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AN IDEA IS NOT SOMETHING MUTE
LIKE A PICTURE ON A PAD

LENN E. GOODMAN

SPINOZA KEPT A SKETCHBOOK in which he made drawings of his many visitors. Unlike Plotinus, he was not ashamed of his body and included himself among his renderings.¹ But the pictures were mute and still. They might suggest the sitters' personalities, but they did not move or speak. When the visitors had left Spinoza's lodgings, their conversations might linger in memory or continue in correspondence. A picture could not preserve them. Even a moving picture, had there been such things, could not bring them back to life.

Acting was another matter. Spinoza had taken part in theatricals from his student days with Van den Enden.² He loved the plays of Terence and Plautus;³ and two of his closest friends, Meyer and

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¹ Colerus reports having Spinoza's ink or charcoal sketchbook, including an apparent self-portrait of the philosopher as a fisherman in a shirt, with a net thrown over his shoulder, a pose made familiar by portraits of the Neapolitan rebel Massaniello. Where Plotinus' refused to sit for a portrait or to speak of his ancestry or birthplace, Spinoza accepts his embodiment—and declines to sunder God from extension. See Johannes Colerus (Kohler), *The Life of Spinoza* (Dutch original, 1706), trans. and repr. as Appendix A in Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy* (1880; reprint, Dubuque: Brown, 1960), 417–18. For Plotinus' seeming shame about his embodiment, see Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Work," in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (4th ed., New York: Pantheon, 1969), § 1, p. 1.

² "Van den Enden was particularly fond of the dramatic arts and encouraged in his students a taste for theater. He frequently had them rehearse dramatic speeches as a way of developing their eloquence in Greek and Latin." Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 109. In 1657 Van den Enden had his students perform Terence's *The Eunuch*.

³ Spinoza's library included a 1652 Plautus, comedies of Juan-Perez de Montalvan (1602–38), the tragedies as well as the epistles of Seneca, a 1669 Petronius, and volumes of Homer, Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Martial, Petronius, Lucian, Cervantes, and Quevedo. As Nadler remarks, "Spinoza's writings abound with references to classical Latin authors." The many works of Latin literature and history among Spinoza's books are "testimony to a passion that was probably aroused during his time with Van de Enden." *Spinoza: A Life*, 109. For Spinoza's library, see A. J. Servaas Van Rooijen, *Inventaire des The Review of Metaphysics* 62 (March 2009): 591–631. Copyright © 2009 by *The Review of Metaphysics*.

Bouwmeester, codirected the Amsterdam theater. Spinoza probably joined the discussions of dramatic arts that first brought together the arts society *Nil Volentibus Arduum*, whose Tuesday night meetings, by the early 1670s, often turned to Spinozistic themes⁴. He prized the writings of Cervantes and Quevedo,⁵ where thought and actions, real and imagined, were preserved on the written page. Living thoughts were something else again: subjective, reflexive, dynamic. Spinoza was convinced that the chief problems of epistemology and the ontology of the mind could be dissolved by an adequate understanding of the nature of ideas. The key to that understanding, since the mind is thought, was recognizing that the mind is the idea of the body—or, put the other way around, that the body is the first object of all our ideas.

Spinoza's bold proposal that the mind is the idea of the body is especially germane to us. For it does not reduce mind to body or make thinking a mere bodily function, its every state passively determined by some prior body-state. Yet it does not sunder mind from body in the manner of the occasionalists or idealists, leaving the body in free fall or the mind to float untended. Without positing a causal dependency, Spinoza provides for an intimate mapping of mental and physical functions and activities upon one another. Sense perception and motor control can now be described without assuming either the ideality of the body or the physicality of consciousness. The mind will not acquire location and dimensions, a temperature or mass.⁶ The

Livres formant la Bibliotheque de Benedict Spinoza (The Hague: Tengler, 1889).

⁴ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 294–5. The group also discussed the nature of language, a special interest of Ludwig Meyer's (1629–1681), and whether an isolated human being on uninhabited island could come to understand God by way of his rational faculties alone. This was the question raised by Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, which Spinoza's friend Johann Bouwmeester (1630–1680) translated from Latin into Dutch in 1672. My own translation, from the Arabic original, first appeared in 1972 (New York: Twayne). An updated edition is forthcoming this year from the University of Chicago Press.

⁵ Spinoza owned a 1627 Cervantes and two volumes of Quevedo, prose works (1660) and poetry (1661), all octavo. Both authors are noted for their mild, sometimes oblique irony. Their humanism and hatred of bombast, hypocrisy, and pretense gives their fiction a tone of modernity that sits well with other works in Spinoza's personal collection: Martial, Lucian, and Petronius, to be sure, but also Petrarch, More, Hobbes, and Machiavelli.

⁶ "Thought must be of what is thinkable, as sense is of what is sensible." Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.4.429a18; see a19–29. Aristotle's writings are cited here by their book, chapter, and Bekker pages; translations, except as noted, are

body does not become a mere figment of fantasy. Nor is any mediating principle like Descartes's medievalizing "animal spirits," expected to labor, somehow, while still physical, as the hydramatic transmission linking the corporeal to the incorporeal—an approach that Spinoza, archly tactful or tactfully arch, called too subtle to prove anything but its author's ingenuity.⁷

Beyond the mind-body problem lies the problem of knowledge. Spinoza affirms that no one would doubt our ability to know the truth of true ideas who did not mistakenly imagine ideas to be something mute and static, "like a picture on a pad and not, in fact, a mode of thinking⁸ the very act of understanding."⁹ Why did Spinoza think that having a better idea of ideas would show us why we need not doubt our powers of knowing, and need not take seriously the ancient Skeptical demands for a criterion of truth (and the equally insistent Skeptical dismissal of every promising applicant for the job)?

after those found in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). I translate here after J.A. Smith in Barnes.

⁷ Spinoza's *Ethics*, *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*, is cited below by the initial E, followed by part number, and P, S, or C, designating Proposition, Corollary, or Scholium, and the volume, page, and line number as appropriate according to the critical edition of Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925); translations are my own. Here: E5 Preface, ed. Gebhardt, 2.279.17–19: "This is the judgment of this supremely celebrated man, so far as I can judge from his own words. I would scarcely have believed it was advanced by such a man, were it not for its keenness."

⁸ *Nempe*, meaning "in fact," is found in Cicero and Lucretius, but also in Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus*, lines 906, 922; *Trinummus*, lines 328, 427; see Terence, *Phormio* 2.1.77. The expression is a contraction and lends a mildly colloquial tone to Spinoza's scholium.

⁹ E2P43S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.124. As Alan Donagan notes, despite Descartes' description (Meditation 3) of some of his thoughts as "images as it were" (*tanquam imagines rerum*), neither Spinoza nor Descartes made ideas static objects. Rather, as he explained to Hobbes (Replies to Objections 4), Descartes built his notion of ideas on the familiar scholastic conception of divine ideas—the Platonic forms now housed in God's mind. Here, the divine mind *is* its ideas. For both Spinoza and Descartes our ideas are lively, conscious representations of something as something. Alan Donagan, "Language, Ideas and Reasoning in *Ethics* II," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 50–1.

I.

The Mind as the Idea of the Body. The Torah vividly pictures our embodiment: We were formed from the earth.¹⁰ Hence Adam's name stems from the Hebrew *adamah*, the soil. The words *homo* and *human* similarly connect with the Latin *humus*. Words like humble, chthonic, chameleon, and even chamomile, are all traced to the zero grade form *dhghm*, marking the ancient admission of human earthiness or earthboundness. These latter forms seem indeed to be related to the Semitic roots *a-d-m* and *a-n-m* that testify to the linking of humankind with the red earth from which we were drawn. The thought that we humans are of the earth is not alien but axiomatic biblically. Man was taken from the dust, and the dust is our destiny: "Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return."¹¹

What is remarkable, miraculous from a biblical standpoint, is that dust is not what we remain. We get our bread by the sweat of our brow¹² but do not live by bread alone.¹³ Rather our lifeless matter, the flat clay of our bodies, is given life by the breath of God.¹⁴ How exactly does this work? Or perhaps it would be better to ask how we can resolve the imagery implicit in the idea of a God with no determinate earthly form breathing life into inert matter, giving bodies made of earth a life of their own.¹⁵ No one would simply blow on a lump of clay to give it life. Nor could a breath of air huff and puff to blow up a clay bubble or balloon into a being that moves and feels and thinks. Breath here is a metaphor, a metonymy to be precise, since breath is not the cause but the mark of life. Soul, however, as philosophers in the Greek tradition liked to put it, is the raw material for thought: Soul, the life principle, is to body, (the medieval Neoplatonists taught), as mind is to soul.

Spinoza cannot use that model—not directly. When Descartes took possession of matter for the physical sciences, by naming

¹⁰ Genesis 2:7.

¹¹ Genesis 3:19, my translation. For the etymologies, see *American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 1513, s.v. *dhghm*; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7, s.v. *adam*.

¹² Genesis 3:19.

¹³ Deuteronomy 8:3.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:7.

¹⁵ Genesis 6:17, 7:15.

extension its only inalienable property and thus marshaling it under the geometry of a jealous mechanism, he exiled all occult properties and resident spirits.¹⁶ No angel guarded Eden more closely than Spinoza picketed the approaches of naturalism against the reentry of such notional entities, effects misnamed as causes and hypostatized in medieval folk psychology and science. Descartes might gladly welcome forces (if only he could find a way to make them at home in his schematic cosmos), since forces would make his physics dynamic.¹⁷ For Spinoza, however, even the qualitative descriptors of Boyle's nascent chemistry smack too much of occult properties.¹⁸

¹⁶ Descartes gave each substance one chief attribute. To body he assigned extension. Descartes's works are cited below from *The Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), hereafter, CSM. Occasionally I will also provide the standard Adam and Tannery numbers, abbreviated as AT. *The Principles of Philosophy* is cited by part and article, followed by the volume and page number in CSM; thus, here: *Principles of Philosophy* 1.53, CSM, 1.210.

What then of the temporal dimension? Descartes urges (in 1.55, CSM, 1.211) that we not hypostatize duration but regard it as a mode of thought under which we conceive of a thing's persistence. Descartes makes room for time in Part 2. It does not affect my argument, however, to treat Cartesian time as just another dimension of extension.

¹⁷ For Descartes's account of forces, see Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 371–77.

¹⁸ Spinoza, in Letter 6, objects to Boyle's nascent distinction between what we call chemical and physical properties; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 71–2. Nitre, Spinoza insists, is "but a mixture." The change in its nature that Boyle observed experimentally "does nothing to confirm his conclusion." It is just a matter of some particles being at rest and others, "in a state of considerable commotion." Spinoza further rationalized Boyle's results in terms of "pores" and passages. He was pressing for a physical chemistry before the basics of a descriptive chemistry had been worked out. Boyle's work led to the discovery of atmospheric Nitrogen, although hampered by the fact that Oxygen was as yet unknown. Once qualitative characterizations of the reagents were in hand it would make sense to seek a physical basis for them. The explanations, however, would involve (electromagnetic and even quantum) variables far beyond the ken of Spinoza and his contemporaries—and not manageable within the Cartesian physics of extension. Spinoza owned a Latin version (1663) of Boyle's work on the elasticity and weight of air (*New Experiments Physico-Mechanical, Touching the Spring of the Air and its Effects*, London, 1660) and Boyle's 1669 *Paradoxa Hydrostatica*. Boyle's experiments with the vacuum pump, first devised by von Guericke, and Boyle's law of gases were paradigms of mechanism in physics. Boyle's chemistry provided the first clear understanding of elements and compounds

Leibniz, similarly, spurns Newton's account of forces and scouts gravitation as action at a distance.¹⁹ With characteristic rigor, Spinoza drops the notion of extension as a property: If extension is what is essential to an object, then extension is what it is. If thought is inalienable from a subject, thought is that subject. Spinoza calls the notion, that the mind is what it thinks, an idea seen "by some of the Hebrews, as if through a mist."²⁰ The outcome, for him, is not hypostatization. For neither thought nor extension has the self-sufficiency of substance. That belongs to God alone.²¹ Conceived in relation to substance, thought and extension do become necessary—

and the first adequate ideas of chemical reactions and analysis. I use Spinoza's term "adequate" advisedly, since Spinoza undervalued Boyle's efforts to understand key properties like acidity and basicity, demanding an eliminative reduction of such fundamental, but qualitative, chemical notions to physical terms.

¹⁹ See Leibniz's 1692–4 correspondence with Huyghens, in *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy Loemker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1976), 414–18; see also Leibniz' papers 3, 4, and 5, §§17, 45, 118–23, in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 30, 43, 94–5. Leibniz directs his "Spinozan rigor" against Cartesian mechanism, in effect, denying forces to any strict Cartesian. Leibniz himself is fully committed to forces—provided they are understood in his own special way.

²⁰ E2P7S, ed. Gebhardt 2.90. Harry Wolfson identifies Maimonides's *Guide* part 1, chap. 68 as the passage Spinoza may have in mind; *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 2, pp. 26–7. The equation of thought, thinker, and the act of thinking is Aristotelian; see *De Anima* 3.4.430a2–5: "Thought is itself thinkable in just the same way as its objects. For with objects that involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical"; see 429a 18. Neoplatonists were especially drawn to the idea. See Augustine, *De Trinitate* bk. 9, chap. 3, § 18 and bk. 10, chap. 2, §§ 5–6; *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), 281, 290–1. See also *De Libero Arbitrio* bk. 2, chap. 9, § 49; translated as *On Free Will*, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 140: "Does reason comprehend reason by any other means than by reason itself?" Aquinas, following a suggestion of Averroes, qualifies the view in *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., 1947), I, q. 87, a. 1; but in responding to the third objection there, he agrees that "the intellect in act is the object understood in act."

²¹ E1P14&C, ed. Gebhardt 2.61: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived . . . It follows that an extended thing and a thinking thing are either attributes of God, or (by A1) affections of God's attributes." There are, of course, weaker notions of substance. But for Spinoza these only aggravate the issue: Why should one call a hand substance as well as the living body it belongs to?

but not in themselves. Neither is self-explanatory. Abstracting from the Infinite All, there would be nothing. Each has its own distinctive terms of explanation, but neither can be explained in terms of the other. Both are primary givens, or adapting Maimonides' language, each must be an attribute of God. For matter and form, as Maimonides taught, are the ways in which we apprehend God's infinite reality in nature.²²

The notion of a soul, then, as disciplined by Spinoza's treatment of thought and extension, is a portmanteau concept, packaging a variety of effects but only pretending to explain them. What we need to know, and have needed to know all along, is why certain bodies move by themselves—and how thoughts can represent anything besides themselves. Since Descartes so forcefully dismissed the neoplatonic thesis that all things in nature borrow their reality from pure ideas, and ultimately from a supreme Reality that funds their goodness, beauty, unity, intelligibility, and awareness (if any),²³ what we most pointedly have needed to know is how it is that certain bodies can think. Without a Platonizing metaphysics to underwrite a free-standing Intellect, let alone catapult us out of our embodiment, we stand acutely in need of a more adequate way of conceiving the mind-body relation.

That problem has not disappeared, and neither Darwin nor the discoveries of our neurophysiologists seem likely to make it do so. Thomas Huxley, Darwin's champion, himself an epiphenomenalist, wrote: "How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of Djinn when Aladdin rubbed his lamp."²⁴ Colin McGinn, convinced that subjective appearances are rooted in physical nature, similarly declares the mind-

²² See Lenn E. Goodman, "Matter and Form as Attributes of God in Maimonides' Philosophy," in *A Straight Path: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett, Michael Samuel Hyman, R. James Long, and Charles H. Manekin (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1987), 86–97.

²³ Spinoza, Letter 13, ed. Gebhardt, 4.64.29–30 dismisses substantial forms as "that puerile and empty doctrine" (*doctrinam illam puerilem et nugatoriam*). Puerile, presumably, because it seems ad hoc; empty, because it disguises effects as causes. The context, strikingly, is the dismissal of Boyle's chemistry.

²⁴ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Lessons in Elementary Physiology* 8 (London: Macmillan, 1866), 210.

body link inevitably inaccessible to us: We cannot introspect the brain, and our finest probes would not find ideas there.²⁵ Hence the enduring problem that Descartes bequeathed Spinoza: Thought and extension cannot be described (let alone explained) in one another's language.

Yet both Spinoza and Descartes spoke of the unity of mind and body. Descartes, writing to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, holds that union to be "recognized only obscurely by the understanding alone . . . yet known very clearly by the senses." For,

those who never philosophize and who make use only of their senses do not doubt that the soul moves the body and the body acts upon the soul; but they consider the one and the other as a single thing, that is to say, they conceive their union.²⁶

Spinoza affirms our knowledge of that union;²⁷ he makes it a paradigm case of knowledge won by inference that I know this body as my own by my clear perception of it and no other.²⁸ How, then, did Spinoza conceive the unity of mind and body?

The cliché is that he dissolved the mind-body problem by treating thought and extension as different aspects of the same reality. Like most clichés, that does not tell us much. It does not actually name that reality, or tell us why mind and body are distinct, let alone how they are related. We do not begin to appreciate Spinoza's strength as a philosopher until we recognize that he did not simply dismiss the Cartesian problem. He began from Descartes's recognition that we cannot speak of thoughts in the same terms as bodies. We cannot think of thoughts in physical terms at all, while thinking of them as thoughts—any more than we can use telekinesis to bend spoons as Uri Geller used to do for the television audience. Given the epistemic turn of Descartes's philosophy, the realms of thought and extension must be incommensurate. For the skeptical method allows us to posit no natures for things beyond those by which we understand them. The

²⁵ Colin McGinn, *The Problem of Consciousness* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

²⁶ Descartes, "Letter of 28 June, 1643," in *Descartes: His Moral Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. John Blom (New York: NYU Press, 1978), 113.

²⁷ E2P31C, ed. Gebhardt, 2.115–16.

²⁸ Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (cited below as *TdIE*) § 21; see also *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well Being*, part 2, chap. 20, § 3, ed. Gebhardt, 2.11; 1.97–8.

means by which two disparate substances would interact, then, must remain a mystery.

Spinoza declines the epistemic turn. He is a *de re* philosopher if there ever was one, as much a realist as Aristotle. Granted, he does speak, constantly, of what is conceived. But, like Plato, Spinoza uses thought as a key to discovery of the real. That works, for both philosophers, because they trust reason: Intellect, working aright, will show us things as they really are. Yet Descartes casts even the ontological argument in an epistemic vein, speaking of “the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being.”²⁹ He psychologizes the cosmological argument in the same way, seeking a source not for the world but for his own idea of perfection.³⁰ In both cases the shift reflects the method of doubt, which Spinoza rejects.³¹ Indeed, the chief fault he finds with Descartes’s philosophy is that the system, properly, should have begun not with doubt but with God, as the anchor of reality.³²

Spinoza is chary of reducing things to what we know—as if God could be confined to the two attributes we encounter. We are finite and fallible. Truth will never be a function of our thinking, or a construct of our words, which belong, after all, to the province of imagination and are thus a prime source of error and confusion.³³ As

²⁹ Fifth Meditation, CSM. 2.45; AT 65.

³⁰ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, CSM, 2.28–31; AT 41–5.

³¹ E2P10S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.93–4.

³² Spinoza, *Descartes’s Principles of Philosophy*, part 1, ed. Gebhardt, 1.147–8, concluding: “the heart of the whole matter, on which everything turns, is our ability to form an idea of God that prepares us less readily to think him a deceiver than to think he is not, but rather compels us to affirm that he is supremely truthful.” See also *Cogitata Metaphysica*, part 3, ed. Gebhardt, 1.241. As the Fifth Meditation clearly shows, Descartes agrees that reason, once freed of doubt, will see the necessity of God’s existence and set aside hyperbolic doubt. Still, he finds the discipline of doubt necessary. For Spinoza it is a distracting bit of theater. The difference depends, ultimately, on the point at issue between Thomas and Anselm: Can one rely presumptively on an adequate idea of God. Descartes, inured to controversy, agrees with Thomas that one cannot. Spinoza, like Anselm, finding intellectual peace in more private meditations, believes that in principle everyone can: “only so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God can we call true ideas into doubt by supposing that perhaps some deceiving God exists” *TdIE* § 79, ed. Gebhardt, 2.30. But “Our mind, insofar as it knows itself and the body under the aspect of eternity, necessarily possesses knowledge of God in that degree,” E5P30; see E1P15S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.57.4; E2P49S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.135.37–136.3; E4P28, 36.

³³ *TdIE* § 88, ed. Gebhardt, 2.33

Richard Mason writes, for Spinoza, how things are comes before how we know. It is in the interest of his realism about particulars that Spinoza presses nominalist arguments; and, as Davidson notes, Spinoza's interest was in causality itself, not the logical form of causal statements.³⁴

Spinoza seems to have gotten the urge to delve into epistemology out of his system in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*—at least so long as epistemology meant sincere or staged systematic doubt. Even the title of that early work is telling, placing it in the therapeutic mode initiated by Socrates and instantiated, say, in the titles Avicenna gave two major works, the *Shifa* and the *Najat*, the *Cure* and the *Salvation*, and again in Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*—although Spinoza's healthy-mindedness addresses improvement, not healing or repair alone.

Spinoza's realism allows him to argue, alongside Descartes, that we must understand things to be what intellect takes them to be—for realist, not skeptical reasons—precisely because intellect would take things rightly. Intellect knows matter as extension and mind as thought. Our successes in formulating a science of physics and another of psychology show that we can know the subjects of these sciences. A paradigm case of physical knowledge would be the law of inertia,³⁵ of psychology, the association of ideas.³⁶ It is plain to Spinoza, as it was to Descartes, that psychology differs from physics not just in language but because these sciences address different realms governed by laws of their own—or, dropping the dead metaphor of scientific laws, each of these sciences discovers principles determined by the natures of the things it investigates. In Spinoza's terms, each attribute is what the intellect grasps of substance as constituting its essence.³⁷

Spinoza is quite clear about the depth of the divide between the two attributes we know:

When I said that God is the cause of the idea, of a circle say, only insofar as he is a thinking thing, and of the circle itself only insofar

³⁴ Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 107; and, at 110, n. 70, citing Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 161.

³⁵ E2A2bisC, ed. Gebhardt, 2.98.24–6.

³⁶ E2P18, ed. Gebhardt, 1.106–7.

³⁷ E1D4, ed. Gebhardt, 2.45.

as he is an extended thing, this was simply because the formal being of the idea of the circle can be apprehended only through another mode of thinking, as its proximate cause, and that mode again through another, and so *ad infinitum*. So, insofar as things are regarded as modes of thought, we must explain the order of nature at large, that is the causal linkage, in terms of the attribute of thought alone. But looking at things as modes of extension, the whole order of nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone.³⁸

As Alan Donagan writes:

Having decided that no analysis can reduce the objective [mental] being of ideas to physical properties (cf. AT VII 78/8–20), Descartes concluded that materiality and mentality are really distinct. Spinoza... follows him not only in this but in a further conclusion. Since modes of thinking cannot be analysed in terms of physical properties, thinking cannot be illuminated by investigating either the meanings of spoken or written utterances, or the causes and effects of physical changes in the organs of sense.³⁹

It is not skeptical parsimony that drives the argument that thought and extension cannot be explained in one another's terms or related through some third party but the fact that the two have nothing in common. Both "as they are in themselves (*ut in se sunt*)" are expressions of God, independently understood because their natures are different—not different because they are differently conceived.⁴⁰ As Spinoza explained early on: "A circle is one thing, and an idea of the circle another: The idea of the circle is not something which has a circumference and a center, as the circle does. Nor is an idea of the body the body itself."⁴¹

How then are thought and extension related? For related they must be. Spinoza professes to see this a priori and expresses the insight in his slogan that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.⁴² Those words prompt thoughts of psycho-physical parallelism and foster the notion that since "things" here must refer to modes of extension, Spinoza must be committed to

³⁸ E2P7S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.90.

³⁹ Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 40.

⁴⁰ E2P7S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.90.29–30.

⁴¹ *TdIE* § 33, ed. Gebhardt, 2.14.

⁴² E2P7, ed. Gebhardt, 2.89.

materialism.⁴³ That, however, would belie the parity of the attributes, each infinite, and each, in its own way, an expression of God's eternal and infinite essence.⁴⁴

Curley rightly observes: "The idea cannot exist without its object, nor the object without its idea."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, to infer their identity from that imports into Spinoza's thinking the modern fashion of reading the biconditional as the sign of an equivalence relation, ignoring the fact that *nothing* in Spinoza's universe can exist without all the rest. That fact, for Spinoza, does warrant an ultimate identity, *of substance*, but not a confounding of God's distinct attributes, let alone the collapse of one into another. True, the body's complexity is a precondition of the powers of the mind.⁴⁶ The activities of the body, similarly, reflect those of the mind. Yet such mappings, Spinoza insists, are not explanatory. They do not pick out a *vera causa*, let alone license reduction of the mental to the physical.

More fruitful and instructive than reductionistic forays at Spinoza's expense, or in his behalf, is his own thought that the body is the *ideatum* of which the mind is the idea. For Spinoza, unlike Descartes, does not truss thought to extension by some quasi-physical/quasi-spiritual bond. The relation he describes is one of intentionality: Body is to mind as a circle is to its idea. That suggests how ideas and brain states—or body states in general—can match up, how sensory images can become conscious, and even how thoughts, including motives or emotions, can initiate bodily acts and activities.⁴⁷ If a body is complex enough (as the human body is, not overlooking all the hormonal and muscular appanages of the nervous system) and if the actions of that body are reflexive or recursive enough (as many of ours are, being self-regulated and self-reinforcing), then a body can

⁴³ See Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 67–78.

⁴⁴ E1D4&6, ed. Gebhardt, 2.45.

⁴⁵ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 69.

⁴⁶ E2P13S, Gebhardt, 2.96.

⁴⁷ Our ignorance of physiology, Spinoza insists, debars us from precluding that the actions we ascribe to free will might be explained in physiological terms just as perspicuously as by the familiar mental notions of voluntaristic folk psychology (E3P2S). Even the most advanced physiology does not exclude a corresponding mental account. Indeed, it demands it, since the order and connection of ideas matches the order and connection of things. What reason precludes, on Spinoza's account, is any utterly arbitrary volition.

become focused enough to be conscious, even self-conscious, and its consciousness can be active, meaning that it can initiate changes understandable in some measure through an understanding of that consciousness. Bodies are not inert, as the Cartesian reduction of matter to extension seems to suggest they should be.

The birth of consciousness does not make us aware of every affect of our body. The body's states are all reflected in its idea. Only some of those reflections are self-conscious, however.⁴⁸ I am not aware of the peristaltic action in my alimentary canal. I am aware of my hunger or thirst, but have no direct awareness of the underlying biochemical processes.⁴⁹ Nor do I apprehend the electro-chemical brain activity behind my thought processes—and a good thing it is. Consciousness of that would utterly distract me and preclude focused thinking, the backgrounding and foregrounding, the temporalization, presenting and forgetting critical to my survival, let alone to any speculative activity. As Bergson argues, were I to scrutinize every atomic (and sub-atomic) event among the processes that constitute my life—or even a moment of my perception—thought would move glacially, trying to anatomize trillions of minute events, whose scrutiny would expand from an instant to many millennia.

There is a complementary, Kantian reason why not all of the events in my body can rise to the level of awareness: The need of any subject to objectify. For a subject is, in Hegelian terms, the dialectical counterpart of its object. Our sense organs must objectify what they apprehend. Consciousness arises through a further objectification. Self-consciousness arises when that process itself becomes reflexive. All the same, consciousness cannot arise without looking beyond its

⁴⁸ Thus E2P24-9: A clear idea, whether of our own body or of another, would be conceptual and contextual, not sensory/affective.

⁴⁹ Some parts of our bodies are specially adapted to fostering the reflexivity that self-awareness requires. After all, "The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of the human mind," E2P29; 3P2S and E4 Preface. As Jean-Luc Marion notes, "if God has an (evidently adequate) idea of my body, it is because, far from having the idea which I have of it, he has the idea that I do not have; he possesses knowledge of the parts that comprise my body (and the modes that affect it), only 'insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things, and not insofar as he has only the idea of the human Body (E2P24D);" Jean-Luc Marion, "Aporias and the Origins of Spinoza's Theory of Adequate Ideas," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 130.

tools—looking *through* the speculum rather than at it. That, I think, is the reason for what G. E. Moore called the diaphanousness of perceptual experience.

The moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see *what* distinctively it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous⁵⁰

Moore was following up on a thought of Hume's:

As every idea is derived from a precedent impression, had we any idea of the substance of our minds, we must also have an impression of it; which is very difficult, if not impossible to be conceived. . . . I desire of those philosophers, who pretend that we have an idea of the substance of our minds, to point out the impression that produces it, and tell distinctly after what manner that impression operates, and from what object it is deriv'd. Is it an impression of sensation or reflection? Is it pleasant, or painful, or indifferent? Does it attend us at all times, or does it only return at intervals? If at intervals, at what times principally does it return?⁵¹

In response, it needs to be said that the diaphanousness of consciousness has two sides to it. Granted, consciousness itself fades into the background when we focus on some object. Nonetheless, there is also what I have sometimes called the self-transparency of consciousness, our privileged access to our own awareness. This does not mean (*per impossibile*) that we are aware of all our thought processes. But consciousness is aware of itself. It is reflexive, whether backgrounding its own presence or making itself an object of introspection. Hume's demand for some peculiar or distinctive "impression" that would mark our self-awareness (and Moore's mincing after in Hume's larger, more aggressive footsteps) is not the linchpin of some devastating argument but the mere telltale symptom of his having begged the question.

Part of what Spinoza contributes here is a new twist to a very old idea. Maimonides had identified human reason as God's image. When Spinoza, for his part, reflects on the liveliness and reflexivity of our

⁵⁰ G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Mind* 12 (1903): 433–53, here, 450.

⁵¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (1888, reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), Book 1, Part 4, Section 5, pp. 232–3.

thoughts, he places a rich Aristotelian overlay on that gloss: For the self-aware human mind, like God's, is a thought thinking itself. It is perhaps with this fusion in mind that Spinoza credits not Aristotle or the Neoplatonists but the Hebrews with the equation of God's thought with its object.⁵² He invokes that identity in ending the long exile of matter from Divinity: God knows extension because it is an aspect of his Godhead. The strategy is Maimonidean, but also kabbalistic. The earliest readers of Spinoza outside his own circle in fact saw a kabbalistic sense in his making extension an attribute. Spinoza, in fact, may be acknowledging a spark of insight in Kabbalah when he speaks of what some Hebrews apprehended, "as through a mist."⁵³

Spinoza acknowledges the limits imposed by the fact that our consciousness is (in the first instance) consciousness of the body by calling sensory cognition fragmentary and truncated (*mutilata*).⁵⁴ The senses do not give us the world as it is. As we now know, they present only certain wavelengths of light, only certain pitches and volumes of sound, only certain finenesses of grain. Subtle as is the sense of smell, it is self-anesthetizing—for good evolutionary reasons rooted in the vital relevance of fresh olfactory information. Delicate as our palate may be, it offers no chemical analysis of what we taste. Our sense organs arose, as Descartes saw, to meet specific sorts of exigencies with specific degrees and kinds of accuracy. We do not perform autologous MRIs. If we want to know the makeup of our world we have to look beyond the senses to the sciences. That's possible, because our thought processes, although always reflective of our bodily states, are not fixated on those states. Our thoughts may be about themselves or other thoughts. Some of our bodily states reflect the impact of external objects. A subset of these allows us to form representations of the world or frame responses to it. Each of our thoughts mirrors and is mirrored in the material world, and each is linked with the innumerable thoughts that have affected it or might be affected by it. Insofar as we are free, however, our thoughts are not explicable by natures external to our own.

⁵² E2P7S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.90.9–12.

⁵³ See Richard Popkin, "Spinoza: Neoplatonic Kabbalist?," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 387–409; and Lenn E. Goodman, "Matter and Form."

⁵⁴ E2P29C.

It is because it can initiate action that consciousness was traditionally hypostatized: By Aristotelian standards, what acts must count as real. Spinoza, however, has no investment in the substantiality of the soul and little interest in the semantics of substance beyond the demand for clarity that finds its goal in his monistic project. What marks Spinoza's theory of mind for our abiding interest is not the deference he shows to the division that motivates Cartesian dualism—since Spinoza has foresworn interaction. Nor is it any precocious anticipation of the physicalism that excites some of our contemporaries. The Epicureans and the Stoics were materialists, after all. But philosophy does not advance by toting up precedents to favored views but by reconciling the suasions that foster contention and fester in confusion.

What is distinctive in Spinoza is his combining a firm adherence to the irreducibility of thought and extension to one another's terms with an equally firm commitment to the mapping of all mental events on the physical and all bodily events on the mental plane. What matters to us here is not the chance to felicitate Spinoza for being somehow ahead of his time—in the self-serving sense of approximating the prejudices we favor—but rather his keen analytic sense and the conceptual synthesis that allows him to conceive of the mind's ability to know and understand the physical world, and even act in it and suffer at its impacts, without becoming its mere butt, a dependent variable, a leaf driven before the storm of physical events. Human identity, for Spinoza, will depend not on the substantiality of the soul but on our degrees of freedom for self-affirmation. Freedom will mean not indetermination but self-determination.⁵⁶

All bodies, as Spinoza likes to say, have perceptions. This means only that they are affected by other bodies and in that way reflect the nature of those bodies. Looking at the world from the standpoint of an

⁵⁶ See Lenn E. Goodman, "Determinism and Freedom in Spinoza, Maimonides and Aristotle," in *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press and Rutgers University Press, 1999), 146–200. Jeffrey Tlumak writes: "It's not clear that Descartes disagrees here. He certainly understands freedom to be self-determination (*Med. IV* and lots of places elsewhere). But in the end I'd argue he also takes as (probably) definitive of mind not introspectability or privileged access or incorrigibility or (spatial) indivisibility, etc., but freedom, as manifested in the infinite adaptability of language use" (Personal communication, October, 1999).

individual body, there is a what-it-is-to-be that body; and, in that sense, there is an idea of that body. If such an idea is integrated enough and recursive enough, however, it can become not self-constituted, of course, but, we might say, self-possessed. It can integrate its perceptions (to use the term in the broad sense that Leibniz and Spinoza share), to the point that they do not just bear the scars that mark the history of external impacts but actually represent external things. It is such ideas that render a body conscious. By registering, and not merely registering but integrating, not merely integrating but assaying, not merely assaying but responding to the affects of the body that is their object, the object that their consciousness reflects, ideas can make choices and (exercising their intimate relation with that body, and with it alone) they can act through it and so express themselves in the world.⁵⁶ Kant's account of the unity of apperception would here appear to bring to fruition the rationalists' integrative understanding of experience—not at all a linear stream or a “blooming, buzzing confusion.”⁵⁷

For Spinoza, ideas themselves are conscious; they are our consciousness. What they are conscious of, in the first instance, is our own bodies—not in all their workings but in their affectedness by various internal states (like hunger and thirst) and by external things that affect them, especially in those parts that are specialized to register specific kinds of external impact. Such impacts, to be sure, do not give us understanding of the natures of things. They can never reveal the whole of a thing, let alone teach us the principles that govern its behavior, that relate it to all other things and cast the mantle of necessity over all its interactions. Such understanding (as in Descartes) is the work of the mind.⁵⁸ It is the mind that informs us of the world beyond the body, containing both bodies and other minds. It is the mind again that tells us that bodies are of the nature of

⁵⁶ See Robert McRae, *Leibniz: Perception, Apperception, and Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976). Leibniz, however, aims to dissolve Cartesian extension rather than explain its relationship with the mind.

⁵⁷ The famous phrase comes from William James' lively and projective description of a baby's awareness—the state we must outgrow if we are to render experience comprehensible. See James, *Principles of Psychology*, (1918; reprinted New York: Dover, 1950), vol. 1, p. 462.

⁵⁸ E2P44, ed. Gebhardt, 2.125.

extension; and minds, of thought. Ultimately we know these things by understanding that an infinite being will express its reality in infinite ways, including those that we first encounter through sensation but understand in terms of motion and rest, and those that we encounter at first hand in self-awareness but understand psychologically. As Margaret Wilson writes, it is Spinoza's idea of God that holds the key to his idea of knowledge. It is because infinite things follow in infinite ways from the necessity of God's nature⁵⁹ that we find the realms of thought and extension intelligible.⁶⁰

Just *how* the mind becomes the idea of the body is a question for neurophysiology, cognitive and affective psychology, and the evolutionary biology that links them. Spinoza, wisely, does not essay all the questions proper to such sciences. He does, however, do something that these sciences cannot do. He sketches a model of the relationship of consciousness to embodiment—a model that respects both the earth from which we are drawn and the distance from it that we've risen.

II.

The Dynamics of Knowing. Students of the philosophy of mind often speak of an infinite regress engendered by the spectator model of the mind, where consciousness is envisioned as something like watching a movie. If ideas are the image projected on the screen, the mind would be the spectator back in the loges. What, then, is this viewer's mind? Is it another movie theater, with another popcorn eating spectator, with yet another movie house in his head, and so ad infinitum? The model presupposes what it pretends to explain.⁶¹ The solution, clearly, is to say that thought is not simply an object of

⁵⁹ E1P16, ed. Gebhardt, 2.60.

⁶⁰ Margaret Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93.

⁶¹ Daniel Dennett criticizes the "Cartesian theater" in *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991); see Daniel Dennett, "Quining Qualia," in *Consciousness in Contemporary Science*, ed. A. Marcel and E. Bisiatch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Eric Lormand responds in "Qualia! (Now Showing at a Theater near You)," *Philosophical Topics* 22 (1994): 127–56.

consciousness but is consciousness itself, since thought is reflexive, self-conscious. The mind would be self-consciousness. Thus Descartes tells Bourdin:

The initial thought by which we become aware of something does not differ from the second thought by which we become aware that we were aware of it, any more than this second thought differs from the third, by which we become aware that we are aware.⁶²

Of course not every thought is self-conscious. Some perceptions hover on the verge, not integrated or articulate enough to enter our awareness. Spinoza, in fact, like Bahya Ibn Paquda, gives a prominent role to unconscious thought processes. The associative work on which Spinoza's first kind of knowing depends—linking one image or sensory presentation to another—is often subconscious. So is much of our language use, or we would scarcely be able to speak at all. Subconsciousness, Willi Goetschel writes, in a way links mind and body and helps Spinoza overcome Cartesian, dualistic “gridlock.”⁶³ That is a sapient insight, although we need to take care not to hypostatize subconsciousness or make it into the new pineal gland.

All the same, the reflexivity of consciousness, however “sloppily” expressed by Descartes, as Alan Donagan puts it, remains critically important. Spinoza handles the matter a bit differently from Descartes, insisting on the distinction between a thought and the thought of that thought.⁶⁴ He uses that distinction to disarm a skeptical sophism, by showing that we do not need to know that we know or how we know before we can know. That point allows Spinoza to elucidate the core idea Descartes was mooting, perhaps a bit too intuitively: that knowledge already is reflexive. Knowing a thing, although not identical with knowing that we know it, entails knowing that we know it. The self-transparency and reflexivity of knowledge—as an act and as a mode of consciousness, rather than an opaque and

⁶² Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, (Paris, Vrin, 1964), vol. 7, p. 160. See Descartes's response to Hobbes in the Third set of Replies, CSM, 2.123–4. And see D. Boyle, “Descartes on Innate Ideas,” *Modern Schoolman* 78 (2000): 35–50; Murray Miles, *Insight and Inference: Descartes's Founding Principle and Modern Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 66–7, 97–104.

⁶³ Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 8–9, 49–50.

⁶⁴ See *TdIE* 33, ed. Gebhardt, 2.14.

static *thing*—are what allow Spinoza to argue that one does not need to know that one knows before one can know. So the regress argument made graphic in the spectator imagery, but long familiar from the complaints of Sceptics, and of Sophists before them, is dissolved: Knowing already provides us with an object of further knowledge, and one can carry that regress just as far as one pleases.⁶⁵ Indeed, one whose ideas are adequate already knows *how* he knows.

The reflexivity of consciousness is not a new discovery, but the concept is subtle in relative terms, and freighted. It seems to demand constant reexplanation and rediscovery. The imaginative and inventive John Philoponus (6th century), for example, building on the work of earlier philosophers and the teachings of everyday experience, writes:

Aristotle wants to attribute to the several senses knowledge both of their objects and of their own acts. But Alexander, in his commentary, ascribes to the five senses knowledge of their objects alone and to the *sensus communis* knowledge of objects and also of their own acts. This happens, he says, through the least noble part of the rational soul, namely opinion. For it is opinion, being the commonest and least worthy part of the soul, that links the rational with the irrational.⁶⁶

But more modern thinkers, neither revering Alexander's brow nor following Plutarch, and even rejecting Aristotle himself, have found a new explanation. They say it is a task of the attentive part of the rational soul to know the acts of the senses. . . . The attentive faculty (*prosektikon*), they say, oversees the events occurring within a person: It says, "I thought," "I reasoned," "I judged," "I was angry," "I desired." This power of attentiveness, in short, pervades all the faculties, rational, irrational, and vegetative. If so, it must go to the senses too and say, "I saw," and "I heard."

For since a man is a single individual, there must be a single subject cognizant of the acts of all the faculties. Were there two, the one apprehending these acts and the other those others, the attentive faculty would still, just as in the other cases, say, "If you apprehend

⁶⁵ *TdIE* 34, ed. Gebhardt, 2.14–15; E2P43&S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.123–4.

⁶⁶ Philoponus is referring to Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Intellectu* p. 106, line 30 to p. 107, line 28, *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect*, trans. Frederic M. Schroeder and Robert B. Todd (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 46–7; see Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima*, part 3, § 19, with part 2, § 51–2, trans. Athanasios P. Fotinis (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), pp. 113, 76–7. This work also has *De Intellectu* in the same translation as an appendix, see 137–9, §§ A2–4.

that, I apprehend this.” . . . The attentive faculty must be one, for it ranges through all the faculties, cognitive and vital. When it applies itself to the cognitive faculties it is called attention. That is why, if we want to chide someone who is not concentrating when using his cognitive faculties, we say, “Pay attention!” When it directs itself to the vital faculties it is called awareness. Whence the tragedy says (Euripides, *Orest.* 396): “Conscience! Aware that I have committed a wrong.”

We agree there is no sixth sense that is self-conscious. Neither is it sight that both perceives and perceives that it perceives. Rather it is a task of the attentive part of the rational soul to do so. . . . Only color is the object of sight. . . . When the eye sees color, it does not see its own activity as colored. . . . If it did, its object would be black and white at once. For we see black and white together [e.g., when we discriminate the two]. . . . Once sensation has perceived color, one must reflect further . . . that is another sort of activity altogether.⁶⁷

Bracket the faculty psychology and Philoponus’ concerns with immortality (which he hopes to derive from the utter separateness of the conscious subject). What abides here psychologically is the idea of an integrated consciousness not reducible to sense impressions yet aware of them, and through them, of their objects. The story we heard in school about light entering the eye, focused by the lens as an image on the retina, and then (if we went to school in the not too distant past) setting up electrical potentials in the rods and cones by chemically altering the photosensitive pigment rhodopsin, sending electrical impulses down the nerves to the brain, *where we become conscious of an image*, is here supplemented by the recognition that nerves and even brains, like sensory organs, are not attentive, not

⁶⁷ John Philoponus, on *De Anima* 3.2.425b12, ed. Hayduck (Berlin, 1897). I translate after Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna’s Psychology* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1981; first ed., Cairo, 1952), 112–14. Aristotle does make each sense aware of its own activity, careful to avoid positing a sixth sense; but he lays the groundwork for the attentive power, by insisting on the specificity of each sense; *De Anima* 3.2. Alexander posits a *sensus communis*, but, as Philoponus sees, this must be a metaphor. Thomas, citing Avicenna (see Rahman, *Avicenna’s Psychology*, 30–1), has five “interior senses”: the *sensus communis*, phantasy, imagination, the estimative, and the memorative; *Summa Theologica* I, q. 78, a. 4. Eric Lormand finds a similar notion of inner attentiveness (*manas*) in Indian Philosophy; *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 2, p. 583. See *Vaiseseka Sutra* in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 411.

conscious subjects at all. Yet something in us is.⁶⁸ Intentionality is not a picture and is never mere mimicry. The I that attends and attends to my every act is not an object but a subject: It does not have a color. Laying out the Cartesian groundings of Spinoza's work, Donagan puts the point lucidly:

Through the mediation of light, a penny indeed causes the retina of your eye to receive its shape with its colour; but a mirror reflecting it does as much, and yet sees nothing. Just so, should the sight of a penny cause you to receive in some non-physical receptor its dematerialized and universalized shape, you would not thereby be anything more than an immaterial mirror. . . . A reproduction of a thing in the sense organs or intellect of a rational animal does not . . . explain the representativeness of sensation and thought, even if they play a role in it.⁶⁹

For a thought to be a thought it must represent, not just re-present but refer. A thought must be *about* something. Besides that, it must be someone's thought, that is, thought *by* some subject; and it must represent its object *as* something, that is, interpret it in a particular manner.

That last has crucial consequences for theology. It means that God's thoughts must be thick with particularity, not thin like the Neoplatonists' universal ideas. It also means that there is no single God's eye point of view. A divine perspective is a contradiction in terms—as much as divine myopia or astigmatism. The issue of interpretation has crucial consequences for epistemology too. For it is interpretation that makes our intuitions sentential.

How does an idea come to intend anything other than a body? The obvious answer is, by way of words. Some would say that only through words, aided, perhaps, by images, do we intend anything at all. Sounds and marks, subvocalized signals, or the kinesthetics of reading or writing can be attached, by convention, to specific or particular objects or events, and so made designators. The beauty of the arrangement is that words can also be plaited (to use Aristotle's image), spliced together into sentences, and thus made judgmental.

Yet words, qua sounds or marks, designate nothing. Some thoughts, moreover, proceed without benefit of words, or even images,

⁶⁸ For relevant reflections by a recent inquirer, see Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 235–55.

⁶⁹ Donagan, *Spinoza*, 37–8.

the thoughts one might express in various languages—or have difficulty expressing. A composer, on a bad day, might have a thought to express in music (a suitably embodied thought), yet find that the music of that morning failed to express the thought, or expressed it inadequately. Who has not had that trouble, on one level or another? The very frustration signals that there is more to thought than words—or images. That *je ne sais quoi* points to the space in which expressive creativity does its work.

Consider just the fact that sounds and marks, as such, are meaningless. Meanings are assigned by acts of intending, personal or conventional. Impressions by themselves do not signify. Labels and tags will do no better. There must be an intending subject, or the world is reduced to dumbshow. A word, uttered or written, without intentionality, is just another noise, or an image in Donagan's mirror. How does intentionality arise? Kant is the philosopher who answers that question most explicitly: It arises through the synthetic activity of the mind in unifying the manifold of perceptions, creating the specious present in the unity of apperception. Alexander of Aphrodisias compares the unifying work of consciousness to the relations of a circle to its radii, which are many at the circumference but one at the focal point, the circle's center.⁷⁰ That simile does not *explain* the unity of consciousness, but its clearly optical terms do clarify it in a way, suggesting how our minds draw together the disparate materials of experience into a dynamic unity. Kant includes the temporal dimension when he speaks of our ability to synthesize the manifold. Rightly so, since it is memory that allows us to pull together the strands and fragments of sensation and awareness into coherent images of objects—and gain a sense of ourselves as subjects. Having a point of view allows us to intend. The dialectic of intending plates out the notion of an object, even as it enables us to crystallize our awareness of ourselves as subjects. If we ask how understanding arises, it is Spinoza who answers, by turning to God—not as Descartes does, by making God the guarantor of our external knowledge and discursive reasoning, but (characteristically) in a far more immanent way, by reminding us that we understand things through their proximate causes.

⁷⁰ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima* 2.50–1, trans. Fotinis, 76–7.

Understanding things through their effects yields inadequate ideas, like those produced by reliance on the blurry notions that were long the mainstay of the sciences, that is, abstractions. We shall derive our highest knowledge of things by reflection on their relation to their ultimate cause.⁷¹ Reliance on ultimate causes alone, however, as Aristotle taught, is far too general to be of real use. Spinoza's turn toward proximate causes marks him as an empiricist. Genuine knowledge is apprehension of the inner essences of things *in their particularity*, conceptually rather than perceptually.⁷²

Consider the case of sensory awareness, where intentionality begins. Spinoza's point here is that the mind can intend things other than itself through its more intimate intending of (and thus inevitable attention to) the affections of the body: There are bodies in the world in which we have vital or casual interests. The organism has evolved to be in some degree responsive to such interests. The impinging of other bodies, insofar as our own body is so constituted as to register their effects, is the first object of our awareness. The ideas reflecting the play of those bodies on our own cannot be adequate, however, since such ideas do not penetrate the natures of those bodies,⁷³ which assail us randomly, at least with respect to the demands of understanding. We confront the effects without grasping the causes. The ideas that result are "like conclusions without premises."⁷⁴

Guttorm Fløistad spells out some of the consequences of our embodiment, by relating the physical basis of false and inadequate ideas to the imagination and the first kind of knowing. For all varieties of that lesser way of knowing bear the limitations that reflect its rootedness in our physicality: Classical and medieval authors had long recognized that imagination, if it is to map physical objects, must itself have a physical locus. Its content, they inferred, will not be conceptual. The materials that imagination works with are sense

⁷¹ *TdIE* §§ 38, 42, 99; ed. Gebhardt, 2.16, 17, 36.

⁷² *TdIE* § 18, 4th kind; ed. Gebhardt, 2.10. See Jean-Luc Marion, "Aporias," 138–9.

⁷³ See Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Second Kind of Knowledge and the Removal of Error," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 93–110, here 94; and Filippo Mignini, "The Potency of Reason and the Power of Fortune," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 223–32, here 226–7.

⁷⁴ E2P28Proof, ed. Gebhardt, 2.113; and see Margaret Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," 106.

impressions, and no matter how impressively it reshapes them they will always still be images and thus incapable of true abstraction and ineligible for use in the universal and necessary premises of a syllogism in “Barbara.” The linguistic constituents of the first kind of knowledge fare little better. Words are their elements, sensory objects themselves, anchored by their origin in the presentations of imagination and stabilized only by social convention.⁷⁶ Fløistad’s exposition reveals the intimate links of Spinoza’s view to earlier accounts of sense-based knowing—and even connects the sense of self to the Rabbinic idea of the *yetzer ha-ra*^c, the so-called evil inclination:

Ideas of imagination are clearly preference building. . . . On this background, Spinoza’s perhaps most succinct rendering of imagination becomes intelligible: imagination “determines the Mind to think of this rather than that.” (Gen. def. aff., exp; cf. E2P29S). The hoofprints of a horse in the sand are obviously interpreted differently by a soldier and a farmer (cf. E2P18S). Spinoza seems to hold that the mind is always likely to entertain ideas of imagination. It may even be added that the first kind of knowledge may be vital in the conduct of daily life. However, for achieving the greatest happiness, this kind of knowledge is clearly insufficient. It makes the individual self-centered.⁷⁶

Still, there would be no personal consciousness without such self-centeredness, which is, at the outset, body-centeredness. Hence the Midrashic irony: “Without the evil inclination, no man would build a house, take a wife, father a family.”⁷⁷

Subjects, that is, persons, arise when bodies become organized enough (think of Aristotle’s “natural body potentially alive”) to affirm their own identity, first in acts of simple appetition and avoidance,

⁷⁶ Galen, *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, bk. 7, chap. 3, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Karl Gottlob Kühn (1821, reprinted Hildesheim:olms, 1964); trans. Philip De Lacy, as *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (Berlin: Akademie, 1984); al-Farabi, *Ara Ahli ’l-Madinati ’l-Fadila*, ed. and trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 165, line 9, pp. 211–17; and Ibn Sina, *Najat*, chap. 3, in *Avicenna’s Psychology*, trans. Rahman, 98–9.

⁷⁶ Guttorm Fløistad, “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge and the Part-Whole Structure of Nature,” in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 37–47, here 46–7.

⁷⁷ *Genesis Rabbah*, chap. 9, § 7; see *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, chap. 3, part 11, § 3. Both works appear in the eight volume English translation of *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (New York: Soncino, 1983), vol 1, p. 68 and vol. 8, p. 91.

then in appropriations of the past and anticipations of the future, but always by asserting interests—making claims upon their surroundings. Hence Spinoza's equation of the essence of a thing with its conatus, the dynamic affirmation of its identity; such interests are always localized, being rooted in a body, whose awareness, in our own case, is the mind.

The integration of awareness allows the emergence of self-consciousness. A conscious being intends; a self-conscious subject can frame purposes and form judgments—synthesize and abstract, characterize this as that. The body is still the primal object of intention. For it is the unity and project of this body that focuses the interests of this conatus. From the platform of such an identity, a subject, constituted as a subject, can intend many things, even the idea of an infinite being. Life has been breathed into lifeless matter; and with that borrowed candle, light itself can be seen.

III.

Knowing and Truth. Spinoza, as we have seen, is not troubled by the challenge of hyperbolic doubt but confident that objective knowledge is possible. His thesis that knowledge is “not like a picture painted on a pad” allows him to head off skeptical efforts to herd knowledge claims into a circle or stampede them into an unbounded regress.⁷⁸ His epistemic optimism and his seemingly brash assertion that truth needs no external sign but is its own sign rests on our access to adequate ideas.⁷⁹ A monitory line from Aristotle helps us see why: “We think we understand a thing unqualifiedly and not in the sophist's accidental way, when we know its cause and why it must be so.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ See Lenn E. Goodman, *In Defense of Truth: A Pluralistic Approach* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Press, 2001), 27–47.

⁷⁹ *TdIE* §§ 35–6, Gebhardt, 2.15.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.71b10–19, translating after Barnes and the original Oxford version in *Basic Works*, trans. G. R. G. Mure, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 111. See *TdIE* § 92: understanding of anything dependent on an external cause depends on understanding its proximate cause; “in fact, to know an effect just is to gain a more perfect awareness of its cause.” To this Spinoza adds in a note: “—whence it will be evident that we cannot rightly or properly understand anything without at the same time enlarging our knowledge of its ultimate Cause, that is, God.” ed. Gebhardt, 2.34.12–15 and note.

Mediated through our bodies, our sensory awareness affords a positive but muddled, distorted, perspectively canted, and pragmatically limited image of the world. Sensory presentations tell us not about things as they are but about their impacts on our frame. The point was made not just by Descartes, but by Democritus long before.⁸¹ Emphasizing the positive impact of external objects, the Stoics had tried to weld human subjectivity to an external objectivity. Their thinking on this score coalesces in the notion of the kataleptic impression, a subjective datum deemed reliable because it bears the very imprint of objects on our bodies. Descartes heeded a similar call when he first conceived of clear and distinct ideas as subjective presentations that cannot be denied. His earliest explorations into fluid mechanics (still reflected in his treatment of nerve impulses in essentially hydraulic terms) suggest his fascination with the idea of a positive, mechanical foundation for sensory knowledge.⁸² The ancient Skeptics, Arcesilaus and Carneades in particular, however, showed clearly that no subjective impression purporting to reveal anything about the world beyond consciousness can bear its own warrant. Descartes himself, I think, understood this perfectly and shifted his search for undeniable thoughts to the contents of his own awareness. Hence, the epistemic turn and the progression from the cogito to God as the Guarantor of knowledge.

Spinoza, however, did not understand the role of God in terms of mediation or intervention. As Mason puts it, "The whole notion of God as a supernatural guarantor 'supremely good and veracious' is wholly out of keeping with Spinoza's metaphysics."⁸³ What our knowledge of the external world requires is a rational apprehension of the natures of things, secured by a causal account of their operations, couched in terms appropriate to those natures. This Descartes himself had shown with his example of the piece of wax: All the sensory properties, the so-called secondary qualities that Galileo had bracketed or subjectivized, are inessential. It is extension that cannot be abstracted from the wax, just as consciousness cannot deny itself. So the wax is

⁸¹ Democritus, apud Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.5.1009b7; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Logicos*, bk. 1 §§ 135–9, trans. R. G. Bury (1935, reprinted Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 74–7.

⁸² See Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 118–24.

⁸³ Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 107.

extended and must be understood *as* extended (that is, geometrically), and the mind must be understood as thought (that is, psychologically).

Generalizing on this approach we reach the Aristotelian pluralist epistemology that allows the method of every inquiry to arise from the natures of its objects. As Jeffrey Bernstein puts it, “there can be no Cartesian *mathesis universalis*,” not simply because “one cannot just apply an already-given method to the matter at hand,” but for the Aristotelian reason that our methods must constantly reflect the nature of the subject.⁸⁴ Knowledge emerges from the mind’s encounter with objects only by reflecting (or conceptually projecting) their natures.

In breaking the chain of infinite regress that Skeptics routinely used to stymie epistemic claims, Spinoza argues that human beings must begin “with the tools they were born with.”⁸⁵ In a Cartesian context that might mean innate ideas,⁸⁶ but for Spinoza the reference is to a knowledge of the essences of things, drawn not from plotting their “extrinsic denominations and relations,” the circumstances which remain far removed from their inmost essences,⁸⁷ but from the stable natures of the things themselves, as modes of thought or extension. For these, as Margaret Wilson reminds us, are the attributes with which we are in constant and intimate contact.⁸⁸ As Spinoza puts it, “Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole can be conceived only adequately,”⁸⁹ and their ideas are

⁸⁴ Jeffrey Bernstein, personal communication, November, 1999.

⁸⁵ *TdIE* §§ 29–30, 43–4; ed. Gebhardt, 2.13, 17. See Lenn E. Goodman, *In Defense of Truth*, 200.

⁸⁶ Descartes, *Meditations* 5: “there are countless particular features regarding shape, number, motion, and so on, which I perceive when I give them my attention. And the truth of these matters is so open and so much in harmony with my nature, that on first discovering them it seems that I am not so much learning something new as remembering what I knew before; or it seems like noticing for the first time things which were long present within me although I had never turned my mental gaze on them before.” CSM, 2.44; AT 7.64. See *TdIE* § 39, ed. Gebhardt, 2.16.

⁸⁷ *TdIE*, ed. Gebhardt 2.36.30–5.

⁸⁸ Wilson, “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” 115–16. Having set out this key to Spinoza’s epistemology of nature, Wilson objects to the apriorism she finds implicit in it. Spinoza was not an apriorist, however. Neither thought nor extension would be known to us at all without experience. Nor would the laws and principles that govern them—laws and principles, in fact, that remain open to further discovery.

⁸⁹ E2P38, ed. Gebhardt, 2.118.

therefore common to all.⁹⁰ It is from this train of reasoning that Spinoza derives the adequacy and perfection of our knowledge of God⁹¹ and hence the thesis that no one can hate God.⁹² The base of such elevated knowledge, we must recognize, nonetheless, lies in our knowledge of God's attributes of thought and extension. To know things in this way, through an adequate understanding of their causes, is to know them as God does.⁹³ So rather than say that our knowledge is guaranteed by God's good faith Spinoza can argue that insofar as our ideas are adequate and true they are the ideas of God.

Understanding the natures of things lets us situate their behavior and dispositions in a wide-ranging (in principle, ultimately comprehensive) scheme, whose coherence warrants its veracity: The more internally connected is our causal account of the world, the less room it leaves for doubt or error and the more does it lay claim to acceptance as knowledge. Causal connectedness grounds Spinoza's reasoning here. For what anchors adequate ideas is no mere formal consistency but the coherency of consilience.⁹⁴ Adequate ideas are causal and contextual understandings. Their progressively interlocking, mutually reinforcing confirmedness, as elements in a system of explanations, makes them ever more reliable guarantors of our veracious apprehensions. Spinoza will define adequacy without reference to truth, so that adequacy may become his core test for truth. Where the Stoics had relied on an implicit, ultimately physiological causal nexus to boost subjective data to objectivity, Spinoza uses an explicit causal understanding to spring the mind from the confines of subjectivity and extend our knowledge beyond the immediacy of our embodiment.

Near the middle of the *TdIE* (a portentous location for Straussians), Spinoza mounts a vehement critique whose target is identified by Wolfson and Curley as Descartes.⁹⁵ For the error Spinoza passionately denounces⁹⁶ bears the telltale markings of the arbitrary

⁹⁰ E2P38C, ed. Gebhardt, 2.119.

⁹¹ E2P46–7, ed. Gebhardt, 2.127–8.

⁹² E5P18, ed. Gebhardt, 2.291.

⁹³ E2P11C&P32, ed. Gebhardt, 2.94–5, 116.

⁹⁴ See L. E. Goodman, *In Defense of Truth*, 132–69, 179–224.

⁹⁵ See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 2, pp. 110–11; Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 27–8, n. 47, at *TdIE* § 60.

⁹⁶ *TdIE* §§ 59–62, ed. Gebhardt, 2.23–4.

and unbounded freedom that Descartes named as the heart of our likeness to God.⁹⁷ That supposed arbitrariness, Spinoza argues, plants the seeds of the most hyperbolic of all doubts, the supposition that all of our experience might be illusory, a notion that plays on the assumption: “that fiction is limited by fiction and not by intellection.”⁹⁸

The idea of a deceiver God, for Spinoza, is a paradigm case of a confused and inadequate idea that will self-destruct under critical scrutiny, undone by its own incoherence.⁹⁹ Some might think it possible to bracket what we know and make no existential claims yet still pursue formal reasoning. We might think here of disembodied minds, or Quine’s ontological relativity, Wittgenstein’s language games, or the worldmaking of Richard Rorty or Nelson Goodman. They all invoke reasoning without realism.

Spinoza poses a dilemma for those who think this way: Do we know anything or not? If we do grasp, say, the truth of some formal claim, then, we know something about the mind, even if our initial claim was couched wholly hypothetically.¹⁰⁰ If, on the other hand, the notion is that we know nothing, the formalist’s views look self-refuting, since the intent was to show that we are licensed or restrained in drawing inferences by the posits we have made. Think of Quine here, rejecting the notion of minds or subjects while bracketing all existential claims within the oblique discourse of some system or schema. Does the schema have no author?¹⁰¹ Or think of Wittgenstein, proposing to leave metaphysics behind by deferring to the logic of our language games—yet privileging the social reality in which those

⁹⁷ Descartes derives freedom from indifference and names “infinite” indifference his chief point of resemblance to God, even though he ascribes such freedom to a “defect of knowledge.” Spinoza, of course, would never equate ignorance with freedom. Nonetheless, as Tlumak notes, Descartes does affirm a higher freedom, of spontaneity, beyond that “lowest grade.” Connecting God’s primal “indifference” with the creation of all things (even immutable truths), Tlumak derives God’s spontaneity from that indifference, in a way, perhaps, saving the Cartesian God from charges of arbitrariness; Jeffrey Tlumak, *Classical Modern Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 43–7.

⁹⁸ *TdIE* § 59, ed. Gebhardt 2.23.1–2.

⁹⁹ *TdIE* § 79, ed. Gebhardt, 2.30.

¹⁰⁰ *TdIE* § 60, ed. Gebhardt 2.23.10–11.

¹⁰¹ Willard Van Orman Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 26–68; “Three Indeterminacies,” in *Perspectives on Quine*, ed. Robert B. Barrett and Roger F. Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); see Lenn E. Goodman, *In Defense of Truth*, 113–27.

games take place.¹⁰² Those who adopt a formalist or internalist posture, as Spinoza understands their claims,

say that the soul can sense and apprehend in many ways, not itself or the things that exist, but only those things that are neither in itself nor anywhere, that is, that the soul, by its own powers alone, can create sensations or ideas that are not of anything, deeming it, in effect, like God.¹⁰³

That is the height of apriorism, projected by philosophers who often pride themselves on their naturalism and empiricism. The fault, as Spinoza sees it, lies in positing ideas without *ideata*, thoughts without referents, language games without players, rules of inference without minds. If we know anything about the logic of our posits, Spinoza shows us, then we do know something about the minds that make them, and systematic doubt is an illusion—as are all the various ways of bracketing ontic commitments.

Leaving such adversaries “to their hallucinations (*deliriis*),”¹⁰⁴ Spinoza pursues his discussion with those who do know something and know that they do, instancing our knowledge of our own existence, and of the things around us. He goes on, constructively, to vindicate the rationalist’s perennial presumption that truth will out and falsity will unravel, and to weave the fabric of his realism, using his holism and contextualism, so as to enlarge the notion of coherence beyond mere logical atomism: We can follow up on our initial knowledge of the natures of things, to learn, say, that it’s impossible for a man to be transformed suddenly into a beast. Knowing why and how this is so will allow us progressively to enlarge our knowledge. As a result, “the haste to feign things”—relying on mere formal suppositions—will abate.¹⁰⁵

Spinoza’s dismissive diatribe has broad application. He has pinioned a widespread misapprehension and tagged it at the source. Regrettably, partly because of the opprobrium attached to his name in the Enlightenment and the resultant erasure of reference to his

¹⁰² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963; from the German original of 1949), §§ 1–53; to be fair to Wittgenstein, the metaphysics that he means to set aside here is chiefly his own of the *Tractatus*.

¹⁰³ *TdIE* § 60, ed. Gebhardt, 2.23.12–17.

¹⁰⁴ *TdIE* § 61, ed. Gebhardt 2.23.25.

¹⁰⁵ *TdIE* §§ 62–3, ed. Gebhardt, 2.24

writings from much that passes as serious philosophy,¹⁰⁶ his analysis was not as widely heeded among those who might most have profited from it as was the line of thinking it intended to cut short.

Spinoza's understanding of the dynamic of the mind—its activity and reflexivity—is what allows him to set doubts aside and dismiss not only the Cartesian demon but the very project of methodical doubt, to treat skepticism as a gambit answered rather than a challenge never finally put to rest. What makes the constructive project work, I think, is Spinoza's focus on the mind's discovery of intelligibility: We find certain things intelligible and, in that very moment, find the means of finding them intelligible. In the highest kind of knowing, as Spinoza puts it: "from the fact that I know something, I know what it is to know something."¹⁰⁷ Setting aside Cartesian doubt, Spinoza can affirm that we can form a clear and distinct idea of a triangle that does not allow us to conceive the sum of its angles as more or less than a straight line, "even if we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us."¹⁰⁸ No prior method is needed (or even possible): "Method is nothing but reflexive knowledge, the idea of an idea."¹⁰⁹

For most of us, the particular geometric conception that Spinoza chooses as his example is mediated by grasping the relations among the angles a line forms when crossing parallel lines. For a few, perhaps, the recognition comes in one fell swoop, deservedly called intuitive and listed under what Spinoza calls knowledge of the third kind. Even then, I suspect, the knowledge is mediated and contextual. Here, parting company with the Platonic conception of rational intuition as *anamnesis*, Spinoza must agree. For knowledge of the third kind is anchored, constitutively, in adequate ideas and is therefore *causal* in nature. Its divine origins are marked not by the metaphor of remembrance but by its conceptual rootedness in the natures of things.

The timelessness that was the ancient marker of rational intuition can now be seen as a poetic vestige of Platonism: Of course we like to distinguish the more pedestrian discoveries of the geometry student from the flash of insight in a more original mathematical mind. All the same, any one of us might recognize, say, that the lines of a triangle

¹⁰⁶ See Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*, 3–4.

¹⁰⁷ *TdIE* § 22, ed. Gebhardt, 2.11.

¹⁰⁸ Spinoza, *Descartes's Principles of Philosophy*, ed. Gebhardt, 1.147–8.

¹⁰⁹ *TdIE* §§ 36–8, ed. Gebhardt, 2.15–16.

must turn around and get back to where they started, if a closed plane figure is to be formed of just three straight lines in Euclidean space. That would give us Euclid's two right angles. The idea may seem elemental enough count as intuitive. It is still mediated. Only the (occasional) swiftness and stealth of such an idea's creeping up on us leads us to call it timeless. Yet, the objects the mind intends (I would argue) can be timeless.

The argument that makes adequate ideas Spinoza's avenue to truth, allowing knowledge claims to be vindicated, requires that there always be what Aristotle calls a middle term, a term discovered when we see (intuit) what relates seemingly unconnected ideas. Adequate ideas arise when we think of the multiplicity of things not by way of our encounters with them in "the fortuitous run of circumstance" (as Shirley nicely renders)¹¹⁰ but in terms of their complementarities, differences and oppositions.¹¹¹ Thinking holistically and taking his cue not from logic but from nature, Spinoza cites not middle terms but causes. The point remains: When we understand the connections among things and see why they are as they are it becomes (progressively) clearer why they must be so. Hume's subjective necessity of anticipation is transformed to recognition of an objective necessity, not by the mere satisfaction of confirmed expectation but by the consilience of causal explanations. The transformation is effected not by passive projections or irrational instincts but by the integrity of the pattern formed by adequate ideas, as contrasted with the increasingly tattered and scattered state of rival notions—phlogiston, or fairies.

As Don Garrett writes:

Spinoza . . . would agree with Hume that our expectations about the necessity of causal connections cannot be satisfied unless it is impossible and inconceivable that the cause should fail to produce its effect. He would also agree that these expectations are really

¹¹⁰ For Samuel Shirley's rendering, see his translation of Spinoza, *Complete Words*, 262.

¹¹¹ E2P29S; see *TdIE* § 25, ed. Gebhardt 2.12: *quod res plures simul contemplantur, determinatur ad earundem convenientias, differentias, et oppugnatias intelligendum.*

incompatible with causation between different separable things. However, Spinoza draws the opposite conclusion.¹¹²

For Spinoza does not think that things ultimately are separable.

Whereas Hume infers that our expectations about the necessary inseparability of causes and their effects must be disappointed, Spinoza concludes that all causation must take the form of logically necessary (inconceivable-that-it-should-be-otherwise) self-development of a logically inseparable individual substance.¹¹³

I would qualify this by saying that the necessity is made formal only by the positing of the natures in question. It would not be considered a necessity of logic in the abstract.

To understand a thing is to see what makes it so. Thus, as Mason explains, Spinoza did not so much analyze causality in terms of logical necessity as understand logic in terms of causal necessity.¹¹⁴ To understand a thing is to grasp the logic of its nature, in the modern sense that semantical pluralism has given to logic. In Spinoza's world, the natures of modes are never static or atomic isolates. Everything finite is contextual and dynamic. If geometry is to map extension, or vectorial analysis is to chart the patterns of motion and rest—if mathematics is to be the language of science, it matters what variables are used. When (and to the extent that) we understand the causal interactions underlying the dynamics of change, we will see why things must be as they are and work as they do.

The mind detects patterns—symmetries, asymmetries, likenesses, unlikenesses, complementarities and oppositions, rhythms, and (may we say it) gaps and distortions, in the data that comes before it. It translates these into local knowledge. Linking up such bits of knowledge, putting coherence into the service of correspondence and explaining one phenomenon by reference to another, we create a record so formidable that rival accounts become mere fables, sent gibbering to the margins of the epistemic realm, much as the disparate gods and spirits of pagan piety are scattered, by their very ineptness to integration, to become the sprites and jinn of legend. For integrated theses can explain one another. Mere disparate givens remain

¹¹² Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70–1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, 56–77.

undigested surds. Integrated accounts map a world in charts that gain clarity and authority with every connection they make, confirming externally and unasked what was supposed internally and heuristically, or metaphysically, all along: That the world itself is an integrated system, its causal connections reflected in our causal narratives.

Bertrand Russell claimed that coherence gains no purchase on the truth, since the negation of any coherent system is equally coherent. That may be sound, as far as it goes. It goes as far as it does, however, only by counting on an etiolated, formalistic idea of coherence as formal innocence, lack of internal contradictions. Coherence as Spinoza conceives it is the explanatory interconnectedness of a holistic system that gives ever increasing assurance to our understanding of nature. Once coherence is understood materially in this way, then, as Derek Turner points out, the demand for rejection of a contradiction acquires vastly greater force.¹¹⁵ It now requires that no idea deemed adequate contradict another. Hence, the idea of a unified science—although we must caution ourselves that unification in the sciences need not mean the reduction of all to physics, as the positivists typically presumed.

Intuitions, being causal as Spinoza understands them, have clearly become dialectical. Older notions of capturing certainty in timeless atoms of comprehension have been left behind for a recognition of the activity and engagement of the mind. Consciousness is not the passive recipient of simulacra—or sentences. It actively embraces its objects. Spinoza writes, “By idea I understand a concept of the mind that the mind forms because it is a thinking thing.” He goes on to explain: “I say concept rather than percept, because the word percept seems to indicate that the mind is passive to its object, whereas concept seems to express an action of the mind.”¹¹⁶ Spinoza all but reaches out here and shakes the word “concept” to reawaken its deep etymological sense as the name for something grasped and captured—in, or *as*, a thought.

Michael Della Rocca compares Hume’s bundle theory of the mind to Spinoza’s account of the mind as the idea of the body and indeed

¹¹⁵ Personal communication, April 4, 2003.

¹¹⁶ E2D3, ed. Gebhardt, 2.84–5.

identical with its ideas.¹¹⁷ He sees a notable difference in Spinoza's talk of the mind's having or forming ideas. Nonetheless, he argues, that difference might be purely verbal: Such talk could be translated into properly regimented bundle statements. Spinoza's lively and assertive ideas, I would argue, on the contrary, are more like a family or a population than like a Humean bundle, which is, of course, at bottom, a bundle of percepts or impressions. The real incompatibility here lies in the static and passive character of Humean ideas. Spinoza, like Hume, does not call the mind a substance—but for quite a different reason. Insisting that the mind is active, Spinoza fruitfully equates its activity with the liveliness of its contents: Minds think. That means the same as saying that ideas are dynamic, not something mute like pictures on a pad.

Would Spinoza's approach, then, be more in keeping with Daniel Dennett's revision of Hume, to yield a more active conception of ideas as "memes"? I think not. Dennett's memes are invaders that "infest" the brain. They are not conscious—lest Dennett fall afoul of the spectator regress argument. Dennett does not use their liveliness to explain or constitute the life of the mind but to dissolve it. The mind, on Dennett's account, being passive and equated with certain brain states, is readily eliminated reductively. Spinoza's intent is to say what the mind is, not to show why it is not.

Freed from the fiction of atomistic intuitions, Spinoza can make ideas affirmative or negative, responding to the adequacy or inadequacy of an idea. That dialectical stance is affirmed as early as the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*. There, denying that the notion of men's sudden transformation into beasts corresponds to any reality, he broaches his distinctive thesis: "If there were any conception here,"—that is, any adequate idea—"the mind would see at the same time"—in the same act of comprehension that gave it the relevant subjects and predicates, from which the mere verbal assertion of a magical transformation has wandered into remote and abstract generalities—"the means and causes (*medium et causas*)"—the material connections and effective agencies—"how and by which (*quo et cur*) such a thing was done."¹¹⁸ The affirmation of a natural

¹¹⁷ Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41–2.

¹¹⁸ *TdIE* § 62, ed. Gebhardt, 2.46. As Garrett notes, the *TdIE* (§§ 18–19; see 29–31) does suggest a Cartesian project of constructing knowledge from

impossibility rests on specious terms, images with no real concept behind them, none that stands for a real thing connected by its nature to the natures of other things that set the conditions for all natural events.

For Descartes, discursive thinking, being temporal, is inevitably suspect, vulnerable, at least in principle, to the demon, systematic doubt. But Spinoza's clear monotheistic and naturalistic faith fears no demons. He knows from the outset that malevolence and deception are incompatible with perfection—not by mere foot stomping but by a clear grasp of the idea of perfection.

For Spinoza it is an axiom that all things in nature are intelligible, either in themselves or through an understanding of their causes.¹¹⁹ So the temporality of thought is no barrier to certainty or conduit for doubt; and there is no need of the Cartesian fiction that the first rudiments of thought are atomic. Rather, Spinoza can picture them (following an analogy that Descartes himself had used¹²⁰) as constructs, fashioned with the aid of the primal givens of experience.¹²¹ Gone is the pretense of the intuitive atomicity of an argument as complex (once articulated) as the Cartesian cosmological proof—with its Platonizing ontology, its premises about the adequacy of cause to effect, its long stretch from a subjective effect to an eminent or formal cause. No longer must a philosopher strain at charity to trust that if one's mind does not quite take this all in at a glance, it must be because one's mind does not reach quite high enough. On the contrary, certainty arises through dialectic (as Socrates supposed), and truths are grasped not in atomic percepts but in the linkage of arguments and the judgments to which those arguments give rise.

At the same time, almost paradoxically, in Spinoza's approach, judgments themselves become not less but more compact. For the

its simplest elements. The *Ethics* makes clear that the simples needed are neither perceptual nor verbal but propositional from the start. Spinoza attributes error not to the arbitrary operations of volition but to the disconnectedness of images (*TdIE* §§ 84–7). The common confusion of ideas with images or words, or even sentences, Spinoza argues, is readily cleared up, “For the essence of words and images is established entirely by bodily motions, which contain not the least notion of thought.” E2P49S2, Gebhardt, 2.132.19–21.

¹¹⁹ E1A2.

¹²⁰ Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Rule 8, CSM 1.31.

¹²¹ *TdIE* 30, ed. Gebhardt, 2.13.17–29.

Stoic account of affirmation that Cicero absorbed and conveyed to Augustine, the conception that has endured down to Frege and beyond, which distinguishes a propositional content from the act of its assertion,¹²² is here dissolved, by the same analytic intelligence that dissolved Descartes's distinction between will and understanding. Descartes had ascribed both a volitional and a cognitive component to the act of judgment. "Making a judgment requires not only the intellect but also the will," he wrote:

In order to make a judgment, the intellect is of course required, since, in the case of something which we do not in any way perceive, there is no judgment we can make. But the will is also required, so that, once something is perceived in some manner assent may then be given.¹²³

In Spinoza, however, such scholastic hypostases as will and intellect are paradigm cases of what needs to be exposed as effects renamed as causes. What follows is the dismissal of discrete faculties of will and understanding,¹²⁴ notional faculties that only stand between us and the fundamentally judgmental nature of thought. Spinoza's insight here is underwritten by his recognition of the ubiquity of the emotions and what Goetschel calls the "constitutive nexus between emotion and cognition."¹²⁵ The same nexus grounds Spinoza's conception of salvation in terms of the intellectual love of God. For it is only

¹²² See Descartes, *Meditations* 3, CSM, vol. 2, 25–6; AT 7.27. For the Stoic doctrine of assent, see, for example Plutarch, *De Stoicorum Repugnantiis*, in Plutarch's *Moralia*, ed. H. Cherniss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), vol. 12, 1057; *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim (Stuttgart, 1903–5), vol. 3, § 177. For Cicero's treatment, see his *Academia*, bk. 2 §§ 78, 108, in *Works*, vol. 19, ed. Horace Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 564–7, 604–6. See *De Utilitate Credendi*; and see Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 217–312. For Frege's use of the assertoric, see his *Begriffsschrift* in Gottlob Frege, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), 1–2. Frege writes: "If we omit the little vertical stroke at the left end of the horizontal stroke [marking the assertoric], then the judgment is to be transformed into a mere complex of ideas; the author is not expressing his recognition or non-recognition of the truth of this."

¹²³ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* 1.34; CSM, 1.204.

¹²⁴ E2P49Dem, Gebhardt, 2.130.

¹²⁵ Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*, 17, 46. For Descartes's construal of the nexus of cognition to volition, see Jeffrey Tlumak, "Judgment and Understanding in Descartes's Philosophy," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 21 supplement (1983): 89–99.

through the fusion of reason and (active) emotion that such a notion as intellectual love escapes the sense of paradox that might debar it from the apprehension of more hidebound minds—and the intellectual love of God becomes at once an intellectual and an affective consummation. Descartes too lays a grounding, in the bass continuo, for recognizing the nexus between emotion and cognition, when he speaks of perceiving or apprehending something in a given way. All the same, Descartes muffles that motif when he segregates the volitional from the cognitive side of judgment, as if to echo the mind-body disjunction. What Spinoza sees is that affirmation or denial, acceptance or rejection, are implicit in our understanding. They are not dependent on a separate act of will or faith, good or bad intent, discipline or indiscipline, wholesome acquiescence or sinful recalcitrance:

In mente nulla datur volitio, sive affirmatio, et negatio praeter illam, quam idea quantum idea est, involvit: There is no volition, affirmation or negation in the mind, beyond what an idea itself, as an idea, involves.¹²⁶

In the human mind, as in God, will and understanding are one. Rationally, we accept and affirm what we can understand, and reject or deny what we cannot—although, in the human case, as Descartes saw, it is hardly inevitable (be it ever so desirable) that our ideas be clear and distinct before we commit to them. Spinoza sees that. Yet he parses the act of judgment differently: “what else is it to perceive a winged horse if not to affirm wings of a horse?”¹²⁷ No independent faculty of will is needed to explain what a simple confusion, addled further, perhaps, by appetites or passions, all too adequately explains. Descartes’s appeal to the will as the motive cause of error, like Adam’s complaint against Eve (“the woman you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate”—Gen. 3:12), is sheer buck passing, a nod in the direction of original sin (another effect masquerading as a cause), exonerating reason from a charge where reason, properly conceived, needs no such rescue, since adequate ideas do not err or misconstrue.

Human thought, for Spinoza, is always affective, just as human emotions are always cognitive in content. That is what distinguishes

¹²⁶ E2P49, ed. Gebhardt 2.130.

¹²⁷ E249S, ed. Gebhardt 2.134.31.

affects from, say, moods or pains, which are auras or sensations, not emotions. Parkinson sums up the doctrine:

Spinoza says that it is axiomatic that there is no such thing as bare affirmation, divorced from all content... and Spinoza now proceeds to assert that the converse is true, i.e. that the very idea of a triangle "must involve this same affirmation, namely that its three angles are equal to two right angles."¹²⁸

So why does Spinoza say that an idea can exist in the mind even though no other mode of thought is present along with it? For Spinoza does make it an axiom that:

There are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire, or whatever emotion is named as such, unless the same person has an idea of the thing loved, desired, etc.¹²⁹ But the idea can be present without any other mode of thinking.¹²⁹

Does this mean that we can entertain a thought without affirming or denying it, or adopting any other posture toward it? That would contradict the vigorously defended thesis of E2P49. It would also be internally incoherent. For even to suspend judgment is to adopt an attitude. It is, in Spinoza's words, "to recognize that one does not apprehend a thing adequately."¹³⁰ Love or hate need not accompany every judgment. Dispassion, pace our post-moderns, is a human possibility. So are an indefinitely large variety of other responses. What is the case is that we do not grasp a proposition without adopting a disposition toward it, any more than we can adopt an attitude without reference to an idea. The idea, after all, is a thought, and there is no thought without a thinker and no thinker without *conatus*. Spinoza's point is simply that no *separate* mental act (or faculty!) is needed. The idea affirmed, denied, embraced, abhorred, or merely entertained, is a single, integrated content, in need of no external, emotive license or support.

¹²⁸ G. H. R. Parkinson, *Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 94. For a lucid and sympathetic account of the Cartesian alternative, grounded in an analysis of the cognitive and volitional aspects of belief, see David M. Rosenthal, "Will and the Theory of Judgment," in *Essays on Descartes's Meditations*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 405–34.

¹²⁹ E2A3, ed. Gebhardt, 2.85–6.

¹³⁰ E2P49S, ed. Gebhardt, 2.134.13–14.

The Stoics rightly read affirmation and acceptance in one another's terms. What Spinoza sees is that they wrongly assigned acceptance or rejection to a volitional capacity independent of our understanding. The pragmatists saw things a bit more clearly, when they included belief in the dynamic of human choice. That, at least, allowed an answer to Hume's anti-cognitivist, anti-rationalist suasions, which sought to isolate ideas and declare them powerless to move a human being to action. Peirce saw clearly that logic is ethical, all the way down.¹³¹ My former colleague Jim Tiles spoke well when he pressed the point that even *modus ponens*, especially *modus ponens*, is a rule, and, as such a prescriptive norm and no mere abstract formula.¹³² Still, we need to understand that if *modus ponens* is a rule, that is because it reflects something about the world; and if it is a rule of logic, that is because what it reflects also goes all the way down. The match up between logic and ethics would reflect the ideal harmony that Descartes hoped for between reason and volition—the unity of affect and understanding, as Spinoza saw it, when the mind is able to constitute itself in adequate ideas. Pragmatists may tilt the balance even further than Hume did when they try to perch non-cognitive values in the mental driver's seat. What we learn from Spinoza is that in epistemology what we choose is what we understand; what we reject is what we cannot. Insofar as we do otherwise it is not we who act but things outside us that act upon us. Only romanticism would clasp such choices to its breast and call them our own.¹³³

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¹³¹ For Hume's doctrine that reason cannot be a motive, see *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Book 2, Part 3, Section, 3, ed. Selby-Bigge, pp. 413–14, corresponding to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1777), ed. P. H. Niddich, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 206–7. For the dependence of logic on ethics in C. S. Peirce's thinking, see his *Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) vol. 2, pp. 156, 196–200.

¹³² Personal communication, Autumn, 1993.

¹³³ My profound thanks to Jeffrey Tlumak, Heidi Ravven, Don Garrett, and Brandon Zimmerman for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.