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Adequacy and the Individuation of Ideas In Spinoza's Ethics

ROBERT BRANDOM

IN THIS PAPER* I will argue that Spinoza's theory of knowledge is best understood as based on a reduction of intentional relations to causal relations. It follows from two of Spinoza's basic theses that some detailed account of intentionality is necessary to his project: that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of extended things, and that universal causal determinism governs the relations of extended things. We shall see that the concept of adequate ideas on which Spinoza bases his theory of knowledge requires intentional notions such as that some mind has an idea of (or representing) some thing. Spinoza must accordingly give an account of such relations which allow them to be translated into assertions of necessary causal relations between extended things. I explicate this reduction of intentionality using two guiding ideas—a novel interpretation of the individuation of extended modes (carried over to the attribute of thought by the psycho-physical parallelism) and an expanded version of the definition of the adequacy of ideas given by Radnor.¹ Providing such a framework enables me to interpret coherently the *conatus* (Spinoza's mysterious individuating principle), the three levels of knowledge, and the relation between this ontological principle of individuation and the epistemological notion of the adequacy of ideas. Elaborating this relation culminates, in the final section, in an explication of Spinoza's doctrine of intuitive self-consciousness.

I. The central notion around which Spinoza weaves his theory of knowledge is that of the adequacy of an idea to the thing of which it is the idea. The definition of an adequate idea is an idea "which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to the object, has all the properties or intrinsic marks of a true idea."² An interpretation of this concept must account for the fact that it is vital to Spinoza's purpose that all ideas be adequate in the divine mind, while many are inadequate in the human mind.³ The notions of error and evil, and the coherence of Spinoza's treatment of finitude depend on distinguishing adequate from inadequate ideas and explicating the relativity of that distinction to context (the mind of which the idea is a part). Considered as a problem of individuation, the adequacy of ideas will require interpretation by means of two principles. First, Spinoza must offer some principle which will tell us when we are confronted with two ideas and when we are confronted with only one (a use of "same idea"

* I would like to thank Margaret Wilson, Arthur Szathmari, and Bruce Kuklick for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

¹ Daisy Radnor, "Spinoza's Theory of Ideas," *Philosophical Review* (July, 1971), 338-359.

² Eth. ii, Def. 4. All citations are from: Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York, 1960), except as otherwise noted.

³ Eth. ii, 28, Dem.

which disregards context). Second, he must offer some principle whereby we can distinguish the various contexts of a single idea in which it is adequate or inadequate. This principle would individuate more finely than the first, making distinctions ignored by that principle (distinguishing ideas-in-a-context, rather than ideas simpliciter). Nevertheless, it is clear that we cannot determine the circumstances under which an idea is adequate unless we can distinguish one idea from a group of related ones.

Ideas are modes of substance conceived under the attribute of thought,⁴ and are hence identical with their objects, which are those same modes, conceived under the attribute of extension. Spinoza individuates substance into modes which may then be conceived under any of an infinite number of attributes (though only thought and extension are available to human beings). Each extended thing is thus the object of an idea. It is clear that this line of thought offers no convenient handle by which we may grasp the stricter individuation according to adequacy (describing the conditions under which one and the same idea can be adequate or inadequate to that thing "of" which it is the idea).⁵ Knowing the object of an idea does not tell us anything about its adequacy. Spinoza does say that⁶

we clearly understand what is the difference between the idea, say, of Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter's mind, and the idea of the said Peter, which is in another man, say, Paul. The former directly answers to the essence of Peter's own body . . . ; the latter indicates rather the disposition of Paul's body than the nature of Peter. . . . The modifications of the human body, of which the ideas represent external bodies as present to us, we call the images of things. . . .

Radnor⁷ argues persuasively that only according to such a distinction between the object of an idea and the thing represented by that idea can we make sense of Spinoza's epistemology, since humans can have ideas "of," e.g., the sun, but never have an idea whose object is the sun.

Presupposing such a notion of representation, Radnor further suggests that "adequate idea of X" (representing X) be glossed as "an idea which represents X and whose object includes X."⁸ We will develop this suggestion, adopting provisionally the following definition of adequacy: An idea I which represents an extended thing X is an adequate idea of X just in case the idea whose object is X is deducible from the idea I. The relation of adequacy so defined is "intrinsic" in Spinoza's sense, concerning only what ideas are deducible from an idea, and not whether the idea "conforms" to the thing it represents. Thus an idea which represents the sun will be adequate only if the idea whose object is the sun is deducible from the initial idea. We may notice both that this is a plausible thing to mean by "an adequate idea of the sun" (one from which could be deduced that complete idea which is identical to the sun, though conceived in the attribute of thought) and that we would not expect Spinoza to claim that humans can have such an idea of the sun. Spinoza does tell us that we have adequate ideas of "those things which are common to all bodies,"⁹ such as motion, presumably because we can

⁴ Eth. ii, 7, Scholium.

⁵ In the first half of Radnor's article (see note 1) she chronicles the difficulties various commentators have been led to by attempting to carry this project through.

⁶ Eth. ii, 17, Scholium to Corollary.

⁷ "Spinoza's Theory of Ideas."

⁸ Actually, Radnor's arguments only require the weaker condition that the thing represented by an idea be *deducible* from the object of the idea.

⁹ Eth. ii, 38.

infer an idea whose object is one of those common things from any idea whose object has motion, be it part of the human body or not. Since one and the same idea can be adequate in the mind of God and inadequate in a human mind, according to our interpretation of adequacy that idea must be able to represent one thing to God and another thing to a human being (the other *prima facie* possibility, that deductive relations themselves are context-relative, will turn out to be either inconsistent with God's infinite inclusiveness, or equivalent to the relativity of the representation relation according to the definition we will offer below). We must be able to determine the conditions of this relativity of the representation relation to the context of a mind in order to settle specific questions concerning adequacy.

II. The suggestion concerning the notion of the adequacy of ideas enlightens us only to the extent to which we can determine the principles of individuation of the objects of ideas, the things represented by ideas, the minds containing various ideas, and the relations of deducibility and causation between ideas and bodies respectively. Spinoza has given us a much more detailed discussion of extended individuals than he ever does of thought or thinking ones, so we will approach the issue of individuation from that direction. Spinoza begins with the "*corpora simplicissima*." Only states of motion-and-rest distinguish these simplest bodies, which move sometimes more quickly and sometimes more slowly.¹⁰ "A body in motion or at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body," which was similarly determined, and "a body in motion will continue in motion until it be determined to a state of rest by another body."¹¹ Spinoza thus sets out to exhibit a world of ideally elastic¹² "billiard balls" of microscopic size. This world is layered, consisting of individuals of many degrees of complexity, all ultimately constructed out of the *corpora simplicissima*. The following definition elaborates:¹³

When a number of bodies of the same or of different magnitudes are pressed together by others, so that they lie one upon the other, or if they are in motion with the same or with different degrees of speed, so that they communicate their motion to one another in a certain fixed proportion [*ratione*]*—*these bodies are said to be mutually united, and taken together they are said to compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from other bodies by this union of bodies.

If a number of *corpora simplicissima* are kept in contact with one another they are treated as a single composite individual. This definition clearly holds good even if the composite individual so formed is in motion relative to its surroundings, so long as the relative motions of the constituents are slight enough that they maintain mutual contact. In the second clause of the definition Spinoza allows a more complicated sort of relative motion as well. The parts of an individual must communicate their motions to one another according to some fixed ratio or proportion definitional of the complex individual. In a series of explanatory lemmas¹⁴ Spinoza indicates that other parts "of the same nature" may replace the parts of such a composite individual without damage to the identity of the whole. Similarly, all the parts may "become greater or less propor-

¹⁰ See discussion after the fourth axiom after Prop. 13; also Axioms 1 and 2.

¹¹ Lemma 3 after Prop. 13.

¹² Axiom 2 after Prop. 13.

¹³ Def. after Ax. 2 after Eth. ii, 13 (White-Stirling translation); cf. also Lemma 7.

¹⁴ 4–7 after the second axiom after Eth. ii, 13.

tionately" within a single individual. More importantly, any number of constituents may be forced to change the direction of their motion so long as they continue to communicate those motions in the same proportion as before, without destroying the individual. It is difficult to see what all of this comes to in detail, though the outlines are clear. Spinoza calls a system of the simplest bodies an individual just in case it exhibits a certain sort of stability. One instance of that stability is the maintenance of a fixed set of spatial relations. A system whose components are in relative motion may also be stable, however, provided that a change of motion in one part is communicated to the others according to a fixed rule. The parts of such a composite individual thus adjust themselves to changes within certain limits. An uncomplicated composite individual like a stone may react to a collision of one of its parts by a coherent change in the motion of all of its parts, that is, by moving as a whole. If it does not, it breaks up into non-communicating pieces and is destroyed.

We can define more complicated individuals made up of first-order individuals. Again we require only that changes in the motions of the parts be communicated to the other parts by a fixed rule. In continuing the hierarchy so as to include the whole universe, Spinoza emphasizes again his conception of stability through change:¹⁵

If we now imagine a third kind of individual composed of those of the second kind, we shall discover that it can be affected in many other ways without any change of form. Thus, if we advance *ad infinitum*, we may easily conceive the whole of nature to be one individual, whose parts, that is to say, all bodies, differ in infinite ways without any change of the whole individual.

The corpora simplicissima maintain their state of motion and rest until disturbed, but any collision alters them. We distinguish composite individuals from one another by the proportion which must be maintained in the communication of motions of the parts. Higher order individuals can remain identical through much greater changes than can the lower ones. The infinite individual preserves the communication of its parts under all circumstances (there is no external motive for change of any sort) and is thus immutable, while its parts change constantly.

This vision of an infinite sequence of ever more inclusive individuals with ever greater ability to resist destructive change offers some help in the interpretation of the "proportion of communicated motion" criterion of identity and individuation for the middle-sized individuals we are directly acquainted with. We may take the immutability of the infinite extended individual—an individual we can hardly help identifying with the "face of the whole universe, which, although it varies in infinite modes, yet remains always the same"¹⁶—as an expression of the conservation of momentum. A particle colliding with another "communicates its motion" with the final velocities being related according to a fixed proportion, namely the inverse ratio of the masses of the colliding particles. Spinoza has not mentioned the masses, merely the fixed ratio which results, but in this he is a good Cartesian. Since this result is due to a law of nature, as we would have it, the communication of motion according to fixed proportions cannot fail in the universe as a whole. It can fail in any finite individual simply because momentum need not be conserved in finite systems.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sch. to Lemma 7 after Eth. ii, 13.

¹⁶ Epistle 64. This and all subsequent references to Spinoza's correspondence are to the Wolf translation, as included in John Wild, ed., *Spinoza Selections* (New York, 1930), pp. 401-479.

¹⁷ Talk of momentum here may not be quite right, since it is not clear what Spinoza's view on the *directions* of motions is, but this does not affect our discussion.

III. In order to appreciate the difficulties of this layered scheme of individuals, we must examine the parallel attribute of thought, and consider how, according to the account of adequacy sketched in Part I, we might come to know individuals constructed as suggested by this scheme. We do not yet have a good enough grasp of individuation in the *Ethics* to redeem our promissory note concerning the notion of representation. Spinoza's initial use of the term and his general theory of perception give us enough information to show that perception must lead to inadequate ideas, however. According to the definition we gave earlier, confused cognition (inadequate ideas) will arise just in case an idea representing something is such that its object is not an adequate cause of the thing represented (or equivalently, the idea of the thing represented is not deducible from the representing idea). It might seem that no perception could lead to adequate knowledge for Spinoza. For perception is a cognition corresponding to a bodily state which is caused at least in part by the impingement of an external body on the soft sensory surfaces of the human body.¹⁸ In the passage introducing representation cited above, Spinoza talks of the bodily objects of the ideas representing things as "images." When I catch a ball, the ball is a proximate cause of an impression which its round shape makes on my hand. Such perception representing the ball would be adequate just in case the idea whose object is the ball could be validly inferred from the representing idea, namely the idea whose object is the image of the ball. This is not the case, since at most the outline of the ball is impressed on my body. Thus something other than that particular ball could have caused the bodily image, and consequently the idea whose object is the ball cannot be deducible from the idea whose object is the image we have taken as representing the ball.

This argument does not imply that no adequate ideas are to be had about the bodies which impinge in perception. Spinoza points out¹⁹ that external bodies and those which comprise the human body have many properties in common. All such common notions must be conceived adequately, for they are deducible alike from the bodily correlate of an idea and any external body.²⁰ All bodies have in common their attribute of extension, their common timeless generation from the immediate infinite mode of extension—motion and rest—and the mediate infinite mode—the face of the whole universe, the infinite immutable extended individual.²¹ Since these *notiones communes* must be conceived adequately, rational mechanics, an adequate notion of motion and rest, is possible. This is the "second kind of knowledge," called *Ratio*.²² (The "first kind of knowledge" is confused or inadequate knowledge. Only the second and third kinds are adequate.)

Spinoza says that this kind of knowledge treats particular things as mere instances of general properties (e.g., of motion and rest) so that we cannot know individuals by it.²³ We discussed the various orders of extended individuals in Section II from the universal point of view of *Ratio*, following Spinoza's own treatment. We did not, then, touch on the essence of any individuals in that discussion, but offered merely a general characterization of the property of *individuality* insofar as it is common to all bodies. We defined

¹⁸ Eth. ii, 13, Postulate 5.

¹⁹ Eth. ii, 38.

²⁰ Spinoza argues at Eth. ii, 37 that none of these "*notiones communes*" can constitute the essence of any particular thing, since his definition of essence requires that such an essence be inconceivable apart from the thing of which it is the essence. Thus such an essence could not be common to all things.

²¹ Cf. Eth. i, 21–23; Epistle 64.

²² Eth. ii, 40, Sch.

²³ *Ibid.*

a system of bodies as an individual just in case a certain sort of stability of contact and the ordered communication of motions among the parts is maintained. Our earlier discussion did not offer reasons for the achievement and maintenance of a particular configuration. Yet surely accidentally stable systems cannot constitute all the particular enduring things we see around us. Some account must be given of the amount of stability we find around us, for it is far in excess of what is plausible if the account of Ratio is the whole story. When I catch a ball, why do I not fly apart at the contact like the set at the beginning of a game of pool? There is nothing in Spinoza's billiard parlor world resembling friction among the parts of the solid which are in contact, nor are there circular motions or fields of force. Spinoza has an appropriate rule for changes of direction in collisions,²⁴ which should make my bodily parts respond the way the massed billiard balls do to an impact. We can say what sort of imperviousness to disintegration by external influence is required for individuality using the mechanics of Ratio. We cannot explain why there should be any. Spinoza's solution of this difficulty is the doctrine of the conatus, the effort an individual expends to maintain itself. This doctrine cannot be approached on the level of Ratio, but only by the third kind of knowledge, *Scientia Intuitiva*, which is founded on the knowledge achieved by Ratio.

From the point of view of Spinoza's total project, the prime positive result of the investigation of common properties by Ratio is an adequate idea of God. We have seen how an adequate idea of the immediate infinite mode of extension is possible in the second kind of knowledge. But by the definition of a mode, any mode can only be conceived through substance,²⁵ which must accordingly be conceived adequately if any mode, infinite or not, is so conceived. We can restate this argument: since motion-and-rest are caused immediately by God, and knowledge of an effect depends upon and involves knowledge of the cause, the adequate knowledge of motion-and-rest Ratio assures us of involves adequate knowledge of God.²⁶ This is essentially the argument of *Eth. ii*, 45–47. Ratio provides an adequate idea of God's essence, and hence sets the stage for intuition to reverse the direction of inquiry, beginning with God and proceeding down to finite individual essences.

Spinoza introduces the principle of individuation we are to achieve by intuitive knowledge in this way:²⁷ "The effort (conatus) by which each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persevere in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself." The mind has such a conatus, of which it is conscious.²⁸ Spinoza calls the conatus of that mode which is both the human mind and its body "appetite." This statement only gives notice that there is some principle other than chance to account for the observed stability of things. An *effort* which they expend to persevere timelessly individuates particular things—the effort helps them maintain a stable configuration. The only help Spinoza gives us with this difficult concept is in the proof of Proposition 6, where he deduces the existence of the conatus from the fact that each particular thing expresses in a determinate manner the power of God, by which he is and acts.²⁹ Our adequate idea of God thus entails in some fashion an adequate idea of the various individuating "efforts," but it is unclear in what fashion.

²⁴ Ax. 2 after Lemma 3 after *Eth. ii*, 13.

²⁵ *Eth. i*, Def. 5.

²⁶ Definition of infinite modes, *Eth. i*, 23, Epistle 64; *Eth. i*, Ax. 4; *Eth. ii*, 37–38.

²⁷ *Eth. iii*, 6 and 7.

²⁸ *Eth. ii*, 9.

²⁹ *Eth. i*, 34.

IV. Epistle 32, where Spinoza elucidates his use of the terms 'whole' and 'part' is the key to understanding the progression by *Scientia Intuitiva* from an adequate idea of God's essence to an adequate idea of the essences of individual things:

I consider things as parts of some whole, insofar as their natures are mutually adapted so that they are in accord among themselves as much as possible; but insofar as things differ among themselves each . . . is considered to be a whole, not a part.

Spinoza's example is blood, composed of different particles of lymph and chyle. We say that to the extent to which they are mutually adapted to form a single fluid, they are parts of a whole, while to the extent to which they differ, opposing one another, each is a whole itself. The relative nature of the notions of whole and part is obvious. Spinoza imagines a tiny worm living in the blood, discerning and understanding the collisions and rebounds of the particles:

That worm would live in this blood as we live in this part of the universe, and he would consider each particle of blood to be a whole, and not a part. *And he could not know how all the parts are controlled by the universal nature of the blood, and are forced, as the universal nature of the blood demands, to adapt themselves to one another, so as to harmonize with one another in a certain way.* (Emphasis mine)

There are three premises here: first, that there is a conditioning of parts by the whole they are included in. That this determination is active in some sense (an effort) seems an unavoidable conclusion from the terms 'forced' and 'controlled by'. Second, he asserts that the worm, who is in full possession of a history of collisions and communications of motion could never discern the action of the whole on its parts. Third, Spinoza claims that we are in the same situation in our part of the universe as the worm is in the blood: we also observe motions of bodies, but cannot discover the control of these bodies by the wholes they comprise.

The comparison of this situation with the one confronting us when we consider the individuation of extended bodies according to the second kind of knowledge is obvious. Like the worm, we can in principle know everything about the laws governing motion and rest. That knowledge was sufficient to allow us to recognize individuals, but not sufficient to account for their existence. The universal knowledge of *Ratio* cannot comprehend why there should be such stable systems. The principles of rational mechanics thus underdetermine individuation. In this letter Spinoza asserts that there is a whole-part determination which "mutually adapts" the parts of a whole, and which cannot be determined by a consideration of the motions involved. Such a holistic determination is just what we need to occupy the place of the *conatus* which Spinoza has described elsewhere as the individuating principle available only to the third kind of knowledge.

Spinoza justifies his assertion of the merely rational worm's inability to discern the whole-part determination with two claims. First:

For if we imagine that there are no causes outside the blood and no other bodies to which the particles of blood could transfer their motion, it is certain that the blood would remain always in its state . . . and so blood would always have to be considered a whole and not a part.

Spinoza thus believes that individuals, if unperturbed by external influences will be per-

fectly stable, as the face of the whole universe is, since motion would always be transferred to another part of the whole. He makes this same claim more opaquely in the *Ethics*:³⁰ "A thing cannot be destroyed except by an external cause." The rest of Spinoza's justification takes us beyond the idealized situation of isolated individuals, qualifying the first statement:

But, since there are very many other causes which in a certain way control the laws of the nature of blood, and are in turn controlled by the blood, hence it comes about that other motions and other changes take place in the blood, which result not only from the mere relation of its parts to one another, but from the relation of the motion of the blood and also of the external causes to one another; in this way blood has the character of a part and not a whole.

Spinoza thus makes the fact that the blood is only a relative whole crucial to justifying the inability of the rational worm to distinguish the force which the blood's universal nature exerts upon its parts. The reason the worm cannot (and we, living in our portion of the universe cannot) distinguish the controlling operation of a relative whole on its parts is that that determination can always be attributed to the external causes impinging on the relative whole. If the blood were an absolute whole, we would be forced to recognize the unity which an individual imposes on its parts, as we were in fact led to do in the case of the conservation of momentum (motion-and-rest) in the maximal extended individual. Spinoza goes on to say that all finite wholes are only relative wholes.

Consider the emerging picture of rational mechanical inquiry. Beginning with whatever level of bodies we can observe most easily, we may chart the mutual communications of motions. Upon analyzing these data according to the mechanical principles sketched in Part II of the *Ethics*, we would discover that we cannot fully account for the motions of the observed bodies on the basis of those physical principles applied just to the system under observation. The stage is set for the discovery of the whole-part determination, and indeed Spinoza claims that that discovery would be made by Physics—if only the system under observation were an absolute, and not merely a relative whole. But since the system we observe shares with all other finite systems its function as a part of a more inclusive whole, it is a whole only relatively. Consequently the possibilities for the application of our physical principles have not been exhausted. The system under observation was not isolated, and was perturbed by collisions from the outside, as we see when we widen the scope of our observation to include a larger whole whose parts interact with our initial system. We should thus not have expected our principles to have accounted for the motions of the initial system solely on the basis of the observations of that system, for external causes were involved. We must extend the observations and attempted explanations to the next most inclusive whole, and then to the next after that, with no complete account of any of the motions along the way (because no awareness of the control by wholes of their parts) until we reach an absolute whole. Of course, since Spinoza has shown in the opening arguments of the *Ethics* that there is only one absolute whole in this (or any) attribute, and that this whole is infinite, it will never be reached by such a progression. Consequently the worm, functioning merely at the level of Ratio, will never know the determination of blood particles by blood's universal nature, and we can't know about a similar determination in our part of the universe by our rational mechanics.

³⁰ Eth. iii, 4.

These failures, however, are failures of Ratio, which, while it cannot reach God by analyzing the motions of finite extended systems directly can, as we have shown, achieve adequate knowledge of his essence by another means. Spinoza tells us that this opens the way for *Scientia Intuitiva*, the third kind of knowledge, to reverse the vicious ascent in search of *conatus* by Ratio, and "proceed" down from an adequate knowledge of the infinite modes to an adequate knowledge of some finite, relative wholes. Ratio could not discover these essences, because the effects of the whole-part determination (the mutual adaptation of parts which is the *conatus* and hence the essence of individual things) cannot be separated from the effects of membership in a more inclusive whole without prior knowledge of the essence of that larger whole. Only intuitive knowledge, proceeding from the essences of the more inclusive to the less inclusive wholes can make the required distinction and discern the essence which individuates. Spinoza refers to the whole-part determination which intuition follows as the expression of God's power by finite things.³¹ He also refers to the conditioning of finite parts by infinite wholes as 'immanent causation', thereby contrasting it with the mutual causal conditioning of two bodies which interact as (relative) wholes.³² Intuitive knowledge is said to follow the course of atemporal emanation of essences.

The descent of intuition from the essence of God to the essences of particular things must be different in kind from the step-by-step analysis by which Ratio proceeds, for there is no next smaller whole after the "face of the whole universe." There would thus be an infinite number of "steps" for reason to go through to get to any particular individual. But Spinoza's sole non-metaphysical example of the different kinds of knowledge contrasts the step-by-step figuring of a proportion by Ratio to "just seeing it" by immediate intuition,³³ so this is an expected difference. It also suggests that we must not expect a discursive explication of intuition, and Spinoza's own efforts at presentation of the notion reinforce this. Since Spinoza specifically denies that all particular extended modes can be deduced from an adequate idea of extension, yet affirms that we can have adequate ideas of the essences of particular things,³⁴ it must be either that the essence of any particular thing (but not all together) can be intuited by a finite mind, or that there is a distinguished class of particular things any one of which may be intuited, while others cannot. My interpretation of intuition will entail the second alternative, but Spinoza offers no direct pronouncement on this issue. He does say we can have intuitive knowledge of our own minds and their modifications.³⁵ We shall concentrate on this example and not consider intuitive knowledge in other cases. We have sketched the rational mechanics which is the object of the second kind of knowledge, and we have seen that the essences which individuate things are not approached on that level of knowledge. We have characterized those essences as principles of stability exhibited in the mutual adaptation of parts according to the whole they constitute. We have remaining to us the problem of individuating ideas in a human mind, in order to complete the characterization of the representation relation, and hence the notion of adequacy. Accordingly, we move to the parallel attribute of thought, and apply the insights gleaned during our sojourn in the realm of extension, with the goal of describing a framework within which we may discover what an adequate idea of a particular thing, namely the human mind, consists in.

³¹ Eth. i, 34; Eth. i, 36, Dem.

³² Eth. i, 18.

³³ Eth. ii, 40, Sch.

³⁴ Epistle 83; Eth. ii, 40, Sch.

³⁵ Eth. v, 4; Eth. v, 4, Sch.; Eth. v, 31, Dem.

V. The analysis of the individuation of extended things began with the *notio communis* of motion-and-rest, the immediate infinite mode of extension. The corresponding immediate infinite mode of thought is understanding.³⁶ We must assume that we can conceive ideas as layered stable systems of simpler ideas corresponding to the scheme for extended individuals, for the "order and connection" of the two systems is identical. But Spinoza has not offered us a rational psychology relating the "states of understanding" associated with ideas in the way in which he sketched a rational mechanics relating the states of motion-and-rest of extended things. The parallelism of ideas and bodies, however, allows us to draw some inferences, as we will see below. In particular, there must be some causal analogue of the intentionality of ideas—the fact that ideas can represent things, be ideas of things. All ideas in the human mind have as their objects affections of the human body (states of motion-and-rest of constituent systems of the body). Yet some of these ideas are "taken as images" of external bodies by a particular mind. Further, we argued in Part I that what a particular mind takes an idea to represent depends on what mind is considered, as well as what idea is considered. Let us then take the context of an idea in a particular mind as the criterion for determining what that mind takes the idea to represent. In particular, consider the mind as the correlate in the attribute of thought in a chain of causal influences whose links are the complex extended individual corresponding to the human body in different states of motion-and-rest. We will consider the idea(s) immediately following the idea we are interested in as determining what that idea is "taken" to represent.³⁷ Thus, each idea I is a proximate cause³⁸ of some effect E in the mind in question.³⁹ E in turn has an adequate cause C (which includes I). We say that I represents the object C' of C and, derivatively, any part of C'. The strategy and motivation of such a functional definition should be clear. The only relation available to reconstruct the intentionality of representation by relating something inside the mind to something outside it is the relation of

³⁶ Epistle 64.

³⁷ If we view the causal commerce of the modes of extension sub specie aeternitatis, it will appear as a net, rather than as a chain, of individuals with particular states of motion-and-rest. The appearance of time is simply a confused idea due to one's identification with his own body as a standpoint. In our scheme this means that a direction is induced into the infinite net by following the career of a few individuals (the bodily parts) through all their changes of motion until the dissolution of the whole they constitute, and thereby picking out a chain such that the mind associated with that body may order things according to the order in which they (arbitrarily, from the divine point of view) impinge on the privileged dimension of the chain. This ordering may not represent the causal relations which actually obtain. It is, I think, clear how a systematically confused ordering of events could be constructed by taking a one-dimensional ordering abstracted out of a two-or-more-dimensional matrix and projecting all the events onto that ordering. Spinoza might even take a hint like this from Galileo's treatment of time as a geometrical dimension, seeing causal events in four-space under the aspect of eternity. Spinoza's doctrine of temporality as confusion due to limited perspective would in that case foreshadow the relativistic notion of local times. But all of his interpretation follows only if we allow some sort of directedness among the causal relations of states of individuals which are nodes of the initial net. This notion is consistent with his paradigm case of logical relations in the parallel attribute of thought. For deductive relations are assymetric (directed) but do not form a total ordering. On this view, then, time is a confused perception because I choose to order my experience according to the order in which things affect me, rather than according to the much more complex order which obtains in nature.

³⁸ Spinoza uses the notion of a *proximate cause* (the last cause in a chain before the effect in question) in several places, e.g., at Eth. ii, 3, Dem.

³⁹ Eth. i, Ax. 3: if there is no effect in the mind in question, then the motion in the parts of the body which are the objects of the ideas of the mind in question is not being communicated, and that body and mind are destroyed.

causation. If we wish to retain a Radnor-type analysis of adequacy, we may not take what a thing represents as determined by the causal *antecedents* of I. For the conjunction of these two moves would entail that the object of and thing represented by an adequate idea are mutually deducible from each other, which is clearly false to Spinoza's usage.

The justification of the definition must come from its plausibility for interpreting the ways in which Spinoza uses representation. Consider first ordinary perception, which Spinoza tells us will present only a confused idea "of" an external individual.⁴⁰ We suppose that I have a bodily state which the incidence of sunlight on my eye causes. According to our definition, what, if anything, the idea whose object is that state represents (is an idea "of") depends upon what ideas follow it in my mind. Suppose further, then, that the idea whose object is a state of my eye is a proximate cause of an idea whose object is the bodily state of my larynx forming the word "sun." Spinoza's discussion of a similar case of ideas related according to idiosyncratic associations rather than universal logical relations within a given mind⁴¹ indicates what relations he conceives as relevant. My speech depends upon the fact that "if the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, when the mind afterwards imagines any of them, it will straightway remember the others also."⁴² The adequate cause of my pronunciation of the word "sun" thus includes the past impingement of sunlight and my verbalization elicited somehow in the process of learning English, as well as the immediate impingement of sunlight which initiates the associative pattern on this occasion. The idea whose object is the state of my eye as sunlight affects it represents both the sun and an incident in my past, according to our definition. This idea will be an adequate idea of the sun just in case the idea whose object is the sun is deducible from it. Since an arc-lamp could have induced the same bodily state of my eye, no such deduction is valid. Similarly, the idea will be an adequate idea of the origin of my association just in case that association is deducible from the idea in question (that is, if from the idea whose object is the state of my eye one could validly deduce that that state had in the past been contemporaneous with another, corresponding to a movement of my larynx). That no such deduction is permissible is just the meaning of the idiosyncratic nature of such associations, depending as they do, not simply upon universal logical relations, but also upon the arbitrary (from a logical point of view) boundaries of finite individuals.

The only examples we have so far of adequate ideas are ideas which represent *notiones communes*, such as extension or motion-and-rest. Let us suppose that I have an idea whose object is a state of my arm muscles resulting from the impact of a ball I have just caught. There are many ideas which might follow such a one according to various associations of mine. Spinoza assures us nonetheless that *notiones communes* "will be represented by an adequate idea in the mind," and "cannot be conceived except adequately."⁴³ It must be that some idea which in fact follows the one in question follows in virtue of universal logical relations. This would be the case if the next idea has as its object the bodily state of my muscles slightly further along my arm, where the

⁴⁰ E.g., Eth. ii, 41.

⁴¹ Spinoza's discussion is at Eth. ii, 18, Sch. Ultimately, of course, all relations of ideas are universal logical relations. If we restrict our attention to those which take place within a single finite individual, however, an idiosyncratic abstraction from the universal relations may be made by the boundary of that individual. This arbitrary limitation of viewpoint is the source of confused ideas, and hence of error and evil.

⁴² Eth. ii, 18.

⁴³ Eth. ii, 38, 39.

momentum of the catch is “communicated” according to physical necessity. In that case the adequate cause of the idea of which the representing idea is the proximate cause would include both the representing idea and the universal properties of motion-and-rest corresponding to the conservation of momentum. By our definition the original idea would thus be “of” this *notio communis*. It would be an adequate idea, since from the initial bodily state one may validly deduce the appropriate general properties “common to all bodies.”⁴⁴

We next proceed to consider the *conatus* in the attribute of thought, and then to the only example Spinoza ever offers of a particular thing which may be known adequately (by the third kind of knowledge)—the human mind in its self-awareness.

VI. The principle or “effort” of *conatus* which timelessly individuates modes under the attribute of extension manifests itself as a control or force exerted on parts by the whole they comprise. Since the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of extended things, a similar control must constitute the *conatus* in the attribute of thought. Spinoza’s analysis of the *conatus* for ideas is more complicated than that for extended things, however, as the notion of the *activity* of a complex idea (mind) links the adequacy of ideas to the individuating *conatus*. Spinoza says⁴⁵ that the *conatus* when applied to the mind alone is called will (*voluntas*). He also says that “there is in the mind no volition or affirmation and negation save that which an idea, inasmuch as it is an idea, involves.”⁴⁶ In proving this proposition, Spinoza argues that a particular affirmation (or will) is the essence of each idea. He claims that this demonstration justifies his comment after the definition of an idea as a mental conception that he chose the term ‘conception’ to indicate the *activity* of the mind.⁴⁷ It is not clear why the claim that a particular affirmation (*conatus*) is the essence of each idea should entail that the mind is active. Considering the definition of activity in this context we find a further notion linked to the individuation of ideas:⁴⁸

I say that we *act* when anything takes place either within us or external to us, whereof we are the adequate cause, that is, when through our nature something takes place within us or externally to us, which can through our nature alone be clearly and distinctly understood.

Reading this definition into the claim above, we find that Spinoza is claiming that ideas are activities of the mind containing them (inasmuch as it is a mind, i.e., a whole, that is, relatively), which by his definition means that the mind is the adequate cause of its own modifications, since the essences of ideas are particular affirmations.

On the model of our previous discussion of whole-part determination in extended individuals, there are three sorts of relations of importance for the notion of activity:

⁴⁴ These claims are puzzling in terms of our actual experience, for we are surely not in general aware of such ideas. Spinoza may well have no idea corresponding to mental contents of which we are unaware. On the other hand, it seems to me that he has the resources for such a doctrine in the contrast between ideas as enduring individuals and ideas as “states of understanding” of such individuals, and the different ways these two categories behave in the mind. We shall not try to develop such an account here, however.

⁴⁵ Eth. iii, 9, Sch.

⁴⁶ Eth. ii, 49.

⁴⁷ Eth. ii, Def. 3.

⁴⁸ Eth. iii, Def. 2.

that of part to part within the relative whole being considered, that of a whole to its parts, and that of the parts of a more inclusive whole to the parts of the included whole (we will ignore higher-order effects). The mirroring of extended connections demands that a mind counterfactually isolated from external forces (that is, an absolute whole, in which relations of the third sort were missing) would be the adequate cause of all its own modifications (the states of "understanding" of its ideas, paralleling the states of motion-and-rest of their objects). A mind is thus active just insofar as it is a relative whole and not a relative part of some more inclusive whole. Since every finite complex is a whole only relatively, however, a human mind will never be the adequate cause of all its modifications. In view of the definition of activity, we can restate this result by saying that the power (conatus, activity) of external things surpasses that of the human mind: "It is impossible that man should not be a part of nature or that he should be capable of undergoing no changes save such as can be understood through his nature alone."⁴⁹ If some state of ideas in a mind is the effect of the action of the whole mind and the states of the other parts, then the mind is an adequate cause of that modification of the mind, and is active with respect to it. The essence of the mind in question then "affirms" that modification.

Spinoza establishes the connection of the individuation of ideas (via the conatus, the determination of parts by the wholes containing them which is activity) to the theory of knowledge and the notion of adequate ideas as follows: "The activities of the mind arise solely from adequate ideas; the passive states of the mind depend solely on inadequate ideas."⁵⁰ This proposition follows from the interpretations we have offered of the adequacy of ideas and the activity of minds. Thinking of the mind as a system of ideas with logical relations between them corresponding to the causal relations between the bodies of an extended system, we find three cases exemplifying the causes of a modification of a mind. First, a single idea, constituting a part of the mind and itself modified by its presence in that whole, may be the adequate cause of some internal modification in the mind. Second, several such parts could together constitute the adequate cause of a modification. Finally, the adequate cause of such a modification could include things external to the mind. In the third case the mind is not active but passive, since the mind in question does not include the adequate cause of the modification. In this case none of the ideas inside the mind (which are partial causes of the modification) are adequate, for each is a proximate cause of the modification whose adequate cause includes the external thing, and could not be adequate unless the external thing were deducible from their objects. If that were the case, however, we could consider the situation as an example of the second case, since we could comprehend the modification in terms of the internal causes, which are accordingly adequate by the definition. In the first case the situation is as clear, for the mind is active just in virtue of one idea's being an adequate cause of its changes of state, and in that case the idea is adequate—it represents only what follows from its object.

But what of the second case? In this situation the mind is active; no external causes figure in its internal modification. Yet it seems that no individual idea is adequate, for only the conjunction is an adequate cause of the modification, so that each one represents things not deducible from *its* object, although deducible from the conjoined objects. In this one case, Spinoza seems to rest the mind's activity on inadequate ideas, contrary to his assertion above. Spinoza holds, however, that "if several individual

⁴⁹ Eth. iv, 4.

⁵⁰ Eth. iii, 3.

things concur in one action, so as all to be simultaneously the cause of one effect, I consider them all, so far, as one particular thing."⁵¹ The second case thus reduces to the first, and Spinoza establishes the correlation of the mind's activity with its possession of adequate ideas, according to the interpretations I have offered for those terms. Of course, by the same principle we ought to restate the third case, for it is not accurate to speak of the collaboration of internal and external causes. There is one individual which causes any given modification. From the perspective of the finite mind of God, all such ideas are adequate, representing only what follows from their objects.⁵² They can be inadequate only with respect to a finite mind, just in case the individual which is an adequate cause of a modification is not a part of (an idea in) that mind. The individuation of minds by their activity is thus dependent upon the epistemological categorization of adequate ideas. Individuation of complex ideas of all levels according to their conatus (whole-part determination) called "affirmation" for simpler ideas and "activity" for those complex enough to be considered minds depends on separating the effects of inclusion in a larger whole from the effects of parts external to such a whole, just as in extended systems.

VII. We now know something about the individuation of modes of either attribute by the conatus which mutually adapts the parts so as to form a whole recognizable by the general principles of Ratio. We have yet to account for the adequate knowledge of particular essences which Spinoza claims a third kind of knowledge, *Scientia Intuitiva*, achieves. Our final consideration of the doctrine of "ideas of ideas" or *idea ideae* in the *Ethics* will bring together three more or less separate issues left by our previous discussion. First, the doctrine of *idea ideae* includes the statement that these ideas are "of" other ideas in the sense in which the mind is "of" the body, namely identity. This doctrine as it stands explicitly contradicts the reading of "idea of X" as "idea representing X" which we borrowed from Radnor in Part I.⁵³ Second, the human mind (and its modifications) is the only finite individual Spinoza ever instances as an object of intuitive knowledge (by an *idea ideae* "of" the mind), so it offers the only opportunity to interpret the possibility of adequate knowledge of the individuating conatus. Finally, there is Spinoza's contention that the human mind is self-conscious in knowing its own conatus.⁵⁴

The difficulty with respect to the first issue is not just that the interpretation I have suggested demands that ideas be "of" the things they represent if we are to make sense of the notion of adequate ideas (although this is certainly true). On Spinoza's own terms we cannot in general read "an idea of X" as "an idea whose object is X." When we have our adequate idea of God, surely God is not the *object* of the idea (else that idea would simply be the divine mind). Similarly for the adequate ideas of "common notions": how could motion-and-rest be the object of an idea in the human mind? Yet Spinoza introduces his discussion of the *idea ideae* with an argument from Proposition 21: "The idea of the mind is united to the mind in the same way as the mind is united to the body."⁵⁵ This claims that ideas of ideas are identical with their object ideas since, like mind and body they characterize a single mode and lack even the distinction of

⁵¹ I have corrected Elwes' erroneous translation of *Eth. ii, Def. 7*; Spinoza's comment to this definition is also relevant.

⁵² *Eth. ii, 32.*

⁵³ Radnor never takes up the issue of *idea ideae*.

⁵⁴ *Eth. iii, 9.*

⁵⁵ *Eth. ii, 21, Sch.*

attributes existing in the mind-body case. The apparent inconsistency of this doctrine with our interpretation of representation derives from that reading's faithful rendering of Spinoza's own principles, rather than from a failure to do so. Indeed, since the point of this series of propositions is to show that in the absence of intuition we have only an inadequate idea of the human mind, what sense could Spinoza attribute to this claim if that idea is in fact *identical* with the mind? My analysis resolves this difficulty for the representation interpretation, and hence for Spinoza. In doing so it tries to make sense of the possibility of both adequate and confused ideas of the human mind. The adequate idea involves activity on the part of the mind, as our discussion of individuation and intuition requires. My discussion points to a plausible doctrine of self-consciousness by viewing the idea *ideae* as instances of representing ideas as previously discussed.

The most desirable state of affairs would be that in which we were allowed to interpret ideas as representing other ideas. In that case consciousness of self would be assimilated as an instance to the general scheme of consciousness "of" X, namely an idea representing X. Further, it would be clear how there could be inadequate ideas of the mind, namely in any case in which the represented idea (the mind) is not deducible from the object of the representing idea (e.g., if the representing idea is a proper part of the whole mind, excluding parts relatively independent of itself). Again, by our definition of representation, an idea adequately representing the human mind would have two characteristics: it would be a proximate cause of a state of "understanding" whose adequate cause is the whole mind, and the whole mind thus represented would be deducible from the representing idea. The adequacy of the idea of the mind would be equivalent to the activity or freedom of the mind, just as in Spinoza's view, for it is only when the mind is an adequate cause of its own states that those states represent that mind in the sense already explicated. Finally, the mind functioning as the adequate cause of its own modifications is just the whole-part determination (immanent causation, mutual adaptation of parts, etc.) which we have identified with the conatus or individual essence of the mind. Consciousness of the self (having an adequate idea of the mind) is thus consciousness of the activity of the mind, and hence of its individuating essence. Subject to the condition of being able to justify allowing one idea to represent another, then, a plausible doctrine of self-consciousness as adequate knowledge of the individual essence or activity of the human mind is an immediate result of the interpretation we have offered of adequacy and individuation.

This happy conclusion is still only hypothetical. Our definition of the thing an idea represents is "the object of the adequate cause of the subsequent ideas" (those ideas of which the representing idea is a proximate cause). The thing represented is the *object* of some idea, and hence not itself an idea. The possibility of knowing extended modes requires the passage to objects in framing this definition. We could take ideas as representing other ideas on the basis of the definition of representation only if it is possible for one idea to be the object of another. But this is just the doctrine which Spinoza put forth in Eth. ii, 21–29 and which we found so mysterious and unmotivated: The point of the scholium to Proposition 21 is the reminder that the definition of an object of X for Spinoza would be "the mode exhibited in one attribute by X, as exhibited in any attribute." Of course Spinoza never gives the definition of "object" explicitly in these terms (we were led to believe that the object was always the mode exhibited in the other⁵⁶ attribute) but the latter rendering is quite consistent with what went before, and is even given some justification in the Letters.⁵⁷ The notion that an idea can be related

⁵⁶ Only two attributes could be involved, according to Ep. 66.

⁵⁷ See Ep. 63–66, 70, 72.

to an idea in the same way in which the mind is related to the body, which seemed to be an unintelligible basis for a doctrine of self-consciousness is precisely what the most natural doctrine requires according to the interpretations I have offered in this paper. The idea A represents idea B just in case the object of B, which is B itself (of course B has an extended object as well), is the adequate cause of the ideas of which A is a proximate cause. A will then be an *adequate* idea of B just in case B is deducible from A.⁵⁸ Thus if A is an adequate cause of the idea in a mind of which it is a proximate cause (if the ideas follow logically from A), then A will be an adequate idea of itself. In general, A will be an adequate cause of B just in case the adequate cause of the idea of which A is a proximate cause (namely B) is deducible from A, that is, just in case A is itself such an adequate cause, which is just in case the mind is active. The more inclusive idea, the human mind, can adequately represent itself and its parts in the same fashion. It is then aware of itself in just the same way in which it can be aware of the sun, or of motion—namely, by representation. Further, just insofar as an idea in the mind adequately represents that mind (the mind is active and free) the whole mind is an adequate cause of the states of its parts, which is the correlate in the attribute of thought of the whole-part determination constituting the essence of that particular mind.

Since this immanent causation of the states of the parts by the state of the whole constitutes the essence of the human mind, it is our essence to be free and active (insofar as our mind is “in itself,” i.e., is a relative whole and not a relative part), it is of the essence of the human mind to conceive things, in particular itself, adequately. It succeeds to the extent to which it is a relative whole determining its parts, and fails so far as it is a relative part superceded by other finite things whose power exceeds that of the human mind.

The way in which we know our own minds adequately differs from that in which we know the notions communes, for the particular essence individuating the object of our knowledge, the activity of the mind, constitutes both the thing known and the knowing of it. Intuitive knowledge is thus immediate and simple. The complexity of the other kinds of knowledge is the result of a finite limitation, and we can discard them when we know as God knows, intuitively. Intuitive knowledge proceeds according to the descending order of whole-part determination. It is knowledge of that adequate causation of the states of the idea-parts by the mind-whole (so far as the individual is determined by its own essence; that is, so far as it is a relative whole) which is the conatus and essence of the individual.

In this paper I have offered interpretations of some of the central notions of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Spinoza uses the concepts of activity, freedom, and intuitive adequate knowledge of the individual essence of the human mind as the basic tools with which his ethical project is to be carried out in the final portions of his great work. It is to be hoped that the elucidation of these notions which is offered here can be of help in our attempts to understand those further doctrines which give Spinoza's project its name.

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⁵⁸ Thus any idea in a mind which follows logically from the previous idea in that mind is itself conceived adequately by that mind. This, I assert, is the basis for Spinoza's claim at *Eth.* ii, 40 that any idea which logically follows from an adequate idea is itself adequate. If we do not read this proposition in this way, it is inconsistent with the interpretation of adequacy I have presented (since nothing can be known of what the idea following the adequate idea is taken by the mind to represent until we see the ideas of which it is proximate cause).