De Deugd, *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge*, 29.
66 Spinoza, Letter 10: 783, emphasis added.
decreasing levels of power depending on how much accurate information we have and what we are taking as the objects of our ideas under the influence of any given affect. Adequate understanding also includes our awareness of what the three types of ideas we can have are and the processes of knowledge construction that relate to degrees of ideational power. Spinoza provides a proof that such knowledge is humanly possible as early as the opening definitions of E1, particularly 1p3: “If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other.” Only things that have something in common can cause something to occur as an effect within or in relation to another thing.

Finite ideas cause other finite ideas, but only within their own idea type. Regarding adequate knowledge, Steenbakkers writes, “The characteristic feature of this kind of knowledge is the application of general patterns to individual cases, thus yielding adequate insight (as opposed to knowledge from causal experience).” Notice that this reading accords with what was just said above about definition and experience and what can be derived from experience. The object of common notions are “whatever is common to all things,” which is not the same as discussing the essence of singular things in their unique determinate transformations and transitions. In other words, the power used to transform may have the same mechanics for all bodies, but the actual transition will be unique to each singular thing.

The material effects of the attributes of thought and extension involve ideas, force, motion, power, expression, continuous transition, speed, and shifting intensities, among other things. They are defined as both the recognition of patterns and knowledge of particular things. They are also expressions of substance in the form of modal modifications to varying degrees of animation.

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68 Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza’s Ethica: from manuscript to print*, 163.
Imaginative knowledge cannot be classified as either “good” or “bad,” because Spinoza feels such classifications are specific to human circumstance and context. Imaginative knowledge is only beneficial if, combined with reasoning, it enhances our capacities for thought and action, creativity and joy. The rational reconstruction, understanding, and use of partial (imaginative) knowledge only makes reason more complete and enjoyable (if the laws of thought are rationally understood). This furthers our capacities to think with more adequate force. As Spinoza writes in 2p13, the object of our ideas is always the affections of our bodies. Our knowledge, though, runs the risk of being “a completely confused knowledge of our bodies.” We can only transform our ideas by strengthening reasoning capacities with the ideas we compare and associate with each other, and by recognizing patterns of thought that increase or decrease our power to exist. This process entails that one’s singular memory plays a key role in our recognition of rational patterns of thought, and that memory is logically categorized as imaginative knowledge. We can also add to our transformation in knowledge by understanding how finite (human) bodies are all the same in that we share various common properties that the laws of Nature produce. The infamous epistemology passage in the Ethics 2p40s reads:

With this I have explained the cause of those notions which are called common, and which are the foundations of our reasoning. But some axioms, or notions, result from other causes… Those notions are Universal, like Man, Horse, Dog, and the like, have arisen from similar cases, namely, because so many images (e.g. of men) are formed at one time in the human body that they surpass the power of imagining… For the body has been affected most [forcefully] by [what is common], since each singular thing has affected it [by this property]. And [the mind] expresses this by the word man, and predicates it of infinity many singulars. For as we have said, it cannot image 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.

70 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p13: 40.
more easily… And similarly concerning the others – each will form universal images of things according to the disposition of their body… 71

Note that Spinoza mentions both singular associations and one’s experience of infinity in the same passage. The term “man” automatically indicates an infinite amount of possible men and expressions made by human beings. Imagining a determinate number of singulars is not possible. For Spinoza, the alternative is that we have to rationally assume an infinite expression of actual and possible singulars as a result, and infinite in all ways and all directions. If he is wrong, what is the alternative? In my reading, 2p40s clearly demonstrates that a theory of human consciousness and subjectivity is crucial to reading Spinoza correctly.

What we learn is that reflective knowledge can continue to attempt to rationally transform new knowledge adequately if one can understand the ways in which the three types of knowledge operate: “The commonality of these singular embodied ideas further enables us to understand the perfection of God through their resolution of the step-by-step agreement between mind and body, and their expression of an embodied kind of human ‘perfection’ or unity.” This level of subjectivity, although singularly experienced, becomes adequately understood as identical with the order of causes in Nature as we know them. 72 In other words, in order for our human minds to increase their capacities for rational thinking, we will have to develop the ability to recognize and shift between various registers of different types of knowledge. Therefore, to become a forcefully rational thinker, using conscious reflection to pay attention is a method of thought required by necessity, including strong reflections on what type of imaginative knowledge one is also using (memory, sensation, language, etc.).

In my reading, we cannot do away with a concept of human subjectivity and singularity even if there are difficulties in reading Spinoza in this way, as Ursula Renz and Harold Skulsky

71 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p40s: 56.
72 Ibid. 3p2s: 71. We act in-so-far-as we are relying heavily on adequate common notions as a disposition of power.
have pointed out, for example. Skulsky notes 2p13s as support for his position that what is true for human minds and bodies is also true for “other individuals” and that “all of these, in varying degrees, are endowed with minds.” E2p12 and its relation to 2p19 cause some to use these propositions as sweeping interpretive conclusions that Spinoza can only have one “subject” and that this subject is God. I find that one of the major problems with such readings is that Spinoza is clear that we (human beings) have individual rights in the *TTP*. How can anything that is not a real singular human being have individual rights? According to Spinoza, using reason well is also an individual experience of virtue. In the *TTP*, we learn that we have the right to personal freedom of thought and safety. These aspects of being an individual are not possible for a human being without personal reflective consciousness.

To further illustrate this point, in the *TTP* we read, “What greater misfortune can be imagined for a state than that honorable men should be exiled as miscreants because their opinions are at variance with authority and they cannot disguise the fact? What can be more calamitous than that men should be regarded as enemies and put to death, not for any crime or misdeed, but for being of independent mind?” Note what is stated years later in the *TP* which is similar, “Furthermore, it follows that every man is subject to another’s right for as long as he is in the other’s power, and he is in control of his own right to the extent that he can repel all

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73 Harold Skulsky, *Staring Into the Void…* 29. To be fair, Skulsky’s writing is refreshing. It asks many important questions and rigorously works to try and understand Spinoza on his own terms. However, I feel there is too much reliance on contemporary terminology and influence being applied to a work over three hundred years old that used some terms in different ways than as we would understand them today. He acknowledges, for example, that an “idea” in Spinoza is something more than “some physical representations or ‘image’—say a brain state—but God’s immediate act of conceiving.” This is true, but he extends this otherwise correct interpretation too far, stating that “the ‘things’ of common sense are actually just ‘modes’…” And modes, for Skulsky, are really “nothing.” As we have already read, when considering modes Spinoza asks us to include, by necessity, the modes of imaginative knowledge. Imaginative knowledge is a singular (human) experience. Skulsky also leaves out the term *conatus* almost entirely from his interpretation. Finally, there is a problem with the fact that Skulsky calls God a person, for this is an anthropomorphic conception of Spinoza’s notion of God and such conceptions are not permitted (Skulsky writes, “At the very least, he [Spinoza] needs to show that his supreme being qualifies as the supreme *person*…”).

74 Spinoza, *TTP*, 20:570.
force.” These deductions require human subjectivity in order to be fully understood. For example, in order to repel the force of another we have to be capable of consciously reflecting on one’s singular circumstances, options, and rational dispositions. Because understanding all of Nature is impossible, attempting to understand oneself within the various contexts and environments one is involved in is more realistic. Yet, we are to keep in mind something Spinoza warns us about as early as the KV, namely that “truth,” “essence,” and “existence” “never depends on me: for, as was shown with reference to the second kind of ideas, they are what they are independent of me…”

Emphasized in the above passages is not only singularity but the nature of human certainty and deductive logic – that such a thing can exist in an objective way. Common notions are common for all regardless of who/what is thinking them; some are human centered and some are common to all of Nature (such as the laws of extension). The object of a common property is not necessarily what the content is as much as the adequate notion that is about laws of thought operating which act according to the same laws of Nature for all, even God. The laws are the same even when the content varies. Just because the content varies does not also entail that Spinoza’s system is one empty of content. As he writes in 3p12 and p13, individual minds strive to seek those things that increase their unique power to exist. Consider it this way: any theory that deduces that I do not have my own power of thought will decrease my power to exist singularly. Therefore, I must, as a human mind, have the capacity to reflect on a singular level and be aware of such things as particularly human and involve human power through consciousness. I also must remain aware of my interactions with other finite bodies as distinct, as that which can add to or take away from my power. My collective contribution

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75 Spinoza, TP, 2: 685.
76 Spinoza, KV, 1:1, footnote 3: 39.
77 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p12, p13: 77-78.
allows me to remain aware of my individuality and increases (or decreases) in personal power, including that aspect of my adequate ideas which expresses common notions that are infinite and apply to all of Nature. This adds to our joy, by necessity, and Spinoza makes this point specifically as early as E1p21. To feel our experiences (ideas and actions) as affects that involve the infinite by logical necessity is to understand that we are thinking and acting with more power; and such an expression is immensely joyous.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p21: 16-17. This is also why Spinoza writes next in 1p28s that God can be conceived as both an immediate \textit{and} a proximate cause.}

The above deductions are similar to what Peg Rawes calls “the production of subjectivity” through philosophically understood “architectural passages” of increasing capacities to use reason well.\footnote{Rawes, “Spinoza’s Architectural Passages…” 67-69.} This requires a theory of human consciousness in my reading. My essence, as my own desire and tendency towards self-preservation, has ratios of motion and rest that interact both with my internal actions as well as with external encounters. Yet, these ratios are unique to my personal equilibrium and homeostasis. As we read in E2p13s, a finite body can learn how to transform itself according to the laws of the attributes so that “its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly.”\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p13s: 40.} Spinoza is not talking about God’s mind, at least not directly, nor your neighbor’s mind or your pet’s mind. He is talking about a human being’s singular mind and thought processes that are controlled by laws of Nature. Spinoza is also talking about the human mind that is reading and learning his system. It is not a pebble learning its surrounding environment and internal structures in the same way as we have access to after-all. It is a singular human person. The ideas we have, as human beings, about the ways in which things agree, the patterns of motion they assume, and the laws of Nature they abide are all adequate ideas when understood rationally. This reading is supported further by such
propositions in the *Ethics* as 2p38, in conjunction with 2p11c and 2p40s2. The interactions with my environment that play a role in my reflective awareness are continually shifting spontaneously. This also involves the rational understanding that ratios of motion and rest cannot be thought of in a linear manner but only as continuously shifting and layered or multiple. That spontaneity (like the thought that the sun is close to one’s body because the feeling of warmth increases, although, in fact, the sun is far away from one’s body) is part of imaginative (singular) experience and knowledge. The key is to not allow imaginative ideas to become the larger portion of one’s awareness. The only way to do this, for Spinoza, is to strengthen reasoning. The content of such exercises is not only about other bodies but one’s own. The content of such experiences is about my own increases and decreases in the power of my *conatus* in relation to what I encounter personally. Imagine a human body that has never experienced being pushed further in reasoning capacities past imaginative experiences (relying on sense data alone, for example). Such an individual would never be capable of recognizing common notions even if they were experiencing them. Nonetheless, their expressions are still an aspect of the reality of Nature. In this way, at least in part, God’s attribute of thought is expressed in all ways. The emphasis is on singular bodily experiences and our affects in a deliberate manner.

*Spinoza’s Theory of Consciousness*

There is a legitimate debate about what a theory of consciousness can be in Spinoza. It is the position of my thesis that such a theory is possible, and, if so, it is not one that ends in mind-matter dualism, egoist ethics, or rigid determinism. Spinoza’s theory of consciousness is transformative, dynamic, and cannot be reduced to any theory of representation, as we will read about in Chapter Four. My ideas and actions have *real effects* and are all expressions of

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the power of Nature. Spinoza makes this clear in Letter 21 where he writes, “When you say that by making men so dependent on God I reduce them to the level of elements, plants, and stones, this is enough to show that you have completely misunderstood my views and are confusing the field of intellect with that of the imagination.”

Some background on current theories of consciousness will be helpful before discussing Spinoza’s Seventeenth Century version. Leading biologist and neuroscientist, Christof Koch, writes, “Without consciousness there is nothing… But there’s the rub. How the brain converts bioelectrical activity into subjective states, how photons reflected off water are magically transformed into the percept of an iridescent aquamarine mountain tarn is a puzzle. The nature of the relationship between the nervous system and consciousness remains elusive…”

The nature of consciousness is, indeed, a “hard problem,” replete with intricate theoretical and practical difficulties about the nature of subjectivity and how it differs from the electrical synapses which continually flow by the trillions between our two hemispheres and spinal cord. David Chalmers writes, “…no explanation given in wholly physical terms can ever account for the emergence of conscious experience.” This modern explanation supports Spinoza’s epistemology. Singular, phenomenal conscious experience is a real experience that we are more acutely aware of when reflecting on the types of ideas that are our mind. On Spinoza’s use of the term “consciousness,” Early Modern philosopher, Udo Thiel, writes, “In any case, although ‘conscientia’ is clearly a relating to one’s own mental states, it remains

82 Spinoza, Letter 21: 825.
83 Christof Koch, Consciousness… 25. In a recent TED talk given to CERN physicists, philosopher John Searle stated that consciousness is real, is not reducible back to physical brain matter, that is, it does not arise from brain states but co-exists with body, brain, and the environment as one organic whole.
84 The phrase “hard problem” was coined by philosopher David Chalmers and, as Koch also notes, in the 1980s and into the 1990s “writing about consciousness was taken as a sign of cognitive decline.” If it’s true that what we are most concerned with is explaining the first person account of consciousness specifically, then Spinoza can help.
unclear what kind of relation to one’s own mental states, emotional or otherwise, conscientia is meant to be in Spinoza.\textsuperscript{86} I aim to make Spinoza’s meaning more clear in this chapter.

In 2008, Spinoza scholar and biographer, Steven Nadler, in his essay “Spinoza and Consciousness,” not only writes that there is a problem with those interpretations which reduce Spinoza’s system to a theory of cognitive representations, but also that there \textit{is} a theory of consciousness to be found in Spinoza’s system.\textsuperscript{87} Nadler makes an important comment within the opening pages of his essay: “What is particularly interesting is how few contributions to the question of consciousness in Spinoza there really are.”\textsuperscript{88} Nadler opens his essay stating, “Spinoza does indeed have an explanation of consciousness, a rather sophisticated one that depicts consciousness, like all elements of the mind for Spinoza, as deeply grounded in certain functional aspects of the body.”\textsuperscript{89} Nadler combines the meaning of human consciousness with what it is to be \textit{aware} that one is conscious in a similar way as I have noted above. As Spinoza defines the mind \textit{as} ideas, Nadler’s reading is logical. In his reading, Nadler includes the capacity to reflect on one’s conscious states, but draws the line at what are typically called “intentional states” in the literature: “Merely having an intentional state is not \textit{ipso facto} to have a conscious state.”\textsuperscript{90} The distinction being drawn is between merely being conscious and reflecting on one’s conscious states and dispositions, but the debate is far from over.

Nadler outlines the two schools of thought regarding a theory of consciousness in Spinoza’s works. There are those who believe there is absolutely no such theory possible in Spinoza’s \textit{Ethics} (Bennett, Della Rocca, Matson, Miller, etc.) and those who believe that such a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{86} Thiel, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Steven Nadler, “Spinoza and Consciousness,” \textit{Mind} 117 (2008). Nadler explains that he understands the notion of human consciousness as “a being who has conscious states.” He states that he is following the same line of thought of philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, Tyler Burge, and Ned Block regarding “phenomenal consciousness.”
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid. 580.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid. 575.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Ibid. 581.
\end{itemize}
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theory is possible, but that it is seriously flawed or limited (Curley, Matheron, M. Wilson, etc.). In one footnote in his *Beyond the Geometric Method*, Ed Curley, while discussing the KV, notes, “…Spinoza recognized what ought to be obvious enough from experience: that different people possess self-consciousness (which I presume includes conscious awareness of the state of one’s body) in varying degrees, and that no human has full self-consciousness.”⁹¹ Some scholars, such as Caroline Williams, eliminate any possibility of a theory of consciousness in Spinoza, writing, “…there is no subject of the affect, because affect drives the subject towards identity and performance.”⁹² If this is true, I would ask, do we ever get to identity? I wonder how there can be a singular drive towards identity without a subject of that identity who is aware that they are a singular subject?

I agree with Nadler that there is a viable theory of human subjectivity and consciousness to be found in Spinoza. It is also important to recognize what Genevive Lloyd states, namely that, for Spinoza, ideas about the modifications of our body depend *both* on ourselves *and* on external bodies that we encounter.⁹³ We need other singular subjects, but that is not all of what it is, for Spinoza, to be a “body” either. The method we learn for better recognizing our own increases and decreases in power is a distinctly singular experience (even though the laws used are the same for all of Nature). Although the laws of Nature work the same for everyone, the experience of the effects produced by those laws as modifications of modifications of substance vary on a singular level. Why else would Spinoza emphasize so heavily in the *TTP* and *TP* the freedom of thought we are all afforded as a natural right? We individually have the unique capacity to order and arrange the three types of knowledge in

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⁹² Caroline Williams, “‘Subjectivity Without a Subject:’ Thinking Beyond the Subject with/through Spinoza,” in *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy*, ed. Beth Lord, 21.
unique ways to increase our conatus. How else would a theory of imaginative knowledge be possible if not that we have distinct memories and singular sense experiences that are our own?

One’s ideas are in continual interaction with other ideas and other bodies external to us. Spinoza makes this point clear in E2p21s, p22, and p23, among many other places. More support can also be found in Letter 19. There, Spinoza explains that those who partake in continuous rational understanding are expressing the intellectual love of God (or what he calls the third kind of knowledge, intuition) and are “conscious.” Those described as “wicked” are those who do not actively express increasing perfection in this way and are, therefore, merely moving about human existence “unconsciously.” The necessity of Nature in motion with continuous interactions is emphasized throughout E4, especially in the Appendix: “Again, because, among singular things, we know nothing more excellent than a man who is guided by reason, we can show best how much our skill and understanding are worth by educating men so that at last they live according to the command of their own reason.” If Spinoza did not want us to consider the subjectivity of singular human minds he would not use such terms and phrases as “of their own reason” as he does in the above passage.

Philosopher John Searle has defined consciousness as what we experience in our waking hours. Yet, I would argue that we are consciously aware when we are asleep, and not only in our waking hours. Any parent who hears their children in danger in the middle of the night while otherwise sound asleep understands that there is always a level of conscious awareness of one’s external environment at work. The physicist and part time philosopher,

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94 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p21s, p22, p23: 48-49.  
95 Spinoza, Letter 19: 810. One can also refer to E3p9, where the term “conscious” is used in this very important proposition about conatus and singular endeavoring. The Latin term is “conscia” and it is used in conjunction with what “conatus” involves. The Dutch term used by Spinoza is “bewust” which is a reference to human thinking.  
96 Spinoza, Ethics, 4 App IX: 156.  
Adam Frank, in conjunction with the work of Alva Noe writes, “The truth of the matter is we are just at the beginning of our understanding of consciousness and of the Mind.”\footnote{Adam Frank’s comments and article on consciousness can be found at: http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/01/29/169896128/is-there-a-place-for-mind-in-physics-part-i.} This is a striking statement, and I believe very possibly an accurate one after decades of contemporary debate on the nature of consciousness.

Conscious reflection is clearly required if we are to control our passions, which are also singularly experienced. This involves what was referenced previously in Chapter One about the method of combining analysis with synthesis in reflection. In the Appendix to E4, Spinoza continues:

> But human power is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. So we do not have absolute power to adapt things outside us to our use. Nevertheless, we shall bear calmly those things which happen to us contrary to what the principle of our advantage demands, if we are conscious that we have done our duty, that the power we have could not have extended itself to the point where we could have avoided those things, and that we are part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4 App XXXII: 160, emphasis added.}

It is not simply that we learn how to build to using the most efficient method. Our increase in conatus helps us live in more rationally powerful ways. As the passage above states, there will be times when we consciously reflect on external circumstances and the power of Nature so that we rationally understand that there are events occurring which are not to our singular benefit. That is, we adequately comprehend how to calmly tolerate external events that are more powerful than we are or can be. It is adequate thinking if we are “conscious that we have done our duty” to the best of our current capacity. Our essence is conatus, but the essence of reason, according to E4p26, is the mind “insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly (see the definition of this in IIP40S2). Therefore (by IIP40) whatever we strive for from reason is
nothing but understanding.”100 This is similar to, but differs from Stoic philosophy because Spinoza’s theory of affects, as directly tied to his dynamic epistemology, cannot be reduced to only our emotions. The Stoic version of the passions are about emotions and our understanding of reasoning verses the passions. Spinoza is clearly talking about singular human minds in the above reference. For example, as Peg Rawes writes, “Geometric thinking in the Ethics is therefore aligned with life, and the reader’s journey towards fulfillment or joy reflects this process as they make the step-by-step movement through the text’s different elements…”101

Absolute affirmations through conscious reflection are done by reasoning with more conceptual force and understanding. Spinoza writes that the less indifferent we are when affirming or negating something, the more forcefully rational we are thinking, by necessity. The laws of the attribute of thought require that ideas of reason cause other ideas of reason only. This is also why Spinoza concludes, as noted above, that reason does not recognize contingency. This process of thought is also when we are most free: “I call him free who is led by reason alone.”102 The processes of analysis, synthesis, and geometric thinking use reason in a way that builds in strength, and bring about the effects such reflections cause. We can only understand these processes of a singular human mind by putting forth a theory of human consciousness. As noted above, because the recognition of contingency is an element of imaginative knowledge, when reason understands contingent events with more force, it is doing nothing else but using reasoning about the laws of thought and extension with more clarity.

Furthermore, adequately understanding the proto-physics of ideational force and the shifting ratios of motion and rest in extension involves reflecting on our affects in adequate

100 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p26: 128. Note the direct link to the epistemological proposition 2p40.
102 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p68: 151.
ways. Such regular habits lead to what Spinoza calls “a virtuous disposition.”^{103} We can employ such tools consistently as we strengthen our “habitual readiness.”^{104} As A. G. Duttmann writes in the anthology *Spinoza Now*, “Each time the rule that determines the relationship between rest and motion is altered, the disposition of bodily parts is transformed.”^{105} Therefore, the process of consciously reflecting on our affects must include both the capacity to recognize what kind of knowledge we are relying on more heavily and what is reasonable to expect our bodies to do in any given context or environment. While this chapter, and particularly this section, are focused on the second kind of knowledge, it becomes increasingly clear that we cannot think about what reasoning is (and the role it plays as a type of force which can enhance our *conatus*) without also taking into serious consideration both the attribute of extension and the combination of extension with our ideas to create affects. In addition, to rationally reflect on the proto-physics of the force between our ideas includes understanding some fundamental laws of physics. As Curley notes, at the very least, “the attribute of extension is that fixed and eternal thing to which the most fundamental laws of physics correspond…”^{106} It is not enough to understand motion, for example, since motion involves the concept of another thing (namely extension) in order to be understood, something Spinoza is clear about in E4. But thought and extension are attributes which are conceived through themselves: one as increasing and decreasing levels of force and the other as shifting ratios of motion and rest. In Letter 2, his first letter to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza writes, “…by attribute I mean every thing that is conceived in itself and through itself, so that its conception does not involve the conception of any other thing.”^{107}

^{104} Spinoza, *KV*, 2:10, 75. Spinoza also writes here that many go astray because “they lack the habitual readiness which is required in order that the understanding may at all times be used aright…”).  
^{106} Ed Curley, “Donagan’s Spinoza,” 125.  
^{107} Spinoza, Letter 2, 762.
extension were not distinct attributes of the same substance, as Paul Wienpahl notes, we would never be capable of having thoughts about bodies, and especially about the diverse and varied experiences of our own body.\textsuperscript{108}

We have adequate knowledge when we determine our ideas internally and not according to any order we perceive externally in Nature according to Spinoza. This is because we cannot know all of the causes of Nature and so to see either order or confusion externally is to rely on imaginative knowledge more heavily than reasoning:

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, that is, so long as it is determined externally... 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... then it regards things clearly and distinctly...\textsuperscript{109}

This is also more support for not interpreting Spinoza’s conception of extension (ratios of motion and rest) as something linear. The ordering of one’s ideas is, in this way, distinctly singular. Conscious, reflective awareness is required for the ordering of singular ideas. By increasing understanding, we increase our capacities for thinking well. Spinoza writes, “But skill and alertness are required for this. For men vary – there being few who live according to the rule of reason...”\textsuperscript{110} By singular, Spinoza intends both individuals and collective bodies of individuals, “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing.”\textsuperscript{111}

Continuous understanding of the laws of thought and extension which create our combined affects become automatically stronger as we understand more. Beth Lord writes,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Paul Wienpahl, \textit{The Radical Spinoza}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p29s: 52.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid. 4 App: 156.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2D7: 32. The term “singular” is used here in two different ways.
\end{itemize}
“We are more rational as we understand things better, and more imaginative as we are more affected by our experiences. At no point can we ever be wholly rational (for then we would feel nothing) or wholly imaginative (for then we would know nothing truly).” One way to understand the deductions made so far are to understand that the laws of thought are separate from the laws of extension. Nonetheless, within the laws of thought there are three types of knowledge with their own properties. Each type can only produce another idea of its own kind. To say that the laws of thought are all we need in order to comprehend Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology is an over-generalization. The experiences of our senses are completely different from the use and experience of the capacity to reason. You cannot stop your senses from flowing (unless you commit suicide, which is an instance of the imagination overpowering reason).

There are a diversity of ways to better order our affects in accordance with reason. As we read in E4p63c, passionate joys can be rational and not excessive. It is much easier to order our affects to benefit ourselves and others if we adequately understand how we are expressions of forces (laws) of Nature. These intellectual affections are tremendously joyous in both their ordering and, most importantly, that is, in their effects. In other words, the more we understand how to apply the laws of proportion to our own lives (ideas and actions), the more readily and easily we can recognize where such laws can be applied or increased in magnitude. It is not enough just to know how something works; one must put it into action in order to truly increase the magnitude of effects from such knowledge. As Spinoza writes in 2p13L7, any given body is composed of many parts communicating their motion and rest to each other.

112 Beth Lord, *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy*, 3. Therefore, affectivity, as Lord discusses, is not only bodily. Language, for example, is wholly an aspect of imaginative knowledge, but this is precisely why we can be affected by it in so many ways.

113 Recall that, as we read in E2p43s, having a true idea is to know something “to the utmost degree.”

continuously.\textsuperscript{115} What matters to a human being whom is \textit{able} to consciously recognize certain effects and transitions is the speed and power of what is possible in such transitions.

Therefore, we cannot eliminate the concept of human, reflective consciousness in Spinoza’s \textit{Ethics}. In his monism, “…nature as such resists any total capture by human thought.”\textsuperscript{116} Nature and its laws lack nothing nonetheless. So, we have to ask what it is about human thought that is both expressive of all of Nature in acting out the laws of thought and extension and, simultaneously, cannot capture all of Nature? To have any lack would imply there was something we were working towards, which is a form of teleology. For Spinoza, such systems are not possible. He writes, “What is called a final cause is nothing but a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, \textit{or} primary cause, of some thing.”\textsuperscript{117} We have to remind ourselves at this point (which involves imaginative knowledge as memory in conjunction with adequate reasoning) of an important metaphysical component that is understood as immanent. Spinoza writes, “For if God acts for the sake of an end, he necessarily wants something which he lacks. And though the theologians and metaphysicians distinguish between an end of need and an end of assimilation, they nevertheless confess that God did all things for his own sake, not for the sake of the things to be created.”\textsuperscript{118} The reference by these theologians/metaphysicians to a future tense is important, as to refer to the future is to say that God’s modal expressions are not yet fully God, which is absurd. The Latin term \textit{perfectus} is translated by Piet Steenbakkers as that which is already complete and fulfilled. The term \textit{potential} is also used by Steenbakkers in a way that denotes an identity between virtue and

\textsuperscript{115} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p13L7: 43. Spinoza writes, “And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual.”

\textsuperscript{116} Anthony Paul Smith, \textit{Spinoza Beyond Philosophy}, 54.

\textsuperscript{117} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4 preface: 114.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid. I App: 28.
power (strength) where human conceptions of values as inherent in Nature are not logically possible.\textsuperscript{119}

As we will read in the following chapters, the intellectual love of God (and Nature) includes enhancing one’s reasoning and power to act, but it also includes loving well. In the \textit{TP}, we read that individual virtue is identical with the strength of one’s rational capacities, which Spinoza also calls “freedom of spirit.”\textsuperscript{120} In E4p22c, we read, “The striving to preserve oneself is the first and only foundation of virtue.”\textsuperscript{121} These ideas are consistent across Spinoza’s works. In Letter 32, he also writes, “But I would first ask you to note that I do not attribute to Nature beauty, ugliness, order or confusion. It is only with respect to our imagination that things can be said to be beautiful, ugly, well-ordered or confused.”\textsuperscript{122}

Letter 32 can be used to compare with E2p7 (“the order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things”) because 2p7 can only be applied to human ideas in my reading. As Pierre Macherey writes, “‘order’ here designates something completely different from a relationship of presence between propositions… For Spinoza, the ideas of method and order cease to be formally determined by a criteria of priority; rather, they express the real movement of thought…”\textsuperscript{123} Spinoza’s notion of the power of the intellect and its rational process “\textit{has nothing to do with the obligatory unfolding of an order, because it no longer has any goal to complete.}”\textsuperscript{124} Again, as noted repeatedly throughout this chapter, this is another reason why one cannot critique Spinoza’s concept of extension as ratios of motion and rest by relying on linear concepts. When talking about extension, we can only refer to concepts of

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\textsuperscript{119} This reading was a part of two courses taught by Prof. Steenbakkers at Erasmus University and Utrecht University in the fall term of 2009 (Netherlands), which I had the privilege of attending in part.
\textsuperscript{120} Spinoza, \textit{TP}, 2: 682.
\textsuperscript{121} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p22c: 127.
\textsuperscript{122} Spinoza, Letter 32: 848. On human confusion specifically see E1p8, 2p28, 2p29, 2p36, 3p9, 3p58d, 4p1, 4p59, and 5p3.
\textsuperscript{123} Macherey, \textit{Hegel or Spinoza}, 45.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid. 53, emphasis added.
\end{flushleft}
continuous transformation, power, layers, and multiple ratios combining in ways that create a unified force with shifting degrees of increases in power. The natural processes of reasoning well include using clear and distinct chains of adequate ideas, but they also include learning more efficient methods of analysis and synthesis in the production of new knowledge.

In Spinoza’s system, knowledge proceeds “…neither from things to ideas nor from ideas to things, but it goes from idea to idea, that is to say it links acts of thought between them, according to a necessary causal order that is the same as the one in which things are linked in reality.” Ideas link acts of thought. Acts of thought are always one of two elements of our combined affects (along with our bodily affections as ratios of motion and rest). Affects are what we are aware of as an expression of our consciousness and physical sensations. The point is that all of substance is expressed modally in distinct and infinite ways, but is at the same time expressed by mechanical operations of the same natural laws. This necessity does not, therefore, mean that our modal expressions are reduced to representations of reality. They are reality. Real expressions of natural laws are not representations of Nature, as we will read about more specifically in Chapter Four. So, for example, contingencies exist in Nature, but they are an expression of singular, imaginative knowledge. It is also evident from Chapter Two of the TP that there are certain desires which can only arise from ideas of reason as an effect the laws of thought and motion together can produce (as affects). In other words, although there is no cross attributal causality between thought and extension, in an affect the attributes combine separate forces into an organic, singular expression of power. Affects, as modes, can be adequately understood as both a cause and an effect of Nature depending on what other conceptual chains they are placed among. E1p36 reads, “Nothing exists from whose nature

125 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 58.
some effect does not follow. Whatever exists expresses the nature, or essence, of God in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things…”

In E1p11, Spinoza challenges you to conceive “if you can” that God does not exist and, therefore, the essence of God does “not involve existence.” The principle of sufficient reason (PSR) is inserted here with force, but this principle will also take on several different variations throughout the Ethics. Everything in this system must have a cause for its existence or for its inability to exist. Those causes cannot contain an inherent contradiction: “But this reason, or cause, must either be contained in the nature of the thing, or be outside it.” As early as the KV, we read, “…for the nature of a thing can require nothing while it does not exist.” In 1p11, Spinoza writes that the reason why substance exists is due to its nature of inherent self-preservation. Its nature also includes the whole of all its attributes. That which has within the drive towards self-preservation always has a quality of existence as part of, yet different from, its essence. So, in a way, even though human beings as singular, finite things die, we continue to exist as new expressions of substance in other ways (new ratios) upon their death. Substance (God, Nature) is eternal regardless of its unique finite expressions, and the definition of “existence” must include that anything which is ever in existence includes a certain set of factors deductively, namely, that it is evident through itself that a thing which is in existence includes primary characteristics of absolute affirmation. Spinoza writes, “These things are evident through themselves; from them it follows that a thing necessarily exists if there is no reason or cause which prevents it from existing.” How we construct order in Nature will be based on the effect of what ideas we are having and what types of knowledge we are relying

126 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p36: 25.
127 Ibid. 1p11: 8.
128 Ibid. 1p11: 7.
129 Spinoza, KV, 41, footnote 8.
130 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p11: 7-8, emphasis added
on. The implication of these deductions is that “cause” (as we understand the concept) does not exist in Nature outside of thought, and yet, the common notion we have about causality is an expression (truth) of Nature as well. A horse or tree will have different determinate ways of interacting with the environment. And although everything strives to persist in its existence, how it persists is unique to each type of thing doing the persisting, including types of ideas. This is not an anthropomorphic conception of Nature if we adequately recognize and reflect on the infinite modal ways Nature expresses itself through its attributes.

There are two final considerations related to E1p11 that are important to understand. As noted, to exist is power, therefore, the more existence a thing has, the more power it has (as a cause and as an effect). In this way, power is a feedback loop. It must be within the thing to begin with, a part of its nature, as we cannot draw our power from external causes but must become self-caused in our own determinate ways. This is what Spinoza refers to as an adequate cause, one whose effects are clearly and distinctly perceived.¹³¹ In 4p26, we read, “What we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding…this striving for understanding (by P22C) is the first and only foundation of virtue…”¹³² The cause of the thing and its power must be itself: “…whatever perfection substance has is not owed to any external cause. So its existence must follow from its nature alone; hence its existence is nothing but its essence.”¹³³ In this way, nature, as well as our singular expressions of substance, has an essence that involves existence. Every effect involves its cause. Something that is in existence is always conceived as affirmative.

The singularity of individual expressions of substance with their own ratios of motion and rest and ideational force involve many common notions conceived through and with the

¹³¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 3D1: 69.
¹³² Ibid. 4p26: 128.
¹³³ Ibid. 1p11: 8.
attributes. The ambiguity of daily human experiences can be organized by relying on rational conceptions of the necessity of natural laws, as well as rational evaluations within conscious reflection as common notions. Yet, as we learn in 2p32 and 2p36, the same rules of necessity apply to inadequate ideas as to adequate notions (as all ideas are in God).\textsuperscript{134}

Recall that an idea is “a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing,” and adequate ideas considered in themselves have “all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.”\textsuperscript{135} These definitions are referenced repeatedly, but another important distinction includes what is written in 2p40\textsuperscript{2} where we learn the distinctions between the three types of knowledge. Leading up to this point Spinoza writes in 2p38 that whatever is common to all things and equally in the part as in the whole “can be conceived adequately.” The corollary reads, “From this it follows that there are certain ideas, or [universal] notions, common to all men. For (by L2) all bodies agree in certain things, which (by P38) must be perceived adequately, or clearly and distinctly, by all.”\textsuperscript{136}

By the time we reach E2p40 and the definitions for kinds of knowledge, we have already learned how to consider what human bodies are, share, and can do or have in common. We read, “Whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas which are adequate in the mind are also adequate.”\textsuperscript{137} This result, as an effect produced by something that is identical (and yet its cause), occurs by necessity. The same thing, as cause, can cause its own kind in effect. It is the force intrinsic to an affirmation of necessity and it causes its own existence as a law of its nature. Therefore, learning how adequate ideas are formed and manipulated with more force only guarantees that one will be capable of conceiving expressions of Nature with more force.

\textsuperscript{134} Spinoza, Ethics, 2p32, p36: 53, 54.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. 2D3. D4: 32.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. 2p38: 54. In a way, this proves the deductions made prior about reason not recognizing contingencies.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid. 2p40: 55.
of comprehension and joy. This is also how it is possible to rationally defer judgment and, yet, such a delay is not something negative but is something affirmative. The delay in judgment is still a use of reasoning. At this point in the Ethics we learn that common notions are the “foundations of our reasoning” and that they result from being caused by other adequate notions about the common properties between things.

Included within these deductions, starting back as early as 1p11, reason is included as a way to build understanding of what causes are. Therefore, reflecting on our ideas and actions as only representations of Nature (or as only modal modifications of substance) will become logically problematic. Modes, for example, can both exist and not exist. Modes are not determined in-themselves, but rely on other concepts to be understood. Adequate ideas, on the other hand, must be understood as something different, that is, they are conceived through themselves and are, therefore, absolute affirmations of existence. We are concerned here with shifting our thought patterns towards that which we have already learned applies to substance itself as necessary, and not only the modal expressions of substance. When we do this, we can produce not only more adequate notions, but more forceful adequate chains of ideas; and we combine them with other variations of imaginative ideas to create stronger, more affirmative, and joyful affects. Contingencies and doubt or limitation are not possible as conceptions within such realizations. In this way, and because we are consciously reflective expressions of Nature, 2p40 can be combined with 3p53, 3p55, 4D6, and 5p6 to allow stronger deductions of rational force, as well as their logical conceptual results or further effects.

Our habitual readiness to use reason well includes understanding the necessity of laws of Nature. All of our experiences can be understood according to only select affects: joy (affirmations), sadness (denials, contingencies, or partial information), or as temporarily neutral
(also affirmations of adequate understanding even if not joyous). The adequate knowledge we have about affirmation is itself a force that propels rationality by necessity. Steve Nadler writes, “Since we cannot control the objects that we tend to value and allow to influence our well-being, we ought instead to try to control our evaluations themselves and thereby minimize the sway that external objects and the passions have over us. We can never eliminate the passive affects entirely; nor would that even be desirable in this life.” Singular, conscious self-reflection is needed for daily evaluations and generative transformations or productions of knowledge being experienced. Passions are singular too, although some are also shared. We may both be terribly upset about a tornado that has torn our shared neighborhood and homes apart, but perhaps your structure stands enough to affect you less economically and emotionally than my completely destroyed home and foundation which I cannot afford to rebuild. Our passions will be both shared and, yet, singularly experienced. The difference is important, but the shared common notion is that Nature is larger in force than either of us individually or combined. In that understanding we are one. Macherey writes, “…the power of the intellect is…an affirmation of self…”

In addition, the human experience of space and time is directly proportional to ideas of the imagination and of reason, depending on what aspect of that experience is being reflected on. Nonetheless, rational truths are clear and distinct common notions and common notions are always affirmative. Our experience of space and time, as durational (finite), is part of imaginative knowledge. Interestingly enough, the effects of thinking clearly and distinctly

138 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49s: 63.
139 Nadler, Spinoza: A Life, 240.
140 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 52.
increase the power of our understanding “not from our ‘being convinced by reasons, but from our feeling and enjoying the thing itself [singular essence]...’”

The deduction made in the above proposition, that we are not necessarily always convinced by reason, places a whole new meaning on the use of the PSR by Spinoza in the Ethics. Understanding the law of how something works is not enough. Such an act would include being able to be convinced by reason(s) alone. We have to put that law into action, which, as an effect, will increase its force further and be something we feel in addition to understand. In this way, it is not the reasons which convince us (which also means that it is not the PSR alone which is at work), but our actions and their results, whose effects we enjoy because we are aware of the transitions in power and how to enhance our laws of thought and action. This is also how new ideas or combinations of ideas are born. It is also a disposition of virtue (and is not only about habits). More is required. Understanding well includes singular habits as an increase in our interactions with others, with new experiences, with more forceful concentration or creativity, and so forth. If the powers of imaginative and rational knowledge were the same for everyone, there would be nothing new to discover, invent, or experience as the generations pass by. Substance has infinite attributes that express themselves in infinite ways, combinations, and continuous arrangements, compositions, and decompositions...

Efficiency and Force in Our Magnitude of Understanding

In Chapter Three of the TTP, virtue as a rational disposition can be conceived as a habit of thought and action that is meant to help “subjugate the passions.” In E4p24, we read, “But

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141 De Deugd, The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge, 17.
142 This deduction is also important for what we will learn next about intuitive knowledge, the third and last kind of knowledge we are capable of, because intuitive knowledge involves affirming the essence of the singular essence of things as we come to know and enjoy them.
we act only insofar as we understand (by IIIIP3).”¹⁴³ Being capable of acquiring a disposition of strength and virtue through developing conscious rational habits, as well as understanding the causes of things, and to live in a state of security with opportunities for good health and freedom of thought and speech are the things Spinoza prioritizes which “depend on human power alone,” that is, “on laws of human nature.”¹⁴⁴ Spinoza calls these natural laws “gifts.”

We can draw a connection between these deductions and E5p39s. Spinoza writes that we can be “conscious” of external causes or we can be conscious of one’s mind in its series of ideas and their idea types which are a part of our affects.¹⁴⁵ To shift one’s conscious reflections between the two options will require learning how the rules of thought operate through demonstrations or applications of common notions, observation, habit, and retention. Reasoning well in a way that allows for an affirmative suspension of judgment is distinctly a human experience. All parts of Nature may strive for continued existence, but pebbles do not experience consciousness like a human being. In 4p33, we read, “The nature, or essence, of the affects cannot be explained through one’s essence, or nature, alone (by IIID1 and D2), but must be defined by the power, that is (by IIIIP7), by the nature of external causes compared with our own. That is why there are as many species of each affect as there are species of objects by which we are affected…”¹⁴⁶ Because human thought cannot escape its own participation in and experience of its affects, we cannot only conclude that there are truths outside of how human thought deduces or understands them. This is Macherey’s point.

¹⁴³ Spinoza, Ethics, 4p24: 128.
¹⁴⁴ Spinoza, TP, 3: 417.
¹⁴⁵ Spinoza, Ethics, 5p39s: 178.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 4p33: 131.
In the *KV* and the *Ethics*, we learn that a finite human can be said to be perfect both in its duration and in its relation to what is an *immanent cause* of ideas.\(^{147}\) This is because it is an expression of an eternal God (substance) with the attribute of thought. Another way to understand that all of substance and my personal finite, modal expressions are both the same thing to different degrees (or how we are modalized in existence and also eternal expressions) is to conceive of simple wholes and complex, determinate parts that do not have set material limits. Motion and force cannot, in themselves, be understood as something with limits. Things in motion stay in motion until they come up against another force that enhances, hinders, or stops that motion. This is a law of Nature that Spinoza was working on in the *Ethics* and in his correspondence with scientists and friends. As we read in Letter 32, for example, relying on a fictional story about a worm living within the blood of some body (unaware that it is a small part of something much larger), Spinoza draws an analogy and asks us to use both our reason and our imagination to consider both the worm and the larger body it is within co-exist in separate, determinate ways within one larger whole together:

> On the question of whole and parts, I consider things as parts of a whole to the extent that their natures adapt themselves to one another so that they are in the closest possible agreement [with the ‘least possible opposition between them’]. Insofar as parts of things are different from one another, to that extent each one forms in our mind a separate idea and is therefore considered as a whole in itself, and not as a part.\(^{148}\)

The ideas within this letter are the key to understanding all of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology and determinist ontology. We get a glimpse of such deductions even earlier in Letter 12 on the infinite where Spinoza also writes what I consider another key passage for adequately understanding his system:

> It is to the existence of Modes alone that we can apply the term Duration; the corresponding term for the existence of Substance is Eternity, that is, the infinite

\(^{147}\) Spinoza, *KV*, 1:2:45.

\(^{148}\) Spinoza, Letter 32: 848.
enjoyment of existence or – pardon the Latin – of being (essaendi). What I have said makes it quite clear that when we have regard only to the essence of Modes and not to Nature’s order, as is most often the case, we can arbitrarily delimit the existence and duration of Modes without thereby impairing to any extent our conception of them; and we can conceive this duration as greater or less, and divisible into parts. But Eternity and Substance, being conceivable only as infinite, cannot be thus treated without annulling our conception of them. So it is nonsense, bordering on madness, to hold that extended Substance is composed of parts or bodies really distinct from one another.¹⁴⁹

Therefore, as our attributes can be understood as the infinite enjoyment and power of existence, it is not that I conceived of myself as separate from another human body or as parts; it is that I adequately understand what it is to be a specific kind of determinate expression of something that is eternal. When we die, for example, our finite expressions of substance as human simply transform into another type of expression of ratios of motion and rest. Spinoza goes so far as to explain that even major transformations in personality due to a growth in rational capacities for comprehension and an increase in the use of common notions are little deaths. As adequate thinking about such things will always be affirmations, Spinoza deduces, “…human understanding is immortal, because it is a product which God has produced in himself.”¹⁵⁰ If we place the deductions of Letters 12 and 32 with E2p38, we start to gain a more lucid perspective and understanding of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. As one cannot place a rational limit on the enjoyment of existence, 2p38 states, “Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.”¹⁵¹

The understanding of parts and wholes, in other words, when logical, will always be adequate

¹⁴⁹ Spinoza, Letter 12: 788. What is striking about this letter is its relation to E1p15, a proposition which was crucial for as part of a correct interpretation of imaginative knowledge in Chapter Two of this thesis. Recall that in this proposition we learn that terms and ideas such as “measure,” “time,” and “number” are “modes of imagining.” Because adequately understanding what modes are can only be an aspect of the second kind of knowledge, the definition of modes must contain the concepts of substance (including the concept of Eternity) and attribute as they are always conceived through something else. Yet, the actual expression of modes can include a relation to imaginative knowledge and experience on a singular (finite) level as well. There is a difference between “mental constructs” and “real things,” and how to adequately describe such relations and differences is something rational. Can this last conceptual deduction also apply equally to the different ways to think about the combination of ideas?

¹⁵⁰ Spinoza, KV, 2:19:87.

¹⁵¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 2p38: 54.
knowledge that produces more adequate knowledge. Just as contingency cannot be understood by reason and is always an aspect of imaginative knowledge, so, too, the understanding of parts and wholes can only, for Spinoza, be understood by reason if being recognized in its logical implications and impossibilities. William Stakstedder concludes:

The way of being correlates thus with the way the subject is considered… Neither part nor whole is a viable notion by itself…calling anything either part or whole is possible only when it is juxtaposed with something other than itself… Rather, anything is called a part in view of a common nature shared with others. It is called a whole in view of its opposition to some other thing.152

Substance is an immanent cause, even if both concepts have to be understood through a finite lens. Furthermore, “Motion alone does not exist, but only motion and rest together; and this is in the whole, and must be in it, because there is no part in extension.”153 The above deductions should make this earlier claim on motion and rest in the KV clearer. He continues, “Now when we consider extension alone, then we become aware of nothing else in it except Motion and Rest, from which we then discover all the effects that result therefrom.”154

With the deductions of part and whole in mind, we can return to a discussion of conatus and especially the proto-physics of force of human conatus. Spinoza writes, “But since the universal power of Nature as a whole is nothing but the power of all individual things taken together, it follows that each individual thing has the sovereign right to do all that it can do; i.e. the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate power.”155 From this passage in the TTP, it is clear that Spinoza believes in both singular individual things and the natural rights of singular things as equal to their essence as determinate expressions of power. It is important for me to establish this point repeatedly so to better structure a theory of human consciousness,

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154 Ibid. 2:19:87.
155 Spinoza, TTP, 16: 527.
and how such conscious reflection is co-extensive with the intellectual love of God (or Nature) and the joy of existence of one’s conatus. To have an idea about the object of one’s idea is to focus reflectively on the object of the idea, which involves using imaginative knowledge and reasoning to process that object, but it also involves adequately understanding shifting registers of motion and rest and ideational power or ways of knowing and being.

My determinate power as my conatus will depend on what type of knowledge I focus on as the object of my ideas as well. To reflect on types of knowledge is to use ideas to reflect on other ideas. In the KV, Spinoza writes, “…Desire depends on the idea of its objects…”\(^{156}\) To define and understand human power as the power of Nature is to emphasize dynamic and versatile human singularity in its reasoning capacities specifically, particularly the capacity to understand the same object from multiple perspectives. Hsana Sharp writes, “…self-determination emerges from our receptive powers to be affected and to coordinate multiple diverse agencies.”\(^{157}\) As I will demonstrate next, adequate understanding involves consciously reflecting on the three types of knowledge we are capable of. Once we grasp this level of what reasoning is capable of, we can process what it is for ideas to have varying forces.

**Conscious Reflection as a Proto-Physics of Force and Motion**

Spinoza reflected on his system in terms both ecological and ethological. If we are not only moved and convinced by reasons, but are also moved by feelings, then all three forms of knowledge should be considered as an organic, unified process (as we read in E2ax2). This is particularly so because some of Spinoza’s ideas fall within today’s generally accepted definitions of ecology: “The scientific study of the inter-relations among organisms and between organisms, and between them and all aspects, living and non-living, of their

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\(^{156}\) Spinoza, *KV*, 2:17:84.

\(^{157}\) Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 50.
environment.” Ethology is the study of human patterns of behavior and disposition, as well as the study of human personalities and their natural habitat with an emphasis on both empirical experiences and the rational and imaginative use of ideas and reflection. Spinoza’s system can be used for both.

Spinoza focuses specifically on what strict deductive logic can show us about different types of causality within our experience in extension and thought. The connection of thought, motion and rest, and ontology includes, as noted earlier in passages such as E1p28, that efficient and material causation (beginnende oorzaak) can only be adequately understood in relation to ideas about modes. This deduction can accompany the understanding that God (or Nature) is the immanent cause (inblyvende oorzaak) of all things. Therefore, we are to consider multiple levels of causality at once. This fact brings up a challenge for relying on one definition or use of the PSR when reading Spinoza because the nature of causality must be in relation to both substance as one organic whole and the expressions of modifications of substance as modes. Modes are not, in other words, conceptual fictions but are real modifications of substance with their own causal rules and properties. There is not one set of rules for understanding all types of causes and all effects.

Adequate knowledge includes true beliefs which are logical and about the properties of things, including about thought and types of ideas. The attributes of thought and extension are real things (res), and the true beliefs of thought, for Spinoza, include “…that conviction whereby it is clearly seen that it cannot be otherwise.” Reason does not recognize contingency because clear and distinct ideas are completely true by necessity and could not

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159 For example, the ecologist Arne Naesse wrote on Spinoza and ecology in 1977.
160 Spinoza, *KV*, 2:16:81, footnote 14. Although this is a deduction from an early work, Spinoza maintains the same idea throughout his later works.
have been otherwise. The way reasoning recognizes that contingencies are a part of one’s imagination is only by understanding the laws of thought and how each type of knowledge is separate, each creating ideas of its own kind. Necessary relations in reason cannot, logically, be contingent. Learning this is what enhances conscious reflection on those contingencies as partial knowledge. The experience of contingencies is a part of the imagination, but the adequate reflection is an action of reason.

Substance is the self-perpetuating single cause of all its effects. Spinoza clearly felt that he had a philosophical system that is one organic whole with infinite ways of expressing itself as self-caused and eternal. We can only understand substance and our expressions of it as the laws of Nature of thought and extension. These deductions bring with them more clarity about E2p7 (“the order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things”). The type of knowledge you are aware of and, consequently, the affects you experience will be how you interpret the world or environment. In addition, as Ed Curley writes, for Spinoza persons are “an indissoluble unity which can be considered from two points of view, and with two distinct vocabularies and two distinct kinds of causation.”\(^\text{161}\)

All expressions of Nature have some degree of determinate power, but for purposes of this chapter I am drawing our attention to human thought and reflective consciousness as potentia mentis. The rational striving for an enhanced capacity for adequate knowledge and expression leads our rational dispositions to become more automatic and forcefully habitual. When we adequately understand how the laws of Nature of thought and extension work, we are able to better recognize how to increase their force and expression (i.e. we comprehend increasingly difficult topics with more speed and clarity and we extend our diverse motions with more options and joy or pleasure). Rational conceptual blending increases our conatus.

These increases are highly correlated with the infinite possible experiences and the joy of existing. As Simon Calder writes, “For Spinoza, it is only through experiencing – and therein enjoying – the activity of thinking that beings become capable of reforming their ‘imaginings.’”¹⁶² This is why it is important to understand the difference between knowing a truth and applying it well, with more effective force, or with more creativity so a multitude can experience the joy of such encounters and not only oneself.

Understanding the physics of force that is produced between and within our ideas will equip us with a capacity to live in a particular way: “The mind as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body’s power of acting.”¹⁶³ As we learn early in the Ethics, increasing our capacity to compare and contrast many ideas at once only strengthens one’s use of rationality, as well as one’s ability to respond to encounters within the environment more productively. This capacity for enhanced rational discrimination adds to our power of being able to recognize and reflect on the kind of affect we are experiencing and how to alter it. In Teaching Philosophy, Richard Shusterman writes, “Contrast makes feelings easier to discriminate…For such reasons, the use of language [imaginative knowledge] to guide and sharpen somaesthetic introspection…is crucial even to those disciplines of body consciousness that regard the range and meaning of our feelings as going well beyond the limits of language… The key is not to rank them in order of importance, but to coordinate them better.”¹⁶⁴ In summary, the way to fully understand Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology and proto-physics of force is to focus one’s singular conscious reflective capacities on singular affects, and to focus on them in a way that powerfully emphasizes to oneself what is felt, what kind of

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¹⁶³ Spinoza, Ethics, 3p12: 77.
knowledge is being relied upon more heavily, how many other ideas can be compared and contrasted during an experience, and how all of this can lend itself to an increase in the rational strength of habitual readiness and affirmative dispositions. Quite simply, Spinoza’s philosophy can become personally transformative.

The increased capacity to use reason well is what Stuart Hampshire calls “configurations of thought.” According to Spinoza, conatus is a natural right for each singular thing. It is not that we have free will and can go against natural laws. Instead, when natural laws are in operation, and they always are, there are different ways the laws of thought and extension are expressed. If sense experience and the imagination are over-active, our power will still be increased but not to our greatest benefit. If, on the other hand, rational disposition and rationally created affects are more proportionally powerful (we can never stop sensing so imaginative ideas are always present), then our power is increased both to our greatest joy and benefit but also for the benefit of others and all of Nature. In the TP, Spinoza writes, “But the fact is that men are mainly guided by appetite devoid of reason; yet even so they do not violate Nature’s order but necessarily conform to it.”

Putting our increased capacities for reasoning well and more creatively into action is what increases our joy: “For more power comes to us from the understanding of proportion itself, than from the understanding of the rule of proportion.” To apply what we learn is a type of operational knowledge, which we will read more about in Chapter Five when I address

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165 Hampshire uses this phrase in the introduction to Ed Curley’s translation of Spinoza’s Ethics.
166 Spinoza, TTP, 16: 527. I am reminded of Thomas Kuhn’s striking critique in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions of Aristotle and how little he knew about the mechanics of motion. Aristotle certainly understood a tremendous amount about what might be involved in rationally contemplating motion, as evident in the Physics, but Kuhn’s assessment is that contemporary science and the development of the discipline of physics over time has shown that Aristotle’s analysis is only partially accurate.
167 Spinoza, TP, 2: 688.
the third and final kind of knowledge found in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. Motion, in other words, involves more than just the properties of change and spatial direction, much more.

In 2011, Ursula Renz wrote that Spinoza is “not taking the cognitive ability which is usually only attributed to the human mind as an absolute privilege of human beings…” I partially disagree with this interpretation because human minds cannot know anything else except what they are consciously aware of as individuals in their expression of ideas. But a complete theory of human conscious reflection would not be possible if she is correct. It is a specific human experience to be capable of cognizing well while referencing one’s singular affects and personal imaginings. Simply stated, we do not know what it is like to be anything else other than human. But just as important, it is a way for a singular human being to control and evaluate one’s individual passions and reactions. This is the point in what was referenced above when Spinoza deduces that not all use reasoning well, but their conatus can still be active and powerful. Recall that the attributes of thought and extension can be expressed infinitely in infinite ways.

To be able to control and understand one’s singular passions is specific to being human. All things may have a certain degree of “awareness” of their conatus, but what that awareness is for human beings is distinctly different from any other expression. Beth Lord writes, “True knowledge as such has no power to overcome [our] affects; only insofar as that true knowledge is felt as an essential desire that is more powerful that other affects will it be able to overcome them…” For example, reflection on essence as expression and on ourselves as efficient adequate causes is the formal essence of the mind. Furthermore, in both Book Four of the Ethics and Chapter Two of the TP, Spinoza is clear that the conscious rational reflections of

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170 Beth Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 110.
individuals are required for true civil order among many competing human interests within one state or nation. We cannot live as we please or always allow only our personal judgments to sway us. There are circumstances where we can and should, by reason, defer our personal evaluations, preferences, or desires to benefit of the greater civil order. This is clear in E4p37s2 where Spinoza writes, “If men lived according to the guidance of reason, everyone would possess this right of his (by P35C1) without any injury to anyone else… Again, in the state of nature there is no one who by common consent is Master of anything, nor is there anything in Nature which can be said to be this man’s and not that man’s. Instead, all things belong to all.”¹⁷¹ Later, in the TP, we read:

Thus it follows that it is quite inconceivable that each citizen be permitted by ordinance of the commonwealth to live just as he pleases, and consequently the natural right of every man to be his own judge necessarily ceases in a civil order. I say expressly, ‘by ordinance of the commonwealth,’ for every man’s natural right (if we consider the matter correctly) does not cease in a civil order; for in a state of Nature and in a civil order alike man acts from the laws of his own nature and has regard for his own advantage. In both these conditions, I repeat, man is led by fear or hope to do or refrain from doing this or that. The main difference between the two conditions is this, that in the civil order all men fear the same things, and all have the same ground of security, the same way of life. But this does not deprive the individual of his faculty of judgement, for he who has resolves to obey all the commands of the commonwealth, whether through fear of its power or love of tranquility, is surely providing for his own security and his own advantage in his own way.¹⁷²

The conclusion is that we are both singular, individual human beings with personal reflective consciousness and social beings who also need to defer some of our personal interests and desires in order to maintain a (rationally) stronger civil order. The passage from the TP supports some of Hasana Sharp’s interpretation as well. Sharp concludes that, for Spinoza, “The modal nature of human existence…entails that humans cannot be considered in isolation

¹⁷¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 4p37s2: 135-136.
¹⁷² Spinoza, TP, 3: 690-691. Spinoza continues, “Furthermore, it is also inconceivable that every citizen should be permitted to put his own interpretation on the decrees or laws of the commonwealth. For if this were permitted to every citizen, he would thereby be his own judge… We see, then, that the individual citizen is not in control of his own right, but is subject to the commonwealth…”
from one another… I think only if we think.”173 In E4p70 we read, “Everyone judges according to his own temperament what is good (see III1P39).”174

Spinoza’s proto-physics of force and power (energy coupled with understanding and application) requires further explanation. Spinoza was interested in and experimenting with principles in physics, such as force, natural laws, momentum, flow and dynamics. He even went as far as to dig up his back yard in order to construct an underground water system with piping which would add fresh running water to his place of residence. As well, and as we read in Chapter One, physics was becoming an official discipline worthy of its own kind of research and experimentation in Holland during Spinoza’s young life. The first university physics laboratory at an academic institution was born at Leiden University. But, more importantly, in Spinoza’s system and letters we find many references to velocity, force, momentum, friction, motion, space-time, energy, and so forth. We get many glimpses of such concerns and how they, conceptually and physically, relate to Nature as expressions of natural laws, but one striking example occurs in a letter from 1665. In a response sent to Spinoza, van Blyenbergh writes, “Consequently, it must also infallibly follow that in relation to God I include as much perfection (differing only in degree) in my actions when I have a desire for pleasure as when I have no such desire… For at that time there pertains to my essence only as much as is expressed in action, for, on your view, I can do neither more nor less than what results from the degree of essence I have in fact actually received.”175 Spinoza clears up the misunderstanding of his system, ending the friendship, by simply stating that many confuse concepts when we attribute to God desires that are similar to human desires. We cannot rationally ascribe human

173 Hasana Sharp, “The Force of Ideas in Spinoza,” 742. E2ax2 is also supportive of such an interpretation.
174 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p70: 152. In E5p39 and 5p42s we also learn about degrees of consciousness.
175 Spinoza, Letter 22, 829. This letter supports my conclusions in Chapter Two of this thesis. Blyenbergh ends his last letter to Spinoza with a postscript condemning his ideas regarding fate!
characteristics to God (or all of Nature), but we can talk about human expressions of God as involving the infinite or as part of a force that is eternal.

A key question when examining Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, proto-physics of force, and theory of human consciousness, is about principles of conservation. For physicists and neuroscientists who study the functions of brain matter and the separate, yet related, experience of human consciousness, what is most puzzling is “the absence of any conservation laws: synapses, action potentials, neurons, attention, memory, and consciousness are not conserved in any meaningful sense.” Therefore, we have to look for support for conservation in order to more fully develop Spinoza’s theory of human consciousness in my reading. One place to look for such a concept and effect or expression of the attribute of thought might be found in the affirmations and use of common notions. Not only is it the case that memories can be thought of as a type of conservation, but our expressions of thought and extension are derived from the same eternal necessity as everything else in Nature. Therefore, if you find conservation somewhere else in Nature, you may also be able to find it as a part of human consciousness, especially if the interpretations of Spinoza (particularly E2p7) by scholars such as Pierre Macherey are correct. Macherey writes, “The movement of thought [in Spinoza] proceeds from the same necessity as all reality.”

The main concept to consider is how ideas themselves can have power, force, and act like bodies. As ideas have their own striving to persist, as everything else, this striving cannot be described as motion. As already noted, motion is a concept and ability assigned to only the attribute of extension, but the equivalent action found in thought with every motion of

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176 Kristof Koch, *Consciousness*… 19. This conclusion is puzzling to me as there are many decades of research in psychology about how memory is preserved in the body, especially in those who experience extreme trauma.
178 Piet Steenbakkers regularly notes that ideas strive in existence like everything else in Nature.
extension is a type of knowledge with increasing or decreasing force. In addition, motion can only exist as understood along with rest as a combination of ratio(s). Beth Lord writes, “If we align our finite existence as far as we can with the true order and connection of ideas and activities that is our essence, we will be more rational, more active, and more free.”

Conatus is defined as appetite coupled with degrees of power and tendencies towards self-preservation, and human conatus is expressed in its own determinate ways specific to being human. This is also part of the logic why we cannot ascribe human characteristics to all of Nature; that is what makes human characteristics specific to human beings. Spinoza would not be able to use such logic if there was not something wholly unique about human expressions and reflective consciousness.

Therefore, we can develop a theory of human consciousness. In Chapter Three of the TTP, we read, “He who counts himself more blessed because he alone enjoys well-being not shared by others [humans]…knows not what is true happiness and blessedness… A man’s true happiness and blessedness consists solely in wisdom and knowledge of truth…” Pebbles, bats, and oceans cannot experience and feel knowledge of truth in the same way human beings can reflect on the force and motion of singular consciousness and action. Our conscious awareness is made up of all three types of knowledge, however rare intuition is, but especially it is composed of a continuously shifting interaction between imaginative and rational ideas.

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179 Beth Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 145. There may be a potential problem with Lord’s reading of “affect” in this work. For example, she writes on several different pages that affects are feelings, actions, transitions in power, and ideas coupled with their corresponding affections (83, 87, 91). Affects are a power which combine ideas with their affections in a type of unified motion that cannot be reduced to either thought or extension exclusively. They are not emotions or feelings, as Sam Shirley also defines them. Affects involve our feelings and emotions, but are not identical with them. They are part of our continuous transformations of power and motion, and are only actions when they involve the adequate understanding of oneself as an adequate cause (of our own evolving understanding).

180 Spinoza, TTP, 3: 416.

181 Simon Duffy notes in an essay on Spinoza scholarship from 2009 that there are two excellent works in French on subjectivity and consciousness in Spinoza. One is by Lia Levy titled L’automate spiritual. La naissance de la subjectivité modern d’après l’Ethique de Spinoza from 2000. The other is by Sylviane Malinowski-Charles from 2004 titled Affects et conscience chez Spinoza. L’automatisme dans le progress ethique.
Stuart Hampshire notes, Spinoza “could not accept a simple-minded materialist conception of personality, having once recognized at first hand and in his own person the power of reflection and of active self-consciousness…”

We might also consider what neurophilosopher, Antonio Damasio, concludes about Spinoza’s early philosophy of human consciousness:

The notion of ‘ideas of ideas’ is important on many counts…it opens a way for creating an idea of self. I have suggested that the most basic kind of self is an idea, a second-order idea… Because it is based on two first-order ideas – one being the idea of the object that we are perceiving; the other, the idea of our body as it is modified by the perception of the object. The second-order idea of self is the idea of the relationship between the two other ideas – object perceived and body modified by perception.

Yet, and of note, Damasio’s later work deduces that Spinoza’s Ethics is not enough to account for all of human consciousness as we know it today. In Self Comes to Mind, he concludes:

Consciousness is not merely about images in the mind. It is, in the very least, about an organization of mind contents centered on the organism that produces and motivates these contents. But consciousness…is more than a mind organized under the influence of a living, acting organism. It is also a mind capable of knowing that such a living, acting organism exists. …the decisive step in the making of consciousness is not the making of images and creating the basics of mind. The decisive step is making the images ours, making them belong to their rightful owners, the singular, perfectly bound organisms in which they emerge.

But if my reading is correct, then Damasio’s early and later conclusions can both apply to a theory of human consciousness in Spinoza. His system of adequate knowledge does not recognize contingencies, therefore, what it does recognize, when reflecting on its own kinds of knowledge, ideas, and conscious experience of Nature as expressions of the laws of Nature (causes and effects with infinite ways of expressing those effects), is true knowledge about what it is to be human. To understand in such ways is to enhance our personal capacities to thrive and persevere. Such understanding is always an affirmation. In E1p33s, we read, “A

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182 Stuart Hampshire, Spinoza and Spinozism, introduction: xxxiii, emphasis added.
183 Antonio Damasio, Looking for Spinoza... 115.
184 Damasio, Self Comes to Mind, 10.
thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause.”\textsuperscript{185} To recognize and reflect on the adequate knowledge of essence, both one’s own and Nature’s, is to have true ideas, that is, to know with certainty and by necessity that it is my combination of ideas that are doing the affirming.

Another way to support such a reading includes some of the elements in the \textit{TTP} where Spinoza differentiates between being a “slave” and being a “subject,” something he would not have been able to write about unless he felt human beings were unique in their capacities for reflective and singular consciousness. He writes, “A slave is one who has to obey his master’s commands which look only to the interest of him who commands…a subject is one who, by command of the sovereign power, acts for the common good, and therefore for his own good also.”\textsuperscript{186} This exact sentiment, written both before and again during the construction of the \textit{Ethics}, is also found later in the \textit{TP}. In other words, the practice and concept of a sovereign state are not possible without the existence of individual human subjects with the capacity for rational reflection, deferment of some personal interests so to live in a state of peace with many others, and the power to thrive and feel joy in existence as human \textit{and} as an expression of Nature. Spinoza continues, “It must therefore be granted that the individual reserves to himself a considerable part of his right, which therefore depends on nobody’s decision but his own.”\textsuperscript{187} Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology and proto-physics of force is an optimistic philosophy: “…awareness is also an apprehension, it is therefore also a mode of understanding…”\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{185} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p33: 22. On this proposition, C. De Deugd notes, “…if we do not know that the essence of a thing involves a contradiction, or if we actually know that it involves no contradiction, and nevertheless we can affirm nothing with certainty about its existence because the order of causes is concealed from us, that thing can never appear to us either as necessary or impossible, and therefore we call it either contingent or possible.” This is an example of using reasoning to defer judgment because your knowledge is partial.

\textsuperscript{186} Spinoza, \textit{TTP}, 16: 531.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid. 17: 536.

\textsuperscript{188} Spinoza, \textit{KV}, 2:16:81, footnote 14.
My process of transformation will be different from yours. This makes our expressions uniquely human in their own determinate ways. And yes, it is, in part, due to the contingencies picked up by me as an individual. This does not cause any problems for Spinoza’s epistemology. Anthony Paul Smith writes that the human question in Spinoza is not merely a new ideology of non-subjectivity; it goes beyond human collectivity as well. The human question in Spinoza is a radically singular one, and it also, as Antonio Negri holds, consists in a “fabric of hard relations.”¹⁸⁹ Reflective consciousness is how we understand our appetites. Lord writes, “There is no difference between appetite and desire, except that desire involves consciousness of our appetite.”¹⁹⁰

Spinoza draws specific differences between human emotions and feelings in many of his works. Reasoning well plays a vital role in regulating our passions. As we read in E4p63c, rational joys are not a problem when we are passionate about something as long as they are not excessive.¹⁹¹ Our habits and dispositions help form our embodied knowledge. Damasio summarizes, “More emotion gives rise to more feeling, and the cycle continues until distraction or reason put an end to it…”¹⁹² Using reason well turns out to be a state of awareness which includes a disposition of focused attention and the increased use of common notions instead of sense experience and imaginative knowledge. We can find evidence for this in E2p28 where Spinoza writes that to consider only our affects will result in confused knowledge, therefore, we must pay attention to both our affects and increased understanding about laws of Nature (causes and effects) in general.¹⁹³ Because all of Nature is one organic substance, we can say that pebbles have conatus and are, in some determinate way, aware of their environment if

¹⁹⁰ Beth Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 90.
¹⁹¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 4p63c: 150.
¹⁹² Antonio Damasio, Self Comes to Mind… 70.
¹⁹³ Spinoza, Ethics, 2p28: 51.
consciousness is understood as only *convenio* and with degrees of animation. But our human situation becomes more nuanced for us because we are passionate and have many desires. Because of this, the idea of shifting perspectives in Nature is important to consider.

Although we are discussing epistemology, the actions of thought and extension run parallel to each other so there is a need to understand *conatus* as it involves extension if we are discussing a proto-physics of force and motion. Our levels of animation involve energy and momentum in more rational directions where our actions will be the most beneficial for all of Nature (because increased benefit is closer to perfection). Enhanced powers of reflection include being more aware of how we are feeling and how our bodies are affected by others, or how we can affect others with more force. Recall that the use of rational power “leads to natural inclination” of the body and mind towards those things which will further add to our understanding. This is why Spinoza suggests we eat new foods, try new experiences, travel, and join with others in friendship as well: “But a free man strives to join with other men to him in friendship (by P37).”

Because the attributes work together to create one combined affect of power, it is difficult to discuss why one might concentrate on thought and understanding. Yet, as Piet Steenbakkers writes, “Spinoza’s favorite expression throughout the *Ethics* seems to be ‘potentia Mentis...’” The “power of the mind” and the “natural light of reason” are regular expressions used by Spinoza. Reducing all of Nature to extension is impossible, especially when we have access to our singular experiences of sense date and imagination in thought. Because of this, thought holds a special ontological status and it involves power relations between ideas that cause force in capacities for imaginative and rational comprehension and

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195 Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza’s Ethica*... 34.
application. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, when rationality is able to readily reflect on what proportion and kind of imaginative idea(s) the mind is using (sensations, memories, language etc.), it can, with more force, access those specific imaginative ideas which will benefit the overall increase in one’s *conatus*. Although common notions involve those “things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part as in the whole,” and which can “only be conceived adequately,” these deductions involve laws of Nature of which we are all subject: how we express those laws occurs in our own determinate ways singularly.196 Foundations of reasoning are not the same as their infinite possible expressions.

When certain determinate chains of ideas are caused, it is not that they are created out of nothing. Another idea type of the same kind, by using the structures of the laws of the operation and function of thought, was produced as an effect of the previous idea. True ideas used by reason and intuition have the most power, but we can apply the structures of thought to our imaginative ideas and impressions as well. This is what occurs when we rationally reflect on our sense experiences, for example. That reflection is composed of clear and distinct ideas about our experiences to greater and lesser degrees of knowledge and force. That is why we are able to defer judgment, as noted above. It is more useful for us to discover, through reflective capacities, what other ideas we are associating with our experiences and not only what the object of our idea is. If we can do this we are closer to the real cause of our ideas (which are always other ideas).197 This is a version of the PSR, but with a very specific use that cannot apply to other attributes. This version and use differentiates itself from the definition of essence. As we will read in Chapter Four, if this is true, and I believe it is, then the essence of

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197 In an early letter to Oldenburg, Spinoza writes, “...of things which have nothing in common with one another, one cannot be the cause of another; for since in the effect there would be nothing in common with the cause, all it would have, it would have from nothing.”
substance cannot be reduced to a definition of linear causality. It is also why rationally creative common notions can be used so powerfully, which is evidenced in E2p40s2 III. The force of our sets of adequate ideas is directly correlated with our knowledge of “the properties of things.” The more knowledge of singular essences, for example, the more creatively powerful we can use our common notions to create stronger affects in ourselves and in others. For example, the more life experiences one has the more they may be able to use their imaginative knowledge coupled with reasoning to create a novel that affects others with greater intensity, such as in aesthetics and the uses of metaphor to produce knowledge for example.

In a footnote in the essay “Donagan’s Spinoza,” Ed Curley writes that there is little difference between geometry and physics. The geometric method Spinoza’s relies on produces a strengthening of rational capacities when we study the Ethics. It is a way of enacting operational knowledge. This method, as an activity of synthesis already noted in Chapter One, is a force which produces more common notions and more of an ability to affect others in affirmative ways. We are affected affirmatively because our existence is enhanced. Such experiences add to our enjoyment of existence as an effect. As Peg Rawes writes, “Rather than operating merely as an idealistic mathematical procedure, geometry is associated with modes of expression that range from the irreducible power of God as ‘substance’ or ‘nature’ to everyday human powers of expression, such as imagination and emotions, and the conatus…”

Existing, thus, becomes a kind of action that can involve novelty. To have increased adequate knowledge is not the enjoyment of continuous understanding only, but it is also, by necessity, to enjoy persevering in existence itself (and the existence of the expressions of

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198 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p40s2 III: 57.
199 Rawes, 71. See Martin Joughin’s introduction to Gilles Deleuze’s work on Spinoza Expressionism in Philosophy.
substance are infinite). Spinoza writes, “And so he who has an adequate idea, or (by P34) who
knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, or true knowledge, of his
own knowledge… For no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the
highest certainty. For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly,
or in the best way.” 200

It will be helpful if we, lastly, consider some interpretative nuances regarding the
definition of essence and the nature of a true idea. E1A6 states that “a true idea must agree with
its object.”201 This is the translation given by Ed Curley. A different translation is provided by
Sam Shirley as a “true idea must agree with that of which it is the idea (ideatum).”202 These
two interpretations can be read very differently. Shirley’s translation seems more in line with
what it is to have an adequate idea of the essence of the object of that idea. When Spinoza
writes that intuitive knowing, the third kind of knowledge we can have, is adequate knowledge
and application of continuous understanding about the essence of singular things, it would
seem his deductions are more in line with Shirley’s interpretation than Curley’s more
debet cum fuo ideato convenire.”

At first glance, these two leading interpretations appear to be very similar or nearly the
same, but consider the distinctions about the formal and objective essence of an idea which
Spinoza elaborates on in the TEI. There, Spinoza draws a specific difference between the actual
“objective essence” of an idea and “formal essence.” He plainly states, “A true idea (for we do
have a true idea) is something different from its object (ideatum). A circle is one thing, the idea
of a circle another… And since it is something different from its object, it will also be

200 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p43, p43s: 58.
201 Ibid. 1A6: 2.
202 Ibid. 1A6: 218 (Sam Shirley translation).
something intelligible through itself.”  A true idea can be about actual physical objects, but true ideas can also be about other ideas, entire events, an attribute of Nature, or imaginary objects or actions that, nonetheless, produce real effects. But agreement between ideas and objects do not entail that they are identical. For example, an idea about an affection of one’s body is not identical with the affection itself. The two events occur simultaneous to each other and are the effects of the laws of separate attributes. A true idea, for example, is “something intelligible through itself.” In addition, true ideas which take – as their object – other true ideas (such as we are doing in this analysis) will also be conceived through themselves, that is, they will be or can be defined as the attribute of thought (or substance) in action. Henry Allison writes:

[The mind] does not passively perceive but actively conceives its objects. Indeed, an idea for Spinoza turns out to be the very act of conception or understanding, this identification [that the mind is its ideas] really amounts to the claim that the mind is identical with its acts, that its essence, as a finite mode, like that of God, is its activity…

The level of activity in thought is not reducible to conceiving thought as only a corporeal activity, although it does include it within its actions and effects. Any theory of representation used to explain Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, therefore, will not be adequate enough. Spinoza makes this clear as early as Letter 4 when he writes to Oldenburg, “But you say, perhaps Thought is a corporeal activity. Let it be so, although I do not concede it…”

Spinoza is concerned with the “formal essence” of the idea, and the ability for the mind to grasp itself in its formal essence (ideas about ideas or singularity), but which can also be about the objective essence of an object (as one’s body or something external to us). When we have an idea about an object that idea is understood in its objective reality. When we have

203 Spinoza, TEI, 33: 240.
204 Henry Allison, Benedict de Spinoza, 89.
205 Spinoza, Letter 4, 766.
reflective awareness about the types of ideas we are relying, and are able to better recognize when we are using adequate knowledge well, the mind is able to reflect on itself in action and as action (as an adequate cause). Objects and actions are two different things. This level of reflection carries with it, by necessity, the awareness and grasping of the formal reality of the idea as adequate knowledge. The result is understanding one’s own thought as an activity. It is an intellectual affection that is also felt, but that effect is experienced differently by each singular thing affected by it through individual, singular experiences of consciousness.

What we add to our knowledge and experience is the awareness of the powerful effects of adequate thinking. Hampshire writes, “Therefore, as our psychological and physiological knowledge of human actions and reactions increases, the range of human actions of which we can reasonably say ‘an alternative action was possible,’ or ‘he could have acted otherwise,’ necessarily diminishes.” In E2p21s we learn more about our having ideas about other ideas: “So the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, thought… For the idea of the mind, that is, the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object.” 206 Therefore, the object of one’s mind is not only one’s body and its affections, but can also be understood as other ideas (as the mind does not have ideas, it is ideas). The reason our range of possible actions may diminish, as noted above, is because we use reason to know, as Spinoza says, what is in our best interest, what is not, and what we can and cannot understand further. You may feel a strong intensity to punch someone in the face for spreading false and destructive rumors about you which contributed to the end of your career, and be fairly justified in feeling that way passionately, but reason limits your

206 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p21s: 48.
possible choice of actions in the moment if you somehow find a way to reflect on the laws of Nature and what is beneficial to you and those around you.

When we consciously reflect on our ideas as an activity, the content we are concerned with are the other ideas that knowledge derived from, is in relation to, and what kind of knowledge will be produced as an effect. This is what it is to grasp ideas in their formal reality for Spinoza. In 2p43, we read, “He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing.” He continues, “And so he who has an adequate idea, or (by P34) who knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, or true knowledge, of his own knowledge. That is (as is manifest through itself), he must at the same time be certain…”207 The most important deduction to grasp is this: ideas in their objective essence can be understood as some form of representation, but, and here is the point, ideas grasped in their formal reality are neither representations nor representational. They are certainty itself, or true ideas (common notions) expressed as “a certain species of eternity.” Like mathematics, those expressions are eternal truths, but unlike being reducible to measure and number, such eternal expressions can be rearranged as needed infinitely as an element of a perfect, indefinite, affirmatively eternal system. The knowledge in our reflective awareness is forcefully clear and distinct in its formal reality. As we read in 2p44c2, “Add to this that the foundations of reason are notions (by P38) which explain those things which are common to all, and which (by P37) do not explain the essence of any singular thing. On that account, they must be conceived without any relation to time, but under a certain species of eternity…”208

207 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p43: 58.
208 Ibid. 2p44c2: 60.
The changes we experience in our increases and decreases in *conatus* involve our changes in momentum.\textsuperscript{209} The objective essence of a true idea is “a mental action.” This action is another true idea, that of the formal essence of whatever is being thought about.\textsuperscript{210} When we learn, as noted above, that “A circle is one thing, the idea of a circle another,” the same deduction can be applied to 2p7 as well. That is, we could say that the body is one thing, but the idea of the body (the mind) is something else. Spinoza not only references a circle and its properties as different from the idea of a circle that includes those properties in its formal essence, which “can be the object of another objective essence…,” but he then gives an important example:

For example, Peter is something real. Now the true idea of Peter is the objective essence of Peter and is in itself something real, something entirely different from Peter. So since the idea of Peter is something real, having its own individual essence, it will also be something intelligible, that is, the object of another idea which has in itself objectively everything that the idea of Peter has formally.\textsuperscript{211}

The object of the idea is *about* the idea of Peter. The idea has an objective essence and is real *in the same way as* the adequate idea of Peter (the first idea) maintains formally (formal essence). In summary, a mode of thinking is not a representation of formal essences, but a true act of understanding of what it is to have an idea as a mental action. It is a real activity of recognizing the true ideas we are having by using other ideas to reflect on the initial objects of thought. These other ideas connected to the rational ones we are having deductively assert themselves as clear and distinct (have force to produce other adequate common notions), that is, as true ideas about the objects (and processes) of thought.

Spinoza ends E2 by writing that, “…the affirmation which the idea of a circles involves differs from that which the idea of a triangle involves as much as the idea of a circle differs

\textsuperscript{209} Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 110.
\textsuperscript{210} Spinoza, *TEI*, 240, footnote.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid. 240-241.
from the idea of the triangle… For there is nothing positive in ideas which constitutes the form of falsity (see P35, P35S, and P47S).”\textsuperscript{212} Each affirmative idea is, therefore, an actual action, an event with power, and not a passion or passive representation. If all ideas of each kind of knowledge are caused by former ideas of the same kind, then in a certain determinate way the new ideas are the object of other ideas to which they are connected or associated by force. This is also how causes involve their effects and how we can logically talk about direct causal laws and proximate causal laws or adequate causes.

Since ideas as causes are responsible for and a part of our affects, to reflect on the necessity of the laws of thought and extension, instead of singular modal experiences as uniquely personal, is to experience the intellectual love of God (or Nature). It is also to have operationally true ideas about the laws of proportion as natural phenomena in ways in which we can put them to use with more force and motion (like God or Nature also do). What is most important is the \textit{way} in which we become aware of what ideas we are relying on and why or what caused them, as well as the differences between the essence of an idea, the essence of an object, the essence of our affects as \textit{conatus} (both ideas and affections combined), and the essence of Nature. All of these are different actions of knowing with different effects. Spinoza writes, “Hence it is evident that certainty is nothing else than the objective essence itself; that is to say the \textit{way} in which we become aware of the formal essence is certainty itself.”\textsuperscript{213}

\textit{Objective essence is coupled with the way we understand the ideas we have having, which requires, by necessity, a consciously reflective human subject in my reading, as well as the object of those ideas.} We can shift from that which appears representational to that which is adequately understood in its formal essence, the latter of which cannot be representational.


\textsuperscript{213} Spinoza, \textit{TIE}, 241.
In other words, what matters is our *method* of thinking or what Dan Selcer calls *ways* of knowing. The laws of thought are there to be used and are regularly accessed, but developing rationality directly involves understanding what ways and methods we use to understand the essence of singular things. This process is an aspect of the understanding of what adequate knowledge is and how it can be strengthened. Each kind of idea can have its own essence. Spinoza writes, “And in turn the idea of the idea of Peter again as its own essence, which can also be the object of another idea, and so on without end.”\(^{214}\) If all ideas had the same kind of essence then their power would be invariable and originality in thought, for example, would have no lasting impact or make no joyous impression. We know this is not the case. Some ideas are just better than others, often because of their acutely rational import and direct applications. Ideas, therefore, have force, a proto-physics of force in the ways in which they are used and expressed, that is, in how they are coupled with other ideas to create a more powerful and effective body of expression. *Our true ideas are expressions of necessary certainty common to all bodies but put into action singularly with varying degrees of force of expression because attributes can express themselves in infinite ways sub specie aeternatatis.* Thus, in Letter 37 in 1666, Spinoza writes:

...one clear and distinct perception, or several taken together, can be absolutely the cause of another clear and distinct perception. Indeed, all the clear and distinct perceptions that we form can arise only from other clear and distinct perceptions which are in us... Hence it follows that the clear and distinct perceptions that we form depend only on our nature and its definite and fixed laws, that is, on our power itself alone... From this it is quite clear what a true method must be and in which it should especially consist, namely, solely in the knowledge of pure intellect and its nature and laws... To understand these things, at least as far as the method requires, *there is no need to get to know the nature of mind through its first cause...*\(^{215}\)

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\(^{214}\) Spinoza, *TIE*, 241.

\(^{215}\) Spinoza, Letter 37: 861, emphasis added.
I believe the last line of this letter involves the earlier logical argument Spinoza makes in the *Ethics* that knowing causes is crucial for advancing knowledge, but one cannot know the “first” cause of any given idea or motion because of the multitude of continuous influences, both in ideas (as each idea is always caused by others prior to it) and extension (internally and externally to one’s body). If we return to Ed Curley’s translation of a “true idea” as one which agrees with its object, it is interesting to take into consideration not E2p7, but the definition of an “idea” and an “adequate idea” given by Spinoza at the start of Book 2 of the *Ethics*. An idea is “a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing.”216 The notion of “concept” in this definition is meant to include the content of that idea, but a concept that has force and its content are meant to be understood differently when required. This is the point of the last few pages of this chapter. Spinoza then writes that an adequate idea is to be considered in itself “without relation to an object,” and that it “has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.”217 Therefore, an adequate idea is a concept or common notion that has content that may vary depending on what other concepts are needed to combine with it in order to be rationally understood. Attributes need no other concepts to be true, but modes are conceived through something else, for example. In these very important definitions, Spinoza is quick to point out the “action of the mind” in the form of an idea, similar to what was discussed above from his earlier work in the *TIE*. Actions of the mind are what Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology is concerned with. In order for ideas to be comprehended as actions, singular human minds capable of rational reflection about the methods of understanding are required.

This deduction deserves repeating because of its implications and unique contribution to the history of Western philosophy in the Seventeenth Century. A true idea is true regardless of a

217 Ibid. 2D4: 32.
finite mind conceiving it, but once conceived, the act of conceiving is an action of a particular mind, which is an expression of something infinite (substance) and not about only that which is finite. Consider how Euclidean geometry has defined “common notions” as “axioms concerning magnitudes in general, e.g. ‘things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.’”218 The magnitude of a common notion for Spinoza is that it expresses one eternal substance. Nonetheless, a direct comparison between magnitude and proportion as the same kind of thing is not possible in Spinoza’s Ethics. I can express, for example, a proportion (not portion, Spinoza’s choice of terms is proportion) of God’s or Nature’s entire magnitude, but I could never possibly, as a finite human being, express all of that magnitude. They are different concepts and actions, with different kinds of effects, and they need to be evaluated separately. Spinoza comments on this exact distinction in the CM and how it is imaginative knowledge to consider things in terms of duration, number, and measure (as in magnitude).219 Yet, the above definition about axioms concerning magnitudes overlaps with something Spinoza also writes about in Letter 12, the infamous letter on the infinite: “things which agree with a third thing agree with one another.”220 I will return to this characteristic.

If the previous deductions in Chapter Two of this thesis are correct, then there are times when we can have adequate knowledge about some of our imaginative ideas in ways that reason can use to its benefit. To develop better habits of adequate thinking (habitual readiness) is to understand what methods of thought and distinction between types of essence (and ways) work more powerfully. It must, therefore, be the case that there is a form of objective essence of inadequate ideas that is different from the objective essence of adequate ideas. I believe this is another way to understand what Spinoza intends at the start of E3 about the intrinsic and

220 Spinoza, Letter 12: 792.
extrinsic determinations of ideas noted above. If so, and I believe we can draw these distinctions if we are careful in our methods of thought, then any theory of representation, such as that of Michael Della Rocca’s which we will review in the next chapter, will not be a completely viable interpretation of Spinoza. Because of this, as Dan Selcer concludes:

If there is a register in which we may distinguish between 'idea-types,' then, the Cartesian assertion of the identity of all ideas with respect to formal reality is overcome. One way to advance this thesis would be to introduce an ontologically or causally differentiated typology of sensations and intellectual affections that could serve as a comprehensive catalog of our various ways of knowing... Another would be to frame a differentiated epistemological hierarchy that would distinguish between levels of ideational power, conceptual efficacy, or kinds of knowledge. Such a hierarchy could, for example, differentiate adequate and inadequate ideas, or again, sensible linguistic knowledge, common notions regarding shared qualities or predicates, and intuition of singular essences. These last possibilities, of course, are precisely the ones that Spinoza proposed in his Ethics...221

Bodily encounters, actions, and combinations of powerful aggregates of ideas working together, produce increases and decreases in motion; ideas generate and express the effects of other ideas as expressions of real things in Nature. Ideas, in other words, have power, create effects, cause impressions, affect us with joy, and strengthen our rational capacities. Using our adequate knowledge well includes reflecting on what methods of thought and action we are relying on and why. These deductions go beyond what Descartes thought was possible, which is why Spinoza makes a real contribution to the history of philosophy.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, Spinoza’s proto-physics of ideational force leads to a detailed discussion about the nature of affects and transitions (transformations) between registers of singular and collective power. A debate in the scholarship involves what kinds of transitions occur between passions and actions or between passive ideas and active ones. We cannot be expected to behave completely rationally on a continuous basis for Spinoza, primarily because Nature and external causes always have the potential to affect us with more force. We

221 Selcer, Philosophy and the Book..., 171. Much more work is needed yet on Selcer’s lucid scholarship on Spinoza.
are also passionate creatures. We write poetically, love passionately, and strive towards dreams which appear, at first, impossible to attain. We also write poetically about bad or negative things that affect readers with sadness, yet the writing is rationally well done in structure, form, creativity etc. There are, in other words, good or joyous passions. As I’ve already stated, the sad passions reduce our *conatus*. Spinoza notes as much in the *KV* when he writes, “We must, however, note here as an excellent thing about the passions, that we see and find that all the passions that are good are of such a kind and nature that we cannot be or exist without them, and that they belong, as it were, to our essence; such is the case with Love, Desire, and all that pertains to love.”

These are not representations of Nature, they are expressions of Nature, that is, they *are* Nature itself. As we learn, we become more aware of our ideational levels of power and striving, as well as how this increased awareness involves the intellectual love of God (or Nature). Stuart Hampshire summarizes, “The individual person’s consciousness of his own needs and strivings (*appetitus*) is reflected in his consciousness as desire (*cupiditas*). But his desire, which is associated with his pursuits of particular ends, is no more than the reflection in idea of his total state, which itself is determined by a variety of external and internal causes…”

As we have learned, and as Pierre Macherey explains in his reading of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, there is not reality and then representations of reality. The finite and the infinite are expressed in infinite ways by singular things, individually and in combination with or relation to each other. He writes:

> With Spinoza…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 a possible knowledge…there are not two orders of reality, one substantial and infinite

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223 Hampshire, 119.
and the other modal and finite, but one single and same reality continuous and indivisible, determined by one unique law of causality...\textsuperscript{224}

The degree of adequacy we express will depend on the degree(s) of comprehensiveness and method we achieve habitually on an individuated and partially non-representational level. Reading Spinoza through a theory of representation, as Michael Della Rocca does, is an inaccurate way of understanding his otherwise dynamic epistemology. I will explain why such a reading ignores foundational concepts found in Spinoza’s epistemology in Chapter Four.\textsuperscript{225}

\textsuperscript{224} Macherey, \textit{Hegel or Spinoza}, 200, 201. In E1 App, Spinoza writes, “…For the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power…” or ways of being affected and affecting others and things.

\textsuperscript{225} An emphasis on E4p37 and the specific human characteristic of reasoning is required in my reading.
CHAPTER FOUR

NON-REPRESENTATION IN SPINOZA:

HOW THE IMAGINATION AND REASON COMBINE TO CREATE GREATER AFFECTS

“Immanence is the very vertigo of philosophy, and is inseparable from the concept of expression...” -Gilles Deleuze

Immanence and Monism As Structure and Method

In this chapter I argue against a dominant strain of interpretation of Spinoza’s Ethics, particularly found in North America, namely a reading of Spinoza’s epistemology where ideas are understood as representations about actions in extension. Michael Della Rocca is the main proponent of this interpretation.¹ His representational parallelism is based on a theory that he calls the “mind-relativity-of-content” thesis. As our mind does not have ideas but is ideas, in my reading, any theory of epistemological representation applied to Spinoza’s monism ignores the very real involvement of affects in such a system. It also ignores how the mind and body are combined in ways where their motions and forces remain distinctly separate modally.

This chapter operates on two levels. First, the first two short sections will further the conclusions of Chapter Two and Chapter Three by continuing to advocate for a theory of affective awareness and human consciousness that is non-representational in Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. Second, it will describe and argue against some of the main elements of Della Rocca’s interpretation of Spinoza’s epistemology. As Spinoza notes repeatedly and as I have argued for in this thesis, the adequate understanding of Nature (or God) is nothing other than the increased understanding of natural phenomena. Our awareness of our ideas in their essence is an

¹ See, for example, the recent annual seminar of The Society for Early Modern Philosophy at Yale (SEMPY) where Early Modern scholar Dan Garber debated Michael Della Rocca on Spinoza’s Ethics: www.yale.edu/sempy/. In this talk, Della Rocca states that he is resolved in being identified as reading Spinoza as an idealist thinker.
expression of natural phenomena. In other words, adequate ideas are not representations of the actions of the attribute of extension but are real entities of their own singular kind with their own variety of dynamic expressions.

As posed in Chapter Three, what is the nature of transformation of intellectual (human) force and power in extension when the method of increasing *conatus* becomes the object of our ideas and desires (and thus the main part of our awareness)? The inquiry involves understanding both the transitions between our passions and actions, and human consciousness taking itself as a direct expression of natural phenomena (with increasing levels of intensity). We need not, for example, overcome all passions as this would be impossible, especially given external causes that could affect us in unexpected ways. Spinoza writes, “We must, however, note here as an excellent thing about the passions, that we see and find that all the passions that are good are of such a kind and nature that we cannot be or exist without them, and that they belong, as it were, to our essence; such is the case with Love, Desire, and all that pertains to love.”[^2] Human desire, as and combined with common notions and actions, create powerful affects. Where there is power there is force. Singular experiences of love and desire are highly individuated. Once we understand such adequate expressions, love is neither a joyous passion nor a passionate joy.[^3] It is adequate understanding put to use to create more powerful affects. Thus, the ontological and epistemological are intertwined in a way theories of representation cannot fully address. As Stuart Hampshire writes, “The individual person’s consciousness of his own needs and strivings (*appetitus*) is reflected in his consciousness as desire (*cupiditas*). But his desire, which is associated with his pursuits of particular ends, is no more than the reflection in ideas of his total

[^3]: As noted in another chapter, for an excellent summary of this debate see “The Joyful Passions in Spinoza’s Theory of Relations” by Simon Duffy in *Spinoza Now* (2011).
state, which itself is determined by a variety of external and internal causes... The key is to determine oneself through internal causes, to become an adequate cause, through a more powerful understanding. The pursuits of particular ends noted by Hampshire are non-teleological. In finite death we simply become a new ratio of motion and rest, for example.

It is the level of conscious reflective power and ideational efficacy that is most intriguing and effective in Spinoza’s epistemology. The effect of adequately conceiving ourselves as self-caused includes the feeling of being a power of Nature that is a natural expression of our being human. Our ideas do not “represent” what is happening in our body. Our ideas are what is happening in and to our bodies, just expressed in their own determinate ways:

The reason I speak here of actual intellect is not because I concede that there is any potential intellect, but because, wishing to avoid confusion, I wanted to speak only of what we perceive as clearly as possible, that is, of the intellect itself. We perceive nothing more clearly than that. For we can understand nothing that does not lead to more perfect knowledge of the intellect.

As we learn about idea types, and when we include the distinction between the objective and formal essence of common notions, our body will experience more power and joy. As Dan Selcer notes, Descartes already focused on ideas which take method and other ideas as their object, but Spinoza seems to take this fact of the intellect and its capacities to a more nuanced and logical outcome (made possible by the premises of all 5 books of the Ethics and other works). Selcer writes, “…in Descartes’ early work we can already see methodological reflexivity begin to take its definitive rationalist form: an immanent self-constitution of method that results when method takes itself as its own object... Philosophical method, on this model, emerges precisely out of its repetition with itself; it arises from the methodological investigation of the

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nature, status, and form of rule-governed thinking." The nature of reflecting on the proportional power of the intellect is one way of experiencing a transformation in thought and extension (through affects) because of the laws of thought and taking method itself as our object of thought.

This organic relationship between idea-types or ways of thinking and accompanying actions of the body with other bodies in increasing and decreasing degrees of power not only maintains itself in a homeostatic state of varying degrees of force and transformation, but it also exists without any intermediary. Without an intermediary, theories of representation will not be adequate enough to address such a dynamic epistemological system. That is, our power, as an expression of Nature, is the combination of the expressions of a singular essence and of infinite substance by definition (with each also being defined separately when needed). The ontological and epistemological distinctions occur for human reflection understood either as substance and its attributes or as modal modifications of substance in infinite ways. Pierre Macherey writes:

> With Spinoza...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 a possible knowledge...there are not two orders of reality, one substantial and infinite and the other modal and finite, but one single and same reality continuous and indivisible, determined by one unique law of causality...  

Thinking adequately about substance, while transitioning between types of knowledge is not that which is fulfilled by some absolute notion. There is always an infinity of relations and continuous combinations of expressions involving the attributes of substance, but we can only be aware of those of our singular expressions of thought and extension through our affects. Spinoza writes:

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7 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 200, 201.
If, therefore, we wish to investigate the first of all things, there has to be some foundation which may direct our thoughts there. Next, since method is reflexive knowledge itself, the foundation which is to give direction to our thoughts can be nothing other than knowledge of what constitutes the specific reality of truth, and knowledge of the intellect, its properties and powers. For when this is acquired, we shall have a foundation from which we shall deduce our thoughts, and a path by which the intellect, according to its capacity, may attain knowledge of eternal things, taking into account, of course, the powers of the intellect.  

Knowledge of how one’s mind develops its power of thinking adequately with more force only adds to that force (with joy). But, for Spinoza, such knowledge about the nature of method and thought must occur before adequate knowledge of eternal things is possible.

Our experience of duration is a good example of the above. For us to recognize that our duration is an experience of imaginative knowledge takes many strong common notions about the logic of an eternal substance that we express. Human sentiments on linear temporality and spatial dimensions in the physical world are part of our imagination (mostly as and for sensations and bodily comportment and survival), for not only can we not imagine all spaces and relationships, but also, according to Spinoza’s logic, that which is eternal with infinite attributes (which have infinite expressions) cannot be fully expressed by one singular thing in thought or extension. Concepts about measurement can be common notions, but acts of measurement by singular things are something else (they are limited expressions etc.). This deduction allows knowledge to be something more than that which is instrumental or representational. Spinoza is aware that it is a human body and mind that is his reader as well. It’s human subjects with reflective consciousness building on their operational knowledge and methods of forceful and joyous, beneficial expressions who are learning his system.  

As Macherey writes:

…the intellect had to first work with the ideas that it had, serving as they did as authentic knowledges, in order to make them produce all the effects they were capable of,

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9 As Spinoza writes in Letter 12, he desires to enter into friendships with other individuals who are interested in pursuing rational thoughts and actions. Together, they will be stronger. This is the aim and goal of the *Ethics.*
gradually refining their own activity… There is no introduction to understanding, no correct method to know; because it is only in its effective practice that thought can be considered, as a real activity of a mind that puts to work and submits to proof, its own power…which it forms in its practice.10

In a letter to Schuller, Spinoza defines his consciousness as that which is composed of “reason and experience,” a letter where he talks about writing as an act of rational and imaginative thought as well as bodily extension all working together, asking that his reader listen to “the consciousness of man himself…”11 By better understanding the laws of thought and ideatypes, and what the extent of our power and expression are as extension, we can better and more quickly recognize errors in reasoning. Such recognition is one of the most difficult problems to solve in philosophy, for when someone feels he or she is certain about something, clear headed, with strong arguments and what they feel is logical evidence, it’s virtually impossible to change their mind. In other words, their beliefs (however partially rational) are so strong that they cannot easily identify their own errors in method or conclusion. This level of force would be a detriment to Nature if it were of the imaginary, illusory kind and of passionate behaviors daily in a proportionally large manner. Beth Lord writes, “Error then, is an inherent aspect of being a finite mode who is necessarily implicated in the world.”12 We are prone to error when our imaginative ideas are proportionally stronger than our rational common notions. The important point to recognize is that errors in reasoning occur on the singular level. Errors are an element of imaginative knowledge and each of us experiences our imaginative expressions differently. Ursula Renz writes, “However, in response to the repeated objection that he [Spinoza] allows individual subjects to disappear, Spinoza has much more to offer than is commonly supposed.

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10 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 49, 50, emphasis added.
11 Spinoza, Letter 58, 910.
12 Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 75.
So, the next time an old schoolmate tells us in glowing terms about beautiful mountain hikes, and this fills us with pain, we can rest assured that their experience was a different one from ours.”

In our daily encounters we have opposing affects and individuated experiences. According to Spinoza, we “develop rational knowledge through experience and imagination.”

As we become more reflectively aware of idea-types and the varying powers of expression they have in conjunction with each other, our personal habitual readiness for using reason well is enhanced. The knowledge of this process, of our ability to enhance our knowledge of natural phenomena as self-caused expressions of substance, gives us increasingly enjoyable pleasure, peace of mind, new ideas, and possibilities for action. It enhances our striving in existence.

Personal identity significantly involves singular conscious awareness. Spinoza believes that we transform into new individuals when our ratios of motion and rest alter our bodies in significant ways. Macherey writes, “The order of ideas is thus that of their actual production; this order is necessary, not by virtue of a rule-bound obligation, which could only be satisfied in a contingent manner, but by reason of the intrinsic causality of the true idea, which determines the idea in the course of producing the totality of effects, that is, all the ideas that depend on it.”

Yet, the intrinsic nature of true ideas will also depend on my own conscious awareness of them in order to use them to further enhance my conatus. The “degree of adequacy” we express will depend on the “degree of comprehensiveness” we achieve, as Spinoza writes, “…for the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men’s senses, or because they are of use to, or

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13 Renz, 118.
14 Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 81.
15 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 45. According to Macherey, Spinoza overturns both the classical definition of ‘method’ and of ‘order.’ Stuart Hampshire’s early work also supports this reading in Freedom of the Individual.
The degree of comprehensiveness we express will depend on our capacity to better recognize errors in reasoning and how to defer judgment if needed.

Some of what we judge to be good is based on our desires. Our desire includes that “the highest satisfaction of the mind stems from the right principle of living,” where we act “from the necessity of nature.” Yet, we cannot account for the totality of human thought nor would it make sense for Spinoza’s system to say we have or can. This is a place where Spinoza differs from many previous Western philosophers and scientists before him. Individual knowledge is fragmentary, with gaps, fissures, external influences, overflows, intensities of varying degrees, habits of thought according to the preface of E4. It is also open ended. Reason understands that certain ideas can be used to the benefit itself and Nature. Spinoza writes clearly in Letter 37, “Hence it follows that the clear and distinct perceptions that we form depend only on our nature and its definite and fixed laws, that is, on our power itself alone; and not on chance, that is, on causes which, although acting likewise by definite and fixed laws, are yet unknown to us and foreign to our nature and power.” Using the example of how reason can overpower one’s passions or false beliefs, but that this action is one of adequate understanding about thought and extension and not an act of free will, Stuart Hampshire supports Spinoza’s conclusions when he writes:

I may look for methods and techniques of ridding myself of thoughts which are painful or harmful, and which are not beliefs genuinely held by me… Even if some unpleasant affect still recurred when darkness fell [the example being used is about fear of the dark], it would not be fear, if the thought of danger was not present [along with the fear]. The method, or technique, that I employed to rid myself of the thought that I was in danger would not amount to changing my mind about the existence of danger; for to say that I had changed my mind about the existence of danger would imply that I was now ready to deny that which I had formerly been prepared to affirm. I had not decided that a proposition, which I had previously believed to be true, was false… Rather I had used

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16 Spinoza, Ethics, 1App: 30-31.
17 Ibid. 5p10s: 167.
some means, or method, or technique, to bring about a change in the sequence of ideas occurring in the natural course of events to my mind, just as I might have used some means to prevent or remove an impulse to behave a certain way, which I find occurs in the natural course of events... I used my knowledge of the cause... to produce a change in the natural course of events. He who employs some method or technique to get rid of an idea, which he knows or believes to be false or groundless, acts upon himself, and brings about an effect in his own mind...  

We are not the whole of Nature, but we do express its eternal truths in our own determinate, dynamic ways. The thoughts we have are our state of mind or the disposition we take, and this state of mind is directly parallel with the affections of one's body. As we've read and can be noted in 4p37s2, one can only counter one emotion by another which is stronger, and rational states of mind always accompany stronger emotions and dispositions. In Letter 30, Spinoza writes:

For I do not think it right to laugh at nature, and far less to grieve over it, reflecting that men, like all else, are only a part of nature, and that I do not know how each part of nature harmonises with the whole, and how it coheres with other parts. And I realise that it is merely through such lack of understanding that certain features of nature - which I thus perceived only partly and in a fragmentary way, and which are not in keeping with our philosophical attitude of mind - once seemed to me vain, disordered, and absurd. But now I let everyone go his own way.

As I've already discussed, Spinoza tried to eliminate the concept of “part” when we are understanding the laws of Nature as substance, which are expressed in their eternity, necessity, and indivisibility. Extension, as an attribute, is indivisible, and yet, in thought an idea can be singular in nature in the way described above. That is, we can have individual ideas. God, or Nature is “simple,” that is, “not composed of parts,” as it is “that which is not composite or composed of parts that are different in nature, or of other parts which agree in nature.” Our ideas are not conceived as individual parts. They are adequately conceived as events and effects.

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21 Spinoza, Letters 35, 36: 856, 858. See also E2p13s, a proposition, as we’ll see, which Della Rocca misinterprets.
**Conatus and Affect as A Force of Physics in Thought and Motion in Extension**

Our desire to keep moving, to endeavor in our existence with power, is a way of affirming our existence, and it is an “impulse” which is “innate in all men,” yet of “no great force and can easily be checked by the recurrence to mind of some other thing which is frequently in our thoughts.”\(^{22}\) This recurrence of thoughts creates a *proportion of force* all its own. What we will learn is that it is not that Spinoza prioritizes the mental over the physical, but that we cannot truly endure with more and more joy, power, and understanding *unless we also reflect regularly on the nature of our affects and the processes by which they can be transformed.*\(^{23}\) To do so is built into the nature of our *conatus* as a capacity to be strengthened.

*Conatus* consists in ratios of acceleration and deceleration in intensities composed of many different motions of the paths of various interactions forming an organic whole. But human *conatus*, and its resulting actions and series of ideas alter consistently, as does our strength of understanding. With more force, our understanding can increase in its capacities of comprehension. *This force, as a ratio and proportion, composes our affects.* Once the powers of comprehension take hold and we are aware of more adequate ideas that is our mind, other forms of comprehension and use of such knowledge can occur more easily and efficiently.\(^{24}\) We need good methods for such regular continuous understanding and conscious reflective capacities.

The concept of an *efficient cause* is crucial to adequately understand here. The efficient cause, for Spinoza, is what always does the moving of any determinate expression of Nature (which is everything at all times). Expressions of Nature are simply *laws of Nature*, and laws of

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\(^{22}\) Spinoza, Letter 58: 909. This is why Harold Skulsky writes that 4p15-17 and 4p54s is evidence that Spinoza felt rational impulses are rare and must be developed. I believe 5p20 in its entirety supports these claims as well.

\(^{23}\) For a very recent work which partially supports a theory of human conscious awareness as it directly relates to the affects in Spinoza, and of which partially supports my reading in the last chapter, see Eugene Marshall's *The Spiritual Automaton: Spinoza's Science of the Mind*.

\(^{24}\) This is also why E2 and E5, in relation to certain aspects of E4 regarding the affects, must be understood together.
thought and extension operate according to causes and effects. In Letter 60 from 1675, two years before Spinoza’s death, he writes, “…I assert absolutely that from certain properties of a thing (whatever be the given idea) some things can be discovered more easily and others with greater difficulty – though they all concern the nature of that thing.”25 This conclusion (method) can be paired with what he states in the same letter when he also writes that the only way we can know the properties of anything at all is if “the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause…”26 But is this also a strict use of only one form of the PSR? Are there a multitude of ways the PSR can express its own definition as it relates to the definition of an efficient cause? Spinoza is clear in E1p8s2 I-V that his version of the PSR is flexible.27

Attributes, as constituting the essence of substance, must be conceived through themselves conceptually. How will the PSR account for something being both conceived through itself and also the cause of its own separate effects? Thought cannot affect extension causally and does not need to be conceived through it in any way. The attribute of thought, nonetheless, is also understood as natural phenomena. Spinoza writes, “…if the Being is Thought, it cannot be conceived as determined in Thought, but only as undetermined, and if Being is Extension it cannot be conceived as determined in Extension, but only as undetermined.”28 Therefore, we can conclude that, understood in a certain way, the efficient cause operating as the force and speed of thought is undetermined substance, yet the three kinds of knowledge I can have and singularly reflect on can be understood as the efficient causes of themselves in the modal distinctions between different effects produced depending on which kind of knowledge is being used as our awareness. I use the term “kind” of knowledge, but you can just as easily say “way” or ways too.

26 Ibid. Letter 60: 913.
27 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p8s2I-V: 5-6.
28 Spinoza, Letter 36: 858. This is similar to the idea that that which is infinitely extended cannot include within its definition the concept of part nor the concept of divisibility, but this is certainly not a novel deduction.
In the anthology *Spinoza Now*, Antonio Negri concludes Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* is the combination of continued learning within the experiences of an individual human and an expression of Nature. Interestingly enough, Spinoza scholar Wiep van Bunge has a conclusion similar to Negri’s. For both scholars, Spinoza's system is, in the end, about intellectual love, even if in Negri’s interpretation he ends emphasizing the collective more than personal identity. In my reading, our singular existence can be transformed and continually regenerated by others as well as by our own rationally powerful combination of ideas. It is a combination of both, but our adequate knowledge is understood as determined internally as adequate causes and their effects. There are dual causes interacting simultaneously and multiple types of causes in relation perpetually. Does not Spinoza place together the concepts of personal identity and memory in, for example, E4p39s? My memories are different from someone else’s memories and that is partly what makes us singular expressions of our own variations in degrees of power and intensity. Although conscious awareness may be inherently inadequate or partial due to the imagination’s fragmentary nature, this does not entail that a concept of the coherent “subject” cannot exist in Spinoza’s system.

If we didn’t strive to persist in our existence, we would die. The more the body is capable of having certain images, the more the conscious mind is simultaneously aware of such images.

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29 Van Bunge concludes in his 2012 collection of essays already noted in this chapter that Spinoza's foundational theme throughout the *Ethics* and the *TTP* can be summed up as a moral (almost Christian) ethic and intellectual virtue to “love thy neighbor.” Although I have found this theme to be very strong in the *TTP*, I disagree that it is the underlying foundation of the *Ethics*. See also *Spinoza Now*, edited by Dimitris Vardoulakis (2011).

30 E4p39s reads, in part, “...I understand the body to die when its parts are so disposed that they acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another...even though the circulation of the blood is maintained...the human body can nevertheless be changed into another nature entirely from its own.” Further, we act according to what benefits us, but not only this. Spinoza writes earlier in 4p37s2 that we act towards our benefit “according to his own temperament.” *Tenacity* is what benefits us, but when we recognize what benefits others, it is *nobility*. One can also point back to 2p10s2 and 2p37 for more support. How can we eliminate the concept of reflective, singular affect and experience while maintaining all of what is written in these and similar propositions?

31 Spinoza, Letter 58: 910: “I think that he must likewise have experienced that the mind is not at all times equally fitted to thinking of the same object, but that just as the body is more fitted to have the image of this or that object aroused in it, so the mind is more apt to regard this or that object.”
The more I am able to imagine something, the more what I am imagining it continuously present to my mind. What is present to my mind composes my state of mind and bodily disposition. This is why Spinoza refers to our use of both images and memories of maxims alongside common notions about the properties of the things we are considering, such as found in E5p10s.32 This is also why, as we'll read next in more detail, the dominant interpretation of Michael Della Rocca will not work as the way to understand Spinoza. As one example, Della Rocca argues, “...Spinoza speaks only of ideas and not of physical images as representational.”33 But in the above proposition just noted (and several others), Spinoza does speak about physical images in singular minds as representational, and it is perhaps the only time we can use the concept of “representation” in Spinoza at all.34 All three types of ideas can exist separately at one time in a singular mind in order to create transformative affects, something I believe is supported by E4p37-39 as well as by 2p13 lem7, where we examine the way we understand the interactions of the ever-shifting expressions of one substance.35 How will a theory of representation account for this combined, affective phenomena and its continuous transformations completely?

Because the mind is ideas, understanding the formation of ideas we are reflecting on is extremely critical because it is equivalent to better understanding one's own mind and its power. I would even say that this endeavor precedes any other discussion about how “logic” and Being are defined. If one does not understand one’s own mind and how combining common notions can strengthen rational processes or if one is not consciously aware about what a singular mind can and cannot do, then the rest of our inquiries about knowledge, logic, and Being become

33 Della Rocca, *Representation*, 60.
34 As we will read, one can contrast the concept/theory of representation with the transitions of corporeal becomings, eliminating the former in support of the latter, such as we find in the work of Clair Colebrook, for example, in her article “From Radical Representations to Corporeal Becomings...” (*Hypatia* 2000).
35 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p10s: 167. The proposition states that we have the power to arrange the modifications of our body according to an intellectual order the less we are affected by emotions contrary to our nature.
impossible.\textsuperscript{36} This is Spinoza's theory of human psychology. Such an endeavor precedes such questions as inquiring into the meaning of Being because, if you cannot better recognize when you are relying on imaginative ideas and why, how will you know when they are in need of a suspension of judgment in order to gather more information? Spinoza allows for doubt when needed, but not contradictions in deductive logic about the properties of things.\textsuperscript{37}

The difficulty of the Ethics is not due as much to its impenetrability as it is to the amount of dedication and conscious deductions it takes to get to the logical effects and consequences of each book in a way in which our knowledge is actively affected in new and rationally powerful ways. This awareness includes the capacity to consciously use one's increase in the power of rational thought and action by learning such a system. This is also why the references to the work of Daniel Selcer at the start of this chapter are important. At the least, the attempt involves reflective awareness on several levels. It particularly involves the ability to recognize more easily if we are relying on a series of imaginative ideas or on rationally understood ideas as certain knowledge. Each attribute must be conceived through itself. It is also about how each attribute is “determined in its own way.” One cannot be defined as representing the other in any way.

Again, keep in mind that what moves us (or not) are affects, which can be passive or actively joined together with “the common properties of things” in order to act with more force or power. For now, it is enough to understand that the intensity of affects is what transforms us. The intensity of affects is never static, nor can it be explained with concepts that are static. Concepts can be logical and yet dynamic depending on other ideas they are in relation to. Affects

\textsuperscript{36} This is more complex a problem than many give credit to. One example includes the many individuals who seem to be capable of things most other minds are not capable of, such as, for example, super memory and being capable of recalling every major detail of one's life on each individual day for years on end. Such rare abilities demonstrate that we have barely scratched the surface of what the human mind is and can do. We still do not have agreement on the nature and definition of consciousness across disciplines.

\textsuperscript{37} See evidence for this, for example, in Letter 56: “I say that a probable proof must be such that, although open to doubt, it cannot be contradicted; for that which can be contradicted is akin, not to truth, but to falsehood.”
can arise as or because of images in the mind or they can arise as and in conjunction with adequate ideas. Recall that Spinoza writes, “An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.”38 And as Gilles Deleuze notes about Spinoza’s system, “…a feeling of which we are the adequate cause is an action.”39 As well, this is how joyous passions can be better understood as adequate ideas about ideas of the imagination (which include our sense experiences). Spinoza writes that our various affects “can be compounded with one another in so many ways, and that so many variations can arise from this composition that they cannot be defined by any number.”40 Again, imaginative and adequate ideas can work together in ways that strengthen reason and its uses.

Book Five of the Ethics is a very important element of Spinoza's dynamic epistemology in this respect. There are many references to affects, especially in relation to the ordo et connexio of things. The images of our mind make us aware of the affections, but affects can shift from passions to effective actions that benefit oneself and the whole. As E5p4 notes, we can have common notions about our affections and how they are formed. New series of adequate ideas about the images of one's mind are more active and powerful. Spinoza writes in the opening of E5, “Therefore, because the power of the mind is defined only by the understanding...we shall determine, by the mind's knowledge alone, the remedies for the [passive] affects.”41 Knowledge of, and transition to, greater affects involves understanding things as necessary, and reducing our reliance on knowledge of causes external to us, as supported by 5p4s and 5p6.42 We read, “We must, therefore, take special care to know each affect clearly and distinctly (as far as this is possible), so that in this way the mind may be determined from an affect to thinking those things

38 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p3: 163.
40 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p59s: 103.
41 Ibid. 5 preface: 162, emphasis added.
42 Ibid. 5p4s, 5p6: 164-165.
which it perceives clearly and distinctly...so that the affect itself may be separated from the thought of an external cause joined to true thoughts.”

Michael Della Rocca labels affects simply “special kinds of ideas.” Yet, affects are something real according to Spinoza, and they include the affections of the body as part of their expression. He writes, “But an affect arising from reason is necessarily related to the common properties of things (see the Def. of reason in IIP40s2), which we always regard as present (for there can be nothing which excludes their present existence) and which we always imagine in the same way (by IIP38).” Note the very important reference to the definition of reason in this proposition with the most important epistemological proposition E2p40. When we understand the necessity of not only the laws of thought and extension, but the expression of those laws as Nature's eternal existence (and thus as always present), we have more power over our affects as a result of this increased knowledge. This type of affect does not alter in its necessity, and is always more powerful than those things which do change. This formula of the affects will be one way to counter certain theories of representation directly.

Recall also that “an affect toward a thing we imagine as necessary is more intense...than one toward a thing we imagine as possible or contingent, or not necessary.” Because “insofar as we imagine a thing to be necessary, we affirm its existence.” Affirmation of existence is what conatus is about, that is, to persist and strive in existing with tenacity and nobility. Our actions can, in this way, be said to issue that which is necessary in conjunction with what we

43 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p4s: 164.
44 Ibid. 5p7: 165.
45 This is one way Spinoza can escape the need to have an absolute definition of time or space, which is also how to logically distinguished himself from systems like Aristotle's Physics.
46 In certain ways, this whole reading supports some of the work of Hasana Sharp on the nature of affects in Spinoza. She writes that affects must be read as singular, qualitative changes, equally corporeal and mental, involving the intensity of what it is for one to have the power to persevere.
47 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p11: 122.
48 Ibid. 4p11: 122.
might call internal causes or our perception and conception as God, Nature, or substance, even if it is the only perspective we have access to. This is why Spinoza needs the concepts of duration and proximate cause, but it is also why the concepts and understanding of variations in power and affects (as signs of effects) must accompany the concepts of substance, mode, and existence.\textsuperscript{49}

Many, if not most, philosophers have engaged in ongoing debates about the nature of causal laws and causality in Nature, as well as our capacity to use the PSR. As Charles Hartshorn notes, many, such as Charles Peirce, Henri Bergson, Boutroux, Dewey, Montague, Whitehead, Popper and other well-known thinkers in physics have concluded “that the genuine causal laws are all approximate or statistical, not deterministic in the classical sense.”\textsuperscript{50} Yet, determinism and laws of Nature as fixed cause and effect processes are what concern Spinoza. As he writes in 4p37s1, if we relate all of what we both desire and what we do “of which we are the cause” according only to an idea of God, we are remaining within the confines of what he critiques as “religion.” On the other hand, if we desire and act according to an adequate use and understanding (guidance) of reason and its various uses it is called nobility, virtue, and “morality.” The use of ideas in these ways requires personal “tenacity” and perseverance (as our environmental circumstances are always shifting and unpredictable).\textsuperscript{51} Spinoza writes, “The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us to establish a bond with men...”\textsuperscript{52}

In the \textit{TdIE} we read about the method involved in the process of reflecting on one’s ideas:

Our aim, then, is to have clear and distinct ideas, that is, such as originate from pure mind and not from fortuitous motions of the body. Next, so that all ideas may be subsumed

\textsuperscript{49} This is a reference to the work of Gilles Deleuze on Spinoza again.

\textsuperscript{50} Hartshorne, “Creativity and the Deductive Logic of Causality,” 62. Conceptually we begin to understand how “the many become one and are increased by one” as Whitehead writes and is noted by Hartshorne.

\textsuperscript{51} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p37s2: 134. If we need others, which we do according to Spinoza, then we too must be one of their other(s); that is, there are individuals and we can differentiate from each other. This same proposition reads, “Now, the good which everyone who lives according to the dictate of reason...wants for himself is understanding.”

\textsuperscript{52} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p37s1: 135. We also read here that it is religion if we relate all of our ideas to a God.
under one, we shall endeavor to connect and arrange them in such a manner that our mind, as far as possible, may reproduce in thought the reality of Nature, both as to the whole and as to its parts. As to the first point, our ultimate aim, as we have already said, requires that a thing be conceived either through its essence alone or through its proximate cause. That is, if the thing is in itself, or, as is commonly said, self-caused, then it will have to be understood solely through its essence; if the thing is not in itself and needs a cause for its existence, then it must be understood through its proximate cause. For in fact knowledge of the effect is nothing other than to acquire a more perfect knowledge of the cause.  

Clearly the above passage cannot be about only ideas which represent bodily actions, and to have in thought the “whole” of Nature is an impossibility. This is another reason why I started this thesis with the nature of definitions for Spinoza.

Throughout the *TTP* Spinoza writes that we do not have true ideas or understanding of the second kind of knowledge unless we investigate scientific principles of the causes of natural phenomena: “For whatever we clearly and distinctly understand must become known to us either through itself or through some other thing that is clearly and distinctly understood through itself.”54 We can understand that substance (God, or Nature) is self-caused, and we can understand adequately that our true ideas are modal expressions of reality determined in their own ways. Modal expressions of Nature are understood clearly and distinctly through something else. This would result in understanding that the concept of the essence of substance, for example, is, in fact, an adequate idea that we can have, but must be understood as determined in its expressions by each attribute being considered in relation to its essence.55 Hasanna Sharp writes, “The true ideas of finite modes should not be understood on a correspondence model of truth... True ideas are not measured by something outside the attribute of thought.”56 True ideas, as experienced by a singular mind, have no need to be understood through something other than

53 Spinoza, *TIE*, 91: 257, emphasis added.
54 Spinoza, *TTP*, 6: 447
55 This is also supported by Letter 50.
56 Sharp, 72. As noted in E2p7, the reasons for our true ideas must be located within what a rational human mind can experience, therefore, in the ordering of our ideas and ways of knowing.
itself and its expression. What this also demonstrates is that modes, as modifications of substance understood through something else, can themselves be that which become clearly and distinctly understood, even though they are, by definition, modifications of substance. Modes can be understood as that which are clearly and distinctly perceived, as long as they are done so in a way that includes the definition of the attribute of which they are a part. To include something in its definition is to say that the thing is immanent to it. Modes are immanent to that which is self-expressed. As Deleuze writes, “The path of salvation [for Spinoza] is the path of expression itself: to become expressive – that is, to become active; to express God’s essence, to be oneself as idea through which the essence of God explicates itself, to have affections that are explained by our own essence and express God’s essence.”

As we've read in previous chapters, definitions and their order and arrangement are crucial for understanding Spinoza's system. Specifically, affirmative definitions are those that generate particulars to be contemplated and used. Part of my task in this project has been to familiarize the reader with “the conditions of a good definition,” as Spinoza puts it. The extensive possibilities of building on and working with certain axioms (deductively) are infinite, but these possibilities can interfere with contemplating “one particular thing rather than another.” We cannot contemplate it all. So, we must have a method to discern what we can know and express in order to improve our understanding. To start with more general yet deductively connected definitions and then progress to particulars enhances the capacity to reason with more force. Not only will we understand more about the thing in question, but the process itself becomes more fluid and efficient by understanding how this process works (or

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57 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 320. Also, adequate ideas about god/causality must coincide with adequate ideas about necessity and perfection, and never with only human nature. What kind of theory of human consciousness will now be required if this is the case?
58 Spinoza, *TIE*, 257.
method). The risk is that this also applies to imaginative ideas that are combined in various associations without using rational ideas to discern why we are relying on them in the first place. Reason works with what the mind is often imagining. Spinoza writes, “For a definition to be regarded as complete, it must explain the inmost essence of the thing, and must take care not to substitute for this any of its properties.” So, as we can see, definitions can be open ended at times until we have enough information and logical certainty to make them more complete. This is argued in the preface of Book 4 of the *Ethics*.

To explain the inmost essence of something is to adequately comprehend its properties, but it is not only this, as we noted in the last chapter when discussing the law of proportion. It is not enough just to know this law exists, nor can one understand every possible expression of such a law. If the existence of a singular thing is an action by definition, then to read or know about something is not enough to keep it in existence even though, by knowing it adequately, one is affirming existence itself. Not because they are not actions too, but only because there are other ways of expressing such knowledge which can become more powerful. Those new ways can be re-arranged and applied creatively by singular minds and bodies, for example. We must accomplish the thing as an action of the mind, especially by imagining certain ideas as present even when they are not. This is the challenge. To rationally reflect on what it does include as a true idea is to understand its properties, of course, but if the affirmative definition of a thing includes its own action, then acting is what we must focus on in order to continue existing with the most power when adequately comprehending.

This is another reason why a theory of representation will not work to understand

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59 Spinoza, *TIE*, paragraph 95: 257, emphasis added.
60 I believe this kind of reading supports the work of Justin Clemens in his article “Spinoza's Ass,” *Spinoza Now* (2011). The rational suspension of judgment is possible for Spinoza, but only with the understanding that this suspension is part of what we are adequately conceiving and rationally reflecting upon, and not only what we are perceiving. See the *TEI* paragraphs 27 and 28 for more support.
Spinoza's system. To “represent” a bodily affection in the form of an idea is not necessarily to truly comprehend all of what that idea involves, is, or could combine with other ideas to become. This will be a problem for the dominate North American interpretation of Spinoza by Michael For example, Della Rocca writes, “For Spinoza…by having a particular representational character, an idea is certain. [Spinoza’s] point is that that idea is certain by virtue of its representational features alone.” Yet, there can be a true idea in the form of an imagination, but not necessarily an adequate idea, for example. In other words, the object of every idea does not always have to be reduced to an affection of the body by definition. The object of our adequate ideas can be other adequate ideas that include the former idea and actions in conjunction with each other (as greater affects) in order to increase both one's motion and power, especially when one is reflecting solely on the methods used to understand. The object and action become the application of method in creating affirmative affects, and not only in knowing.

By the end of the TEI, Spinoza is more concerned with our properly conceiving the nature and method to achieve affirmative, reflexive knowledge as an act of its own (as a force that will influence other ideas and enhance our power to exist). As we think adequately, we act in multiple ways with more power, due to the parallelism of the two attributes. The intellect is to “reproduce the interconnections of Nature” when conceiving singular essences or particular things, not merely represent them. To “reproduce” Nature because one is Nature is not to represent it, just as difference is not negation for Spinoza.

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61 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 132. This reading is directly correlated with the objective essence of an idea for the author.
62 See E2Def4 and Letter 60 for more support here. “Between a true idea and an adequate idea I recognise no difference but this, that the word 'true' has regard only to the agreement of the idea with its object (ideatum), whereas the word 'adequate' has regard to the nature of the idea itself.” This is a crucial distinction for understanding Spinoza's dynamic proto-physics of ideational force adequately.
63 Spinoza, *TIE*, paragraph 95: 258.
64 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p32s: 130: “For things which agree only in a negation, or in what they do not have, really agree in nothing.” There are infinite things that do not agree with each other. Therefore, the concept of what we do not have or agree with, such as is found in the concept of negation, cannot work logically as a part of Spinoza’s system.
in its own determinate way conceived as a modal modification of substance (a finite mode).

In part, this is thinking with more power of force (reflexive knowledge), adequacy, and application. To think adequately is to think rationally. To think rationally is to think affirmatively and productively, but also while reflecting on one's affects more habitually. To think affirmatively produces more powerful chains of rational ideas and patterns of thought that affect us. The use of reason in increasing our understanding always produces something with more force or power if it is in conjunction with understanding the necessity of the laws of Nature of thought and extension. It is always something that is affirmative and includes an automatic and simultaneous increase in our ratio of motion and rest. Negation is something that does not increase our individual conatus for Spinoza. What we express is Nature in every way, but with more or lesser degrees of power. Therefore, you can understand how ideas are produced, although that is not enough; you need to actually put that understanding into greater use, or, by definition, you are not truly understanding the adequate notion you believe you are.

What is contrary to something contained within a definition is not capable of truly being a part of that definition for Spinoza because definitions are affirmative if we are conceiving them adequately. A definition that is otherwise always affirmative and generative cannot include any real negation. This is one use of the principle of non-contradiction Spinoza relies on. We increasingly comprehend that the more we understand about how these laws work, the more easily and creatively they can be put into action. To have adequate knowledge of particulars one must continually access reasoning capacities in ways that include consciously reflecting on laws of Nature. This means reflection not only on the content of particulars, but also on the actual adequate function in action and what it can produce. When consciously reflecting on what we are taking as the object of our ideas (for example, God, laws of Nature, or some external body or
event), we are accessing adequate ideas about the properties of things. We can be deceived in thinking we understand such laws if, for example, we simply sit in one place contemplating them and nothing more. *The contemplation is an act of conscious reflection, but it is not an action of understanding applied to its fullest force and capacity.* Each attribute “will be something that expresses God's nature in some way...” The determinateness of Nature is immanent. The attribute of thought does not express God (Nature) as a representation of extension. This deduction is another way to understand how God is the *efficient cause* of all things, as demonstrated in Ep16c2 for example. But for us, knowledge of God is the *same as* knowledge of natural phenomena. Spinoza also refers to God's (Nature's) existence, by definition, as a *force* that we will read more about in the last chapter next. The order and connection of things express the order and connection of the laws of Nature. How can God be conceived as the efficient cause of all things if those things are also conceived as laws of Nature in our series of adequate ideas? Because to think adequately with more force is to apply what one understands. *To understand involves being continuously capable of reflecting on our affects in ways in which we can transform them through the application of adequate knowledge.* As Eugene Marshall writes, “For animals such as human beings have a complexity and sophistication that allows for a peculiar type of affect, one that pans and pancreases likely lack, namely, the ability for one affect to take another affect as its object. In other words, the affectivity account explains how people can be self-aware in a way that pans and pancreases likely cannot be.” The deductions made so far will be given more support in the last section of this chapter next.

*The more adequate ideas a singular mind has, the more it is enhancing its own strength in understanding through understanding the functions of the laws of the attribute of thought, and the*

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65 Spinoza, Letter 36: 859.
more power and force those ideas will reproduce. Hasana Sharp writes, “My mind serves as the adequate cause when it acts, that is, when the idea it produces follows more from its power and the ideas included in it than from external sources.”

Motion is understood by thought as only applicable to the attribute of extension. Our awareness of this naturally increases our action and power in thought. In this context, for something to be in motion involves that which can be understood as a ratio in extension (between our levels of homeostasis and striving indefinitely). As that ratio increases or decreases in intensity, we can evaluate the power of what it is we are thinking and doing. That is, if increased, we have more power to adequately evaluate the magnitude and kind of an effects we experience and produce. To speak of qualitative effects is also to understand the causes and effects of our affects, especially on a singular level. In other words, to slow down in intensity is not a negation nor is it a decrease in some form of quantitative motion that can be directly measured; it is simply to be acting with less overall (combined) affective force in thought and action as a total ratio. Therefore, it involves the result of having less forceful effects. It is a degree of power along a continuum of animation that has less force than it could have had. To increase that force is to have an adequate understanding of the laws of Nature that are at work in the construction or pattern of ideas one is associating while evaluating one’s affects. To increase this force is an action. Thus, negation cannot be a cause, only an effect or expression of partial or fragmented knowledge and less force of power (as noted in 4p22s). The essence of God, or Nature, is to exist. Our essence (conatus) is also to strive to exist, but we are “in part a negation” because of our finiteness. A true negation of the definition of essence is a conceptual impossibility for Spinoza. That which is eternally self-caused and self-causing cannot negate itself in its own existence: “But this reason, or cause [of necessary existence], must either be

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68 Sharp, Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization, 72.
contained in the nature of the thing, or be outside it."69 For Spinoza, the cause and definition of substance is the fact that it exists: “Therefore, there is no cause, or reason, either in God or outside God which takes its existence away.”70 We can think adequately about God as the immanent cause of all things because we can think logically, and, for Spinoza, to think logically about a God (or continuously self-causing agent such as Nature) includes that it would be illogical to conceive of anything else outside of it and its nature.

At one point in the TEI, Spinoza writes that ideas are embedded in and depend on their context in the same way that the object of an idea is embedded within reality as a real thing (as expressions of the laws of thought).71 This distinction is critical. Although the real concept of what an idea is and can do is discussed in the KV, not to mention what a body is, both concepts were not fully developed in this work. The distinction mentioned is helpful nonetheless. On one hand, we can compare the objective essence and formal essence of ideas themselves, as was covered in the previous chapter. On the other hand, we can also keep the two topics separate and apply one (objective essence understood as mental action) to Natura Naturans (all of nature naturing in the active sense) and the other (the object of the idea which is not an action, but only the thing in question) as Natura Naturata (nature natured simply by being an expression). Although we can distinguish between these two different concepts logically, we can understand that all of nature is always both, and we can only truly comprehend Natura Naturata (our expressions of substance). Jeffrey Bernstein, in his essay “The Ethics of Spinoza's Physics,” describes it best when referencing Letter 6:

At first glance, Spinoza seems to be making a sharp distinction between topics such as 'movement and rest' (which express nature in-itself) and topics such as 'fluidity and solidity' (which only express our conventional ways of viewing nature). However,

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69 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p11: 7.
70 Ibid. 1p11: 7-8.
71 Spinoza, TIE, 41: 242. We can also refer back to paragraph 25 for more support.
Spinoza does not (and, in fact, cannot) suggest that there is an ontological distinction between the former and latter kind of topic. This means that perception of nature ‘in itself’ is only modally distinct from our imaginations about nature. What Spinoza desires, therefore, is that we understand the involvement of movement/rest in fluidity/solidity. Simply put, we need to investigate the causes (Spinoza calls it the 'necessity') of movement/rest with respect to fluidity/solidity... And since there can be only one substance (E1p14cor1) from which modes cannot be distinct, it follows that substance/nature...is its modal expressions.\textsuperscript{72}

We can also reference a footnote on this topic by Sam Shirley in his translation of Letter 40 when he writes that, for Spinoza, like Descartes, the “objective reality of a representation cannot be explained by an infinite series of causes, although just such a series does explain its formal reality.”\textsuperscript{73} Just as when we understand that something is a part of Nature and, therefore, within the context of what is influenced by it, the same can be said of ideas. Not only are those ideas one is contemplating the result of the ideas that have come before them in kind in a causal series, but they also have the power and force as mental actions to create new ideas not observed or understood before through a variety of associations. This next statement by Spinoza about method from the \textit{TEI} is telling in this respect:

\begin{quote}
Again, method must necessarily be discourse about reasoning or intellection. That is, method is not reasoning itself which leads to the understanding of the causes of things, and far less is it the understanding of the causes of things. It is the understanding of what is a true idea, distinguishing it from other kinds of perception and examining its nature... so that we may thereby \textit{come to know} our power of understanding and may so \textit{train the mind} that it will understand according to that \textit{standard} all that needs to be understood, laying down definite rules as aids, and also ensuring that \textit{the mind does not waste its energy.}\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Spinoza believes the mind's ideas are a kind of energy as force, a power that combines with our affections to create diverse affects. It is the affects that move us and not just ideas or external bodies. In fact, as we've seen, certain affects can even overpower all of our other

\textsuperscript{72} Bernstein, “The Ethics of Spinoza's Physics,” p. 8. Bernstein also suggests that one can find a consistency between Spinoza's earlier work in the \textit{KV} with the later \textit{Ethics} regarding the nature of ratios of motion and rest and the affects.

\textsuperscript{73} Spinoza, Letter 40: 865, footnote 144.

\textsuperscript{74} Spinoza, \textit{TIE}, 241, emphasis added.
This is how Spinoza uses and translates the Latin term *vis* as well, as an expression of force. This force is *not* defined as motion, for motion and rest are what the body does in extension. It is a force or tendency in the ways in which we apply our ideas and experience our affects. *Recall, the object of the idea as a mental action is its formal essence, but the idea itself (if adequate and certain) has its own objective essence, and we must attend to that aspect of what it is to think dynamically in order to discover the true causes of the object of our ideas.* A theory of representation needs to address this distinction in this way.

The goal is to compare ideas as actions of force and degrees of power. This aspect of Spinoza's *epistemological physics* hinges on the direct, non-representational parallelism between the attributes. When we discover the adequate cause of something, our power to act is increased. As Dan Selcer writes, “Spinozan textual materialism involves reconfiguring matter itself as power and the notions of 'idea' and 'body' in terms of movement and its capacity to produce effects.” This type of *dynamic materialism* conceives matter as “productive power,” while bodies can be understood as “complex patterns of movement as well as equally complex and constantly mutating articulations of a power or force to act and to exist.” The ideas we have now are about force or power that are a part of an adequate series of ideas that we are certain of *after* we learn how ideas can have increasing force (i.e. how the laws of Nature work). This sense of *after* is not a temporal one because of the definition of common notions as infinitely affirming the existence of substance. The force of an adequate idea includes its deductive certainty, and its capacity to also be an action that produces more clear and distinct

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75 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p44s: 139.
76 Spinoza, Letter 59: 911. Two years before his untimely death, Spinoza was asked for his “General Treatise on Physics,” including that it was known that he had made “great advances” in this topic. I read Spinoza's work on epistemology and metaphysics as directly overlapping with his work in optics and physics generally, as I have stated throughout this thesis.
78 Ibid. 176.
ideas. The more one understands what it is for ideas to be mental actions, the more one’s understanding is enhanced as a productive effect. Again, this is about acquiring a powerful method for the application of operational ideas. Spinoza writes:

So a good method will be one which shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea. Again, since the relation between two ideas is the same as the relation between the formal essences of those ideas, it follows that the reflexive knowledge of the idea of the most perfect Being will be more excellent than the reflexive knowledge of other ideas. That is, the most perfect method will be one which shows how the mind should be directed according to the standard of a given idea of the most perfect Being. From this one can readily understand how the mind, as it understands more things, at the same time acquires other tools which facilitate its further understanding.79

To better understand means acquiring new tools for understanding. Notice the connection Spinoza draws between our ideas, the idea of the most perfect Being, and the most perfect method. “God, or Nature” can be the efficient and immanent cause of all things. This passage also brings up the intimate relation between Spinoza's epistemology and his ontology, a topic I address in more depth in Chapter Five next. Spinoza places emphasis on our need to pay attention to both, and his discussion of what definitions are, can do, and how they relate to the concept of a cause and existence involve both.80 For more support we can refer to Letters 34 and 35. There we learn about the nature of definition as they relate to what God is, for example. Recall that definitions of each singular thing “includes nothing other than the simple nature of the thing defined,” which entails that absolutely no definition “involves or expresses a plurality, or a fixed number of individuals, since it involves and expresses only the nature of the thing as it is in itself.”81

God, or Nature, by “its own sufficiency or force” is the immanent and efficient cause for

80 Spinoza, Letter 34: 854.
81 Spinoza, Letter 34: 854. The footnote of this letter cites E1p8s2 which emphasizes the flexibility of the PSR. In Letter 35 Spinoza continues, “To come now to the point at issue, I assert that there can only be one Being whose Existence pertains to its own nature, namely, that Being which possesses in itself all perfections, and which I shall call God.”
all its expressions, for all its perfection, by necessity of its existence. For continued support we can briefly note Letter 58, already referenced in Chapter Three. There, Spinoza is discussing God's necessity, human free will as an illusion, laws of Nature, and the physics of force and power that are involved:

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 functions. For every single thing is necessarily determined by an external cause to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way.82

Therefore, the more a mind is capable of adequate knowing, including about processes of the imagination, the more perfectly it understands. Or rather, it expresses Nature's perfection more forcefully. But this is not merely an exercise in recognizing what we know or think we know. It is an exercise in increasing our power to know, that is, of our proportion of perspective, our power to affirm or deny (compare, contrast, and combine) concepts between types of ideas and their logical limits.83 It includes our power of discerning between continuously changing ideas so to increase our power of comprehension. Increasing our conatus strengthens our adequate patterns of knowing leading to an increase in our rational actions. Not only is it the case that “the more the mind understands of Nature, the better it understands itself,” but it is also an encounter which increases and decreases the power of our mind as an experience that coincides with the actions of our body and bodily joy. In other words, we have more joyous and powerful affects. Therefore, understanding Nature and natural phenomena includes understanding human perceiving and conceiving as they relate to dispositions and perspective. That is, the more the

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82 Spinoza, Letter 58: 909.
83 This insight is dedicated to anyone who has ever thought they had the absolutely correct perspective about an experience, only to discover with enough time, a softened ego, and genuine investigation into either the thing itself or the nature of how we obtain real knowledge, that they were wrong in their original (seemingly certain) deductions. This is the meaning of true courage for Spinoza.
mind “understands the order of Nature, the more easily it can restrain itself from useless pursuits.”\textsuperscript{84} Again, we witness a reference to mental energy, to a conservation of energy so not to waste it on useless pursuits.

It is not as much a matter of understanding the order and connection of the causes of all ideas, which is an impossibility, as it is about understanding and recognizing the power between different types of ideas and how that power increases when we affirm our existence as natural phenomena. The only way one can follow a train of thought in order to enhance one’s own power is by consciously reflecting on personal, subjective types of ideas in their relations and productive effects and in accordance with one’s ratios of motion and rest in extension.

Spinoza is interested in how we draw inferences from the ideas that both agree with their object and are adequately understood to the degree that one can discern between types of knowledge with more power. How we draw inferences is similar to the above example of a stone and its impulsion. He is strictly interested in how we draw inferences from ideas (composing the strength of the mind itself) understood as mental actions and not only as conceptual causation. If there were not a relation to another idea of which the ideas in question were not associated, what Spinoza calls interrelated with, then “we could make no inference regarding it.”\textsuperscript{85} That is, because the mind is ideas, we would not be aware of our own mind if we were not continuously drawing various kinds of inferences. This is the same deduction made in Letter 32 and it is telling. All of Nature is interrelated and thus, all ideas are also interrelated. With new adequate ideas, the method and tools of reflexive thought also increases in force and affirmation or inclination. Things that are interrelated in Nature will be capable of being understood, and the objective essence of our ideas will also have this order. What is important to pay attention to in

\textsuperscript{84} Spinoza, TIE, paragraph 40: 242.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. paragraph 41: 242.
this letter is the comment about tools acquired “for further progress.” We need to be capable of recognizing not only the adequate ideas we are having, but how they can be used as tools! That is, “the order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things.” As Spinoza writes, our affect of joy is related both to the mind and to the body simultaneously as one and the same thing expressed in two different determinate ways.86

When building on a more powerful method of conscious reflection we need the power of accurate recollection, an aspect of imaginative knowledge. Therefore, recall that in E3p11 we learned, “Whatever increases or diminishes, assists or checks the power of the activity of our body, the idea of said thing increases or diminishes, assists or checks the power of thought of our mind.”87 This is the nature of an affect and our appetites, as noted in E3p9s earlier. We are conscious of our striving, but reflection is about connections between ideas and consciousness of our striving (and not only about what words we know and use): “When this striving is related only to the mind, it is called will; but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation.”88 Book 3 is the exact place in the Ethics where Spinoza defines desire as appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite, which creates an affect. If conatus, as desire, is an affect, then we are forced to pay much more attention to the nature of our affects and the relations of adequate chains of ideas that we are conscious of.

Of course, we cannot be aware of all the ideas we are actually associating at all times. Yet, we can strengthen the method we use to recognize the various types of ideas which bring us more joy, power, and conservation of energy. This method will simultaneously influence one's

86 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p11: 77.
87 Ibid. 3p11: 76.
88 Ibid. 3p11, 76.
thought processes with the same variation of either more or less power. In this way, conscious reflection becomes a type of physics of force.

Before moving to the last section about how a theory of representation cannot work to apply to Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, we have to add to our understanding about the nature of what an “idea” is, such as found in E2P49s2 for example. In this very telling proposition and its demonstration, Spinoza makes clear that the “concept of extension” is not involved in the definition of what an idea is. This also coheres with 2p6d and elements of Letter 34. As we will read next, this is going to be a problem for Della Rocca’s interpretation. We can have an adequate idea about how the laws of extension work, but the object of that idea in its formal essence is another adequate idea about rational (logical) understanding. Even if all ideas are also categorized as modes, as it seems they are in 1p31, there are modes of thought that are determined in a certain way and modes of extension that are determined in their own ways, not to mention the three distinct categories of modes we learned about in the last chapter. Being aware of the objective essence of our ideas includes knowing what kind of knowledge one is relying on when thinking and how it can be used in efficient ways, which transform our affects to include more reflection on the formal essence of our conatus!

What an idea involves at its core is an affirmation or negation. Words are neither affirmations nor negations as well. That is how we can clearly understand how an idea in a finite mind can also be understood as eternal. All affirmative ideas logically connected are clear and distinct. This claim is a logical deduction related to Spinoza's initial definitions at the start of the Ethics. We are born with the ability to reason, but those ideas we can understand and use in a reflectively certain way are not immediately apparent until we synthesize them with more powerful knowledge. The logical argument is that adequate ideas are eternal affirmations of the

89 This will become important later in this chapter when examining the work of Michael Della Rocca.
properties of things (common notions), and eternal affirmations are always in existence as true. Spinoza writes that those who view images or words as ideas “do not see that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation.” An image or word is not, in itself, either an affirmation or negation, but all ideas are. This is why those who claim that Spinoza's idea of “cause,” is identical to both what it is “to conceive” and what it is “to explain” something, cannot be logically possible. To conceive adequately is not necessarily to be capable of explaining what one knows, although the latter is, naturally, helpful, constructive, and potentially productive. Recall that words and images are part of imaginative knowledge. They are not classified as either affirmations or negations because imaginative ideas are always only partial knowledge, which is why we can use the same word in so many diverse ways of varying intensities depending on the context. As we read in E3p56, truth does not reside in our explanations, but in our adequate understanding and application. Explanations can be and are applications of knowledge, but Spinoza is interested in more than just our explaining things. In addition, also found in Letter 56, we learn that we can have clear, adequate ideas of something which, nevertheless, we can never imagine clearly - that is, we don’t form a clear mental image of in its entirety (such as all of Nature). Spinoza concludes this sentiment in Letter 37 years earlier. We cannot have a series (or many series) of causally connected adequate notions about all of Nature, but we can understand why this is so logically, that is, clearly and distinctly. This is a great example of the difference between expressing a common notion that, nonetheless, uses certain aspects of imaginative knowledge to do so (we need to be alive in order to be thinking), which is an idea that has no equivalent in the form of images.

90 This is also one reason why we can see some overlap with Nietzsche's philosophy, for example, and the eternal return. There are other overlaps as well, but I believe their systems differ more than they are alike.
91 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49s2: 64.
92 Spinoza, Letter 56: 905.
Recall from the last chapter that Spinoza writes that words acquire their meaning from their use. The “nature of thought” does not involve the concept of extension. What thought is (as an attribute) must be in relation to types of knowledge, types of ideas, and what it is for God to be the immanent and efficient cause of all attributes (in relation to the concept that God is a thinking thing). An idea understood to exist as a mode of brain activity, for example, “consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words,” as corporeal motions do not involve “the concept of thought.” Recall, as Letter 50 makes clearer, that to think of the concept “one” must include only the affirmative concept of existence. To speak of human essence, therefore, is to speak of determinate modal expressions or modifications of modifications of substance that are affirmative. My conatus on an individual, imaginative level, for example, must include the concept of mode, but when I understand substance as one, only that substance’s existence and expression as Nature is logically important. This is yet another reason why we might characterize Spinoza as a type of existentialist thinker. This level of understanding has more power to assist me in reaching a more homeostatic state and continue to thrive. Spinoza writes, “In the common round of life we have to follow what is probable, but in speculative thought we have to follow what is true.” This conclusion demonstrates yet again that probability (often conceived as imaginative knowledge) and reason (common notions) work together to increase our conatus.

It seems Spinoza makes a distinction between thought in conjunction with a process and motion of the body as corporeal extension and “the concept of thought” that reasoning is both doing and is trying to understand (in action, in conceiving). The brain’s movements (as corporeal motions) are not the concept or content of thought, yet our affects include ideas we are having about the affections of our bodies. Attributal parallelism does not also include a strict identity

93 Spinoza, Letter 56: 905. This is going to be a real problem for Della Rocca’s reading.
94 Ibid. Letter 56: 904.
between the attributes, even if, in the end, thought and extension are “one and the same thing.” Our adequate “concept of thought” involves only other ideas and the laws of the attribute of thought. Since we strive to exist by necessity, ideas that involve affirmation increase our conatus. Therefore, ideas about negation must be related only to other ideas about essence, as the concept of one organic whole involves only the adequate definition of affirmative existence in expression (modally).

When Spinoza discusses reflexive knowledge he is not only talking about ideas of ideas. He is also speaking about the activity of comprehending clear and distinct, true ideas that are intrinsically determined and doing so regularly as an efficient method. Intellectual activity involves a different kind of transformative force. There is activity when we think, and we have to find ways to accurately account for the development of novel combinations of ideas that have more impact and leave a larger trace or imprint of Nature. Activity, therefore, becomes an expression, and that expression, in turn, becomes more (or less) activity with more (or less) power and force depending on what other ideas are used in associations and reflective awareness. Part of this expression is what we affirm or deny about the ideas and affects we are reflecting on at any given time, and what we decide to keep in mind.95 As Spinoza writes and was referenced earlier in the thesis, “For an idea itself is nothing but a certain awareness.”96 Conscious awareness of (and reflexive knowledge on) what types of ideas one is relying on, in addition to their actual content, is crucial to Spinoza's epistemology in the TEI, TTP, Ethics, and the unfinished TP. In all of these works (and his correspondences) it can be demonstrated that, in order to think well, one must attain an adequate method for becoming increasingly (reflectively)

95 I would like to thank Kevin Daily for teaching me more about the importance of this dynamic. We do not have true free will according to Spinoza. What we have is the ability to connect ideas of one kind or another in ways in which knowledge can be expressed. For my part, I believe in both singular consciousness and free will.
96 Spinoza, TIE, paragraph 77: 253.
aware of both the content and cause of their ideas, and also of how to categorize what type of idea they are relying on the most (imaginative, rational, or rationally intuitive) in order to affirm or deny that idea in its meaning and function with other ideas. Further, Spinoza writes that “the more intelligible a thing is, the more easily it is retained.” Retention is a part of imaginative knowledge. Therefore, as intelligibility increases in efficiency, rationality is used to strengthen those aspects of imaginative knowledge that benefit our capacity to reason with more force. Certain knowledge lasts longer and is easier to recall because it is stronger and present to us. It can be accessed readily or with habitual readiness.

A Theory of Affects and the Non-Representational Way to Read Spinoza

Here's where things get intriguing! Memory and recollection are something wholly different for Spinoza. They are not identical processes. Memory is expressed as imaginative knowledge, and is “the sensation of impressions in the brain together with the thought of the determinate duration of the sensation.” Memory, in other words, is a combination of bodily sensations coupled with ideas about our duration and pleasure or pain, very similarly to an affect. Personal memory involves singular affect, and awareness of affects requires conscious reflection of both imaginative and rational ideas. Recollection, on the other hand, retains the memory of the original sensations on the brain that left impressions, but disregards the idea of a determinate duration because recollections involve only conscious awareness of ideas within the attribute of thought as common notions. Therefore, we can say that in Spinoza's earlier writings he made explicit the importance of recollection over mere memory, especially if one is remaining consciously aware of what it is to have adequate and intuitive ideas. The more we think adequately about true singular essences, the easier one recalls certain kinds of ideas (as

97 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p18: 46-47.
memories along with their involved affects). Spinoza writes, “...the more singular a thing is, the more easily it is retained.”\textsuperscript{98} We more readily retain both memories and recollections of the essence of a singular thing. It is clear, at least in the \textit{TEI}, that once understood, we should concentrate on becoming increasingly aware of how to construct more adequate ideas, and how to recollect them \textit{as singularities more regularly}.

Recall what we understood in Chapter Two about weaker and stronger imaginings: when reason understands its own processes, it can combine its power with certain kinds of ideas of the imagination to create stronger impressions in order to strengthen itself. It is similar to the idea that when we understand the laws of Nature and then act rationally in order to benefit others, we are also aware of how much this benefits ourselves, as well. This is one reason why virtue can be included in the definition of reason. It is also why the mind works towards a principle of conservation in its methods and efficient use of various kinds of ideas as power and force.

Yet, this type of awareness and mental activity are not only about recollecting if one also has desires and daily needs. It is more about retention in the intellect due to a learned impression. The force of retention in consciousness increases significantly as the ideas that we are reflectively aware of become more intelligible. The more something is understood adequately, the more easily it becomes a part of our habits; that is, it becomes ready knowledge, in a similar way as conceptions of force in mathematical deductions or the physics of bodies when combined in one activity cooperatively. Spinoza writes, “\textit{When on reflection a person perceives the inadequacy, the emotion is immediately changed.}”\textsuperscript{99} This level of awareness and the processes involved are Spinoza's proto-physics of force. As Eugene Marshall writes, “…if we become consciously aware of the fact that the mind is a causal mechanism governed by the laws of

\textsuperscript{98} Spinoza, \textit{TIE}, paragraph 83: 255.
\textsuperscript{99} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, introduction: xi, emphasis added.
Nature, and if we actually understand this idea adequately, then it must be the case that this adequate knowledge has become an affect, increasing our power or moving us to act.”\(^{100}\)

If reflection is needed to increase one's power, then debates about whether Spinoza is discussing human consciousness as direct awareness are diminished. Our concentration on our conscious awareness is absolutely necessary in order to increase our joy and power in thought and action. Hampshire continues, “Through systematic knowledge of the workings of the mind, matching systematic knowledge of physics, we can gain control of our sentiments and follow a consistent path towards tranquility and happiness.”\(^{101}\) This is also supported by what Spinoza writes in and after E2p13, as well as what Sam Shirley refers to as offering “a basic outline of Spinoza's physics.”\(^{102}\)

How many multiple, internally determined states we can assume and compare, that is, how many sets of ideas we can rationally contrast and arrange, determines how one can increase their force of conatus and of motion simultaneously. By Book 5 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes that we should “...develop into a body that is capable of a great many activities and is related to a mind *that is highly conscious of itself, of God, and of things*, and in such a way that everything relating to its memory or imagination should be of scarcely any importance in comparison with its intellect...”\(^{103}\) Intellectual affects dominate the mind and are not “special kinds of ideas,” but are the very increase in our force of existing and joy. They are real, true ideas which express reality. True ideas must include an aspect of adequate understanding about how one's body is affected, but that does not imply that they are defined as representations of actions in extension.

\(^{100}\) Marshall, *The Spiritual Automaton*, 206.
\(^{102}\) Spinoza, Letter 59: 911, footnote 213. I believe it is also supported by such authors as Anthony Uhlmann, where in his article titled “Spinoza, Ratiocination, and Art,” he writes that *we feel meaning*: “Ideas are not [strictly] identified with words or images; rather the idea is the very process of understanding... Might this mean we do not come to think or learn to think; that rather, insofar as we understand, we are already in thought? (265)’”
\(^{103}\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5p39: 178, emphasis added.
I have already mentioned above the problem of any reading of Spinoza which wholly collapses the idea of “cause” with the idea of “explanation” into one and the same thing. This collapsing of both processes/meanings into one is not a new problem in philosophy, but when Spinoza refers to “the order of Nature,” he is always intending Natura Naturata or substance modally expressed through thought and extension. Recall that in the very first definition of Book 2 of the Ethics we learn that a “body” is one type of expression of substance, as a mode, and extension is another type of expression, as an attribute. As is so famously debated, in 2p7 we then read that “a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways.”

If a body, as a mode of expression, is not reducible to the definition of extension as an attribute, then we might want to read 2p7 as more about affects than about either modes or attributes. As we read in 2p5, modes can be understood as the effects of their respective attributes only. The meaning of the determinate expressions of the attributes as the same substance is different.

Michael Della Rocca, in his influential reading of Spinoza’s Ethics, draws together what he feels is the necessary and essential relation between three details: an ideational modal expression, God as cause, and the concepts of essence and existence. He does this through his reading of the principle of sufficient reason that allows for our ideas to be explained as representations of expressions of extension. He calls his thesis “mind-relativity of content.” For him, “each idea 'represents' [an] extended counterpart,” yet we need look no further than certain propositions in the Ethics regarding the affects in order to demonstrate how his interpretation, although fruitful in some respects, is inaccurate. For example, when Spinoza asks us to “imagine” a maxim that pertains to a rational good, but of which we must pair with an image of something that represents that maxim specific to us, one's understanding cannot be explained as

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104 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p1D1, 2p7s: 31, 35
representing only the extended counterpart of each of these idea chains or combined affects. I will explain why next.

As already noted, we cannot imagine eternity, but we can reason about it conceptually, trying to understand its logical limits. “Finite” modes are not, in themselves classified as eternal, but they express, and are in relation to eternal attributes conceived through themselves. For Spinoza, words are always an element of imaginative knowledge so we must look past mere explanation to that of understanding and the feeling of meaning, as well as how meaning can create greater affects. Primarily, we have to consider what it is for the type of idea we are having to be either active or passive. In many respects, certain bodies of ideas in relation to each other have greater or lesser degrees of expression and power. As organically active, they lend themselves to our being an adequate cause of chains of ideas which are already true facts about the properties or essences of singular things. All judgments are ideas, as is made clear in 2p49, but there are elements left unclear. Do we express essence when thinking adequately or is this only possible when we have an adequate idea about essence? It seems both are possible, but the former is logically something very different than the later. For example, if individuals cannot adequately recognize errors in reasoning then they may also not know that their ideas are not adequate enough. So how do we strengthen reasoning? William Earle expresses this distinction well:

The [ontological] argument states in some fashion that the existence of God or substance follows from his essence alone; to attempt then to give further grounds for the existence of God than those asserted by the argument would be to destroy that argument. The argument must stand or fall by itself... Briefly the argument states that there is an essence whose existence follows necessarily from that essence. That is all. It does not say: I have an idea of such an essence, and therefore God must exist as cause. Nor does it say: there are certain finite things, hence there must be a necessary being as cause. These are both variants of the cosmological argument, and although used by Spinoza, were considered by him to be a posteriori and of inferior certitude. ...an essence is not an idea, or a

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105 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49: 63.
psychological state of some sort. Spinoza distinguishes between the idea and the ideatum... The essence of house or of circle, therefore, neither is nor involves the notion of thought... The conclusion of all this is simply that essences are not ideas, although sometimes ideas are ideas of essences, the essences do not require that particular act of thought for their definition, and hence are structurally independent. ...An independent essence will be one which is conceived through itself and which is in itself... The discernment, therefore, of an essence which is thought through itself will be at the same time the discernment of that which exists through itself; defining the essence is precisely this act of discernment. ...Existence follows only from certain essences, those namely which express infinity, independence, and substance.\textsuperscript{106}

When we have adequate ideas proportionally more powerful than imaginative ones, we are expressing an independent substance that is infinite in those strivings. In other words, we are neither expressing representations of the attribute of extension when thinking adequately, nor expressing representations of God as cause. In thinking adequately we are expressing directly God’s (or Nature’s) power. It should be noted that even as the above description is helpful, Spinoza does away with the ontological status of ideas about ideas in E2p21s.\textsuperscript{107} This better clarifies how to read Spinoza accurately, should the mind affirm its existence according to greater or lesser degrees of power. This is also why a theory of human consciousness is required for accurately interpreting Spinoza’s epistemology as we read in Chapter Three.

We can rearrange not only our ideas, but also our affects using adequate common notions. To be an adequate cause in this way is not to be a proximate cause, as Spinoza writes in E4p2-4. Della Rocca argues that the expressions of the mind and body are absolutely identical, with the exception that all ideas of a finite, human mind must be called representational. It would be illogical to say that our ideas represent our mind, as they are our mind. It is not as problematic to say that they represent some parallel expression of our bodies, perhaps. In later works, Della

\textsuperscript{106} William Earle, “The Ontological Argument in Spinoza,” 549-551, 553. Etienne Balibar supports this kind of reading. For Balibar, every act is also a cause, which is the meaning of causa sui for him. The more we have adequate ideas, the stronger our desire to learn becomes, the more our existence is enhanced.

\textsuperscript{107} Spinoza, Ethics, 2p21s: 48. “For the idea of the mind, that is, the idea of the idea, is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object.”
Rocca writes, “The most fundamental question in the philosophy of mind, for Spinoza, is this: What is it for a thought or idea to represent, to be about, a particular object? This is the crucial question because...all features of a mental state just are, or derive wholly from, its representational features. In this way, representation -and not, as Descartes would have it, consciousness- is the essence of the mental.”

Yet, our ideas are our conscious awareness of our shifting affects so I have a problem with the way Della Rocca approaches Spinoza’s system. Readings from representation of this kind want to replace the idea of reflective consciousness with that of ideational representations of bodily actions, though I do not believe this type of replacement is possible for Spinoza. Della Rocca writes, “My interpretation takes Spinoza's claims at face value, as involving a representation relation between an idea on the one hand and its extended counterpart and the cause of that counterpart on the other hand, and as involving no duality of senses of representation.”

He continues, “Again, I take Spinoza's talk of perceiving something...as talk about what the relevant ideas represent.” Yet, I would like to ask if ideas about other ideas are included in the above description? As already noted, in E4p37s2 we learn that there are times when we cannot fully restrain our emotions, but a greater affect can overpower more passive emotions. It is not clear how Della Rocca's interpretation might account for ideas about ideas that create transformative affects unless they are conceived as objects of their own. Some of our adequate ideas, for example, are about eternity, which is nothing other than another adequate idea that is taken as the object of the first idea. The object of that particular idea could be said to be what it is for an idea to be eternal. This is a key point for

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108 Della Rocca, Spinoza, 89-90. In contrast, Hasana Sharp writes, “...Hegel is concerned above all with relationships of representation, while Spinoza examines relationships of composition [as well as decomposition, transformation, aggregation] among human and nonhuman forces (121).”

109 Della Rocca, Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza, 46. To be fair, about a quarter of the way into this book Della Rocca writes, “I should note that my aim here is not to give a complete account of Spinoza's theory of adequate and inadequate ideas (53).”

110 Ibid, 48.
Spinoza as early as E1p8, among other places, where he writes that confused knowledge occurs if one does not track the use of concepts distinguishing between the nature of substance's modifications (being a singular mode) and what it is to be an attribute conceived through itself.

Some parts of our bodies can communicate their motion to other bodies while the integrity of our whole body continues to operate according to its own ratios of motion and rest. Affects are crucial to this process. Recall that to think of anything as an organic whole is to consider its thriving as a continuation of existence in an affirmative manner only, that is, as existing. One might ask, is representation a complete conceptual affirmation according to Spinoza’s logic and definition of existence? Can a representation of something else be a complete affirmation? No. But do we experience representation? Yes.

The transformations we experience continually contribute to our overall conatus. There are times when we can think about certain kinds of ideas we are having and their content, and yet there are many other kinds of ideas relied on simultaneously that are not in our direct reflective focus – ideas that strengthen or weaken the types of knowledge being used by our awareness. As demonstrated in E2p9, the adequate idea of a singular thing is defined by its relation to other singular things or ideas, not only to one's affections. It is a definition that includes the necessary relations to many other singular things continuously, as well as continuous interactions with the organic whole that is substance. This organic interaction as substance is taken to a new level of description when considering what it is for something to have infinite attributes expressed in infinite ways, as clarified by Spinoza in Letter 66. There he writes, “I say that although each thing is expressed in infinite modes in the infinite intellect of God, the infinite ideas in which it is expressed cannot constitute one and the same mind of a particular thing, but an infinity of

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111 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p24: 49. See the infamous Letter 32 for more support.
112 Spinoza, Letter 32: 849: “Thus the blood would always have to be regarded as a whole, not a part.”
113 See here Letter 50 where Spinoza confirms this. Letter 50 will be taken up at the beginning of the next chapter.
minds” (as he also makes clear in 1p10 and 2p7s). Notice that this is the problem of infinities later to be taken up in the field of mathematics and which I address, at least in part, in this thesis.

Della Rocca's brand of interpretation fits very nicely within current strands of physicalism and theory of mind movements that reduce all conscious experiences from or back to their “origins” in brain states. Della Rocca summarizes his interpretive conclusions about mind-body identity in Spinoza in the following way:

Since all extensional properties must, for Spinoza, be neutral, I will investigate what kinds of properties Spinoza would regard as neutral. By eliciting these neutral properties, it will become evident that, for Spinoza, mind and body share all their neutral properties. From this fact, it follows that mind and body share all their extensional properties and are thus identical... The parallelism provides the basis for concluding that mind and body are identical.

This quasi-materialist approach also ignores some viable atomist strains of arguments in Spinoza scholarship, as well as theories of consciousness and affectivity. Della Rocca calls his reading of Spinoza representational parallelism, although also stating there is no duality between attributes noted above, which he states is “absolutely crucial” to his overall interpretation and that addresses current problems in the mind-body debate in philosophy. I partially agree with him when he states, “Spinoza's arguments represent a significant advance in our understanding of the traditional and still raging mind-body problem.” The difference is that brain states in his reading are conceived as wholly physical, giving rise to causal thoughts, whereas ideas are to be

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114 Spinoza, Letter 66, trans. Shirley, 921. There is a lot of controversy with this letter in response to Letter 65.
115 There is a lot of material on this debate over the past century. For one such current and lucid exposition in the debate, see the recorded dialogue on video at Northwestern University (2013) between Owen Flanagan and Evan Thompson.
117 Della Rocca writes, “Further, and more important, certain current debates in the philosophy of mind show Spinoza's views to be as philosophically relevant as ever... One important aspect of current debate is whether or not the mental can be reduced to the physical. Reductionists claim that mental properties are necessarily coextensive with certain physical properties. The connections between the properties would hold by virtue of laws of nature... If such laws held, mental events could in principle be explained simply in terms of the occurrence of the physical properties of events and objects... A similar dynamic is at work in the raging debate over the nature of representation.” Yet, each attribute for Spinoza requires its own determinate type of causal explanation. One cannot represent the other.
118 Della Rocca, Spinoza, 57.
understood pertaining to the attribute of thought as representations of these brain states and bodily affections. Della Rocca also interprets modes, against alternative readings by Ed Curley, Piet Steenbakkers, Gilles Deleuze, and many other Spinoza scholars, as “states of substance.”

Although some elements of his interpretation work, Della Rocca does not adequately address the very important metaphysical aspects of Spinoza's dynamic epistemology, nor do his initial assumptions cohere with more accurate readings of Spinoza's works already in circulation by prominent Early Modern scholars on the nature and importance of the affects. If you recall from earlier chapters, for an effect to “involve” its cause is for modes (modal modifications) to be a necessary logical consequence of that which has infinite attributes expressed in infinite ways. Modes are Spinoza’s answer to the infinity problem and affects provide the evidence. The problem of contingency does not fall into the problem of an infinite regress, a common critique of philosophers who work on the infinity problem. As reason does not recognize contingency for Spinoza, only necessity, an adequate and sufficient explanation for the contingency problem and infinity does not exist as a problem for Spinoza’s system in the typical ways often addressed by Western philosophers.

The only neutral property mind and body share is that they are both expressions of

\[\text{Della Rocca, } \textit{Spinoza, 62.} \] Della Rocca goes on to write that it is easy to understand how all modes are also “features or states of God.” Whereas they might be conceived as expressions of substance, I do not believe one can say modes are “features” of God. There are three types of modes, and finite modes cannot be described as features of a God as God is eternal, as Spinoza himself writes in footnote 7 to Chapter 1 of the KV. There, Spinoza notes, “Certainly not from God, for he has nothing imperfect or finite, etc.” Therefore, classifying finite modes as properties of God might run into logical problems of explanation. For Della Rocca, Ed Curley's interpretation on modes is particularly problematic. He writes, “For him [Curley], modes are merely causally dependent on God, they do not inhere in God, they are not states of God. And, while Spinoza does say that modes are in God, by this, for Curley, there are two different kinds of dependence: inheritance and what might be called mere causation or dependence that is not inheritance. The states of a thing would be conceived through the thing on which they depend, and Curley-esque modes as mere effects would be conceived through substance. The question I want to press here is this: in virtue of what are inherence and mere causation different kinds of conceptual dependence? What makes them distinct? ...One can see such a distinction as a violation of Spinoza's naturalism which is, as we saw, the thesis that everything in nature plays by the same rules (65, my emphasis).” But here I would ask Della Rocca to then address what is written by Iiro Kajanto in his essay “Spinoza's Latinity,” when he writes that the term “involvere” can be loosely translated as “to entail,” but “In Aquinas...the word still had its original meaning 'to envelop,' while in Spinoza it is a logical term, 'to have as a necessary consequence...' (\textit{Spinoza to the Letter, 50})."
substance with respective laws of Nature. It is clear that Della Rocca’s ultimate aim is to demonstrate the identity of the mind and the body in Spinoza, but we might ask how one’s personal affects, as part of both the essence of my singularly formed ideas and my extension together, are in any way neutral? Is any affect, which always involves ideas as either affirmations or negations, neutral? Della Rocca relies heavily on the much debated proposition E2p7 for support of his reading, particularly for his claim that our ideas are solely about their objects and nothing more. But which object and how many motions of the object in question? In other words, if understanding involves adequate knowledge about the operations of the things we encounter, one might wonder how far such knowledge can extend at any given moment.

But more problematically, perhaps, is not only that the mind and body can be understood as “one and the same thing” in certain deductive contexts, as Spinoza demonstrates, but that Della Rocca seems to include all possible (numerical) causes and effects in his mind-body parallelism across all contexts. As he understands it, each idea we have represents something else and, therefore, cannot be considered in-itself as a direct expression of substance, for it is only a representation of extension and ends in identity. To apply a concept of causality that only refers to the external world as part of its foundational structure will not be able to properly account for the dynamic status and force of ideational power as the essence of a singular thing.

Della Rocca continues, “The thesis of parallelism simply states that there is a structural similarity between two separate explanatory or causal chains.” There may be an element of structural similarity in that the laws of thought parallel the laws of extension in corresponding actions or degrees of power. But what does this have to do with types of explanations when

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120 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 18.
121 This is Dan Selcer’s point when he concludes that Spinoza’s “dynamic epistemology” can be read as registers in ideational power, including a theory of singular affects (as required) in his work *Philosophy and the Book*.
Spinoza is clear that words are always an aspect of singular, partial knowledge? Della Rocca’s reading equates issues of linear (possibly temporal) causality with issues of semantics and identity. He also relies on 2p7 in a way in which there is “not stated or referred to in 2p7d any requirement that the idea of a cause itself causes the idea of the effect of that cause.”123 But this is exactly the opposite of Spinoza's point in Letter 66, as well as Letter 64, as it is often noted that our understanding of cause aids in our strengthening both reason and creativity.124 This means that the force of understanding, as an affect, is something different from the definition of a cause. Della Rocca’s reading also contradicts E1ax4, where Spinoza insists that knowledge of an effect involves knowledge of its cause.125

In addition, an important relation to pay attention to here is found 1p33s, which may offer an alternate way to evaluate concepts about causality. There we read, “A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause.”126 Therefore, one can interpret the necessity of the relation between cause and effect as adequate knowledge being an element of the essence of the laws of thought as an attribute, and not that the idea of an effect depends on the idea of a cause only. Spinoza does not “need to satisfy” this requirement as Della Rocca believes is necessary.127 As another example, E1p33s includes two allowable, separate ways to explain something, by its essence (my conatus) or by its cause (God as first cause for example), but each

123 Della Rocca, Spinoza, 22.
124 In Charles Hartshorne’s “Creativity and the Deductive Logic of Causality” we read that “Entailment without equivalence is always a matter of dropping, in conclusion, some part of the logical strength, the information, contained in the premises. The one-way view of causal necessity is the limiting and most concrete case of this, with the description of the later situation, the outcome or effect, being the logically stronger premise and the antecedent situation or cause the logically weaker conclusion. Becoming is enrichment of reality, adding definiteness but not subtracting any (64).” We also read, “The cause-with-the-effect must be superior to the cause alone. Also, if causes do not annihilate themselves, effects with causes are the only effects there are…”
125 Della Rocca does mention this issue again on page 22, but his concern is strictly whether this coheres with his version of representative parallelism only. But what would he do with E5p7? I will return to this proposition later.
126 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p33: 22, emphasis added.
127 Della Rocca, Representation, 23. Della Rocca writes that all of his claims in chapters 2 through 5 in this work depend on how he interprets only E1ax4! I believe he misinterprets 1ax4 so I did not proceed much further on this problem in all of his chapters.
one carries its own series of adequate ideas that either refer back to substance and its attributes or refer to the modifications of substance (my singular modal expressions).

Let's return to an even more fundamental distinction drawn by Della Rocca’s version of representation in Spinoza. His reading depends wholly on what he interprets as Spinoza's definition of a human mind. Recall that for Della Rocca, an “idea” in Spinoza is representative of the object it corresponds to (i.e., our body’s affections in extension): “A further important feature of parallelism is the fact that an idea represents the item with which it is parallel.”¹²⁸ This is not entirely true for Spinoza, something I have noted both in the previous chapter and on the nature of affects in this chapter. Della Rocca admits that there can be both an identity between thought and extension and a parallelism in a certain sense, but that parallelism must be conceived in a way in which thought and extension have actions which are a one-to-one correspondence which renders the shared property neutral. Isn’t that another way to describe identity? Further, such a reading misses the crucial importance of Spinoza’s theory of an affect. An affect is, by definition, not related to definitions of parallelism.

As well, where does Della Rocca’s one-to-one version of (numerical) representation stop? I think this is why the lesson of Letter 50 continues to be so important. There, we learn that we can think about the same thing in two different ways. That is, the example used includes that there are either two numerically separate coins in our hand (a nickel and a dime) or there is simply money in our hand. Adequate ideas about objects in one’s hand can be either of two separate and different things or of the one thing that they both are. They can be conceived as

¹²⁸ Della Rocca, Representation, 19. In the footnote to this statement is also written, “The representational nature of parallelism is also evident from the fact that, as we will see, in order to demonstrate 2p7, Spinoza uses 1ax4, an axiom that involves the notion of ‘knowledge.’” Della Rocca seems to feel Spinoza is using traditional forms of the concept of representation as employed (and thus influenced) by Descartes, making reference to Descartes’ Third Meditation and Second Replies. But Spinoza challenges or extends Descartes’ argument by altering the definition of immanence.
wholly different or as the same thing equally. In a way, the first type of idea, that we have two coins, is a part of imaginative knowledge, but the second kind of idea is much more adequately conceived. Also, recall that, for Spinoza, extension is *indefinite* by definition. It is indivisible, yet the attribute of thought does not carry the same logical type of necessity of indivisibility in the same way. Just as continuous motion(s) in its expression of ratios of motion and rest is what extension *is*, continuous alterations between the power of imaginative knowledge and of rational understanding is what a human mind is defined as. *The key is to focus our attention on our affective knowledge, which becomes easier to do when experiencing joy because our power of thought is enhanced.*

To be fair, in an early work Della Rocca writes, “In a similar way we can arrive at a series of ideas of ideas of ideas (and so on). What that relation between these various series of ideas is intended to be is also something I will not explore here.” Nonetheless, this specific avoidance is one key problem with his entire interpretation. The avoidance makes his deductions about parallelism even more problematic as well when he writes, “This may seem to be a misleading way to use the term, since parallelism seems to imply a duality of parallel things. But, as I will argue, the duality in Spinoza's parallelism is not one between distinct things but between distinct descriptions or ways of conceiving things.” Again, conceiving something adequately and describing it are not identical for Spinoza. Della Rocca conflates conceiving and description.

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129 One of the problems in Spinoza scholarship is how something *indefinite* can then be said to also have a tendency? But for something to be in existence means, by necessity, that it strives to continue to exist for Spinoza.

130 Della Rocca, *Representation*, 19. The issue of ideas about ideas cannot be ignored and is critical to adequately understanding Spinoza's dynamic epistemology. As Steve Nadler has also shown more recently in a 2012 article titled “Spinoza's Monism and the Reality of the Finite,” this element of Spinoza's system is crucial to interpret correctly from the outset. Nadler is concerned more specifically with what it is for a finite singular idea to adequately comprehend that which is infinite, for example, and how the two work together logically.

131 Ibid., 19. As Della Rocca writes, his interpretation has its basis in a *semantic distinction* and not an ontological one. Yet, his conclusions reduce ideas themselves to mere representations of the attribute of extension, thereby making the attribute of extension more important ontologically than the attribute of thought if his reading is correct.
Although he insists that this is where he'll end up, he continually relies on the concept of causality and his version of the PSR in such a way that needs the two attributes to be both distinct in their description and one and the same thing by definition. At times, this is also where Spinoza takes us, it is not the logical route Della Rocca takes to reach his deductions. How does Della Rocca understand Spinoza’s meaning of being “conceived through something else”? He separates what it is to be a “mental individual” with what it is for an individual to be a composite of ideas expressing substance in its affirmation through reflective understanding and the experience of affects, ultimately eliminating the latter.\(^{132}\) But we cannot eliminate the latter. In addition, Spinoza has a unique version of what it is to be an “individual.”

As we've already seen, this kind of interpretation does not compare well with the lucidly written yet divergent readings of Spinoza, such as those of Warren Montag and C. Casarino more recently.\(^{133}\) In his later work titled \textit{Spinoza}, when Della Rocca relies heavily on E2p49 to make his argument, we also witness an overlap with current theories of representation that find their place in many analytic circles in North America. Some of what is stated in this work contradicts, in part, what is concluded in his earlier work on representation in Spinoza. For example, Della Rocca writes, “2p49 is thus not only a crystallization of Spinoza's philosophy of mind and metaphysics, but it is also a crystallization of his multifaceted anti-Cartesianism.”\(^{134}\) As noted earlier, 2p49 states, “In the Mind, there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that

\(^{132}\) Della Rocca, \textit{Representation}, 25. Earlier Della Rocca also writes that he does allow for possible asymmetry between the attributes and points to E2p13s for support, but does not take up this problem fully. The mind's degree of reality expressed is wholly determined by what series of adequate common notions about the thing in question one is clearly and distinctly having. Therefore, if one is thinking clearly about the attribute of extension, it is enough to logically deduce that at that moment both the attributes of thought and of extension are expressing, as one whole, the same degree of reality as one organic whole. If there is any real logical asymmetry, it is only, in my reading and according to 2p13s, because the first idea of the mind “is the body.” The first idea in our mind is not the mind itself, but that we have a body, that body has a brain, and that we are aware of our ideas.

\(^{133}\) The entire anthology \textit{Spinoza Now} could effectively be used as a way to advance alternative legitimate interpretations of Spinoza that are rigorous and directly challenge Della Rocca's influential interpretation.

\(^{134}\) Della Rocca, \textit{Spinoza}, 200.
which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea.”

This proposition cannot be understood independent of other related propositions and definitions, and it is a very long, important, and complex proposition (of which many disputes have occurred). To be “about” an object is not necessarily to represent it in its totality or identity, as we can certainly think about an eternal, self-causing substance logically and yet, as Spinoza writes, we cannot fully grasp it in our mind (or we would become that thing in identity). For an idea to correspond to an object does not necessarily mean that the idea contains all of what that object is. That the first idea of my mind is of my body does not include, for example, that I am aware of absolutely all of what is occurring in my body.

When we know (and are aware) that we have knowledge of an object, this knowledge does not include confirmation of complete knowledge of the entire object. One might ask what part of the object(s) in question are being represented in the idea if Della Rocca’s reading is correct? Direct conscious awareness of our adequate ideas, and of their laws of construction and power, their method of revelation and action, is absolutely paramount to Spinoza's dynamic epistemology and our understanding of our epistemic autonomy. Also, knowledge is infinite, but knowledge about the function of our finite bodies is not necessarily infinite (by definition of what it is to be a finite expression of substance at least). As Beth Lord correctly notes, “Whenever we gain true knowledge about the world, we gain more true knowledge of God. Only once we understand that basic relation can we begin to truly understand the nature of the body, the nature of experience and the knowledge available to us.” So to know Nature is to know

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136 This is why Piet Steenbakkers has noted that infinity is not inside modes, but rather is conceived as that which can be found in the causal chains which create and are in relation to modal expressions of substance.
137 This phrase is used by Charlie Huenemann's “Epistemic autonomy in Spinoza,” Interpreting Spinoza (2008).
138 Beth Lord, Spinoza's Ethics, 48.
God and to know God and Nature is also to know the mind and body expressed in determinate ways at once (as affects). Gilles Deleuze writes, “In return, the finite is clearly limited and determined: limited in its nature by something else of the same nature; determined in its existence in such and such a place or at such and such a moment.” He continues, “The existing finite mode is limited in its essence and determined in its existence.”

For more support of a non-representational reading of Spinoza, we can turn to E2p11c where Spinoza is not discussing issues of representation, but human awareness and the immanent ontology of substance: “From this it follows that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God. Therefore, when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God...insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, has this or that idea...” Della Rocca takes up this issue and proposition specifically in his interpretation, but his reading includes that “...the human mind is just a certain (complex) idea that...is an idea God has. Thus, when Spinoza says that in this situation God 'also has the idea of another thing together with the human mind,' his point is that in this situation God has the idea that is the human mind, and that God also has another idea distinct from, and presumably not part of, the human mind.”

Yet, anything that is expressed by our mind is a modal modification of substance, which has to be conceived and understood through the attribute of thought as both attribute and mode.

In my reading, we are passively perceiving and actively conceiving and continuously expressing substance all at once, but each of these activities can be described differently and need to be described differently because of their different logical series of deductions. My adequate idea of God conceived as a thinking thing is identical to adequately understanding the

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141 Della Rocca, *Representation*, 54. Della Rocca also relies on 2p24-25 on p.38 for more support.
laws of the attribute of thought, but that understanding, although wholly my own singular expression, is also a common notion. Common notions are the common properties of things of which an infinity of minds can adequately comprehend. In other words, against Della Rocca I would argue that we cannot apply one strict sense of causal linearity and semantic distinction to Spinoza’s God if the attribute of thought can be expressed in infinite ways.

Yes, the first idea the mind is aware of is that it exists as something real (a body with a brain), but this is, at least in part, still an element of singular imaginative knowledge (because it involves a human perception and sensation). Therefore, as Spinoza writes in Letter 64 to G. H. Schuller, to understand God as a cause of anything that involves the attribute of extension, and then to conceive of the mind as the idea of the body, is also to understand God as the cause “only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of extension.” In other words, to understand the cause of ideas we must go further and adequately conceive what it is for a singular mind to become an adequate cause of its own knowledge (mind), as well as what it is to have ideas about other ideas that have God as their cause among the separate attributes. Substance is not neutral, it’s active and it expresses itself in an infinity of ways. Spinoza gives evidence for these deductions in Letter 64, E2p13, as well as 2p10 and 3p7 (and most importantly in a reference to the scholium of 2p7). This is a very important reference because Della Rocca relies on 2p7 and 2p13 to make some of his initial claims regarding his theory of representational parallelism. The reason Letter 64 is so important is because Della Rocca also uses 2p13 as absolute proof of Spinoza's parallelism. However, Spinoza is using this proposition as a way to talk only about the identity between substance and its attributes, something already noted in this thesis. Della Rocca writes, “In this passage, Spinoza is implicitly invoking parallelism...(The context, which depends heavily on 2p7, makes clear that Spinoza has in mind here the relations between parallel items.)”

142 Spinoza, Ethics, 2D1: 31.
He believes 2p13s points to “some kind of asymmetry between modes of thought and modes of extension,” yet he cites the identity between substance and its attributes as support. Perhaps we need only point to 4p8 where Spinoza, in discussing the importance of the power of our affects and our understanding of that power, is very clear that there is a real difference between things being really distinct and that which is “conceptually” distinct. If this difference exists in his system, and I believe it does, then Della Rocca cannot hold that real things are identical to the ways that we describe them conceptually using the rules of the PSR.

As Pierre Macherey has also noted, there is not a hierarchical structure between substance and attributes. Substance is not transcendent or prior to what the attributes are, that is, the attributes are not devoid of content. Adequately conceiving the affections of substance logically fall after one has already adequately understood the true nature of substance as per the very first proposition of the *Ethics*. Substance is conceived, therefore, prior to its effects. Substance is logically prior in nature to its affections because it must be conceived as their cause, as already noted. Furthermore, substance exists eternally, but all finite modes do not, at least not in the same way as substance is understood. Macherey writes, using Letter 9 as support, “...the attributes are essences, hence realities. Thus they are absolutely not names in themselves, that is, designations of substance by an intermediary, a means by which substance would decompose itself abstractly into a multiplicity of perspectives or appearances.” Things that are really distinct cannot be said to be one representing the other.

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143 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p8: 121. In other words, human semantic distinctions in what we can conceive are not identical to real ontological distinctions. They are ways to express what we know.
144 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 108. Letter 9 is also proof of the identity between all attributes and substance, even while each attribute expresses substance in its own unique way. Substance is composed of infinite attributes expressing themselves in infinite ways. In *The New Spinoza*, Macherey writes, “...the independence of the attributes, which are nonetheless identical in the substance of which they constitute the essences, is only comprehensible from the fact that substance expresses itself not in one, two, or any number of attributes, but in their infinity, which forbids establishing among them a term-by-term relation, whatever its form (72).”
145 Ibid. 93.
If, as Beth Lord has written, Spinoza's God is “the activity of actualising its being...[which] is a power of actualising its essence, of activity 'unfolding' the modes that follow necessarily from its essence,” then, not only does this eliminate any real problem of inherence in substance between being and its attributes, modes, and activities (“whatever is, is in God,”), but it also becomes apparent that its causal nexus would be impossible to deduce in totality for anyone other than an all-powerful, eternal God.\textsuperscript{146} The discussion of “parts” interacting with one “whole” must logically shift to a more important distinction that emphasizes the activities and expressions of one, unified substance for this reason. That is, the correct arrangement of common notions about the essence of singular things must shift to a method of interpretation about expressive, active relations between types of knowledge and bodily capacities, and must include a conscious singular thing who knows what it is to understand more about the natural phenomena and the laws of Nature. Inherence, causation, and conception are, thus, not identical.\textsuperscript{147}

Spinoza repeatedly emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to the ordering of our ideas as an activity, that is, how we attempt to organize and associate all three kinds of ideas (imaginative, rational, and intuitive) into patterns of thought which are increasingly more logical, creative, enjoyable, or, at the least, more beneficial. These patterns of thought (or method) are the understanding of relations and force between all three kinds of knowledge.\textsuperscript{148} Adequate ideas are true in-themselves; and because we become aware that they are both true and adequately

\textsuperscript{146} Lord, \textit{Spinoza's Ethics}, 35. The quote “whatever is, is in God” is from Spinoza's \textit{Ethics} 1p15. For more on the problem of inherence in substance, one can turn to the anthology \textit{Spinoza on Monism} edited by Philip Goff (2012).

\textsuperscript{147} Yitzhak Melamed published an article in 2012 titled “Spinoza on Inherence, Causation, and Conception” where he argues against Della Rocca’s interpretation specifically. His interpretation differs from the conclusions of my thesis, but I support the continued effort of understanding that inherence in Spinoza is not identical to causation.

\textsuperscript{148} Although Eugene Marshall’s most recent work on Spinoza can be used to support my reading of a theory of human consciousness and the importance of the affects found in Spinoza’s system to some degree, this is the one significant place where we disagree. My reading of Spinoza places much more emphasis on the constructive and necessary uses of imaginative knowledge in order to reason well with more force and creativity. Certain kinds of imaginative ideas strengthen reasoning capacities. As well, there are too few female Spinoza scholars left out of Marshall’s latest book whose work is crucial to understanding Spinoza correctly today.
conceived by us, they do not need to include a reference to their object in every instance in order to be understood. That they are “adequate” is enough to posit their certainty.\textsuperscript{149}

Macherey’s interpretation can be relied on further to counter Della Rocca’s reading. Briefly stated, our point of view within the intellect is what we know of substance, as referenced in Letter 67, and our proportion of perspective directly involves our affects and reflective awareness:

Here the fact that in his definition of attributes Spinoza uses the word 'perceive' (\textit{percipere}) must be taken seriously: the intellect perceives the attributes as constituting the essence of substance...regarding the idea that is a 'concept of the mind,' Spinoza writes that 'I say concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the mind.' This indication can be turned around and applied to the definition of the attributes: Spinoza does not say that they are what the intellect 'conceives' of substance, precisely because that would imply an activity of the intellect in relation to its 'object,' on which it would impose a modification, for example, by giving it form... The attribute is what the intellect 'perceives' of substance, because, in the relation established here, there is on the contrary a passivity of the intellect vis-a-vis substance, which it accepts as such, in the essences that constitute it, that is, in its attributes.\textsuperscript{150}

The above passage helps counter Della Rocca's mind-relativity of content thesis. The human mind is not wholly different from God's mind, that is, it cannot fully be explained as something separate from God's mind because we use the attribute of thought to explain such things (and all expressions of that attribute are through itself). It is only expressive of God's attribute of thought, conceived as a thinking thing, in its own determinate way. That is, we both perceive and conceive God according to our singular expression of ideas. This is why “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”

In the end, one could say they are one and the same thing in the same way that Spinoza concludes that thought and extension are also “one and the same thing.” That is, the above passage demonstrates how there is no real representational difference between God's mind and

\textsuperscript{149} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 2p21s: 48, as one good example prior to 2p49.

\textsuperscript{150} Macherey, \textit{Hegel or Spinoza}, 73.
the human mind once we adequately understand what it is to perceive substance through the
attribute of human awareness and a God with that attribute (a God as a thinking thing). Nonetheless, Della Rocca concludes, “...where representation in God's mind is concerned, Spinoza does quite clearly insist that the correspondence relation involves representation. So it should not surprise us that this relation involves representation on the level of the human mind as well.” Yet, “God” is never fully external to us, not in any real sense if we are expressing Nature at all times in some way. There is no relation of transcendence possible other than that we do not have infinite attributes and substance does. That is, Nature is never wholly external to us because we are Nature. The same can be said for God and the expression of the attributes of thought and extension. God is never wholly external to us because, in our expressions, we are God. Everything is God, or Nature.

Recall E2p13, a proposition that Della Rocca relies on repeatedly: “This indicates that for Spinoza the mind is united to the body simply because the mind is a representation of the body.” Isn’t this similar to saying a conscious mind is representing its brain processes? This is how the mind and body are united according to Della Rocca. Yet, as we have already read, the mind's adequate ideas are also expressions of God's power in a non-transcendent way. This proposition states that the object of the idea is a mode of extension. In other words, our body as the object of our ideas is conceived (understood) as a modification of the attribute of extension. This is not news, but Spinoza states that “the nature of thought...is quite removed from the concept of extension.” In light of Della Rocca's 1991 essay on causation, the focus is on the

151 Della Rocca, Representation, 69-70.
152 Ibid., 50.
153 We can locate more support here by referring back to E5p4-6 for example.
154 Della Rocca, Spinoza Society, Rijnsburg, Netherlands, September 2009. Another problem is that Della Rocca ended this talk claiming Spinoza allows teleological ideas as part of his system, citing E1 App as support. I completely disagreed then and I still do today as well. Chapter Three of this thesis demonstrates otherwise.
155 Spinoza, Ethics, trans. Curley, 2p13: 39-40. Della Rocca was clear in his Spinoza Society talk in 2009 that this is
problem of any form of numerical identity thesis and the attributes.\footnote{one of the propositions which he feels proves his thesis, particularly 2p13s.} Spinoza is clear in some aspects of E2p13 that what thought is is not to be found in any concept about extension (due to his parallelism) other than the concept of substance. Della Rocca modifies his position slightly in a later work titled \textit{Spinoza} when he writes, “For Spinoza, as we've seen, no fact about thought depends on any fact about extension.”\footnote{See “Causation and Spinoza's Claim of Identity,” \textit{History of Philosophy Quarterly}, 1991.} Yet, he continues to hold throughout his main conclusions that the two attributes are in relation to each other according to his thesis of \textit{representational parallelism} and the mind-relativity of content. He does so by offering that the mind cannot know itself without the body. So we might ask, what happens to the mind’s expressions of adequate ideas after the body dies? Are they lost? If so, where were they before?

It is helpful to return to some of what Stuart Hampshire concludes about Spinoza’s theory of human reflective awareness. What we actually are to reflect on in adequate thinking is the “order of causes” between our own ideas, and not the order of causes between us and God or all of Nature, as both of these latter types of order and causality are impossible to adequately conceive.\footnote{Della Rocca, \textit{Spinoza}, 54.} There are multiple types of causes and conceptions of causality we could consider. Recall that knowledge proceeds “…neither from things to ideas nor from ideas to things, but it goes from idea to idea, that is to say it links acts of thought between them, according to a necessary causal order that is the same as the one in which things are linked in reality.”\footnote{Hampshire, \textit{Spinoza and Spinozism}, 88. Spinoza writes in the \textit{KV} that we are much more affected by our own internal ideas then we are by anything external to us. This is also why we need to conceived ourselves as the adequate cause of our ideas as well.} If so, a move to add the idea of knowledge as representation is not needed. Spinoza’s emphasis here is on “acts of thought” which occur between ideas. This is a helpful deduction to support my reading of his epistemology.
At one point in his work Della Rocca also writes, “Finite modes of extension are simply particular physical objects.” But, are all modes of extension “objects”? Why are modes of thought not considered objects of their own kind in reality? Does Della Rocca need modes of extension to be objects in order for our ideas to be representations of “objects?”

Spinoza’s theory of affectivity is how I will end this chapter and continue to support my counter-reading. As Spinoza writes in 3p1, where we determine the causal identity of any given “object” or action (including our interaction as a body with other bodies) is crucial to how we understand our affects. This is important because the deductive move Spinoza draws from this is, not only the identity of mind and body as both the same substance expressed in different ways, but also, “The result is that the order, or connection, of things is one, whether Nature is conceived under this attribute or that; hence the order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind.” This “oneness” is what an organic whole can be said to express in the form of an affect. Curiously, in a small footnote to the above proposition, Della Rocca writes that this description of finite modes of extension includes all physical events. So now we have finite expressions of the modes of extension as “facts,” as “objects,” and as “events.” Physical objects, in my reading, are conceived very differently from physical events, especially of an attribute that is indivisible by nature of its expression. A law of Nature is an event when it is being expressed. We need reflective thought to adequately understand what laws of Nature are, but part of that understanding will include that they can be conceived as involving that which is both externally universal or objective and subjectively

160 Della Rocca, Representation, 6.
161 E3p1, in relation to the epistemological claims in 2p40s, states that the mind acts when having adequate ideas and is acted upon when having inadequate ideas. The action of the mind is described here very clearly; it is not due to brain states or anything related to modes of extension. The conception or definition of what it is for a mind to “act” includes what it is for God to act in that God is a thing that thinks. It is highly metaphysical in its epistemological relation, but it is also about singular affects. Spinoza goes directly to the statement that “the mind and the body are one and the same thing” deductively to finish this proposition as well.
162 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p2s: 71, emphasis added.
durational or singular in their expressions. In other words, there is an identity on the level of that which is understood both internally and externally, but there is more than this when describing substance’s modal modifications. As Spinoza notes in 1p25c, all “particular things” in Nature are to be conceived as modes (modifications of substance), and modes need other concepts in order to truly be understood.\textsuperscript{163}

We continue to learn that for Della Rocca “Finite modes of extension and infinite modes of extension differ in the way they are caused by or conceived through the attribute of extension.”\textsuperscript{164} For example, infinite, immediate modes are, well, always immediate. As an action of extension, the expression of extension is acting in-itself, both in the physical sense \textit{and} in the sense of being \textit{defined as ratios of motion and rest}. The actual definition differs from the many things that can be expressed in extension. When Della Rocca writes that for Spinoza “just as there are no conceptual or explanatory relations between mental facts and physical facts, there are no causal relations between the two realms,” he misses the explanatory relations between the two attributes, as is demonstrated by Spinoza’s theory of the \textit{affects}.\textsuperscript{165} Affects are not “special kinds of ideas,” nor are they “emotions,” as Samuel Shirley has called them.\textsuperscript{166} Affects are a \textit{collective expression} of one organic whole of both our thoughts and our actions working together to create effects of which we can reflect on, feel, and of which increase or decrease in power, joy, energy, and reasoning capacities.\textsuperscript{167}

In a 2009 Spinoza Society lecture in Rijnsburg, Della Rocca drew attention to the

\textsuperscript{163} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p25c: 19.
\textsuperscript{164} Della Rocca, \textit{Representation}, 6.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{166} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, trans. Samuel Shirley.
\textsuperscript{167} I am reminded here of a sentiment expressed by Rabindranath Tagore when he writes, “Facts occupy endless time and space; but the truth comprehending them all has no dimension; it is One... The facts of the gramophone make us aware of the laws of sound, but the music gives us personal companionship.”
importance of E1p11d2 and 2p13s, and later 2p11 and 1ax2 and 4. The references to E2 and
1ax4 were already noted above, but in this later lecture there is a specific appeal to 1p11d2 for
more support of his theory of representation and the use of the PSR (as conceiving and as
explanation). Yet, if there is any proposition that distinguishes between “concept” and “cause,”
as 1p28 does for example, then Della Rocca is going to have a problem. It is clear Della Rocca
felt his interpretation needed more support yet at that time. I believe 1p28 is an explicit reference
to the very real difference between that which is an adequate cause and which is an adequate
concept. One way to understand this is to understand simply that God, as an eternal cause, is not
to be understood as a human concept, but human minds, as finite modes of expression of
substance, have human reflections as well. To adequately conceive chains of causes and effects is
to separate the understanding of what it is to conceive something adequately in comparison with
what it is to adequately conceive a chain of causes while understanding causality itself as a
process. One is a law of Nature that structurally never changes and the other is enveloped within
itself in a problem of both self-reference and potential infinite regress. It is a productive
repetition. In addition, the only way we can focus reflectively on the content of our ideas that
may interact with things external to us is through our own ideas, and as our affects (which
involve the ideas we decide to use/focus on). Consider what Charles Hartshorne writes in an
essay on creativity and causality to support the difference:

The mistakes of traditional reflections upon causality have been the arbitrary assumptions
(a) that causal conditioning is symmetrical or bi-conditioning (events equally requiring
their antecedent conditions and their respective results) and (b) that the way to understand
effects is to consider what it means to be a cause. By (a) either creativity is wholly
excluded (determinism) or else no strict cumulativeness is allowed (Mead). By (b) one is
trying to understand causal deduction by asking how its conclusions imply its premises,
thus taking the affirmation of the logical consequent as the primary deductive procedure!
Not causes but effects are the premises, the logically stronger terms.169

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168 This lecture has already been noted above in footnote 146.
169 Hartshorne, “Creativity and the Deductive Logic of Causality,” 68.
My thesis has shown that Hartshorne’s reading is correct and can be applied to Spinoza. What we are to pay attention to are the effects we can create.

Each finite mode is caused by another finite mode in order to produce its effect. Therefore, depending on what you are comparing, a mode can also be either a cause or an effect. If so, Della Rocca’s interpretation will run into further difficulties. When discussing substance as self-causing, modes are always modifications or effects. He writes, “Thus, there are two causal chains within the realm of extension: an infinite series of finite causes and a series of infinite causes beginning with the attribute of extension. Each finite mode of extension occupies a point at which these two series intersect.” Although Della Rocca immediately states that he will not participate in the debate about the nature of attributes and modes as “properties” of substance, while also stating he feels they very much are to be considered as “properties,” he has already staked his claim in the debate with some of the assumptions he relies on and the extensive analysis of Spinoza’s system he offers.

In contrast, we have already understood modes as God's infinite power to exist, that is, as “ways,” configurations, expressions, constellations, modifications, arrangements and/or things. The “destruction” of one mode means only it becomes something else, expressed in a new way. Our perfection includes maintaining a rational identity in the continuous events of changing configurations of modal expressions and affects in their power. This is the intensity of one's actuality in the power to exist where patterns of rational thought and action can endure with increasing or decreasing in force. If, in Spinoza, as Della Rocca believes throughout his work, “...causal relations must correspond to conceptual connections,” and if there are “two causal chains within the realm of extension,” does this also mean that there are two causal chains within

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170 Della Rocca, Representation, 7, emphasis added.
the attribute of thought at all times in order to maintain the thesis of parallelism?

It is not that there is an infinite series of finite causes and, in addition, a series of infinite causes that are categorized as something other than finite causes. For Spinoza, it is rather that any and every mode of expression of substance is only what it is “in a certain and determinate way,” which alters what this determinate way is in effect. Spinoza often asks us not to think about things as modes, but as direct expressions of substance in their own determinate ways. But even more, is not an infinite series of all finite causes already inclusive of any series of infinite causes in any and all attributes? In other words, any adequate concept describing an infinite series of all finite causes is, in a way, the same thing as describing an infinite series of causes, because this would include the finite within such a description (doing the explaining by a finite person able to speak and write for example). The infinite is just that, eternal. The only thing that “causes” an infinite series of causes and effects perpetually are the laws of Nature themselves. The effect of that which is self-caused is just an infinite series of causes and effects in all directions expressed in infinite ways.

Therefore, that the problem of finite modes only partially follows from God directly (perhaps as proximate causes) is not a logical problem at all. It is only a problem if you believe that modes must inhere in God in a way that is unrelated to or different from being conceived through the adequate concept of laws of Nature.\footnote{Della Rocca appeals to the thought experiment of what it would be for an attribute to “produce one finite mode,” but such a thought experiment does not prove what our logical options or lack-there-of would be. It is problematic to begin with the idea that we can rationally conceive (in a complete way) such a thought experiment at all. For Spinoza, all modes expressed by adequate thinking cause other modes of adequate thinking continuously by necessity. The correlate in extension is that everything is in motion. The mind does not have ideas, it is ideas, and although we can say that ideas are modes, they are not only modes. Common notions are, in the end, universal common properties of things of which we can all become aware of and express modally. Della Rocca appeals to E1p28 and some letters for his conclusion that a mode can be said to come directly from God if understood only “as part of a package of infinitely many other finite modes.” Number cannot enter into the equation as a concept of rational measurement here. I would agree that there are infinitely other finite modal expressions which are human.}

Causes are not reducible to only concepts as
Della Rocca would hold, and, therefore, are not equivalent to the best possible explanation. If causality were reducible to concept construction alone, Spinoza would be easily classifiable as an Idealist, Relativist, or Rationalist.

*We are aware that we cannot possibly know about all causes and types of causes in Nature, and, therefore, we can recognize through reflection that our affects regulate the force of intensity of our ideas and actions.* As Hampshire summarizes:

I come to realize that *all* my knowledge of causes in the common order of Nature is to some degree fragmented and partial, and that I concentrate irrationally on only a few proximate causal factors. So a balance between the active and the passive in the mind characterizes my empirical knowledge...which Spinoza characterizes as the level of imagination. The laws of thought operating at this level are both the laws of logic and the laws of the association of ideas, one pressing against the other...

Return now to combine this reading with what we've already learned (because adequate repetition produces more conceptual force): *“When on reflection a person perceives the inadequacy, the emotion is immediately changed.”* Della Rocca's argument that Spinoza does not clearly account for our singular feelings being restricted to our bodies will no longer hold. Recall that he interprets E2p11 to mean that ideas in the mind are “numerically identical” to ideas in God's mind and that *all* inadequate ideas are effects of other ideas “that are not part of the human mind” which is perceiving them. Yet, the inadequate ideas that I am perceiving are minds and their ideas, and I agree that, because all modes are causally related, Spinoza system is deterministic by necessity, but measuring one finite mode is an experiment of abstraction in the imagination only.

172 This would call into question Spinoza's multiple demonstrations in E2 that state that the order of our ideas is the order of causes in 2p9, 2p19, and 2p30. All that we are aware of which contain the power to change our ideas are other ideas and the experience of powerful affects, but we cannot possibly be consciously aware of all the causes of those many chains of ideas. Nancy Cartwright, in referencing the work of Bas van Fraassen again, writes, “...are not ‘inferences to causes after all merely inferences to the truth of propositions describing general characteristics of...the things the propositions are about’ (8)?” And later, “Explanatory power is no guarantee of truth, unless van Fraassen's challenge can be met.” But perhaps Cartwright can, in a way, be seen as an ally for Della Rocca when she also writes that the laws of association (Hume for example) are also “insufficient to account for the facts about effective strategies. Causal laws are required as well (10).”

173 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 9, italics added. This was quoted in chapter two, but it bears repeating here.


175 Della Rocca, *Representation*, 27.

176 Ibid. 54. What is most important are the “necessary and sufficient conditions for...” aspect of the equation.
not numerically identical to ideas in God's mind and they are not caused only by ideas external to us, but are a part of our changes in singular affects. Another interpretation of 2p11 and 2p11c is required. A law of Nature is not only a concept (although it may be conceived as such in its own way as part of the attribute of thought and within certain parameters of what it is to think about both processes of reasoning and of explaining).

Della Rocca makes another claim that is particularly difficult to accept, namely, that all affects are “simply special kinds of ideas,” already noted above. An “affect” is defined by Spinoza in E2p22 as an idea coupled with its affection. It is a singular organic experience that combines both thought and extension into something comprehensible and felt, such as joy and sorrow. For Della Rocca, an affect is only an idea. Yet, he does note that there is a place where Spinoza makes it explicit that affects are not only ideas (in 1p31d and 2ax3, both very important to Spinoza's overall system), but then relies solely on elements of Book 5 in order to support his final conclusion that affects are only special kinds of ideas. In a 2008 publication he writes, “Affects are simply ideas considered insofar as they are passive, considered insofar as they are caused from outside a given mind… What's worse, insofar as we have affects we ourselves are unintelligible and do not exist. Affects, for Spinoza, literally strip us of our existence… This charge is propelled by Spinoza’s PSR.” The claim that we do not fully exist insofar as we experience passive affects is highly problematic. Is this account about the representational nature of the affects sufficient if Spinoza notes in many places throughout E4 and 5 that affects work as

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177 Della Rocca, *Representation*, 7. He also writes, “It is worth noting that Spinozistic ideas are particular psychological items. They are always states of some particular mind.” I might agree with these latter statements, especially as they apply to a theory of subjective consciousness that is possible in Spinoza. He continues, “Spinoza is concerned with my thought or idea that summer is nice as opposed to your thought that summer is nice.” This is true, but when both you and I are adequately conceiving the same common notion and combining in our actions while doing so, we are a stronger body as one organic whole and are now understood as two separate individuals alone. Both singular organic unity as one’s affect and a combined organic unity between two minds or two bodies (or more) are possible in Spinoza’s system. Just as we read in 1p15s, two versions of the same concept are possible depending on whether we are understanding that idea in imagination or as a common notion.

178 Della Rocca, “Rationalism run amok…,” 51, 52.
something other than only ideas? They are ideas in action, activity and energy itself. In the 2008 article, Della Rocca also writes that the reason affects are representational is because the affect in question depends on a particular type of “relevant idea” as “prior to the affect,” and he intends this conclusion as something temporally prior. Affects are continuously shifting between our types of ideas and desires and they are also highly related to the singular imagination.

Affects involve ideas, but they are not only ideas nor only special kinds of ideas. They combine with affectations. They can also be conceived as effects. Della Rocca writes that, because affects are special kinds of ideas, “all finite modes of thoughts are ideas of one kind or another.”

This is accurate. There are three types. While it is certainly true that the mind is nothing but ideas, it is not the case that this second conclusion can be applied to (or follows directly from) the nature of affects. The definition of affects includes that they are about one, unified experience of force(s) and motion(s), that is, they are not understood as one event in only the body or one idea in only the mind. A theory of representation is not possible between two things if those two things are considered, in the end, as one unified experience of its own kind with its own specific definition. Ideas cannot be understood as only representations because they do not arise solely on account of objects in the world (at least not only). As Spinoza writes in 2p37, “That which is common to all things and is equally in the part as in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any one particular thing.” Therefore, adequate ideas alone do not compose my essence, conatus does; and my conatus is a continuously shifting force of ideational

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179 Della Rocca, “Rationalism Run Amok…,” 33. In another work Della Rocca cites E5p3 and 5p4c as support that affects are only special types of ideas.

180 Della Rocca, Representation, 7. Della Rocca cites Parkinson’s interpretation of Spinoza’s epistemology in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge as supportive of his claims here, and, therefore, to be taken as the correct interpretation. He also cites Letter 72 as support, but this is problematic for reasons already stated in this chapter. Yes, ideas can be about things, have content, refer to their objects, etc., but they can also be about other ideas.

181 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p37: 54.
power and ratios of motion and rest.\textsuperscript{182}

There is yet another problem with the theory of representation and Spinoza. Della Rocca relies heavily on what he considers to be Spinoza's use of the PSR, writing, “Spinoza strongly adheres to the Principle of Sufficient Reason...” and later, “Spinoza accepts the Principle of Sufficient Reason and thus, for him, every fact must be explainable.”\textsuperscript{183} This is the explainability thesis already noted above. Yet, for something to be a fact about Nature does not automatically include, by necessity, that it can be completely explainable. If this were true, there might be nothing left to learn once important facts about Nature are all uncovered and fully explained. In 2009, Della Rocca states that Spinoza relies on a “two-fold” use of the PSR claiming, “The PSR emerges clearly in Ethics 1p11d2...And in 1ax2...” as well as 1ax4.\textsuperscript{184} This conclusion is closely related to what he takes to be that which is explainable, with the only other option being that a thing is inexplicable (which he calls the “inexplicability argument”). If it is not explainable then it is deemed inexplicable and forgotten? The PSR must apply to the concept of “existence,” as well as to all ideas of reason, which therefore, according to some, must be explainable. As Jim Swindal notes in his work Action and Existence, “As Herbert Schnadelbach argues, even though all linguistic modes of representation link up with arguments, it does not follow that on what the argumentation either depends or is conditioned by must itself take the form of argumentation.”\textsuperscript{185}

In addition, in his work Spinoza, Della Rocca claims Spinoza is reliant on the PSR for the demonstration of the wholly independent nature of attributes.\textsuperscript{186} I have already noted in this chapter that the process of thinking through the absolute affirmation of the logical necessity

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{182} Spinoza, Ethics, 2p37, p38: 54.
\item\textsuperscript{183} Della Rocca, Representation, 31, 35. See also the essay “A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason,” Philosophical Topics (2003).
\item\textsuperscript{184} Della Rocca, unpublished paper, Spinoza Society, Rijnsburg, September 2009. E1p11d2 reads Cujuscunque rei assignari debet causa, seu ratio, tam cur existit, quam cur non existit. E1ax2 reads Id, quod per alidum non potest concepi, per se concepi debet. E1ax4 reads Effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet, & eandem involvit.
\item\textsuperscript{185} Jim Swindal, Action and Existence: A Case For Agent Causation (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 117.
\item\textsuperscript{186} Della Rocca, Spinoza, 55.
\end{footnotes}
involves that which exists. The “reason” for the cause of substance is itself (in its eternity), but the reasons for the increase in my singular power of existing becomes myself as the adequate cause of, and result of, understanding things with more rational and imaginative force.

For Spinoza, though, these are not the only two options. Although these statements are said conclusively, the PSR is mentioned very minimally throughout Della Rocca’s earliest work. The PSR in Spinoza is the “mind-relativity of content” thesis which then becomes a theory of representation in later work. It is impossible for any one individual to explain every fact of Nature when relying on, conceptually, the processes of cause and effect to do so. But Della Rocca's version of the PSR clearly uses an argument which stems first from effects (as “facts” about objective reality, as he puts it) and then going back to their causes, instead of concentrating on the property of Nature, which is the infinite production of effects of rational and imaginative power vis-à-vis Spinoza's dynamic epistemology. Spinoza proceeds from causes to effects after we have understood how the three types of ideas work together to create affects. Because of his method, we can alter how we think about the causes of effects after those effects have happened and we can imagine them as present to aid in increasing our power and joy. This contributes to the striving of all of Nature. We can transform our affects. Necessity does not prevent novelty and creative new arrangements that express reality to stronger degrees of perfection and joy. Spinoza writes, “To have a true idea means only to know a thing perfectly, that is, in the best

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187 Della Rocca, as a student of Early Modern scholars Don Garrett and Dan Garber, has also been influenced in his interpretation of Spinoza by these thinkers as well as Jonathan Bennett, even though he will point out where he disagrees with Bennett. In addition, Della Rocca sets himself up as countering Ed Curley's interpretation. Thus, it seems Della Rocca feels his reading and application of the PSR is the correct way to read Spinoza over all other major interpretations. For example he writes, “While I disagree with Curley about inherence, he is, believe, absolutely right that the in-relation just is causation or, more generally, conception (67).” Here and elsewhere we can see that Della Rocca's conception of the PSR is to collapse what it is for something to inhere in substance, and for that something to be causal, and thus for it to be completely conceptual and explainable: “For Spinoza, inherence must be intelligible and it is intelligible in terms of intelligibility itself.” I do not believe that these three elements (inherence, causality, and conceptual understanding) are identical or wholly reducible to each other, but they do involve one another.
In the 2009 lecture, Della Rocca relied on Leibniz's *Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles* (hereafter the PII) to support his interpretation, claiming that “the non-identity of two things must be explained by a qualitative difference between the things. No two things can be exactly alike.” Yet, I would note that Spinoza is clear about some very fundamental distinctions we need to keep track of as we read the *Ethics*: 1) there are times when the definition of substance and attributes can be used in the same way, 2) there are contexts when the definition of substance, attribute, and mode must be distinguished from each other, 3) there are no two substances which are identical (so the PII already appears in a certain form, for example, in the opening definitions and propositions of E1), and 4) the attribute of thought and extension, although both substance and (in that way) identical, are to be distinguished qualitatively in “a certain and determinate way,” as well. The way in which Della Rocca uses the PII will not work from the outset. Reading E1p10s, which says, “From these things, it is evident that although the two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct, we still cannot infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances,” Della Rocca interprets conceiving two attributes as really distinct to mean “one may be conceived without the aid of the other.”

The point is that each attribute does not cause anything in the other and, therefore, one cannot be said to “represent” the other. They are qualitatively different in that they each have their own series of causes and effects, yet Della Rocca has said, “The mind and body are indiscernible so they must be identical.” They are not indiscernible. If the idea of the effect depends upon the idea of its cause, then we need to adequately be capable of identifying which

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190 Jeffrey Bernstein, in his article “The Ethics of Spinoza's Physics,” notes that E3def3 and 3p2s help show how the mind and body are only modally distinct.
cause (and type of cause) one is associating with which effect. The mind and body are not identical – or affects would not be possible as Spinoza defines them. Together, thought and extension create affects we can reflect on, but we cannot possibly reflect on every single effect which occurs in our bodies or in our associations between ideas which run parallel. This is also why the nature of reflecting on our changing affects is so important. In 1p10s we learn that there is a very real difference between what one can conceive and what one can then infer from what one conceives, thereby drawing a *real distinction* between that which we can understand adequately and that which we can possibly explain well using language.

We need to reconsider what it is for something to be “conceived through itself.” The very definition of a modification of substance in E1p8 *includes* that we understand what it is for something to be “in another,” that is, “those things whose concept is formed from the concept of the thing in which they are.”¹⁹¹ The definition of a mode includes the definition of an attribute, but what an attribute expresses is something different in explanation from a mode (by logical necessity). The mind and the body are only *modally* distinct. Spinoza “could not accept a simple-minded materialist conception of personality, having once recognized at first hand and in his own person the *power* of reflection and of active self-consciousness...”¹⁹²

When Della Rocca writes, “The main problem is this: the fact that all thoughts are conceived through thought does not show that thought is an attribute unless it also can be shown that thought, in turn, is not conceived through anything else. Unless this gap is filled, one is not entitled to conclude that thought is an attribute....” he has contradicted what Spinoza has already asked us to do in E1p8.¹⁹³ It is true that definitions are composed of words, but this is particularly

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¹⁹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p8: 4. Again, Letter 50 is helpful, as are those places where Spinoza both equates and differentiates between “substance” and “attribute.”

¹⁹² Hampshire, introduction, xxxiii, my emphasis.

¹⁹³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1p8: 4 and Della Rocca, 15. Stuart Hampshire also writes, “In a person as a thinking subject, the
applicable to the definition of Substance, whose nature (essence) is that it exists (and not that it needs a definition or explanation to exist nor that it does not exist through anything else).

It is very important to follow what is written in E1p10 and 1p11 here. Each attribute must be defined and understood as being conceived through itself because it is the nature of the attribute to exist as itself, and because its concept, therefore, does not involve the concept of anything else on which it relies. Critically, in 1p11 Spinoza writes, “But this reason, or cause, must either be contained in the nature of the thing, or be outside it.” There is a reference to the PSR, but it is only within the opening context of proving that substance (and thus its attributes) must be the cause of itself. In other words, the reason for its existence is itself and its nature is to exist. No other concept is logically needed. But, this deduction cannot be applied as an overall principle for the rest of the demonstrations in the Ethics. For example, it cannot be applied to the definition of modes.

The theory of representation applies a narrow version of the PSR to Spinoza's system, a version which Della Rocca believes is the only way the PSR can be understood and used. In an article titled “PSR” as recent as 2010 in Philosophers' Imprint, he starts by saying outright:

And even when I am relentlessly pursuing this line of thought, as I am wont to do, a part of me really wants to stop because I know that this pursuit can win me few friends and allies. And where does this line of thought lead? Straight to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the PSR, that forelorn principle according to which, for each thing (object, state of affairs, or whatever) that exists or obtains, there is an explanation of its existence, there is a reason that it exists. An interesting aspect of Della Rocca's reading of the PSR is a confession in the footnote to this opening statement: “Alternatively, if we focus on truths instead of things or states of affairs, we

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levels of complexity are levels of reflexiveness, of thoughts about thoughts.”

194 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p8, p9, p10: 4-7.
might say that, for each truth, there is an explanation of its truth.” I feel this second statement of what the PSR “really” means is telling. In fact, it alters the very way in which one might read Spinoza. Recall that earlier Della Rocca admitted that our ideas create singular, psychological “states” of mind and that affects are only “special” kinds of ideas. There can be an explanation for every truth, but the truth of common notions as rational conceptions and adequate knowledge is not reducible to their explanations (words) in order to be true. Della Rocca emphasizes a focus on “truths” and “facts,” but what is and is not a “fact” can alter if, for example, more information is uncovered at another time.

It is one thing to feel the PSR is in need of a revival, which I tend to agree with for different reasons than what Della Rocca gives, but he is concerned that many philosophers today presuppose or “operate under the assumption” that the PSR is false. I feel any decent philosopher will examine and use the many versions of the PSR and principle of non-contradiction (Leibniz certainly did). Della Rocca appeals to Leibniz's example about Archimedes for support in particular. Archimedes, realizing that two equal weights hanging on each side of a scale are not necessarily at rest, must, nonetheless, reject this possibility as a rational explanation because it is virtually impossible to prove why the whole apparatus is actually not fully at rest. I feel this line of reasoning is a poor way to draw our attention to Spinoza's system. For example, it’s clear in E2p43s and 2p49s that when we have a true idea we simply “know a thing perfectly, or in the best way,” and this “best way” includes being able to suspend judgment when we are aware that there may be more to know about the thing in question. In this way, the “act of understanding” itself is a rational affirmation (an adequate idea with force), and it can be experienced as an affect, an intellectual affect. Spinoza makes this clear throughout E4, but 4p52 and 4p56

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196 Della Rocca, “PSR,” 2.
197 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p43s, p49s: 58, 64, 66.
demonstrate this well.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p54, p56: 143, 144. We read that perceiving our power of acting is perceiving our power of understanding.} Therefore, we can adequately conceive (as an act of understanding) that we \textit{do not} have to pass judgment and, therefore, give an explanation for what we think we know at all times. In other words, knowing how to defer such judgments and explanations is \textit{also} adequate knowledge. This ability to rationally defer explaining what one is learning about or knows is critical because it adds a third possibility to the two mentioned above by Della Rocca. He writes, “...the PSR is simply the rejection of inexplicability in general.”\footnote{Della Rocca, “PSR,” 2.} If this is what the PSR is, then it is not applicable to Spinoza’s system as his main tool. Spinoza simply writes that he will rationally suspend judgment (and explanation) until he can understand more, and that it is necessary and sufficient to do so. This deduction is also the acceptance of rational inexplicability, even if we also know that every effect has and involves a cause. For example, I am rationally aware, because of my ability to reflect on what I am thinking about and feeling or being affected by, that my imaginative ideas are only (ever) \textit{partial} explanations, yet cannot escape them entirely. As we read in Chapter 2, I can access them to aid reason nonetheless, and too many imaginative ideas can lessen my power to think at any time should they become proportionally stronger in my awareness.

I think we can consider another kind of explanation or example to make this more clear. When Spinoza describes what it is to know something that is based on an interaction with other bodies and ideas, his example in Chapter One of the \textit{TTP} is very helpful. He writes that when we hear (hearing being a perception/sensation) someone say “I understand,” we \textit{know} that it is a person’s mind (and not necessarily their body) that is doing the understanding. He writes that we use ourselves (as a singular subject with conscious reflection) as a comparison between ideas to draw this conclusion: “...the hearer knows what it is to understand, that he readily grasps the
speaker's meaning through comparison with himself.” Comparing ideas between ourselves and others is often the nature of human dialogue, but these ideas of comparison are filtered through many series of my own, singular ideas and their proportions.

Della Rocca is effectively claiming that ideas, as “representations,” arise from the brain states (therefore are always mediated in some way) and are less real in their singularity then their physical counterpart. If you are not yet convinced, consider his statement (which involves the topic the nature of consciousness) that rationalists tend to avoid the inexplicability argument mentioned above: “This concern to avoid inexplicability is, I would argue, the core motivation behind most forms of physicalism and functionalism in the philosophy of mind.” Yes, understandably at times, this is the primary concern of physicalism and philosophy of mind, but that does not include (by necessity) that such an avoidance entails that the PSR is true based on the inexplicability problem.

Yet, this is not the same as what Della Rocca then writes at the end of his essay in 2010, which is, actually the real philosophical issue. He notes that many “leave untouched the central philosophical issue here: viz., determining whether there is a principled line between [types of] explicability arguments, and if so, what it is. And, again, if there is no such line, then the argument for the PSR that I have offered may not be able to be avoided.” I am offering an

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200 Spinoza, TTP, 1.
201 “My uncovering of these implications in Spinoza is not meant as an argument either for or against the radical-independence view. My goal is to show how this view is employed by a master system builder such as Spinoza. To attempt a final evaluation of the radical independence view would require something that...I do not have, namely, a solution to those problems about representation and the relation between the mind and body that this work hopes to illuminate (17).” This is what Della Rocca calls “the numerical identity interpretation” in his earlier 1991 essay, that is, whether the mind and body are independent from or identical to each other. He writes, “The numerical identity interpretation can avoid these inconsistencies [posed by Delahunty and Bennett] if it can be shown that Spinoza holds a certain thesis about causation.”
202 Della Rocca, “PSR,” 4. The author relates these views to his views on causality, and, as we know, Spinoza has several forms of causation that he employs in the Ethics, but more importantly, an affect, as an organic, forceful and moving experience, cannot be directly measured.
203 Ibid., 10. Della Rocca does not take states of mind (which he defines affects to include as well) or objects as important as what he names as “truths,” even while having previously spent a great deal of time explaining his
epistemological line for discussion in this chapter. Unless one is to claim that there is only a first cause *and nothing more*, each effect can also be named as the cause of the next effect, and that next effect becomes the cause of the one after that *ad infinitum*. In other words, *new* kinds of explanations are needed if one decides to explain this new series of causes that are based on previous effects, and not only for the first cause of all effects. This is yet another reason why *naming* a cause and an effect as such requires a *different conceptual model* from understanding the *process* of causality itself according to the traditional sense of the PSR only.

Gilles Deleuze might have an answer for us. As he writes in his essay “Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics,'” Spinoza is more interested in the logical understanding of “forms of expressions” (three types of knowledge in their power) than he is their actual shifting content, as the latter is open ended and alters according to context. We are continually shifting ratios of motion and rest with ideas of three kinds, and placed together are our awareness of our ideas and the sensations (though not only sensations but much of what occurs in our body is unknown to direct awareness).

For Deleuze, Spinoza's system can be read in a non-representational way in which signs are “always an *effect*,” and effects are traces left on/inside/related to bodies. Strong affects leave those trace impressions as they alter and form the next singular affect or collective body of action. These effects as affections are states of duration that cannot be directly compared (as discrete facts, for example) *because they are continuous*. Space and time are, ultimately, elements of imaginative knowledge for Spinoza. Deleuze writes, “...each state of affection mind-relativity thesis in his work on representation and the mind-body problem. Here he concludes, “Alternatively, to insist that there be an explanation of the truth of each truth is simply to insist on the PSR itself. I will not continue to give the alternative formulations in terms of truth.” But he does continue to discuss forms of truth later in this essay when he writes, “Similarly, if we focus on truths instead of things or states of affairs...” etc.

204 Deleuze, essays critical and clinical, 138.
determines a passage to a 'more' or a 'less'..."\textsuperscript{205} That is, each passage as affect determines how much power we have, but this process is continuous and organic in either direction. That our ideas about our affections are “confused,” at least in part, \emph{is not a problem when considering the nature of the power of affects}. Deleuze categorizes the three types of knowledge into affects, concepts, and knowledge/experience of essences. I believe I have already demonstrated where in the \textit{Ethics} Spinoza combines the first two types of ideas and calls that combination its own kind of affect, an immensely enjoyable kind. Therefore, the second kind of knowledge cannot be categorized as only concepts. But by categorizing the three types of knowledge the way he does, Deleuze is better able to discuss the signs of \textit{continuous affects}, and from there he concludes that we can be affected by \textit{both} joy and sadness at the same time.\textsuperscript{206} How would a theory of representation account for such an affect?

For more support, we can note that Spinoza writes that we can use reason to alter the combination of images and imaginative concepts we focus on when we imagine a former experience which was noble or courageous and couple it with an image about a maxim of what it is to be noble. But while doing so we are also accessing the adequate knowledge of what it is to re-arrange ideas of the imaginative sort. We are applying, that is, the laws of thought. This experience we are creating for ourselves brings a sense of real joy. In our experience of joy there is a passage from lesser to greater effects in this instant, but as soon as that emotion and affect are altered, there is no longer any sadness. Or, at the least, the sad passion is weaker than the adequate idea about it. I believe E4p11 and 5p4-10 are significant examples for support of this

\textsuperscript{205} Deleuze, \textit{essays critical and clinical}... 138-139.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid. 140. Why? Because various types of signs “are Abstractions that fix a relative constant for variable chains of association.” Certain types of affects (vectorial signs) “enter into variable associations as much as do affections: what is growth for one part of the body can be a diminution for another part, what is servitude for one part is power for another...”
The law at work, that is, is the law of force and strength. Adequate ideas about the cause of our affects (as ourselves or as externally determined) immediately alters that affect into something more efficient, enjoyable, and producing more adequate knowledge. Our sad passions can take over, but not if we are understanding what caused them and how to alter their effects.

What is most important to take away from Deleuze's reading in contrast to Della Rocca's interpretation of the PSR is that signs “do not have objects as their direct referents.” Similarly to what Bernstein has written (which was noted above about the ethics of Spinoza's physics), affects are “variations of power,” they are signs of effects. Deleuze writes that Spinoza categorizes causality into two types of series, a type of reflection between bodies that affect each other (variations and combinations or decompositions of motions), and a type of absorption when we experience a singular affect that includes both the effects between bodies and our own ideas about our affections as a result. Both processes are occurring at once. Objects can be causes, and ideas can be causes, but effects can be their own type of cause by definition, and affects yet another type of cause. Deleuze’s conclusions show why and how Della Rocca's use of the PSR does not work in the way he applies it to Spinoza's system:

In effect, the structure is geometrical and consists of solid lines, but they are constantly being formed and deformed, acting as cause. What constitutes the structure is a composite relation of movement and rest, of speed and slowness, which is established between the infinitely small parts of a transparent body...there is in each body an infinity of relations that are composed and decomposed... Modes are geometric but fluid structures... Structure is rhythm, that is, the linking of figures that compose and decompose their relations... But the structure moves in both directions simultaneously... If one refers to the cleavage in causality, signs refer to signs as effects refer to effects, following as associative chain that depends on the order of the simple chance encounter between physical bodies. But insofar as concepts refer to concepts, or causes to causes, they follow what must be called an automatic chain, determined by the necessary order of relations or proportions, and by a determinate succession of their transformation and deformations... But when one asks how we manage to form a concept, or how we rise from effects to causes, it is clear that at least certain signs must serve as a springboard for

207 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p11, 5p4-10: 122, 163-168.
208 Deleuze, essays critical and clinical… 141.
us, and that certain affects must give us the necessary vitality... There is thus something in signs that at the same time prepares for and doubles the concepts... The cries of the language of signs are the mark of this battle of the passions, of joys and sadnesses, of increases and decreases of power... The Ethics is the discourse of the concept... The common notions refer to relations of movement and rest that constitute relative speeds; essences on the contrary are absolute speeds that do not compose space by projection, but occupy it all at once, in a single stroke... What the notions grasp are the relations between relative speeds. But absolute speed is the manner in which an essence surveys its affects and affections in eternity (speed of power)... They are not simple operations of fact, but an entire production in principle...²⁰⁹

Can't we say that the above coheres with Spinoza's use of causa immanens (inblijvende oorzaak), that which is a cause that remains a part of (is involved in) its effects? And can't we say that the result is that our adequate common notions about causality are then transformed? For Spinoza, every effect “involves its cause,” but what sense of “involves” (involvere) is the debate, as noted above. The use of the PSR for Della Rocca is applied specifically to “facts” about objective reality, and the PSR as he sees it (especially in his most recent essay from 2010) is always in relation to existence. He writes, “…the existence of each thing that exists must be explicable, just as the consciousness of each conscious mental state must be explicable, and so on for other cases... So the explicability argument concerning existence, unlike the other explicability arguments, is an argument for the PSR itself...”²¹⁰ It is clear from this statement that Della Rocca feels a rational argument for the concept of “existence” is a rational argument for the PSR. But there are different versions of the concept of existence and, at times, of the PSR that have already been noted here.²¹¹ For Spinoza, existence is, utterly, a complete affirmation first. Yet, to be a

²⁰⁹ Deleuze, essays critical and clinical, 141-145, 148-149, italics added. This is the heart of the matter, and it makes a difference. This is also why it is so importance to understand how immanent and transitive causation. In the end, when reasoning with force we are the efficient cause of our affects.

²¹⁰ Della Rocca, PSR, 6-7.

²¹¹ To this, Della Rocca might respond, “So if the non-rationalist is to draw the kind of line she needs to draw between acceptable and unacceptable explicability arguments, she must do so in a principled way, i.e., she must give us a reason for thinking the other-at least some other- explicability arguments are legitimate, but that the explicability argument concerning existence is not.” Yet, it is one thing to give a reason for something and an all together different matter to insist that for every cause in Nature there is a human explanation in the sense that they are identical. Causes are not reducible to human explanations in order to have truth value as real in Nature.
cause that remains in its effect seems closer to the use of the Latin term *involvere* as “to envelop.” The sense of cause and effect Spinoza holds is closer to Ed Curley’s reading than to Della Rocca's. We might turn to those like Deleuze, Macherey, and Bernstein together for more support. In addition, Don Hoffman, in a 2008 article titled “Conscious Realism and the Mind Body Problem,” writes, “Despite substantial efforts by many researchers, we still have no scientific theory of how brain activity can create, or be, conscious experience. This is troubling, since we have a large body of correlations between brain activity and consciousness, correlations normally assumed to entail that brain activity creates conscious experience.”

Against the version of necessity and the PSR Della Rocca embraces, Macherey writes, “On the other hand, in Spinoza's statement the principle of causality literally inverts the terms of the traditional principle: from the well known formula 'nothing is without a cause,' which proceeds in an *analytical manner from effect to the cause*, he substitutes 'no cause is without effect,' which proceeds *by contrast from cause to effect, synthetically* and summing up in a single phrase the genetic conception of knowledge...” This reading relates quite well to Deleuze's interpretation noted above. Further, Macherey links this *synthetic reversal* of the way to think about causality in Spinoza to a theory of non-representation specifically. He writes, “For Spinoza...adequate knowledge 'explains' its object to the extent that it affirms itself as identical to it, not in the transparency of a conforming representation but in the likeness of the order of an equally necessary reality.”

In strengthening adequate knowledge and action, we regularly affirm our objects of thought as identical to substance’s causal order. It is through the effects of other effects that I recognize when my understanding acted as a

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213 Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 56, italics added.
214 Ibid., 56. Because finite affects are not only about thought, so to they are, therefore, not only about explanations either and is evident in E2p49s2 as one example.
cause. As substance and identical to it, I am both the cause and the effect as the adequate cause.

Della Rocca reads Spinoza's concept of the human mind as having ideas about objects and things, about facts, of which the cause is in need of a rational explanation, instead of the mind as ideas that are signs, effects, and an organic part of the ever-shifting landscape. As is clear in E2D3, having an “idea” is not equivalent to speaking about brain states or physical descriptions as representations, but is in relation to what it is for God (or Nature) to be a thinking thing perceived and expressed as a human mind. And in 2p28 we learn that finite affects cannot be only about the attribute of thought (therefore they cannot be only about our explanations), but are about the composition and decomposition of relations between idea types and interactions with other bodies of all kinds in our environments (chairs, clouds, buildings, people, plants, animals, desks, church, the state, revolutions and so forth). As Jeffrey Bernstein writes, “In other words, the stability of our bodies is due to – in fact our bodies are constituted by – certain proportions of movement and rest (i.e. forces)... As the ratio of forces changes, the formation of these bodies changes... Simply put, change occurs by the composition or decomposition of fluid, determinate bodies; space need not enter the equation... Differently stated, Spinoza's monistic substance is constituted by ratios of forces. Spinoza calls such forces 'affects.'”

Ratios of forces always in motion cannot possibly be reduced to representations of something else. They are Nature.

After we understand the logical consequence of a cause being “in” its effects, “substance” can be understood as an infinite series of degrees of expression and power that continually transform into other degrees of power and expression or ratios of motion and rest. This is

217 At the end of chapter 1 of the *Kv*, Spinoza writes, “From all this, then, it follows clearly that we can prove both a priori and a posteriori that God exists. Better, indeed, a priori. For things which are proved in the latter way [a posteriori] must be proved through their external causes, which is a manifest imperfection in them, inasmuch as they cannot make themselves known through themselves, but only through external causes. God, however, who is the first cause of all things, and also the cause of himself [*causa sui*], makes himself known through himself (Shirley,
Deleuze’s main point. Those things that are in-themselves do not involve the concept of another thing. Existence needs no explanation. The meaning is conceived through itself. How then do causes inhere in their effects if the concept of the thing, in the above sense, does not involve the concept of another thing when conceived through itself? In other words, the explanation of a definition will alter in what is required depending on whether you are understanding something as an expression of an attribute or as an expression of a mode. The explanation will logically alter depending on which common notions are placed together.

When concepts involve the concepts of other things, such as the definition of a “mode,” their sense of what it is to be a cause, an effect, and “involve” alters depending on what is being defined. This is yet another reason why Spinoza writes in E2p49s, among a series of replies to possible objections to his deductions, “But…we perceive that one idea has more reality, or perfection, than another.” Some explanations are better than others, but that which is conceived through itself needs no explanation in order to be both true and to cause effects.

God's essence is eternal existence and is self-caused. Our essence, as a finite mode, is understood differently. I can logically understand that I exist as a real expression of Nature, and I am aware of this regardless of an adequate explanation of how it is possible that I exist as an expression of an eternal substance. In a way, there is only one explanation of substance; it exists, eternally. We adhere to the necessity of laws of Nature of which substance is. The rest are the effects of variations in degrees of intensity of thought and action by all things with each other.

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40, emphasis added).”

18 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49s III.A.(iii): 65. Prior to this, in a warning but also in 2p49s, Spinoza writes that we must first distinguish between an idea (concept) of the mind and the images of the mind, and then we must distinguish “between ideas and the words by which we signify things... (Curley, 64).” In fact, “in order to arrange one's life wisely,” Spinoza insists that we must always keep track of the differences in our mind between ideas, images, and words. I believe this complicates Della Rocca's interpretation.

19 Della Rocca writes, “I suspect many of you simply will not see the force of the challenge that I am issuing to the non-rationalist. (I speak here from long experience, experience that prompted me to call my endeavor here quixotic.)” He continues that the need to respond to his reading of the PSR “in a non-question-begging way becomes
And where there are degrees of intensity in rational and imaginative thought, there are novel ways to both experience, express, and explain reality. But Della Rocca believes necessitarianism and the PSR, as he has defined it, are inseparably intertwined: “Precisely because necessitarianism is an implication of the PSR, the intuitive pressure leading to the PSR is intuitive pressure leading to necessitarianism. A clear-headed proponent of the PSR can be expected to embrace necessitarianism for precisely this reason. (Spinoza certainly did.)” Yet, Spinoza's concept of necessity is intimately related to his metaphysics and the idea of a God. The meta-physics of the many uses of language as signs, to produce effects, as types of explanations, or simply as types of knowing also seems to go beyond a strict reliance on the PSR as the best way to perceive and conceive reality. My ideas are not representations of reality in extension. My ideas are concepts, methods, and ways of knowing that create my awareness; some are images, some are words, some are rational common notions connected to other rational common notions with the force for understanding, novelty, and creativity as well.

At this point it would be helpful to refer back to the definition of an “idea” that can be found in E2p48s: “For by ideas I understand, not the images that are formed at the back of the eye...but concepts of thought.” Images and concepts are, thus, distinguished from each other. If the mind is understood not as having ideas but as ideas themselves, then ideas as concepts of thought are what the mind can be said to be defined as, but not without the dynamic epistemology of ideational method and “ways” of knowing. Images are only a bi-product or yet urgent.” Yet, he also writes at the very end of his 2010 essay, “And I must admit that I am not optimistic that such a line can be found.”

220 Della Rocca, PSR, 9. It seems one cannot deny the PSR or, according to Della Rocca, in doing so one has actually relied on it to do so. In this logical move, there is little recourse to argue against Della Rocca. He writes, “To appeal to the PSR's implication of necessitarianism as ruling out the PSR and as enabling us to draw a principled line between good and bad explicability arguments is thus question-begging.” What Della Rocca explains as question-begging is in question, primarily because it is not that opponents of his position “have no response at all,” but that the explanation given does not satisfy his specific use and reliance on the PSR.

221 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p48s: 62.
another way for the attribute of thought to express itself. In this respect, if the mind and the body are “one and the same thing,” then the equivalent of ratios of motion and rest of extension can be said to be parallel in the mind as proportions of adequate ideas (and what concepts and images they are in relation to). Our proportions of the power of effects cannot be defined as representations. Recall that in 2p13 the idea of a mode can be taken as the object of an adequate idea, even while the expression of that adequate idea is also a mode itself. In other words, in this case the object of an idea is another idea. The attribute of thought has its own kinds of modes, and although they can be understood as immediate and infinite in certain determinate ways, mediated and infinite in other determinate ways, or just finite, taking a specific kind of mode as a concept and object of an adequate series of ideas realizes a different kind of affirmation in thought (than simply understanding that ideas are modes of the attribute of thought). In other words, understanding what ideas of ideas are in this system is crucial to unpacking it correctly. This is related to an argument Spinoza makes about judgments of the imagination. He notes that our prejudices (opinions) about the mind's ideas and free will, among other things, “...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.” If an adequate conception of knowledge does not necessarily need words in order to be understood, how will Della Rocca’s explainability thesis and his use of the PSR hold? Not all of our understood and felt concepts need to be explained or are explainable in order to be true. Some

Della Rocca notes an important interpretation problem with 2p13 on page 26. Some translate this proposition as “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is ‘a’ body...” and some as “is ‘the’ body...” The difference is large conceptually. I believe, along with other Spinoza scholars already mentioned in this chapter, that this proposition is to be read in relation to 2p17s where it is referenced, which reads at one part that he has already demonstrated that “the human body exists as we are aware of it (see P13c).” Therefore, it seems we should interpret the correct Latin here as “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body,” as in one's own body and its affections, though this can also be adequately understood as the direct expression of substance itself as eternally self-causing.
can be applied with force and power and, therefore, demonstrate their truth directly.

We can understand how one idea “has more reality, or perfection, then another,” and how that which ideas involve can differ in their types of affirmation. To repeat, “...the affirmation which 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.” Therefore, we may have two adequate ideas that differ completely in their affirmative powers. There is not a representational image for such expressions either. In Letter 17 we read, “The effects of the imagination arise from the constitution either of body or of mind.” It is important to remember while trying to understand this type of system that, as Spinoza writes, “Whether we are 'determined to act' by passion or by reason is a matter of where we locate the causes of our activity.” Locating causes is a mental action. We find more support in Chapter 13 of the TTP where Spinoza emphasizes that we are not to think of God as having motion when concentrating on the nature of extension, but as ratios of motion and rest, including our own ratio. Thus, the cause of my motion is the result of a law of Nature that is an expression of God, but I am only to concentrate my understanding of the natural phenomena of the law of Nature itself. My expressions will be different in intensity from yours. Substance cannot negate itself so when I die, it is simply a new ratio of motion and rest that my body has in relation to Nature.

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223 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p49s II, IIIA (iii), and IIIB (iii): 64-67, italics added.
227 This is another place where I think one can argue effectively against Della Rocca as he ends his article on how to use the PSR with the conclusion that when thinking about existence and the PSR “the contrast need not be seen as holding between two existing things.” How can we think clearly and distinctly about existence if the definition includes that it need not exist as something real? To equate (treat?) existence and the PSR as identical, as one thing, is more along the lines of what Hegel tried to accomplish, yet Spinoza allows for causal laws of nature to be built into the essence of things as early as the TIE. These laws, however, can be used and expressed in arrangements that are also conceived as infinite, whereas there are times the definition of what I am, as a finite mode, cannot be understood as causally infinite.
after death. The “awareness” of such a process and transition, the parallel attribute of thought in action, is where the current debate is located still today.

As Macherey holds, we are able to explain the fact that substance proceeds from cause to its effects (as modifications and synthesis) in generating itself. Substance's continual generation of itself is its effect. We cannot define Spinoza's use of the PSR as simply that “every fact must be explainable.” There may also just be too many facts in Nature to explain them all anyway. They are infinite in expression. Spinoza's use of a version of the PSR understands identity that proceeds in explanation from that which is self-caused (substance, God) to the nature of its generated effects (modifications of modifications of substance).228 In this way, I believe we can gather a tremendous amount of support for a non-representational counter-reading, including support from E3p37, p47, p49, p53-54, 4p7, p8, p9, p14, p18 (and several other related propositions). Perhaps Spinoza makes this most clear when he writes in the preface to E4, “Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, that is, the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard for its duration.”229 The understanding of the essence of singular things, as we will read in Chapter Five, is intuitive understanding.

My reading of Spinoza’s theory of affects is a way to argue against Della Rocca’s theory

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228 Mendal Sachs draws a nice summary of what we are also talking about above when he writes on physics and what it means to attempt measurements of that which is always in motion: “To predict the motion of a "test body," one must first solve for the field solutions corresponding to the entire closed system, and then take the asymptotic limit in which the system appears to manifest itself as a part very weakly coupled to the rest of the closed system, treating this part as a "test body." It is important to note, however, that no matter how closely one may approach the limit where there would appear to be an actual uncoupling of the test body from the rest, the actual limit cannot be reached, in principle. The closed system is not composed of separable parts! This is a conceptual view of the oneness of the universe in accordance with Spinoza's philosophy. Such an existential approach is also taken in Einstein's unified field theory. This is a view that asserts the elementarity of relation, not as a set of secondary restraints on relata, but rather as a basic order that is primary to an understanding of the real, substantive universe. It is an order in terms of fundamental relations, in the sense of logically necessary connections, where no manifestation of the universe, be it man or elementary particle, is unconnected from the rest of the single closed system. In this view, what appear as relata in atomistic philosophies play the secondary role of being derivative features, following from the underlying abstract relations that are the laws of nature.” At this point, I turn to quantum mechanics.

229 Spinoza, Ethics, 4 preface: 116.
of representation. To conclude, we can examine how and why Spinoza references our experiences of (psychological) freedom, love, sadness, affects as effects, and passages to greater perfection, but he also references the use of powerful images and imaginative knowledge in creating more affirmative affects. We read in 3p47 that when we are sad it is often because the memory of what caused our sadness is still vivid: “While the image of the thing still remains, this determination is, indeed, restrained by the memory of those things that exclude its existence; but it is not taken away. And so man rejoices only insofar as this determination is restrained.”

Restraining a certain type of imaginative determination is a rational affirmation because our adequate knowledge understands which imaginative determinations need restraining and why. Clearly, our adequate knowledge about joy and sadness is not enough. We need to include, as a general affect that we experience and feel, those memories that are strong enough to overtake the existence of the thing we are recalling to mind. This is because such things reduce our tenacity and capacity to thrive. In this way, ideas of the imagination have their own type of existence because memories are in existence for us, they are real, but as singular memories the object they refer to may not be real. In fact, in restraining them there is no real way to explain what exactly is becoming passive and what is becoming active through a theory of representation. Therefore, their object is directly related to the proportions of other types of ideas we associate with them, such as the imaginative idea of freedom from a past danger or “evil” (which Spinoza refers to directly). In many places, including the previous 3p43 (which also references 3p37), we learn that our striving “will be greater or lesser in proportion to the affect from which it arises.”

Conatus is a striving, a tendency, and it is clear that the strength of that striving is in direct relation to our changing affects of which we are aware in conscious reflection. We read in 4p14,

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230 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p47: 94.
231 Ibid. 3p43, p. 93.
adequate knowledge of what is true is not enough, as “no affect can be restrained” by this true knowledge “but only insofar as it is considered as an affect.” So the restraining of certain imaginative ideas spoken about above can only occur if the ideas are understood as an organic whole of force and motion expressed in an affect that has degrees of power. This changes the strength of our desire because the affect that desire arose from (by necessity) is stronger. And recall that desire is “the very essence of man.” True knowledge cannot be used to restrain affects necessarily. Only stronger affects can achieve this according to Spinoza’s dynamic epistemological system. Conscious reflection is required for such a task. It’s where the propelling force of intellectual power, creativity, and joy arises. Our method is what aids us in recognizing what ideas we are affirming or denying and locate the cause of our affects.

We also learn in 3p48 and p49 that our understanding of causes can increase or diminish the power of the affects we are experiencing. E3p49 reads, “Given an equal cause of love, love toward a thing will be greater if we imagine the thing to be free than if we imagine it to be necessary...” This is telling because it means that, at times, a stronger, affirmative affect is experienced if we rely on an imaginative idea rather than an adequate one. Awareness of the laws of Nature helps generate stronger affects.

Where things get really interesting is in what Spinoza writes next as the demonstration. He notes, “A thing we imagine to be free must be perceived through itself, without others (by ID7).” We are all affected differently by the same object (3p51). We also judge from our own affects what is good or bad, better or worse for us, and we can suspend this judgment, as stated above. Noted in 2p49, the rational suspension of judgment is a perception and an affirmation. It is the affirmation of a series of inadequate thoughts, but an affirmation that we are understanding

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233 Ibid. 4p15: 123.
234 Ibid. 3p47: 95.
how to use such ideas, which is clearly a rationally adequate series of understanding about natural phenomena. The diversity of expressions of this kind are infinite: “it follows that men can vary as much in judgment as in affect” and, as already noted from the TTP, the more certain terms are used to describe things, the more we come to believe that we have adequately described the thing in question. If this is a real problem, then explanations can also become a real problem when they are inaccurate and yet perpetuated. Spinoza writes, “...we can deduce more affects than those which are usually indicated by the acceptance of words. So it is clear that the names of the affects are found more from the ordinary usage [of words] than from an accurate knowledge [of the affects.]” Naming something (description) is, therefore, not enough for understanding things. The explainability and inexplicability thesis won’t hold if understanding Spinoza’s system in the ways I have outlined in this chapter. As Syliane Malinowski-Charles writes, “it is all a matter of a question of proportion between adequate and inadequate knowledge...” Words are always, for Spinoza, a part of inadequate, partial knowledge. There are other ways to express what one knows, particularly by application.

As one last claim of support for my reading on the nature of our affects and their role in strengthening not only adequate knowledge, but also imaginative ideas and images which can aid reason, consider what Yirmiyahu Yovel writes: “Cognitive events are at the same time affective events.” Spinoza confirms this as early as the TEI where he writes that what we are to pay most attention to is “the way we become aware” of our changing ideas. The way we become aware of powerful knowledge is directly needed in a theory of human consciousness as a result. We are always to reflect on our power of action in existence, and we can do this through

235 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p49: 63. This is also an important point also noted by Genieve Lloyd in Spinoza and the Ethics.
236 Ibid. 3p51: 52, 96-97.
238 Yovel, Desire and Affect, 53.
239 See all of Spinoza’s TIE paragraphs 31, 35, and especially 41.
reflecting on and altering our dispositions and affects. As Anthony Paul Smith writes, reason guides our affects and our affects guide reasoning in ways that become actions, that is, “...they become acts through being known.” This places the singular experience of wonder within an important current debate as well, particularly because some believe Spinoza felt wonder could move us with great accuracy and joy if used well with other series of rational ideas. Others, such as Piet Steenbakkers, believes that wonder is left solely to the imagination as a passive (and thus less forceful) response to our environment.

Other explanations are possible against a reading from a theory of mind and representation perspective, but in 2011 we find more support for where Della Rocca goes off course. Because his interpretation of Spinoza has been so influential in North America, it is important to gather as much alternative support as possible. In Mogens Laerke’s essay, “Spinoza's Cosmological Argument in the Ethics,” the author argues that Della Rocca's reading has gone wrong from the start. The reading won’t work because of how DR interprets 1p11D3 and Letter 12, both already cited in this chapter in detail. Spinoza's system is directly relating to the continuous transformation of our affects within a singular theory of human reflective consciousness which we have learned about in later books of the Ethics.

Letter 12 is highly relevant to this conversation. Spinoza lucidly writes that we can understand the same thing in one of two ways, either by its definition alone or by its cause (which can alter depending on what kind of knowledge we are using and why). The latter is about the use of the PSR, but the former is something entirely different. It seems Della Rocca, in combining both the nature of definitions (explanation) and of causality, collapses these two

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240 Smith, *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy*, 61. Paul Wienpahl, in his work *Radical Spinoza*, also writes, “At its very abrupt end BdS was using 'perceiving,' 'thinking,' and 'understanding' interchangeably...(107)” I would agree.

241 Steenbakkers, “The Passions According to Lodewijk Meyer,” in * Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, Ethica III, 200. Steenbakkers writes, “In EIIIdef.aff.4exp, Spinoza ranks wonder as imagination and he does not, for that reason, number it among the affects.”
distinctions that Spinoza goes to great lengths to remind us to keep separate.\textsuperscript{242} Spinoza is clear both here and throughout the \textit{Ethics} that we must learn how to distinguish between that which only the intellect can comprehend from that which can also be apprehended by both the intellect and the imagination together to create greater affects. The main reason is that “its parts cannot be equated with or explicated by any number, although we may know its maximum and its minimum.”\textsuperscript{243}

The point about what can be comprehended \textit{by the intellect alone} is very important here. Letter 12 states that the imagination \textit{cannot} adequately comprehend the nature of Substance or Eternity. In other words, there is no real representation of reality possible if examining only imaginative ideas. This is important because for Della Rocca's interpretation to be correct, that \textit{all} ideas are representations of the affections of our bodies, he would have to say that these representations then do not, in any way, involve imaginative ideas when thinking through the nature of Substance or Eternity. In other words, he would have to show that no part what-so-ever of imaginative knowledge is used when comprehending the true definition of Substance or Eternity in his reading, a position I demonstrated is not possible to maintain.

In addition, in this same letter Spinoza notes that the concepts of “number,” “measure,” and “time” are simply “aids to the imagination” and, therefore, cannot be conceived as truly infinite by definition. I believe Della Rocca needs, at the least, the concept of measure for both his explicability thesis and number for his numerical identity arguments to be true. Explicability is a concept of measure, that relies on the nature of words to explain what was previously thought unexplainable (i.e., to measure and understand “facts” about Nature). The concept of “facts” is a numerical concept in many ways, as well. But modes of Substance, Spinoza

\textsuperscript{242} Spinoza, Letter 12: 787.  
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 787.
continues, cannot be fully understood using these kinds of concepts. Direct adequate application of the knowledge of reality as natural phenomena is what we experience with stronger rational affects. We learn that there is also a difference between “mental constructs” and “real things” for Spinoza, something that I believe Della Rocca does not pay enough attention to. For him mental constructs are real things, they are facts about Nature. The problem with “facts” is that many of them change over time with shifting paradigms of knowledge and methods of investigation, hence the requirement that reason be able to defer to others (for democratic fluidity in a state for example) or suspend its assertions of certainty when needed. Furthermore, some things may be explainable about any one complex thing, while other aspects or properties of that same thing may never be explainable, as Spinoza also addresses in Letter 60 later in his life.²⁴⁴

Therefore, in conclusion, as substance can be understood as one, eternal, self-causing, organic whole alongside an adequate understanding that the attributes of thought and extension are separate (in the sense that they can be conceived through themselves and are only modally distinct), we can then understand how we are both individuals and collective assemblages of desire and power with other bodies. Affects are something other than emotions. They are real expressions of natural phenomena and they increase and decrease in force. This is clearly stated in 5p39s where we read that a mind becomes more capable the more it is conscious of its own ideas, of God, and of things.²⁴⁵ Our feelings and our ideas give rise to variations in affects, but also to reflective awareness. We find more evidence of this in E2p19-23 and 2p31. There is always more to learn. Such an awareness of this law of thought in reflection makes more

²⁴⁴ Spinoza writes in Letter 60, “...I assert absolutely that from certain properties of a thing (whatever be the given idea) some things can be discovered more easily and others with great difficulty – though they all concern the nature of the thing.”

²⁴⁵ Spinoza, Ethics, 5p39s: 178-179. “And really, he who, like an infant or child, has a body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes, has a mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things. On the other hand, he who has a body capable of a great many things, has a mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things.”
learning possible.246 We are allotted these experiences in duration, but the laws of Nature operate in the same way structurally for all. But the variations in power that affects create is an organic combination of both knowledge and affections. Our singular imagination, memory, and language use can only take place if our body endures, but our expressions can cause effects in series of relations with other ideas and bodies for eternity. Singular reflective awareness requires some sense of organic identity. This is why Spinoza writes in 3p53 and p54, “When the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices, and does so the more distinctly it imagines itself and its power of acting.” We then read, “The mind strives to imagine only those things which posit its power of acting.”247 Spinoza draws a direct reference in the final thoughts of the Ethics for us to reflect back on 2p40s again, the well-known epistemological proposition. Why? Because the more we learn, the more we understand that there is more to learn. This brings us joy in both ways, bodily and as energy given, as well as by having three kinds of ideas to use and experience.

Our power of thought, or reflective thought as action, is diminished when we experience the sad affects. As we learn in the list of affects in E3, an affect of sadness can be an action, but it is an action as “a passing to a lesser perfection.”248 It is similar to what we might think of as a slowing down of a motion or not putting all of one’s energy into something when we are aware that we could. Do you call this action less motion or do you call it a coming to rest? For Spinoza, it is simply a shift in the intensity of motion and rest as a ratio. So an affect can be understood as always in action in this way. It is an action that increases our power to act or that which

246 One can refer back to E2p13 lemmas 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 for continued support of this chapter's conclusions.
248 Ibid. 3AffIII: 104. Further, in the preface to E4 we read, “For nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause. And whatever follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause happens necessarily.” In my reflective action, that is, I become an expression of the efficient cause of Nature immanently and understand myself as an adequate cause.
decreased our power to act as an increase or slowing down of our motion. Therefore, both the imagination and reason are needed to work together to reflect on one's power of thought and motion. This new affect includes adequate thinking about our power of acting, which is then increased by such understanding. This is Spinoza's proto-physics of motion and dynamic epistemology of ideational force. It is an ethic because, when we understand how the mind can reflect on itself in its actions and on the body and mind in its affects, it is nothing more or less than a “strength of character” with tenacity according to BdS.\(^{249}\) E4Def8 reads, “By virtue and power I understand the same thing...” and virtue is “nothing but acting from the laws of one's own nature.”\(^{250}\) I believe this is directly related to what is stated in 2p7, 2p11, and 2p40. The first idea of the mind is the body because “The striving to preserve oneself is the first and only foundation of virtue. For no other principle can be conceived prior to this one (by P22) and no virtue can be conceived without it (by P21).”\(^{251}\) This is why suicide would not be permitted in such a system as well. Reason strives “for nothing but understanding,” its essence is one's mind “insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly...” and “this striving for understanding (by P22C) is the first and only foundation of virtue...”\(^{252}\) But affirming one’s increase in power can also be a sad passion. Affirming one's increase in power when one errors in reasoning is an example of a sad passion. The power is not increased, though, in the same intense proportion and causal influence if it were a joyous passion or a series of adequate common notions.

There is not an identity between thought and extension because they are substance – substance just expressed in two different ways infinitely. Although common notions are adequate

\(^{249}\) Spinoza, Ethics, 3p58-59: 102. It is also clear in 3p58 that we can have both joyous passions and joyous actions as an affect.

\(^{250}\) Ibid. 4D8: 117. Recall, at the end of E3 we read that an affect that is a passion is “a confused idea, by which the mind affirms of its body….a greater or lesser force of existing than before, which….determines the mind to think of this rather than that...” This is the key to understanding all of Spinoza’s system.

\(^{251}\) Ibid. 4p22c: 127. I believe you cannot read the infamous 2p7 and 2p11 without relating them to this proposition.

\(^{252}\) Ibid. 4p25-26: 128. Further, to have adequate ideas is simply to be capable of reasoning with force.
ideas we all share (as they are the common properties of things which are true), imaginative knowledge is highly singular in its internal processes (and it involves ratios and proportions). One reason why it is beneficial to us and our survival and use of energy includes, by necessity, that we must work towards understanding more about this process. That is, a regular aspect of our daily ways of living and knowing, of understanding and doing, includes strengthening reasoning, and allowing ourselves to use certain imaginative ideas to do so as well.

For Spinoza, every idea we have does not represent its “counterpart bodily mode and also the external cause of that bodily mode,” as Della Rocca concludes is necessary, and which 5p4s demonstrates is not where we should direct our attention and reflection. As 3p56 and p57 make so clear, the more we are affected in a way in which what we imagine involves both ourselves and bodies external to us, the more we are acted upon. But the more we imagine our own power of thought regardless of temporality and external causes, combined with reasoning about the laws of thought themselves, the more we act and the less we are acted upon. “It is enough, I say, for us to understand the common properties of the affects and of the mind, so that we can determine what sort of power, and how great a power, the mind has to moderate and restrain the affects.” If affects were only “special kinds of ideas,” why would Spinoza develop Books 3 and 4 of the Ethics in the ways cited here? “No life, then, is rational without understanding, and things are good only insofar as they aid man to enjoy the life of the mind, which is defined by understanding...all those things of which man is the efficient cause must be good...” Spinoza's ethics are clear:

I do not say these things in order to infer that it is better to be ignorant than to know, or that there is no difference between the fool and the man who understands when it comes to moderating the affects. My reason, rather, is that it is necessary to come to know both

253 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p4s: 164.
254 Ibid. 3p56-57: 100-101.
255 Ibid. 4 App V: 155-156.
our nature's power and its lack of power, so that we can determine what reason can do in moderating the affects, and what it cannot do... Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone loves himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead a man to greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can. This, indeed, is as necessarily true as that the whole is greater than its parts...²⁵⁶

CHAPTER 5
PROPORTIONS AND MAGNITUDES OF SINGULAR ESSENCES:
JOY AS THE PASSAGE TO GREATER PERFECTION

“I may desire absolutely and forever a revelation of a moment.”
-Simone de Beauvoir

“A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea.”
-Gilles Deleuze

“...the greater complexity of the human body does not 'causally' explain consciousness in the mind. This would violate the causal and explanatory separation that exists between the attributes of Thought and Extension in Spinoza's parallelism; no mode of Thought can be causally affected by a mode of Extension, and no state or property of a mode of Thought has its causal explanation in a state or property of a mode of Extension. The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute' (IIP6). ...what I am claiming is that for Spinoza, human consciousness just 'is' the greater complexity of the human body as this is manifested under the attribute of Thought.”
-Steven Nadler

The Intellectual Love of God and Nature

The title of this chapter is a reference to the third kind of knowledge (intuition) that we find in Spinoza's genetic epistemology. Intuitive knowledge is conceived both as something eternal in its truth and as the singular intellectual love of God. As we read in the opening definitions and axioms of E1, all things are either in themselves or in something else.¹ From a given determinate cause(s) there follows an effect(s).² The knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of its cause (or at least some partial or proximate knowledge of its cause).³ Things that have nothing in common with one another cannot be conceptually

¹ Spinoza, Ethics, 1D3, 1D5, and especially 1Ax1 and Ax2: 1-2.
² Ibid. 1Ax3: 2.
³ Ibid. 1Ax4: 2.
understood through each other, nor can they be the cause of each other.\textsuperscript{4} This is also applicable for the process of combining an immanent system with other elements important to rational beings – rational beings who contemplate their immanence as expressions of that system. A true idea must agree with that of which it is an idea (have something in common with the object of the idea).\textsuperscript{5} Finally, if a thing can be conceived as not existing, its essence cannot involve existence.\textsuperscript{6} Therefore, substance is one organic and eternal expression of itself as its attributes. Their effects or modifications (modes) are conceived through substance as expressions of it. We are an expression of substance as “bodies conceived as complex patterns of movement,” and intuitive knowledge is both the direct awareness of the laws of our attributes (of which we are an expression) and also an open possibility to combine with and understand other singular essences.

This chapter focuses on one way to interpret the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza's dynamic epistemology. In the scholarship, the nature of intuition in Spinoza’s system is one of the most challenging concepts to unpack and one of the most controversial. As we've seen, the necessity of the laws of Nature do not absolve the rational capacity to speak about a “God.” Spinoza writes that, “...the inevitable necessity of things does not do away with either divine or human laws.”\textsuperscript{7} Using reason alone does not allow for intuitive knowing or Spinoza would have only needed to identify two types of knowledge instead of three. Intuitive knowing is its own kind of knowledge but we use ideas of both the imagination and reason to develop it. This is apparent as we use language, words, and calculative deductions in order to understand and explain what we are reflecting on. Spinoza was, in many ways, myopically focused on thinking about what a God might be. For instance, he writes the following: “...Nature's bounds are not set

\textsuperscript{4} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1Ax5, 1p3: 2-3.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. 1Ax6: 2.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. 1D1: 1.
\textsuperscript{7} Spinoza, Letter 43: 879, italics added. We can refer to the end of E1p15, 1p16 and 2p9c for more support.

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by the laws of human reason which aim only at man's true interest and his preservation, but by
infinite other laws which have regard to the eternal order of the whole of Nature, of which man is
but a particle.”⁸ At the least, we can conclude that he believed there was “one Being which
subsists through its own sufficiency or force. This I not only affirm, but undertake to prove from
the basis, that its nature involves necessary existence.”⁹ To have beliefs is one disposition and to
use common notions regularly is another disposition. However, the expression of intuitive
understanding is in the act of combining rational beliefs, regular habitual practices, and increases
in the power of thought and activity with others.¹⁰ For Spinoza, these human expressions are as
close to God as we'll ever express (as he makes clear in E1p25c, 5p24, and 5p25).¹¹ In this way,
we are God or Nature. As Steve Nadler writes, “The knowledge of God just is the knowledge of
Nature in its broadest dimension.”¹²

As we'll see, intuitive knowing is “difficult and rare.” When we achieve intuitive
knowing we have the clearest knowledge we can have without the need to rely on “hearsay, or
experience, or the art of reasoning, because by [one’s] penetration [one] sees the proportion in all
such calculations immediately.”¹³ Yet, this immediacy does not last. Singular imaginative sense
perceptions and memories, for example, are always shaping our affects continuously as well.
Intuitive knowing will include more than “our being convinced by reasons,” but it will also
include “our feeling and enjoying the thing itself...”¹⁴ You cannot feel and enjoy any theory,
person, event, encounter, relation, affect, or knowledge without applying it directly to your own

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⁸ Spinoza, *TTP*, chapter 16: 528.
⁹ Spinoza, Letter 35: 855. This letter specifically addresses Spinoza's logical understanding of a God. I find it adds
striking evidence that he felt he was not an atheist or a materialist.
¹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 5 preface: 160. Spinoza writes that “much practice and application are required” for restraining
the power of regular affects which we experience daily. This too is a form of operational knowledge.
¹¹ Ibid. 5p24, 5p25: 173.
¹⁴ Ibid. chapter 2:2: 63.
life and experiences “because when we know and enjoy what is best, that which is worst has no power over us.”\textsuperscript{15} At the least, intuitive knowledge overrides those proportions of motion and rest we experience singularly that decrease our power to exist by enhancing those elements in us (proportionally) that increase our power to exist.

Intuition is joyous, instantly applicable, and useful in its expression for singular individuals.\textsuperscript{16} It is the direct awareness (alertness) in conscious reflection of our \textit{conatus} (and not only of our existence). It is adequate knowledge and, therefore, knowledge of the essence of singular things. It is both an intellectual intuition coupled with a sensuous felt action and effect(s) in the form of an affect(s). This knowledge is crucial because, as we read in E2p24, it is the communication of motion between the parts of one whole, thus involve essence.\textsuperscript{17} Singular things are understood in E1p28 as finite things with a determinate existence, as that which is capable of producing effects by another finite cause.\textsuperscript{18} The awareness of the power of our singular essence (\textit{conatus}) includes the intellectual love of God. However, as each singular thing has its own determinate essence, we can, therefore, not always hold that the concepts of “cause” and “essence” are easily inter-changeable (as demonstrated in Chapter 4). For example, even though we express two of God’s infinite attributes, God’ essence differs from our own in many ways.

Martial Gueroult's famous essay on Spinoza's letter(s) on the infinite is helpful for

\textsuperscript{15} Spinoza, \textit{KV}, chapter 2:19: 87, footnote 16.
\textsuperscript{16} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 5p33: 175. In 5p38s, Spinoza writes that the “greater the mind's clear and distinct knowledge,” the “more the mind loves God.” Therefore, all three types of knowledge are both immanently and metaphysically related. The same “rules of reason” apply to us even if we are not yet aware of the eternal nature of our capacities for comprehension, as is evident in 5p41. Therefore, becoming aware of this must include an automatic increase in the power to reason itself.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 2p24: 49.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 1p28: 19: “...all modes (by P25C) are nothing but affections of God's attributes.” Add this to the opening proposition of the \textit{Ethics} that substance is prior to its affections and we can deduce that the best logical way to understand Spinoza's system requires that one adequately understand what substance and attributes are before addressing the nature of modes.
understanding Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge. On the infinity of substance and indivisibility of modal expressions as substance, Gueroult concludes that both can logically derive from substance as self-caused. He writes, “Indeed, whatever necessarily exists of itself cannot, without contradiction, be deprived of any part whatever of its existence; consequently, it is necessarily infinite and excludes any partitioning.”\textsuperscript{19} This deductive conclusion also applies both to the concept of eternity and magnitude, rationally understood, “insofar as it is conceived as the extension of bodies.”\textsuperscript{20} In other words, the infinite divisibility of modes is the same as the eternal indivisibility of substance with infinite attributes expressed modally in infinite ways. This is not a numerical distinction. Gueroult continues, “Indeed, just as modes, \textit{qua} modes are conceivable only through substance...so, too, the endless divisibility of the continuous, which is that of modes, is conceivable only through the indestructible subsistence in them of an indivisible absolute...”\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Both reason and the imagination are needed to understand the inter-relatedness of both.} In our adequate knowledge we conceive that it is the attributes which are understood as eternal because they are, like substance, conceived through themselves.\textsuperscript{22} Gueroult writes that the divisible and finite \textit{cannot} explain the indivisible and infinite, but “being explained by them, are henceforth reconciled with them.” In this way we can conceive of the infinite indivisibility of substance as already complete in each modal expression.\textsuperscript{23} Why? Because, as definitions are very important in Spinoza's system, the definition of that which is indivisible is always complete and is “equally in the part as in the whole,” as Spinoza writes. This is how Gueroult can then deduce:

\begin{quote}
...Hence, every mode, whether small or large, envelops within itself the indivisibility of infinite substance... But, after the understanding has been returned to its authentic
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Gueroult, “Spinoza's Letter on the Infinite,” 182, 184 (as found in Marjorie Grene's anthology \textit{Spinoza: A Collection of Essays}).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 184.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 193.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 194.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 195.
constitution, substance, by the same stroke, is restored to its true nature, and since its infinity as well as its indivisibility are grasped genetically from its necessary existence, they are imposed upon us in their full intelligibility. In this way light penetrates Metaphysics. ...The antinomy regarding the divisibility of matter is then resolved in favor of the Infinite. Thus, light penetrates Physics as it penetrates Metaphysics. ...My duration is my existence posited by the immanent and eternal act of substance...24

As we read in the TTP, “This is the point we have demonstrated above, namely, that our intellect and knowledge depend solely on the idea or our understanding of God, and spring from it and are perfected by it.”25 As Steven Nadler cites in one of his works, “…what is most advantageous to a rational being is the perfection of its proper and 'better' part, that is, the rational faculty or intellect. And what perfects the intellect, bringing it to its ideal condition, is knowledge. ...to know God is ultimately to have an adequate causal understanding of natural phenomena.”26 Clearly, though, it is also to have the rationally efficient capacity to comprehend logical deductions about both substance and modes as found above in Gueroult's insights. Finite things cause other finite things within each respective attribute to produce effects as natural phenomena, but as God's affections (modes) are the direct expression of substance God must be conceived as “the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not [a proximate cause] in his own kind...”27 The intellectual love of God, or “blessedness,” is defined most directly in E5p32: “Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause.” He ends by saying that this is called the amor intellectus Dei.28 This may be close to what Lucretius writes in De

25 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 4: 434.
26 Nadler, A Book Forged in Hell, 147.
27 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p28s: 20. Our ideas must agree with their objects as “what is contained objectively in the intellect must necessarily be in Nature” and, therefore, any intellect (finite or infinite) “must comprehend God's attributes and God's affections, and nothing else.”
28 Ibid. 5p32: 175. We also read in 5p36s that “the essence of our mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and foundation.” Therefore, to intuitively understand the essence of ourselves as a singular thing is to express God and the intellectual love of God with as much force as a human being is capable.
Rerum Natura regarding the power to understand causes or vivida vis animi. In introducing one of Gilles Deleuze's works on Spinoza and intuitive knowing, Robert Hurley references Deleuze's reading of the intellectual love of God as a type of understanding which is “performed with the maximum perspective possible,” and in which one doesn't necessarily need to follow the deductive method exactly as it is found in the Ethics. In point of fact, “the intuitive of affective reading may be more practical anyway.” Why? Because our “units of understanding are not propositions but acts.” In his larger work on Spinoza, Deleuze writes, “The production of all ideas, starting from the idea of God, is of itself a reproduction of all the things in Nature; the sequence of ideas has no need to copy the sequence of things… An adequate idea is thus an expressive idea… Method leads us to the highest thought, that is, leads us as quickly as possible to the idea of God.”

E2p1 states that our singular thoughts are modes. When we rationally regard something as “good” we find a certain kind of confidence and perspective “unmixed with any sorrow” regardless of context. Although we may not call it “good,” this also applies when we understand that something could not have been otherwise. But we have to be careful because what human beings decide is good relates to what they desire: “By good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be.”

30 Deleuze, Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, iii.
31 Ibid, ii. In the anthology Spinoza Now there is a debate regarding the nature of 'joyful passions' in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza that I have already commented on earlier in this thesis and in my book review of this anthology appearing in the journal Critical Horizons. To add to this debate, I find Deleuze's comment in the work cited here to be telling when he writes, “So the conatus is an effort to augment the power of acting or to experience joyful passions... (101).”
32 Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 138-139. This entire work deserves more scholarly attention.
33 Spinoza, KV, part 2:9, 74.
34 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p39s: 91. What we name as 'good' might include more a common usage of the term to generalize many things instead of what Spinoza feels is more important which is knowledge of affects (3p52s).
are better goods for us when speaking about the intellectual love of God?

As we read in 2p17s, our bodies exist “as we are aware of them” and, therefore, as we reflect on our affects, we can rearrange our affects and compare various ideas we are having with a stronger understanding of the relations between types of knowledge.\(^\text{35}\) As we accomplish this level of reflection, our conatus increases and we are, as Spinoza says, ready for anything. In loving our own increase in power in rational comprehension and action, God (Nature) is expressing itself in its perfection. However, decreases in power are also a part of Nature's perfection (just to a lesser degree of force). In *The God of Spinoza* Richard Mason summarizes one interpretation regarding the intellectual love of God on a singular level:

The system is meant to be self-propelling. Knowledge of nature – of our nature – can lead to virtue because we will correctly understand our interests as part of our nature, and we want such knowledge because our nature also includes a positive drive towards *activity* – an accumulation of truths and a diminution of falsehoods. We want knowledge not because truth is attractive – that would be teleology – but because the positive side of our nature has a drive towards it... We may think that a way of life, a religion, is based on all sorts of human needs, wishes, hopes or desires. It is certainly based on an historical and social position. People can and do act well without what he sees as true beliefs. But if they cultivate the positive part of their natures they will seek true beliefs about themselves and about their location in nature. The *reason* or cause to do that is to be simplified in the basic drive of conatus. Why be religious? means the same as, why live a life of piety and virtue? With suitable research, we will see that this is our nature, it is in our interest. How do we know that? Because that is how we are. We cannot look further.\(^\text{36}\)

Some may argue that we are not naturally disposed towards virtue. In contrast, a Spinozist would respond in a twofold manner. First, she would agree with you in part, as Spinoza writes in both the *TTP* and the *TP*, men are not, on average, disposed towards using reason well. However, that does not include additionally that such behavior (not thinking well) increases our conatus. Two, if reasoning well was not inclined toward more education for those who do use it

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\(^{35}\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1, 2p17s: 33, 46.

\(^{36}\) Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 145-146. We can look to Letter 76 here also where Spinoza writes that he knows that he has discovered the truest method of rational contemplation as clearly as he knows the three sides of a triangle.
with more strength (or desire to), then one would have to adequately address what it is disposed towards. This is because we have this positive aspect in our nature that drives us towards understanding our shared natures. This simultaneously includes the following insights: 1) understanding that we have diverse singular desires, 2) learning about human psychology, 3) necessary social interactions, and 4) the necessity of social-emotional collectives. This is evident in E4p73 and the 4 appendix.\textsuperscript{37} As we will see, we are to “accommodate” ourselves “in ways nearly infinite” according to the guidance of reason and continuous understanding of all things human and humanly perceivable; this is something we also read about repeatedly prior to books 4 and 5 of the \textit{Ethics}. If we are to seek the highest “human good,” then using adequate thinking is something “good” which makes human beings their own efficient cause.\textsuperscript{38} This is also stated clearly in 5p39 where we read the following: “\textit{He who has a body capable of a great many things has a mind whose greatest part is eternal}.”\textsuperscript{39} With understanding such things more freedom follows. Stuart Hamshire writes, “The mind is active and free when, and only when, the argument is strict, when the conclusion of a passage of thought is internally determined by the thinking process itself.”\textsuperscript{40} Hampshire writes elsewhere, “...for at the highest level of knowledge Nature is presented \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}; Nature must be understood, not as a temporal sequence of events, but as a logical sequence of modifications necessarily connected with each other... In so far as the ideas which constitute my mind add up to such a logical sequence of ideas, reflecting the true order of Nature, my mind becomes part of the infinite idea of God.

\textsuperscript{37} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p74, 4 appendix: 154-160: “For this reason, he strives most of all to conceive things as they are in themselves...”

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. 4 appendix II: 155. In Letter 60 Spinoza also writes, “…I follow this one rule, that the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause.” Sam Shirley notes at this point of his translation of this letter is more evidence that, like Hobbes, Spinoza was concerned with generative and constructive definitions that express Nature.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. 5p39: 178. It should be noted here that Piet Steenbakkers has written about the problem with translating 5p40 correctly. This is primarily because there is evidence of this part of the \textit{Ethics} being edited potentially during the months leading up to and after Spinoza's death by friends within his publishing circle who also cared deeply about his work. It is important because 5p40 involves the nature of intuitive knowing, activity, passivity, and perfection.

\textsuperscript{40} Hampshire, \textit{Spinoza and Spinozism}, 177.
When we are dealing with *material* and *efficient* causes then we can also say that we are talking about physics, whereas when discussing *formal* or *final* causes, traditionally speaking, the topic was usually referred to as metaphysics. Spinoza invented a new way to think about both simultaneously, but without the use of teleological concepts. This claim is why we can return in this chapter to the infamous epistemological proposition E2p40s2 where, regarding intuition specifically, we learn, “And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.” He proceeds to explain all three kinds of knowledge through one example regarding understanding proportionals. And what is the essence of singular things, but *humana natura* as *communem hominum conditionem*? This idea about the nature of essence is reinforced in E5p31 where we read about becoming the formal cause of the third kind of knowledge that we can have: “Therefore, the more each of us is able to achieve in this kind of knowledge, the more he is conscious of himself and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is.” Steve Nadler adds to this writing about intuitive knowing, “In fact, Spinoza's intellectual love of God is the key to dispelling fear and hope, not generating them... It involves not passivity but activity and an appreciation of one's own powers and their cause. It is, in Spinoza's view, the proper accompaniment of virtue.” This is true, but it does not exactly square with other relevant

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41 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 132, “…so far and under these conditions, my mind is itself eternal.”
42 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p40s2: 57. In addition, 2p45 makes clear the distinction between the second kind of knowledge as common notions and the third kind of knowledge which is about singular essences, and, therefore, not composed of only common notions shared by all.
43 As found in a footnote of Sam Shirley's translation of *TP* (11:6). Human nature is understood as “a general set of individual properties.”
44 Ibid. 5p31s: 175.
45 Nadler, *Spinoza*, 152. Nadler is considered one of the world's foremost biographers on Spinoza in history. I trust his scholarship. I only ask if we might pay closer attention to the sentiment by Gilles Deleuze which began this thesis where we learn that reading Spinoza can be done by anyone and is for everyone, or rather, anyone can walk away with new knowledge after reading the *Ethics*.
interpretations, such as that of Stuart Hampshire for example. The latter writes, “We know that some of our movements are actions, some are the effects of external forces acting upon us, and some of them are the outcome of a mixture of forces, internal and external. The active-passive distinction is prominent in all our self-awareness and in awareness of our own activities.”

This position or trajectory in interpretation taken in this chapter is supported by, among other places, what is written about being in the present with one's understanding (remaining there clearly) as often as possible in E4p62 and especially p62s. There we read that we are determined by nature to discover if what is in front of us on a daily basis is good for us or not. We can call this our natural biological tendencies for summary purposes, but what is most important is that Spinoza ties this to our evaluations of “good” and “evil.” He finds it highly problematic that we believe we can have continuous adequate knowledge of the duration of things because we cannot. He warns that the reason we cannot is a natural one regarding the powers of singular things who have access to both thought and extension writing:

If we could have adequate knowledge of the duration (by IIP31), and we determine their times of existing only by the imagination (by IIP44S), which is not equally affected by the image of a present thing and the image of a future one. That is why the true knowledge we have of good and evil is only abstract, or universal, and the judgment we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes, so that we may determine what in the present is good or evil for us, is imaginary, rather than real.

Although we can focus more on the physics (natural laws) involved with intuitive knowing, it is important to note that Spinoza did not believe himself an atheist in any sense, once writing that atheists “are usually inordinately fond of honours and riches...” Adequate knowledge through the observation of natural phenomena as the intellectual love of God are the “supreme good.” This brings up an interesting point which has been written about my Michael

46 Hampshire, Spinoza and Spinozism, xli.
47 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p62: 149.
Mack. Blessedness is a level of joy we can experience while interacting with our environment that waxes and wanes in intensity and homeostatic balance, but orienting ourselves towards an unselfish type of preservation is also an element of the intellectual love of God and Spinoza's understanding of eternity. If this is true, and I believe it is at least partially, then those who conclude Spinoza's system is an egoistic ethics are not warranted in their critique. Although it is our singular essence and existence of which we are continuously aware, and this good is that which can be shared by all, it is not only that which is enjoyed by us alone or only to our own benefit.49 This is also evident in E4p51. Comparing the sentiments of Goethe in relation to Spinoza's conception of intuitive knowing and blessedness, Mack writes:

Deepening and developing Spinoza's notion of the intellectual love of God, Goethe proclaims that we are only universal by remaining subjective [singular]... What governs the logic of Spinoza's conatus is the seemingly paradoxical formula according to which $x$ can only be $x$ by not merely being $x$... This type of love is intellectual, because it presupposes that we realize what keeps nature or God from destruction and self-destruction. As such it keeps the selfish passions in check... Keeping the passions in check is not an end in itself. Rather it is a means for performing a new kind of self-preservation: a Spinozist one where the boundaries of the self turn porous so that selfhood overlaps with the life of the other and of others...50

New forms of self-preservation are acutely possible when we are also consciously rationally reflecting on our continually changing passions, especially as we are also aware of how the laws of thought and extension operate as one organic whole while shifting in ratios of motion and rest. This level of awareness allows for more rationally intense interactions with others, something we know is good for us, which also constitutes the feeling of freedom and a joyous affect.

Speaking about the love of God, Spinoza is very clear in the TTP what his conception of

49 “Everyone's true happiness and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of good, not in priding himself that he alone is enjoying that good to the exclusion of others. He who counts himself more blessed because he alone enjoys well being not shared by others...knows not what is true happiness and blessedness...a man's true happiness and blessedness consists solely in wisdom and knowledge of truth, and not in that he is wiser than others, or that others are without true knowledge...”

50 Mack, Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity...; 146-149 (intermittently).
theology is noting, “Theology thus understood, if you consider its percepts and moral teaching, will be found to agree with reason; and if you look to it purpose and end, it will be found to be in no respect opposed to reason, and is therefore valid for all men.”51 This is the nature of what Spinoza, at times, calls blessedness. Salvation and blessedness “consist in the true contentment of mind and we find our true peace only in what we clearly understand...”52 The logical deduction does not include the abolition of all organized religion as Spinoza felt the creation and destruction of varieties of religion was a historical and social process, at times as necessary as any other social phenomena, and he practiced toleration for the varieties of religious ideas of his time in many respects. He was a critic of the historical construction and content of the Bible and other religious texts, and the many uses and abuses of imaginative knowledge for obedience and ritual.

At times, the problem for the philosopher was the concepts used and practices done in the name of salvation. Salvation, in the religious sense, required “simple obedience” and this is one main reason why he rejected it, for it did not require the use of reason and understanding. In addition, as we read in E4p8, there is not a real thing as “evil,” and any knowledge about good or evil “is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness...”53 Note that our knowledge of what is good for us is an affect of joy. Our feeling of joy brings more strength. Further, as Nadler writes:

On Spinoza's view, then, the divine law includes no historical content, no metaphysical doctrines, and no prescriptions of ceremonies. It does not require the belief in any narratives of events in the past, the assent to any philosophical claims about God's nature

52 Ibid. chapter 7: 467. Richard Mason writes in a footnote to the work noted above that part of the origin of the term *salvation* includes the term *salus* which can mean “health,” “well-being,” or as a specific religious connotation. He writes that the term, therefore, was perfect for Spinoza to employ in his own way in his system (161, note 53).
53 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p8: 120. It is particularly interesting to read what Henry Oldenburg writes to Spinoza in Letter 61 as late as 1675 (as the latter is preparing to print and distribute the *Ethics*): “But on considering the whole matter more closely, I find much that convinces me that, so far from intending any harm to true religion and sound philosophy, on the contrary you are endeavoring to commend and establish the true purpose of the Christian religion, together with the divine sublimity and excellence of a fruitful philosophy.”
or about the cosmos and its origins, or the performance of any devotional rituals...⁵⁴

The force of ideas is *substance* as that which is eternally in existence, something that Gueroult was also noting in the passage referenced that began this chapter. Ratios of motion and rest in extension become ratios for motion and rest in practice. We are passionate beings and our levels of power for action often depend on external influences, but if we are conceiving substance adequately, then we understand that we can become the adequate cause of how we conceive things and why. Ideas about ideas “involve knowledge about God insofar as [God] is considered under the attribute of thought, and not under any other attribute.”⁵⁵ The above passage shows that all references to motion are left to the realm of the laws of extension. Also, it shows that our ideas involve not only some knowledge of God (or Nature), but are also expressions of God's ideas determined in a certain (modal) way. Spinoza did *not* desire to eliminate theology. As Warren Montag writes, “Spinoza sought not to convince his readers to abandon theology...but instead to show them how to think rationally within it, in its terms, in a way that not only accepts the premises of any theology, but which even offers itself as theology's strongest defense, thereby turning it against itself.”⁵⁶ Indeed scholars such as Neal Grossman and Charlie Huenemann go so far as to conclude Spinoza's primary epistemological aim was to demonstrate how to properly think about God so in order to increase our power to exist. Huenemann writes:

Spinoza's goal, in other words, is to find something divine in the world... The naturalists among us face a critical decision about how to regard nature. Is it as an arbitrary lodging or a kind of sanctuary? That is a question as alive for us as it was for Spinoza. It is perhaps, in the end, the deepest question anyone can ask... Every understanding of God is set against a backdrop of metaphysics. This backdrop is what makes it an understanding,

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⁵⁴ Nadler, 156.
⁵⁵ Spinoza, Letter 64: 918-919.
⁵⁶ Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, 3-4. This is yet another way to think about ways Spinoza's genetic and dynamic epistemology can be used to invent a type of modern revolutionary politics for rationally powerful actions between bodies.
as an explanation is always a broader context into which we project the phenomena being explained... 57

Spinoza is very clear about his deductions regarding God in the opening propositions of E1. E1p17 and p18 read: “God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, constrained by none” and “God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things.”58 This immanence, on a singular level, has to do with our modal expressions of power in varying degrees of intensity (potestas) and our interactions with other bodies in our environment (potentia), and, therefore, as God/Nature.59 By the time we get to Book 5 of the Ethics, we have already learned that we have to combine both of these aspects while continuing to investigate natural phenomena. With this understanding and use of common notions about the essence of singular things we automatically strive to understand more.60 This increase in our striving involves much more than just a tendency to persist in existence. It also involves more knowledge about God, or Nature. In E5p25 we learn, “The greatest striving of the mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.” We read next in the demonstration of this proposition that this is because intuitive knowledge “proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things...and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God.”61 This knowledge cannot derive from imaginative knowledge alone, but it does involve the first kind of knowledge significantly. Even further, this chapter provides support for the interpretation that what Spinoza was most interested in, however rare, is the

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57 Huenemann, Spinoza's Radical Theology, preface, 32.
58 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p17, p18: 13, 16.
59 A fun reference for more support are the short, lucid chapters in the Spinoza issue of the Funambulist Pamphlets.
60 We can also look at propositions like E4p64 to understand that this concept of essence is necessary for understanding anything adequately at all. Dan Selcer's work is also helpful in understanding how and why this is the case. And if we follow this logical train of thought, we see that ideas about ideas become a crucial concept for understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology adequately; a point Spinoza emphasizes in Letter 64 when he writes, “Therefore…the idea of the idea involves knowledge of God insofar as he is considered under the attribute of thought, and not under any other attribute.”
productive powers in activity between collectives and within singular individuals as the way to
know God and what it is to be human. That is, we learn how to enter into more relations with
others in ways that enhance our joy, understanding, and collective productive powers. This is the
position Daniel Selcer takes, referring to Spinoza's intellectual debt to the work of Francis
Bacon. In his most recent essay from 2014, we learn:

Baconian *scientia operativa* does not consist in the injunction to generate particulars
through experiment simply so that they may be *known*, but so that something may be
done... The aim of experiment, for a surprisingly Baconian young Spinoza, is the
discovery of true natures or forms... [Spinoza's] essence can no longer designate a formal
account of what a thing is (Aristotle), let alone an independent substantial form through
which it is actualized (Scholastic Aristotelianism). Instead, the essence of a thing must be
fully immanent to it and bound up in the particular ways it manifests its primary
qualities... This essence may be conceived relationally, from the perspective of a finite
thing immersed in a broader realm of duration and extended relationships; or, *sub specie
aeternitatis*, from the perspective of its cause...

So what is the passage from a lesser to a greater perfection as the strength of our bodies
and minds increase towards that which is affirmative, creative, and effective in the application of
adequate knowledge? Stuart Hampshire writes, “...pleasure and pain always represent a change
in psycho-physical state; they are mental reflection of the rise or fall in the power of activity of
the organism.” As we read in E2p1s *the patterns of thought that endure in one's mind will help
determine which affects one continues to be affected by.* That is, we become more aware in
conscious reflection of ourselves as an adequate cause that can produce powerfully rational
affects. In this way, we are the one doing the determining and are not being acted upon. And in

62 Selcer, “From scientia operativa to scientia intuitiva: Producing particulars in Bacon and Spinoza,” 42, 45, 46.
Selcer concludes, “To reason, for Spinoza, is certainly not to leave the ‘imaginative’ realm of sensation, language,
memory and experiment behind. It is to do something new with the materials those forms of knowing provide...” In
support of this position, Chapter Two and the conclusion of this thesis address how Selcer’s reading is accurate and
works in conjunction with strengthening both creativity and reason. We can also look to the works of George Eliot
and Moira Gatens for more support. For example, Simon Calder, in his essay “Georeg Eliot, Spinoza and the Ethics
of Literature,” writes, “[Eliot's] fictions were ‘simply a set of experiments in life – an endeavor to see what our
thought and emotion may be capable of – what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better
after which we may strive.’”
63 Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, 101. See also the work of Neal Grossman on Spinoza here.
64 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p1s: 33.
this way we are truly free, as free as we can be within the laws of Nature, because we are acting from our necessary nature according to our essence: “I call him free who is led by reason alone.”65 The above is mentioned at the start of the _Ethics_ in 1p24 when we read that intuitive understanding is acting from our _essence_ as singular things and not according to only our _existence_, that is, in accordance with our _conatus_ and knowledge of it. In addition, 4p1s tells us that “imaginations do not disappear through the presence of the true insofar as it is true...”66 And in 5p24 we read, “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God.”67 As early as the _KV_ we also read, “...the whole only consists of and [exists] through its parts, and so it comes that you represent the _thinking power_ as a thing on which the Understanding, Love, &c., depend. But you cannot call it the _Whole_, only a _Cause of the Effects_ just named by you.”68 In the _KV_ we can continue to gather support for Spinoza's consistency in some main systematic ideas over his texts early and late, even if he did abandon the _KV_ around 1662. Yet, as we learn throughout the _Ethics_, the organic whole is always more powerful than any of its parts.69

What has been demonstrated so far includes a rationally understood proto-physics of power, force, proportion, and motion of the intellect and of our actions. Ideas affect other ideas through their force or lack of force. As ideas have their own essence they can combine in powers to become an organic body of their own creating multiple effects at once instead of only a few. Rationally understood common notions are the universal properties of things that all rational minds have access to by way of recognition in reflection, but not all can use this capacity with

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65 Spinoza, _Ethics_, 4p68: 151. A free man “strives to join other men to him in friendship (by P37)...”
66 Ibid. 2p1s, 4p1s: 33, 118.
67 Ibid. 5p24: 173.
68 Spinoza, _KV_, Wolf, trans. “Between the Understanding, Love, Reason, and Desire,” 34. Importantly, we then read, “And that is why I called the understanding...a cause; and on the other hand, since it consists of its ideas, a whole: so also God is both an Immanent Cause with reference to his works or creatures, and also a whole, considered from the second point of view.”
69 This concept is important because, as we read in E4p44s, when we are torn by daily affects (not affections but affects) this is because it is related to only certain parts of us and our bodies more than other parts or the organic whole, the latter which is our combined body and mind striving for continued existence regardless.
the same force of ideational power, creativity, and action. Therefore, we might have to seriously consider here if such ideas can be said to be innate? Common notions lead us to the increased capacity to apply what we have understood in ways that bring great joy, a sense of peace and harmony, and a feeling of continued striving for more understanding, but the latter are singular experiences of our individual essence. As we know from E2p45, the third kind of knowledge is specific to individual essences and not only to or as common notions. If it were only about common notions then there would not be a need for a third kind of knowledge to be distinguishable as its own kind of knowledge.

This increased capacity for reasoning leads us to understand more than general things in Nature, something Spinoza comments on in 2p13s, but the essence of particular things more immediately. Essence is wholly related to both God as cause and to our conatus as striving to exist. In E1p25 we read that from each of the previous propositions certain logical conclusions are required, including “that from the given divine nature both the essence and the existence of things must be inferred.” And in Chapter 5 of the TTP we read that “intellectual axioms” are that in which our adequate conclusions are drawn “from the force of the intellect and its orderly apprehensions.” The necessity by which each attribute expresses itself is part of God's necessity, that is, what each attribute expresses in its own ways is both all we can know logically at that time and all that is possible for that attribute in power. In the KV, in the chapter “That

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70 In his recent work supporting a theory of human consciousness in Spinoza already noted in this thesis, Eugene Marshall concludes that adequate ideas are innate. In my reading, he is both correct and incorrect. Even if adequate ideas are innate, the definition we give of adequate knowledge is important at this point because clear and distinct knowledge requires, by necessity, that it maintains the capacity to be developed and combined with additional adequate knowledge.

71 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p45: 60.

72 Ibid. 1p25s: 18, as noted by Richard Mason in The God of Spinoza (59).

73 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 5: 441. This is also a passage where it is crystal clear we can rely on both sense data and observation of natural phenomena and the use of reason at once to draw such necessary conclusions.

74 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p29s: 52, Mason, 59. This is also related to the references already made in previous chapters to the interpretive conclusions of Pierre Macherey.
God Exists,” Spinoza has a wonderful footnote where he writes that “it belongs to the essence of a mountain that it should have a valley, or the essence of a mountain is that it has a valley; this is truly eternal and immutable, and must always be included in the concept of a mountain, even if it never existed, or did not exist now.”75 In this vein he also writes in the TTP “...everything in Nature involves and expresses the conception of God in proportion to its essence and perfection; and therefore we acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena.”76

Logical error in reasoning diminishes our capacity to strive just as much as something overtaking us physically that has more power or is stronger than us externally.77 But the rational use of creativity brings us an experience of physical and mental joy and pleasure. Therefore, the stronger our capacity to think about an immanent God of which we are both expression and effect, the more power of thought we will have.78 Spinoza writes, “They say also that God has no knowledge of particular and transient things, but only of the general, which, in their opinion, are imperishable. We have, however, rightly considered this to be due to ignorance. For it is precisely the particular things, and they alone, that have a cause, and not the general, because they are nothing.”79 It is particular things of a singular experience “that have a cause.” This deduction concerns the essence of singular things only. Most important to recognize and reflect on again is how we confuse concepts of understanding if we ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics to God:

...while we are speaking philosophically, we ought not to use the language of theology... But in philosophy, where we clearly understand that to ascribe to God those attributes which make a man perfect would be as wrong as to ascribe to a man the attributes that

75 Spinoza, KV, chapter 1: 15.
76 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 4: 428. This deduction is similar to what we find in E2p13s as well.
77 See Letter 23 for another example. It was the impetus for a fractured relationship with van Blyenburgh to come.
78 This is Dan Selcer’s point in footnote 59 above. We can learn how to use imaginative knowledge more rationally.
make perfect an elephant or an ass, these and similar words have no place, and we cannot use them without utterly confusing concepts. So, speaking philosophically, we cannot say that God wants something from somebody, or that something is displeasing or pleasing to him. For these are all human attributes, which have no place in God.\footnote{Spinoza, Letter 23: 833.}

Later, in Letter 60, Spinoza writes to friends about how God cannot be ascribed any characteristics that are applicable to human expressions with complete identity. This is why the nature and function of definition is so important. He continues, “So too, when I define God as a supremely perfect being, since this definition does not express the efficient cause...I shall not be able to extract therefrom all the properties of God as a being, etc.”\footnote{Spinoza, Letter 60: 913.} When we are talking about efficient causes, our definitions need to remain within the purview of sets of ideas that are true properties of objects, that is, we follow the rule “that the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause...” Spinoza, in other words, does not equivocate on the concept of necessity.\footnote{Morgan Laerke, “Spinoza’s Cosmological Argument in the Ethics,” 440, footnote 6.} The adequate idea of God expresses all of God's causal models. At its core, God (or Nature) is the immanent expression of itself in all its possible manifestations. It is its own cause at all time for all expressions and effects.

If so, what are we to make of our intellectual love of God and acquiring more perfection in accordance with God as a thinking thing if we cannot ascribe human characteristics to that God? In other words, how do we relate directly to such a metaphysical concept and reality in our immanence (as physical human bodies and minds)? Perfection and imperfection are “only modes of thinking.”\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4 preface: 115. In the same preface we also read, “Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, that is, the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard for its duration.”} Affects are involved on this level because they are the passage from greater or lesser degrees of perfection or “certain modes of thinking.” In the \textit{TP} and the \textit{TTP} we learn that we endeavor to understand everything about human nature as natural phenomena, and in this

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80 Spinoza, Letter 23: 833.
81 Spinoza, Letter 60: 913.
83 Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4 preface: 115. In the same preface we also read, “Finally, by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, that is, the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard for its duration.”
desire we are closer to expressing God with more perfection. We learn, as Richard Mason writes, that “Even human passions such as love, hatred and envy are seen as phenomena which are necessary, having 'causes by means of which we endeavor to understand our nature.'”

In the *TTP* we read:

> ...we must unreservedly conclude that we get to know God and God's will all the better as we gain better knowledge of natural phenomena and understand more clearly how they depend on their first cause, and how they operate in accordance with Nature's eternal laws. Therefore, as far as concerns our understanding, those events which we understand clearly and distinctly have far better right to be termed works of God, and to be referred to God's will, than those of which we are quite ignorant...

As we also read in chapter two of this thesis, we can have clear and distinct ideas about the ways in which the imagination operates, which can be utilized to enhance our singular power of reasoning. In Letter 36, Spinoza is clear that the concept of “imperfection” includes that which lacks something, and substance does not lack anything in this system. He also writes, “...perfection consists in being, and imperfection in the privation of being.”

Our method of a rationally powerful understanding includes the following:

So a good method will be one which shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of a given true idea. Again, since the relation between two ideas is the same as the relation between the formal essences of those ideas, it follows that the reflexive knowledge of the idea of the most perfect Being will be more excellent than the reflexive knowledge of other ideas. That is, the most perfect method will be one which shows how the mind should be directed according to the standard of a given idea of the most perfect Being. From this one can readily understand how the mind, as it understands more things, at the same time acquires other tools which facilitate its further understanding.

In addition, as Piet Steenbakkers (noting passages from the *TEI*) concludes, “The most perfect

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84 Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 54. The phrase in Latin reads “causas, per quas eorum naturam conamur.” This is one place where I differ from systems such as Spinoza's and even Alan Badiou in contemporary philosophy. Love is not calculable in advance, regardless of how many variables one can account for or measurements/data collected.
86 Spinoza, Letter 36: 859.
87 Ibid. 858.
method will start from the idea of a most perfect being.”

Ed Curley has asked what the definition of “rationality” becomes within relations involving human intuitive knowing? How, in light of the above emphasis, might the definition alter? One might also ask: what is the phenomenal experience of intuitive knowledge? E1p31d demonstrates Spinoza's belief in our capacity to rationally examine the phenomenal nature of more intense forms of overlapping certain knowledge. We can do this not only as thought, but also understood as the nature of our knowledge about extension. The question is what are the types of equivalent actions (physically) when we are intellectually loving God intuitively (mentally)? If the intellectual love of God involves intuitive knowing, and intuitive knowing is a combination of both rationality and imagination in a way in which our conscious reflection grasps the laws of thought while strengthening our imaginings to aid rational processes, then a question arises about what rational love would consist of when we have enhanced intuitive knowing? It also involves what it is for some ideas of our mind to be understood as eternal. Early Modern scholar Ursula Renz notes, “The notion that there is some part of our mind which is eternal can, for instance, be equated with the claim that in principle all our subjective experience can be expressed in terms of completely true, i.e. eternal truths. Understood in this way, the term ‘eternity’ is denoting a possible epistemic achievement.” Neal Grossman would agree with this sentiment writing:

Philosophers for ages have wondered how something mental can cause something physical and vice versa; how can there be an interaction between mind and body. Some, like Descartes, give up on the problem and conclude that it is one of those mysteries that we humans cannot hope to grasp. Others, like the materialist philosophers who dominate the academic scene today, also give up on the problem and conclude that minds do not

89 Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica...*, 153. He ends this work stating, “Form always matters when a philosopher has something important to say.” True, but what expression these forms take can be rationally creative and diverse.  
exist (or to put it more charitably, that what we call conscious experience is entirely produced by the brain). For Spinoza, the mental and the physical are distinct manifestations of a single Divine Being and there is no causal influence from one to the other. The consequences of this metaphysical picture, when applied to ourselves, are enormous.92

Recall that ideas are modifications of substance which exist along with their cause. Together with their affections they create affects. It is the affects we are patterning our thought in response to. We need the concept of modes and modifications of substance because, as one example, we cannot say that God is the cause of a specific number of things but only of all things (singularly expressed) by definition.93 I have already demonstrated that rationally understood processes of imaginative knowledge can transform our reflective awareness and habits of thought in ways that create stronger, more useful imaginings, which reason can then better recognize as aids to its own capacities and power. From this we were able to deduce that one is capable of enhancing their power for reflective awareness in ways that influence (as effects) the power of rational thinking and bodily movement and capability. This is an expression of God's (or Nature's) power. As Spinoza makes clear in the TTP, it is through love for others, both intellectual and in our actions, that we can recognize how God can be our expression: “It is only through this love [of one's neighbour]...that every man is in God, and God in every man.”94 This same sentiment is shared throughout the Ethics. Recall that E1p14 reads, “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived” and in 5p14 we read, “The mind can bring it about that all the body's affections, or images of things, are related to the idea of God.” In addition, 5p16 reads, “The love towards God must engage the mind the most.”95 The mind, in its rational ordering of adequate ideas about how our reflection can increase or decrease our power also understands

92 Neal Grossman, The Spirit of Spinoza, 125, emphasis added. I am indebted to Grossman’s friendship and insight.
93 See Letter 34 here for more elaboration.
94 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 14: 161.
95 Spinoza, Ethics, 1p14, 5p14, 5p16: 9, 168, 169.
how to use imaginative visualization, for example, to our increased efficient ways of conceiving.

Why the above is so important to reflect on and use as a method to understand intuitive knowledge further includes the crucial importance of E5p10, p11, p15, and p20 taken together. In 5p10 we learn just how important tenacity and habitual readiness are for the strengthening of conatus. Spinoza writes that a “greater force” is required to order our ideas and affects on a daily basis then is required for “uncertain and random” affects. If a greater force is required in order to increase our capacity for habitual readiness and rational tenacity, then how might this occur and why is Spinoza writing about it as late as E5? He writes, “The best thing, then, that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready.”

In this way, memory and imaginative knowledge become crucial for strengthening the force required for ordering our ideas about our affections as regular affects. That is, imaginative ideas work to help reason create the “greater force” required. This method guarantees that we will act from affects of joy and power. E5p11 demonstrates that the more we have a certain image in our mind the more power it has over our other ideas. In fact, previously in 4p17s we learn that there are times when reason cannot control all one's affects all the time: “My reason, rather, is that it is necessary to come to know both our nature's power and its lack of power, so that we can determine what reason can do in moderating the affects, and what it cannot do.” In other words, sometimes even reasoning is not enough because of what it cannot do. We need to be aware of what reason cannot accomplish, which is an affirmative use of reasoning.

97 Ibid. 4p17s: 124, emphasis added.
Why is Spinoza returning so often to the importance of imaginative knowledge again and again? Images (as ideas) will continue to affect us in reflection and gain more force the more present they are, that is, the more we use a certain image and relate it to other ideas the stronger its force becomes. This is because “there are more causes by which it can be aroused and encouraged.”98 What we imagine is what is engaging our mind in reflective awareness. The more we imagine something the more we start to connect it to other ideas, but in E4 we have already learned that affects and the imagination work together to create stronger affects of various kinds. E4p11 demonstrates that if we imagine something as necessary (the eternal nature of one organic substance for example) the affect will be more powerful than if we imagine something as contingent.99 This demonstration is coupled with a discussion on salvation and knowledge of human created concepts such as good and evil. The best method we can employ is to use our memories and imagination in ways in which we know will guarantee strengthening our habitual readiness from affects of joy. Affects (as ideas about the state of our body) are a way for the mind to “affirm of its body a greater or lesser force of existing than before…” Our increased force of action (ratio of motion and rest) and power of adequate thinking are derived in this way from internal causes, and we are aware of this process and its effects directly if we conceive the laws of thought adequately. As we read in the KV, an intelligent soul “uses the body as a tool.”100 This is another way to understand the direct application of intuitive knowing. When individual humans who use visualizations to attain more knowledge of “God” or Nature, they are still using reasoning to order their thoughts and meditations appropriately to the more efficient degree.

Spinoza writes that we can relate our images to the idea of God. If we add to this what is said specifically in 5p15 and p20 we get a very strong picture and more clear understanding,

98 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p11: 168.
99 Ibid. 4p11: 122.
100 Spinoza, KV, 2:19, 89, footnote 18.
including why this is related to the intellectual love of God. In these propositions we read, “He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects.”\textsuperscript{101} Not only is this love “joined to all affections of the body,” but the more we understand how this process works adequately the more joy and power are produced. This is a singular experience and expression, but it involves the collective because the laws of thought and extension work the same for all humans. As the power of our mind “is defined by knowledge alone,” we can imagine many individuals joined together in the same ways as we are understanding our affects. Spinoza writes that we desire this activity with more force once we understand it: “…the more men we imagine to enjoy it, the more it must be encouraged… So we can conclude that this love is the most constant of all the affects, and insofar as it is related to the body, cannot be destroyed…”\textsuperscript{102} This works to increase our affects of joy and strengthen the force required to order our daily affects in new ways. As Spinoza lists, we have a greater (adequate) understanding of our own affects, we relate those affects to an intrinsic cause (the power of our singular mind) and not an external cause, what we understand with greater clarity increases our capacities to act with more power and motion (parallelism between the attributes), we understand God (substance) as the cause but because it is our understanding expressing itself we also know that we are the cause of this greater force and joy, and as a result we have a greater power to order our affects. And we all know that the affect of love is the most powerful, which is why the intellectual love of God too, as we'll see, is what Spinoza concentrates on in the last parts of the \textit{Ethics}. External causes will be very important for our experience of love and joy.\textsuperscript{103} This coheres with what we learned in E5p20 above because the effects created by our rationally loving Nature and our expressions of it add to the overall

\textsuperscript{101} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 5p15: 169.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid. 5p20: 170.  
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. 4p44: 139.
homeostasis of Nature as eternally affirmative.

Next, Spinoza refers back to E4p5 and writes, “the force of each affect is defined by the power of the external cause compared with our own. But the power of the mind is defined by knowledge alone...”\[104\] The key common notion relied on is our ability (as knowledge) to compare ideas with greater force of thought and, therefore, increase our powers of both thought and action as the effect of such comparisons. This is also stated very clearly in 4p33 where we read, “The nature, or essence, of the affects cannot be explained through our essence, or nature, alone (by IIID1 and D2), but must be defined by the power, that is (by IIIP7), by the nature of external causes compared with our own. That is why there are so many species of each affect as there are species of objects by which we are affected (by IIIP56).”\[105\] For example, we learn in 4p66 that it is rationally powerful to desire a greater future than settle for a lesser present circumstance. Note that such a desire must use the imagination as well. In the appendix of E4, we are reminded to meditate on the varying degrees of power of our affects. Our highest happiness (blessedness) is the result of perfecting our powers of reasoning because we are then able to rearrange our affects accordingly with more force and increased activity. The habitual readiness we acquire is the increased capacity to understand that although we are affected by things external to us regularly, our affects can be ordered according to reason, and we are the cause of that understanding. As well, if we surround ourselves with others who act rationally, we increase our ability to survive and thrive in a way where we are “capable of affecting, and being affected by, external bodies in a great many ways,” and “the more the mind is capable of thinking...”\[106\] This lends itself to a kind of freedom of thought which is in relation to what Spinoza calls blessedness. As we can never exhaust continuing to understand Nature’s possible

\[104\] Spinoza, Ethics, 5p20: 170-171.
\[105\] Ibid. 4p33: 131.
\[106\] Ibid. 4 appendix: 155-160.
modal modifications and expressions, so too does rational thought require a type of freedom.

Individual human beings are actual things existing in Nature with their own essence. Quoting the Apostle John, Spinoza agrees that “God is love.” As he points out in the TTP, the Hebrew word Jadah can be translated as both “to know” and “to love.” To know is to love, to love is to know. The word Jehovah can also include the meaning “to be,” that is, to exist. In other words, to know is to love and to love is to both exist and to understand with more power. There is evidence for this series of ideas as their own web of relations in Spinoza’s correspondence in Letter 21.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the intellectual love of God or Nature is how we “acquire a virtuous disposition” using reason, which includes what it is to love oneself, others, and a God conceived logically and felt as joy. In Letter 23, Spinoza writes “For by a righteous man I understand one who has a steadfast desire that each should possess his own, which desire I show in my Ethics...arises necessarily in the pious from the clear knowledge they have of themselves and of God.”¹⁰⁸ Note the emphasis on clear knowledge of both oneself and of the intellectual love of God. What we are observing and comparing is the natural phenomena of knowing and living both singularly and collectively. This does not include conceiving finite things in abstraction as parts or as good or evil, at least not for Spinoza. What it is to have an affect of the intellectual love of God includes our understanding of expressions of substance in its power as our expressions. Substance cannot be divided: ex quo sequatur, substantium posse dividi.¹⁰⁹ In other words, God (or Nature), in its effects, has the power to express itself in infinite ways.¹¹⁰

Intuitive knowledge includes (or just is) the singular intellectual love of God. As Spinoza

¹⁰⁷ As noted by Charlie Huenemann in his work Spinoza’s Radical Theology, Letter 21 reads, “My intellect does not extend so far as to embrace all the means God possesses for bringing men to the love of himself, that is, to salvation.”
¹⁰⁸ Spinoza, Letter 23: 834.
¹⁰⁹ Spinoza, Ethics, 1p12: 9, as noted by Richard Mason in The God of Spinoza (58).
¹¹⁰ In this respect Dan Selcer writes, “If I am particularly astute, I may even begin to engineer encounters in order to generate and test such commonalities; that is, I may begin to experiment (49).”
writes in the *KV*, “...if we use our understanding aright it will be impossible for us not to love God.”\(^{111}\) *Amor erga Deum* (I am here and I am expressing a love towards...) becomes *amor intellectualis Dei* (the intellectual love of God).\(^{112}\) We experience ourselves as an expression of the eternal when we adequately grasp what the rational concept of Eternity (and love) can be for a human mind, as Spinoza writes about in E5p31 and 5p39s for example.\(^{113}\) We can adequately conceive the difference between finite modes and that which is eternal. Although every finite idea is a real expression of Nature, finite modes are not (by definition) eternal. It is only immediate, infinite modes and mediate, infinite modes which are *conceived as* eternal. Thus, as we increase our rational comprehension of what Eternity is and how it gets expressed the more we experience the profound joy of that which is both unified as one organic whole and conceived as our own degree of power. What could be more fun than experimenting with creative combinations of rational sets of ideas along with others which not only benefits all involved, but also produce experiences with unexpected or novel powerful effects? As Deleuze writes, “…the third kind of knowledge has as its formal cause nothing but the soul or understanding itself. It is the same with the idea of God: what is expressed is infinity, but what expresses itself is the absolute power of thinking.”\(^{114}\)

\(^{111}\) Spinoza, *KV*, chapter 5: 69. As I interpret Spinoza's “God,” it is not the traditional Christian conception of God, although there are several citations Spinoza makes that he approves of certain elements of Christianity. One reason I believe we can leave the Christian conception of God behind is expressed by Spinoza in Letter 54 where he writes to Hugo Boxel that it is silly for anyone to believe that God is defined as something masculine.

\(^{112}\) I thank Piet Steenbakkers for this particular reference and emphasis made in his courses on Spinoza at Erasmus University and Utrecht University in the fall term of 2009 (Netherlands). Errors in reasoning are what I'm most interested in, especially as they involve Spinoza's system.


\(^{114}\) Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 141. What would prevent, I have been asked, a group of Nazis claiming the same thing in strength of power? Spinoza’s system is not one of over-powering sad passions, violence, and power through domination. In fact, his system demonstrates that such things are not conducive to Nature’s power of survive. Those activities will contribute to the destruction of those balancing factors and elements that allow for human beings to thrive. We need the Earth is another way to say this and those who destroy the Earth, themselves, and others will lose their strength in power and numbers when a more rational body of individuals takes over. Spinoza’s point is that large groups of rational individuals are smart enough to be aware of such facts and act accordingly when needed. This too is a form of survival.
We understand that it is necessary to separate, when needed, the logical series of concepts connected to our rational understanding about the relationship between the finite and the infinite. Letter 54 clearly reads, “This I do know, that between the finite and the infinite there is no relation, so that the difference between God and the greatest and most excellent created thing is no other than that between God and the least created thing.”\textsuperscript{115} In the \textit{KV} we also read that “...human understanding is immortal, because it is a product which God has produced in himself.”\textsuperscript{116} Many years earlier in Spinoza's correspondence in Letter 12 he also writes on infinity. Something can be infinite by virtue of its cause or by virtue of its essence. Spinoza strictly distinguishes between the two when needed.\textsuperscript{117} In Letter 64 he does not want to define God, substance, or Nature as part of any numerical (or mathematical) distinction. Spinoza calls all three the same thing and eternal or of the nature of that which is “an absolutely infinite Entity.”\textsuperscript{118} He addresses the concept of the infinite in the same way again in 1676 in Letter 81, one year before his early death. He writes that when we speak about “parts” of Nature, we are not then inclined to deduce “an infinity of parts.” This is primarily so because it would include a spatial concept and no such spatial concept about an infinity of parts can be clearly and distinctly perceived by us when thinking adequately about infinity.\textsuperscript{119}

Spinoza's conception of a God is not an anthropomorphic idea, which is another reason not to name it as something that is “one” thing (as the use of numbers is a tool for human minds only).\textsuperscript{120} Daniel Selcer writes, “...Spinoza's mature metaphysics will reject entirely the notion that God, as the sufficient reason for the existence of the world, can be radically separated from...
it. Instead, he advances an immanent monism that identifies God, substance, and nature (with all its immanent expressions) as the same thing, distinguishing them only with respect to whether they are grasped in terms of their productive power \((natura naturans)\) or in terms of their expression in the dispersed totality defined by the infinite modes that follow in infinite ways from God \((natura naturata)\)...”\(^{121}\) We might also turn briefly to the work of George Eliot, the first writer (author) to translate Spinoza’s \textit{Ethics} into English even though her work was suppressed from publication. Eliot interprets E3p2 as adequate and intuitive knowing including the ability to “retain the impressions or vestiges of objects”\(^{122}\) needed in order to pass into greater perfection. Spinoza confirms such a position in some of his earliest work. For example, in the \textit{KV} we read, “...for, as the Understanding is that in us which must know God, and as it stands in such immediate union with him that it can neither be, nor be understood without him, it is incontrovertibly evident from this that nothing can ever come into such close touch with the Understanding as God himself can. It is also impossible to get to know God through something else.”\(^{123}\) The only way one can know anything at all is through observation of natural phenomena. And this is how one also knows God, but it is not conceived as understanding God through something else. Therefore, the understanding of natural phenomena and the immanent expression of one’s singular understanding are (logically) the understanding and expression of God (or Nature).

It is quite common that the importance and coherence of Book 5 of Spinoza’s \textit{Ethics} is continuously debated among scholars much more than other books.\(^{124}\) The last book is where we

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\(^{121}\) Selcer, \textit{Philosophy and the Book}, 167. I am indebted to Dr. Selcer for a decade of mentorship and lessons.  
\(^{122}\) Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, trans. George Eliot, Saltzburg Studies in English Literature. For more support on how this kind of interpretation might work in productive ways one can turn to the work of Warren Montag.  
\(^{123}\) Spinoza, \textit{KV}, 2:24, 98.  
\(^{124}\) In her otherwise incredibly helpful, lucid, and accessible work on Spinoza's \textit{Ethics}, Beth Lord concludes that intuitive knowledge is impossible for Spinoza. I have to disagree with this aspect of her reading. If it were impossible he would not have written that it was difficult yet rare, nor would he have expended so much rational
learn about beatitude. To aid our understanding, Spinoza writes, in response to questions put to him by Hugo Boxel, “To your question as to whether I have as clear an idea of God as of a triangle, I reply in the affirmative. But if you ask me whether I have as clear a mental image of God as of a triangle, I reply in the negative. We cannot imagine God, but we can apprehend him by the intellect. Here it should be observed that I do not claim to have complete knowledge of God, but that I do understand some of his attributes…”¹²⁵ The imagination is of assistance to the understanding when thinking about our singular expressions and interactions with other ideas and bodies. The concept of an attribute is not possible without the distinction between that which is indeterminate and determinate being in a unified relationship.¹²⁶ God is conceived as an eternal indefinite reality with infinite attributes. We can only know and experience the actions and ideas of two as our own expressions.

It would do well for us at this point to briefly examine some of Nancy Cartwright's work. In “The Limits of Exact Science, from Economics to Physics,” Cartwright not only summarizes the processes relied on within the science of her time, but she also demonstrates that most likely we will never have an exact science about all the possible natural phenomena of Nature. In other words, there is no end to particulars and their combinations in the universe. This logical and reasonable conclusion effects how we construct our models of measurement. Cartwright's position does not damage any of Spinoza's epistemology. Her reading on how we use and express human scientific practices only strengthens our possibilities for continued democratic leanings, identifications, methods, and enjoyment. In reviewing the “iron law of probability” as “an association generated by particular social and economic structures and susceptible to change in

¹²⁵ Spinoza, Letter 56: 905.
¹²⁶ Ibid. Letter 36: 859. Both that which is determinate in its determinateness, and that which is indeterminate in its indeterminateness, are perfect. If they were not, they would lack something and, therefore, not be distinct in their determinateness or indeterminateness respectively. I believe Hegel found one impetus for his work here.
these structures,” which apply to the natural phenomena of social interactions, and Cartwright concludes:

The same, I claim, is true of all our laws, whether we take them to be iron – the typical attitude towards the laws of physics – or of a more flexible material, as in biology, economics or psychology. I repeat the lesson about the dual nature of frequencies and propensities: probabilities make sense only relative to the chance set-up that generates them, and that is equally true whether the chance set-up is a radio-active nucleus or a socio-economic machine.127

All of our knowledge is an expression of substance and its power, but as we have already noted in previous chapters that a clear and distinct conception of God does not include a reduction of what we know to that of material substance only. Instead, we are to try and understand all that we can about the force of thought and the movements of extension. We cannot do this in isolation. Both attributes interact within series of causal actions and reactions continuously. There is a necessary conceptual and metaphysical relation between our singular expressions of “true ideas” and God (or Nature) in its eternal nature. In Chapter 19 of the TTP, we read that our true ideas are “the very percepts of God.”128 Spinoza is not an occasionalist in the strict sense where the force of extension is located somewhere outside our ratios of motion and rest (or direct effects caused by the power of an attribute would not be possible). Spinoza's system is the perpetual self-causing immanence of one substance with infinite modifications in the form of the expressions of attributes that are God.129 As we read in E5p24, to truly know

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127 Cartwright, “How the Laws of Physics Lie,” 323. “The view of course only matters if the kind of knowledge that we need to understand the operation of a socio-economic machine is not itself more knowledge of 'deeper' probabilistic and causal laws...the knowledge we need here is knowledge not of laws but of capacities...In the simplest sense these capacities can be thought of as probabilistic propensities.” I think Spinoza would agree with this sentiment completely.
128 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 19: 558.
129 See Dan Garber's “Descartes and Occasionalism” in the edited work Causation in Early Modern Philosophy where he tries to demonstrate that Descartes is closer to the ancients than just a precursor for occasionalism. Garber concludes, “How God grounds the laws of motion is illustrated in the proofs that Descartes gives for them. These proofs are grounded in the celebrated doctrine of continual re-creation...Clearly such a power is not in us; if it were, then, Descartes reasons, I would have also been able to give myself all of the perfections I clearly lack...it must be God that creates and sustains us...But though the conservation principle may constrain God's activity, it does not in any way constrain ours; in our mutability and imperfection, we are completely free to add or subtract motion from
singular things well is to know God in the best way possible. Also, to know God well is to know singular essences. The infinite is, in this way, an aspect of finite expressions of adequate knowledge, which is Spinoza’s point in Letter 64 as well. The infinite and the finite cannot have a direct relation to each other conceptually otherwise. This is the only way. If our true ideas, expressed in our own singular, determinate ways, are the very percepts of a God, and the former is finite whereas the latter is infinite, demonstrating a direct relation is not needed in order to comprehend the difference.\textsuperscript{130} E5p20s explains that this idea is also an affect. It “is the most constant of all the affects” and 5p26 explains that our conatus is increased for understanding more particulars through the third kind of knowledge the more we experience what that kind of knowledge is and can do.\textsuperscript{131}

Piet Steenbakkers writes that Book 5 (in both the Latin and the Dutch translations) had multiple variations and interpretations added by its publishers and editors: “My hypothesis is that Spinoza himself had not written out the final parts of the demonstrations fully and systematically, but contented himself with a summary indication...”\textsuperscript{132} Knowing that Spinoza may not have written the exact full demonstrations of the last part of the Ethics (at least not without editorial suggestions from friends), and realizing that the majority of the disputes revolving around Book 5 include its inconsistencies, we can still examine what the eternal parts of our mind might be. True intuitive knowledge is possible for a finite mind, but it is a complex issue how to describe the world... Indeed, it is through our own ability to cause motion in our bodies that we have the understanding we do of God and angels as causes of motion.” As an aside, this otherwise excellent collection of essays jumps completely over any reference to Spinoza on causality.

\textsuperscript{130} This reminds me of work done on Spinoza's radical theology by Charles Huenemann who writes that Leibniz helped Spinoza with this formulation when he visited him in the Hague. Huenemann notes, when discussing how Leibniz tried to prove we can only logically conceive one God, “Since the proposition that two perfections are incompatible cannot be demonstrated to be true, Leibniz infers that it cannot be necessarily true (since, if it were, it would be demonstrable). Therefore, it is possible for there to be a being with all perfections... The reason for going into these considerations about the compossibility ('being possible together') of attributes is that, for Spinoza, as with any geometer, showing the intelligibility of a conceptual entity is sufficient for showing its existence. In logical space, to be is to be conceived (39).”

\textsuperscript{131} Spinoza, Ethics, 5p20s, 5p26: 170, 173.

\textsuperscript{132} Steenbakkers, From manuscript to print..., 136.
exactly what it is, although I believe Daniel Selcer’s reading is the most accurate. Spinoza already prepared us for the deductions of E5 in earlier sections of the *Ethics*, particularly within E2, of which E5 is intimately connected.

Intuitive knowledge includes (finite) rational understanding and enjoyment of singular essences in their capacity to increase their powers of thought and action. Intuitive ideas are always affirmative and giving us pleasure, and, as stated in E3p54, this type of knowledge uses imaginative ideas. The power and striving of our mind, as its essence, “affirms only what the mind is and can do, not what it is not and cannot do.” Spinoza continues, “So it strives to imagine only what affirms, or posits, its power of acting...” Next, in 3p55s, a very important passage for understanding the entirety of the *Ethics*, we read, “For whenever anyone imagines his own actions, he is affected with joy (by P53), and with a greater joy, the more his actions express perfection, and the more distinctly he imagines them, that is (by IIP40s1), the more he can distinguish them from others, and consider them as singular things.” We have the most power of thought and action when our mind is composed more of these types of ideas in proportion (adding to the power of our joy as a singular thing). As we learned in previous chapters (using E3p17s for support), when the mind has two contrary affects, it tends to vacillate instead of having the right force to think in clear chains of adequate ideas. In E4p45s we read, “On the contrary, the happier we are, the higher the perfection we rise to...” We cannot always act in moderation continuously because of unforeseeable external causes, for example, nor is it always enjoyable to do so (i.e. joyous passions and passionate joys are a part of human living). There are times of great inspiration, for example, where one feels compelled to act, not only

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134 Ibid. 3p54: 98.
135 Ibid. 3p55s: 99.
136 Ibid. 3p17s, 4p45s: 80, 140.
because of the joy and energy involved, but also because the original rational ideas being experienced and played with. But what are new ideas if they are not put into action but figments of one’s imagination?

The above passages explain, as does Letter 54, that the effects created in us by our perceptions and by our ideas determine how we judge something as beautiful or perfect. Spinoza writes, “Beauty...is not so much a quality in the perceived object as an effect in him who perceives... So things regarded in themselves, or as related to God, are neither beautiful or ugly... Perfection and imperfection are designations not much different from beauty or ugliness.”¹³⁷ This deduction is also expressed in 2p49 as another example. Affirmations, as concepts, are about the singular essences of things, and Spinoza has just written that ideas are “concepts of thought.”¹³⁸ The key is to become an affirmation of singular essence and, therefore, of the existence of substance in its power and expression. Expression is a critical conceptual dynamic for understanding Spinoza’s epistemology correctly. As Deleuze writes, “The notion of expression is essentially triadic: we must distinguish what expresses itself, the expression itself and what is expressed [i.e. the effects]. The paradox is that ‘what is expressed’ has no existence outside its expression, yet bears no resemblance to it, but relates essentially to what expresses itself as distinct from the expression itself.”¹³⁹ The increase in our power of affirmation involves being able to compare our internal ideas and affects with knowledge of how the laws of thought and extension work. More specifically, intuitive knowing includes the intellectual love of God and Nature as they are conceived together where our adequate comprehending of ourselves as cause

¹³⁸ Spinoza, Ethics, 2p48s: 63. See also E2p49. These deductions add to what philosopher Ruth Chang lectures about regarding making hard choices. Chang works on moral theory and in a recent TED talk she notes that what we perceive individually as really hard choices between two seemingly equal options are actually opportunities to shape our character and be creative about who we are and what we want.
¹³⁹ Deleuze, Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 333.
of the ideational and extensive effects we experience are recognized and reflected on. The concepts and experience of love and enjoyment are very important for this kind of epistemological system. As early as the KV, Spinoza writes, “True belief is good only because it is the way to true knowledge, and awakens us to things which are really lovable.”

Indeed, when we learn something true that cannot be denied we are awakened to things lovable. Spinoza writes in Letter 54 that “beauty” is more an effect than a real thing or even just an idea. It has a real effect on us that we incorporate as an affect with our bodily affections (pleasure etc.). Love and knowledge are intimately intertwined for Spinoza. He claims as much in the opening pages of his interpretation and commentary on Descartes's philosophy in the PCP when he distinguishes between that which is really difficult and that which is impossible. It is important to be capable of thinking well (with more rational force in reflection) so to be able to know the difference. In the KV, we read, “As man has not been in existence from eternity, is finite, and is like many men, he can be no substance; so that all that he has of thought are only modes of the attribute thought which we have attributed to God. ...without God no thing can be or be understood. That is, God must first be and be understood before these particular things can be and be understood.”

Immediately preceding E2p11, Spinoza emphasizes that although God “does not pertain” directly to the essence of singular things, nonetheless, “singular things can neither be nor be conceived without God...” In the same proposition we also read, “From this it follows that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God. Therefore, when we say that the human

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140 Spinoza, KV, part 2:4, 66, footnote 11 and comment on p. 67. Spinoza will condense what he writes in the KV and the TEI by the time of the Ethics in ways that involve more strongly combining rational power with the “immediate union with the thing itself” as intuitive knowing. I do not understand Spinoza’s notion of “immediate union” as that which is innate.

141 For a beautiful demonstration on how inseparable these two concepts are in Spinoza see the work by Amile Rorty in Feminist Interpretations of Spinoza edited by Moira Gatens. I hold this article close to my heart.

142 Spinoza, KV, part 2, preface:. 61.

143 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p10s2: 38.
mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but
insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind, or insofar as he constitutes the
esSENce of the human mind, has this or that idea.”¹⁴⁴ I suspect that this is also why, in 2p13s, we
read that everything prior to this specific proposition has been composed of general statements
about such important things as a God and human expressions of Nature.¹⁴⁵

We already read that God does not constitute the essence of any one human mind, but
singular things cannot be (nor be conceived) without God. God, as a rationally understood idea
of the attribute of thought, is that concept which modal modifications are also conceived through.
The idea of me as a thinking thing cannot exist without its relation to God conceived as a
thinking thing (which has adequate ideas common to all things) and also as Substance itself. Ed
Curley writes:

Whatever happens according to the laws of nature is an expression of the power of nature,
but it is equally, and by that very fact, an expression of the power of God, for the laws of
nature just are God's decrees regarding nature. To think of them as expressions of a power
which nature has independently of God is to limit God's power. If God were to act
contrary to these laws, he would act contrary to his own will, intellect, and nature, which
is absurd.¹⁴⁶

Right at that point in the Ethics where we learn that we cannot adequately understand our
own mind without the concept of God, Spinoza asks us to pause and wait for him to fully explain
the other important elements of his deductive system.¹⁴⁷ In other words, our method should
include that we are to defer our judgment about God until we have as much information about

¹⁴⁴ Spinoza, Ethics, 2p11c: 39.
¹⁴⁵ I have recently come to realize that Spinoza is very clear and purposively serious in E2p13s when he writes that
he has only generalized all major concepts up to that point, and is now prepared to be much more specific about both
God and about human expressions as modes of thought and extension. This method coheres with working more
rigorously through E1 to E5.
¹⁴⁶ Curley, “I Durst Not Write So Boldly…” 554.
¹⁴⁷ I believe this sentiment supports what Spinoza also demonstrates in E2p13s.
how the mind forms adequate ideas as is logically possible. He knows that we will reject what
he has so far attempted to demonstrate (as it is not yet adequate enough). It is our singular
attempts to comprehend the connections between adequate ideas about God as intuitive
understanding in application to our own lives. *Demonstrations by others are not enough...one
has to experience and understand common notions in the regular application to their own lives.*
*This is also why, as we'll read in the next chapter, Spinoza's system is still relevant for us today.*

In the *KV* Spinoza uses the example of bees to illustrate this point. The activity of bees are about
preparing for winter, responding to natural sunlight in their dance, and all related, but they are
also used by man for their honey. In the *KV*, we read, “So also is it with man, insofar as he is an
individual thing and looks no further than his finite character can reach; but, insofar as he is also
a part and tool of the whole of Nature, this end of man cannot be the final end of Nature, because
she is infinite, and must make use of him, together also with all other things, as an
instrument.”

With more understanding about how thought works, the stronger our thinking
becomes. This is not a performance, but the necessary result of using our affects with power.

Spinoza emphasizes the same sentiment in E2p11s when he asks us to use patience and
“continue on with me slowly, step by step, and to make no judgment on these matters until they
[we] have read through them all.”

Whereas in the opening of the *Ethics*, the generative
definitions Spinoza uses include the phrase “in so far as we wish to know...,” by Book 5 he relies
solely on the phrase in so far as we “ought to know.” By the end of the *Ethics* we have learned
what it is we ought to know regarding the laws of Nature. Our desire to know more and
capacities for acquiring more adequate knowledge become enhanced and are more efficient by

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148 Of course, if one can demonstrate that they have knowledge of some aspect of God without knowing all of how
such knowledge is possible, they deserve the opportunity to provide such evidence in a way that can be repeatable.
149 Spinoza, *KV*, 2:24: 97. Note the reference to Nature as a gendered “she” as well, which is problematic.
using Spinoza’s method. The ways in which we order our ideas according to the nature of our conscious reflection and disposition alters in a way that combines rational power between ideas. What matters is the regular disposition we learn to acquire more regularly. In Letter 19 Spinoza defines those who partake in rational understanding according to this method as expressing the intellectual love of God as “conscious.” The “wicked” move about existence “unconsciously.”

Clearly, this is a deductive conclusion that requires human consciousness and reflection. Human joy is a passage to greater perfection, as noted in the definition of the affects at the end of E3. We need conscious awareness and reflection in order to experience such passages. Yet, joys can be excessive as well, and we learn in 4p63c where we read that joy that is excessive cannot produce an increase in desire from the use of reason. The desire for continuous learning remains. Our motions and ideas regarding Nature's necessity are now more quasi-automatic and more habitual. It is not just that reason produces joy; it is also that rational affects can only arise from adequate understanding and ideas of reason. These passages to greater perfection are included in the intellectual love of God.

E1p15 states that whatever is, is in God. God is conceived as substance, therefore whatever is expressed by the universe must, by necessity, be conceived through God as one organic whole. The laws of human thought are God's ideas expressed as those laws, but only if God is rationally conceived as a thinking thing because this is the only chain of ideas we can rationally have about something eternal. God has infinite attributes and one of them is thought. Thought is all we have access to as our mind and awareness. God is not conceived as having

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151 Spinoza, Letter 19: 807-810. I also believe this is even further support for positions taken on Spinoza and consciousness in the work of Eugene Marshall. This letter also shows Spinoza’s fascinatingly acute perception regarding the human psychology of animal behaviors in comparison with what we dislike about human behavior. I believe that set of comments alone can be used to support a theory of human consciousness as well.

152 Spinoza, Ethics, 3 definition of affects II: 104.

153 Ibid. 4p63c: 150.

154 For how joy can produce a power of the mind see also E3p11, 3p14, and 3p15c, among many other places.

155 Ibid. 1p15: 10.
ideas about the affections of human finite bodies. Our affects are the ideas about our singular affections. In other words, we can say that our affects, as ideas about our bodies, are unique to our singular expressions, but the laws the attributes abide by are God’s expressions. The latter is solely about the nature of what it is to be an expression of one substance that has infinite attributes. The human mind is not identified with only one idea (i.e. of only the body as one idea). The mind is identified according to both the increasing complexity of the body in relation to other bodies (*potentia*) and its disposition, as well as the increasing habits of reason in relation to other ideas expressed by the laws of thought. That is, the mind and the body, in all its causal interactions with its environment and other bodies, *is* the attribute of thought and extension being expressed (*potestas*) in their respective determinate ways.

The importance of ideas of the imagination rationally understood in Spinoza's dynamic epistemology at this point cannot be overlooked. Inadequate ideas (partial knowledge) are not always false or inaccurate; they are merely incomplete knowledge. Imaginative ideas are the only *source* of falsity, but the emphasis here is on the nature of a *source*. In other words, *just because they are the only source of falsity does not also entail that they always produce false ideas*. Yet, none of God's knowledge can be conceived as partial or inadequate. Therefore, there must be an element to all our ideas that can be understood under the conceptual and expressive rubric of that which is infinite and perfect in one sense and finite and imperfect in another. This is the nature of what it is to use (human) logical deduction and adequate ideas about what a finite mind is capable, and how infinite substance expresses itself. The example is that we are only one mind and body and yet, we can think about what it entails for something to be eternally in existence.

Spinoza scholars Herman De Dijn and Richard Mason (noted above) summarize what is required when tackling Spinoza's epistemology from the perspective of his ontological
deductions. Mason writes that we must take into account the first premise of Spinoza's ontology in order to comprehend either his epistemological or ontological system adequately. Mason extracts from the TTP quoting directly, and writes that, in our chain of adequate ideas about both ourselves and about Nature, “God or nature comes first, the mind second: 'our intellect and knowledge depend solely on the idea or knowledge of God, and spring from it and are perfected by it.'”156 This must occur after we learn that there is only one substance (logically) and then defer judgment until we learn how the laws of thought and ratios of motion and rest (extension) work with greater perfection for us singularly. It is then that we can return again to the intellectual love and knowledge of God, as Spinoza does by ending the Ethics in this exact way. The Ethics is structured with knowledge about how there is only one substance with infinite attributes and includes how finite individuals express two of those attributes, but leads to the nature of human (finite) ideas and bodies, the power of human affects, and the intellectual love of God. In this way we realize that all modes are not to be conceived as only finite. This is because our adequate idea of God includes an identity with what we understand as an infinite, immediate mode of thought, that is, as the laws of Nature of human thought that are necessarily and eternally expressed.157 Mason continues:

In response to the question, how does God exist? Spinoza's thought was that God exists in infinite ways as one substance. That was not an answer or a solution – just as the 'question' was never put so directly. It was not an answer because the basic thought that God exists in infinite ways as one substance advances a discussion hardly at all in itself. It helps only in so far as we understand that Spinoza meant to take his assumptions as literally as he stated them, and in that he intended to pursue them consistently. There were, he believed, different ways in which nature – things in nature – can be conceived... What Spinoza needed was a framework to capture the notion that God or nature could be characterized in the most basic sense, in an unlimited number of ways. And he could not have wanted to interpret that notion so that it might impute to God any kind of unintelligibility...158

156 Mason, The God of Spinoza, 106.
157 For support see Spinoza's Ethics 1p17s, 1p21-23, 1p29s, and 1 Appendix.
158 Ibid. The God of Spinoza, 47, 49.
Recall that, as E2p11c notes, it is not that God constitutes our essence as something necessary but only in relation to the fact that all of our ideas are expressions of the attribute of thought. And yet, because we are finite, every idea we have can also be understood from the perspective of a finite mode. In fact, it must be understood in that way. Not only does this not destroy Spinoza's parallelism, but what appears to be a contradiction is actually a chain of deductive arguments which, at one point, are understood according to the relation of every idea alongside the idea of a God conceived as a thinking thing, and then, in another way, can be understood in relation only to the ideas a finite mind had prior that led to the ideas in reflective awareness. This awareness though cannot be completely deduced or described within any arrangement of concepts of human temporality other than the way in which Spinoza has understood finite duration. Actual time and space cannot exist as logical dimensions within a system that is an eternal and organically expressive unified whole with infinite expressions in infinite ways.159 In E4p62s we read, “But we can have only a quite inadequate knowledge of the duration of things (by IIP31), and we determine their times of existing only by the imagination (by IIP44S), which is not equally affected by the image of a present thing and the image of a future one.”160

Because duration is always in relation to what it is to be finite (our sense of time being a part of imaginative knowledge), we need to train our mind to strive towards a rational disposition about laws of Nature of both thought and extension and about the nature of cause and effect. These laws are conceived through themselves as part of what attributes are, and each attribute’s parallel causality can be enhanced to produce more powerful effects by adequately

159 We read in Plato's Parmenides (lines 141 a-e, 934) that all that is One cannot be understood using human conceptions of temporality. So this is not a new concept in Spinoza, but he develops monism in new ways.
160 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p62s: 149.
comprehending what it is for Nature to be self-caused and eternal. As expressions of one organic substance, we also express a degree of eternity in our own determinate ways. Your ways are different, perhaps more effective or powerful, than my ways. That is, we can express the adequate conception of the intellectual love of God, or Nature, depending on the perspective (disposition) we hold, as well as the deductive chain of adequate ideas used to create the effects of understanding. This is why the concept of singularity and individual subjectivity cannot be completely done away with in Spinoza.

Reasoning about the laws of the attributes of thought and extension will include concentrating, in reflective awareness, on that which is sub specie quaedam aternitatis from the perspective of a finite, singular essence. This leads to the logical conclusion that ideas about the affections of our bodies, that is, of a human mind as the idea of its body, must be understood in at least two different ways. For Spinoza, there is no true opposition here, only difference in degrees of ideational complexity and expressive power or capacity. In other words, we are God in our expressions as substance, just to a lesser degree of power. We are substance, but we are not all of substance. Beth Lord writes, “Because it is part of the infinite intellect, the essence of every finite mode is eternal.”

Necessarily Finite in Our Expressions of Eternity

The concept of freedom is an important part of Spinoza system, particularly as it relates to the last two books of the Ethics. As noted in previous chapters, freedom is understood as acting from one's determined singular essence while entering into relations with others and discovering (through reflective awareness) the causes of the effects we experience as our own increases or decreases in power. In other words, we can select which perspective and disposition we hold in our reflective awareness based on our understanding. Our bodies and ideas change as

161 Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction, 147.
we come into contact with the forces of other bodies and ideas. We can engage in rational thinking, but we interact with these laws through our singular reflection, awareness, sense perceptions, and habitual dispositions or habits. Effects are the product of the coming-together and decomposition of relations between bodies and ideas, but the interaction with imaginative ideas when one alters their disposition is an internal process experienced singularly. Nonetheless, this recomposition between ideas has already been affected by previous ideas that we have had, both internally and externally, in causal chains.

Consider how many combinations, rearrangements, and decompositions are occurring in an eternally existing substance. In the first part of the KV Spinoza writes about the distinction between the concepts of generation and creation, composition and decomposition. He writes, “...men are not created, but only begotten, and that their bodies already existed, but in a different form.”¹⁶² He clearly states that we also cannot think of ideas as “created.” They are merely unique expressions (ways) of the laws of thought (laws of Nature which are causal). We must think of our ideas as continually “generated” and rearranged, and new combinations are always possible through conceptual blending. When something is conceived as that which is “created,” we immediately posit both its existence and its essence. This is why, logically, positing the existence of an eternal God must also include that it is self-caused and continually self-creating in essence. But the meaning of that which is continually “generated” (or regenerated) involves positing only the nature of existence.¹⁶³ That is why we are concerned with our singular conatus as a way to express our power in existence.

We can possibly deduce that, depending on which of the three types of knowledge we are reflecting on, the mind can be conceived as both representational and non-representational. This

¹⁶² Spinoza, Letter 4: 767.
¹⁶³ Spinoza, Short Treatise, 41.
outcome, if possible, is still up for debate. Ed Curley writes, “Persons must be mind-bodies, an indissoluble unity which can be considered from two points of view, and with two distinct vocabularies and two distinct kinds of causation.” Curley's point is that there is not a logical possibility of a causal relationship between thought and extension. The result is that we cannot say that one attribute represents the other. What, then, is the equivalent of bodily action when we are adequately comprehending the intellectual love of God and how can a human mind adequately describe such a thing? Part of this answer is made clear in the TTP when Spinoza writes that we should join with others of like mind in friendship, love our neighbors, practice charity, and continue to strive towards understanding. Such experiences enhance our powers of thinking and acting with more affirmative effects. In this way of expressing human desires, capacities, needs, and use of rationality we are expressing the intellectual love of God (and Nature). When we are happy we are free.

Potentia Mentis is more than this as well. This term and concept was referenced in Chapter Three. We must first understand the meaning of what it is for the human mind to be the idea of its body prior to truly understanding Spinoza's claims about the mind and body being one and the same thing, that is, as expressions of the power of Nature, or God. The following quote by Spinoza bears repeating in this respect: “When you say that by making men so dependent on God I reduce them to the level of elements, plants, and stones, this is enough to show that you have completely misunderstood my views and are confusing the field of intellect with that of the imagination.” What this statement also demonstrates is that Spinoza clearly feels human consciousness, thinking, and acting are not the same as the animated activity of the extension of plants or stones. The “elements” don’t imagine with joy.

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164 Spinoza, Ethics, introduction: xv. Further, we can locate some evidence for David Hume's indebtedness to certain aspects of Spinoza's system expanded upon in the work of Wim Klever.
165 Spinoza, Letter 21: 825.
The deduction that human conscious experience is real and includes certain characteristics and laws is not problematic for Spinoza’s system because we cannot understand the power of either substance or how we express substance in finite ways unless we also understand the laws of thought and extension as two points of view of the same thing. One conceptual effect includes the new knowledge that Spinoza's epistemology and ontology are collapsed into one while continuing to understand that each can also be understood separately. In other words, what we logically realize is that our finite mind and body are one and the same thing and were all along, but each must be described in completely different ways. They are comprehended as God and Nature. The definition of affect is important here yet again. Curley writes, “We may think of a particular thing (animal or person) as having an aim and appetite of its own, which explains its behaviour...as a desiring and perceiving creature; or we may explain the thing's behaviour as the effect of external causes, and this is the model of a mechanical explanation.”166 Both ways should be explored separately, but they are always one and the same thing. It takes the training of the mind to clearly differentiate between these sets of ideas in their separateness and as the same thing without falling into contradiction or negation. As Spinoza writes in E1p25c, “Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way...”167 Therefore, to understand intuitively is to realize the above deduction’s validity (and subsequent consequences) in the ontology of the everyday. It is also to understand why “substance” is always logically prior to its affections.

If our starting point is that we have a mind inside our bodies spatially, a mind that has ideas, then it is not logical to also say that the mind is ideas. Yet, instead, if we begin from the

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166 Spinoza, Ethics, introduction: x.
167 Ibid. 1p25c: 19
understanding of what it logically entails for all of Nature to be both one substance with infinitely connected causal interactions and that this whole is continually expressing itself according to degrees of power that exist as the separate laws of Nature of its attributes, then the non-spatial notion that the mind is ideas is logical. This is why Spinoza spends Book 1 of the *Ethics* on his ontological argument before appealing much more specifically to his epistemology and the nature of affects in later books. It’s true that substance, as a logical concept, must be understood adequately before the affections of substance, but this is also not even possible until a human mind understands how human minds and bodies think and act according to their laws. In other words, as evident in the opening proposition of the *Ethics*, ontology precedes epistemology for Spinoza. It is also another reason why several Spinoza scholars have written about Spinoza's *method* and/or *form* as such an important topic. This debate includes the need for analysis between sets of ideas in relation to each other and only then acts of conceptual synthesis about what has been deduced (along with its logical implications afterward). Referencing the process of analysis and synthesis, just as this thesis began referencing, Piet Steenbakkers writes, “For Spinoza method [as in the *ordo geometricus*]...involves both moments...”\(^{168}\) In my reading, therefore, such a method requires human consciousness. As Spinoza writes in the *TEI*, the reason for conscious reflection about the types of ideas and power between them is “...so that we may thereby come to know our power of understanding and may so train the mind that it will understand according to that standard all that needs to be understood laying down definite rules and aids... From this we may conclude that method is nothing but reflexive knowledge, or the idea of an idea.”\(^{169}\) This is another clear indication why readings such as Della Rocca’s do not work. Such readings do not take seriously enough the affects in creating our most efficient and
rationally creative effects in our expressions as substance.

In the same set of adequate ideas used to distinguish between understanding laws of Nature from understanding that which is partial, abstract, or in error rationally, we can also recognize how reason alters our affects. Anthony Paul Smith writes, “There is no strict separation between reason and affects [in E5], for reason can act on an affect and change it from a passion to an action when we form a clear and distinct idea of it (Evp3), and an affect can arise from or be aroused by reason (Evp7).” Yet, as we have learned, rational knowledge is composed of ideas, and affects are both an idea and an affection together. Affects are not ideas, but ideas help shape affects into new affects. The body matters, but Spinoza's deducive order starts with God's essence as concept in book 1 of the Ethics and proceeds for all other concepts from there derivatively. Nonetheless, naturally, we cannot adequately realize the complete synthesis of his argument until we first understand the laws of human thought and action as well. All of this leads to the singular expression of the intellectual love of God if we have worked through the system deductively and synthesized it adequately. It is only after we understand the nature of rational analysis, the priority of specific concepts which result as ideational effects of such analysis, and the synthesis that also results that we realize what our reflective processes involve and how they express more powerful affects as God (as Nature). Affirmative affects that we are the adequate cause of are actions. As Spinoza writes in both E2p7 and earlier in the TEI, what is necessary is that we deduce what we know “from physical things...” He writes:

As to the ordering of all our perceptions and their proper arrangement and unification, it is required that [...] we should ask whether there is a being – and also what kind of being – which is the cause of all things so that its essence represented in thought is also the cause of all our ideas. Then our mind [...] will reproduce Nature as closely as possible; for it will possess in the form of thought the essence, order, and unity of Nature. Hence we can see that it is above all necessary for us always to deduce our ideas from physical

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170 Smith, Spinoza Beyond Philosophy, ed. Beth Lord, 60, emphasis added.
things, i.e. from real beings, advancing, as far as we can, in accordance with the chain of causes from one real being to another real being.\textsuperscript{172}

The ordering of perceptions is the ordering of our ideas through the reflective lens of conscious awareness and adequate understanding about both the essence of God and our essence as \textit{conatus}. Chapter 3 of the \textit{TTP} can be directly correlated, in my reading, with two of the most important propositions of the \textit{Ethics}, 2p7 and 2p11:

By God's direction I mean the fixed and immutable order of Nature, or chain of natural events; for I...have already shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of Nature according to which all things happen and are determined are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. \textit{So it is the same thing whether we say that all things happen according to Nature's laws or that they are regulated by God's decree and direction.}\textsuperscript{173}

Therefore, the intellectual love of God, or intuitive knowing, can be an awareness of our chains of ideas and actions as laws of Nature or as that which is “regulated by God's decree and direction.” All natural phenomena involve eternal truth. The important point here is that we have already learned that a substance monism of one organic and eternal whole is that which is immanently expressed.\textsuperscript{174} Even errors in our awareness are substance in expression in their own determinant way. To recognize errors in reasoning we need to develop the habits of a rational method already understood as remaining aware of the laws of thought and extension. It is one thing for something “to be” and another thing “to be conceived.”

Although the attributes of thought and extension are ontologically identical, they have separate types of determinate effects that have already been described as three different kinds of modes. Related to this are the three categories of modal modifications to describe how substance is immanently expressed by each attribute. These are the \textit{infinite immediate modes, infinite

\textsuperscript{172} De Dijn, \textit{The Way to Wisdom}, 163.  
\textsuperscript{173} Spinoza, \textit{TTP}, chapter 3: 417.  
\textsuperscript{174} For other current albeit selective work on Spinoza's monism one can see the edited anthology by Philip Goff \textit{Spinoza on Monism} (2012).
mediate modes, and finite modes already discussed in previous chapters. To have an idea about what an infinite, mediate mode is is to understand that such modes express the totality of all possible ideas mediated by substance as a modification of itself. This expression is a true idea that we can understand about the nature of infinite, mediate modes, even when we cannot express all the ideas that are possible in a substance that is eternally expressing itself. The infinite, immediate modes are the actual laws of each attribute, and they can be read about in E2p21, p23, and p31, among other places. Because expressions of the laws of Nature occur continuously and in infinite ways, we cannot possibly have a singularly complete experience of them, but we can have adequate knowledge about what an infinite, immediate modal modification is by definition. Each thing is caused by its own laws of Nature in an infinite and immediate way continuously because God (Nature) is eternally in existence. The adequate idea of God that we can have is also the infinite, immediate mode of thought conceived through an attribute of substance. That is, it is the idea of God as action, as immanently expressed, and not any idea of a “representation” of a God as external to us. As we’ve read in E1p25, “God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.” Spinoza continues to write that all modes are “nothing but affections of God's attributes.” Therefore, substance is logically the cause of all modal modifications as effects, but we are expressing substance at all times. Our expressions can be understood as both causes and effects. We can, for example, conceive ourselves as an adequate cause of the effects of substance determined in a singular way.

Recall that, for Spinoza, we cannot attribute anthropomorphic concepts to God, so why would we attribute to God an interest in human affairs and desires? We express God conceived as

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176 Ibid. 1p28: 19.
a thinking thing and a thing whose existence is eternal in an immediate way. Spinoza writes:

Since certain things had to be produced by God immediately, namely, those which follow necessarily from his absolute nature [infinite immediate modes], and others (which nevertheless can neither be nor be conceived without God) had to be produced by mediation of these first things [infinite mediate and finite modes], it follows: I. That God is absolutely the proximate cause of the things produced immediately by him, and not a proximate cause in his own kind, as they say. For God's effects can neither be nor be conceived without their cause (by P15 and P24C)... II. That God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things... For a remote cause we understand one which is not conjoined in any way with its effect...\textsuperscript{177}

Notice the separation in conceptual thinking and categories here. God is to be conceived as the proximate cause of things produced immediately, but is the immediate cause of itself because it is of its own kind. If this is true, and it is in a logically deductive sense, then this system requires different versions of modal modifications. \textit{No effect of substance can be adequately conceived without involving its cause. A true effect always involves its cause in Spinoza's system.} Any singular awareness or expression of this is an effect of its cause. If we are using human logic to understand such a system, then we have to find ways to separate what a cause is from its effects and expressions with the knowledge that all effects involve their cause(s).

Infinite, mediate modes, by contrast, maintain a much more nuanced and controversial interpretation. You can read about how they operate in E2p22 and 2p23, as well as Letter 64 and other places. Spinoza writes that they are “the face of the whole universe.” Ed Curley translates this as “...those features of that individual which enable it to retain its identity through change, that is, the contrast relationships between its parts... The mediate infinite mode of the attribute of extension is supposed to follow from the absolute nature of the attribute of extension, timelessly, logically, and without the need for any other cause.”\textsuperscript{178}

An adequate idea is recognized by the way in which that idea is determined, but also in

\textsuperscript{177} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p28s: 20.
\textsuperscript{178} Curley, “Donagan's Spinoza,” 132. See also E1p21.
its truth by definition. Ideas can be felt as an element of our affects. To have an adequate idea is also to have a mental action that is non-physical yet composed of power and force. The brain’s actions that parallel are a part of extension. Ideational affective responses include an awareness that one is thinking with rational force (as we read in previous chapters). That expression is singular, but the action can also be defined as that which is the immanent action of God (or Nature) conceived as a thinking thing. The mediated aspect is that we have to include all possible expressions of the singular sort of that attribute, but all possible expressions of substance are also defined as logically infinite as well. To have adequate ideas about other adequate ideas is an action as well. They are ideas in relation to each other within their own series of logical relationships that are both finite and infinite. The same applies to the singular actions of the attribute of extension. The series of fixed and eternal things includes “that if we really want to understand the series of singular changeable things, we must attend to the series of fixed and eternal things.”

The above reading coheres with what I have emphasized about the imagination in Chapter Two and brings us to finite modes. A finite imaginative idea used with more rationally understood power by a singular individual can be classified in two different ways, as both active and passive. To think rationally and intuitively includes not only conscious awareness of what it is to understand necessary truths (common notions) more clearly and distinctly (or be used with more power), but it also includes understanding how the ideas of the imagination operate in a form of conceptual blending. Susan James notes, “The passionate life might be perfectly ok most of the time...but it is insecure...it could turn out you are mistaken.” To understand the laws by which imaginative knowledge is produced is another type of rational common notion, as we

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179 Curley, “Donagan’s Spinoza,” 123. Also see the TEI paragraphs 99-101. This includes that “the totality of finite things does not exhaust reality...”
180 Susan James, Philosophy Bites, radio broadcast, BBC, 2012.
learned in previous chapters. Our rational and imaginative ideas effect other ideas in series continually connected to their respective type of knowledge. We can use our powerful series of ideas to cause effects in the minds of others as well. Yet, as Beth Lord writes, “No matter how rational a person becomes, he will never be able to avoid the affects altogether: they interrupt the flow of rational ideas and determine our thinking and acting.”

This is where Spinoza’s system differs significantly from many other Western philosophical systems. As we enhance the power of conscious reflection, our combined knowledge becomes more useful and enjoyable for us. We become more consciously aware of what it is to have shifting registers of ideational power and usefulness with a *method* that recognizes that *ratios* of motion and rest run parallel with our *reasons* for our motions. Spinoza writes, “It is enough, I say, for us to understand the common properties of the affects and of the mind, so that we can determine what sort of power, and how great a power, the mind has to moderate and restrain affects.”

This brings us back to the nature of affects and is how I will end this thesis. Affects, as we've already read, are at the core of Spinoza's dynamic epistemology. Ideas of intuition (knowledge of the essence of singular things) are real, natural things. They are ideas involving knowledge about other ideas of the first and second kinds, and act as a type of knowledge that can be put to use. This can become easily confused when, for example, we believe we have free will. I may prefer coffee in the morning and you may prefer tea, but our separate decisions are not acts of free will. There is a cause for the affect I have which I associate with other ideas and actions, while your associations are different but still related to each other by the laws of thought and extension in the same way as are mine. Spinoza writes, “For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way that he is of the idea of

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182 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p56s: 101. 3p57 also reads, “Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other.”
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.”183 It is singular adequate thinking that understands the difference. All things, in their own determinate way, strive to continue to exist. E1p17c2sII reads, “Hence, they can agree entirely according to their essence. But in existing they must differ.”184 Because everyone does not use reason regularly, this insight demonstrates that human essence agrees in being made of degrees of power but existence differs on a singular level. Perhaps this would have been a great proposition to begin this chapter with, but it logically synthesizes with other important ideas currently to create more ideational power. As Antonio Negri writes, “The realm in which singularities are immersed, the phenomenological fabric of existence, is in fact a fabric of hard relations...”185 Hard relations require individuals with reflective consciousness. Negri often refers to Spinoza's system as that which has “personality,” and as a realistic ethics for living; as that which lucidly describes the nature of true human experiences. And, as Anthony Uhlmann writes in Spinoza Now, “Intuition, then, also involves affect...”186 Spinoza confirms this when he writes in Chapter 4 of the TTP that what it entails for us to have knowledge of an effect through its cause “is nothing other than the knowledge of a property of that cause...”187

The best we can do is adequately conceive of the cause of our effects which is both involved in those effects and stronger than them. Spinoza, in discussing the impossibility of miracles, writes:

For since a miracle is an event of a limited nature, expressing a power that is never other than fixed and limited, from such an effect we could not possibly conclude the existence of a cause whose power is greater than that effect. I say 'the most' because an event can also be the result of several simultaneously concurring causes, the force and power of the result being less than all the causes taken together, but far greater than the power of each

183 Spinoza, Ethics, 2p13s: 40.
184 Ibid. 1p17c2sII: 15.
185 Negri, “Power and Ontology Between Heidegger and Spinoza,” Spinoza Now, 313.
186 Anthony Uhlmann, Spinoza Now, 276.
187 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 4: 428.
The adequate idea of God is an eternal expression. The Hebrew term for both thought as deliberation and for vigilance is mezima. Spinoza wrote a compendium for Hebrew grammar so he was highly familiar with the language and its many uses. As already noted, the Hebrew word for what it is to know something can also be defined as what it is to love. In addition, the Hebrew word for God can also be defined as “to be.” Thus, to know is to deliberate and to have vigilance in doing so. It is also to love, just as we see in Spinoza’s definition of blessedness, and to love can also be understood as what it is to exist. In an absolutely beautiful and modern passage, Spinoza summarizes these deductions in E4p45s. I quote the passage at length as no element can be left out. The passage is at the heart of Spinoza's dynamic proto-physics of thought and action and a theory of human affects:

Nothing forbids our pleasure except a savage and sad superstition. For why is it more proper to relieve our hunger and thirst than to rid ourselves of melancholy? My account of the matter, the view I have arrived at, is this: no deity, nor anyone else, unless he is envious, takes pleasure in my lack of power and my misfortune; nor does he ascribe to virtue our tears, sighs, fear, and any other things of that kind, which are signs of a weak mind. On the contrary, the greater the joy with which we are affected, the greater the perfection to which we pass, that is, the more we must participate in the divine nature. To use things, therefore, and take pleasure in them as far as possible...this is the part of a wise man. It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things at once.189

The transitions to greater degrees of perfection are discussed in the preface to E4, and they bring us greater and greater joys of all types. Spinoza explains that perfection is the adequate

188 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 6: 448. This is also why a theory of representation will not work applied to Spinoza’s system.
189 Spinoza, Ethics, 4p45s: 140-141, emphasis added.
understanding of “reality.” Yet, not all knowledge of reality is joyous. Our greater disposition towards understanding reality involves intuitive knowing because it is the understanding of “the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces effects” without regard to its duration.\textsuperscript{190}

We can have an idea that is conceived \textit{both} as constituting God's idea \textit{and} as not constituting it.\textsuperscript{191} It is here, among other places, that I feel theories of representation will not work to fully capture Spinoza's system. For example, Della Rocca writes, “Similarly, the fact that a given idea has one content relative to God's mind and a different content relative to the human mind must be explained by some difference between the two minds.”\textsuperscript{192} But the point is that we can never know God's mind fully or we would be God. We can only know our mind as ideas, and we understand that its power of adequate expression \textit{is} God conceived as a thinking thing expressing itself as natural phenomena. We, therefore, have no real need to distinguish between this difference Della Rocca points to. We can investigate with more depth human phenomena as expressions of God (or Nature’s laws).

Rationality can recognize the truth of the limits of human finiteness while also maintaining a disposition towards its own continued activity as an expression of an eternal substance. In E4p18s we read, “Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what really leads a man to greater perfection...This, indeed, is as necessarily true as that the whole is greater than its part...”\textsuperscript{193} But one's mind cannot operate in isolation. \textit{If a mind and body did not understand anything but itself it would be imperfect and there is nothing imperfect in Nature.}

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\textsuperscript{190} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4 preface: 116: “For no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time.”
\textsuperscript{191} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 1p21: 16-17. E1p16 also reads that we can infer more properties about a thing “the more the definition of the thing expresses reality, that is, the more reality the essence of the defined thing involves.”
\textsuperscript{192} Della Rocca, \textit{Representation...}, 68-69.
\textsuperscript{193} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 4p18s: 125.
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Spinoza continues, “There are, therefore, many things outside us which are useful to us, and on that account should be sought. Of these, we can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our nature...”\(^{194}\) These activities aid in our capacity to produce more powerful effects, especially when we combine with others of a similar nature and disposition to form a larger body of action. As Richard Mason summarizes so well:

> The system is meant to be self-propelling. Knowledge of nature – of our nature – can lead to virtue because we will correctly understand our interests as part of our nature, and we want such knowledge because our nature also includes a positive drive towards activity – an accumulation of truths and a diminution of falsehoods. We want knowledge not because truth is attractive – that would be teleology – but because the positive side of our nature has a drive towards it... \(^{195}\)

As we read in E4p66, a proposition which is key to the adequate understanding of the *Ethics*, when we are acting from reason “we want a greater future good in preference to a lesser present one, and a lesser present evil in preference to a greater future one.”\(^ {196}\)

Virtue was discussed as part of reason in Chapter Three, but it must also include the nature of affect and power in intuitive knowledge as well. Virtue is a part of our rational use of imaginative knowledge to enhance our power and expressions of thought and extension. Yet, if so, then as we read in E4p17\(s\) earlier, affects and the use of reason are different, as reason cannot control all of our affects. Spinoza reminds us that we have to learn about the power of reason so we can distinguish what reason can and cannot do in relation to our affects. In this way, what is written in books 4 and 5 of the *Ethics* on virtue and power is critical to evaluate correctly. For example, 4p20 states that virtue is “human power itself, which is defined by man's essence alone...,” and in 4p22\(c\) we read that our self-preservation “is the first and only foundation of

\(^{194}\) Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p18\(s\): 125.

\(^{195}\) Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 145, emphasis added. This is also another way to understand how Spinoza differs From Stoic philosophy. Mason writes, “Spinoza believed that the stoics made the emotions subject to the will. He could not accept that. We are not made that way. That is not our true nature. How we are – our nature – is that we are part of nature as we are, with the drives that we have, having the power that they have (141).”

virtue.”197 Recall, in the *TTP*, that a man can strive to preserve his or her nature without the use of reason. If affects are also about power, and not everyone uses reason well, then virtue is conceptually about more than that which involves only adequate ideas. This is also why, I believe, Spinoza injects another idea about what it is “to be blessed” right between these two propositions in 4p21. In 4p21 we learn one has *first* to desire “to be, to act, and to live, that is, to actually exist” before they can then desire “to act well and to live well.”198 This is also why suicide cannot be a justified rational action according to this system. You have to desire to exist before you can also desire to live and act well. Even so, we still learn that all of Nature benefits and we increase our own advantage by using reason. By reasoning well our desire to understand more is strengthened, but this leads us to understanding that God and Nature are identical, at least in the sense of what a human mind can rationally comprehend: “Knowledge of God is the mind’s greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God.”199 And we could not exist nor be conceived if we “did not have the power to enjoy this greatest good.”200 We might ask at this point if a phenomenological account of temporality is required? One example to explain why we have to include some temporal concerns (even though duration is only partial knowledge) is found at the start of E4 in the preface:

But here it should be noted in addition that just as we can distinctly imagine distance of place only up only up to a certain limit, so also we can distinctly imagine distance of time only up to a certain limit. …we imagine to be equally far from the present all those objects whose time of existing we imagine to be separated from the present by an interval longer than that we are used to imagining distinctly; so we relate them, as it were, to one moment in time.”201

The dynamics of force and power involved in the expressions of Nature are infinitely

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197 Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p20, 4p22c: 126, 127. In chapter 3 of the unfinished *PT* we read that the most essential feature of a human being is “to preserve themselves” and that this preservation is a “striving.”
199 Ibid. 4p28: 129.
200 Ibid. 4p36s: 133.
201 Ibid. 4 D6: 117, emphasis added.
more complex than any one body.202 Our tendency towards both understanding and doing many things at once is a type of stability that increases in strength. The complexities are actually that which can be combined in order to become more useful, more powerful in its effects, and thus more joyous and pleasurable. This level of power in ideational awareness is directly correlated to an individual's increase in reflective awareness and intuitive knowledge. Our method of investigating the object of our ideas as other ideas is an effect of being capable of better recognizing and using true ideas about knowledge and things. This is why we need to investigate and pay more attention to the importance of imaginative knowledge in understanding Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology. Beth Lord writes, “Passive joys are important in increasing our power to act and think, just as imagination is important in increasing our rational knowledge...”203

The more you read the Ethics and other works, the more you understand the nature of your own ideas, which causes more joy and desire for knowledge. The Ethics becomes a tool for growth in personal self-awareness and further understanding of laws of Nature (which apply to all things), but also of continuous understanding about the environments that we influence and are influenced by. The increased knowledge we gain through reason coincides simultaneously with an increase in the ways in which our body is affected and can affect others, including the ways in which we can experience joy and develop better methods for understanding. This is why, as Dan Selcer notes, experimentation is a part of intuitive knowledge for Spinoza. Note what is written in the TEI that aligns with what will later be systematized in the Ethics in this respect: “...they [we] have reached a point where they can make very many complex things with little labour. In just the same way the intellect by its inborn power makes intellectual tools for itself by

202 Recently a Chronicle of Higher Education article, dedicated to fairly assessing Tom Nagel's 2012 now heretical work Mind and Cosmos, noted the following: “The chemist Addy Pross...argues that life exhibits 'dynamic kinetic stability,' in which self-replicating systems become more stable through becoming more complex – and are therefore inherently driven to do so (Michael Chorost, May 13, 2013).” I wonder how this might apply to our ideas?
203 Lord, Spinoza’s Ethics, 101.
which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools - or capacity for further investigation..."²⁰⁴ Just as it is of God, as a thinking thing, who can conceive an idea of its own essence and all which follows from that essence, we too, in our own degree of rational power can formulate an adequate series of ideas about our essence and what can (and cannot) follow from that essence. And in this way, thought and extension, or God and Nature as one substance, are one and the same thing.²⁰⁵

Between ideas of the first kind and ideas of the second and third kinds there is a significant ontological and epistemological shift of emphasis. Spinoza writes:

Men have been so mad as to believe that God is pleased by harmony... All of these things show sufficiently that each one has judged things according to the disposition of his brain; or rather, has accepted affections of the imagination as things... For although human bodies agree in many things, they still differ in very many. And for that reason what seems good to one, seems bad to another; what seems ordered to one, seems confused to another... We see, therefore, that all notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain Nature are only modes of imagining...²⁰⁶

Experiencing real joy includes the ideas of the imagination, but the intellectual love of God is also a type of joy. This is more than just bodily pleasure. It is not only the knowledge of harmony, as is also written in the PT, but this level of joy involves homeostatic conatus with increased energy, peace, and seeking environments which allow us to thrive. Spinoza emphasizes this aspect of conatus specifically in E3p1. As an idea “in itself is nothing but a certain kind of awareness,”²⁰⁷ if ideas are also actions, then conscious reflection on a singular level must be part of the ontological equation we seek in our understanding. In Chapter 8 of the PT we learn, “For he who swears by God puts at stake a private good of which he alone knows the value, but he who by his oath puts at stake the freedom and welfare of his country is swearing by the common

²⁰⁴ Spinoza, TIE, 9-10.
²⁰⁵ See Spinoza, Ethics, 2p3: 33.
²⁰⁶ Ibid. 1App: 30-31, emphasis added.
²⁰⁷ Spinoza, TIE, paragraph 78: 22.
good of all, the value of which is not set by him [but by as many equally rational collective interests as compose the body of the state]...\textsuperscript{208}

The knowledge of the essence of things comes with adequate thinking, which can transform understanding into intuitive knowledge. When we have true knowledge of the causes of our ideas and actions, we have more knowledge about ideational and extensive effects. This includes a rational process that is the understanding of the \textit{scientific principles} of thought (common notions) and our relations to the environment.\textsuperscript{209} This is also why Spinoza writes in several places:

...the more the mind understands of Nature, the better it understands itself...the more things the mind knows, the better it understands both its own powers and the order of Nature. Now the better it understands its own powers, the more easily it can direct itself and lay down rules for its own guidance; and the better it understands the order of Nature, the more easily it can restrain itself from useless pursuits.\textsuperscript{210}

Another way to explain this level of intellectual love and affection is to consider that if there is a God, the best we can do as expressions of laws of Nature is to better understand those laws. This will bring us closer to a better understanding and stronger expression of God. The sentiment is about understanding the nature of one's essence and its power to reproduce its natural force, and, therefore, to express Nature with more power. These registers of degrees of power of thought and action is why I read Spinoza’s system as a proto-physics of force. The continuous increases in power is not caused by our knowing the adequate reason or true cause alone, although this does add to that power. It is \textit{also} about the simultaneous process that is cause and effect at once, understood as one and the same thing, as substance itself in its nature as self-caused. This transforms our adequate understanding about what causes and effects are and can do. Maintaining the force and intuitive understanding of power and virtue as a common disposition

\textsuperscript{208} Spinoza, \textit{TP}, 119.
\textsuperscript{209} See Chapter 6 of Spinoza's \textit{TTP} for the statement that reason consists of knowledge of scientific principles.
takes more than habit formation, especially because such knowledge is “both difficult and rare.” It also requires what was described in previous chapters as *habitual readiness*, for such knowledge is strengthened the more we understand the mechanics involved. Our strengthened habitual readiness is what Spinoza is referring to with the meaning and use of the term *quatenus* or “in so far as...,” a term relied on often throughout the *Ethics* related to which perspective one can acquire according to type(s) of knowledge being relied on. If you are focused on only your sensations, for example, then you are too reliant on imaginative ideas and lack understanding.

Care for our ideas and actions involves how we use ideas accompanying our actions, what affects we experience, access, and produce for ourselves and others, and how much these ideas increase the power to produce related ideas that include more creative and effective actions. You can engage in activities with others, but still lack the true understanding of the laws of Nature that your actions are abiding by, that is, of the causes of your affects that increase and decrease your power of thought and action. The more rationality understands the laws of thought, the more it can use the imagination to its benefit. If our circumstances are limited by external causes, the power to imagine those things that we have already rationally experienced that brought us joy becomes particularly important for our peace of mind and overall homeostasis.

If we govern everything from our affects, what we can learn how to do is act with a level of rational and intuitive force which expresses the intellectual love of God. This is because we can both imagine what causes real happiness and power in us *and* use reason to reflect with regular awareness on the causes of those particular affects in their laws of force and motion. When we imagine what we love we also imagine that it is preserved, for example.\(^\text{211}\) The stronger the affect of joy and love, the stronger our desire arises from such joy.\(^\text{212}\) What we can


\(^{212}\) Ibid. 3p37: 89.
learn how to do is “apply one's zeal to those things which help to bring men together in harmony and friendship.” This level of love and nobility requires “skill and alertness” which varies for each of us in degrees of power. It requires so much alertness that Spinoza writes in the KV that we should not even speak of such things to others unless they too are of a rational and alert disposition: “I do not want to say that you should absolutely keep them to yourselves, but only that if ever you begin to communicate them to anybody, then let no other aim prompt you except only happiness of your neighbour, being at the same time clearly assured by him that the reward will not disappoint your labour.” Spinoza is interested in the ways in which we conserve and use our energies, aiming as often as possible to add to the joyous affects of others.

Because of the variation in levels of power and experience, a method is employable for all to understand how to use in Spinoza’s system, but it still “requires a singular power of mind to bear with each one according to his understanding...” Not only according to each of our levels of individual understanding, but also, as we read in the KV, “we could not exist without enjoying something with which we become united, and from which we draw strength,” that is, love and knowledge are “a union with the object which our understanding judges to be good and glorious; and by this we mean such a union whereby both the lover and what is loved become one and the same thing, or together constitute one whole.” In other words, through the intellectual love of God we become one with God (Nature).

To summarize, this chapter has demonstrated that adequate reasoning, including reasoning about how to access imaginative knowledge in ways that aid reasoning, are required for the increased capacities to think and act with more force, as well as for the intellectual love of

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215 This particular skill took me many years to learn how to do regularly, but Spinoza’s system added to my strength.
God (and Nature). As we move into the last book of the *Ethics* we learn that conscious awareness, reflection, and alertness are continually required. Joy can be excessive “unless reason and alertness are present.” As Stuart Hampshire writes, in adequate thinking we move from using reason to understanding that we are not a “particular standpoint and location in time,” but intuitively we know that we are “parts of the eternal framework of Reality.” That which is an expression of an eternal reality is an absolute affirmation. Right at the start of the *Ethics* in 1p11s Spinoza is already preparing us for how this level of conscious alertness works. We can only take the perspective of a singular finite individual, but we understand rationally that we are also an expression of substance, and substance is an eternal affirmation of itself:

> For things that come to be from external causes – whether they consist of many parts or of few – owe all the perfection or reality they have to the power of the external cause; and therefore their existence arises only from the perfection of their external cause, and not from their own perfection. On the other hand, whatever perfection substance has is not owed to any external cause. So its existence must follow from its nature alone; hence its existence is nothing but its essence. Perfection, therefore, does not take away the existence of a thing, but on the contrary asserts it.

In the same proposition we also learn that human beings can create each other in existence (procreation of the species), but we cannot create another individual's essence. Spinoza writes, “because whatsoever exists in Nature, if we entertain any wish about it, then we must always improve it, whether for our sake or for the sake of the thing itself. And since a perfect man is the best thing for us that we know of all that we have around us and before our eyes, it is by far the best both for us and for all people individually that we should at all times seek to educate them to this perfect state.” Thus, Spinoza’s *Ethics* involves human education. The nature of our essence and existence in transformation involves increased capacities for true knowledge and

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219 Ibid. introduction, xv.
220 Ibid. 1p11s: 8.
powerful (creative) activities, and includes the alertness of such passages to greater perfection. That which is our striving, that is, “the better part of us,” agrees with what is most beneficial and joyous for us and for a rational collective. This is the love of God, an awareness of one's essence in-so-far-as it acts. As self-caused and self-causing, God is always in action (an absolute affirmation). To be free is to join in continuous and creative democratic collectives with others, but not without enjoying one's own singular ways of being. Because a rational collective is aware of their shared experience, we can rejoice in the joy of others. Spinoza writes, “Indeed blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God.”

Intuitive knowledge is as important for correctly interpreting Spinoza’s system as are the first two kinds of knowledge, imaginative and rational.

In the conclusion of this thesis, I address some weaknesses of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology, but end with an emphasis on using such a system to strengthen our creativity. In the KV, Spinoza writes, “For it is precisely the particular things, and they alone, that have a cause, and not the general, because they are nothing.” Intuitive and operational knowledge aid not only the rational collective, but also singular joy and expressions of creativity. In the preface to his translation of Spinoza’s works in 1982, Samuel Shirley writes:

Can the essence of God be seen as the source of the ill-understood phenomena that we call artistic creativity? In the ‘conatus’ of human beings, a conatus that derives from God’s potential, do we see a shadow, an image, of God’s creativity, finding expression most markedly in the process of artistic creativity?  

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CONCLUSION

SPINOZA TODAY

“Curiosity about the object of knowledge and the willingness and openness to engage theoretical readings and discussions is fundamental. However, I am not suggesting an over-celebration of theory. We must not negate practice for the sake of theory... By the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice, as in the use of dialogue as conversation, is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. In order to achieve this unity, one must have an epistemological curiosity – a curiosity that is often missing in dialogue as conversation.”

“But action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation...”

-Paulo Freire

“To have work that promotes one's liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed... When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice... Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end.”

-bell hooks

“Human activity dignifies the song.”

-Leonard Cohen

Spinoza’s Dynamic Epistemology and the Enhancement of Creativity

In A manifesto for cyborgs, philosopher Donna Haraway writes about the legitimacy of understanding and using various forms of epistemology today. Echoing Paulo Freire, Haraway writes, “In the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making a partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. Epistemology is about knowing the difference.” There are multiple ways to evaluate, theorize about, and utilize the methods and applications found in theories of knowledge. The term “epistemology” has a questionable history in Western philosophy in the ways in which it normalizes certain terminology and concepts that apply only to a privileged group of thinkers (typically male for example). But I believe we can

1 As noted in the opening to Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology edited by Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (1994), emphasis added.
say how much this term and concept changes throughout the epochs depending on what we learn and the new kinds of knowledge we gain. What is involved in the examination of various forms of knowledge can be summarized as a variation on what it is “to know,” and what types of knowledge are rationally legitimate, as well as what we take as our objects of knowledge. We can explore theories of knowledge without falling back into the dangerous and often destructive ground of placing more value on theory or traditional problems of the concept of what is considered “objective.” As Alison Baily writes, we need to be careful what we value (and how often, thus repetition takes on new meaning as a method of investigation) when discussing the nature of true ideas; that is, we need to recognize when we hold an idea as more valuable than the actual experiences of human beings and our relationships with each other: “Sometimes [in philosophy] we hold concepts so tightly that our love for them replaces our love for one another. We care more for the coherence of our arguments than for the coherence of our relationships.”

I have used the chapters of this thesis to provide more rigorous and systematic evidence that we can rely on Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology to apply to our everyday lives and (methodologically) to larger social, scientific, theological, and philosophical debates today. The laws of thought and action read as a proto-physics of ideational force and motion can be accessed with greater ease, efficiency, and creativity by each of us, and used collectively to create affirmative changes with stronger results.

One reason we can access such a system today as Spinoza's includes that there is infinite room for the development of creativity, novel concept creation, and various applications in ethics and human psychology, for example, by understanding this kind of dynamic epistemology. As

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2 For a good discussion on this history see the work An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies by Alessandra Tanesini.
3 Alison Baily, “On Intersectionality and the Whiteness of Feminist Philosophy,” In the center must not hold, ed. George Yancy, 58.
Beth Lord writes, “Experimental art is, like experimental science, based on combining ordered thought with affective experience; it explores processes of making and relating things together in order to understand the world more clearly.” In this way, Spinoza’s epistemology can be demonstrated through the arts. For purposes of this chapter, that epistemological art is learning and teaching philosophy specifically, or what we might do to strengthen philosophical thinking.

We are also free to use philosophical systems in new ways that apply to our current context. It is also worth noting that one of the feminist pioneers to write against the theoretical Western “Man of Reason” (MOR), Genevieve Lloyd, was also a Spinoza scholar. She advocated for using his system to address on-going social issues and epistemological concerns, including the problem of gender and meaning in the philosophical systems we chose to emphasize and repeat. Lloyd writes:

Taking temporal distance seriously [between old systems as compared to how we think today] demands also of course that we keep firmly in view what the thinkers themselves saw as central to their projects. This exercise involves a constant tension between the need to confront past ideals with perspectives drawn from the present and, on the other hand, an equally strong demand to present fairly what the authors took themselves to be doing. A constructive resolution of the tensions between contemporary feminism and past Philosophy requires that we do justice to both demands.

Not only can Spinoza's proto-physics of ideational force and activity enhance individual and collective (rationally powerful) uses of creativity and strategies for problem solving, it can also be understood as an alley for philosophies of race which address on-going problems of

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4 Lord, *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy*, 8. This work combines Spinoza’s system with various themes of art and creativity.
5 Recently, in a 2015 article, Standford University researchers announced the results of an extended study on walking and creativity. They concluded that regular walking (increased motion) enhances creativity.
6 As comedian and actor Mike Myers has recently said in an interview about his turn to documentary film making, “If you're in the mentality of possibility, you're not in the mentality of deficit... If you're in the possibility of creating, you're not in the possibility of taking away.”
7 Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, 110. She writes earlier, in an example about Virginia Woolf’s novel *Night and Day*, that the main character’s need to leave her female duties of the house and attend to exercises in reasoning is “a longing also for release from a certain style of thought, from intellectual confinement to a realm of the particular, the merely contingent; a longing, in brief, for access to Reason. For Reason is the prerequisite for, and point of access to, not just the public domain of political life, but a realm of thought – of universal principles and necessary orderings of ideas (74).”
racism that persist today, including in the ways in which we “do” philosophy. Spinoza's system is not without critique. I will briefly address some of the weaknesses of his system before ending this thesis on the productive uses of a proto-physics of force and motion that can enhance creativity and understanding.

To have an increased capacity for reflection on not only one's knowledge but also the methods of construction of that knowledge only allows the development of a better capacity to use knowledge in powerful and collective ways. What is the difference between words on a page and paint on a canvas or actors on a stage if all of these arts can produce similarly powerful, affirmative effects? As Moira Gatens writes, “Spinoza's non-dualistic metaphysics offers interesting possibilities for conceiving of the transformation of social and political life.” Of course, Spinoza was very interested in the production of material effects through reading and writing, or what we might understand as the arrangement of words in a certain order so to create real effects. He was also highly invested in what a rational political life consists of. In the TTP, we read, “Furthermore, as we have a better understanding of a person's character and temperament, so we can more easily explain his words.” In this way, as problematic as it may be to categorize people by temperament (because as we learn we can change the ways in which we live, think, and act etc.), both imaginative and rational knowledge work together with the capacity to produce real material (ethical) effects. Warren Montag writes:

The meanings (both literal and metaphorical) of a word or phrase must be determined by reference to established linguistic usage alone. Language is not a reservoir of possible

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8 The term “womanism” was first used by Angela Davis. I will define womanist epistemology in more detail as we proceed.
9 Gatens, “Feminism as ‘Password’...,” 61.
10 As Warren Montag writes in Bodies, Masses, Power, relying on the philosophy of Lucretius and Spinoza’s affinity for it, “Lucretius in De Rerum Natura describes not only speech as a subtle matter that produces the effects of meaning by impinging upon the auditory sense organ but writing itself as a disposition of material elements, letters, whose arrangement determines meaning...” This is also one significant point of Dan Selcer’s work already well documented.
11 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 7: 459.
meanings waiting to be realized, although it is this in the case of poetry and related of course. On the contrary, meaning always exists in an actualized state and the set of meanings attached to a given phrase is finite, limited to those meanings actually in use... 12

Again, repetition becomes an important theme to pay attention to. The above insight becomes especially powerful if the limited contexts in use that are recognizable to reader and writer can overlap each other in diverse and meaningful ways creating new affirmative effects as affects.

I believe there is another question about the definition of subjectivity in philosophy that can be addressed from a Deleuzian perspective in support of Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology being applicable today. One aspect includes that Deleuze makes an excellent case for the notion of subjectivity when he identifies what he calls the “plane of organization” and the “plane of immanence.” Planes of organization in our social, political, biological, and personal language are not the only elements of idea formation and physical motion we are capable of. We are also planes of immanence which are continually “deteritorialized” on a daily basis, and this includes “lines of flight” and dynamic intensities created by our ideas and action that cannot be completely categorized, classified, or closed off by any definition or theory of knowledge. In other words, continuous understanding and the processes of the ontology of the everyday are open ended. Our experience of the plane of immanence includes several layers of flows, transformations, and the unnamable between the myriad of shifting ideas and actions we produce and encounter. Nonetheless, this does not mean we cannot evaluate such lines of flight. 13 Deleuze’s philosophy becomes even more interesting when combined with Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology because he relied on the latter’s system in massive ways in his own work and education in philosophy, especially involving the ideas and actions of creativity, concept

12 Montag, Bodies, Masses, Power, 9-10.
13 See Gilles Deleuze’s A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Also, poetry is a good example of such evaluation, for example.
creation, and experimentation. More importantly for this thesis, Deleuze used and relied on the idea of “ethology” as the study of human (animal) behavior. Moira Gatens describes the implications of a Spinozist ethology in thinking and acting in her work well. In an essay titled “Feminism as 'Password': Re-thinking the 'Possible' with Spinoza and Deleuze,” Gatens describes Deleuze’s version of a Spinozist ethology as follows:

’Ethology is first of all the study of the relations of speed and slowness, of the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterizes each thing.’ If we understand a rule-based morality as one which addresses itself to molar subjects, then ethology may be understood as offering an ethics of the molecular, a micropolitics concerned with the 'in-between' of subjects, with that which passes between them and which manifests the range of their possible becomings... An ethological evaluation will not select subjects, animals, or persons categorized according to species and genus, but rather will individuate according to principles of compossibility, sets of fast or slow combinations, the range of affects and degrees and affectability... A Spinozist will insist that to think differently is, by definition, to exist differently: one's power of thinking is inseparable from one's power of being and vice versa.

Note that the above reference is both for singular human subjects and about the forces and power between humans and other bodies (both human and non-human) in Nature. As we've read in the last five chapters, Spinoza’s system can be applied in ways that better strengthen our capacities for creatively powerful thought and actions. Placing together the various ways that this kind of system can be applied across disciplines will have more powerfully affirmative effects then if we were to remain only within our respective disciplines. Gatens continues, “Creation displaces the command function of language, it expresses a new action, it calls upon the 'commander' to react or flee because it shows his world as one possible world rather than the world.” In other words, as an action creating can be revolutionary. In this vein, I diverge from the usual way of writing a doctoral thesis for a moment and embrace my creative side:

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14 See, for example, the new work by Anne Sauvagnargues Deleuze and Art (2013) and David Cole’s essay “Matter in Motion: The educational materialism of Gilles Deleuze,” Educational Philosophy and Theory (2012).
15 Gatens, “Feminism as Password’…,” 62, 63, emphasis added.
16 Ibid. 72, emphasis added.
“What is truly Spinozist about this architecture is the fact that one is forced to develop the second degree of knowledge (the one that makes your body compose harmonious relations with your physical environment) that can ultimately flirt with the third one (a perfect reading of the material assemblages in their movement of speed and slowness). The outcome of such a conquest is an increase of power (*potentia*), hence the joy to which I was referring in the original text. The joy is quite literal in the case of the playgrounds... In a society of idols and comfort that serve the exact opposite purpose, we absolutely need more architectures of Spinozist joy.”

*There are significant aesthetic, social, ethical, and intellectual conditions of various kinds that apply to innovative problem solving in a modern, technological age and Spinoza’s dynamic proto-physics of thought and action can aid our problem solving capacities with rational force and efficiency.* Another way to summarize the point can be expressed by the writer Saul Bellow in his novel *Humboldt’s Gift*:

He wanted to be magically and cosmically expressive and articulate, able to say *anything*; he wanted also to be wise, philosophical, to find the common ground of poetry and science, to prove that the imagination was just as potent as machinery, to free and to bless humankind.18

This is why things become even more interesting when we are discussing what it is a body can do, or rather, what a body can become, such as Deleuze writes when he states, “Spinoza offers philosophers a new model: the body.”19 Innovative thinking is critical in so many aspects of our lives. To be regularly creative and original is virtually impossible to enact (although I have met individuals who try to live this as a daily ethic, creating powerfully affirmative effects continuously), but various levels and types of creative thinking through ideational fluidity in the ontology of the everyday is possible for anyone using reason and understanding with increasing force. One of the most difficult aspects of creative thinking includes the risk it involves, as any

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17 The Funambulist Pamphlets, Vol. 1, chapter 7 (40).
experiment might. There is no teleology to look forward to and the range of outcomes are virtually unknown. Yet, if you have a method that guarantees an increase in understanding and reasoning capacities, then the potential harmful risk and margin for error significantly diminishes. One example I use involves how to relieve the more taxing elements of creative, critical thinking to include “contagious,” joyous affects while helping to eradicate some of society's challenging problems (such as racism or sexism for example). When it comes to invention, creatively powerful, rational groups of ideas can be immensely joyous, reaching more than just a few individuals. I like how Alexis Philonenko describes the act of writing, innovation, and affecting others using a good method:

The creative flashes of writing are a spattering of dirty and dangerous mud…the writer-philosopher is an *energumenos*, a person possessed… To write is to dirty one’s hands, to give over that ultimate thought by which one is possessed to anyone and everyone, and to risk not being understood…one must be prepared to be invaded in every part by writing… Man writes everywhere – in his churches, in his ships, in his fortresses, in his houses, in his paintings, in his gardens. The field of writing is immense… Innovation, repeated but not imitated, allows us to plunge into myth, into the essence of things – their power of renewed presence…20

As we’ve already read, understanding the essence of singular things in the present is using intuitive knowledge in the application of our understanding with more effective force. What Spinoza teaches us is that by understanding the process of thinking in these ways more adequately, we are better able to cope, experience joy, and have the greater part of our mind enhanced by continued adequate thinking. *This is what a body can do.* As Deleuze writes, “To think is to create – there is no other creation – but to create is first of all to engender 'thinking' in thought.”21 We combine with others to create and manifest new things, but each individual body

20 Philonenko, “Reason and Writing,” 182-183, 186-187. “Reason is necessity… One cannot *not* think; one can *not* write.” On the work of Paulo Freire, Richard Shaull writes, “Then this happens in the process of learning to read, men and women discover that they are creators of culture, and that all their work can be creative (Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 33).”
21 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 147.
is necessary in those instances for producing greater effects. This is why there is no need for a theoretical erasing of the concepts of “subject” and “object.” To do so would disavow the subjective experiences of others which differ from our own, a point made in Chapter Five by Ursula Renz about Spinoza’s epistemology. In this respect, we can return to the practice of a Spinozist ethology to further our understanding while remaining critically aware of the dangers of repeating forms and methods that can be problematic and biased. Gatens continues:

One cannot predict merely from the form of a body all the relations and affects of which it is capable... From the standpoint of ethology, sex, gender, race, and class distinctions appear as coagulations of molecular combinations, strata of more or less stable configurations that are held in place by a complex variety of practices that are at once discursive (for example, the human sciences), normative (for example, medical and legal 'codes'), and subjectifying (subjects designated as 'woman,' 'native,' 'mentally ill'). On the ethological view, ways of being both implicate and explicate ways of knowing, that is, both the power of thought and the power of existing express a mode of embodied life...

By enhancing our diversity of experiences, we increase our reflective awareness of cause and effect processes in Nature, but we also enhance our capacities to gain new knowledge (and then use that knowledge in novel and enjoyable ways). This is why it is quite amusing to read Spinoza’s fairly extensive list of human affects at the end of E3. For example, at one point we read about how important it is to experiment with cooking and food in order to enhance the diversity of our levels of possible joy and adding to our knowledge. Recall that it is also in E3 that Spinoza writes that we define as good “every kind of [rational] joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be.”

Yet, even if we accept Spinoza's position on the necessity of laws of Nature, what we have learned is that there are several different ways to reflect on and use one's ideas, actions, preferences, and alterations in habitual readiness in more creative ways. In a recent anthology of

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22 Gatens, “Feminism as 'Password'...,” 65, 66.
23 Spinoza, Ethics, trans. Curley, 3p39s, 91.
interdisciplinary essays on the history of the concept of habit in the Western canon, philosophers Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson write, “...habit is never simply an aspect of what people do or what occurs in their bodies, and it is much more than a name for what happens when humans mimic machines.” Habit, in other words, is not only something physical. Spinoza’s system allows for creatively powerful applications across interests and disciplines as well. Beth Lord writes, Spinoza's system is inter-disciplinary in two ways: “...his thought, while expounding a complex metaphysics and epistemology, ventures into physics, politics and hermeneutics, and while Spinoza is studied mainly as a philosopher today, he is widely read and cited by many others. Categorizing his work as 'philosophy' is restrictive, for he is interested in truth, wherever that may be found.”

It is those with the courage to be vulnerable in informed ways who enjoy true happiness, are genuinely open to gaining real and continuously altering forms of knowledge or knowing (especially for new experiences, new ways of learning, or true aspects of reality that they previously thought were not possible etc.), and so forth. Spinoza advocates for rationally exploring in experimental ways in order to gain both new knowledge and have new experiences. When we are habitually ready to learn more, opening ourselves up to being wrong or understanding something through another's lens, we become more interested in learning as an aspect of our essence and of Nature. In such practices, our tendencies towards more education and uses of reasoning are enhanced, and we desire to understand more about how the effects of learning involve pleasurable experiences and outcomes, both bodily and intellectually, and on

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26 These ideas are not generalized although they are, of course, not without exceptions. For current sociological and psychological evidence on the massive problem of vulnerability in our society, one can turn to the work of sociologist Brene Brown. Her first TED talk is the most viewed TED lecture in all of TED talk history. One has to wonder why that is? http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability
both collective and individual levels.

This is exactly what philosopher George Yancy will describe as included in his teaching pedagogy in the philosophy classroom; that is, for all involved in a learning environment to allow a space for the validity of real, lived experiences, including subjective reports (personal narratives) as legitimate forms of knowledge. This involves altering some of the ways in which philosophy has traditionally been done in the classroom. Yancy writes, “It is necessary to rethink the ways in which philosophy speaks to the mind and the heart.”27 The idea of fearless speech, and what Yancy also calls fearless listening, are practices that we can all engage in when learning about different types of knowledge, experience, and ways of knowing.28 In this respect, the following bears repeating. Pierre Macherey writes:

...the power of the intellect is not determined a priori by conditions that would limit its activity...the reflexive knowledge that has for an 'object' the power of the intellect, is not the condition of the manifestation of the true but on the contrary, its effects, its results. The method does not precede the development of knowledges, but it expresses or reflects it. What this implies is that it is necessary to produce real ideas before being about to ‘re-cognize’...the conditions of their understanding.29

Therefore, experimentation and imaginative knowledge in learning will be crucial for new ways of being.30 Spinoza’s system, in my reading, cannot be adequately understood, used, or developed without the inclusion of imaginative knowledge in the importance of rational capacities. In this is another powerful ideational tool or methodological device we can access which Spinoza refers to as levity. There is much work to be done on Spinoza and the experience

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27 Yancy, Look, a White!, 58. “So-called safe classrooms are those that suppress serious and probing questions that interrogate ‘sacred’ boundaries. Safe classrooms are those that do not interrogate pedagogical approaches that refuse to value the whole person in terms of her multiple standpoints and how these standpoints shape knowledge claims. Indeed, safe classrooms are those that teach us to conform through false choices (65).”

28 Ibid. 71. The “funkiness of existential pain,” and lived experience as legitimate forms of knowledge, Yancy writes, humanizes theory. I believe, in this way, Spinoza’s system read as a dynamic proto-physics of ideational force and power can humanize many of our theories today.

29 Macherey, Hegel or Spinoza, 43.

30 For Michael Della Rocca’s Spinoza “the rational is the real,” but as already demonstrated, there are other ways to express knowledge that can be beneficial for us all.
of levity. For Spinoza, when we experience levity we are also the most open to forming powerfully creative, rational groups of ideas and actions with others. Is it not the case that when we genuinely laugh together we are the closest, and that we might say, in that moment of levity we are in union with each other as one body of thought and experience?31

Ursula Renz has noted that to read Spinoza well is to read his ethics in conjunction with anthropology, among other areas.32 This is yet another aspect of Spinoza’s system in its interdisciplinary applications. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, an understanding of how affects work are prior to any real understanding of effective ethical relations with others, something demonstrated throughout this thesis. In this way, I appeal to how Stuart Hampshire summarizes Spinoza’s contemporary systematic possibilities when he writes, “Nothing is more useful to a person, [Spinoza] claims, than the added strength that comes from the union with other persons in a community, which then becomes itself an individual thing, with its own drive to self-preservation.”33 Spinoza’s system has also been used in the advocacy for green politics and environmental philosophy, as another example of its interdisciplinary applications. Although his works can be and are tools of motivation, inspiration, understanding, rigorous scholarship, art, science, philosophy, psychology, ethical and political theory, and theological criticism, one friend turned foe critiqued Spinoza's character and ideas in an exchange of letters, stating:

You claim to have finally discovered the true philosophy. How do you know that your philosophy is the best out of all those that have ever been taught in this world, are at present being taught, or will ever be taught in the future? To say nothing of possible future philosophies, have you examined all those philosophies, throughout the entire world? And even if you have examined them properly, how do you know that you have

31 In his biography on Spinoza, Steve Nadler points to a note by someone who knew about Spinoza’s overall personality, wit, intelligence, and charm with all who he came into contact with, writing, “Lucas tries to convey just this when he writes that… ‘He had a wit so well seasoned that the most gentle and the most severe found very peculiar charm in it (196).’”

32 In a 3:AM MAGAZINE interview from September 2012, Renz comments, “Following a widespread view of Spinoza, one of the basic claims of the Ethics is that ethics, as a philosophy discipline, has to rely on anthropology.” http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/after-spinoza-wiser-freer-happier/

33 Spinoza, Ethics, introduction by Stuart Hampshire, xiii.
chosen the best? ...Come to your senses, philosopher, acknowledge the folly of your wisdom, and that your wisdom is madness.34

Certainly, not all communities with increasing strength are beneficial to the larger whole of humanity, such as white supremacist organizations like the Klu Klux Klan, for example. Regardless of their strength in numbers, the pathological ideals, lack of the use of reason, and continuous violent actions of such groups are harmful to society at large. For example, the types of sad passions such groups might engage in will end up being more destructive than beneficial to the larger whole, will not last as long, will use up more energy to the point of lacking the motivation to think with reason and community. To address one way Spinoza countered his critics, we can refer back to an early and beautiful passage where Spinoza confesses in Letter 19:

For my part, of all the things that are not under my control, what I most value is to enter into a bond of friendship with sincere lovers of truth. For I believe that such a loving relationship affords a serenity surpassing any other boon in the whole wide world. The love that such men bear to one another, grounded as it is in the love that each has for knowledge of truth, is as unshakable as is the acceptance of truth once it has been perceived.35

In addition, we can turn to E3p46, a proposition that encourages the joining with others from another nation or class.36 In the unfinished TP, we also read about how to allow marriages between countries (nations) and account for their children as equal citizens in their country of birth as a democratic action. This is why Debra Nails writes that Spinoza demonstrates that he was “...the philosopher [of the Early Modern and Modern periods] who provokes the deepest and most difficult philosophical questions about race...”37 Spinoza did accomplish what Nails suggests with his overall system if you place together several of his texts, but he did so in a limited sense. For example, there are other elements to the otherwise unfinished TP which

35 Spinoza, Letter 19: 807-808.
36 Spinoza, Ethics, 3p46: 94.
continue to support the position that Spinoza's overall ethic can be applied to the philosophy of race as a white ally, but there are also comments made in this text which are negative assessments of both women and those known as “slaves” in the Seventeen Century. Nonetheless, Spinoza offers a distinction between what it means to be free as compared to what it is to be a slave. Charlie Huenemann writes, “A community of Spinozists sages would establish a harmonious social order with ease.” In other words, we would work to help everyone be free.

What is so striking is the way Nails puts together Spinoza's larger system in the Ethics with the issue of his philosophy being accessible enough to counter racism as a philosophical and social problem. Nails notes that Spinoza's ontology is what “undermines all forms of racism while preserving the right of a race to do what is within its power.” Spinoza wrote in Latin, for example, in order to avoid censorship and discrimination, and this demonstrates that he was acutely aware of such issues as discrimination. She continues to examine such a system as that which addresses issues of racism by pointing out several key ontological and epistemological structural formulations found in the Ethics. For example, “right” (jus) and “power” (potentia) can be read as co-extensive, and they are co-extensive in ways that make Spinoza a political philosopher to the core:

Spinoza argues that 'whatever an individual thing does by the laws of its own nature, it does with sovereign right...'...he admits no 'distinction between men and other individuals of nature' (TTP 16, par. 3). With this statement, the necessity of examining Spinoza's metaphysics, rather than his political theory, should be clear: no distinction between men and other individuals of nature. Thus there is no reason a priori to take the citizen, or the state, or the worker, or the cell, or the race, class, or gender to be one's fundamental unit of analysis across a variety of contexts; for to take any of these – or some other – as fundamental is to distort the interconnections among them that are characteristic of them.

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38 There is literature combining Spinoza's epistemology and certain elements of the philosophy of race only recently. To add to this, in his biography of Spinoza, Steven Nadler writes that Van den Enden, one of Spinoza’s greatest teachers, insisted on “civil, political, and legal equality between all members of the state, absolute freedom of speech, religion, and opinion; and freedom of ‘philosophizing.’”
39 Huenemann, Spinoza's Radical Theology, 113.
Human beings exist as parts of ever more encompassing systems, and yet are themselves contexts in which other individuals (viruses, freckles) are embedded. Yet our human distinctions are not merely arbitrary, for some inhibit, and others promote, our ability to persevere in existence (conatus). What is a person? A web of relations. A race? A web of relations.41

Racism, sexism, classism are also webs of relations. Nails continues to examine Spinoza's ontology in this way. I have placed more emphasis on human consciousness and singularity on an individual basis for understanding Spinoza’s system than Nails has, but perhaps this is a way to also incorporate important phenomenological considerations about race and epistemology. One cannot deal adequately with race and racism without allowing for the legitimate philosophical categories of subjectivity, phenomenal experience, and singular imagination. Nails’ account of Spinoza's notion of an “individual” is still relevant. She writes that an individual, for Spinoza, is “that which has a natural disposition to cohere in existence, so each molecule of my cup is likewise an individual.”42 These are brute facts about the nature of existing. That my and Debra’s coffee cups can also be called individuals in similar ways as we can call human beings individuals is because Spinoza includes within his ontology ways for bodies and minds (as one and the same thing) to express laws of Nature in varying complexities and with multiple types of degrees of power and intensity and still both be expressing the same identical laws. This applies to all animated bodies of Nature. The way Spinoza gets away with then making human emotions, experiences, affects, dispositions, challenges, and types of knowledge (which can be creatively accessed, used, applied, and experimented with) as something specific to human subjectivity is by continuing to show that what it is to use imaginative knowledge is distinctly particular to human essence in a singular way. It also shows that to use human reason well is correlated with what it is to experience, clearly and distinctly, human consciousness in reflection. That is,

42 Ibid. 60.
although a pebble and a human being are both “individuals” by Spinoza's definition, I do not know what it is like to be a pebble and the pebble does not know what it is like to be a human, but we are a web of relations interconnected to each other expressing the same laws nonetheless and sharing environments. If the pebble is with me in my pocket for years, inspiring me to continue to write philosophy, a pebble over two thousand years old that carries a world of inspiration for me personally, as well as has many beautiful lines of sedimentation (lines of flight) and was a gift from a close friend in love and support as a pen pal, then the pebble in my pocket and I are even more causally connected within a web of relations than any other stone I may come into contact with. Nails continues, “To speak curiously again, but not incoherently, my cup has exactly as much right to exist as it has power to persevere (conatus) against the onslaught of heavier and sharper objects, the effects of my clumsiness, and the pressures of style to exchange mugs for dainty teacups.”43 That is also why it will become important for us to be capable of imagining something that increases our power to exist as present to us (as our personal web of relations and causal meaning) in rational ways.

What Nails writes next on Spinoza and race is worth noting extensively, especially within the context that I work (both on epistemology in Early Modern philosophy and the philosophy of race). As “race” is a web of relations or what Spinoza calls a finite mode of substance expressed in a certain and determinate way, it can be explained under the attribute of thought and its laws within the rubric of how the three types of knowledge operate together. Under the attribute of extension and its laws, race can be explained as perceived, embodied, and acted out according to interactions with other bodies of similar and different races which effect its ratios of motion and rest. Therefore, an informed, compassionate, and humble white body can add to the power of a black body as much as another knowing black body can. At the least, they can combine in

rational understanding to form one body of effective force.

The only element of this description Nails provides that can be questioned is when she equates all thought with sets of mathematical descriptors, as she calls it: “The descriptors are to the race as the mind is to the body – the expression of an idea of what is physically perceptible.” In addition, a race can continue to exist and persevere in its existence because, as she writes, “a race depends for its continued existence on the free identification and participation of its members. Rational voluntary association is the only legitimate form of solidarity. Thus one of the potentially oppressive uses of race is precluded – at least metaphysically.” I agree in part, but there may be a problem with this definition of race when we consider that an element of the most violent forms of racism include that bodies and minds of one race, typically those with dark skin visually, cannot escape being seen as lesser human beings by those of another race (typically those with white or lighter skin). In other words, where “rational voluntary solidarity” may apply easily to white people (although as part of a racist culture I might continue to question the “rational” aspect of this description), being forced into a category of a race which is understood as sub-human, irrational, animal like, and criminal is not a voluntary association by any stretch of the imagination. Such limits force “rational” categories on some as natural and on others as unnatural.

Perhaps what Nails writes next can clear up some confusion for us. Race qua race cannot act independent of its collective members, their web of relations with each other, and their various environments according to Nails. Although I agree that this analysis applies in many respects, especially for those of the white race, it may not completely apply to all of those with darker skin tones in a racist nation. In a passage that speaks to more than Spinoza on race, Nails

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45 Ibid. 63.
continues, “Imagine rounding up all the philosophers, or all the redheads, and announcing that they are a separate race. Like a colony that grows into a state, the redheads might come to view themselves as a race. But, for Spinoza, there is no individual state and no individual race until each has *conatus* to unify and preserve it.”

We learn that what it is to be a human being, as I stated above, is not the same kind of web of relations as what “race” is for Spinoza. That is, humans have an acute awareness (consciousness) of their *conatus*, but just as a school of fish, as Nails references, is not aware of their *conatus* in the same way as human beings, “race,” as an individual thing, is also not conscious of its *conatus*. Nails writes, “Whereas a person has a mind that is complex and is conscious of its own existence, a race (like a state) can be severally conscious of its existence of the whole but has no distinct consciousness of its own.” Therefore, a state, as an individual body, is different from a person as an individual body (even as both abide by the same laws of Nature). What Nails is referring to is that a race, a sports team, a classroom, a group of trees and so forth can come together to create a larger group as one “body” of force and motion, and can be conceived as a Spinozian “individual,” but each of these bodies coheres with “no [real] fixed existence in space time.”

...racial bias is a species of bias, and all bias is for Spinoza a refusal of the counsel of reason; and reasoning validly from true premises is the business of all persons who would be free... Spinoza takes issue at the most fundamental ontological level with claims that race exists independently, claims that will, a century later, fuel the rise of the physiological basis for modern racism. In our day, those same arguments from ontological principles against the concept of group consciousness, against the organicist notion of collective social entities, and thus against the very idea of *the* black experience, or *the* mind of the ancients... There is no collective consciousness, according to Spinoza,

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46 Nails, “Metaphysics at the Barricades: Spinoza and Race,” 64. Nails notes Chapter 3 of the *TTP* where Spinoza speaks lucidly against the persecution of Jewish people, as a group as well as some of the customs of the Chinese.
47 Ibid. 63.
48 Ibid. 63-64.
49 Ibid. 64.
only the consciousness of persons...

Yet, there is a different problem with Spinoza’s deductions on human consciousness and rational capacity. One might ask how, in such an extensive and dynamic epistemology, a system with such verve and capacity to empower us, can we still have an epistemological problem involving gender? Spinoza appears, on the surface, to believe that women cannot reason as well as men. He is not exempt from a line of male thinkers of his time (and in the history of Western philosophy) whose systems we continue to use as our examples of excellence in thinking while simultaneously allowing for their ideas on female thinkers to be ignored or neglected. Feminist epistemological concerns cannot and do not separate issues of acquiring knowledge, race, and gender, although, as bell hooks has written on, even the history of Western feminism has a problem with being primarily white. Note what Elizabeth Spelman writes in her essay “Gender & Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought,” when she concludes, “...thinking differently about women and about sexism might lead to thinking differently about Blackness and about racism.” Clenora Hudson-Weems has written regularly about the need to understand black female writers as holding a special epistemological category of their own in order to address the very real concerns which face African American women. She writes that female philosophers who identify as Womanists, for example, have only recently been able to create a space within academia, having prior adapted to traditional Feminist discourses and language in order to navigate the academic community. Hudson-Weems concludes, “…more and more African women today in the academy and in the community are reassessing the historical realities and the agenda for the modern feminist movement. These women are concluding that

51 As noted above, Genevieve Lloyd has written extensively on this problem in our history in this respect.
53 For support of this claim, see bell hooks’ Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics.
feminist terminology does not accurately reflect their reality or their struggle…”

So we need to talk about gender and its relationship to epistemology. It is clear, by the end of the unfinished *PT*, as Margaret Gullan-Whur, in her article “Spinoza and the Equality of Women,” also notes, that Spinoza's views on women are inconsistent with his larger epistemological and political project at the end of his life. Yet, she writes that in this last text, Spinoza’s views on women are both peculiar in a negative sense and also striking in an affirmative sense considering their metaphysical import. I agree with her, especially if we take seriously what is said in the *TTP* in Chapters 15 and 20. In these two chapters we learn that freedom of judgment and of thought itself (within a safe environment) is the aim for *every* individual who resides in a state, male and female. As already noted, Chapter 3 also states that we might have to yield some of our natural rights to others, including some of our own rationally justified reasons for things, if it can benefit the larger whole (majority). This is only a hypothesis, but one that can defend Spinoza’s system in the face of some of his otherwise irrational views on women. In addition, in Chapter 7 of the *TP*, we learn that what is to our advantage as a whole depends “on the general welfare and the peace of all.” This conclusion would be applicable, for example, to general safety of all members of a community. Gullan-Whur writes, “...his refusal to allow that any woman's intellect could match a man's, is odd.” But because of this fact, and because we read it in the latest of works, it “is an argument claiming to affirm a metaphysical principle that justifies a strong type claim about the class 'human female'. It thus warrants neither

54 Hudson-Weems, “African Womanism,” 44. She also writes, “There is a general consensus in the African community that the feminist movement, by and large, is the White woman’s movement…” As Patricia Hill Collins also writes, “African American women’s efforts to distinguish between womanism and black feminism illustrates how black women’s placement in hierarchical power relations fosters different yet related allegiances to a black woman’s self-defined standpoint (65).”
57 Spinoza, *TP*, chapter 7: 710.
58 Gullan-Whur, 92.
charity nor neglect.”59 In the same essay, Gullan-Whur later concludes, “Spinoza's indictment of female mentality could be construed as meaning that women have the same chance at recognising common notions as men, but just are more likely than men to let them be confused by sensual or emotional ideas.”60 Although somewhat helpful, this conclusion is still highly problematic for obvious reasons. And to combine insults, according to Whur, the Dutch scholarship condemns the last page of the TP, calling it...the black page.61 “If the ‘black page’ claim is accepted then Spinoza the political pragmatist has proved the Spinoza of Ethics wrong.”62 The condemnation is necessary, but the title given to it, from the perspective of philosophers of race, as another example, is problematic as well.

I certainly feel some of the unfinished ending (and possible editing) of the TP is problematic. Yet, consider the claim in the TTP in Chapter 15, which also shows us how much Spinoza cared deeply about keeping ourselves open to new ideas, open to new ways for expressing those ideas in a civil society, when Spinoza writes, “And again, I ask, who can give mental acceptance to something against which his reason rebels? For what else is mental denial but reason's rebellion?” He continues, “I am utterly astonished that men can bring themselves to make reason, the greatest of all gifts and a light divine, subservient to letters that are dead, and may have been corrupted by human malice...”63 These are Spinoza’s own words and, on that note, I will try to utilize his methods in ways that lead me on to authors, philosophers, ideas, and systems of thought other than only those found only in the Ethics.

As a way to speak about our more contemporary and practical needs or societal problems today, Spinoza's system can be useful for anyone. Spinoza would encourage you to take what

60 Ibid. 106.
61 Ibid. 96.
62 Ibid. 97.
63 Spinoza, TTP, chapter 15: 521.
you learn and find affirmatively creative ways to both singularly express what you know and to also form more rationally powerful collective bodies of which you can participate in. I will not make allowances for the very real systematic issues involving comments about women and rationality. I simply believe Spinoza would have been in agreement with our pointing out this flaw in his system. I can draw this assumption based on the temperament found in his letters to friends where he is repeatedly open to being shown any errors in his reasoning, but this does not excuse the problematic deductions nonetheless.

The problems regarding his choice of description on the matter leads me to believe that the issue of female intelligence is the largest epistemological weakness of his corpus, but it may be something we can still work on through a better understanding of human affects. As Gillan-Whur notes, when we understand the nature of our own ebbs and flows of affects, the more easily it is to control or override one affect with another (more rational) affect. Regarding the nature of women, Whur continues, “Can Spinoza legitimately claim that women are as a class more subject to the passions than men? ...induction does not vindicate a Spinozistic claim that women tend, more than men, to blur the boundaries of purely rational thought. Instead, it gives grounds for belief in a sex-differentiated shackling of reason in some, even most, males and females. This coheres with Spinoza's principle that all people are subject to the passions...”\(^{64}\)

Being subject to our passions, both sad and joyous, are something many if not most of us experience fairly regularly. The key is to reduce the sway of the sad passions by adequately determining one’s more powerful affirmative affects and understanding oneself as the cause.

We learn that there are ways to demonstrate the coherence of the *Ethics* and other works by Spinoza while still understanding the last page of the *TP* as a “philosophical abberation.” Yet, even this otherwise helpful description, that the black page is an aberration, can be shown by

philosophers of race to be a highly problematic choice of terms. Dark skinned individuals have, throughout time, been labeled as human aberrations. Luckily, Whur writes, “I conclude...that the argument of the last page of the Political Treatise is inconsistent with Spinoza's general Ethics doctrine...”65 In added support of her reading, we can turn to Chapter 7 of the TP where Spinoza writes that when civil order turns to natural order “…sovereignty reverts naturally to the people, which therefore has the right to enact new laws and repeal the old.”66 I read statements like this as inclusive ways for rational groups of individual citizens who are equal in all rights to change their laws and ideals as needed, including abolishing practices of slavery and allowing women to enter the political arena, for example.

That being said, as is found in works like the “Combahee River Collective” in Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, issues of oppression for African American females in particular cannot separate race, class, and gender. So even if we can rely on Spinoza's system as a white alley, those in Womanist epistemology may not be able to rely on such a system in the same ways as other groups of females might be able to. In the “Combahee River Collective,” we read, “This focusing upon our oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics... We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.”67 With similar sentiments, Vanessa Sheared writes, “The Africentric feminist perspective is not just about the voices that have been silenced on the grounds of race or gender but instead considers the simultaneous effects of race and gender... The womanist perspective acknowledges the

66 Spinoza, TP, chapter 7.
67 Smith, “The Combahee River Collective,” in Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 267. We also read “There is very low value placed upon Black women's psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist (269).”
intertwining realities that human beings experience within society. Race, gender, and class are interwoven.” I am acutely aware, for example, that my white privilege can skew the way I interpret womanist or Black Feminist epistemologies, but in being continually and reflectively conscious of this fact, I can grind my epistemological lens to greater socio-emotional clarity. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Self-defined Black diasporic feminisms require links among U.S. Black feminisms and feminisms expressed by women of African descent as well as ties with transnational women's rights activism.” Individual rights for all were the concern of much of the unfinished TP for Spinoza. These were also the concerns, among others, of the TTP. Spinoza writes in Chapter 8 of TP that even an aristocracy with a council who has absolute power would never cause a fear that the citizens would become slave like in any manner if it were behaving as one elected rational body; a body with one voice that speaks for all its people and their ruler. After reading passages such as these, that all voices are represented as one body and one voice if they are being rationally represented, I wonder how anyone can question that Spinoza was a philosopher who wanted his system to be included within a future politics of fairness, justice, peace, and democracy?

There is yet a further problem. As a philosopher of race writing on Spinoza, I am continually calling into question my own white privilege. To borrow the words of philosopher Emily Lee regarding her work within professional academia today, “I cannot escape the ambiguous circumstances of the current socio-historical influences—including my own education—within which I think. Moreover, I must admit that the structure of my analyses—pointing to a conceptual difficulty in race and turning to the work of another dead white man for

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69 Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 235.
70 Spinoza, TP, trans. Shirley, chapter 8 725.
a solution—is problematic." These same concerns apply to my own work of which I must continually aim to understand better, balancing both tradition with honesty about the systems I study and rely on to live a better life. Rosalyn Diprose, in an article about feminist philosophy from 2000, writes that she is forced to rely repeatedly and, at times, heavily on male philosophers because that is what the discipline is primarily composed of and concerned with. Diprose also considers, rightly, that she reads various philosophers and philosophical texts in the realm of “the other,” as in all others, and, in this way, she can attempt to understand an author's philosophy regardless of their race or gender. But this attempt has its limits. I understand these same potential critiques are applicable to my thesis in many respects. In a recent essay, Audrey Thompson notes, “As Michael Hanchard points out, 'there has been a popular and academic tendency to diminish, deny, or neglect the impact of African peoples, practices, and civilizations have had on the West's development, as well as to forget the extent to which these populations have sought paths that have veered away from Western modernities even while being interlocked with them.'” It may help to refer to what Spinoza scholar Sam Shirley writes in a footnote to his translation of Letter 76 of Spinoza’s correspondence. Shirley writes, “In fact, no philosophy (his or any other) can claim completeness on Spinoza's own account; since philosophy by its very nature is a finitary activity and deals at most with a finite number of the divine attributes. No matter how adequate or true a philosophy should be, infinite orders of nature will lie beyond its range of understanding.” This analysis is consistent with Spinoza’s system and philosophy.

To read Spinoza is to enhance both our creative capacities and our regular use of reason.

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71 See Emily Lee’s comments on race at http://www.berfrois.com/2012/10/emily-lee-maurice-merleau-ponty.
73 Thompson, “Reading Black Philosophers in Chronological Order,” in the center must not hold..., ed. George Yancy.
37. Or as Alison Baily puts it in a recent essay titled “On Intersectionality and the Whiteness of Feminist Philosophy,” “Why do we turn to Aristotle instead of [Gloria] Anzaldua?” It is my belief we must turn not to one over the other, but to both thinkers.
To enhance reason with natural power is to become more virtuous. This virtue, in turn, benefits others, as we are also always in need of our environment and other finite ideas and bodies to interact with. Therefore, we can use our imaginative and rational understanding to help others. Continually working to enhance our rational capacities yields the greatest and most joyous, most powerful effects, shared benefits, and singular experiences with greater knowledge and enhanced affirmative affects. When we are more *consciously aware* of this process as it unfolds, in addition to whatever else we are considering topic wise, it adds to our joy, gives confidence and courage, and thinking with rational force becomes easier. Perhaps a theory of temporality that addresses what we know in today’s context can be combined with Spinoza to explain these processes even better? If so, it must take into account other forms of knowing, such as Feminist and Womanist epistemologies, for example. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Thus the significance of Black feminist epistemology may lie in its ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice... Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics that underlie what *counts* as knowledge.” If Spinoza's dynamic epistemology is going to be beneficial in these other areas, it needs to account for singular, subjective experiences that are both real and valid. This makes a theory of human consciousness even more important than was already addressed in this thesis.

In *Black Bodies/White Gazes*, philosopher George Yancy explains why “subjective narratives” and related phenomenological considerations are so important for any philosophical system that overlaps with topics in epistemology. Speaking about different races is not the same

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75 Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*... 269, 273, italics added. Hill Collins also writes, “Epistemological choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail (252).” I believe Spinoza’s version of truth is, nonetheless, an admirable one.
as speaking about the oppression of certain communities and groups of individuals based on their skin tone. Race, according to Yancy, is “...a contingent social category, but the persistently real bodily-cum-material-institutional-symbolic effects of race are profoundly devastating, to which the history of racism attests... Although race is not real, this does not mean that race is not 'objective' or that it does not affect how we actually see ourselves, comport ourselves, transact with each other, and assess each other morally, aesthetically, and ontologically.”

So something that is not “real” (in the sense that the sun and the universe and humans are real) is still a valid, sound, and relevant category of human experience. Recall that for Della Rocca the “real” is what is rational. Yet, human perception becomes the key indicator of how people with different skin tones are treated in this world. Individuals with lighter skin tones might believe they are acting well, with good intentions, and with objectively real knowledge, but actually end performing their “whiteness” (and thus dominant status and privilege) within their assessments and descriptions of the way the world is or the objects of their knowledge. It is a privileged position, for example, to believe that there is nothing to worry about regarding race today. Yancy writes, “Whites develop a form of immunity that enables them not to be 'mindful' of that from which one is exempt...” That immunity enables many environments to perpetuate racist behaviors, including within institutions of higher learning. As Yancy has recently written, “…the problem is that blackness is pre-marked and pre-nominated as a site of 'deviance' vis-a-vis white racist epistemic and axiological frames of reference.” And this applies to everyone, but the problem for philosophers is what counts as “epistemic,” and how to address it in our contemporary

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76 George Yancy, *Black Bodies/White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 2008), 34. Yancy also addresses several philosophers and their systems in this work, including but not limited to those of David Hume and Martin Heidegger.

77 Ibid. *Black Bodies/White Gazes*, 53.

philosophical circles? In this way, I am reminded of a passage written by Patricia Hill Collins in her womanist epistemological project, *Black Feminist Thought* (already noted above), when she writes about our methods of explanation moving more towards paradigms and, what philosopher of science, Sandra Harding, calls, *standpoints*:

Distinguishing among epistemologies, paradigms, and methodologies can prove to be useful in understanding the significance of competing epistemologies (Harding 1987). In contrast to epistemologies, *paradigms* encompass interpretive frameworks such as intersectionality that are used to explain social phenomena. *Methodology* refers to the broad principles of how to conduct research and how interpretive paradigms are to be applied. The level of epistemology is important because it determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put.\(^79\)

As it turns out, this is yet another reason why we can support Spinoza as a white alley, by combining his most valuable insights with other more contemporary theories of social change, when examining those changes through certain paradigms found both within traditional and more current epistemological frameworks. Spinoza's system is highly adaptable and his methodology is applicable to several different types of epistemological paradigms today. Further, many forms of mild resistance can accomplish moments of “re-narrating the self” for any person oppressed of any race or gender as well. Re-narrating the self is directly involved in how we describe and understand our lives and interactions with others. Yancy continues, “…the white oppressors' narrative [about raced bodies] is not faithful to Blacks' hermenutics of self-understanding...the discourse of *workable* and *unworkable* narratives replaces the logic of metaphysical essentialism regarding racial identities, and dispenses with the correspondence theory of truth.”\(^80\)

The above is *not* a problem of essentialism, as Yancy states and as is often the criticism

\(^79\) Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 252. In the *Feminist Philosophy Reader*, Alison Bailey and Chris Cuomo write, “While the principle task of most Anglo-American epistemology has been to refute the skeptic and to determine the conditions for objective knowledge, feminist epistemologies focus on social and historical circumstances that determine knowledge in particular contexts, and on the relationships between knowledge production and forms of power (669).”

\(^80\) Yancy, *Black Bodies/White Gazes*, 115.
made against philosophers of race. It is an ontological and epistemological, “socio-historical, political, and deeply embedded psychological problem,” and Yancy continues:

On my view, some material-cum-axiological/epistemological framework first must exist that 'justifies' the valorization and sovereignty of whiteness, and, by extension, the denigration of Blackness. ...the ideological norms informing the white self as all seeing and all knowing, forms the larger unthematized sociovisual epistemology that militates against the slippages between 'seeing' and 'knowing,' at least with respect to the enslaved African body.  

Yancy also writes, “Through the process of rendering the Black body hypervisible, white bodies became invisible.”  

How would a philosophy of “the real is rational” address these facts? In this way, white privilege is able to dominate social relations, institutions, various systems of power, what we call legitimate systems of knowledge, and many other areas of life. How, then, does white (male) privilege structure, unconsciously or otherwise, traditional systems of Western epistemology? As Alessandra Tanesini, in defense of naturalized epistemologies, writes, “Feminists have criticized traditional epistemology for its disregard of the situatedness of the knower, and of the specific circumstances in which knowledge is acquired.” I would agree and argue that unless we allow for singular human consciousness and reflection as a part of Spinoza’s epistemology, his system only partially addresses what it’s like to be a human being. And as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi writes, Womanism includes those who have to answer to both their racial and sexual predicaments. There is a version of womanist thinking which simply means a woman “who is ‘committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female.’”

As Shannon Sullivan also suggests, if we all derive from a history of the cultural oppression of individuals with dark skin, as well as from the continued oppression of women,

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81 Yancy, Black Bodies/White Gazes, 145, 149.
82 Ibid. 170.
83 Tanesini, An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies, 114.
then we maintain a culture of these oppressive feelings, ideas, choices of preference, blind spots, and behavioral responses. How does one re-signify the racist, sexist, or classist unconscious tendency towards oppressive ideas and behaviors when it is already so difficult to recognize such things in the conscious mind? What role can reasoning play in situations where the very functioning of reason can be persuaded by racist or sexist affects? Further, Tanesini writes that “Women belonging to different social classes, race, and sexual orientations face very different problems, and encounter different forms of oppression.” Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology is not reducible to scientism or naturalized epistemology as often found in some North American interpretations. Tanesini writes that the social practices of scientists today can be understood as just that, practices, and not as the only model for one to hypothesize about, experiment with, or describe how human beings get and use knowledge. She writes, “Social factors can be constitutive of knowledge.”

The changes needed have to start with oneself, and with regular rational and imaginative conscious reflection. One way is to retrain the imagination in order to create greater rationally constructed, informed affects for oneself and between groups of people in innovative ways. We would also have to find more ways to interact spontaneously and creatively with each other in order to re-signify one’s socially embedded beliefs. Spinoza’s system works well with the issues of the philosophy of race in this respect. For example, in Chapter 7 of the TP we read,

86 Tanesini, An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies, 146. Tanesini continues, “While it is reasonable to claim that we all are ‘victims’ of racism, insofar as racism affects in negative ways everybody’s life, the experience that non-white people have of racism is, of course, very different from what is experienced by whites.” The same is true for gender discrimination and experiences.
87 Ibid. 121: “Insofar as naturalized epistemologies point out the unattainability of a God’s eye epistemology which stands outside its sociocultural contexts, they are to be applauded. Their [naturalized epistemologists] mistake is to take scientism as the only alternative.”
88 This is a possibility, how spontaneity can help to re-signify one’s racist or sexist unconscious, that I have discussed in some depth with George Yancy over the years, and in which our conversations he references in the last chapter of his work White Gazes/Black Bodies (2008).
“For freedom and slavery do not go well together.” Indeed, in the work of Warren Montag in *Bodies, Masses, Power*, we read that Spinoza’s entire corpus of work can be read as a way for all to free themselves from any form of oppression and strive towards liberation.

The trajectory of themes in this thesis have supported, assisted, perplexed, moved, frustrated, and transformed me throughout the last decade. In the words of Hegelian Katrin Pahl, “The ability to stay with torn, restless, trembling transports is of great value to me.” It is an act of courage to spend years with Spinoza’s system. We all have experienced such transports and transformations, of course, but the phenomenological and ontological-epistemological problem here is clear. How can we rely on Spinoza's system as one among many possible aids to better understand and deal with racism and sexism if oppressed individuals are already being torn regularly in ways they cannot escape? In this way, Yancy writes, “My Black embodiment, after all, should solicit whites to self-interrogate their certainty, to re-cognize, to know otherwise, to look yet again, to wonder and to stand in awe of my shared humanity. Yet, it is precisely my humanity that has been questioned and denied within white North America.” As a visibly white individual I have some power, and I try to use it to raise awareness about others who are marginalized or have less power. Yet, as a woman I have to continually manage the predominately male terrain which, directly or indirectly, believes I am less capable of reasoning than my (male) interlocutors.

As we read in E4p52 on the nature of self-esteem, Spinoza writes, “Next, while a man

89 Spinoza, *TP*, chapter 7: 719.
90 This is one place where Spinoza and Hegel are very similar in my opinion and Pahl proves that well. In dealing with Hegel's “non-linear” style of addressing intensities between varying or conflicting human emotions, Pahl describes his system as one of emotional transports. She writes, in emotional transport, “We feel unease, we feel troubled, we feel torn. Of course, we can also feel grounded, calm, and at one with ourselves – but those feelings come either in a break from transport or as effects of an extraordinary reconciliation with transport... Since human transports are accompanied...by a feeling of unease, of trouble, of tears, I argue in favor of an acceptance (even an enjoyment) of these negative feelings, and against the impulse to reduce, reject, or avoid these feelings and to dismiss or punish those who have them.” http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia19/parrhesia19_pahl.pdf
91 Yancy, *Western Journal*... , 4.
considers himself, he perceives nothing clearly and distinctly, or adequately, except those things which follow from his power of acting (by IIID2), that is (by IIIP3), which follow from his power of understanding. And so the greatest self-esteem there can be arises only from this reflection...”

Here is one instance where Spinoza clearly writes that our power of acting has more to do with our power of understanding. Regarding a more collaborative understanding of all three forms of knowledge, Susan James writes:

By cultivating and sharing our capacity for philosophical understanding, [Spinoza] claims, we can learn how to live in ways that avoid the psychological and social conflicts that are usually so prevalent, and approach an ideal of maximal harmony and empowerment. Achieving this ideal is a difficult process, which always remains incomplete, but its rewards are such that we have every reason to work towards it and get as far as we can.

Although there are singular essences as part of Spinoza’s system, we are social beings and, as we learned in E2p40s and 2p47, certain common notions are formed differently for each person depending on their past experiences and recollections. Therefore, although common notions are the true ideas about the nature of things, how we come to that knowledge and apply it varies greatly.

Just as we need certain conditions in order to experience a variety of different foods in our lives (I cannot try all the new foods of the world unless I have the financial means to travel for example), we also need a certain type of environment for affirmative and adequate sets of ideas to grow and develop. We cannot develop our understanding alone. This is applicable at least in the sense that those ideas will have the opportunity to develop with more force and creativity in conjunction with many other ideas and individuals if the conditions are conducive to such growth. But, in many ways, we might say that we can always find other methods of gaining knowledge on an individual level as well. We will just be limited to our personal experiences and

recollections when doing so. Yet, working through Spinoza’s system teaches us how to develop our ideas in such a way that they are conceived as internally determined, that is, our adequate ideas become understood as self-caused (and not as the effects of external causes).

As Hasana Sharp notes in her work on the politics of renaturalization, Spinoza’s system “encourages us to consider which practices, associations, and relationships might strengthen and care for emerging, fragile, and challenging ideas... Favorable ideas are those that enable a mind better to understand the conditions of its power and activity and thus to aid its perseverance... One must gather the forces of ideas compatible with one's striving.”94 This involves all our appetites, but especially individual capacities to thrive based on knowledge of the operation of affects. What would it entail to “gather the forces of ideas” compatible with our conatus? Could this process include a method of enhanced creativity, for example? In support of the position that there is a substantial theory of singular consciousness in Spinoza in this respect, Peg Rawes, in “Spinoza's Architectural Passages and Geometric Comportsments,” writes that Spinoza's Ethics is “a kind of architectural passage because of the diverse figures and passages of comportment that his geometric thinking enables.” She continues to combine values found in architecture with similar values in Spinoza, writing, “Geometric thinking in the Ethics is therefore aligned with life, and the reader's journey towards fulfillment or joy reflects this process as they make the step-by-step movement through the text's different elements, its axioms, definitions, corollaries, propositions and scholia.”95 This produces the transformation of our affects and an emphasis on the third kind of knowing in the development of rational individuals and collective democracies. Rawes continues, “…Spinoza inaugurates a diverse

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94 Sharp, Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization, 74, emphasis added.
95 Rawes, Spinoza Beyond Philosophy, 67, 73.
living geometry through which multiple, transformative subjects live out life.”

96 Rawes’ reading also supports Dan Selcer’s interpretation about the meaning of dynamic materiality, learning, and ideational and bodily transformations found in Spinoza’s philosophy.

One concern becomes how difficult it is to care for the development of our ideas (and the experiences of our bodies) in the midst of rapidly changing social norms, expectations, institutional power, technological advancement, external influences (racism, sexism, classism), or other challenging factors and dynamics. If this thesis is going to end on a more phenomenological note, which I would like it to because of the importance of individual conscious awareness and the affects, discussing how we move about our environments, how we comport ourselves in our many dimensions with each other and with objects, how we work and how we have fun, all of this is phenomenologically one's own. Reflection is not possible for a singular mind without an enveloped environment of which it (we) are a part. In addition, we all have many different kinds of communities of which we are engaged in our lifetime. From those different types of communities, we draw different variations in power and vitality, energy and levity. In these ways, creative thought and action becomes an important skill to develop.

It is on the nature of creativity that I would like to end this thesis. Consider what Berys Gaut writes in a recent article “The Philosophy of Creativity” when he notes that there has been little philosophical work on the nature of creativity between the years of 1950-2000: “Yet given its importance and the number of interesting philosophical questions it raises, it should be a major topic in philosophy.”

97 Creativity is a regular topic in areas of Continental philosophy, but its epistemological elements can be taken up more systematically through Spinoza as well. The science of creativity includes incredibly exciting and lucid research begun in the past decade, but

96 Rawes, Spinoza Beyond Philosophy, 81.
97 Berys Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1034. See also Irving Singer’s Modes of Creativity: Philosophical Perspectives (MIT Press 2011) for more recent work.
any sustained examination and experience of the history of great aesthetic works will also add to our education about the rationally powerful uses of creative ideas in a philosophically systematic manner. Spinoza's philosophy is deductively rigorous, creative (the scholia alone could be a humorous book on human psychology and sarcasm), and intense in its ontological and epistemological conclusions. It encourages both moderation, deliberation, and seeking varied intensities in living and new experiences. In other words, moderate pleasures and “gentle motions of the body” or ataraxia are not the only things we seek in our dynamic transformations for Spinoza.\(^98\) The element of favoring creativity and experimentation also certainly separates Spinoza from previous influences, such as Thomas Hobbes, who felt creativity should be classified as a weak sense.

In work on emotion and creativity, Mike Radford references Antonio Damasio’s books on human development, neuroscience, psychology and philosophy (not to mention on Spinoza) to elaborate on the role of rationally developed emotions and the use of creativity. Teachers know how this works. In the classroom, good teachers can read their student’s emotions well and adjust the class presentation or discussion as needed, adding unexpected questions, art, or a sense of humor. Teachers are also very creative in the many ways in which knowledge is transmitted effectively and with inspiration.\(^99\) Radford notes that Damasio includes the creative process as an aid to reasoning, writing that it is “‘a ceaseless process of creation which is what reasoning and deciding are all about.’”\(^100\) Using imaginative knowledge well was also the focus of Chapter Two of this thesis. Radford continues that we can access both language and non-verbal cues from the store of memory. We do this regularly, and such a mechanism allows us to also rearrange powerful ideas in ways that can positively affect others. This process also includes “a self-

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\(^98\) Noted from the edited student reader *ethics: contemporary readings*, James Swindal ed. (2004).

\(^99\) For an excellent resource on this topic see Andrea Kenkmann’s edited volume *Teaching Philosophy*.

\(^100\) Radford, “Emotion and Creativity,” 60.
regulatory character” and, as we consider more complex decisions and how to act in our nuanced and varied circumstances, we also realize through rational reflection that the many possible outcomes “might be complex, multiple, or uncertain.”¹⁰¹ From this, individual subjectivity is both aware of its uniqueness and that it is a social being in constant interaction in its web of relations. Both are required for enhanced uses of creative rationality and actions such as composing good art. Our intuitive knowledge accesses these insights and puts them to use.

Experience and emotional intelligence:

…put emotional feelings at the heart of intelligent action. They influence the way we select to process that information and account for the differences that we experience in different people’s perceptions and interpretations of reality. They are at the heart of individual subjectivity. At the same time, having been acquired through our acculturation, it might be suggested that they are also shared.¹⁰²

This is what, in Early Modern circles, is called thinking in Spinoza. Notice how it involves the use of understanding to create positive affects for oneself and for others in joyous ways, but also for the environment in which one interacts and needs to survive. Radford concludes:

Genuinely creative efforts are accompanied by intense feelings of emotional commitment and great excitement upon their realization, but the argument goes further than this. The actual guidance mechanisms that lead us to choose one path over another or that nudge us into the realization of a particular theoretical explanation or inspirational artistic construction are informed by non-rational, emotional markers, a taste for some particular informational items, or lines of connections over others. We are, in a non-reflective sense, guided by our feelings.¹⁰³

Again, those who believe only the rational is real will run into problems with this version of Spinoza. It is also true that feelings and emotions are not affects, but it becomes increasingly important to find ways for rational reflection to focus on which emotion we are having and why.

¹⁰² Ibid. 62. Radford continues, “The sense of excitement, of the ‘rightness’ of a particular expression of judgment and the way the creative act enables everything to fall into place might address a basic emotional tension that is embedded in the psychology of human beings. This tension takes the form of an impulse toward self-understanding and understanding of one’s relationship with the external world (62).”
¹⁰³ Ibid. 63.
In this process of reflection we are transformed in multiple ways. We may be able to enhance the use of reason and use it both well and creatively often, but there are times when we are overcome with emotions in unexpected ways that decrease our power to exist. It is just not the case that Spinoza’s epistemology, in all its capacities to help us enhance our reasoning about laws of Nature, will comfort me immediately upon the unexpected passing of a loved relative or friend. This kind of evaluation and serious contemplation about the use of kinds of knowing in Spinoza is very similar to what we find in the naturalized epistemology debates in feminism that have been occurring for decades. But I believe Spinoza was well aware of just how human we all are.

As the above research also notes, to “‘play’ at the boundaries of sense” is what rational creativity also demands. It is not a static, solitary, or even gentle process. Our capacities to use reason with increasing force and effect are dynamic, and this includes understanding how to use creativity well. To use creativity well, as anyone who has ever experienced the power of amazing works of art understands, is an intensely affective event. The process of creativity may also contribute to the relief of natural tensions between singular interests and a collective interest. Such a collective transformation comes with the experiences of joy in recognizing we are using reason creatively with more power. Emotions are part of the thinking process and our on-going experiences. Natural tensions create an environment for the mind and body which are an “impetus to creative development…the reconciliation of such tensions is an emotionally satisfying experience.”

Spinoza gave the title of *Ethics* to a work combining important questions about metaphysics and epistemology, including a rigorous evaluation of human psychology. I believe the title is an indicator that Spinoza was adept at human interactions and psychology, enough to write a proto-physics mechanics of interactions between force, motion, and bodies. “In order to

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be creative, the original and novel outcomes of generation within the system must be perceived to be of some value. It is quite possible for individuals to generate new perspectives, new combinations of elements within a system, and produce something that is attractive or interesting to a particular group.”

105 As Alexis Philonenko writes, “Reason is what gives essence to innovation.”

106 This is another reason the philosophy of George Yancy can be applied in combination with Spinoza’s system. Yancy writes, “Not only am I excited by ideas, but I also feel the transformative dimensions of wrestling with them. Furthermore, this excitement is deeply embodied; it is not captured in a ‘pure’ moment of abstract contemplation, but induces shuddering and ecstasy.”

107 Spinoza’s philosophy does the same when both understood and put into use to create more powerfully affirmative effects (and affects).

108 In this way, Hasana Sharp has the right intuition when she concludes that ideas have real force. Ideas are what change, transform, combine, alter, negate, compare, contrast, inspire, re-imagine, and express reality. The use of creativity cannot, therefore, entail only the act and concept of mere production or creation of some object or experience. Artistic creativity can be applied to the use of ideas arranged in a powerfully affective manner. It includes many different types, kinds, and expressions of human activity and uses all three kinds of knowledge. It can also be read as an affirmative force or affect which occurs not only as an effect of thinking with rational force, but also as the natural consequence of our immanent expression of Nature. Benjamin Dalton writes, “…all action, whether defined creatively, rationally, normatively, or in another or an eclectic fashion, involves physical and symbolic relationships to objects in the

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106 Alexis Philonenko, “Reason and Writing,” 188. The author ends, “So the task of philosophy is to save writing…”
107 Yancy, The Philosophical I..., 65.
108 This is not a Medieval concept of God or Being as good because Spinoza alters the meaning of the definition of concepts such as “substance,” “attribute,” “mode,” “power,” and even in many ways eternity.
In addition, rational uses of creative thinking and acting have political and social import as production and as expression. If we adequately understand such increases in our joy, power, and possibilities to affect others affirmatively (rationally), then we also will be inclined to agree that the concept and practice of creativity can and does enhance human conditions for increased happiness, freedom of thought, and peace between various groups of individuals with diverse interests. In other words, it can act as a social cohesive. The use of creativity “…identifies a significant set of concerns that macrotheoretical approaches must take into account when considering social change. This would add to my reading that Spinoza’s system can be used as support of certain aspects of the philosophy of race. Further work in this direction, then, might consider how social and cultural structures systematically manage the constant introduction of creative accomplishments produced in action and thereby influence the direction of historical change.”

Spinoza’s descriptive epistemology in its dynamism creates lasting impressions in one’s mind and as one’s bodily affections. In the practice of working through such a system, one is transformed by the work. This is Dan Selcer’s reading of materiality conceived dynamically and the material book as rhizomatic, a Deleuzian term. Selcer concludes:

Instead, it demands a perspective that understands the book as the locus of causal power. The rhizome, in other words, is the figure for a book that is what it is insofar as it produces a regime of singular effects. The rhizome-book is a dynamic individual that, on the one hand, maintains a consistent, complex pattern of motive action while simultaneously undergoing profound transformations with respect to its elements or parts (up to and including the limit-point of its own destruction when it can no longer maintain the integrity of its nature)... This concept of the dynamic unity of an individual whose

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109 Dalton, “Creativity, Habit, and the Social Products of Creative Action…,” 617. He continues, “Thus, creativity implies not simply the overcoming of practical or strategic problems or the reestablishment of the capacity for practical activity through the refinement of habit and is not only social in the direct judgments and environments in which creative action is embedded, but it also involves creating material and symbolic objects that exist in a social space and that have implications for the embodied existence and practice of other agents (618).”

parts undergo constant flux is also…precisely the key to Spinoza’s account of the body.\textsuperscript{111} Selcer uses the terms “individual” and “body” to include something in addition to a human individual, but the processes undergone by both a person and the book (which needs an audience to be known, a reader with subjective consciousness in my reading) can be described in similar ways. What is a book without the fact that such an object requires consciously reflecting subjects as both author and audience or reader?

In an edited work on creativity, J. P. Guilford, in his article “Traits of Creativity,” writes that the primary trait for creative thinking is \textit{fluency of thinking} (both \textit{associational} and \textit{expressional}). I am not certain we can describe a book as being creative in the same way as a human according to this description. Perhaps that factor, of how creativity is used, is the difference between a human body and other types of bodies. Guilford notes, “A trait of probably much wider usefulness is fluency in the production of ideas, or the factor of \textit{ideational fluency}. We cannot necessarily say that a book, such as a philosophical system, has immediate ideational fluency for all readers. Ideational fluency is the ability to produce ideas to fulfill certain requirements in limited time.”\textsuperscript{112} Creative fluency also includes \textit{spontaneous flexibility} (which is \textit{adaptive} and \textit{original}). Does a text, as a body, have such spontaneous flexibility? Perhaps works of literature and related can, but can we say, for example, that Immanuel Kant’s \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} has the same capacity? Guilford notes:

\begin{quote}
111 Selcer, \textit{Philosophy and the Book…}, 201. Selcer continues that the implications of the importance of examining “the mobilization of material figures of inscription” in the early modern period which includes reading Spinoza’s conception of materiality “on a dynamic model directly connected with figures of material inscription.” It also includes that “conceptualization and embodiment can be understood to be one and the same thing differently expressed.” Selcer includes in this, drawing from Epicurus and Lucretius, the importance of “images, arguments, concepts, and metaphors” for reading Spinoza in this way. Yet, how I live is not always the same as my thinking. It’s my conclusion that this is too general of a categorization. We think about much more than we can do…

112 Vernon, \textit{Creativity}, 171. The article first appeared in the work \textit{Creativity and Cultivation}. Ideational creativity also includes things like a \textit{tolerance for ambiguity}, the manipulation of \textit{symbols and symbolic symbols}, and a use of \textit{divergent thinking} (including a sensitivity to problems and their nuances). This includes an enhanced social intelligence. What is striking was that the authors also found that things like \textit{temperament} and \textit{motivation} were minimal factors in enhanced creative acts. I wonder if motivation isn’t of more need and use though, as perhaps Spinoza’s system demonstrates for us.
\end{quote}
There are many, no doubt, who would look for the chief secrets of creative performance outside the modality of aptitudes. There is no denying that traits of motivation and of temperament should be expected to have significant determining effects upon whether or not an individual exhibits creative performance… There has been little rigorously obtained information regarding the roles of such traits in creative performance, however. In her studies of leading artists and of leading scientists in several fields, Anne Roe found only one trait that stood out in common among individuals. This was a willingness to work hard and to work long hours…”

Art is hard work, science is hard work, philosophy is hard work, but I’m not so sure we can extend this description to texts. Human conscious reflection and transformation is needed to add the hard work factor to the book. Guilford replies that this trait is also found in any successful profession or endeavor. What is most striking about the use of ideational fluidity and flexibility for creativity is “…a freedom from perseveration, which is one form of rigidity, and that adaptive flexibility appears to be a freedom from a persistence in using previously learned, futile methods of solution, another form of rigidity.”

For the sense of our creativity and ideational flexibility to become enhanced, a general feeling of freedom is required, and, as we know, this involves the affirmative uses of the imagination for Spinoza. This kind of freedom must be free of continuous evaluation/observation by others, for example, but not free from responsibility and reason. Reason is aware that the laws of thought and action (cause and effect) are also at work. This recognition is not a problem, for the imagination loves to play and, for that matter, to imagine all those things which increase one’s power to exist (real or not). The understanding and intuition access the imagination and put it to work with more force and rational deliberation. As we read in the article “Moral Freedom and Artistic Creativity” by L. P. Chambers, “Belief in determinism implies freedom no less than freedom implies belief in determinism.”

Spinozists Moira Gatens and Susan James have

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113 Vernon, Creativity, 175.
114 Ibid. 175.
deduced the same. Chambers continues:

If I once grant the futility of human effort will I not refrain from further hard endeavor? I may continue to act and think in terms of habit; but when habitual belief and behavior fail to function I will not enter upon the difficult quest for more efficient conduct and adequate theory, but will assume that the limits of human capacity have probably been reached. If I am to persist in my endeavors I must have some hope of their success, some confidence in man’s capacity to discover truth.116

As already noted, Spinoza is clear that his system aids in our more adequately understanding not only the uses of imaginative and rational capacities, but also in being able to better recognize the limits of reason. On enhancing levels of artistic expression in these ways, Chambers continues, “But the musician’s reason for thus acquiring habits is not that habits are preferable to voluntary acts, but in order that the mechanical performance of acts already proved useful by trial and error may leave the creative spirit of the musician free to rise to higher levels of achievement undreamed of and indeed impossible before.”117 Now, when we read about Spinoza’s insistence on developing habitual readiness through the use of both the imagination and reason, we may better understand the level of enhanced creative thought and action Spinoza edges us towards. As Berys Gaut notes in his recent work on creativity, the philosophy of creativity goes “beyond aesthetics” and is in its infancy in philosophy.118 Thus, as Dan Selcer notes, experimentation with reason is an excellent way to enhance both the affirmative uses of imaginative knowledge, experience, and rational ideational force.

Throughout my project I have been discussing an enhanced form of understanding found in Spinoza’s epistemology that includes learning how to express more efficient power in our

116 Vernon, Creativity, 171.
117 L. P. Chambers, “Moral Freedom and Artistic Creativity,” 176. “May we not suppose that the God in Nature creates in this fashion, not according to some preconceived plan, but expressing his soul, his genius in his creation, as the artist does in his; his capacity for self-expression growing by the very fact of expression; his abundant life, unexhausted and inexhaustible, creating new forms at every turn, so that he exceeds himself, knowing not when he starts where he is to end. And if we meet the artist in his work, may we not meet God in his?”
118 Gaut, “The Philosophy of Creativity,” 1044. “Creativity is an emerging and exciting area of research within philosophy.” I would only add to this that thinkers like Nietzsche already worked with and developed the concept, creatively.
rational thoughts and actions. This includes the powerful and affirmative use of imaginative knowledge in many aspects. But there is a further aspect of his proto-physics of force and motion that benefits our communal nature, and that is Spinoza’s concept of love. In our enhanced understanding, we transition to more powerful forms of affirmative expression in our love of Nature. As there are infinite ways for the attributes to express themselves relationally, we are drawn, through the understanding, to feel more power, joy, and striving in our affects and actions, including a general tendency towards effective and creative uses of such knowledge. Martha Nussbaum writes that Spinoza, in some ways, can be compared to Plato, but on the notions of creativity, enhanced knowledge, and love Spinoza goes beyond Plato. Nussbaum writes:

As we are, we need many things. We therefore attend closely to our transitions – that is, to the significance of external things for the status of our own project… Emotions are our recognitions to these significant relations to external things… Where in all of this is love? Love, Spinoza argues, is an awareness of a significant transition in the direction of greater flourishing, combined with the idea of an external cause of that transition. In other words, it is both a necessary and sufficient condition of love that we find a person (or thing) extremely helpful to us in preserving our being. Indeed, love just is nothing other than the recognition of such significance.119

My working through Spinoza’s dynamic epistemology has been a greater transition towards more enhanced flourishing combined with the adequate understanding of the external causes which I have combined with to form a more powerful body of understanding and action. As we read in E5p24, if we continue to understand better the essence of particular things, the more we are expressing them with increased power sub specie aeternitatus: “The more we understand particular things, the more we understand God.”120

In a recent article on the creative aspects of being human, writer Maria Popova, in citing R. M. Rilke, reflects that we are pushed out of the use of creativity by the familiar, by routine, by

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120 Spinoza, Ethics, 5p24: 173. The more we understand things, the more we understand God and, therefore, ourselves.
because the familiar allows us to become increasingly more habitually passive in our ideas. This occurs in our “inability to ‘live the questions.’”¹²¹ We are inclined in the direction of enhanced forms of the use of both the imagination and reason the more we understand about how to “live” both, but also the more we understand how to live the questions remaining, the expressions yet possible. This includes an element of uncertainty or ambiguity that we allow for because we understand that there is always more to learn, always more to understand, always new ways to express our understanding, actions, and joy. We are experiencing love and an increased force of power when engaged in such understanding and, therefore, our activity and energy for more activity automatically increases. Using Spinoza’s system to critically analyze the intellectual and artistic aspects of Proust’s writing about the experience of human beings impacting each other, about living the questions, Nussbaum writes, “This love is not contingent on any particular state of the body, or on any external event. Therefore it need not come to a halt at any time… Nor is it tarnished by ambivalence… And since it is the common property of all human beings, [an individual] will not envy in anyone else this understanding, but will realize that the understanding is made the more complete the more people enjoy it…”¹²² It is as aspect of our


¹²² Nussbaum, “The Ascent of Love: Plato, Spinoza, Proust,” 939. The author references E5p34c, 5p37, and 5p18c for support, but I would like to note that I do not agree with Nussbaum’s conclusions on other philosophical topics. Nonetheless, in a day and age of radical terrorism, of all kinds large and small, some of which I have experienced directly yet was incomprehensible to many around me, not to mention global warming, poverty, racism, sexism, classism, and the insanity of capitalist systems which perpetuate violence and hate, we will all benefit collectively to learn even more about human perception and the formation of beliefs, as well as more about the properties, spiritual and otherwise, of consciousness. Love matters, but love and understanding are not reducible to material components. Compassion and continuous understanding perpetuate each other, and we have real souls… If we are going to continue to do genuine philosophy, we can no longer ignore the other aspects of truth, beauty, and goodness related to consciousness as extended and spirituality. Each of our individual souls exist not only from physical birth in this life, but also throughout many lives past and many more to come. We thunder in oneness and we are one thunder. We have free will, it is a gift, and we are more than mechanical bodies in motion reducible to physical components. We are our ideas, but this includes an aspect of spirituality that often goes unrecognized in scientific circles and philosophies of immanence. Consciousness needs the physical brain and body, but it is not reducible to it. It holds the property of extension and, as Nikola Tesla once wrote, “If you wish to understand the universe, think of energy, frequency, and vibration.” Our ideas and intentions are energy, frequency, and vibrations. Spirit is real.
conatus that we realize this brute fact with joy. Such realizations add to our “energy, beauty, and wonder.” It is a human ethology, a Spinozist ethology, a delight of and in the expressions of natural phenomena sub specie aeternitatus.
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