The Joy and Sorrow of Believing:

Spinoza on Affect, Power, and Belief

Thomas Colbourne

Department of Philosophy

McGill University, Montreal

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Abstract

In the Joy and Sorrow of Believing, I argue that Spinoza is committed to a theory of beliefs where we adopt beliefs on the basis of how they affect us, rather than solely on the basis of their epistemic merits. That is, we believe something because it is either joyful – and thus empowering – or because it is sustained by external forces, as is the case with disempowering beliefs. While it is the case that true or adequate ideas are always joyful and empowering, they are not always more empowering than their inadequate counterparts and are thus not always preferable. I arrive at this theory of belief by way of examining Spinoza's metaphysics and philosophy of mind. I argue that characterizing Spinoza's theory of beliefs in terms of causes, affect, and power is in keeping with how Spinoza fundamentally conceives of ideas as modes. Minds, according to Spinoza, are modes of thought that strive to persevere in being and to increase their power of thinking. Whether or not we adopt a particular idea is determined by how that idea affects the mind, since the mind will strive to adopt and maintain empowering ideas and to resist and reject saddening ones. Having established this theory of belief, I outline a program for future study that analyzes what constitutes a bad belief and I determine to what extent state intervention in bad beliefs is justifiable.

Dans la Joie et la douleur de croire (Joy and Sorrow of Believing), j'apporte l'argument que Spinoza est engagé dans une théorie des croyances qui veut que nous adoptions des croyances sur la base de la manière dont elles nous affectent, plutôt que seulement sur leur valeur épistémique. C'est-à-dire que nous croyons quelque chose, soit parce que cette chose nous apporte de la joie – et donc nous rend plus puissants – ou parce que ces croyances sont soutenues par des forces externes, comme le cas des croyances qui nous font perdre cette même puissance.

Même si c'est le cas des idées vraies ou adéquates qui nous apportent de la joie ou nous rendent plus puissants, ces idées ne nous rendent pas toujours plus puissants que leurs contreparties inadéquates et donc, elles ne sont pas toujours préférables. J'arrive à cette théorie de la croyance en examinant la métaphysique et la philosophie de l'esprit de Spinoza. J'argumente que la caractérisation de la théorie des croyances de Spinoza en termes de causes, d'affect et de pouvoir est fidèle aux fondements de la conception de Spinoza des idées en tant que modes. Selon Spinoza, les esprits sont des modes de pensée qui s'efforcent de persévérer dans leur existence et leur capacité à accroître leur pouvoir de penser. Le choix d'adopter ou non une idée en particulier est déterminé par la manière dont l'idée affecte l'esprit. Il en est ainsi car l'esprit s'efforce d'adopter et de maintenir des idées qui rendent plus puissants, qui visent à la résistance et au rejet des idées qui attristent. En établissant cette théorie de la croyance, je dégage un programme pour de futures analyses de ce qui constitue une mauvaise croyance et je détermine des fondements pour l'intervention de l'État dans les mauvaises croyances.

An Introduction

(i) Why Belief, Why Believe?

Like many projects, this dissertation began with more grandiose ambitions than with which it will be concluded. I commenced with a desire to offer a radical reading of Spinoza's philosophy that would allow me to derive a novel theory of belief formation that could be applied to contemporary moral and political dilemmas. But like many young writers, my gusto outpaced my acumen. Approaching the conclusion of my work and having learned something of the strength of a modest thesis, I am now content with less and hopefully will thereby be able to accomplish more.

To say what this work is about, I offer the explanation that I often provide to inquisitive strangers. I am concerned with the question 'why do we believe what we do?' and I seek a resolution to this question in Spinoza. As we shall see, for Spinoza beliefs are a species of ideas, and so to inquire after beliefs is to inquire after ideas. My concern with beliefs, rather than the broader category of ideas, has less to do with Spinoza than it does with our own contemporary intellectual landscape. The notion of belief provides me a site of contact to import Spinoza's insights about epistemology and human psychology into contemporary philosophical discussions.

Thinking of our mental lives in terms of beliefs has become common practice. For instance, you are much more likely to encounter the phrase "true belief" in contemporary philosophical discussions than you are to encounter Spinoza's "adequate idea". Likewise, your average person is more likely to agree with the claim that "you can't believe everything you see

on TV" than with the Spinozist rephrasing that "when we watch TV we form ideas through the imagination." When we describe or reflect on our mental lives, we are often predisposed to do so in terms of our beliefs. Focusing on beliefs thus allows for a way to take Spinoza's insights about ideas and apply them to a domain with which we are already familiar, employing a vocabulary that is ready at hand.

I turn to Spinoza to resolve the question 'why do we believe what we do?' because his philosophy contains a way of thinking about ideas that is strikingly different from our current inclinations and assumptions. There has been a tendency in contemporary western philosophy, as well as in our historical narratives about philosophy, to treat reason and truth as the dual Sovereigns in the domain of ideas. In keeping with this general tendency, contemporary philosophers predominately conceive of truth as the standard of correctness for believing. That is, a correct instance of believing, it is claimed, necessarily involves the act of affirming a true proposition. Consequently, if I believe something false, I have committed a type of doxastic error. J. David Velleman argues, for instance, for the "truth-directedness" of belief, claiming that "to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth."[1] Belief, according to Velleman, seeks after the truth. Nishi Shaw even goes so far as to say that if anyone were to claim "that truth has no relevance to determining belief in general" then "it is clear that we would question whether someone who made such a claim had fully grasped either the concept of belief or the concept of truth."[2] The concept of truth is so interwoven with contemporary notions of belief that contemporary philosophers think that someone would be committing a conceptual failure if they were to claim that the two were separable.

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[1] Velleman, *Practical Reason,* 251.
[2] Shaw 2003, "How Truth Governs Belief," 454.

Philosophers like Velleman or Shaw would claim that we believe something because we take that thing to be true. While we might be mistaken, while we might commit doxastic errors, the goal of beliefs is to affirm true propositions about the world. The idealized believer, then, is one who precedes according to reason, who carefully selects their beliefs according to the best available evidence and the strongest available arguments. Again, people might get things wrong, we might believe something without the proper reasons, but doing so is regarded as a deviation from the norms that govern believing. Contemporary philosophical discussions surrounding beliefs have the tendency to take the claim that truth is the standard of correctness for believing for granted, and then to explore various philosophical puzzles that such an assumption introduces.[3]

Turning to Spinoza provides us with a philosophical system where this basic assumption about belief is upended. Belief, for Spinoza, is not about affirming true propositions, but about adopting empowering ideas. Further, since joy is an indicator of empowerment for Spinoza, our beliefs are guided by our feelings of joy and sorrow, rather than by a search for truth and falsity. To put it somewhat simplistically, I believe with the aim of making myself joyful. What allows Spinoza to make this claim is that he conceives of humans as primarily passionate, affective, relational beings, rather than emotionless, atomistic reasoners. Moreover, as I shall argue, for Spinoza adopting beliefs on the basis of joy is not a regrettable state of affairs, since doing so ultimately allows for the empowerment of the mind. While we must be on guard for what we might call “false joys”, i.e., joys that obstruct greater empowerment, a mind that seeks after joyful ideas is functioning properly and pursuing intellectual empowerment.

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[3] See Carr, “Epistemic Utility Theory;” Steglich-Petersen, “No Norm Needed;” Whiting, "Does Belief Aim (Only) at the Truth?"

Spinoza provides us with a model for approaching belief that is fairly different from the one that dominates contemporary ways of thinking. This alone is philosophically useful, since it provides us with a historical model that challenges our accepted paradigms and forces us to re-evaluate our current ways of thinking. Spinoza's theory of belief thus provides us with a set of conceptual tools that can be put to use when working on contemporary epistemological, moral, and political problems. For example, Spinoza's conception of belief allows us to reconceptualize how we might combat harmful beliefs by raising the possibility that movement away from harmful beliefs needs to occur on the affective level. It might not be enough to expose people to true ideas, we might also need to ensure that these ideas are affectively powerful and joyful. I thus seek a response to the question 'why do we believe what we do?' in Spinoza because Spinoza provides us with an explanatorily powerful response that can help us to reapproach and reconceptualize the problems of belief. This response, I contend, allows us to shift outside of the framework of truth, and allows us to treat belief as a topic with wider moral and political ramifications.

This dissertation will not work out all of the ramifications of Spinoza's theory of belief. In fact, I am primarily concerned with establishing what Spinoza's general understanding of ideas and beliefs was, rather than engaging with all the consequences of Spinoza's position. This will require, as we shall see, devoting a section of the discussion to metaphysical issues. In this sense, Spinoza's theory of belief is more of a destination than a point of departure. Part of the reason that I do not take Spinoza's theory of belief as a starting point is that it requires engaging in a reading that will likely strike many scholars as counterintuitive. There is a tendency in the

secondary literature to regard Spinoza as a rationalist.[4] On such a reading, Spinoza is concerned with reason, adequacy, and knowledge above all else. This concern with reason is articulated in a series of interconnected theses. For instance, it is argued that Spinoza is committed to the principle of sufficient reason, meaning that he rejected every brute fact; that the world itself can be reduced to conceptual relations; that the goal of our moral emendation is to overcome the passions by way of reason; that to be free is to be fully rational; that politics is a matter of encouraging citizens to live according to the guidance of reason.

While it cannot be denied that reason and related concepts play an important role in Spinoza's philosophy, the interpretive emphasis placed on reason is at least partially a reflection of the importance we give to reason in our narratives about the history of philosophy, and, in particular, about early modern philosophy. The early modern period is often regarded as a transitional period when philosophers began to move away from the irrationalism of religious superstition and towards the scientific principles of the enlightenment. Rationalism and empiricism begin to rule the day, scientific knowledge commences its fight against religious dogmatism, and reason, rather than faith, is viewed as the key to our salvation. Writing about the scholarly neglect of the passions in early modern philosophy, Susan James explains that this "neglect also stems in the twentieth century from a preoccupation with philosophy as a scientific and secular form of enquiry, distinct from psychology, a conception which has shaped our understanding of historical texts and led us to read them as mainly addressing the metaphysical,

[4] See for instance, Della Rocca, *Spinoza;* Grey, "Reason and Knowledge;" Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*; Lin, "Rationalism and Necessitarianism;" Nadler, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy." There are, of course, also those who push against a traditional reading of Spinoza as a straightforward rationalist. To name a few examples, Armstrong, "Natural and Unnatural Communities;" Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings;* James, *Passion and Action;* Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason.*

scientific and epistemological issues that now tend to be seen as the core of the subject."[5] While Spinoza was doubtlessly concerned with reason, it is often treated as his primary concern, with the passions regarded merely as obstacles to be overcome by the rational cultivation of the mind.

This focus on reason can be highly pronounced when it comes to interpretations of Spinoza's epistemology and philosophy of mind. The mind is often regarded as constituted by a striving towards true or adequate ideas, even by those who are sympathetic to the conceptual importance of affect and power in Spinoza's thought.[6] Through reason, the mind is able to act, cultivate its virtue, overcome the disempowering influence of the passions, and perhaps even become eternal.[7] Reason is cast as the essence of the mind with knowledge as its telos.[8] All ideas that do not stem from reason's spring, such as the ideas of the imagination, are false, inadequate, and contaminated by the limitations of the body. This is not to say that commentators have failed to recognize the importance of the body, the passions, or the imagination, but that the dominant approach to Spinoza places reason as primary, especially when considering Spinoza's philosophy of mind.

As such, the suggestion that we, as thinking things, are not driven inexorably towards reason and adequacy, but are fundamentally affective thinkers – adopting our ideas on the basis of how they empower and disempower us – will, I suspect, strike many as a counter-intuitive reading in need of some serious defense. This is one of the tasks that I set out to accomplish with this project: to demonstrate that Spinoza's philosophy of mind is far more affectively oriented

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[5] James, *Passion and Action,* 15.
[6] For instance, in his concluding remarks on Spinoza's theory of *conatus*, Viljanen claims that for Spinoza "the optimal form of human striving amounts to forming adequate ideas and a state of the most endurable joy acquirable for finite human beings" (Viljanen, "Theory of Conatus," 153).
[7] See, as examples, Marshall, "Destroying Passions" and Nadler, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy."
[8] For an example of this type of teleological reading of Spinoza, see Lin, "Teleology." To what extent Spinoza's philosophy is teleological is an ongoing discussion. See, for example, Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza;" Harvey "Spinoza and Maimonides on Teleology;" Sangiacomo, "Teleology and Agreement."

than we often allow. This is not to say that affect is completely ignored or overlooked in the secondary literature, but rather that it is often conceptually subordinate to reason, especially in the domain of Spinoza's epistemology. Nor do I wish to suggest that reason is opposed to affect – that the two notions are fundamentally in conflict with one another – but to show that we can advance a defensible reading of Spinoza where affect and empowerment are conceptually primary.

I arrive at this position by way of a gradual build-up, one that commences with the metaphysics and moves towards Spinoza's theory of beliefs. Part of the reason for this approach, as I shall explain in the next section, is that Spinoza's philosophy seems to demand from us a systematic approach. The other reason, however, is that it allows me to highlight that much of what Spinoza says about minds has its basis in his metaphysics. For instance, when I claim that the mind is a complex network of causally interconnected ideas, this claim can be seen as the natural consequence of a metaphysics that views all things as embedded in an infinite causal nexus. As such, the claims that I attribute to Spinoza regarding his philosophy of mind can be understood as particular manifestations of more general metaphysical principles, and approaching Spinoza's philosophy of mind in this way helps to buttress my counter-intuitive reading.

Again, it is not my intent to deny the merit of rationalist interpretations of Spinoza nor to claim that they are somehow completely erroneous. One would need to engage in a circus of back-bending in order to completely expunge reason from their reading of Spinoza. Reason plays an undeniably important role in Spinoza's philosophical thought. My purpose is not to reject the importance of reason, but to elevate the importance of affectivity in Spinoza's epistemology and theory of belief. I think that a reading of Spinoza that emphasizes the conceptual primacy of

affect and power is both viable and laudable. By advancing a reading of Spinoza's epistemology that privileges the affective over the rational we can potentially highlight dimensions of Spinoza's thought that occasionally go unnoticed. Moreover, the theory of belief that we arrive at by emphasizing affectivity and power can potentially allow for new ways to approach interventions into contemporary epistemological, moral, and political philosophy, as I shall explore in the final chapter. Although my interpretation of Spinoza might, at times, work against the grain, I contend that it is grounded in a close reading of the text and a sensitivity to the historical-intellectual context in which Spinoza was embedded. I am not attempting to flip Spinoza on his head, but to emphasise certain strands throughout his thought that reveal a less familiar image of Spinoza, an image that, while somewhat more alien, is engaging and insightful.

(ii) A Road Map

My central argument is that Spinoza is committed to a theory of beliefs where we adopt beliefs on the basis of how they affect us, rather than on the basis of their epistemic merits. That is, we believe something because it is either joyful – and thus empowering – or because it is sustained by external forces, as is the case with disempowering beliefs. While it is the case that true, or adequate, ideas are always joyful and empowering, they are not always more empowering than their inadequate counterparts and are thus not always preferable. This is perhaps the most controversial claim that I shall make, and it is in Chapter 4 that I argue that Spinoza is committed to this theory of belief.

Chapters 1 and 2 are focused on Spinoza's metaphysics and philosophy of mind respectively. These chapters play a dual role in the development of my overall arguments. First, these chapters introduce the requisite conceptual vocabulary for the arguments developed in

Chapters 3 and 4. For example, Chapter 1 explains that an idea is a mode, that is, a type of thing that expresses God's power under the attribute of thought. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to discuss an idea in Chapter 3 as something capable of having causal interactions with other ideas, without having first situated ideas within Spinoza's metaphysical landscape. Similarly, Chapter 2 develops Spinoza's understanding of the mind as a composite of ideas that strives to maintain its own existence, a characterization of the mind that I will make use of in the arguments developed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Second, these initial two chapters establish a conceptual continuity between Spinoza's initial metaphysical characterization of ideas and minds, and my later claims about his epistemic and doxastic commitments. The arguments that I develop in Chapter 3 will likely be counterintuitive to many Spinozists, insofar as they deprivilege the role of reason, truth and adequacy in Spinoza's epistemology. Part of the goal of the initial two chapters is thus to lend support to my later interpretations of Spinoza by demonstrating that my characterization of the mind in Chapter 3 and 4 is in keeping with Spinoza's metaphysical treatments of modes, ideas, and minds. My arguments in Chapters 3 and 4 can thus be viewed as teasing out implicit commitments contained in Spinoza's treatment of ideas and the mind, as developed in earlier sections of the *Ethics*.

The first chapters thus act as a conceptual primer, preparing the reader with the conceptual vocabulary necessary to engage with my later arguments, as well as rendering these arguments more intuitive by demonstrating their conceptual continuity with Spinoza's initial characterization of the mind. In particular, I am taking seriously Spinoza's commitment to the notion that the mind is a thing that causally interacts with other ideas and using this commitment to bring to the fore some interesting consequences for Spinoza's theory of belief. It is by

stressing the ontological and existential character of the mind, i.e., the mind as an expression of causal power, that we can arrive at an epistemology where affect, causation, and power play a more primary role than truth, adequacy, and reason.

It is Chapter 3 that develops my pivotal conceptual arguments. In Chapter 3, I argue that Spinoza maintains what I refer to as the affective theory of ideas, or the ATI. This theory holds that which ideas our mind strives to adopt or reject has to do with the affective force of those ideas: the mind strives to adopt empowering, joyful, ideas, and to reject disempowering, saddening ideas. While adequate ideas are always empowering, according to Spinoza, I argue that they are not necessarily more empowering than some inadequate counterparts. This is because our mind is a system of interconnected ideas and occasionally inadequate ideas can interact with our mind so as to be more empowering than their adequate counterparts. Consequently, I argue that Spinoza conceives of the mind as a thing that seeks after empowerment, rather than a thing that seeks after truth or adequacy. Chapter 3 thus sets the argumentative stage for Chapter 4: if ideas are adopted on the basis of how they affect the mind, and if beliefs are a type of idea, then beliefs must be adopted because of how they affect the mind. In Chapter 4, I explore two prominent models of belief in Spinoza: the Universalist Model and the Dominance Model. While both models have their strengths, I argue that we ought to adopt the Dominance Model because it avoids the risk of transforming the notion of belief into a vacuous concept. I also argue that my main claim – that we adopt beliefs on the basis of how they affect us – can be advanced using either model, and so ultimately my position doesn't rise or fall with this preference for the Dominance Model.

The final chapter explores some of the conceptual upshots of this theory of belief. In particular, Chapter 5 argues that viewing belief formation as primarily affective potentially

provides us with new tools for redressing harmful beliefs. In Chapter 5, I argue that what makes a belief bad is not whether or not it is true, but whether or not it is empowering for the believer. However, there is a concern that such a position might come to condone harmful beliefs, such as the belief in white supremacy: if a belief is good because it is empowering, then there is a worry that we would be committed to claiming that some noxious beliefs are good insofar as they empower the believer. To address this concern, I argue that beliefs are bad if they prevent us from achieving potentially greater empowerment, and that this applies to what I refer to as antisocial beliefs. On the basis of this description of bad beliefs, I argue that there is a *prima facie* justification for intervening into bad beliefs on the basis of harm reduction. Chapter 5 further explores the extent to which the state is justified in intervening into bad beliefs and outlines some strategies for effective belief intervention. Chapter 5 thus sets the stage for a program of future study that is premised on the theory of belief developed in this dissertation.

I think that Spinoza's theory of belief and his approach to ideas is of interest to a wide range of readers, not only to my fellow Spinozists. As far as the material allows, I have tried to present my arguments in such a way that they can be followed by a general audience. At times, this has required me to articulate points that might be obvious to some readers, or to sidestep arguments in the secondary literature that would bring me too far afield from my purposes. I have tried to strike a balance between enough of the nitty-gritty to satisfy and convince my fellow Spinozists, while also maintaining a modicum of approachability.

Chapter 1: Modes, Causes, and Power

(1) Beginning with the Metaphysics

If a belief is anything for Spinoza, then it is a type of idea. To fully understand what a belief is, what it can do, how it interacts with other ideas, *etc.*, we must start at the beginning and determine where ideas are situated in Spinoza's metaphysics. This is by no means a small task, and a substantial portion of this dissertation will be dedicated to discussing how Spinoza conceives of ideas in general, rather than focusing exclusively on Spinoza's theory of belief. But the question of belief is not being postponed without proper cause. If I delay my discussion of beliefs, it is in the manner of Quintus Fabius, who avoided engaging with Hannibal until Rome was well-provisioned and adequately prepared for battle.

Spinoza's main work, *the Ethics*, is an example of what can be called systematic philosophy. Rather than approaching philosophical problems discretely, resolving one question independently of others, Spinoza approached these problems as he did all other things in nature – as inherently interconnected and as having an unified foundation. Spinoza's philosophy is systematic in the sense that the claims Spinoza proposes are conceptually interdependent. To properly understand how to organize our political institutions, for example, we must also understand how passions are likely to divide and unify people, and to understand these passions we must understand the body, physics, and ultimately, God.

Spinoza was not alone during the early modern period in his approach to philosophy. Two of Spinoza's immediate philosophical influences, Hobbes and Descartes, both regarded philosophy as a unified science that required a systematic approach. For example, Hobbes's

Elements of Law Natural and Politic begins with a sustained and detailed discussion of the "faculties of the body" and "faculties of the mind" that he uses as the philosophical basis for his political theory. Descartes, going farther than Hobbes, claimed that philosophy is "a perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing" that must be "deduced from first causes."[9] For Descartes, all of our knowledge must be developed from basic principles that are "so clear and so evident that the human mind cannot doubt their truth."[10] This foundationalism maintained that it is impossible to securely arrive at philosophical knowledge without having proceeded from first principles. Although we contemporary academics tend to produce knowledge in highly specialized and isolated disciplines, in the early modern period, philosophy was widely regarded as a unified domain of knowledge to be worked out as a systematic whole.

Spinoza's systematicity is revealed by his use of the *more geometrico*, or the geometric method, which advances and presents philosophical claims in a manner modeled after Euclid's geometry. Commenting on the *more geometrico* in the preface to Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy,* Lodewijk Meyer's writes that

> Everyone who wishes to be wiser than is common among men agrees that the best and surest Method of seeking and teaching the truth in the Sciences is that of the Mathematicians, who demonstrate their Conclusions from Definitions, Postulates, and Axioms. Indeed, this opinion is rightly held. For since a certain and firm knowledge of anything unknown can only be derived from things known certainly beforehand, these things must be laid down at the start, as a stable foundation on which to build the whole edifice of human knowledge; otherwise it will soon collapse of its own accord, or be destroyed by the slightest blow.[11]

[9] Descartes, *Philosophical Writings,* 179.
[10] Descartes, *Philosphical Writings,* 179.
[11] *PPC*, G| I/127/6-13.

According to Meyers, the *more geometrico* is the proper method for all science insofar as it ensures that the "whole edifice of human knowledge" rests upon a solid foundation. As Meyers indicates, Spinoza's *more geometrico* involves using a series of definitions and axioms, the truth of which is intended to be evident to anyone who properly attends to their meaning, as the basis for deducing subsequent propositions. These propositions, in turn, serve as the basis for additional claims, and so on. This method allows Spinoza to demonstrate that all of his philosophical claims – even those that might strike the reader as scandalous or absurd – are in fact deducible from a series of basic, self-evident ideas.

There is disagreement as to the extent to which Spinoza's method is akin to Descartes'. Daniel Schneider, for instance, argues that Spinoza adopts Descartes' epistemological methodology in maintaining that knowledge production requires deducing new claims from "clear and distinct ideas." Schneider contends that where Descartes and Spinoza diverge is on what properly constitutes the foundation of knowledge. For Descartes, all knowledge must be traced back to the claim "*cogito ergo sum*," while Spinoza allows that "any principle that is conceived just as clearly and distinctly as the *cogito*" can serve as the basis of knowledge.[12] In contrast, Diane Steinberg argues that Spinoza's method is, *contra* Descartes, nonlinear. According to Steinberg, "although Spinoza clearly holds that knowledge is causally foundational in that all our adequate ideas must derive from ideas of things which are the cause of themselves, he does not hold a foundationalist view regarding the justificational structure of knowledge. Rather, what makes any idea or knowledge certain is our adequate understanding of that idea or knowledge, i.e., our having the system of knowledge within which the existence and nature of

[12] Schneider, "Spinoza's Epistemological Methodism," 595. Schneider contrasts his claim with the particularist reading of Robert Chisholm (Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*), which claims that knowledge begins for Spinoza with a series of particular claims, and the metaphysicalist reading which maintains that our knowledge is based on certain basic metaphysical assumptions.

that particular idea is explained. Hence, certainty (justification) for Spinoza is holistic."[13] While Schneider reads Spinoza as retaining a Cartesian foundationalism, *albeit* with a foundation that is more expansive than Descartes', Steinberg proposes that Spinoza has a holistic approach to knowledge production, where an idea only counts as knowledge when it is situated in an overarching system of ideas.

Regardless of where one falls in this debate, knowledge for Spinoza remains systematic, since the truth of any claim depends on how it relates to other ideas, whether it be foundationally or holistically. For Spinoza, epistemology cannot be separated from ontology. To know what an idea is, we must understand the position that an idea occupies in nature; to know what an idea can do, we must know the general laws the constrain things of this species. While it is possible to begin with the notion of beliefs and then to explicate the metaphysical concepts here and there when needed, I contend that we will be better served by beginning from the wide and encompassing vantage of Spinoza's metaphysics of ideas and then focusing in on beliefs as particular types of ideas. Spinoza's explanations about what an idea is and what it can do often rely on claims most clearly articulated in his metaphysics, and, since Spinoza's metaphysics is somewhat peculiar, it is useful to attempt to paint a picture of his metaphysics from the start. It is useful, I contend, to begin with a general picture and then to color sections with more detail, rather than developing the metaphysics in a piece meal fashion and requiring the reader to infer the overarching metaphysical context from glimpses they catch here and there.

Another reason for engaging in the metaphysics is that doing so will go a far way to supporting what might otherwise be a counter intuitive reading of Spinoza's epistemology, as

[13] Steinberg, "Structure of Knowledge," 164. Schneider categorizes Steinberg's position as a coherentist reading, which he claims is a species of the metaphysicalist approach.

was discussed in the previous section. By grounding my reading of Spinoza's theory of belief in his metaphysics, I hope to demonstrate that some of the claims that readers might take to be counter-intuitive are present throughout Spinoza's thought and can be traced back to foundational metaphysical premises.

Finally, I contend that a theory that has its metaphysics worked out has more explanatory power than alternatives that do not. The reason for this is that problems that arise within a given theory, for instance, a theory of belief, are often easier to resolve when one can make use of the underlying metaphysics. These problems can be either internal or external to the theory, i.e., they can either be problems with the internal workings of the theory, or external problems posed to the theory for a solution. Having access to the theory's metaphysical commitments provides access to a reserve of conceptual resources that can be employed when the water gets murky.

Suppose that you were asked to apply your theory to the problem of *x*, where *x* is a phenomenon that was nonexistent at the time your theory was proposed. For example, we might wonder what Spinoza's epistemology has to say about the internet. To know how to accurately have this theory speak to this phenomenon, we must extend the theory beyond its initial horizons. This is undoubtedly an exercise that requires a certain amount of creativity, but there must also be a high degree of continuity and fidelity to the original theory, lest the internal coherence and consistency of the theory unravel in the face of novel problems. The metaphysical commitments of a theory provide us with the conceptual building blocks, the basic units to be relied on when rearranging or extending the theory to contend with new phenomenon. Having a well fleshed out metaphysics thus provides us with greater conceptual flexibility and adaptivity, since it provides us with more conceptual resources to develop a theory in the face of new theoretical challenges. With that being said, let us turn to the metaphysics.

(1.1) Inherence, Conception, Causation

Underlying Spinoza's metaphysics is the distinction between ontological independence and ontological dependence. Samuel Newlands explains that "if, at bottom, the world is a world of things, dependence relations are the ties that connect those things to one another, giving the world its structure."[14] Something is, to put it generally, ontologically independent if it requires nothing outside of itself to secure its existence. Conversely, something is ontologically dependent if it requires something else in order to exist. A child, for instance, is ontologically dependent insofar as it relies on its parents, family, community, and so on, to sustain its existence. In fact, as we shall come to see, all the things that we interact with on a day to day basis are, for Spinoza, ontologically dependent things and they exhibit this dependency in a variety of ways.

The purpose of this section is to explicate Spinoza's distinction between substance and modes using this notion of ontological (in)dependence. As we shall see, ideas are a type of mode, and so understanding how modes relate to one another, as well as how they relate to God, will tell us something about how ideas exist. Spinoza's metaphysics is extremely complex and introduces a plurality of different conceptual relations that are often perplexing and occasionally vague. Ontological (in)dependence, because of its generality, provides a unifying concept through which to conceive of the various ways that things can exist and relate to one another in the world. Framing Spinoza's metaphysics as a series of dependence relations thus provides us with a concept that is broad enough to encompass the variety of metaphysical distinctions Spinoza relies on in the *Ethics*, yet unified enough to allow for a clear narrative thread.

[14] Newlands, *Reconceiving Spinoza*, 57.

Approaching Spinoza's metaphysics through the lens of ontological (in)dependence also allows me to set the stage for later arguments about the nature of minds, ideas, and beliefs. In particular, there are a few points that I will establish during my development of Spinoza's metaphysics. First, I contend that nothing apart from God is truly independent, and that all finite things exist entangled in dependence relations with other finite things. The importance of this claim is that when we analyze something like an idea, we cannot approach it as if it were a solitary thing separable from other things in nature. Rather ideas, like all other finite things, are enmeshed in a plurality of causal relations and could not exist otherwise. Second, to exist is to have a certain modicum of power, understood as the ability to produce effects. There are no inert objects in the world for Spinoza: everything that exists exerts causal pressure on those things with which they are interconnected. Taken together, these two points demonstrate that Spinoza initially conceives of ideas as things that exist, that are causally interconnected with one another, and that have a certain amount of power. These claims will act as the conceptual backdrop for later arguments. For instance, I will argue in Chapter 3 that we adopt ideas based on how they affect the mind, and for this argument to be plausible we must accept that ideas are things that can affect the mind, that is, that ideas can cause the mind to increase or decrease its power. Looking at ideas through Spinoza's metaphysics thus allows us to develop a characterization of ideas that renders later arguments both possible and plausible.

There are three different types of ontological (in)dependence that I will concern myself with in this section: inherence, conception, and causation.[15] By explicating these various types of

[15] Samuel Newlands claims that "Spinoza uses some twenty-two different terms for dependence in the opening pages of the Ethics" (Newlands, *Reconceiving Spinoza,* 57), and so there are potentially more than just three types of dependence relations. Further, there is some debate as to how these different types of dependency relate to one another. Della Rocca argues, for instance, that inherence and causation are the one and the same and are both forms of conceptual dependence (Della Rocca, *Spinoza,* 67). Melamed agrees with Della Rocca that inherence and

ontological (in)dependence we will be able to explain the various ontological categories at play in Spinoza's metaphysics, as well as to explain how these different categories relate to each other. After having discussed these types of ontological (in)dependence and having used this concept to introduce the categories of substance and mode, I will introduce Spinoza's concept of attributes. My discussion of the attributes will be used to advance the argument that the modes are expressions of God's power, and thus are properly conceptualized in terms of power. Further, the notion of the attributes will allow me to discuss the relation between mind and body, setting the stage for arguments advanced in Chapter 2.

The ontological (in)dependence distinction is explicitly articulated by Spinoza in the first axiom of the *Ethics,* where he writes "whatever is, is either in itself or in another."[16] This axiom develops the distinction as an inherence relation: if something exists it either inheres in ("is in") itself, or it inheres in something else. It can be helpful to understand inherence as analogous to the relationship between a subject and its properties. A subject can exist without being predicated of something else, whereas a property's existence requires being predicated of some subject.[17] The property of 'being shiny' for instance, cannot exist independent of some subject, such as a piece of ore, whereas the ore itself has some claim to existence independent of the particular properties it instantiates. Likewise, for *x* to inhere in *y* is for the existence of *x* to require the

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causation are both instances of conceptual dependence, but denies that they are the same (Melamed, "Spinoza on Inherence). Newlands argues that "there are no distinctions between causation, inherence, following-from, and the rest of his non-conceptual laundry list" but insists on the explanatory and metaphysical priority of conceptual dependence (Newlands, *Reconceiving Spinoza,* 65). I am more concerned with using dependence relations as a means of explicating Spinoza's general metaphysics, rather than weighing into this debate.

[16] E1a1.

[17] This is an imperfect analogy for a few reasons. As we shall see, if being a subject is equivalent to inhering in itself, then objects that we typically take as subjects, such as dogs, cats, humans, etc., will not properly count as subjects for Spinoza. Also, under certain theories of properties, some properties can exist without being instantiated. The reader is invited to approach this analogy merely as a useful way of imagining the inherence relation.

concurrent existence of *y*. Take away the piece of ore, and the shininess vanishes, but cover that ore in a dusty veneer and the ore continues to exist.

Spinoza puts this distinction to use to demarcate the two primary ontological categories in his metaphysics, i.e., substance and modes. Substance is "what is in itself" and a mode is "that which is in another."[18] Substance, for Spinoza, does not need to inhere in something else in order to exist, but rather "it pertains to the nature of substance to exist."[19] In contrast, modes are understood as "modifications," or "affections" of some other thing, namely, substance. Modes inhere in substance, with the former thus being ontologically dependent on the latter. You can take a mode away from substance, and substance would continue to exist, but if you were to remove substance then all of its modes, its modifications, would likewise cease to exist. To speak metaphorically, substance is the ground in which modes are embedded.

Unlike his predecessors Aristotle and Descartes, Spinoza denies the possibility of a plurality of substances. For Spinoza, there is only one substance and this substance is God, or Nature.[20] Spinoza articulates this point clearly in E1p14 when he writes "except God, no substance can be or be conceived." Given that God is the only substance that exists for Spinoza, it is only God that is self-inherent and everything else must inhere in God. As Spinoza states in the following proposition, "whatever is, is in God."[21] All modes are thus conceived by Spinoza as things inhering in the unified substance that is God.

Abstractly, a mode is anything that is not God *qua* substance. More concretely, anything that we encounter in our daily lives, from dogs to cats, storms to currents, beliefs to imaginings,

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[18] E1d3; E1d5.
[19] E1p7.
[20] In what follows, I will use the capitalized 'Nature' to refer to Nature as substance, and will use the non-capitalized 'nature' when I refer to a particular thing's nature, i.e., a thing's essence.
[21] E1p15.

are all modes or the complex arrangement of modes. Returning to the abstract, something is a mode if it is not absolutely infinite, since God is the only substance and God is "a being absolutely infinite."[22] To be absolutely infinite is, to put it somewhat imprecisely, to be infinite in every conceivable way. Suppose, following some Pythagorean dream, that the universe was populated only by numbers. The set of rational numbers, although infinite, would not be absolutely infinite, insofar as it fails to have all possible numbers as its members. In contrast, a set containing all possible numbers and all possible sets would be a closer conceptual approximation to what Spinoza means by the absolutely infinite. Or, to push it further, perhaps God is more accurately a set containing infinite sets, all of which contain infinite members. Modes, for Spinoza, are thus anything that is not absolutely infinite, and this category encapsulates both infinite and finite things. Modes encompass both the world of finite things that we encounter, such as humans and fish, as well as some infinite things, such as matter conceived of as a unified totality. All these things, big and small, inhere in God and are modifications of God *qua* substance.

Alongside the inherence relation, Spinoza also articulates ontological (in)dependence as a conceptual relation. It might strike the reader as a misnomer to describe a conceptual relation as an ontological relation. It seems plausible that two things might be conceptually related without thereby sharing any sort of corresponding ontological relation. For example, a red rose and a red door might be conceptually related, insofar as both are red, without thereby exhibiting any sort of ontological relation, let alone a relation of ontological dependence. To explain conceptual (in)dependence we thus need to resolve two questions: why does Spinoza conceive of the

[22] E1d6.

conceptual as corresponding to the ontological, and what kind of conceptual relations are indicative of ontological relations?

Spinoza is what we might now call an ontological realist.[23] I take this claim to mean two things. First, the world has a determinate structure, what Spinoza refers to as the "order and connection of things."[24] Second, the world is fundamentally intelligible, or as Spinoza says "God's power of thinking is equal to his power of acting."[25] To put it another way, when I form a true idea of a thing, the representational content of this idea (i.e., its objective being) agrees with the way that thing actually is in the world, independent of my representation of it (i.e. its formal being).[26] This is not to say that we always get things right. As finite thinkers it is possible to misrepresent how things are in the world, to form false or inadequate ideas. I might for instance, think, as the result of an optical illusion, that a straw in my glass of water is bent when it is in fact straight. However, for a thinker such as God, who is incapable of forming false or inadequate ideas, the way the world is conceptualized accurately maps onto the way the world is. To invert a well-worn proverb, the map is the territory, at least for God anyhow.[27]

To put it in a form that will serve us well here, Spinoza is committed to the claim that the conceptual relations between true, or adequate, ideas accurately represent the ontological relations between things. As such, if the concept of *x* is conceptually dependent on the concept of *y*, this indicates a type of ontological dependency between *x* and *y*. Spinoza's notion of conceptual (in)dependence is explicitly developed in the second axiom of the *Ethics*, where he

[23] For a thorough treatment of Spinoza's rationalism and realism, see Lin, "Being and Reason." See also, Della Rocca, "The Real is the Rational."
[24] E2p7.
[25] E2p7c.
[26] E1a1 and E2p7.
[27] Martin Lin argues that Spinoza "believes that the metaphysical and the epistemic/conceptual mirror one another in such a way that the structure of the world is accessible to philosophical reason, but he does not try to justify this assumption by reducing the metaphysical to the epistemic/conceptual" (Lin, "Being and Reason," 182).

writes "what cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself."[28] With this axiom, Spinoza is making a claim very similar to his claim about inherence: whatever is, is either conceived through another or through itself.

This leads us to the second question to be resolved, namely, what type of conceptual relations are indicative of ontological relations? Spinoza indicates throughout the *Ethics* that conceptual (in)dependence pertains to our ability or inability to fully conceive of a given object. That is, if my idea of *x* requires that I also have an idea of *y*, then *x* is conceptually dependent on *y*. Conversely, if my idea of *x* does not require being conceived through anything else, then it is conceptually independent. I can, for instance, form an adequate idea of water without also forming an adequate idea of Cicero, and so the concept of the one is not dependent on the concept of the other. However, I cannot form an adequate idea of water without also forming an adequate idea of hydrogen and oxygen, and so the idea of water is conceptually dependent on the idea of hydrogen and the idea of oxygen.

We can further elucidate this type of conceptual relation by turning to what Spinoza says about causal relations. As we shall see, causal relations are also a form of ontological (in)dependence. If *x* causes *y*, then *y* is ontologically dependent on *x*. How Spinoza suggests we conceptualize causal relations is thus indicative of what type of conceptual relations indicate ontological relations. In E1a4 Spinoza writes "the knowledge of an effect *depends on, and involves* [involvit], knowledge of its cause."[29] Not only does this passage further support the claim that ontological dependence corresponds to conceptual dependence, but it also explains the

[28] E1a2. What is curious about this axiom is that it does not appear in any of the subsequent sections of E1. Instead, Spinoza heavily favors the use of E1a1. I take this to be a further indication of his commitment to the fact that certain conceptual relations imply ontological relations, and *vice versa*.
[29] Emphasis added.

type of conceptual relation that Spinoza thinks is indicative of corresponding ontological relations.

To put it generally, if the idea of *x* involves the idea of *y*, then *x* is conceptually dependent on *y*. The Latin term *involvere,* which is translated by Curely as 'to involve' can also be translated as 'to envelop,' or 'to encapsulate.' This suggests that for one idea to *involve* another is for the one idea to be contained in the other. The idea of a triangle, for instance, involves the idea of a geometrical figure, since we cannot conceive of a triangle without simultaneously thinking about a geometrical figure. When *x* is conceptually dependent on *y*, the idea of *y* can be said to be contained in the idea of *x* in an essential way, such that if you were to remove the idea of *y* you would no longer be conceiving of the idea of *x*.[30]

As is the case with inherence, Spinoza claims that only substance is conceptually independent. Substance, according to Spinoza, is "conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed."[31] In contrast, all modes – or anything that is not God – are conceptually dependent on God. Spinoza claims that "whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God."[32] Recall that a mode is a modification of substance. As such, when we think about a mode, we must also necessarily form an idea of substance, since a mode is no more than an aspect of, or a modification of, substance. Thus, we see that God is ontologically independent, and modes are

[30] Discussing this point in a different context, Karolina Hübner suggest that the only conceptual relations that reflect the ontological structure of the world are inferences from essences to properties. That is, only those inferences "between the substantial essence and the properties its definition analytically contains, and between the essences of those properties and their properties" reflect the causal, or ontologically, structure of Nature. (Hübner, "Significance of Formal Causes," 160). Placing this in the language used above, we could say that the ideas of properties involve the ideas of the essences from which they follow.
[31] E1d3.
[32] E1p15.

ontologically dependent, not only in terms of inherence, but also in terms of conception: God is conceived through itself, whereas modes must be conceived through God.

However, it also appears that, where inherence is primarily a relation between substance and modes, there can be conceptual (in)dependence between modes themselves. That is, modes can both be conceptually independent from other modes, as well as conceptually dependent. For example, the idea of a fish does not involve the idea of a hockey card (I can conceive of the one without thereby conceiving of the other), and so the two things are conceptually, and thus ontologically, independent. In contrast, the idea of earth's atmosphere is conceptually dependent on the idea of the sun, since I cannot adequately conceive of the earth as having the atmosphere that it does if it were not in the proper proximity to a star. Consequently, the earth's atmosphere is conceptually, and thus ontologically, dependent on the sun. It is worth noting that the ideas of finite modes typically exhibit a plurality of conceptual dependence relations. For instance, the idea of the earth's atmosphere is also dependent on the idea of the earth's magnetic field, the idea of the organic life that emits carbon dioxide, etc. Consequently, we must view modes as occupying a complex network of ontological relations and as being ontologically dependent on a vast variety of other modes for their existence. Spinoza has what might be called an ecological view of nature, where the ontological relations between modes are varied and complex, and where the existence of any one thing requires the existence of a system, or ecosystem, in which it is embedded.[33] This ecological view extends to minds, insofar as they are a part of nature.[34] As

[33] For an insightful treatment of the notion of ecology in Spinoza, see Smith, "Affective Ecology." In evoking the notion of ecology, I intend to emphasize the interdependence of modes, what Smith describes as "the interconnectedness of all things" (Smith, "Affective Ecology," 53). I believer, however, that I am moving conceptual in the reverse direction from thinkers like Smith and Naess (see Naess, "Spinoza and Ecology"): rather than seeking to find the origins of a contemporary notion of ecology in Spinoza, I am using our contemporary understanding of ecology as an analogy to understand the metaphysics and philosophy of mind of Spinoza.

we shall see, ideas in the mind are interconnected through various dependence relations, such that exerting pressures on one aspect of the mind will have ramifications for the system as a whole.

Along with exhibiting conceptual dependence relations, the ideas of modes can also exhibit what can be called conceptual interdependence. Conceptual interdependence occurs when two ideas are mutually conceptually dependent. We can think of the ideas involved in complex systems as exhibiting this type of conceptual interdependence. Take for example the idea of the human body. Arguably, we cannot form an adequate idea of the human body without also forming an idea of the smaller bodies that compose it, such as the heart, lungs, nervous system, stomach, etc. But likewise, it seems that we cannot adequately form an idea of the heart, for example, without also having an idea of the larger system in which it functions. An essential aspect of our idea of a human heart is that it is an organ that circulates blood throughout the body, and thus we must have an idea of the body to have an idea of the heart. To put it another way, in the case of complex systems where members of that system play a vital function, the whole cannot be conceived of independently of the parts nor the parts without the whole. The idea of the human body is conceptually dependent on the idea of the heart, and *vice versa*. Consequently, the body and the heart are conceptually, and thus ontologically, interdependent.

Closely related to conceptual (in)dependence is the notion of causal (in)dependence. To be causally dependent is for a thing's existence to be causally determined by an external thing, whereas to be causally independent is for a thing's existence to be self-caused. The notion of

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[34] As Hasana Sharp explains, "one might consider the attribute of thought to be a kind of ecosystem of ideas. The image of the ecosystem highlights the fact that ideas, like all living things, desire to persevere in being, and only survive in a favorable environment" (Sharp, "Force of Ideas," 745). We might add that, like beings in an ecosystem, ideas are dependent on one another and cannot exist without as free-floating entities.

causal (in)dependence is explained by Spinoza in terms of the relation between a thing's essence and existence: for any thing, *x*, either *x*'s essence involves existence, or it does not. Spinoza develops this relation between a thing's essence and a thing's existence as a type of conceptual relation. When Spinoza claims that the essence of *x* involves existence, he is claiming that it is impossible to adequately conceive of *x* without conceiving of it as an existent thing. In contrast, when a thing's essence does not involve existence, it is possible to conceive of that thing as non-existent. Spinoza uses this distinction to further differentiate between substance and modes, claiming that God's essence involves existence, whereas there is always a divide between a mode's essence and its existence. Spinoza states that "God's existence and his essence are one and the same thing," while "the essence of things produced by God does not involve existence."[35] So while it is impossible to conceive of God as failing to exist, it is possible to conceive of any given mode, for instance the socks that you wear, as not existing.

In discussing this relation between essence and existence, Spinoza explains that this distinction demarcates things that are self-caused and things that must be caused by something else. Spinoza explains that "for that whose nature involves existence [i.e., God,] (considered in itself), is its own cause, and exists only from the necessity of its own nature."[36] God is self-caused, existing from "the necessity of its own nature" and requiring nothing external to causally produce it. It is in this sense that God is causally independent since God requires no external cause in order to exist. Following Spinoza's argument, if a thing's essence does not involve existence, then it cannot be self-caused and must therefore be caused by something else. This is the case for all modes. Insofar as the essence of any mode does not involve existence, its

[35] E1p20 and E1p24.
[36] E1p24d.

existence must be causally secured by something outside of itself, and, as such, all modes are causally dependent.

Fundamentally, all modes are causally dependent on God. As Spinoza states, "God is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, or (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things."[37] That is, God is both the first cause of modes (E1p16c3) but is also the efficient (E1p16c1) and immanent cause (E1p18) of all things. To put it more plainly, God both kicks off the infinite series of cause and effects in the universe, albeit from a position of eternity, and actively sustains this causal network at each link in the system. However, it is important that we do not think of God as existing separate from the rest of creation, since finite modes are expressions of God that inhere in God *qua* substance. Rather than being a detached Aristotelian first mover, God is Nature and is causally efficacious in every conceivable capacity. Since modes cannot cause their own existence, they are causally dependent on God.

Causal (in)dependence applies not only to the relation between substance and modes, but also to the relation between modes and other modes: while modes are always causally dependent on God, modes are also causally dependent on other modes. Spinoza claims that

> Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to

[37] E1p24c.

> exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.[38]

This passage establishes that the existence of, and effects produced by, any finite mode is the result of its causal encounters with other finite modes. Thus, not only are finite modes causally dependent on God, but they are also causally dependent on other finite modes.

For Spinoza, all finite things exist within a complex, infinite, causal network. No finite thing can exist without being ontologically embedded in the world. Moreover, the effects that we are able to produce as finite things are the result of the causal structures that we occupy. Spinoza's ontology of finite things is fundamentally relational,[39] insofar as the existence of anything and the causal powers which things exhibit are the result of the causal relations that they occupy with other finite things. There can be no finite mode that exists as a radical individual, as something that can exist independently of other things in the world, and no finite mode – no matter how powerful – generates its own causal powers. As a finite mode, whatever I can do, or fail to do, is the result of complex causal interactions with other finite things. Further, as is the case with conceptual dependence among modes, finite modes often exist in states of causal interdependence. Take for example the relation between my digestive tract and its gut flora. Without the bacteria that comprise my gut flora, I would be unable to digest many things, and thus the power of my digestive tract would be significantly limited; and without a digestive tract in which to live, the gut flora themselves would be unable to sustain their existence. Thus, there is a relation of causal interdependence between my digestive tract and its gut flora.

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[38] E1p28.
[39] For an interesting discussion of what Morfino refers to as an 'ontology of relations' in Spinoza, see Morfino, *Plural Temporality*, Ch. 2.

To jump the gun a little, ideas are modes. As modes, ideas are causally dependent on other things, namely other ideas. Ideas do not come into existence through the spontaneous power of the will or reason, but as the result of a long and storied causal history. Further, ideas casually interact with other ideas, now increasing their power, now having their power diminished. What ideas come to dominate a mind, as we shall see, has to do with the power of that idea, which is determined by the causal nexus in which that idea is embedded, rather than by the propositional content of that idea. Ideas are historical, causal entities, that come into being and continue to exist much in the same way as material things. Just as a spruce grows as the result of the causal nexus in which it is embedded, just as it flourishes in some seasons and wilts in others, just as it gains its nutrients from the environment and is victim to storms and decay, so too do ideas live, grow and die according to their broader environment.[40]

When it comes to questions of why we adopt one idea over another, we must keep this picture in mind. To explain why we adopt a given belief, for instance, we have to attend to how that idea interacts with the mental ecosystem in which it is embedded. It is not a matter of the mind rejecting or adopting ideas on the basis of their epistemic merits alone, but of ideas being promoted or discouraged by their causal relations with other ideas, both those in the mind and those in the world at large. The mind is a system of causal relations, and new ideas take hold either by integrating well with this system or by being sustained by external forces. Why we believe, therefore, has less to do with our ability to evaluate the epistemic merits of a given idea and more to do with the way that idea interacts with the other ideas in our minds.

Returning to our initial discussion, it would appear that there is a potential tension between Spinoza's claim that all things are ultimately caused by God and with the claim that

[40] See Sharp, "Force of Ideas."

modes can be both causally dependent and interdependent. Spinoza explains that God is the cause of all things in many different senses of the term: "God is the efficient cause of all things which fall under an infinite intellect […] God is a cause through himself and not an accidental cause [… and] God is absolutely the first cause."[41] Someone might respond to my above claim about the ontological dependence and interdependence of finite modes by responding that, just as all roads lead to Rome, all causation leads back to God. It might be objected that since God is the cause of all things, causal interactions between finite modes represent an ontological dependence on God, rather than an ontological dependence or interdependence between finite things.

While it is the case that, in the end, everything is both in God and caused by God, and so fundamentally ontological dependence is – in the first and last instance – a relation between substance and modes, failing to distinguish between the various ways in which God causes things to exist risks leading us into the night where all cows are black. Spinoza introduces several different types of causes including efficient causes, nonaccidental causes, first causes, transitive causes, immanent causes, proximate causes, and absolutely proximate causes. These different types of causation are used by Spinoza to distinguish between different ways that God causes things to exist. For instance, God is only the absolute proximate cause for infinite immediate modes, whereas God is, *albeit* only in an inaccurate sense, the remote cause of singular things.[42] Putting aside the question of what exactly is an infinite immediate mode, the point is that although God causes – and is – all things, there are different ways in which God's causal power is conceptualized, which maps onto different ways that God relates to himself and to modes. For instance, we must conceive of the causal relation of God *qua* substance and God

[41] E16c1-3.
[42] E2p28d.

qua infinite modes as different from the causal relation between God *qua* substance and God *qua* finite modes. While God is the efficient and immanent cause of all things, i.e., something could not exist without being in God and directly caused by God, he nonetheless allows that a different type of causal relation structures the existence and powers of finite modes. While everything bottoms out in God, we can still establish conceptually meaningful differences in how God relates to different aspects of existence.

To end this section, I would like to summarize the above points with an eye towards where we are headed. In what follows, we shall see that beliefs are ideas and ideas are finite modes. Having a general understanding of what modes are, how they relate to both other modes and to substance tells us something about beliefs. Analogously, if we know that a car is a type of mechanical device, knowing something about mechanics generally, or perhaps the physics underlying these devices, informs us about cars, even if only in an oblique manner.

At the base of Spinoza's metaphysics is the distinction between things that are ontologically independent and things that are ontologically dependent. Spinoza articulates this (in)dependence in a variety of ways, including as an inherence, conceptual, and causal relation. Ontological (in)dependence highlights the fact that modes, of which beliefs are included *qua* ideas, are radically dependent things. What interests me is not so much the relation of modes to God, but the dependence and interdependence relations exhibited among modes themselves. Modes begin to exist, continue to exist, and have causal powers that are dependent on other finite modes (E1p28). Spinoza conceives of things in the world from the very start as finite things dependent on other finite things for all they can do and be.

Earlier I described Spinoza as a systematic thinker, and at this point we might add that he is also a thinker of systems. For Spinoza, the world cannot be conceptualized as discrete entities that move and exist independently of one another, but as a system of interconnected and interdependent things.[43] This is not to say that Spinoza reduces the world to an indistinguishable blur of being, that we cannot speak of apples as distinct from the trees on which they grow, but that the further we treat something as separable from its surroundings, the more we participate in a type of conceptual artifice. Sometimes this artifice can be useful, but if we are concerned with how to grow a better apple then we should remember that it came from a tree planted in the soil.

When we ask ourselves why we maintain a certain belief, there is an inclination to look at the content of that belief for an answer. If I believe that the earth is round, presumably it is because I think there is merit in this belief, i.e., that the belief is true or that it accurately represents the world. After all, most of us don't set out to intentionally deceive ourselves or to get things wrong. It makes intuitive sense to claim that belief formation is the result of our attempts to accurately conceptualize the world. But, if beliefs are ideas and ideas are modes, then why a given belief exists can be given a causal story. That is, why a belief exists in a certain mind will have to do with the causes that sustain that idea and how it interacts with the other ideas in the mind. Modes are, after all, ontologically dependent on other causes, and we must attend to the causal nexus in which an idea exists in order to account for its existence.

This is central to the understanding of ideas and beliefs that I advance in this work. Beliefs are not the product of a rational deliberative process. That is, we do not land on our

[43] Spinoza does maintain an atomism where bodies are comprised of individual atoms. But even these individual atoms, insofar as they are modes of extension, can only exist and cause effects by being determined by other finite modes. Consequently, even atoms owe their being and power to things outside of themselves and cannot be properly understood separate from the system of causes in which they are embedded.

beliefs as a result of evaluating different claims about the world and adopting those claims that we regard as being best supported, or those that we regard as true. Rather, beliefs come and go as the result of the causal interactions of ideas in our minds, interactions that bottom out in affective forces. It is ideas that affect my mind in the right way, ideas that either cause me joy or are sustained by external forces, that become my beliefs. To understand why we believe something we must thus understand what it is about that idea that makes it powerful. As we shall see in later chapters, the more we develop this picture of ideas, the less standard epistemic concepts, such as truth, will play a role in determining the existence of a given idea in the mind: beliefs have less to do with truth and more to do with causation, power and affect.

(1.2) Attributes and Modes

So far, we have discussed Spinoza's basic ontology, which is divided into substance, or that which is absolutely ontologically independent, and modes, or those things that are ontologically dependent on other things. For those familiar with Spinoza's philosophy, it might appear as if a key concept has remained conspicuously absent from this initial discussion, namely, the notion of the attributes. In the above sections, I was primarily concerned with providing a general outline of Spinoza's ontology and there is a sense in which attributes do not properly belong to this ontology. Spinoza claims that "except for substances and modes there is nothing,"[44] and so if we are speaking about the fundamental categories of things that exist then attributes do not make the cut. In separating the discussion of attributes from the above discussion, I hope to emphasize that the attributes are not a unique ontological category standing among substance and modes, but rather a way of understanding how modes are instantiated in the world.

[44] E1p15d. See also, E1p4d.

In this section, I will discuss the notion of the attributes with an eye towards both articulating what an idea is for Spinoza and how ideas relate to other types of modes. Because it is easy to get lost in the weeds, it will be useful to say a little about why the attributes are important to a discussion of belief. The attributes can be understood as describing different ways that things exist in Nature; they are the mediums of God's expressive power. There are, Spinoza tells us, an infinite variety of attributes, although we are concerned only with two: thought and extension. To put it another way, in Nature there are thinking things, i.e., ideas, and there are extended things, i.e., bodies.[45] In order to properly develop Spinoza's philosophy of mind we thus need to understand what type of thing the mind is and how it relates to other things in the world. And it isn't until we understand the mind, the type of thing that the mind is, how it functions, and so on, that we will be able to grasp a full picture of what beliefs are and how they come about.

As I will argue, beliefs are types of ideas, and, more specifically, they are our most powerful ideas. Looking at the attributes will give us the conceptual framework for understanding this claim. In particular, a discussion of the attributes allows me to argue that ideas *qua* modes are essentially expressions of God's power. Recognizing that Spinoza conceptualizes modes fundamentally as expressions of power lends support to my later readings of Spinoza's theory of belief, since it validates approaching ideas through the conceptual lens of power, just as developing the notion of causal (in)dependence validates approaching ideas in terms of causal relations. Before turning to a more technical discussion of the attributes, it will be handy if we begin with a general picture of what the attributes are. Proceeding in this manner

[45] Spinoza also suggests that are an infinite variety of attributes, and so there will be an infinite variety of other types of modes. However, we do not have access to these modes, and so we focus on minds and bodies.

will allow the reader to have what we might call an imaginative understanding of the attributes – that is, a useful analogy – which we can subsequently clarify and refine.

We can conceive of the attributes as different ways, or mediums, in which God's existence is articulated. Consider the following analogy. Artists can use different media to convey the same concept. For instance, a *memento mori* might be equally well expressed as a painting or as a musical composition. We can regard the concept conveyed by each work of art as identical, despite the fact that the concept has been expressed in two distinct media. Further, we can claim that the media themselves have no existence over and above the works of art produced in those media. Painting is only expressible in terms of actual brush strokes, and music only expressible in terms of actual notes.[46] The attributes can thus be understood as occupying a metaphysical role analogous to that of artistic media: they allow for God's essence to be expressed in various ways while requiring the modes to achieve determinate existence.

In and of themselves, the attributes cannot be said to exist but rather indicate how modes are instantiated. The two attributes that Spinoza explicitly identifies in the *Ethics* are thought and extension, although there are infinitely many.[47] All modes that we encounter, however, are expressed under one of these two attributes. If a mode is expressed under the attribute of thought then it is a *res cogitans*, a thinking thing, or an idea; whereas a mode expressed under the attribute of extension is a *res extensa*, an extended thing, or a body. To put it another way, there is no attribute of thought independent of the actual modes that are instantiated as thinking things, nonetheless the notion allows us to demarcate this type of existence from other types of

[46] Let us ignore John Cage's 4'33" and the questions it presents.
[47] E1d6.

existence, such as extension. With this general description of the attributes in place, we can now proceed to a more robust discussion.

Spinoza defines an attribute as "what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence."[48] There are three parts of this definition that need to be unpacked: first, there is the question as to whether attributes are understood by Spinoza as subjective or objective, or, how we should make sense of the claim that attributes are "what the intellect perceives;" second, there is the question of what Spinoza understands by the term 'essence'; and, third, there is the question of exactly how attributes constitute the essence of substance. I will begin with the latter two questions and then return to the first.

In the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza provides us with the following definition of essence: "I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily also taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing." We can thus understand a thing's essence either existentially or conceptually. An essence, Spinoza explains, is that which is both necessary and sufficient for a thing to exist or to conceive of that thing. My heart, for example, is inessential, since although it may be necessary for my existence, it is not sufficient – creating my heart would not thereby bring me into existence. In contrast, the essence of a triangle could be understood as its having exactly three internal angles that are equal to two right angles, since if you produce a geometric figure with these angles you are creating a triangle and you cease to have a triangle as soon as you eliminate one of the angles from its construction.

[48] E1d4.

Although Spinoza explains the concept of 'essence' both existentially and conceptually, existence and conception do not always coincide. That is, Spinoza thinks that it is possible to conceive of a thing's essence, without thereby positing its existence. To put it otherwise, the conceptual relation inherent in conceiving of essences is not the type of conceptual relation that necessarily corresponds to an ontological relation. As Spinoza claims, we are capable of having "true ideas of modifications which do not exist; for though they do not actually exist outside the intellect, nevertheless their essences are comprehended in another in such a way that they can be conceived through it."[49] I might be able, for instance, to conceive of the essence of a triangle with definitive proportions without it being the case that this triangle exists anywhere in Nature. In fact, this is possible for all modes since the "essence of things produced by God does not involve existence."[50] As such, since the essences of modes don't necessarily involve existence, it is possible to conceive of modes without simultaneously conceiving of them as actually existing.[51] So while we can understand essences as having both a conceptual and existential dimension, the two notions can, and often do, come apart. Making use of a term that Spinoza introduces in part three of the *Ethics*, we can refer to the existential essence of a thing as its 'actual essence' while using the term 'essence' *simpliciter* to refer to the conceptual essence of a thing.[52]

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[49] E2p8s1.
[50] E2p24.
[51] Hübner relies on the distinction between formal and objective being to explain this claim. In a footnote, Hübner explains that "The "actual" existence of a thing refers to its in fact having been produced by substance (for finite things, this will also involve existing in duration), such that it no longer exists merely qua "formal essence", that is, an eternal but indiscernible implication of God's essence" (Hübner, "Thinking Substance," 5). Something can exist formally, in the mind of God, without having objective, or actual existence, in Nature.
[52] While Spinoza claims God produces all possible/conceivable things, at any given time, only a subset of all possible things will actually exist. That is, since finite things have duration and come in and out of being, there are things that are conceivable but do not currently exist.

God, however, is the exception, since "God's existence and his essence are one and the same thing." Consequently, if an attribute constitutes God's essence it must also constitute God's existence. It is for this reason that Spinoza defines God as a "substance consisting of an infinity of attributes," since to limit the amount of God's attributes would be equivalent to limiting God's power of existence. To rephrase it, since "the more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it,"[53] God, lacking no perfection, must also be lacking in no possible attributes. However, even if we allot all the attributes to God, it is still unclear how they can constitute his existence since, as was mentioned earlier, Spinoza maintains that nothing exists apart from substance and modes.

To resolve this question, it is useful to approach it from a somewhat different direction. First, we must observe that God's essence, and thus God's existence, is absolutely infinite. That is, since God is the only substance, there is nothing outside of God that could limit him.[54] Further, since "God's power is his essence itself,"[55] then we can claim that God's power of acting is also absolutely infinite, as is his essence. Second, Spinoza maintains that part of God's existential power is articulated through the modes. God is the cause of the existence of all infinite and finite modes, and thus to limit the modes that exist would be to limit God's power. Conceptually, what the attributes allow Spinoza to do is to explain how the existence of modes is absolutely infinite, rather than merely infinite, which in turn ensures that God's existential power is not limited in anyway.

[53] E1p9.
[54] E1p11d.
[55] E1p34.

The attributes play this role by allowing God's existential power to express itself in an infinite variety of ways. Suppose that rather than having an infinite variety of attributes God only had one attribute, for example, extension. If this were the case, then God's existential power would only be expressed in terms of extended things. While there would be an infinite variety of extended things and God's existential power could be said to be infinite, it would not be absolutely infinite. To return to an example used earlier, suppose that numbers were things with a definitive existence. Now suppose that God only created the set of rational numbers. Given that the set of rational numbers is infinite, we might say that God's expressive power is also infinite. However, since the set of rational numbers does not encapsulate all possible numbers, while God's existential power might be infinite in creating that set, it would not be absolutely infinite. To use another example, suppose that there are in fact multiple universes. While any one universe might be infinite in itself, if God were to express his existential power by causing the existence of one universe while not securing the existence of other possible universes, then God's existential power would be infinite without being absolutely infinite.

My argument here is that Spinoza subscribes to something resembling the principle of plenitude and that he thinks this principle is only satisfied if there is an infinite variety of ways in which modes are expressed.[56] As Spinoza claims, "from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)"[57] The attributes constitute God's existence by ensuring that God's existential power is absolutely infinite, i.e., expressed in an infinite variety of conceivable ways. God's entire existential power is secured both horizontally and vertically, as it were. The modes

[56] For a more detailed discussion on the many forms of plenitude in Spinoza, see Newlands, *Reconceiving Spinoza*, Ch. 1.
[57] E1p16.

allow for the horizontal articulation of God's existential power, and the attributes, by producing an infinite refraction of this same causal power, allows for the vertical articulation. God creates an infinite causal nexus of modes in an infinite variety of existential media. It is in this sense that we should understand the claim that "each of [God's] attributes expresses his existence."[58] The attributes, while not existing in themselves, nonetheless express God's existence by allowing God to articulate his existential power in a way that is absolutely infinite.

Why is this relevant to the notion of belief? As I shall argue in subsequent chapters, beliefs are our most powerful ideas, and we adopt or reject ideas based on how they affect the mind. At the basis of this treatment of beliefs is the claim that power is essential to understanding what beliefs are and how they operate. Some of the claims that I make in subsequent chapters, such as the claim that the affective force of an idea is more important than its epistemic merits when trying to understand why we adopt ideas and which ideas we ought to adopt, are more plausible when we approach them with Spinoza's metaphysics in mind. In particular, in this section we have seen that, for Spinoza, modes are expressions of God's power. To conceive of a mode primarily in terms of power is simply to emphasize how Spinoza conceives of modes in the first instance. To approach ideas in terms of power is therefor not an interpretive aberration, but a return to Spinoza's basic conception of what an idea is. As was said earlier, examining the attributes tells us what type of things ideas are, and in this section we see that ideas, *qua* modes, are expressions of power: God's power made manifest in Nature. Or as Spinoza says, "whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things."[59]

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[58] E2p20.
[59] E1p36d.

Modes are, in the first instance, expressions of God's power. One of the immediate consequences of this claim that Spinoza develops is that all modes must be causally efficacious, which is to say, "nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow."[60] There cannot be, in other words, causally inert things in the world. To exist is to express a modicum of God's power, and God's power is causally efficacious. Ideas, as modes, must necessarily produce effects. Consequently, as I shall argue in Chapter 3, there is no possibility of an idea being introduced into a system without this introduction having effects on that system. The full ramifications of this claim will be developed later.

We have seen, so far, from a discussion of the metaphysics that modes exist in relations of causal interdependence, that modes are expressions of God's power, and that, as expressions of God's power, modes necessarily produce effects. Accepting these claims, which I take to be largely uncontentious aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics, will serve to make my later arguments regarding ideas and beliefs more plausible.

The question that remains is what Spinoza means when he claims that the attributes are "what the intellect perceives of a substance."[61] This phrase suggests to many readers, especially those with a more idealist inclination, that Spinoza understood the difference amongst the attributes as a conceptual rather than a real, i.e., ontological, distinction. By insisting that the attributes allow Spinoza to explain how God's existential power is absolutely infinite, I am committed to the position that the distinction among attributes is a real distinction. If there were no ontological difference between thought and extension, for instance, then God's existential power would not be affected by the existence of these attributes – God would be just as powerful

[60] *Ibid.*
[61] E1d4.

even if there were no thinking things, since this is only a different way of conceiving of God rather than a way that God is. While I am committed to a real distinction between the attributes, my overall arguments do not hinge on this commitment. That is, even if you deny that there is a real distinction between the attributes, you can still accept my characterization of modes as ontologically interdependent, causally efficacious, expressions of God's power.

Drawing upon the vocabulary of Noa Shein, we can say that I have an objectivist, rather than a subjectivist, reading of Spinoza.[62] The subjectivist maintains that the distinction between the attributes is only a subjective distinction, i.e., a distinction in thought, rather than an ontological distinction. Thus, while we can differentiate between different attributes, such as thought and extension, the subjectivist maintains that these are only conceptual distinctions that fail to map onto any ontological distinction. In contrast, the objectivist maintains that the difference between the attributes is a real distinction, in the sense that there is an ontological difference between substance *qua* thought and substance *qua* extension.

Shein characterizes the difference between these two interpretative models as hinging on the meaning applied to two key terms used in Spinoza's definition of the attributes. Recall that Spinoza defines the attributes as "what the intellect [*intellectus*] perceive of substance, as [*tanquam*] constituting its essence."[63] Shein explains that *intellectus* can either be understood as referring to a finite or infinite intellect, whereas *tanquam* can be translated as either "'as in fact' or 'as if (but not in fact)'."[64] Depending on how we understand these two terms, we will arrive at

[62] Shein, "Spinoza's Theory of the Attributes."
[63] E1d4.
[64] Shein, "Spinoza's Theory of the Attributes," 505.

a subjectivist or objectivist interpretation of the attributes. Shein summarizes the two interpretative strategies as follows:

> […] the subjective interpretation, traditionally conceived, takes the intellect in question to be the finite one, and 'tanquam' to mean 'as if (but not in fact)'. The definition, according to this type of interpretation, should be understood as saying that attributes are what the finite intellect perceives of substance as if (but not in fact) constituting its essence. The objectivist interpretation, on the other hand, favours rendering 'intellect' as the 'infinite intellect' and 'tanquam' as 'in fact'. Objectivists, therefore, take the definition as stating that attributes are what the infinite intellect perceives of substance as in fact constituting its essence.[65]

That is, the subjectivist understands the distinction between the attributes as a subjective distinction with no ontological oomph, whereas the objectivist conceives of the attributes as being really, i.e., ontologically, distinct.

Shein takes Wolfson's position to be "the paradigmatic example of a subjectivist interpretation."[66] According to Shien, Wolfson's interpretation of the attributes follows the medieval rationalists who were concerned with reconciling "God's absolute simplicity with the divine attributes in such a way that the divine attributes would not imply any multiplicity in God."[67] Shein argues that Wolfson, like his medieval predecessors, maintained "God's absolute simplicity" and located "all the apparent multiplicity in the human or finite mind."[68] That is, for Wolfson the attributes are how God's essence is perceived by a human mind. As Shein explains, "Wolfson claims first that there is an identification of the attributes with the substance, 'for of

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[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Shein "Spinoza's Theory of the Attributes," 506.
[67] Shein "Spinoza's Theory of the Attributes," 507.
[68] *Ibid.*

themselves the attributes have no independent existence at all but are identical with the essence of the substance' (ibid.: 146); and second, that an attribute is 'a description of the manner in which substance, unknowable in itself, manifests itself to the human mind' (ibid.: 145)."[69] Thus, Wolfson conceives of the attributes as ultimately inadequate ways for an finite mind to represent that which is "unknowable in itself."

The virtue of the subjectivist position is that it can easily maintain God's simplicity: God's essence is both singular and simple and the multiplicity introduced by the attributes is explained as an illusion generated by finite minds. However, Shein points out that this explanation is also the source of the main objections levelled against the subjectivist position, some of the most definitive objections having come from Gueroult.[70] Shein identifies four objections that respond to the subjectivist claim that our knowledge of the attributes is, in some sense, illusory. While I will not spend the time reiterating these arguments, they are all concerned, in one way or another, with claiming that Spinoza thinks that we can have adequate knowledge of the attributes.[71] If, as Spinoza appears to claim, that we can have adequate knowledge of God through the attributes, then we cannot claim that knowledge of the attributes is illusory, or inadequate. The objectivists, either implicitly or explicitly, advance their interpretations on the basis of this objection, striving to provide an interpretation of the attributes that allows them to be conceived of adequately. And since true ideas correspond to their objects, if there is a non-illusory distinction between the attributes, there must likewise be a real distinction between the attributes as well.

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[69] *Ibid.* References in this passage are to Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*.
[70] See Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 430; Gueroult, *Spinoza 2*, 86.
[71] Spinoza claims at E2p47 that "the human Mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence," which implies that we can have adequate knowledge of the attributes.

The objectivists, however, face a concern of their own, one which Shein thinks reintroduces the problem of illusory knowledge into the objectivist camp. The bulk of the objectivist's difficulties comes from Spinoza's claims at E2p7. In the demonstration to this proposition, Spinoza appears to claim that there is an identity relation between modes conceived of under different attributes. That is, a mode conceived of under the attribute of thought is "one and the same" thing as a specific mode conceived of under the attribute of extension. Since the objectivist is concerned with treating the distinction between attributes as a real distinction, i.e., an ontological distinction, the claim that modes from different attributes can be identified is problematic. The objectivist, it would appear, must explain how there can both be an identity relation between particular modes while also maintaining a real distinction between the attributes at large.

What hinges on whether we adopt a subjectivist or an objectivist reading of Spinoza's theory of the attributes? Both a whole lot, and very little. If we are concerned with the nitty-gritty details of Spinoza's philosophy of mind, how we explain the relation between the attributes will determine what we take to be the relation between the mind and the body. If we are subjectivists, the mind and the body can be conceived as one and the same thing, now understood under one attribute, now under another. However, if we are objectivists, then the mind and body are ontologically distinct things, although the happenings of the one must map onto, correspond with, or parallel, the happenings of the other.

However, for my purposes, this question can be largely bracketed and placed to the side. This is because the aspects of ideas that I wish to emphasize will be shared by those in both the subjectivist and objectivist camps. The fact that ideas are modes, that they are causally interdependent, that they are expressions of God's power, that their power can be reduced to

their ability to produce effects – all these claims will be accepted regardless of whether you are an objectivist or subjectivist. I am concerned primarily with how Spinoza allows us to conceive of ideas, and thereby how he allows us to reconceptualize our understanding of beliefs. Whether this description of ideas is ontologically factual, or whether it is merely a type of conceptual imperative, makes little difference here. I have engaged in this discussion because my claims regarding Spinoza's principle of plenitude commit me to an objectivist position, and I did not wish to gloss over the interpretative difficulties involved in this position. Engaging with Spinoza's metaphysics necessarily places one in contentious territory, but discussions like the above work to show that the positions that I take are defensible, even if contestable.

What is of importance for my later claims is to recognize that ideas are modes that enter into causal relations with other ideas in the same way that extended bodies enter into causal relations with other bodies. Ideas are ontologically robust beings – they have a certain thickness to them that comes apart from their representational content. To understand an idea, what it is, I must do more than just turn to its representational content, I must understand (by E1a4) its causal history. It makes little difference if, at the end of the day, ideas are separate from bodies or if they are one and the same thing as bodies, so long as we recognize that they are things with causal power that exert force in the world in a way that is analogous to the causal interactions of extended things. This, I take it, is something to which both the subjectivist and objectivist can agree. Further, a subjectivist might deny my argument that the attributes allow Spinoza to advance a principle of plenitude, but they will not deny that modes are expressions of God's power, and thus can be conceptualized in terms of power.

(1.3) Conclusion

In this first chapter, we have covered a fair bit of Spinoza's metaphysics. At the risk of being repetitive, allow me to summarize what our discussion of substance, modes, and attributes teaches us about ideas and beliefs. We saw from our earlier discussion that modes are dependent things, and that they are dependent both on God and other modes. It is the interdependence of modes that needs to be emphasized. Ideas *qua* modes are causally dependent on other modes, such that ideas do not exist without being caused to exist by preceding ideas. Further, all ideas are causally efficacious and must produce their own effects in order to exist. As such, we can understand ideas as embedded in a nexus of causal relations, with some of these ideas being causally interconnected. Ideas are things that exist in Nature, and to explain an idea we must understand its location within a field of causes.

More specifically, we can conceive of ideas as expressions of power that have forceful encounters with other ideas in the same way that bodies bump up against one another. Since ideas are causally interconnected and causally interdependent, it is the power of other ideas that cause a given idea to exist, or that cause it to stop existing. Ideas do not come into existence spontaneously and float around the world like ghosts; ideas are things that have a causal history, a causal explanation for their existence, and an explanation that bottoms out in power relations. When we turn our discussion to how the mind adopts ideas, we must keep this metaphysics in sight, since without it some of my claims will appear counterintuitive. However, the reading of Spinoza's theory of ideas and theory of beliefs follows naturally from a reading of his metaphysics that stresses that ideas *qua* modes are causally dependent, interconnected, and powerful. We shall see that this too is the case with minds, to which we shall turn presently.

Chapter 2: *Res Cogitans et Res Extensa*

(2) Mind and Body

Having traversed the craggy terrain of Spinoza's metaphysics, we can now begin our treatment of the mind. But perhaps we have spent too much time in the mountains and have lost track of our destination – so let us orient ourselves once more. We are, step by step, working our way towards a discussion of beliefs in Spinoza. If beliefs are anything for Spinoza, then they are a type of idea, which we now know is a thinking thing, a *res cogitans*, or a mode expressed under the attribute of thought. So far, we have said more about how modes fit within Spinoza's general philosophical landscape and less about how modes relate to each other. Moreover, little has been said about how we, the humans who presumably form beliefs, relate to ideas. As we shall see, Spinoza conceives of humans as both thinking things and extended things: we have both a mind and a body, and the two relate to one another in a very particular way. To get a full account of what our beliefs are we will need to be able to situate them in the human mind, which will in turn require that we understand how the mind relates to the body.

In this chapter, I argue that Spinoza conceives of the mind as a system analogous to the human body. While Spinoza establishes a strict causal and explanatory barrier between modes from different attributes, it is helpful to conceive of the mind as analogous to the body and to conceptualize interactions between ideas using spatial metaphors. When the necessary caution is exercised, this approach allows us to readily view the mind as a system of causally

interconnected ideas that interacts with external ideas. Just as physical interactions can be conceived in terms of power and force, so too can we conceive of mental interactions. The arguments in this chapter follow from points established in Chapter 1, namely, from the claim that ideas, *qua* modes, are causally embedded, causally efficacious, expressions of power. As we shall see, the mind is a type of complex idea, and so we can apply our earlier observations to the operations of the mind. The final part of this chapter develops Spinoza's *conatus* principle, namely, the claim that all things strive to persevere in existence. I argue that this striving can be conceptualized as homeostatic and expansive: not only do things attempt to maintain homeostasis, they also strive to increase their power. I contend that this characterization of the *conatus* applies equally to the mind and body. Approaching the mind through this treatment of the *conatus* principle allows us to see that the mind's interactions with other ideas can be treated in terms of causation, power and affect.[72] It is on the basis of this characterization of the mind that I will advance my arguments in Chapter 3.

(2.1) The Mind

What is the human mind? First and foremost, the mind is a type of thinking thing, a finite mode expressed under the attribute of thought. As a mode, it is something that has been produced and sustained by antecedent and persistent causes; it is something that expresses God's power of existence; it is causally efficacious, producing effects in other thinking things and being affected in turn; it is finite, at risk of being destroyed by other more powerful modes; it is embedded in a causal nexus which both secures and maintains its being and its power to act; and it is

[72] Spinoza states that affects are "affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (E3d3). To speak of affect is to speak of the changes in empowerment undergone by the body, as well as the mind.

ontologically dependent on God and on other modes. Finally, as a thinking thing, the mind is an idea.

Spinoza claims that the human mind is a complex idea (by E2p15) that takes as its object a particular body, stating that "the first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists."[73] But what is this actually existing thing? Spinoza argues that it is none other than our body, and that therefore the first thing that constitutes the human mind is an idea of the body. Spinoza's argument here is fairly straightforward, and relies heavily on E2A4, where he claims that "we feel [*sentimus*] that a certain body is affected in many ways."[74] Put simply, Spinoza argues that since we sense that our body exists, this means that our mind is the idea of the body. Putting it negatively, Spinoza argues that "if the object of the human Mind were not the Body […] the ideas of the affections of the Body would not be in our Mind."[75] The mind is an idea and the mind senses the body and if the mind were not the idea of the body, then we could not explain why the mind forms sensations.

Despite the fact that the mind is constituted by an idea of the body, Spinoza denies that there is any causal or conceptual interaction between the mind and the body: the mind cannot cause the body to act, nor can the body move the mind to think; we cannot explain mental events in terms of bodily events, nor can we do the reverse. Spinoza explains at E2p6 that "each attribute is conceived through itself without any others (by E1p10)" and that consequently "the

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[73] E2p11.
[74] The verb *sentire* in Latin has a range of meanings that carry with them subtle differences in connotation. *Sentire* can be translated as "to sense," "to perceive," "to feel," "to think," and "to opine." Curley translates *sentire* as "to feel," which both distinguishes the term from Spinoza's *percipere,* which is readily translated as "to perceive," and which carries with it sensorial, experiential connotations. The verb "to sense" is also readily suggested by *sentire*, especially since it is an English descendant of the Latin verb.
[75] E2p13d.

modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, but not of another one." Given that "things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another," it follows that a mode of extension cannot be understood through a mode of thought, or *vice versa*. Further, since we know that "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause," this explanatory barrier also ensures that there can be no mind-body interaction. The mind and body, although intimately unified, nonetheless remain discrete things.[76]

At this point, it is useful to attend to Spinoza's distinction between formal and objective reality. Spinoza thinks that all things have a "formal" reality, and an "objective" reality. As Hübner explains, "the "formal reality" of a thing picks out what this thing is in its intrinsic nature—for example, as an extended thing, or a thinking one. The "objective reality" of a thing refers in turn to what this thing is insofar as it is represented in thought."[77] In other words, the formal reality of a thing picks out that thing as it exists in *Nature*, whereas the objective reality of a thing picks out how that thing is represented in thought. When we consider the formal reality of an idea, we must account for its changes, not by referring to the body, but by referring to other ideas. As Spinoza explains, "the formal being of ideas admits God as a cause only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explained by any other attribute."[78] So while God's idea of my body perfectly represents my body as it exists in nature and this idea changes as my body experiences changes, the cause of the changes in this idea is always other

[76] The precise relation between the mind and the body is a highly contested topic. Many scholars maintain that the mind and body are identical and would thus contest the claim that the mind and body are "discrete". For more on the relation between the mind and body see the following works: Bennett, "Spinoza's Mind-Body Identity;" Daniels, "Two Questions;" Della Rocca, "Identity Theory;" Hübner, "Mind-Body Relations;" Koistinen, "Causality, Intensionality, and Identity;" Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought."
[77] Hübner, "Formal Causes in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 163.
[78] E2p5.

ideas, rather than the body itself. Likewise, although my mind represents the body, and thus the objective reality of the body is contained in the mind, the formal reality of the ideas that comprise my mind can only be explained in terms of other ideas.

Spinoza conceives of thinking things and extended things as distinct conceptual categories, and so we cannot explain the existence of the one through the other. As such, Spinoza's claim that we feel that a body is affected in many ways cannot be thought of in terms of our body causing our mind to have certain ideas. While there cannot be a causal or explanatory connection between the mind and the body, there is nonetheless a unique connection of some kind, since my mind registers – in some way or other – the changes that occur in my body, and it does this in a way that it doesn't for other bodies: while I form an idea of pain when my arm is struck, I don't do so when someone strikes an inert object.[79]

This presents something of a problem for Spinoza, a problem that was previously encountered by Descartes, namely, the problem of how the mind can *sense* the body. Descartes claimed that the soul was "closely joined" to the pineal gland, such that the gland could act as the go-between for mind-body interaction.[80] Thus, although the mind and body were separate substances for Descartes, they were still connected in such a way as to allow for intersubstantial communication. However, as we have just seen, Spinoza rejects any causal or explanatory bridge between mind and body. How then can we explain the fact that I am able to sense the changes in my body? If I stub my toe, or if I eat a scrumptious mango, I certainly sense the changes that these events cause in my body. But if my sensations fall on the side of ideas, then we need to

[79] Supposing that we don't have a sympathetic relation established with this inert object.
[80] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul,* art. 41.

explain why these sensations are not purely illusionary. That is, we need to explain what ensures that the sensations that occur in my mind actually track the changes that occur in my body.

Spinoza claims that "whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived [*percipi*] by the human mind, or there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the mind; that is, if the object of the idea constituting a human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived [*percipi*] by the mind."[81] Spinoza thus maintains that, although the mind and body do not causally interact, the changes in the body are necessarily perceived by the mind.[82] Spinoza is clear that the mind is able to register, not just some, but all the changes that occur in the body, despite the fact that the two cannot causally interact.

Spinoza's argument for this position relies heavily on E2p9c, where he claims that "whatever happens in the singular object of any idea, there is knowledge of it in God, only insofar as he has the idea of the same object." The demonstration to this corollary refers back to E2p7. Spinoza explains in the demonstration to E2p9c that "the order and connection of ideas (by E2p7) is the same as the order and connection of things; therefore, knowledge of what happens in a singular object will be in God only insofar as he has the idea of the same object, q.e.d." My body exists as a certain "singular thing" in nature, and, as such, God has an idea of this "singular thing." Now since God understands everything as it exists in nature, or that the "order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things," God's idea of

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[81] E2p12.

[82] It is important to note that Spinoza uses the term *percipi* rather than *sentiri*. Spinoza's claim that "we neither feel [sentimus] nor perceive [percipimus] any singular things except bodies and modes of thinking" suggests a difference between these two verbs. Spinoza also explains that "the word perception [perceptionis] seems to indicate that the mind is acted on by the object" (E2d3). This qualification indicates that there is a certain amount of passivity in the concept of perception, which might not be shared by sensation. It is curious that Spinoza uses *sentimus* when arguing that our mind is an idea of the body (E2p13) but *percipimus* when claiming that the mind must register any change that occurs in its object (E2p12).

my body perfectly reflects the way my body exists. Consequently, if my body is affected in some way, if I get a sliver in my foot or if I see a scilla in the grass, then God's idea must necessarily reflect this. There can thus be no change in my body that is not accompanied by a corresponding change in God's idea of my body.[83]

What ensures that the human mind perceives the changes in the body is the omniscience possessed by God: "whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind, the knowledge of it is necessarily in God insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind, that is, knowledge of this thing will necessarily be in the mind, *or* the mind will perceive it."[84] The real trick of this demonstration is Spinoza's movement from the omniscience of God to the perceptions of a finite human mind. It is one thing to say that God understands everything perfectly, another to extend this understanding to humans. However, as modes, human minds are expressions of God's power. When the human mind thinks, it does so in virtue of participating in God's thinking, which is to say that the human mind itself is just a finite expression of God's infinite power of thinking. Although we do not share God's omniscience, in virtue of being expressions of God's power, we do become mentally attuned to the workings of our body. Spinoza explains that "when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human mind, *or* insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, has this or that idea."[85] The human mind can be understood as an instance of God's power of thought. My

[83] This is not to say that I will be conscious of each and every change that occurs in my body. God's idea of my body must certainly contain everything change that occurs, such as all the cellular activities that I am unaware of. However, I do think that our mind registers these changes in our body, even if we remain oblivious to the specific details. For instance, I will sense the way my body is affected by a cold, even if I do not perceive how my body is responding on a cellular level.
[84] E2p12d.
[85] E2p11c.

mind is not separate from God's power of thinking and is the same as God's idea of my body. Consequently, if God's idea of my body always accurately reflects the changes undergone by my body, so too must my mind register the changes in my body.

For a more precise treatment of the relation between the mind and the body, it is necessary to address E2p7 and how Spinoza conceives of the relationship between attributes, an issue that I have placed to the side. For our purposes, I wish to draw our attention to the following claims that have revealed themselves in this initial discussion of the mind and its relation to the body. First, the mind is a complex idea, or a mode under the attribute of thought. As such, all the lessons that we have learned about modes are applicable to the mind. The mind must be embedded in a causal nexus, it must be causally efficacious, and it must be an expression of God's power of thought. Second, although the mind perceives and senses the body, we cannot claim that the body moves the mind to think, nor can the mind cause the body to act. If we are to approach the mind as a thing that can be effected and produce effects, we must recognize that it is with other ideas that the mind causally interacts. By emphasizing these points, I wish to shift the reader's thinking about the mind into less familiar territory, that of things, causes, and power. The mental realm is not an ethereal domain where ideas exist as reflections of the actual world; the realm of ideas is a realm of things that engage in causal interactions much the same way that bodies bump up against one another. Approaching the mind in this way will make more plausible the view that Spinoza's theory of belief hinges on affect, causation, and power.

In the next section, we turn our attention to a more detailed account of the body. Given that the mind is the idea of the body, exploring what the body is will tell us more about the mind. But Spinoza's descriptions of the body also provide us with a way to better understand the mind

by allowing us to approach the mind as an analogous thing to the body. Spinoza's comments on how bodies are put together and how bodies exist as composite things is, at times, both more developed and more intuitive than his corresponding comments about the mind.[86] I contend that, so long as we don't lose sight of the causal and explanatory barrier between minds and bodies, it is useful to describe the mind as something analogous to the body. This, I believe, provides a more intuitive way to conceptualize Spinoza's philosophical commitments about the mind and how it interacts with other ideas. With that being said, let us turn to the body.

(2.2) The Body

Having demonstrated that the mind is an idea of the body and that the mind perceives the changes in the body, Spinoza finds it necessary to provide a more robust account of the body itself. Although the second part of the *Ethics* is entitled "concerning the nature and origin of the mind [de natura et origine mentis]," a substantial portion of this part of the *Ethics* is dedicated to explaining what a body is and how it interacts with other bodies. Given that we perceive all the changes that occur in our body, we cannot have a full understanding of our mind's operations without likewise having an understanding of our body. While Spinoza does not think we need to understand all the minutia of our body to understand the mind, there are some general features of bodies that he takes to be of primary importance.

Spinoza distinguishes between simple bodies and composite bodies. Simple bodies, he claims, are "distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness."[87] Thus, simple bodies are uniform and do not differ from one another except in terms of their motion. That is, we know that two simple bodies are not identical if the are moving at different

[86] It is, for example, more intuitive for most readers to conceive of the body as something that strives to continue in being and to avoid being destroyed by other bodies, and less intuitive to make the same claims about the mind.
[87] E2p13a2.

speeds, or perhaps along different trajectories. Composite bodies are composed of simple bodies arranged in a particular way. Composite bodies, such as a human or a horse, are comprised of a "number of bodies"[88] that "lie upon one another" in such a way that they can "communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner."[89]

Suppose that you have two pieces of wood, a hinge, and some screws, and further that all these objects remain separate from one another – the wood is in a closet, the hinge in a drawer, and the screws on your desk. In this condition, these separate objects do not form a composite body: these objects are not conjoined in such a way as to be able to transfer motion to each other in a "fixed manner." Now suppose you collect all of these objects and attach them together, screwing the hinge onto both pieces of wood so as to form a joint. If you were to do this, the object would then form a composite body, given that the objects would now be conjoined in such a way as to communicate motion to one another in a fixed manner. If one of the pieces of wood were struck, it would now communicate motion to the other piece in a predictable way– if the pieces of wood were struck twice in the same manner, they would transfer this motion throughout the composite in the same way each time, barring some degradation to the composite. Composite bodies, such as humans and horses, differ from this wooden joint only in terms of their complexity.

For Spinoza, it is the compositional structure of a body, i.e., the arrangement of its component bodies, that differentiates it from other bodies by ensuring it has a particular "ratio of motion to rest," a particular fixed manner for its parts to communicate motion to each other. If the compositional structure of a complex body is altered such that it ceases to be able to transfer

[88] Either simple or composite.
[89] E2p12sdef.

motion throughout its parts in the same fixed manner, then it ceases to be the thing that it is. Likewise, if the hinged wood is struck with such force as to break the hinge, then the complex body will be destroyed, since it can no longer transfer motion in its distinctive manner.

This "ratio of motion to rest" is more essential to individuating a body than the actual material that composes it. For instance, Spinoza explains that "if, of a body, or of an individual, which is composed of a number of bodies, some are removed, and at the same time as many others of the same nature take their place, the individual will retain its nature, as before, without any change in its form."[90] Thus, although cells in my body are constantly dying and being replaced by new cells, I nonetheless retain the same body so long as the "union of bodies" that comprises me retains its characteristic "ratio of motion and rest." Additionally, Spinoza allows that things can grow or shrink, that they can become "greater or less," and still retain their nature, so long as this ratio is preserved.[91] I can, for example, become stronger or weaker, and retain the same body, so long as the ratio of motion and rest is preserved.

What is important for our purposes is to recognize the impact that the composite nature of the body has on our mind. Most importantly, as a complex composite body, we are capable of being affected by and affecting things in a variety of ways. For instance, the complexity of my nervous system allows for a high degree of sensitivity when it comes to the communication of motion to my body – even the lightest of touches can produce activity, or motion in Spinoza's terms, in my nervous system. Conversely, my body can affect other things in a great many ways. Think about, for example, all the ways the body must be capable of imparting motion just to forge a piece of glass. Given that the human mind perceives all the changes that occur in the

[90] E2p13l4
[91] E2p13l5.

body, and given that changes occur both when we affect others and are affected, Spinoza claims that "the human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways."[92] The more my body can do, the more my mind can do.

Empowering our body is thus an essential process in our mental empowerment – the more the body "can be disposed in a great many ways" the more our minds are capable of perceiving "a great many things." This claim is supported by Spinoza's conception of how we gain knowledge of external bodies. Our minds do not have direct access to external bodies: I cannot, for instance, have immediate knowledge of the table in front of me. Rather, knowledge of external bodies is always mediated through an awareness of our own bodies. When I encounter an external body, I gain awareness of this body by the way that it affects me. Because my mind only changes according to the way my body changes, I could not gain an awareness of an external body if it did not affect my own body in some way. However, since my knowledge of external bodies must be mediated by changes in my own body, "the ideas which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies."[93] Thus, the more sensitive and resilient my body is, the more ways that it can be affected without being destroyed, the more ideas I will be able to form of external bodies. Although the power of my mind rises and falls with the power of my body, and *vice versa*, we must constantly remind ourselves that this is not the result of a causal interaction between the two.

[92] E2p14.
[93] E2p17.

While the state of my body cannot determine the sate of my mind, increased intellectual power will always coincide with certain bodily conditions. Again, although this is not a causal relation for Spinoza, it is nonetheless necessitated by his philosophy of mind. This observation will be of prime importance to our final discussion in Chapter 5. If we are looking to combat harmful ideas, ideas which I shall argue must necessarily be supported by external forces, than doing so must be accompanied by certain bodily changes. Again, it is not that changing the body changes the mind, but rather we cannot have mental changes without corresponding bodily changes. As such, any program that seeks to improve the intellect must also look to improving material conditions. We will return to this point later.

Spinoza also reveals that, just as the body is composite, so too is the mind. Spinoza tells us that "the idea that constitutes the formal being of the human mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas."[94] That is, our mind is not a singular idea, but a composite – a fact that our experience attests to. Spinoza's proof of this fact, however, is based not on experience, but on the composite nature of the body. Spinoza explains that "the idea that constitutes the formal being of the human mind is the idea of the body, which is composed of a great many highly composite individuals," and given that for "each individual composing the body, there is necessarily an idea in God," it follows that "the idea of the human body is composed of these many ideas of the parts composing the human body."[95] The mind, like the body, is composite. The mind is not simple, but complex. While the mind might not have breadth, while it is not extended, it is nonetheless a composite thing composed of many finite modes. This point forces us to change our thinking about how the mind operates. As we shall see, there are restrictions, conceived of in terms of

[94] E2p15.
[95] E2p15d.

ideas excluding their contraries, on what ideas can coexist in the same mind for Spinoza. The mind is a dynamic entity for Spinoza, a complex system held together by a shared reference point, i.e., the body.

Spinoza's comments on the mind-body relation can be extremely informative for the notion of how ideas operate and, consequently, how we form beliefs. We can view Spinoza's comments on the mind-body relation as establishing an analogy between how the body interacts with external bodies, and how the mind interacts with external ideas; thinking through this analogy emphasizes how our mind exists as a thing embedded in a causal nexus. This analogy is not one always explicitly explored by Spinoza, however it is a conceptually fruitful way of developing the consequences of his claims, so long as we make sure not to overstep Spinoza's explanatory and causal barrier.[96]

To explore this analogy, let us ask ourselves what occurs when we form an idea about an external body. There is a temptation to default to a type of naïve empiricism: our body interacts with external bodies such that these external bodies bring about a change in our body, and as a result of this change, we form an idea of the external body. For example, light reflects off of a surface and strikes our eyes in such a way as to produce in our body the image of quack grass, which then allows me to form an idea of this grass. In other words, a change in my body brings about a change in my mind, which seems to be warranted by Spinoza's claim that the two systems undergo changes simultaneously. However, we are unable to give this explanation, since there can be no causal or explanatory story that moves from the mind to the body, or *vice versa*.

[96] However, Spinoza does explicitly acknowledge this approach in the preface to E3, writing "I shall treat the nature and powers of Affects, and the power of the Mind over them, by the same Method by which, in the preceding parts, I treated God and the Mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a Question of lines, planes, and bodies."

As such, while we can explain the changes that occur in the body as resulting from causal interactions with external bodies, we cannot explain the changes of the mind in the same way.

Similarly, we cannot explain the idea of quack grass, for example, by reference to my mind alone, since quack grass is not essential to my mind: you can posit my mind without thereby positing an idea of quack grass, and my mind will remain even if you remove from it the idea of quack grass. Consequently, if my mind has an idea of quack grass, it cannot be said to have caused this idea, since this would imply that the idea of quack grass follows from my mind alone. Ideas of this type, what Spinoza deems ideas of the imagination, cannot be explained either in terms of external bodies, nor in terms of my mind alone. What options remain? Bodies are ruled out, and so is my mind. We are left, therefore, to appeal to external ideas. When my mind forms an idea of quack grass, it does so because of a causal interaction with external ideas. Recall that ideas, for Spinoza, are things that can produce effects and causally interact with other ideas. Moreover, Spinoza maintains that anything that occurs has a causal history that explains its occurrence. As such, for any idea that occurs in my mind, there must be a causal explanation for why it has occurred, and if this causal explanation cannot be given in terms of the mind itself, or in terms of the body, then we must look for it in other ideas.

The importance of this observation is that it demonstrates that just as our body enters into causal interactions with other bodies, so too does our mind come into contact with other ideas. If my mind forms an idea of something that cannot be accounted for by reference to my mind alone,[97] then the origin of this idea must be separate from my mind. The picture of the mind that results is one analogous to the body, i.e., as a thing that comes into causal contact with other things of its kind, and a thing that changes as a result of these causal interactions. To speak

[97] As opposed to ideas that can be accounted for by reference to my mind alone, such as the idea of my body.

metaphorically, ideas bump up against one another, and the shape of our mind is the result of the causal encounters with external ideas. When we ask ourselves why we have the beliefs that we do, we will need to recognize that it is a result of how our mind interacts with the external ideas that push-up against it.[98] Some ideas are resisted and pushed aside, some are readily adopted into our mental landscape, and others overcome our mental resistance. This is not your standard picture of belief, where we adopt or reject ideas based on their epistemic merits but is a theory of belief that views beliefs as things that require a complex causal story to be accounted for, and a theory that looks at our mind as the product of relations of power.

Ideas are, of course, not extended, and so the talk of contact between ideas is metaphorical. However, it provides a way for us to conceive of the causal interactions between ideas in a way that is more readily familiar, since we are more accustomed to thinking of bodies as entering into relations of force, and less accustomed to extending this thinking to ideas. And while the means by which ideas interact with other ideas will be different from how bodies interact with other bodies, I wish to draw our attention to the fact that ideas participate in similar causal interactions to bodies, albeit under the attribute of thought rather than extension. Acknowledging this analogy will help to make some of my later claims more palatable. As I shall argue, we adopt ideas based on how they affect us, rather than being driven inexorably towards truth and adequacy. This approach to ideas, and subsequently to beliefs, is based on emphasizing Spinoza's commitment to the claim that ideas are modes, i.e., expressions of causal power, and that ideas interact with one another in a manner analogous to bodies.

[98] This applies both to adequate and inadequate ideas. Although adequate ideas follow from my mind alone, and can be understood through my mind's essence, we still need to consider my mind's interaction with external ideas. Even adequate ideas in my mind are at risk of being excluded by external inadequate ideas, and so the presence or absence of an adequate idea will also depend on the fortuitous encounters of my mind.

As we saw in the previous sections, to exist is to be both caused and causally efficacious– nothing exists without having been caused to exist and nothing exists without producing further effects. The ideas that compose our mind cannot be static, and they must necessarily interact with each other in virtue of their existence. There is no causally inert idea and no idea can dwell in the mind without producing some effect. As such, the ideas that constitute the mind exist in a complex causal system, with every idea contributing to the overall structure of the mind. This point has significant implications for Spinoza's theory of belief. Supposing that beliefs are ideas, then no belief can be held without it interacting with the other ideas that we have. Some beliefs might have rather small implications, such as the belief that "there is coffee in my cup" – if this belief turns out to be wrong, then it will be easy to adjust. Other beliefs will have more of an impact on our mind, such as the idea that "p = p". If this claim of self-identity turns out to be wrong, then there will widespread consequences on our beliefs. While much more must be said on this point, for now we must keep it in mind that the ideas that constitute the mind must interact, and that the mind is thus a dynamic entity.

(1.3) The *Conatus*

We can extend this analogy between the mind and body further when looking at Spinoza's conatus principle. I argue in this section that Spinoza is committed to the claim that the mind strives to increase its power as much as possible. As has been said, the mind is a thinking thing, a *res cogitans*. As a thing, Spinoza claims that the mind "as far as it is in itself, strives to preserve in being."[99] That is to say, the mind has a *conatus*, a striving, and this *conatus*

[99] E3p6. Translation modified.

is "nothing but the actual essence" of the mind.[100] I argue that the *conatus* has both a homeostatic and an expansive component: a thing will try both to preserve itself as the thing it is and to increase its power. As Justin Steinberg puts it, "the conatus doctrine is supposed to explain not only why we resist opposing forces, but also of why we strive to increase our power of acting."[101] As we shall see, the latter component of the conatus, a thing's striving to increase its power, follows from the homeostatic component, i.e., a thing's striving to maintain itself as the thing it is. Although my aim is to talk about the mind's *conatus,* and in particular its striving to increase its power, it is useful to begin with a discussion of the body, since it offers a more intuitive register for discussing the notion of the *conatus.* Having developed a general description of the *conatus* by way of the body, I will extend this notion of the *conatus* to the mind.

The homeostatic component of the *conatus* is most readily apparent from Spinoza's discussions regarding complex bodies. Recall that complex bodies are composites that are arranged in such a manner that the individual parts are able to communicate motion to each other in a fixed manner. Since all things strive to "preserve in being," physical bodies must strive to preserve their compositional structure, i.e., that structure which produces "their ratio of motion to rest." Hence, Spinoza claims that "those things are good which bring about the proper preservation of the ratio of motion and rest the human body's parts have to one another; on the other hand, those things are evil which bring it about that the parts of the human body have a different proportion of motion and rest to one another."[102] It is in this sense that the *conatus* is a striving for homeostasis, since a thing strives to maintain its structure despite undergoing changes. Thinking of the *conatus* as a striving for homeostasis highlights the fact that striving is

[100] E3d7.
[101] Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, 4.
[102] E4p39.

a dynamic process of maintaining a certain structure in the face of internal and external pressures. To persevere in being is not to continue existing without change, but to undergo changes while maintaining the organizational structure that differentiates you from others.[103]

Further, the notion of homeostasis allows us to provide a common basis for two aspects of our striving – an attractive and a repulsive aspect. All things strive both to join with beneficial forces and to resist harmful force. Complex bodies, for example, strive both to join with other bodies that can help sustain their current ratio of motion to rest, as well as to resist those bodies that threaten to undermine this ratio. The body, Spinoza claims, must "refresh and restore" itself with the moderate use of "pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind."[104] That is, the body must strive to join with things that allow it to sustain its current constitution. Similarly, the body must resist those things that threaten to undermine our constitution. For instance, recoiling from an object that causes pain can be understood as an expression of our *conatus,* insofar as we are striving to avoid bodies that threaten to damage our current constitution. We both strive to join with certain things and to resist other things, and we do so because we strive to maintain a certain homeostasis that requires that we take things in as much as we push them back.[105]

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[103] My reading of the *conatus* is indebted to the position articulated by Viljanen in S*pinoza's Geometry of Power*. Viljanen develops an interpretation that he refers to as "perfect essence realization," which maintains that "each and every singular thing is a powerful entity which, when it encounters opposition, strives to exist and to bring about things derivable from its own definition alone" (Viljanen, *Geometry of Power*, 127-8). Viljanen is concerned with demonstrating that Spinoza's *conatus* involves both a power to resist external harms and a power of self-realization. I have taken from Viljanen's reading the commitment that the *conatus* doctrine has a dual aspect, that it is as much about resistance as it is about active development. Viljanen's reading is somewhat more teleological than my own, since he maintains that singular things are striving to become, or realize, their essence. In contrast, my position is more existential, starting with the assumption that singular things have actualized their essence and are striving to maintain it. This position that the *conatus* involves a realization of the essence is also shared by Don Garret, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument."

[104] E4p45s.

[105] Commentators typically articulate the *conatus* as an individual striving and overlook how important these empowering relations are to the success of our *conatus*. For an excellent essay that pushes back against this

However, not only do we strive to maintain our constitution, we also strive to increase our power. Power, for Spinoza, is our ability to act, our ability to bring "about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of [our] nature alone."[106] The first part of this description of power is causal: to have power is to be able to produce effects. However, not all effects to which we are causally related are signs of our power, as indicated by the second part of the description. Being able to produce certain effects is only indicative of my power if those effects can be understood as resulting from my nature, or essence. As Della Rocca explains, "the power of a thing is simply its ability to bring about changes in itself or in other things, changes that are thus conceived through and explained in terms of that thing."[107] A hammer can be used to drive a nail into a piece of wood, and when the hammer is used in this way, it can be said to be causally efficacious. However, driving a nail into a piece of wood is not a power of the hammer, since such an effect cannot be understood through the hammer alone: in order to explain why a nail was driven into a piece of wood, we have to refer not only to the hammer, but also to the person wielding it, along with all the infinitely many antecedent causes.[108]

Power, then, is not only the ability for a thing to cause effects, but the ability to cause effects which can be understood through that thing's nature. To know which effects can be understood through a thing's nature we must refer back to the homeostatic aspect of our *conatus*. As Spinoza states, the *conatus* is "nothing but the actual essence of a thing"[109] and – given that Spinoza equates a thing's essence with its nature – we can see that something will count as an

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individualistic tendency see Armstrong, "Autonomy and the Relational Individual" and Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason.*

[106] E4d8.

[107] Della Rocca, *Spinoza,* 183.

[108] Although, the hammer's ability to maintain its physical composition when exposed to certain forces, such as when it is struck against a nail, is indicative of the hammer's power.

[109] E3d7.

expression of our power if it can be understood as following from our striving. To put it another way, a singular thing strives to preserve itself as the thing it is, to maintain its constitution, and it has power insofar as it can produce effects that aid this striving. To claim that we strive to increase our power is to claim that we strive to produce effects that help us preserve our being. It is in this sense that our striving has an expansive component – not only do we strive to maintain ourselves as the things we are, but we also want to increase our ability to do so. We strive to expand our power, insofar as this allows us to produce effects that aid in our maintenance and preservation.

Consider the following example. My body requires a consistent nutritional input in order to maintain its composition. Suppose that, by way of a miraculous pill, I was able to significantly increase the number of things that could nutritionally benefit me by allowing me to eat plants that were previously inedible – perhaps the pill allows me to digest the fibrous outer bark of maple tree. Such a pill, on Spinoza's account, would contribute positively to my power, since it increases the number of effects that I can bring about that can be understood through my nature alone. Even if my actual diet doesn't change, even if I do not take advantage of this new digestive ability, I have nonetheless become more powerful. It is for this reason that Spinoza maintains that "whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these

things is harmful."[110] The more ways that my body can affect and be affected, the more powerful I am.

Thus, the striving of anything is both a striving to maintain itself as the thing it is and a striving to increase its power, with the latter following from the former. A singular thing strives to maintain a certain homeostasis and its success depends on its ability to produce effects that contribute to this self-preservation. Consequently, a singular thing also strives to increase its power, since power is nothing more than the ability to produce effects that contribute to its striving. To put it another way, things want to survive as what they are, and so all things look to increase their ability to produce effects that contribute to this survival.

I have begun my discussion of the *conatus* in terms of the body because it allows for a more intuitive departure point for explaining the homeostatic and expansive aspects of the *conatus*. Further, I do not think this departure point risks being misleading, since Spinoza treats minds in a way that is highly analogous to bodies, as we shall see. Let us now look at how the notion of the *conatus* applies to the mind.

(2.4) The Mind's *Conatus*

Recall that, like the body, Spinoza conceives of the mind as a composite thing. More specifically, Spinoza contends that the mind is a complex idea, an idea composed of other ideas. As Spinoza claims, "the idea that constitutes the formal being of the human Mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas."[111] Whereas the body is differentiated by its particular ratio of motion and rest, its particular compositional structure, the mind is differentiated by a

[110] E4P48.
[111] E2p15.

particular constituting idea. More specifically, Spinoza claims that "the first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists."[112] This thing, Spinoza tells us, is nothing other than "the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else."[113] In other words, all minds "feel that a certain body is affected in many ways"[114] and one mind is differentiated from another by reference to the particular body that it forms thoughts of.

It is this constituting idea, the idea of a body that actually exists, that orients the striving of a mind. Given that this idea constitutes the mind, the mind must necessarily strive to preserve this idea, for if this idea is destroyed, so too is the mind. At first blush, it might appear as if the notion of maintaining a certain homeostasis is less apt for discussing the striving of a mind. However, the mind for Spinoza is a complex idea, and as a complex idea the mind can be understood as having an ideational structure analogous to the structure of the human body. That is, just as the human body is a composite that strives to maintain its physical structure, so too is the mind a composite that strives to maintain a certain structure of ideas.

Allow me to undertake a brief description of how I understand this ideational structure of the mind. The mind is a complex idea, but these ideas are not free floating, as it were, but rather occupy specific causal relations to one another. Ideas are linked by two organizational principles in the mind: by the imagination and by reason.[115] The imagination links ideas according to the "order and connection of the affections of the human body," whereas reason orders ideas

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[112] E2p11.
[113] E2p13.
[114] E2a4.
[115] For an extensive and informative discussion of the imagination in Spinoza, see Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings.*

according to the "order and connection of the intellect."[116] That is, the imagination connects ideas to one another according to our chance encounters in the world. Spinoza provides the example of a soldier who, "having seen traces of a horse in the sand, will immediately pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a horseman, and from that to the thought of war, and so on."[117] We pass from "one thought to another" because of the connections that the imagination establishes between ideas. However, these connections neither reflect the logical relation between ideas nor the actual relations between objects in the world, but rather our chance encounters with those objects: "when we imagine, we register the ways in which external things act on us."[118] In contrast, reason is able to establish connections between ideas that reflect the logical relation between ideas, such as when we pass from the definition of a thing to an idea of one of its properties. Imagination and reason thus impart a structure on the mind by way of connecting ideas with one another. As such, not only is the mind a complex idea, but it is a complex idea with a certain structure among its constitutive ideas. As a result of this order among ideas, it is impossible to affect one idea without thereby affecting ideas to which it is connected. That is, if *x* and *y* are linked in my mind, such that the idea of the one necessarily involves the idea of the other (whether this be through the imagination or through reason) then excluding the one idea would result in the exclusion of the other. This notion of exclusion will be further developed in Chapter 4.

Whereas the body's homeostatic striving takes the form of maintaining a certain ratio of motion to rest, the mind's striving takes the form of maintaining the complex ideational structure that is its constituting idea. The mind strives to affirm ideas that contribute positively to this

[116] E2p18s.
[117] E2p18s.
[118] Susan James, *Philosophical Reasoning*, 73.

structure and exclude ideas that risk compromising this structure. The mind's *conatus* is not simply a striving to constantly affirm the simple idea that my body exists, but rather a striving to maintain the complex idea of my body's actual existence. That is, my mind strives not only to think about my body, but to think about it in a particular way. In the Ethics, Spinoza discusses the case of a Spanish poet who suffered from extensive memory loss, to the extant that he no longer recalled having authored his poems. Spinoza concluded from this example that the poet had, in a sense, died, even though his body was still functioning. This "living death" of the Spanish poet is not the result of the disappearance of his body but rather because the idea of this body was sufficiently changed as to destroy its structure.[119] If the striving of the mind were simply to affirm that my body exists, but not to affirm that it exists in any particular way, then we would be hard pressed to explain why Spinoza insists that the Spanish poet has changed from one thing to another. It is not enough that we strive to maintain an idea of our body, but an idea that has a specific type of structure, a specific order and connection among ideas. The ideas that comprise this complex idea are linked to one another in such a way as to create a certain ideational structure and our striving manifests itself as an attempt to maintain this structure.

Further, just as the body can undergo changes while maintaining its structure, so too can the mind undergo changes – admit of new ideas, exclude old ideas, establish new connections, destroy old connections – while still maintaining itself. And like the striving of the body, the mind's homeostatic striving is both attractive and repulsive: the mind strives to adopt ideas that contribute positively to its current ideational structure and tries to resist ideas that compromise this structure.

[119] E4p39s. The term "living death" is taken from Montag *Bodies, Masses, Power.*

The mind, Spinoza claims, strives to affirm certain ideas of the body while also striving to exclude other ideas. For Spinoza, which ideas aid the mind's *conatus* and which hinder it is determined by how these ideas represent the current power of the body. The mind strives to "imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting,"[120] and strives to exclude ideas that force it to imagine "those things that restrain or diminish the body's power of acting."[121] Just as the body attempts to join with things that maintain its structure, so too does the mind strive to incorporate ideas that positively contribute to its idea of the body, i.e., those ideas that represent the body as more powerful. And just as the body attempts to resist bodies that undermine its structure, so too does the mind strive to resist ideas that risk diminishing its structure by excluding ideas that represent the body as less powerful.

Consider the following example. The idea of my body is complex and will contain, among other things, ideas about my body's physical capabilities. I affirm, for instance, that my body is capable of performing certain exercises, such as being able to do a set of pull-ups. Let us call the idea that I can do *n* pull-ups idea *p*. Insofar as *p* is a part of my mind's ideational structure, that is, insofar as it is contained in the complex idea of my body, my mind will strive as far as it can to maintain *p*. As such, my mind will strive to adopt ideas that promote *p* and exclude those ideas that undermine *p*. If I encounter the idea that I can do *n*+1 pull-ups, my mind will seek to adopt this idea; if, on the other hand, I encounter an idea antithetical to *p*, such as the idea that I cannot do *n* pull-ups, the mind will strive to exclude this idea as far as possible. Further, given that the mind has a certain ideational structure that connects composite ideas to one another, an idea can promote or diminish *p* indirectly. Suppose I have erroneously formed

[120] E3p12.
[121] E3p13.

the idea that people wearing blue shirts lack physical stamina. If this is the case, my mind will strive to exclude the idea of my wearing a blue shirt, insofar as this risks indirectly undermining *p* and thus risks impinging upon my mind's ideational structure.

Just as the body strives to increase its power to act, so too does the mind strive to increase its power to think. Spinoza argues that "the idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking"[122] and, as such, the mind "as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body's power of acting."[123] That is, not only does the mind strive to maintain the complex idea of its body, it also strives to form ideas that affirm a greater power of acting for the body and exclude ideas that affirm a decrease in the body's power.

The reason that Spinoza connects the power of the mind to the power of the body is because, as we have seen, the mind is the idea of the body and perceives all the changes that occur in the body. As has been discussed in the previous section, anything that increases the body's power of acting, will necessarily correspond to an increase in the mind's power of thinking. Given that the mind is fundamentally constituted by the idea of the body, Spinoza takes it to be the case that the mind will necessarily form new ideas, or perceptions, when the body is affected. As Spinoza claims, "whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human Mind must be perceived by the human Mind, or there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the Mind; i.e., if the object of the idea constituting a human Mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the Mind."[124] Consequently, the more the body is able to be affected by external objects while maintaining its *conatus*, i.e., the more powerful the body is,

[122] E3p11.
[123] E3p12.
[124] E2p12.

the more ideas the mind will be able to form. The mind is able to form more ideas, to perceive more things, the more its body is able to be affected while maintaining its constitution, or, as Spinoza puts it, "the human Mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways."[125] The power of the mind, its ability to perceive a "great many things," rises and falls with the power of the body. The mind thus strives to form ideas that affirm a greater power of the body, since this is coextensive with affirming its own power of thought.

Given that the mind is a complex idea, one with a particular structure formed by the interconnection between its composite ideas, whether an idea positively contributes to the power of the mind will depend on how it interacts with this structure as a whole. The mind comprises an ecosystem and the introduction of a new element will have effects not only on the immediate vicinity but also on the larger environment.[126] As such, determining whether an idea is empowering for the mind does not depend simply on the content of that idea, but has to do with how that idea will interact with the other ideas that already comprise the mind. An idea is not empowering in and of itself but is empowering based on how it interacts with the ideational structure of a given mind.

For instance, the idea of placing a particular washbasin on one's head might be empowering to Don Quixote, if he also has the idea that this washbasin is actually an enchanted helmet, and yet disempowering to Sancho, if he also has the idea that the washbasin is no more than just that, a washbasin. Which ideas increase the mind's power, or which ideas affirm an

[125] E2p14.
[126] See Sharp, *Politics of Renaturalization*, Ch. 2.

increase in the power of our body, depend on the mind's current constitution. An idea is empowering depending on how it relates to our mind's current condition.

To put it another way, since different bodies have different constitutions what is empowering to one person might be disempowering to another. For example, as Spinoza explains in the preface to part four, "music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf." As such, we cannot make the general claim that to affirm *x* of the body is to affirm something that increases its power, since what might empower one body can disempower another. Likewise, since the mind increases its power by adopting ideas that affirm an increase in the body's power to act, we cannot make the general claim that idea *y* is necessarily empowering. The question arises then as to how the mind can determine which ideas to adopt and which to reject. If an idea is not in itself empowering or disempowering, how can a given mind determine whether a particular idea contributes to its power?

The answer arrives with Spinoza's definition of the affects. According to Spinoza, affects are "affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections."[127] When the body's power is increased, we experience joy, and when it is decreased, we experienced sadness.[128] The experiences of joy and sadness are thus indicative of changes in our power. As such, joy and sadness allow the mind to recognize when an idea positively contributes to its power. Given that ideas are not intrinsically empowering or disempowering, the mind must rely on the affects of joy and sadness to indicate whether a given idea is beneficial or detrimental.

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[127] E3d3
[128] E3defaff.

Increasing the power of the mind, however, is not regarded by Spinoza as a matter of simply seeking to maximize your present pleasure. While it is important to seek after joy, some joys can be more advantageous than others in the long run. For example, Spinoza warns us that "Pleasure can be excessive and evil, whereas Pain can be good insofar as the Pleasure, or Joy, is evil."[129] Spinoza's reasoning is that certain excessive pleasures can excessively affect one part of the Body, such that they prevent "the Body from being capable of being affected in a great many ways."[130] Frequent, high-intensity exercise, for example, might be pleasurable for parts of the body, but can prevent your body from experiencing later joys, such as if you end up injuring yourself from overstraining your muscles. Certain joys can be excessive and can become harmful to your overall striving. As such, although we ought to strive to maximize our joy, insofar as this is indicative of maximizing our power, we need to ensure that this striving isn't short-sighted.

At this point in the discussion, we have gained a fairly robust sense of what an idea is and what the mind is. Ideas are *thinking things*, or modes expressed under the attribute of thought. As modes, they are causally and conceptually dependent on other things. My idea of my body, for instance, is conceptually dependent on my idea of substance, since I cannot conceive of a mode without this idea involving the idea of substance. Further, ideas, as finite modes, are causally dependent on other ideas. Since nothing can exist or produce effects without being determined to do so by some antecedent cause, all the ideas that I have and all the effects that they produce are dependent on their causal relations with other modes. Ideas, no less than fruit flies, are capable of spontaneous generation. Further, the ideas which I can call my own are all intimately connected

[129] E4p43.
[130] E4p33d.

in the causal microcosm that is my mind. Since my mind is primarily constituted by the idea of my body, all my ideas become connected to this constituting idea.

In this chapter, I established that there is a causal and explanatory barrier between the mind and the body. I argue that, so long as we attend to this barrier, it is useful to think about the mind as a system analogous to the body. For instance, just as the body undergoes changes by being affected by external bodies, so too does the mind undergo changes by being affected by external ideas. Moreover, I argue that the mind, like the body, has a striving that is both homeostatic and expansive: the mind both attempts to maintain its ideational structure, as well as to increase its power. Since joy is indicative of empowerment for Spinoza, increasing our power corresponds with seeking after joy. However, we must keep in mind that certain joys are excessive, and so our striving must look to our overall or long-term joy, rather than always attending to immediate joys. In the following chapter, we shall take all the pieces that we have developed so far and tackle the crux of this work: the argument that we adopt ideas based on how they affect us rather than based on their epistemic merits.

Chapter 3: Affective Theory of Ideas

(3) Spinoza's Affective Theory of Ideas

Having explained what ideas are, how they relate to the mind and to one another, we can now discuss what I call Spinoza's affective theory of ideas. This theory promotes a reevaluation of Spinoza's epistemology, one that pushes against the scholarly consensus in the secondary literature on Spinoza. It is most often claimed that, according to Spinoza, ideas are adopted or maintained on the basis of their epistemic merits, i.e., that the mind seeks to form true or adequate ideas. While a certain number of inadequate ideas might be unavoidable for finite minds, it is assumed that the striving of the mind is oriented towards adequate ideas and knowledge. For instance, Garrett states that

> the mind's highest good is knowledge, according to Spinoza, because the mind's own good must be understood as that which it actively strives for through its own nature - that is, what it tends to produce or acquire insofar as it is genuinely active. But it is genuinely active only insofar as it is an adequate cause of its thoughts, and it is the adequate cause of its thoughts only when it is deriving adequate knowledge from other adequate knowledge through its own rational power.[131]

[131] Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," 276. Renz makes a similar claiming, arguing that ""as far as the discussion of our epistemic goals is concerned […] man's striving for happiness is, rationally considered, targeting the same end as his striving for true knowledge and consciousness" (Renz, "Spinoza's Epistemology," 142). See also Nadler, "Spinoza Moral Philosophy," in which Nadler connects human striving to virtue and living according to the guidance of reason. It should be noted that the claim that humans strive after truth, adequacy, or knowledge is often most explicitly developed in essays on Spinoza's moral psychology or ethics. Much of the work done in Spinoza's epistemology looks at Spinoza's theory of knowledge and various issues that arise within this epistemology, such as the distinction between the three types of knowledge or what constitutes an adequate idea. That the mind strives after truth and adequacy, I contend, is an implicit assumption in work on Spinoza's epistemology that finds explicit expression in work on Spinoza's moral philosophy.

Most Spinozists would encounter claims like the above and regard them as stating an obvious truth about Spinoza's philosophical position. While I agree that reason, adequacy, and knowledge play an important role in Spinoza's philosophy, I disagree that the mind strives for "adequate knowledge." Instead, I contend that, according to Spinoza, the mind strives after empowerment and this striving does not always amount to a striving after truth, adequacy, or knowledge. This is because inadequate ideas can be empowering and are thus appropriate targets for the mind's striving, and, moreover, inadequate ideas might be preferable to their inadequate ideas in certain contexts. I contend that we can interpret Spinoza's epistemology as privileging affectivity and empowerment over truth, adequacy, and knowledge. The implications of this claim are extensive, and, as we shall see, this theory will have a substantial impact on how we conceive of beliefs.

I argue in this chapter that Spinoza maintains an affective theory of ideas – what I will refer to from here on as the ATI. According to Spinoza, ideas affect us, causing our mind's power to increase or diminish, and likewise causing us to experience either joy or sadness. Since the mind strives as far as it can to increase its power, we adopt ideas on the basis of how they affect us rather than on the basis of their adequacy or veracity. Although it is possible that adequate ideas could always be the most empowering ideas, and so striving after empowerment could be one and the same thing as striving after adequate ideas, I argue that this is not that case, i.e., that inadequate ideas are sometimes to be preferred over adequate ideas from the perspective of our mind's empowerment. This is not to say that truth, adequacy, and reason are removed from the picture entirely; they are simply removed from their position of pre-eminence. Truth, adequacy, and reason might generally remain more advantageous than their counterparts –

falsity, inadequacy, and the imagination – yet they are neither the mechanisms that drive the mind nor are they always to be preferred over their inadequate counterparts.

The ATI thus maintains (1) that the mind adopts ideas on the basis of how those ideas affect it, seeking to adopt and maintain empowering ideas, and (2) that mental empowerment cannot simply be equated with the adoption of adequate or true ideas. It is the latter of these two claims that is the more controversial, and although this claim is likely to be contested, it is worth defending. If there is indeed a gap between empowerment and adequate ideas, for Spinoza, then we cannot read Spinoza as a straightforward rationalist; and if we maintain this gap, then we are forced to conceive of mental empowerment as more expansive than truth, adequacy, and knowledge. This second claim opens the possibility that there are ways to empower the mind that extend beyond the acquisition of true propositions. Further, this claim allows us to explain why ideas or beliefs can be undesirable or bad, without reducing the badness of a belief to its inadequacy or falsity. This will be of particular importance in Chapter 5, where I explore the ramifications of Spinoza's theory of belief. To a large extent, it is inclusion of this second claim that allows me to advance a novel reading of Spinoza, one that promotes a revaluation of central concepts and problematizes interpretative norms. By placing a wedge between reason and empowerment, we can emphasize different dimensions of Spinoza's thought and potentially open new ways of approaching epistemological, moral, and political issues in philosophy.

In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate that Spinoza is committed to the ATI, while the second part expands on the ATI by considering two attractive objections. The first objection focuses on the descriptive aspect of the ATI, while the second focuses on its normative component. On the descriptive side, the objection maintains that the ATI is incomplete: while we may strive to adopt ideas based on how they affect us, we also necessarily strive to adopt true or

adequate ideas, since it is true or adequate ideas that are most empowering. This objection maintains that the mind's striving is oriented towards truth, adequacy, and knowledge, and that to describe the mind as striving exclusively towards empowerment is either misleading or only partially correct. On the normative side, the objection maintains that we ought to adopt ideas based on their truth or adequacy, rather than because they cause us joy. Even if an inadequate idea is joyful, it would be an error to adopt it in preference to an adequate idea.

I respond to these two objections in the following way. First, I argue that we strive for adequate ideas only when we strive on the basis of reason. But since Spinoza maintains that we strive from both adequate and inadequate ideas, it is not the case that we always strive for adequate ideas. Following this, I contend that even when we do strive from reason our success and motivation is affectively underpinned. That is, we only adopt adequate ideas when they are more joyful than inadequate competitors, and our striving for adequate ideas is itself motivated by the fact that adequate ideas are joyful. In response to the second objection, I deny that adequate ideas are always to be preferred to inadequate ideas, since inadequate ideas can be empowering and are occasionally more empowering than their adequate counterparts. That is, I deny that adequacy is a reliable indicator of which ideas are good for our mental striving.

The ATI contends that people adopt ideas on the basis of how those ideas affect them: if accepting a certain idea causes *x* joy, then *x* will strive to adopt that idea. As a description of our mental processes, the ATI aims to accurately describe the mechanisms underpinning our adoption of (or our resistance to) ideas. If the ATI gets our actual practices wrong, then it has failed as a descriptive account. If, for instance, people adopt ideas because they are true, or because they have been transmitted by a trusted source, then the ATI would be wrong as a descriptive theory. However, I contend that, for Spinoza, it is joy, or empowerment, that

determines the striving of a mind relative to some idea, rather than truth or adequacy. While it might hold as a matter of fact that we generally regard as true those ideas which we adopt, what is of importance is whether or not it is the truth of those ideas that determines their adoption.[132] The ATI maintains that the truth does not play this role, since ideas are adopted or rejected on the basis of joy or sadness.

As a normative theory, the ATI tells us something about what we ought to do as thinking things. That is, the ATI tells us that we ought to adopt ideas based on how they affect us and that when we do so we are acting properly as thinking things. I suspect that the counterintuitiveness of this theory has much to do with its normative component. While many might accept that, as a matter of fact, we do adopt ideas based on how they affect us, it can nonetheless be maintained that this is a flaw in our practices as thinking things and that we ought to strive to adopt ideas based on some other standard, such as truth or adequacy. Consider the example of Sancho. Even if we accept that Sancho adopts the idea that 'this object is an enchanted helmet' because it causes him joy, we might still insist that he has committed an error for proceeding in this manner. We might contend that Sancho ought to use his judgment and only assent to clear and distinct ideas, rather than adopting ideas because they cause him joy.[133] In contrast, the ATI maintains that Sancho is not at fault for adopting an idea because of its joy, and that all thinking things should proceed thusly. The exact nature of this epistemic norm will be discussed more fully in what follows.

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[132] I contend that we are predisposed to regard our own ideas as true, regardless of what motivated us to adopt those ideas. More will be said about this in Chapter 4.

[133] This would be the Cartesian position. Descartes maintains that "we fall into error only when we make judgments about things which we have not sufficiently perceived" and that "making a judgment requires not only the intellect but also the will" (Descartes 1984, 204). Given that our will is absolutely free for Descartes, error only ever arises from a misuse of our will. Descartes maintains that we ought to only assent to clear and distinct ideas – if we do otherwise, then we are freely committing ourselves to error and are thus acting poorly as thinkers.

It should be noted that it is not the aim of this chapter to provide a full account of Spinoza's theory. While I aim to demonstrate that Spinoza holds such a theory, I will not be concerned here with discussing all the nuts and bolts of this position. We might ask, for instance, why a particular idea affects us as joyful or saddening; or what role our affective constitution has in determining the affective valence of an idea; or how the mind's affective constitution is determined by the ideas that comprise it. While these questions are important for fleshing out the details of Spinoza's ATI, they are somewhat peripheral to the task at hand. This chapter will establish that Spinoza holds such a theory, while leaving it to subsequent chapters to develop the details of this theory.

(3.1) Truth and Adequacy

Before making the claim that the mind adopts ideas based on how they affect the mind, rather than based on their truth or adequacy, we must understand what is meant by an adequate idea and how it relates to the more familiar concept of truth. As modes of thought, ideas are all part of the same genus, however there are different species of thought – differentiated on the basis of their representational content. Ideas, Spinoza claims, can either be adequate or inadequate.

To understand the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas it is useful to explicate it in contrast to closely related concepts, i.e., truth and falsity. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza defines truth as "an affirmation (or denial) which one makes concerning a thing and which agrees with the thing itself," whereas "falsity is an affirmation (or denial) about a thing

which does not agree with the thing itself."[134] Spinoza treats truth and falsity as extrinsic properties of an idea, that is, as properties that have to do with the idea's relation to something external. An idea is true insofar as it accurately represents its object, and false insofar as it inaccurately represents its object. As Radner explains, "the truth or falsity of ideas has to do […] with whether or not they represent things as they are in themselves. A true idea of X is one which represents X as it is in itself. A false idea of X is one which represents X but not as it is in itself."[135] For example, suppose I were to form an idea of my coffee mug. The idea of my mug will represent the mug as having certain properties, such as being teal, having a handle, having a volume of roughly 250 ml, *etc.* If the mug has these properties (independent of my representation of the mug) then I can be said to have a true idea of that mug. But insofar as I inaccurately represent the mug, perhaps I overestimate the amount of liquid it can hold, then I have a false idea.[136]

Although truth and falsity are extrinsic properties of an idea, this should not suggest that recognizing an idea as true requires comparing that idea with its object. As Spinoza claims, "truth is its own standard,"[137] meaning that true ideas can be recognized as such without having to evaluate them in relation to something external. According to Spinoza, "no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the highest certainty. For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way."[138] Although the truth of an

[134] *KV,* G| I/78/19-22. At E1a6 Spinoza claims "a true idea must agree with its object," which is in keeping with the definition of truth and falsity provided in the Short Treatise.
[135] Radner, "Spinoza's Theory of Ideas," 352.
[136] For a useful discussion about how an idea can agree with its object see Parkinson, "Aspects of Spinoza's Theory of Truth."
[137] E2p42s.
[138] *Ibid.*

idea is dependent on how it stands in relation to its object, if an idea is true then this truth is immediately recognizable and does not require going beyond the idea to be known.

While Spinoza uses truth and falsity to describe an extrinsic property of an idea (i.e., its relation to the object it represents), adequacy and inadequacy are intended to denote an intrinsic property of an idea. Spinoza defines an adequate idea as "an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, *or* intrinsic denominations of a true idea."[139] Adequacy and inadequacy thus provide Spinoza with a means of describing the veracity of an idea without having to refer to anything beyond the idea itself. Thus, the difference between the adequacy of an idea and its truth has to do with whether we attend only to the idea itself, or if we attend to the idea in relation to its object.[140] It follows from this that a true idea is always adequate and *vice versa*. As Renz puts it, "Spinoza draws a parallel between "adequate" and "true" ideas, stating that, in principle, truth and adequacy are coextensive terms. All and only adequate ideas are true ideas."[141] Yet, there is a "functional difference" between the two terms, since truth and adequacy pick-out different properties of an idea, one extrinsic and the other intrinsic.[142]

It is worth taking a moment to mention how Spinoza's notion of truth compares with our contemporary use of the term. Truth, for Spinoza, refers to a property of an idea, specifically, how that idea represents its object. We can thus speak of true or false ideas, but it is less clear if Spinoza's notion of truth is applicable to statements, claims, or propositions. This is somewhat at

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[139] E2d4.
[140] As Spinoza states in a letter to Tschirnhaus, "I recognize no other difference between a true idea and an adequate one, except that the term "true" concerns only the agreement of the idea with its object, whereas the term "adequate" concerns the nature of the idea in itself. So really there's no difference between a true idea and an adequate one except for this extrinsic relation" (*Epist.* 60; G IV/270/15-20).
[141] Renz, "Spinoza's Epistemology," 151.
[142] *Ibid.*

odds with contemporary treatments of truth, which typically treat truth as a property of propositions or a statement's propositional content. We are, for example, accustomed to claiming that the statement "all bachelors are unmarried men" is true. Moreover, most of us would assume that such a claim is true regardless of who is making the statement. My niece might utter the phrase without understanding its import or being able to explain if or why it is a true claim, yet most assume that the statement retains its truth regardless of who utters it.

For Spinoza, however, it is ideas that are true or false, rather than statements or propositions, and it is the way the idea represents its object that determines its truth value. If my niece, completely ignorant of the meaning of the term 'bachelor', imagines that it refers to people who work at the local pool, then she cannot be said to have a true idea when she states that "all bachelors are unmarried men". This is because the object of my niece's idea, namely, the local pool employees, are not accurately represented as being exclusively unmarried men. Again, truth represents the property of an idea, rather than the property of a proposition, and depends on that idea's representational content. Since two people with varying imaginations can form two ideas of the same statement, we cannot claim that a statement itself is true. When we do make these sorts of claims, we are perhaps assuming that our interlocutors understand the statement in the same way as we do.

The difficulty in understanding Spinoza's notion of adequacy is in understanding what Spinoza means by the "intrinsic denominations of a true idea." What we need to determine is what properties of an idea – properties that relate to nothing outside of the idea – make it adequate. It is useful to begin with Spinoza's comments on inadequate ideas. An important passage for understanding inadequate ideas is proposition 35 of *Ethics* II, where Spinoza claims that "falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused

ideas involve."[143] There are two important points that we can learn from this proposition. First, just as a true idea is always adequate, so too does a false idea always involve some inadequacy. As such, understanding what characterizes false ideas will help us to determine features of inadequacy. To understand what makes an idea inadequate, we can examine the intrinsic properties of a false idea, knowing that this false idea must involve some inadequacy. Second, this passage suggests that inadequate ideas are equivalent to "mutilated and confused" ideas, and so understanding what makes an idea "mutilated and confused" should help reveal what makes an idea inadequate.

Spinoza claims that "there is nothing positive in ideas that constitutes the form of falsity."[144] By this Spinoza means that it is not in virtue of the representational content of an idea that it is false, but because of some lack of content. Spinoza makes this clear in his comment on error: "I should like you to note that the imaginations of the Mind, considered in themselves contain no error, *or* that the Mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack an idea that excludes the existence of those things that it imagines to be present to it."[145] Spinoza clarifies this conception of falsity and error by introducing the example of the sun. Spinoza claims that when we look at the sun "we imagine it is about 200 feet away from us."[146] This is a false idea, since our representation of the distance between our body and the sun does not agree with the actual distance. However, what makes the idea false is not in how we represent the idea to ourselves, but in the fact that we lack knowledge which would exclude

[143] E2p35.
[144] E2p35d.
[145] E2p17s.
[146] E2p35s.

us from concluding that the sun was actually 200 feet away; we err because "we are ignorant of [the sun's] true distance and of the cause of this imagining."[147]

Spinoza's point is that even if we were to come to know the actual distance of the sun, we would "nevertheless imagine it as near."[148] That is, how the sun appears to us – the phenomenological experience of seeing the sun – would remain the same even if we knew the true distance of the sun; what changes is that we no longer conclude the distance of the sun on the basis of how the sun appears to us. In other words, true knowledge of the sun's distance excludes the idea that the appearance of the sun is a good indication of its actual distance. What distinguishes the true and the false idea of the sun is that the false idea involves a "privation of knowledge" – i.e., the actual distance of the sun – which allows us to affirm something inaccurate of the sun, i.e., that it is 200 feet away.[149]

Given the connection between falsity and inadequacy, we can conclude from the above reflections that inadequate ideas must also involve some "privation of knowledge." However, in the case of falsity the "privation of knowledge" is established by an incongruence between the idea and the object of that idea. The idea is false insofar as a "privation of knowledge" causes the idea to represent its object inaccurately, such as when the sun is represented as 200 feet away. In contrast, while an inadequate idea will still involve some "privation of knowledge," its inadequacy pertains to its intrinsic constitution rather than being based on how the idea relates to

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[147] E2p35s.
[148] *Ibid.*
[149] There are many ways in which we can elaborate on this "privation of knowledge." For instance, my idea of *x* could be false (a) if it lacked content that would exclude the possibility of my affirming (or denying) something inaccurate of *x*, (b) if it lacked content that ought properly to be attributed to *x*, or (c) if it lacked content that would allow me to properly organize my representation of *x*.

its object. An inadequate idea is inadequate because it is internally constituted in such a way that makes it "mutilated and confused."

To get a better understanding of what makes an idea "mutilated and confused" we can turn to an example of an inadequate idea provided by Spinoza. Spinoza claims that "the ideas of the affections of the human Body, insofar as they are related only to the human Mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused."[150] Spinoza argues that the "affections of the human Body involve the nature of external bodies as much as that of the human Body."[151] That is, since our knowledge of external bodies is mediated through the perception of the affections of our body, this knowledge of external bodies must involve knowledge of our body. However, Spinoza claims that we have an incomplete knowledge of our own body, since we are aware only of the effects of the smaller bodies that compose us rather than having knowledge of these bodies directly. As Spinoza explains, "the parts composing the human body pertain to the essence of the body itself only insofar as they communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed manner […] and not insofar as they are considered as individuals, without relation to the human body."[152] The mind perceives the body through its affections and we are aware of the parts that compose our bodies only insofar as they contribute to the overall affective state of my body. I do not, for instance, have direct knowledge of the cells of my body, but I perceive them insofar as they communicate their motions to the body as a whole. But since we only have this incomplete knowledge of the body, we can only ever have an inadequate idea of external bodies. While we necessarily form ideas of the affections of our body,[153] these ideas are "like conclusions without

[150] E2p28.
[151] E2p28d.
[152] E2p24d.
[153] E2p12.

premises."[154] That is, while we form an idea of what change has occurred in our body, we remain ignorant of precisely how this change came about and precisely how this change has affected our body. I might register pain when my finger is held too long above a candle, but I do not immediately perceive the constitution of the fire nor the cellular damage that has occurred.

To put it another way, since we only form ideas of external objects through how those objects affect our body, without a precise understanding of how our body registers the interactions of external bodies, we cannot form accurate ideas of those bodies. Consider the optical illusion in which a stick appears to be bent in water. If I form an immediate idea of this stick without understanding how my body is being affected by the refraction of the light, then I might mistakenly conclude that the stick itself is bent. But if I am able to supplement my perception of the stick with an understanding of optics, then I will be able to conclude that the stick appears to be bent only because of how the light interacts with the surface of the water. We must understand how the body works, such as how it forms images of external bodies through the perception of reflected light, in order to form adequate ideas of things outside ourselves. A similar example could be given for any of the ways that we interact with the external world, such as how we perceive the distance of the sun, demonstrating that self-knowledge is a prerequisite for external knowledge. We might add that this self-knowledge, i.e., an understanding of the body's mechanisms, will also require a general understanding of the attributes. That is, to understand how my body works as a complex mechanism, I must have an understanding of how bodies generally interact with one another. If my body is a physical mechanism, then I must understand general physical laws and then apply them to my body's functioning.

[154] E2p28d.

What I wish to emphasize from the above example is that inadequate ideas are like "conclusions without premises." What makes an idea inadequate is that it fails to contain the grounds of its own validation. An idea can be like a "conclusion without premises" insofar as the content of the idea can fail to affirm its own validity. For instance, suppose I form an idea of gasoline and affirm that gasoline is highly combustible. If my idea of gasoline does not include an understanding of what makes it highly combustible – something that would be provided by an understanding of chemistry together with an understanding of the chemical composition of gasoline – then my idea would remain inadequate. Inadequacy is an intrinsic property of an idea because it pertains to the completeness of the idea itself. Furthermore, since "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause" we can conclude with Mark that "to show that an idea is inadequate, it is sufficient to show that it does not include ideas of all the things to which its object is causally related."[155] That is, my idea of an object will remain inadequate so long as it is incomplete, or lacks the basis of its own validation, by virtue of failing to involve knowledge of that object's causal dependencies.[156]

Conversely, for an idea to be adequate is for that idea to exhibit what Mark calls "the logical feature of self-completeness."[157] That is, an adequate idea is like a conclusion together with its premises: it is complete insofar as it contains within itself the grounds of its own validation. It is for this reason that Spinoza treats an adequate idea of *x* as identical to God's idea

[155] Mark, "Truth and Adequacy," 19.
[156] This is another instance where Spinoza's sense of truth comes apart from common usage. Most people would assume that I have a true idea if I maintain that "gasoline is combustible." Afterall, if I hold a flame to gasoline, it will ignite. But if true ideas are coextensive with adequate ideas, and I can have an inadequate idea if it is partial or confused, then my claim that "gasoline is combustible" might qualify as a false idea, if, for instance, I do not understand why it is combustible.
[157] Mark, "Truth and Adequacy," 19-20.

of *x*,[158] for God cannot fail to understand things completely.[159] God does not conceive of objects as if they existed in isolation, but rather understands an object in terms of its embeddedness and interconnectedness with the rest of Nature. Consequently, having an idea of an object that is the same as God's idea requires that we conceive "that object as it stands in the self-sustaining context of Nature."[160] That is, an adequate idea of *x* represents *x* in its causal relations to the rest of Nature, which is equivalent to God's idea of *x*.[161]

Moreover, this explains why Spinoza discusses inadequate ideas in terms of God having to form an idea alongside the idea of the human mind. Take, for example, Spinoza's claim in the corollary to E2p11. Here Spinoza writes "when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human mind, then we say that the human mind perceives the thing only partially, or inadequately." Consider once more the example of the sun. When I perceive the sun as 200 feet away, I form an inadequate idea. However, God is capable of forming an idea of this perception that is wholly adequate, but this idea will necessarily involve an adequate idea of the sun. That is, if we had an adequate idea of the sun and an adequate idea

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[158] Spinoza claims that "when we say that there is in us an adequate or perfect idea, we are saying nothing but that (by P11c) there is an adequate and perfect idea in God insofar as he constitutes the essence of our Mind" (E2p34d).
[159] It should be emphasized that understanding something in the exact same way is both an epistemological and an ontological claim. When I have an adequate idea of *x*, my idea is identical to God's idea of *x* That is, it is not that my idea of *x* and God's idea of *x* merely have the same content, but that they are one and the same idea.
[160] Mark, "Truth and Adequacy," 20.
[161] Admittedly, this explanation of adequacy focuses on adequate ideas of existing objects, which allows me to explain the completeness of an idea in terms of the idea's inclusion of the causal connections of its object. However, this explanation will not necessarily work for all types of adequate ideas. For while it will work for ideas of objects that are causally embedded in Nature, it will not work for knowledge of things that have a distinct type of existence. For instance, an adequate idea of the essence of a triangle (one that does not actually exist in Nature) cannot be said to be complete in the same way. If we do not want to exclude the possibility of having adequate ideas of things that do not exist – or things that exist in a different manner than objects causally embedded in Nature – we must have other ways in which to explain this notion of completeness. One possibility is to pursue a notion of completeness that resembles something like *a priori* analytics truths. That is, an idea may still contain the grounds of its own validation, even if this is treated as a logical feature of an idea rather than the idea's containing content of its object's causal connections. For a discussion of *a prior* knowledge and Spinoza see Miller's "Spinoza and the *a priori*."

of the human body – as God does – then we could perfectly account for why I perceive the sun as 200 feet away. Consequently, when God forms such ideas, i.e., ideas of other things together with the human mind, these ideas are moments of inadequate perception from the human perspective, since our minds do not contain this additional idea.

Unlike how we typically conceive of truth and falsity, adequacy and inadequacy does not appear to be a strict bivalence. Rather, inadequacy admits of degrees and should be conceived as a scalar notion. Ideas can be more or less confused, more or less mutilated, and thus more or less adequate. For instance, suppose I form an idea of a soap bubble. My idea of this bubble can be more or less adequate depending on the extent to which I understand the bubble's causal connections to the rest of nature. If my idea contains the causal history of the bubble, if it contains the chemistry and physics that explains how the bubble retains its form, and if it contains information about how the bubble is liable to interact with other objects, then I would have a much more adequate idea of a bubble than a young child whose idea of the bubble lacks this content. My idea of the bubble can be more adequate than the child's idea, even if both our ideas are ultimately categorized as inadequate.

(3.2) The Affective Theory of Ideas

Having done the necessary groundwork, the argument for the ATI moves surprisingly quickly. Recall that the mind is a thing that exists and that strives to maintain this existence. Part of this striving is homeostatic, with the mind trying to maintain its ideational structure, while the other part is expansive, with the mind trying to increase its power. Since ideas are not empowering in and of themselves – the same idea can increase one person's power while decreasing another's – the mind must attend to how it is affected by a particular idea. If an idea

causes joy, the idea indicates an increase in the mind's power, and if it causes sadness, then it indicates a decrease in the mind's power. The striving to empower itself thus actualizes itself as a striving to adopt joyful ideas and resist saddening ideas. It is possible to adopt saddening ideas, and in this case – since these ideas cannot be explained in terms of the mind's striving alone – the ideas must be sustained by external forces. In other words, while we always seek to adopt joyful ideas, we sometimes adopt saddening ideas when those ideas overpower our ability to resist.

Another way to advance the ATI is in terms of Spinoza's metaphysical commitments. We know that the mind is a complex idea, and we know not all ideas that comprise the mind can be explained through the mind alone. That is, there are some ideas that must be external to the mind, such as my idea of quack grass.[162] We also know that the mind is a thing that strives to maintain its being and to increase its power. Further, we can conceive of the mind as a kind of ideational system, with the ideas that comprise the mind being causally interconnected: recall that nothing can be causally inert, and so the ideas in my mind must produce effects and therefore will impact the system of which they are a part. Now, viewing the mind as an ideational system that strives to maintain its structure and empower itself, we can ask what occurs when an external idea comes in contact with the mind. The answer depends on how that idea affects the mind: if the external idea causes joy, if it leads to empowerment, then it will be incorporated into the mental system, and if it causes sadness, if it leads to disempowerment, then it will be resisted. Not all resistance is successful, since the power of an external idea can be greater than the mind's power to resist. Again, whether the mind strives to accommodate or resist a given idea has to do with

[162] Perhaps God can understand how quack grass follows from the order and connection of Nature, but for finite minds it is something that must be first encountered through the body.

how that idea affects the mind as a structure of interconnected ideas, and the success of the mind has to do with its power relative to the power of the external idea.

A similar story can be told for adequate ideas. Although adequate ideas are not external, insofar as they follow from the mind's nature, the production of adequate ideas is also sensitive to external forces and dependent on the affective power of these ideas. We can imagine the mind's production of adequate ideas as a type of expansion, a result of the mind striving to increase its power. Whether this expansion is successful will depend on the mind engaging in empowering relations with external ideas and being able to overcome external resistance. If external ideas create too much resistance, the mind will be unable to expand further. For instance, the mind will not produce an adequate idea of *x* if it is overcome by a stronger inadequate idea of *x*. In other words, the success of an adequate idea to occupy the mind requires that it be able to overcome external forces, and this process occurs on the affective level. Moreover, the truth or the adequacy of the idea lends it no additional power in this struggle to occupy the mind.

The ATI appears more plausible when we see that it is treating the mind as a system that operates analogously to the body. We can view the body as a complex arrangement of smaller bodies, such as atoms, cells, organs, etc., that strives to maintain homeostasis and increase its power. Nutrition offers a useful example of this process. Suppose we introduce a foreign substance to the body – whether my body incorporates or resists that substance will depend on how my body interacts with it. Let us suppose that this foreign substance is peanut butter. For those who are not allergic to peanut butter, the introduction of peanut butter into the system will cause joy and empowerment: my body will be able to break down the fats and use them for its cellular operations, allowing it to maintain homeostasis or increase its power. However, if I am

allergic to peanut butter, my body will have an immune response, treating the peanut butter as something harmful and to be destroyed. Determining if my body will incorporate or resist a substance thus has to do with how that substance affects me, which will depend on how that substance affects a structure with my specific type of composition. We cannot look solely at the composition of a body and say whether it is good or bad, whether it is empowering or disempowering, since it will depend on how it interacts with other bodily systems. Peanut butter is nutritious to some, deadly to others.

The mind operates analogously to the body in this way. Some ideas are empowering and some are disempowering, but this doesn't have to do with the idea taken in isolation, but with how that idea causally interacts with my mind. The truth or adequacy of an idea tells us something about that idea, about how it is structured, or about its epistemic content, but it does not tell us how this content will interact with a given mind. The ATI shifts our thinking away from truth and adequacy, and towards affectivity, since it is affectivity that captures the causal relation between the mind, *qua* system, and an idea, *qua* external pressure. The claim that the ATI makes is that it is ultimately the striving of the mind that determines whether an idea is adopted or resisted, that is, whether an idea is empowering or disempowering, joyful or saddening. The shift is away from the epistemic dimension of ideas and towards its causal dimensions, a shift that is justified by Spinoza's metaphysical treatments of minds as modes, i.e., causally embedded, causally affectatious, expressions of God's power. The ATI is an intuitive interpretation of Spinoza's theory of ideas when we give conceptual priority to ideas as things, and approach the mind through bodily analogies.

Spinoza's theory of ideas forces us to shift our focus when it comes to the epistemic merits of an idea: ideas are things that, like all things in nature, exist in virtue of being embedded

in a field of causes and effects. When we evaluate the merit of a given idea, we cannot look at that idea in isolation, but must evaluate it in terms of the effects that it has on a given system. To know whether an idea will empower or disempower me, we must look at how my mind is constituted and how the introduction of a new idea will affect this mental ecosystem. The truth value of an idea cannot tell us whether that idea will be beneficial or detrimental to a given mind. Further, for Spinoza truth and adequacy are properties of actually existing ideas, rather than the properties of abstract units, such as a sentence's propositional content. As such, it makes little sense to speak of the adequacy of an idea in and of itself, since its adequacy (and likewise its truth) depends on how that idea is connected to others in the mind. I might assent to the claim that "2 plus 2 equals 4", but if I lack an understanding of the relevant mathematical functions, then I cannot be said to have an adequate idea. This reenforces the claim that the merits of a given idea depends on how that idea will connect with others in the mind, rather than on some intrinsic property of the idea. Joy and sadness are indicators of how ideas affect us, and as such reveal whether an idea is empowering or disempowering given our specific mental constitution. As Kisner claims, "the passions serve as a barometer of our power" and "help us to increase our power by indicating whether an activity increases our power."[163]

More will be said about the details of Spinoza's position in the following section, where I respond to two objections. Before moving to these objections, I would like to highlight what makes my position contentious. Most Spinozists will accept the underlying claims of the ATI, but will insist that adequate ideas are always the most empowering. However, I shall argue in this chapter that adequacy and empowerment come apart. While I do not deny that adequate ideas are always empowering, I deny that they are always the most empowering. Likewise, it is

[163] Kisner, "Spinoza's Virtuous Passions," 778.

clear that Spinoza thinks that inadequate ideas can also be empowering. As such, if the mind's striving tracks onto empowerment and joy, and empowerment is not coextensive with adequacy, then our striving does not ultimately track adequacy. This is what makes the ATI a contentious position, since Spinoza is typically interpreted as regarding adequate ideas as the most empowering, and as developing the mind as driven by a desire for adequate ideas. What will cause readers pause is my contention that the mind is driven by joy, not reason. In the following sections, I will develop my position further by way of defending it against objections. These objections, I hope, will anticipate those held by my more skeptical readers.

(3.3) Striving for Understanding

In this section, I examine two possible objections to the claim that we adopt ideas based on how they affect us. The first objection deals with the descriptive dimension of the ATI, while the second addresses the normative component.

The first objection maintains that the ATI is incomplete: while we may strive to adopt ideas based on how they affect us, we also necessarily strive to adopt true or adequate ideas, since it is true or adequate ideas that are most empowering. Recall that for Spinoza the mind, like all existing things, strives as far as it can to persevere in being. Part of this striving, I have argued, is homeostatic: the mind strives to maintain its constitution as the thing that it is. But the mind's striving is also expansive, given that the mind strives to increase its power of thinking as far as it can. Further, our power is understood by Spinoza as synonymous with our ability to act, our ability to bring "about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of [our] nature alone."[164] Spinoza is very clear that the mind acts only insofar as it does something which

[164] E4d8.

can be understood as resulting from its adequate ideas. Spinoza claims that "insofar as a man is determined to act from the fact that he has inadequate ideas, he is acted on, i.e. he does something which cannot be perceived through his essence alone, i.e., which does not follow from his virtue. But insofar as he is determined to do something from the fact that he understands, he acts, i.e., does something which is perceived through his essence alone."[165] The mind acts only insofar as it produces effects which follow from its adequate ideas and is acted upon whenever it produces effects that follow from its inadequate ideas. Since the mind is constantly seeking its own empowerment, Spinoza claims that "what we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding; nor does the Mind, insofar as it uses reason, judge anything else useful to itself except what leads to understanding."[166] If the mind strives to increase its power, which is understood as its ability to act, then the mind necessarily strives for understanding, or the formation of adequate ideas, given that these ideas contribute positively to the mind's power.

Based on these considerations, it would seem that the mind's striving is not determined primarily by how ideas affect us, i.e., by whether they cause us joy or sadness, but by a pursuit of understanding. Thus, the mind does not simply strive to adopt joyful ideas and reject saddening ideas, but rather strives to adopt "clear and distinct ideas," since it is these ideas that guarantee an increase in our mind's power: the mind seeks understanding, not joy, and adopts ideas on this basis. This objection would not threaten the ATI if joyful ideas and adequate ideas were coextensive – if all joyful ideas were adequate, then striving for adequate ideas and striving for joyful ideas would be one and the same thing. However, since we can experience joyful passions, i.e., joy that results from being acted upon, it is possible that inadequate ideas can cause joy. This

[165] E3p23d.
[166] E3p26.

objection thus maintains that it is inaccurate to say the mind adopts ideas based on their joy or sadness, and rather that we strive to adopt ideas based on their adequacy.

I do not deny the connection between having adequate ideas and the mind's ability to act. It is clear that Spinoza maintains that the mind acts insofar as it has adequate ideas and is acted on insofar as it has inadequate ideas. Further, I do not deny that Spinoza thinks that adequate ideas empower the mind: the more we have adequate ideas, the more the mind can act and the more powerful it is. My response is to first emphasize that Spinoza thinks that our actual striving manifests itself as a result of having both adequate and inadequate ideas. As Spinoza claims, "both insofar as the Mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has."[167] So while what the mind strives "for from reason" is understanding, it is not the case that this is how the mind exclusively strives, since we also strive on the basis of inadequate ideas. If the mind were exclusively rational, if it only ever strived on the basis of reason, then it would exclusively strive to adopt ideas based on whether or not they contribute to the understanding. Since the mind is comprised both of adequate and inadequate ideas, it cannot be said to exclusively adopt ideas in this manner.

Spinoza makes this point several times when discussing natural right in the *Tractatus Politicus.* Spinoza begins his discussion by describing what he means by natural right: "by the Right of nature, then, I understand the laws of nature themselves, or the rules according to which all things happen, i.e., the very power of nature."[168] When describing the natural rights by which humans act, Spinoza takes himself to be commenting upon the laws of nature that govern human

[167] E2p9.
[168] *TP*, G|III/277/2-5.

behaviour. Spinoza is clear that humans do not act according to reason alone, but are often – if not predominately – driven by the passions. Spinoza claims

> if human nature were so constituted that men lived only according to the prescription of reason, and did not strive for anything else, the Right of nature, insofar as it is considered a peculiar property of the human race, would be determined only by the power of reason. But men are led more by blind desire than by reason. So the natural power, or Right, of men ought to be defined not by reason, but by whatever appetite determines them to act and to strive to preserve themselves."[169]

Humans are driven by appetite, by joy and sadness, "to act and to strive to preserve themselves" rather than being driven by reason. While reason directs us towards knowledge and the understanding, we ourselves are not exclusively, nor primarily, driven by reason.

However, more must be said to fully respond to the above objection. Since the ATI claims that we adopt ideas based on how they affect us, rather than on some other criteria, such as adequacy, demonstrating that we occasionally adopt ideas based on how they contribute to our understanding is enough to refute the ATI. The argumentative strategy, then, is to demonstrate that, even when the mind acts from reason, the ideas it adopts are determined by how those ideas affect the mind.

The mind, for Spinoza, is capable of both acting and being acted upon. When the mind acts, or strives on the basis of adequate ideas, it necessarily seeks understanding. The success of the mind's striving for understanding is determined by its ability to overcome the influence of the passions, i.e., its ability to overcome being acted upon. If we are subject to a passion, the

[169] *TP*, G|III/277/9-17.

"force and growth" of this passion is determined "by the power of an external cause compared with our own."[170] When, for instance, an external power affects us and is able to consistently overcome our own power to act, we will be affected by this power such that "the affect stubbornly clings" to us.[171] That is, we will be acted upon, and form inadequate ideas as a result, to the extent that our own power is unable to resist and overcome external forces. Spinoza maintains that resistance to external forces occurs on the affective level, i.e., that "an affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained."[172] It is not the veracity of an idea that determines its ability to resist the force of inadequate ideas, but the affective power of an idea.

Consider the case where our body is affected by an external cause that decreases the power of the body. When this occurs, the mind necessarily forms a corresponding idea of the way the body has been affected. Spinoza claims that "an affect, insofar as it is related to the Mind, can neither be restrained nor taken away except by the idea of an opposite affection of the Body stronger than the affection through which it is acted on."[173] Consequently, when the mind is affected by sadness, i.e., when the mind forms an idea of the body's decrease in power, the affective force of this idea can be restrained or taken away only by being affected with joy, i.e., by forming an idea of the body's increase in power. Our ability to overcome the passions, then, occurs on the affective level: when my mind is affected by an external cause, its ability to

[170] E3p5.
[171] E3p6.
[172] E4p7.
[173] E4p7d.

overcome this passion depends on having ideas that are affectively contrary to, and more powerful than, the idea that affects us.[174]

As was said above, Spinoza equates inadequate ideas with the passions: when we form an idea based on being affected by an external cause, we necessarily form an inadequate idea. When the mind strives from reason, the mind strives to form adequate ideas or understanding. Its ability to do so, to form adequate ideas rather than inadequate ideas, will depend on its ability to act and resist being acted upon. But, as was explained above, the mind's ability to resist being acted upon occurs on the affective level, given that we resist the passions by way of having ideas that are affectively contrary to and more powerful than the externally generated affect. As such, our ability to form adequate ideas requires that our adequate ideas affect us in the right way. Adequate ideas must be joyful, since otherwise the mind would strive to reject them, and they must be more powerful than their saddening, inadequate counterparts. As such, even if we accept the point raised by the objection that when we strive from reason we strive to adopt adequate ideas, it is nonetheless true that our success depends on the affective force of ideas: we will maintain an adequate idea in the face of a contrary, inadequate idea only if our adequate idea is affectively more powerful.

Spinoza's discussion of the "true knowledge of good and evil" demonstrates that even when we strive from reason, and thus strive for understanding, our success is determined on the affective level. Spinoza claims that "we know nothing to be certainly good or evil, except what

[174] A saddening passion can be overcome either by a joyful action or a joyful passion. What is of importance is that the opposing affect, whether action or passion, be more powerful than the affect it is overcoming. My point is not to suggest that only joyful actions overcome saddening passions, but rather to demonstrate that when actions do overcome passions it occurs on the affective level.

really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding."[175] As such, when we form a desire based on the "true knowledge of good and evil" it is a desire to gain understanding, i.e., a desire to form adequate ideas. Since Spinoza understands desire as "man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something," to desire and to strive are one and the same thing. Hence, to form a desire for understanding based on a "true knowledge of good and evil" is the same as striving for understanding. The above objection suggests that when we strive in this way, which ideas we come to adopt are determined by a striving for understanding, rather than a striving to adopt joyful ideas.

However, Spinoza maintains that the success of this striving depends on the affective power of our ideas. Given that Spinoza claims "a Desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other Desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented,"[176] whether or not our desire for understanding persists will depend on its affective power, i.e., its ability to resist and overcome opposing affects. To put it another way, we strive for understanding only insofar as the affect that generates this striving is more powerful than opposing affects. While reason may dictate that we strive for understanding, our success depends on having ideas that are affectively more powerful than those opposed to the understanding. The actual ideas my mind comes to adopt, whether it is able to adopt adequate ideas and resist inadequate ones, is determined by the affects. Consequently, even when the mind strives for understanding, the actual unfolding of this striving is determined by the affective force of ideas.[177]

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[175] E3p27.
[176] E3p15.
[177] This position is highly similar to the one maintained by Hobbes. For instance, in *Human Nature,* Hobbes' maintains that a persons' inclination towards reason depends on their passionate dispositions. As Hobbes explains,

To put it another way, the success of reason depends on the fact that reasoning is itself joyful for Spinoza. As Susan James explains, "by increasing our power of active thinking, understanding generates forms of joy that make the experience of reasoning a pleasurable one and are themselves classified as affects."[178] It is because the understanding "generates forms of joy" that operate on the affective level that allows reason to guide our adoption of ideas. If reasoning were not joyful, then the ideas that it generates would not have the ability to overcome ideas born from the imagination. In other words, even when the mind adopts ideas based on the demands of reason, even when the mind seeks understanding, it does so because of the joy produced by this activity.

I do not intend to deny that adequate ideas are empowering, but rather to emphasize the mechanism by which the mind prefers one idea to another. This mechanism is affectively underpinned, and the mind is oriented towards joy and away from sadness in its striving. It is because true or adequate ideas are empowering, and thus joyful, that the mind adopts or maintains these ideas. That is, it is the empowerment, rather than the truth, of an idea that determines whether the mind will strive to adopt or maintain that idea. Nor is the empowerment of adequate ideas accidental for Spinoza: it is the fact that adequate ideas get things right that allows them to act as reliable guides to increasing and maintaining our power. Striving on the basis of adequate ideas promises to be more reliably successful than striving on the basis of inadequate ideas. It is for this reason, Spinoza frequently identifies virtue with living according to the guidance of reason. But the mind, like everything else in Nature, strives to increase its power and to maintain its existence, and does so by engaging with joyful affects and resisting

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"the difference therefor of wits hath its original from the different passions, and from the ends to which their appetite leadeth them" (Hobbes, *Human Nature,* 61). We are not, according to Hobbes, rational by nature, instead we are passionate.

[178] Susan James, *Passion and Action,* 78.

saddening ones. Spinoza can claim that "whether a man is led by reason or only by desire, he does nothing except according to the laws and rules of nature" precisely because both the wise and the ignorant act according to their nature: to seek after empowerment, to pursue joy, and to avoid pain.[179] If the mind were naturally compelled to seek after the truth, then the ignorant would surely be acting contrary to nature.

Let us consider a couple examples to further clarify this point. Suppose that I have an adequate idea of my competencies as a swimmer. Insofar as I act from reason, I will strive to maintain this adequate idea given that it contributes positively to my understanding. Now suppose that I go to a pool that is filled with obnoxious swimmers that take great pleasure in denigrating my front crawl. Whether or not I will be able to maintain my adequate idea will depend on this idea's ability to affect me in the right way. If my adequate idea is joyful enough, then it will resist and overcome the saddening ideas generated by my fellow pool goers; however, if the sadness generated by the external affect is more powerful than my adequate idea, I will be overcome by the inadequate idea and forced to reject an idea that contributes to my understanding. As such, even if I were a highly rational individual, whether or not I adopt ideas that contribute to my understanding will depend on the affective strength of those ideas.[180]

[179] TP, G|III/277/26-7.

[180] I do not wish to imply here that I have a faculty by which I either adopt or reject ideas based on an evaluation of their affective force. The formation of ideas in the mind is the product of natural forces, i.e., my mind's homeostatic and expansive striving in conjunction with the impact of external forces. I do not form my ideas any more than I can determine my own will or desires. I do participate in the process, since the striving of my mind impacts what ideas are formed, however this participation is more akin to a natural unfolding rather than one of spontaneous intervention. We might say that the coastal cliff participates in its erosion by the ocean, since the internal structure of the cliff will determine what gives way and what holds firm. Just as the cliff cannot will itself into a particular shape, we cannot will ourselves to adopt or reject a given idea.

Perhaps a mind exclusively comprised of adequate ideas and operating only according to reason would be immune to such ridicule, but such a thing is an impossibility for Spinoza.[181]

It is worth restating that my position is not intended to denigrate the merits of reason and adequate ideas entirely. It is clear that Spinoza holds adequate ideas, reason, and the understanding in high regard. The point, rather, is to shift the center of emphasis from reason to joy. Understanding is pursued because it is joyful and reason allows us to more consistently pursue empowering ideas. When it comes to the descriptive dimension of the ATI, we are concerned with the mechanics of the mind, that is, the processes by which the mind either adopts or rejects ideas. At base, it is joy and sadness that direct the striving of the mind. Reason is useful because it allows us to consistently and reliably pursue our empowerment. We are not hyper-rational machines seeking after truth and adequacy tirelessly, but are finite creatures striving to persevere in being by seeking after joy and avoiding sadness.

More will eventually need to be said about the specific mechanics of how ideas conflict on the affective level. For instance, we might wonder if it is possible for an inadequate, joyful idea, to replace an adequate joyful one, if the two ideas share incompatible content and the joy of the inadequate idea is greater than the joy of the adequate idea. For now, however, it suffices for me to have argued that even when we strive for understanding, what ideas we actually come to adopt or resist will be determined by the affective powers of these ideas: it is the joy of an adequate idea, rather than the adequacy itself, that determines whether or not it will be adopted or retained by my mind.

(3.4) The Normative Push for Adequate Ideas

[181] This might be possible for God, but not for human minds, which are necessarily finite.

Even if we accept that we do, as a descriptive fact, adopt ideas based on how they affect us, it might still be objected that we ought to only adopt adequate ideas. As I have articulated it, the ATI is both a descriptive and normative theory: not only does the mind, as a matter of fact, strive to adopt joyful ideas and reject saddening ideas, but it is correct for us as thinking things striving to persevere in being to proceed in this manner. That is, we are not acting as poor mental agents when we strive after joyful ideas rather than striving exclusively after adequate ideas. The normative objection rejects this claim and instead asserts that we ought always to strive for adequate ideas, since it is adequate ideas that are ultimately most empowering.

Before I flesh out the details of this objection, it will be useful to discuss where normativity enters into Spinoza's philosophy. [182] It is tempting to interpret Spinoza as having rejected all normative notions. This might be suggested, for instance, by his insistence that good and evil "indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another."[183] However, Spinoza's comments here are intended to reject the notion of good and evil as properties of things in themselves, rather than rejecting the notion of good and evil altogether. While a thing cannot be said to be good or evil *simpliciter*, it can still be good or evil relative to some being, and, consequently, Spinoza defines the good as "what we certainly know to be useful to us."[184] Moreover, what we certainly know to be good, as was said above, is nothing other than "what leads to understanding."[185]

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[182] For a general overview of the types of normative claims developed in the *Ethics*, see LeBuffe, "Spinoza's Normative Ethics."
[183] E4preface.
[184] E4d1.
[185] E4p26.

Spinoza draws this connection between the understanding and the good because it is the understanding which contributes to our mind's *conatus*. Spinoza claims that the "essence of reason is nothing but our Mind, insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly" and that, consequently, "whatever we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding."[186] That is, if the essence of our mind is nothing other than reasoning, i.e., understanding clearly and distinctly, then for the mind to persevere and empower itself is nothing more than to cultivate its understanding.[187]

From this observation we can arrive at a general understanding of what makes something good: something is good for *x* if it contributes to the striving of *x* to persevere in being.[188] This general formulation is useful because it allows us to understand that there is a conceptual distance between the good and adequate ideas. For instance, we can understand how restoring the body with "food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind" can be considered good, even if the connection to the understanding is not immediately obvious. We can claim that moderate food and drink is good for the body, since it contributes to the body's striving to persevere in being. And although Spinoza contends that things which contribute to the body's power of acting contribute to an increase in the mind's power, using this general formulation of the good allows us to avoid the need to constantly translate talk of bodily goods into talk of mental goods: we can speak of the good of the body without having to explain how it contributes to the understanding.

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[186] E4p26d.

[187] Spinoza is somewhat ambiguous on this point. At times, he suggests that the essence of our mind is reason; at others, he suggests that our *conatus*, which is our actual essence, is constituted by both adequate and inadequate ideas.

[188] Della Rocca reaches a different conclusion, claiming that something is good to the extent to which it is powerful. Thus, he claims that "our actions are good to the extent to which they are powerful, i.e., to the extent that they lead to the successful realization of the striving that constitutes those actions" (Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 182).

This general formulation also allows us to highlight an aspect of Spinoza's notion of the good which can be easily overlooked. Spinoza claims that the good is "*what leads to* understanding," rather than the understanding itself. It is thus possible that certain inadequate ideas may be good, insofar as they "lead to" the understanding, even if they do not in themselves constitute understanding.[189] For instance, teaching children moral lessons through fairy tales might be useful insofar as it can eventually lead to understanding, even if the lessons operate through the imagination and thus contain some inadequate ideas.[190]

This is a point that deserves to be emphasized: joyful inadequate ideas can be good insofar as they contribute to the understanding. If we conceptualize empowerment as a continual process, rather than a fixed state or end goal, then the value in harbouring inadequate ideas becomes evident. Education provides an immediate example. When we set out to educate children, we don't expect that they will immediately grasp adequate ideas. With a young child, for instance, we might be content to allow them to believe that the sun goes to sleep at night – it is by no means an adequate idea of the sun, but the fact that the child is contemplating the sun's nocturnal disappearance sets the stage for later discussions and later learning. A time will come when the child, equipped with enough of the relevant ideas, will be able to grasp the earth's rotation. These inadequate ideas can thus be good because they can lead to knowledge without themselves constituting knowledge.

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[189] Susan James claims that "although passive affects cannot by definition constitute reasoning, there remains the possibility that they may have a part to play in enhancing our ability to engage in this activity, and that some passions may be better suited to this role than others" (James, *Passion and Actions,* 76.) James would thus agree that inadequate ideas can lead to the understanding.

[190] For a discussion on how the imagination can be empowering even when containing inadequate ideas, see Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings,* and Gatens, "Compelling Fictions." See also Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions,* for a discussion of the pedagogical uses of inadequate ideas in the context of scripture. We will return to this discussion in what follows.

If we accept that something is good for *x* if it contributes to the striving of *x* to persevere in being, then we can arrive at a thin notion of normativity in Spinoza's philosophy. When we ask whether we ought to do *a*, we are asking if it is good to do *a,* or if it is better to do *a* rather than some alternative. The response to this question, given our general formulation of the good, will depend on whether *a* contributes to our *conatus* or whether *a* contributes more to our *conatus* than some alternative. Even if, taking into consideration Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism, whether we do *a* or avoid doing *a* is something that cannot be freely determined, we can still discuss correct and incorrect actions using this thin notion of normativity. We ought to strive for what leads to understanding, even if the success of our striving is itself a determined fact.

It is this conception of normativity that also underwrites Spinoza's claim that "from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils."[191] If we have two goods that cannot be enjoyed simultaneously, we ought to pursue that which is the greater, since it contributes more to our striving to persevere in being. Likewise, if we must pursue one of two evils, the lesser evil should be considered good, since it inhibits our striving the least. Because of this notion of the good, it would turn out that something can be good and still less preferable than an alternative. As we shall see in what follows, the ATI does not need to demonstrate that adequate ideas are sometimes bad, in the sense of being disempowering or hindering our *conatus*, only that there are occasions when they are not as empowering as some inadequate alternative.

The normative objection to the ATI relies only on this thin notion of normativity and claims that, regardless of whether we do in fact adopt ideas based on the joy and sadness they

[191] E4p65.

produce, we ought to strive only to adopt adequate ideas. All things considered, it is adequate ideas that are most empowering, that contribute most to our *conatus*, and so we ought to adopt only adequate ideas. If this is the case, then even if the ATI is true as a descriptive theory, it fails to capture Spinoza's normative push for adequate ideas.

If we don't accept that inadequate ideas are occasionally preferable to adequate counterparts, then the ATI can be read as a type of affective rationalism. That is, if adequate ideas are always preferable to inadequate ideas, then the normative dimension of the ATI would need to concede that we ought always to strive for adequate ideas or knowledge. Although the mechanism underpinning the acquisition and maintenance of ideas might be affective, it could be argued that we are nonetheless oriented in our striving toward adequate ideas, insofar as these are always the most affectively empowering. By demonstrating that inadequate ideas are occasionally preferable to adequate ideas, we show that mental empowerment cannot be reduced to the acquisition of adequate ideas, and thus prevent the ATI from collapsing back into a rationalist interpretation of Spinoza.

In response to this objection, I would like to begin by partially conceding the point. Absolutely speaking, it would be better if we only had adequate ideas, and, in this sense, we ought to strive to only form adequate ideas. This is indicated by Spinoza's discussion of the *homo liber,* Spinoza's paragon of virtue, who is free from the passions and thus free from all inadequate ideas. The *homo liber* is "one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone"[192] and thus always strives for understanding. If the *homo liber* is Spinoza's moral exemplar *par excellence,* then there is a clear sense in which we ought to strive to only adopt adequate ideas, so as to more closely approximate moral virtue. However, Spinoza is careful to point out that

[192] E467d.

people are not born free and that we are always subject to the passions.[193] So while, absolutely speaking, we ought to only ever act according to reason and thus only ever strive to adopt adequate ideas, Spinoza thinks that this is an impossibility given our nature as finite minds.[194]

Not all will agree with this conclusion. Although most agree that the *homo liber* is an ideal, some scholars maintain that it is an ideal towards which we should strive, even if the ideal will never be fully embodied. Some scholars go even further and argue that the ideal of the *homo liber* is achievable. For example, Nadler writes

> The free person represents an ideal human being—not some subjectively and passionately generated ideal human being, but just that ideal that has a metaphysical foundation in human nature. And when human beings actually recognize that ideal for themselves, when they set it as the goal of their endeavors, they do so on the basis of a deep understanding of what they truly are […] While the free person does represent an ideal, it is (in principle) a realizable condition of our very concrete human nature. The free person is, in fact, identical with the person who, in Spinoza's description, acts "according to the dictate of reason*"*[195]

Nadler argues that it is a mistake to think that the *homo liber* is one who only has adequate ideas, rather "[w]hat makes the free person "free," [..] is that his actions are consistently determined by his adequate ideas. He has passions or inadequate ideas, but he never acts on their basis."[196]

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[193] E4p4, E4p68s.
[194] Not all will agree with this conclusion. Although most will agree that the *homo liber* is an ideal, many scholars maintain that it is an ideal towards which we should strive, even if the ideal will never be fully embodied. For example, Nadler writes "The free person represents an ideal human being—not some subjectively and passionately generated ideal human being, but just that ideal that has a metaphysical foundation in human nature. And when human beings actually recognize that ideal for themselves, when they set it as the goal of their endeavors, they do so on the basis of a deep understanding of what they truly are […] While the free person does represent an ideal, it is (in principle) a realizable condition of our very concrete human nature. The free person is, in fact, identical with the person who, in Spinoza's description, acts "according to the dictate of reason"" (Nadler, *Spinoza on How to Live,* 34).
[195] Nadler, *Spinoza on How to Live,* 34.
[196] Nadler, *Spinoza on How to Live,* 53-4.

However, Spinoza is clear that "it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause."[197] Even Nadler's more plausible characterization of the *homo liber* is unobtainable. If we take "action" to mean only those actions that follow from adequate ideas, then no one could ever, by definition, fail to act solely on the basis of adequate ideas; if we take action more broadly to include all human behaviours, then it follows, from E4p4, that acting only on the basis of reason is impossible for humans.

The question then becomes not what we ought to do if we were able to solely act according to reason, but what we ought to do given our actual limitations as finite minds. If we are so constituted as to be unable to be completely rational, is it still the case that we ought to only adopt adequate ideas? I argue that we ought not. There are two reasons that we ought not to only ever seek adequate ideas: (1) inadequate ideas can be empowering, despite being inadequate, and (2) adequate ideas can be less empowering relative to some inadequate counterpart.

The first claim has both intuitive appeal and textual support. I contend that ideas that are inadequate can nonetheless be empowering by contributing to our mind's power to think. Consider for instance, someone who learns mathematical operations by rote. From Spinoza's discussion in the second scholium to E2p40, it appears that performing mathematical operations in this manner involves a degree of inadequacy. Suppose that Peter is asked for the result of multiplying 3 by 4. If Peter has memorized his multiplication table such that he can provide the correct answer, knowing that the result is 12 but without understanding why this is the result, then Peter may arrive at a modicum of understanding despite having an inadequate idea. That is,

[197] E4p4.

while having memorized a multiplication table provides only an inadequate idea of the multiplication function, Peter has a greater understanding than had he never acquired the ability to multiply by rote. Moreover, memorization of a simple multiplication table might be a useful pedagogical step to teaching Peter how multiplication operates as a function, and, as such, an inadequate idea can "lead to understanding" despite its inadequacies.

Textual support for the claim that inadequate ideas can be useful can be found in Spinoza's discussion of fictions. While Spinoza is somewhat ambiguous about this point, it appears that fictions are, by their nature, inadequate ideas. As Spinoza claims in the *Short Treatise*, "false and fictitious ideas have nothing positive […] through which they are called false or fictitious, but they are considered as such only from a defect of our knowledge."[198] However, despite the inadequacy involved in fictions, Spinoza recognizes that there is a utility to employing them.

When discussing the eternity of the mind in the fifth part of the *Ethics,* Spinoza makes the following claim: "but here it should be noted that although we are already certain that the Mind is eternal, insofar as it conceives things under a species of eternity, nevertheless, for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things we wish to show, we shall consider it as if it were now beginning to be, and were now beginning to understand things under a species of eternity, as we have done up to this point."[199] Although the mind, strictly speaking, cannot be said to become more or less eternal, Spinoza engages in this fiction because it makes "for an easier explanation and better understanding of the things" he intends to demonstrate. Spinoza's use of fictions thus indicate that inadequate ideas can be useful and can "lead to understanding"

[198] *KV*, G| II/40/7-8.
[199] E5p31s.

despite being inadequate. As Gatens and Lloyd argue, these fictions "allow glimpses of the deep truths which elude reason operating without imagination."[200] Consequently, it can be the case that we ought to adopt an inadequate idea, since even inadequate ideas can positively contribute to the mind's striving for understanding.

Another place where Spinoza acknowledges the advantage of inadequate ideas is in his discussion on the teachings of the prophets in the TTP. Fraenkel observes that, although Spinoza denies the possibility of miracles, the prophets still make use of miracles in scripture as a pedagogical tool. Scripture employs the use of miracles because "its purpose is not to instruct philosophers, but to offer pedagogical-political guidance to non-philosophers."[201] Although relying on miracles to teach is a form of relying on inadequate ideas – since Spinoza's denial of miracles implies that we cannot adequately understand events in the world as being miracles – the prophets nonetheless employ these ideas to speak to the understanding of their interlocutors and ultimately guide them towards understanding. To support this reading, Fraenkel points to a passage in the TTP where Spinoza claims that "it is not the part of Scripture to explain things through their natural causes; it only relates those things that greatly occupy the imagination, employing such method and style as best serves to excite wonder, and consequently to instill piety in the mind of the multitude."[202] For Spinoza, inadequate ideas are occasionally useful and worth encouraging, such as when they can lead to "piety" or have other empowering consequences.

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[200] Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings,* 38. The argument that I make regarding the utility of fictions is directly taken from Gatens and Lloyd, although I have adapted their arguments somewhat to suit my present purposes.
[201] Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions,* 271.
[202] *TTP*, G| III/90/2-6.

The second claim that I make, that adequate ideas can be less empowering than some inadequate ideas may appear less tenable than the first. Some initial worries can be alleviated by noting that the ATI does not rest on the strong claim that inadequate ideas will always, or even usually, be preferable to their adequate counterparts. All that is required to establish the ATI is only one instance where this is the case. That is, if it is the case that there is at least one circumstance where an inadequate idea is more empowering than its adequate counterpart, then we have discovered an instance where we ought to pursue an inadequate idea over an adequate idea. Having this one example is enough to demonstrate that we cannot claim that the mind ought always to seek adequate ideas, or that it is always to our advantage to pursue reason. It is an advantage of the ATI that it can accept that, generally speaking, adequate ideas might be preferable to inadequate ideas, given that adequate ideas might generally be more empowering than their inadequate counterparts. What I argue in this section is for the claim that at least sometimes it is overall more empowering to adopt an inadequate idea over an adequate counterpart. Through the use of examples and thought experiments, I aim to establish this weaker claim.

Before I argue this point, however, I must make a few remarks about what is meant by the claim that an inadequate idea can be more empowering than its adequate counterpart. Recall that adequate ideas are “clear and distinct” whereas inadequate ideas are “mutilated and confused”. Further, falsity, which is the companion of inadequacy, is nothing positive in itself, but rather privation of knowledge. What makes an idea false is that the mind lacks certain ideas that would make it true. Recall Spinoza’s example of the sun: the sun might appear 200 feet away, even if its actual distance is much greater. There is nothing false in the idea that the sun appears to be a certain distance from us – this is indeed how it appears to us. However, if we

don't have the relevant understanding of perspective, that is, if we cannot supplement this idea with the relevant knowledge, then we might mistakenly believe the sun is actually 200 feet away, rather than just appearing to be so.

I raise this example to highlight that the inadequacy or adequacy of an idea depends on how it relates to other ideas in the mind: if I lack the relevant auxiliary ideas, an idea might be false since it involves a privation of knowledge, or if the idea becomes connected to other ideas according to the accidental arrangements of the imagination, it might be "mutilated and confused." As such, it does not make sense to speak of ideas in isolation from other ideas and disconnected from a mind as being either true or false, adequate or inadequate, since what matters is how these ideas relate to other ideas in the mind. What then would it mean to say that there are occasions when an inadequate idea is more empowering than an adequate counterpart, given that inadequacy and adequacy depends on the relation between an idea and other ideas in the mind?

How we answer this question will determine whether we think that inadequate ideas can be more empowering than some adequate ideas. The question essentially has to do with what we are comparing when we are evaluating whether an inadequate idea is more powerful than its adequate counterpart. The following examples explore different ways that we can approach this question.

The Learning Machine

Suppose that you could receive an adequate idea ready-made. Being able to receive a fully formed adequate idea allows us to directly compare the merits of adequate and inadequate ideas. Imagine there were a machine that allowed you to gain some new idea at the push of a

button, and imagine that this machine was more ingenious than our current computers: whereas access to the internet might provide you with a huge quantity of information (and disinformation), access to information does not by itself make for adequate ideas. To have memorized a fact is not equivalent to having understood this fact. I might, for instance, readily claim that water is H_2O, but if I do not understand that the term "H_2O" is telling me about the molecular structure of water, then I can hardly be said to have an adequate idea. Current computers can provide you with bare facts, such that water is H_2O, and can also provide you with the information with which to transform this into an adequate idea, but they still require a great deal of activity on the part of the user for this to happen. Our cutting-edge learning machine, however, will do all the heavy lifting for you. At the click of a button, the learning machine will instantaneously download an adequate idea directly into your mind, perhaps by stimulating the neuropathways in your brain in just the right way as to excite a certain idea. Set up next to the learning machine is a verisimilitude machine – this machine is something like the discount version of the learning machine, for it will also instantaneously provide you with an idea on a given topic, albeit only an inadequate one.

Case 1: Simple Addition

Suppose that what occurs when we use the learning machine, or the verisimilitude machine, is that it simply adds an idea to your mind without changing the composition of your mind. That is, everything about your mind prior to using the machine remains the same, except that you now have an adequate idea or an inadequate idea. In this situation, it appears that we should use the learning machine and not the verisimilitude machine.

The rationale for this response is as follows. All other things being equal, a mind with more adequate ideas would be more powerful than a mind with fewer. This is because a mind only necessarily acts when it does so from the basis of adequate ideas, and it is only when the mind acts that it can guarantee that it promotes its *conatus*.[203] Consequently, the more adequate ideas, the more the mind has an opportunity to promote its perseverance and thus the more powerful it is. If we compare two minds that are identical except for the introduction of an adequate or inadequate idea, then the mind with the additional adequate idea would have more opportunities to act, and would thus be more powerful.

However, I do not think that this situation is possible for Spinoza. That is, it is impossible for an idea to be introduced to the mind without that idea causally interacting with the rest of the mind. To suppose that it could would be to suggest that the idea somehow stands apart from the rest of the mind. This would be analogous to claiming that a man could exist separately from the rest of nature, insofar as it supposes that some singular thing could exist separate from the causal nexus that comprises nature, and it is a circumstance that Spinoza would reject as impossible.[204] Given that all things by nature produce effects, it is necessary that the introduction of an idea into a mind must have certain effects.

Suppose, for instance, that you have lived your entire life with the belief that the world is flat. You have recently stumbled upon Aristotle's proofs of the earth's rotundity and, convinced by his arguments, have revised your beliefs.[205] While we can consider the two singular ideas "the earth is flat" and "the earth is round" in isolation, we must recognize that these ideas will impact

[203] E4p23: "A man cannot absolutely be said to act from virtue insofar as he is determined to do something because he has inadequate ideas, but only insofar as he is determined because he understands."
[204] E4p4 and E4p4d.
[205] Let us accept that beliefs are ideas of some sort or another.

other beliefs we hold, such as the possibility of circumnavigating the earth. We can imagine the mind as a network of interconnected ideas, with connections being stronger or weaker, with connections established through reason or the imagination, and with ideas being connected to other various ideas in the mind. If you tug on one idea, the rest will shift; if you introduce a whole new idea, accommodations to the mind's structure must be made: other ideas might need to be abandoned, certain connections strengthened or reorganized, and so on.[206]

The introduction of a new idea can cause other ideas to become weaker. For instance, if the idea that the earth is flat were a central idea in the mind, it might support other ideas by being connected to them. The idea that the earth is flat could be connected with the idea that the Flat Earth Society (FES) is an admirable institution, for instance. In such a situation, the introduction of the idea that the earth is round might weaken this connection, and consequently weaken some of the causal influence, i.e., power, that the idea of the FES has. You might still maintain that the FES is an admirable institution, but you might now have fewer ideas supporting this claim.

If we accept the claim that the introduction of an idea will have effects on the overall structure and composition of the mind, then evaluating whether an idea will be empowering or disempowering will not strictly depend on its adequacy or inadequacy. The lesson here is the same as the one that underpins Spinoza's claim that the same thing can be either good, bad, or neutral to different people, depending on their composition. For some people, peanuts are nutritious and good, for other people they are deadly. What matters is how our mind interacts with peanuts that determined whether they are good or bad for us. Likewise, we must look at how the introduction of new ideas interacts with the current composition of our minds. The same

[206] More will be said about this point in the following chapters.

idea might be good, bad, or neutral, depending on the mind with which it interacts, and there can be instances where an inadequate idea is preferable to some adequate counterpart, because of the way that those two ideas would interact with the rest of the mind.

Case 2: Mutatis Mutandis

Instead of simple addition, in this example the learning machine and the verisimilitude machine introduce new ideas, but the process requires that your mind undergo the relevant changes in its composition to accommodate these ideas. For instance, if you have the idea that 2+2=5, this idea will be removed by the learning machine if it were to introduce the claim that 2+2=4. Or if you were to gain an adequate idea of the war of 1812, the learning machine will also adjust your knowledge concerning the historical use of Ontario's canal systems, given that these canal systems were constructed as a result of the war. What we want to know is whether you will always come out ahead when opting for the learning machine over the verisimilitude machine. I argue that you won't, and sometimes it is better to use the verisimilitude machine.

Consider two friends, Boudica and Veronica. Among many other things, Boudica firmly maintains that: (a) people who maintain ridiculous things are foolish, (b) that you cannot be friends with foolish people, and (c) you cannot reason with foolish people. For our purposes, it doesn't matter whether you think that these ideas are woefully inadequate and should be replaced, we just need to accept that they are firmly rooted in Boudica's mind. Let us suppose that Boudica and Veronica's friendship produces a lot of love and empowerment for the two of them. Whenever Boudica considers Veronica, she is filled with joy. By hypothesis, let us suppose that a loss of this friendship would have significant negative impacts on Boudica's empowerment: she would be devastated if she were to lose Veronica as a friend. During dinner

one night Boudica and Veronica start discussing the Napoleonic wars, and Boudica discovers that Veronica maintains that the entire Napoleonic wars resulted from Napoleon having a complex about his height. Boudica, knowing very little about history, makes note of this interesting fact, and decides she would like to know more about Napoleon.

The next day Boudica heads down to the local learning machine with the intention of learning more about Napoleon. Let us suppose that having an adequate idea of Napoleon precludes the idea that the Napoleonic wars were the result of Napoleon's height. Further, let us suppose that if Boudica were to develop an adequate idea of Napoleon, she would consider Veronica's belief to be ridiculous. We can imagine that if Boudica were to acquire an adequate idea about Napoleon, this would lead to the dissolution of her friendship with Veronica, a friendship that brings her joy and empowerment. The question then becomes whether knowledge about Napoleon would outweigh the empowerment brought about by the Boudica's friendship with Veronica. Since it would lead to the loss of a significant friendship, I contend that adopting this adequate idea would be less empowering than maintaining an inadequate idea of Napoleon.

You might be inclined to respond by saying that such an adequate idea of Napoleon would not be disempowering for someone who operates according to reason. Since we can suppose the idea that you cannot be friends with foolish people, or that foolish people cannot be reasoned with, are themselves inadequate ideas, if Boudica were acting only on the basis of adequate ideas, then knowledge of Napoleon wouldn't threaten to dissolve the relationship with Veronica. With this I can agree. However, it is worth stressing once more that I am concerned with actual finite minds, with all their limitations and hang-ups. Since minds are not led exclusively by adequate ideas, or since minds don't always follow the guidance of reason, it will sometimes be better to have an inadequate idea over an adequate one. If the introduction of an

adequate idea will interact with other ideas so as to cause an overall loss in power, even if this loss is more the result of the mind already maintaining other inadequate ideas, it would still be better to maintain the inadequate idea. There might be occasions when it is more prudent, more empowering, to live our lives according to the imagination. This is not the case for all inadequate ideas, however, nor for all joyful inadequate ideas. As I shall discuss in Chapter 5, some joys can be excessive and prevent the mind from greater empowerment.[207]

You might agree that in order to accommodate the adequate idea of Napoleon certain adjustments must be made to the structure of ideas that comprise Boudica's mind, but argue that Boudica might adjust her ideas in such a way that wouldn't compromise her friendship with Veronica. We might suppose that Boudica could just as easily abandon the idea that "people who maintain ridiculous things are foolish," that "you cannot be friends with foolish people," or that "you cannot reason with foolish people." If Boudica were to do so, then she would be able to gain adequate knowledge and retain her friendship, and thus there would be no reason to choose an inadequate idea over the adequate idea. Fortunately for me, such a response only favours the ATI.

Suppose we have a mind that contains ideas *x, y,* and *z,* and suppose that we introduce an idea *q* that is incompatible with this set, such that we will need to remove either *x, y,* or *z* to make *q* a member. We might think, for instance, that *x, y,* and *z* entail not-q. We must drop one of the ideas to make room for *q*, but which idea ought to be jettisoned? We could always select one at random, but this sort of indeterministic method would seem to be rejected by Spinoza, given that

[207] In this scenario, we must assume that the relationship between Boudica and Veronica is generally empowering and that it does not prevent Boudica from obtaining greater empowerment elsewhere. Suppose the scenario were less innocuous, and instead of beliefs about Napoleon, Boudica was to discover that Veronica believed in Nazism. In this situation, it seems that Boudica would have more to gain by dissolving the friendship than by maintaining it.

he maintains that anything that occurs must have a preceding cause sufficient to explain its occurrence. There is also no single logical choice, since logic only dictates that one of the ideas must go, but not which one. However, if we think about ideas as things with power, as forces that are capable of producing effects, then another possibility occurs, namely, that the least powerful idea be removed from the mind. Spinoza is clear that when ideas conflict it is not the truth that determines which idea will persevere, but the affective power of the given ideas. As such, if we conceive of *x*, *y*, and *z* as trying to resist the presence of an incompatible new idea, *q*, it stands to reason that the least powerful will be forced aside. To return to our example, we can indeed accept that an adequate idea of Napoleon is compatible with Boudica's friendship with Veronica, but only if that friendship is more affectively powerful than the other, potentially conflicting, ideas.

It might be objected that, while in the short term, adopting an adequate idea might be empowering, it is always beneficial in the long run to do so. That is, the immediate sadness of an adequate idea will eventually be overcome by a greater future joy. It is unclear, however, why this should be the case. One possible explanation has to do with the way adequate ideas relate to one another: since adequate ideas do not exclude one another, since they do no conflict, the presence of an adequate idea which is immediately disempowering allows for the maximally powerful configuration of ideas to emerge, i.e., a mind that is comprised of only adequate ideas.[208] On the other hand, since inadequate ideas can both conflict with each other and can conflict with adequate ideas, even if an inadequate idea is immediately empowering, it necessarily prevents us from adopting the maximally powerful configuration of ideas. As such, an inadequate idea remains an impediment to our overall empowerment, even if it is immediately

[208] The conflict between ideas is something that could be discussed more in the previous chapter.

more empowering than its adequate counterpart. But if, as Spinoza suggests, the maximally powerful configuration of ideas is impossible to achieve, then we seem to have no reason to prefer adequate ideas on this ground. That is, if there is no guarantee that adopting a disempowering adequate idea will allow for a more empowering configuration of ideas to emerge in the mind, then we have no reason to favour an adequate idea simply because it is adequate.

Allow me to put this another way. Suppose that *m* represents the maximally powerful configuration of ideas, i.e., a mind that only has adequate ideas. Suppose that any introduction of an inadequate idea to *m* would weaken that mind by exchanging some set of adequate ideas for an inadequate idea. This suboptimal configuration of ideas, m^{-1}, would be less preferable to *m*, and as such we ought strive for *m* over m^{-1}. As such, even if an adequate idea is initially less empowering than some inadequate counterpart, it is still to be preferred since it is ultimately compatible with *m*, where the presence of its inadequate counterpart is not. Consequently, if the goal is to achieve *m*, then we ought to accept an immediate loss in power given that it will ultimately be made up for by placing us in a position where we can maximize the power of our mind. My argument is that, since *m* is an impossibility for Spinoza, we can never achieve anything other than a suboptimal configuration of ideas. Further, since m^{-1} is compatible with the presence of some inadequate ideas, it is not the case that we ought to prefer a less empowering adequate idea to a more empowering adequate one, given that we can maintain the empowering inadequate idea without impeding the possibility of acquiring m^{-1}.

I agree that Spinoza conceives of mental empowerment as a movement towards understanding. To increase our mental power, to be virtuous, and to cultivate our understanding are the same activity for Spinoza. For this reason, it is tempting to conceive of Spinoza's

normative position as one where we ought only to adopt adequate ideas. If the ideal goal is to become the *homo liber*, to be a person who only acts according to reason, then it appears that we ought to always privilege adequate ideas over inadequate ones. However, how we move towards the moral ideal does not involve a straightforward rejection of all inadequate ideas and an acceptance of all adequate ones. Our actual striving as finite minds requires that we occasionally adopt inadequate ideas and reject adequate ones depending on how they contribute to our empowerment given our current affective constitution. To put it slightly differently, given that human minds are comprised both of adequate and inadequate ideas, it is not the case that we can universally claim that whether or not an idea is useful to *x* depends on whether or not that idea is adequate: inadequate ideas can occasionally empower a finite mind more than their adequate counterparts. As such, we should evaluate the utility of an idea not based on its adequacy, but based on how it affects us, that is, how it contributes to our overall empowerment.

Case 3: Pay to Play

While the learning machine was originally free to use, its growing popularity led to its monetization by an unscrupulous owner. The verisimilitude machine, being somewhat less popular, remains free of charge. Suppose that the cost to use the learning machine becomes wildly prohibitive, such that people have to withdraw large loans if they want to access the machine. Our old friend Boudica has an inkling to know more about early modern European fashion. Is it better, given the absurd cost of the learning machine, for Boudica to opt for an adequate idea over the more accessible inadequate idea? It seems that, even if adequate ideas are more powerful than inadequate ideas when directly compared, if accessing the process of adequate ideas is disempowering, then an inadequate idea ought to be preferred.

As epistemic agents, if we were solely concerned with acquiring adequate or true ideas, we should never privilege an inadequate idea over an adequate one. However, if the purpose of the mind is to seek empowerment so as to promote the *conatus*, then seemingly non-epistemic considerations have relevance to our favouring one idea over another. You might choose to study at one university rather than another on the basis of financial considerations, even if you imagine that this might result in a less robust education. Similarly, you might get your scientific knowledge from popular magazines that summarize the findings of academic journals, if the cost of accessing these journals is prohibitive. Reading summaries of scientific journals might lead to more inadequate ideas than having access to the original articles, but it is a reasonable choice given the available options. As Spinoza says, there can be no virtue prior "to the striving to preserve oneself,"[209] and there would be little virtue in inviting economic ruin for the sake of truth or adequacy. To put it another way, since is good for the body is good for the mind (and *vice versa*),[210] the mental empowerment of an adequate idea is not necessarily to be lauded if it is only obtainable by jeopardizing the body's *conatus.* Although adequate ideas might follow from the mind itself, the production of adequate ideas is still dependent on certain circumstances obtaining. While theoretically I might be ablet to derive the *Ethics* if my mind commences with the right definitions and axioms, on a practical level, I will be unable to do so if I am starving.

Case 4: Out of Service

In this situation, the learning machine is broken and only the verisimilitude machine works. Given that the verisimilitude machine can lead to some joy, and thus empowerment, it would be untenable to claim that we ought not use the verisimilitude machine. While this is the

[209] E4p22.
[210] E4p38 and E4p39.

weakest example for establishing the ATI, since it does not demonstrate that inadequate ideas are more empowering than adequate ideas, only that inadequate ideas are more empowering than nothing at all. However, I include this example because it stresses a point made earlier, namely, that inadequate ideas can be empowering, and it thereby helps us to conceive of inadequate ideas as having their own merit. It also emphasizes that there are cases where we ought to pursue inadequate over adequate ideas, if only because those adequate ideas are unobtainable.

There are times when, given a person's mental limitations or other factors, adopting an empowering inadequate idea is preferable to attempting, yet failing, to adopt an adequate idea. Suppose, for example, that I am told that gravity is not a force but the result of the shape of space-time. To help me to understand this, a kindly physicist places a weighted ball on a stretched out square of fabric and explains that the fabric represents the shape of space-time and the weighted ball represents a planet. Just as a planet bends space-time around itself because of its mass, the weight of the ball causes a depression in the fabric. The physicist then adds a smaller ball to the situation and puts it in motion, causing it to roll around the heavier ball, as if it were a smaller planet in orbit. The physicist explains that it is not that the larger planet attracts the smaller planet with some hidden force, but that the larger planet changes the shape of space-time, thereby altering the trajectory of smaller objects. Through this example we gain some understanding: gravity is not a force, but the result of the mass of an object acting upon the shape of space-time. To understand this adequately requires a significant amount of training in mathematics and physics. If the kindly physicist were trying to explain gravity to me using mathematical equations, I would be more perplexed than had they used the simplified analogy of a weighted object on a taut piece of fabric. Certainly, my mind would be more powerful if I

could grasp this concept adequately, but if the choice is between no comprehension that gravity is not a force and a limited comprehension, the limited is the lesser of two evils.

This example closely tracks much of our epistemic activities in the world. That is, since we are not in a position to access a learning machine, and thus cannot gain adequate ideas at the push of a button, there will be times when adopting inadequate ideas is advantageous, such as when we learn *via* the imagination. We might mourn the fact that we cannot know as God does, that we cannot exclusively avail ourselves of adequate ideas, but we must accept the virtue of inadequacy given our existence as finite minds. What is good is what leads to understanding, and often understanding is preceded by imagination, by analogy, metaphor, parables, fiction, and myth. This is not to say that inadequate ideas merely have an instrumental value, tilling the soil for the seeds of adequacy, since these inadequate ideas can empower the mind even when their adequate counterparts never arise. While understanding that gravity isn't a force through the use of visual metaphors might prime me for further, more complex, more adequate knowledge, it still empowers my mind even if that knowledge never arises.

A Review of the Preceding Cases

I introduced the learning machine and the verisimilitude machine in order to avoid a difficulty when comparing adequate to inadequate ideas. If the adequacy or inadequacy of an idea has to do with how it is supported by other ideas in the mind, then it is unclear what it would mean to say we ought to occasionally pursue an inadequate idea over an adequate one. Ideas are not free-floating units that we can pick up and assimilate into our mind. From the first two cases we can learn the following lesson: we cannot evaluate the merit of an idea simply by looking at whether the idea is adequate or inadequate, true or false. Since ideas are not causally inert, since

they necessarily produce effects, the merit of an idea must be determined by the effects that it has on a given mental system.

If we could compare ideas in isolation, I would readily agree that adequate ideas are always more powerful than their inadequate counterparts. However, I contend that the net gain in power to a system is occasionally greater by adopting, pursuing, or retaining an inadequate idea over its adequate counterpart. This is because it is possible for adequate ideas to disrupt the organization of the mind in such a way as to exclude inadequate, yet joyful, ideas, or what we might call joyful configurations of ideas. There are sometimes illusions, fictions, and myths that we take great solace in, that can be empowering, that aid us to live. If we could achieve a life free of all inadequate ideas, if we could hone our mental abilities such as to only act according to the guidance of reason, then the calculus would change such that inadequate ideas would always be best to avoid. However, if we are necessarily bound by our finitude, if we will always have some inadequate ideas, then the goal is not to exclude all inadequate ideas, but to adopt those that are useful, that are empowering, that can help us to persevere and can lead to understanding.

It should be noted that while I maintain that Spinoza held the ATI in both its descriptive and normative dimensions, i.e., that we do and ought to pursue the most empowering ideas, and while I think Spinoza recognized the merits of certain inadequate ideas, such as a belief in miracles or the eternity of the soul, I do not wish to pretend that this was Spinoza's sole concern. As most commentators would agree, Spinoza is clearly concerned with how reason can be leveraged to overcome the passions that keep us in bondage and encourage social strife. There is clearly a certain antagonism that Spinoza feels towards the passions, and thus inadequate ideas, for their ability to be socially divisive and to cause our individual sufferings. As exemplified by the *homo liber*, reason can act as a powerful ideal to guide our aspirations and mental cultivation:

one who always acts, who is always led by adequate ideas, is a useful moral exemplar. What I want to suggest is that Spinoza does not think that the road towards understanding is exclusively paved by adequate ideas, that there are ways that our minds are empowered by inadequate ideas. And since we are not exclusively guided by adequate ideas, there can be times when inadequate ideas might serve us better than their adequate counterparts. From the perspective of the overall functioning or empowerment of our mind, it can sometimes be better to maintain or prefer inadequate ideas. This is not to say that, in themselves, adequate ideas cause us harm, only that they do not necessarily empower our minds to act more than a given configuration of inadequate ideas. Again, this is not to say that we should seek to dwell perpetually in ignorance, only that sometimes ideas that are inadequate will serve us better than their adequate counterparts.

(3.5) Joy and Reason

Up to this point I have been advocating for the ATI both as a descriptive and normative theory. I have argued that, for Spinoza, we adopt or reject ideas based on how they affect us rather than based on some other criteria, such as adequacy or veracity. Further, I have argued that, as mental things concerned with preserving our being, we ought to proceed in this manner. Both arguments have relied on an assumption that requires some further nuancing. I have, for the sake of presenting a more straightforward argument, relied on the claim that a joyful idea is an empowering idea and a saddening idea is disempowering. It will be necessary to muddle this claim somewhat.

Recall that for Spinoza, not all joys are equal, and joys can be mutually incompatible. Suppose we compare two affects, *a* and *b*, where *a* causes a great increase in our mind's power, and *b* only causes a moderate increase in our power. If *a* and *b* were incompatible, it would be

best to seek *a* rather than *b*, since "from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils."[211] That is, if we are presented with two incompatible joys, it is best to strive for the joy that is greatest, since this leads to a greater increase in our power. However, we are not always in a position to recognize that a current joy is incompatible with a more powerful future joy, and thus sometimes our current enjoyment can prevent us from having a more substantial enjoyment in the future.

Consider the following example. Exercise can be a joyful activity: moving our body, going for a walk, dancing, running, climbing, swimming, etc. bring many people joy. Exercise, in all its various forms and manifestations, is also empowering for the body. However, the joy brought about by exercise can also be harmful. Suppose that you were to become highly attached to the joys felt after an intense jog and decide that you are going to run a marathon every day. While this activity might be immediately joyful, running great distances everyday will likely lead to injury, since you are not giving your body enough time to recover in between runs. This activity, while immediately joyful, could be harmful in the long run. If you injure yourself and are unable to run for half a year while you recover, this would be less empowering than had you exercised at a more moderate rate.

The point of the above example is that some joys can be considered harmful when viewed from the perspective of how they interact with future joys. A joy, in and of itself, always indicates an increase in power, however, it is possible that present joys can prevent us from being affected by greater joys in the future. Likewise, it is possible for certain sad affects to be immediately disempowering yet nonetheless contribute positively to our overall striving. For instance, humility and repentance are species of sadness, and thus contribute to a decrease in our

[211] E4p65.

power. Nonetheless, Spinoza argues that it is better to experience these affects than to be "proud, ashamed of nothing, and afraid of nothing,"[212] since humility and repentance are more compatible with a greater good, namely, sociality.

It is thus the case that, when viewed from the perspective of our overall striving, joys can be harmful, and sadness can be beneficial. This observation does not change the descriptive aspect of the ATI, although it is potentially problematic for its normative component. Spinoza thinks that when a present joy is incompatible with a greater future joy, we will come to favour that future joy only when we form an adequate idea of it. This is because Spinoza contends that when we form an adequate idea of a future thing it affects us just as much as if it were present. As Spinoza claims, "if the Mind could have an adequate knowledge of a future thing, it would be affected toward it with the same affect as it is toward a present one."[213] As such, competition between current joys and future joys is still mediated on the affective level – if we relinquish a present joy for some greater future joy it is because the future joy affects us as if it were present. Likewise, we can tolerate a current sadness in order to achieve a future joy, if that future joy affects us as if it were present. The competition between present and future joys and sorrows operates according to the same rules by which we negotiate between present joys and sorrows. As such, the fact that a future joy can be favoured over a present joy does not threaten the claim that we adopt ideas based on how they affect us.

The fact that a present joy can be viewed as detrimental if it prevents us from achieving some future good, might also make the normative claim of the ATI problematic, for it seems to suggest that we ought to adopt those ideas that will contribute most to are overall striving, rather

[212] E4p54s.
[213] E4p66d.

than adopting ideas that are simply the most joyful. Further, we cannot say that we ought to adopt ideas based only on their joy or sadness, but that we ought to adopt ideas based on what reason tells us about how these ideas contribute to our overall striving. Consequently, rather than adopting ideas based on how they affect us, we ought to adopt ideas according to the dictates of reason. However, the demonstration to E4p66 suggests that the advantage of forming ideas according to reason is precisely that it allows us to be affected in the right sort of way. If we form an adequate idea of a future joy, we are affected as if it were present. Thus, even the push to know things according to reason is a push to have these things enter into our affective economy in the right way. It is not that reason tells us which ideas to adopt by telling us how things will affect us in the future, but that reason allows us to adopt the most joyful ideas by presenting these ideas in such a way that their affective power is immediately present. So while it is clear that Spinoza wants us to become more rational, to form more adequate ideas, even this call for rationality is based on a desire to have our minds be affected in ways that would otherwise remain inaccessible to us. Part of the advantage of reason, then, is that it allows us to be affected in new ways.

(3.6) From Ideas to Beliefs

In this chapter, I argued that Spinoza maintains an affective theory of ideas. This theory tells us something about how we adopt ideas and about how we ought to adopt ideas. We strive to adopt ideas that are empowering, or joyful, and avoid those ideas that are disempowering. I also concluded that we ought to proceed in this manner, so long as we keep in mind the fact that some present joys can exclude future joys and some present sorrows can lead to future joys. The role of reason, I claimed, is not to unwaveringly propel us towards true or adequate ideas, but to present ideas to us so such that they can affect us in the right sort of way. Reason allows me to

conceive of future events, for instance, in such a way that the joys that I might experience in the future affect me presently. If I am living it up on a Sudbury Saturday night, reason might allow me to conceive of the consequences of having another beer in such a way that tomorrow's potential hangover can properly affect me tonight. Reason allows us to adjust the affective scales so as to weigh future potentialities against current joys and sorrows.

In the next chapter, I will develop Spinoza's theory of beliefs. I argue that Spinoza conceives of beliefs as our most powerful ideas. Consequently, what I believe will be determined by which ideas affect me the most. As minds, we strive to adopt those ideas that are most empowering and to avoid those beliefs that are disempowering, regardless of their truth or adequacy. Further, what makes something a correct instance of believing is not whether this idea is true, but if this idea in fact positively contributes to my empowerment. The consequence of this position is that our conception of the world turns out to be more of the result of our striving for mental joy than about our search after truth.

Chapter 4: Spinoza's Theory of Belief

(4) Two Models

Spinoza's philosophy of mind is as plentiful as it is austere. While Spinoza recognizes a broad spectrum of mental actions – such as willing, desiring, judging, imagining, understanding, affirming, etc. – all these actions can be explained by way of a single category: the idea. As we have seen, the activities and interactions of ideas are determined by universal laws in a way analogous to how physical laws determine the activities and interactions of bodies. All ideas play by the same rules, as it were, and can be understood according to the same laws, whether they be instances of desiring, imagining, or understanding. Thus, despite the array of mental phenomena encountered in Spinoza's *corpus*, we are always fundamentally dealing with different aspects of a single genus. However, this is not to say that there is no distinction to be made between an imagining and a judgement, for example, but rather to stress that Spinoza views both phenomena as explicable as ideas. This aspect of Spinoza's philosophy of mind creates difficulties for those trying to provide a taxonomy of mental phenomena in his works, since his insistence on the fundamental category of ideas and his tendency to regard certain mental faculties as "complete fictions"[214] makes it difficult to establish the differences between various types of ideas.

The task of this chapter is to examine different ways of determining what distinguishes beliefs from other types of ideas, if there are distinctions to be made. The goal is to argue that our beliefs are adopted based on how they affect us, rather than being solely based on their epistemic merits. As believers, we are driven by empowerment, and we thus seek after joyful beliefs and avoid saddening ones to the best of our abilities. The ATI, as developed in the previous chapter, does much of the leg work in establishing this claim, but we still need to

[214] E2p49s.

determine what a belief is for Spinoza. Once we have determined what a belief is, we will be in a position to discuss how they relate to other ideas and how they enter into the economy of the mind.

The first two sections of this chapter examine two ways of articulating a Spinozist theory of belief: section one develops the Universalist Model, as advanced by Della Rocca, and section two develops the Dominance Model, as advanced by Dianne Steinberg. In section two, I further develop a key notion on which the Dominance Model relies, namely, the notion of exclusion, with an eye to expanding and strengthening the model. In section three, I argue that my thesis about beliefs can be advanced using either model, I highlight aspects of the Universalist Model that I take to be correct and informative, but I argue that the Dominance Model is preferable as a theory of belief. Having argued for the Dominance Model, section four further develops this theory of belief by connecting it to the conclusions arrived at in the previous three chapters. At the end of this chapter, we will be able to conclude that beliefs are adopted on the basis of how they affect the mind, and we will be better able to understand the underlying mechanics of this claim.

(4.1) The Universalist Model

The UM maintains that "every idea is intrinsically belief-like."[215] That is, the UM argues that since all ideas share certain qualities and since these qualities are characteristic of beliefs, it follows that "each idea is something like a belief."[216] Della Rocca identifies two such qualities: ideas are belief-like because they are propositional and because they involve an affirmation (or negation). Commenting on Spinoza's claim in E2p49s that to perceive a winged horse is nothing

[215] Bennett, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 164.
[216] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 202.

other than to affirm wings of a horse, Della Rocca observes that "part of what is going on in [this section] is that Spinoza is presupposing that ideas are inherently propositional in character. But [Spinoza] is also going beyond this point and claiming that each idea is inherently an *affirmation* that something is the case, that each idea is something like a belief."[217] This passage demonstrates that, for Della Rocca, the fact that an idea is both "propositional in character" and "an *affirmation* that something is the case" renders it belief-like.

Della Rocca does not give an explicit argument for why these qualities render an idea belief-like,[218] and so we must provide one on his behalf.[219] For many contemporary philosophers, a belief is nothing other than a certain type of propositional attitude, namely, the attitude of regarding a proposition as true.[220] If, for Spinoza, all ideas involve affirmations that something is the case, and all ideas are propositionally structured, then this would coincide with a common understanding of what makes something a belief. Della Rocca might argue that when we affirm wings of a horse, for instance, what we are doing is nothing other than regarding the proposition 'the horse has wings' as true. Martin Lenz, who also favours the Universalist Model, likewise assumes that a belief is nothing more than affirming a proposition. Lenz states that "terminologically speaking, Spinoza's crucial step is to use the term 'idea' for what we might call beliefs. Structurally speaking, a belief is the mental counterpart to what can be expressed by

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[217] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 202.
[218] Nor does Jonathan Bennet, who also holds that ideas are belief-like on the basis of their being propositional and affirmations. Martin Lenz makes a similar assumption. See Bennet, *Spinoza's Ethics,* 164; Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 52.
[219] This should not be regarded as a condemnation of Della Rocca. In the "Power of an Idea," Della Rocca is primarily concerned with examining Spinoza's claim that all ideas involve affirmations. Della Rocca develops the UM somewhat peripherally, and even claims that the difference between the UM and DM is "merely terminological and that nothing of metaphysical or psychological import turns on it" (Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea, 211). Dianne Steinberg responds to this claim, and so I leave it largely unaddressed in this essay (Steinberg, "Belief").
[220] Ray Buchanan describes this propositional attitude approach as "philosophical orthodoxy" (Buchanan, "Propositional Attitude," 1), although there is disagreement on how best to explain what constitutes this type of attitude.

a statement. It means to think that something is the case or to predicate some thing of something."[221]

This reading requires that we understand Spinoza's use of the term "affirm" as being roughly equivalent to regarding something as true, which appears to be the case on Della Rocca's reading.[222] Della Rocca claims that "an affirmation cannot be or be conceived without an idea, i.e., one cannot conceive that there is an affirmation that something is the case but that there is no idea of the matter affirmed or of the object which the affirmation concerns."[223] This passage demonstrates that, according to Della Rocca, an affirmation (a) involves conceiving that "something is the case" and (b) is directed towards some "object," i.e., the idea or its propositional content. It is further supported by Della Rocca's observation that "it seems perfectly possible to have an idea without thereby affirming it or some propositional content associated with it,"[224] which suggests that Della Rocca understands affirmation as an attitude that we hold towards some idea. It is reasonable to assume that affirmation, for Della Rocca, is roughly equivalent to regarding something as true, since affirmation is a process of conceiving of some object (i.e., an idea) as "being the case." Consequently, since "affirming that something is

[221] Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 52.
[222] There are reasons that we might push back against this claim. See for instance Abizadeh, "Hobbes on Mind," for an alternative understanding of the term "affirmation" used in the early modern period. Abizadeh contends that "to affirm a proposition in Hobbes's sense is merely to form a proposition via the copula, that is, to connect a subject to predicate rather than produce a mere list. It remains a separate question whether one assents to it or, indeed, asserts its truth" (Abizadeh, "Hobbes on Mind," 26). It is not obvious to me that Spinoza should be thinking of affirmation as a type of propositional attitude rather than thinking of it in terms of predicating some property to a subject, as Hobbes did.
[223] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 201.
[224] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 202.

the case" is roughly equivalent to regarding something as true, then it follows that all ideas, insofar as they are propositional and involve affirmations, are beliefs.[225]

However, Della Rocca does not focus on establishing how the above-mentioned qualities render something a belief, but in arguing that all ideas involve affirmations. As noted above, Della Rocca thinks that this is a "contentious claim" for Spinoza to make,[226] since we seem perfectly able to entertain ideas without thereby affirming them. For instance, it seems plausible that I can entertain the idea of ancient aliens lurking in the depths of our oceans while nonetheless failing to affirm (or deny) that this is the case. Given that Spinoza neither provides an explicit argument defending the claim that all ideas involve affirmations nor states it axiomatically, advocates of the UM must provide some basis for this claim.

Della Rocca argues for the claim that all ideas involve affirmations in the following way. The first step is establishing a tripartite identity relation between affirmation, volition (willing), and mental action. Della Rocca offers E2p48s, where Spinoza states that "by will I understand a faculty of affirming and denying, and not desire," and Spinoza's use of the term "sive" in E2p49, where Spinoza writes "in the mind there is no volition, or [*sive*] affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea" as evidence that Spinoza equates volition (or willing) with affirmations.[227] To establish an equivalence between mental actions and volitions, Della Rocca points to E2p48d and argues that "there Spinoza treats as equivalent the claim that ''[the mind] cannot be a free cause of its own actions'' and the claim that ''[the mind] cannot

[225] Della Rocca vacillates between claiming that all ideas are "belief-like" and all ideas are "beliefs." It is unclear if he intends there to be difference between these two claims, but Della Rocca equally commitments himself to both.
[226] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 202.
[227] It is common in the secondary literature to regard Spinoza's use of the term *sive* as establishing an identity relation.

have an absolute faculty of willing and not willing''."[228] If we accept that Spinoza indeed equates affirmation with volition, and volition with mental actions, then it follows that mental actions are equivalent to affirmations. Thus, insofar as an idea is a mental action, it will necessarily be an affirmation for Spinoza and will therefore be belief-like.

The next step in Della Rocca's argument is qualifying in what sense all ideas are mental actions. Della Rocca begins by differentiating between a strong and weak sense of the term "action" employed by Spinoza. According to Della Rocca, a mental action in the strong sense is "any state, such as x, that occupies the role of being a state that is adequately caused by the mind and that in turn gives rise to further states that are adequately caused by the mind,"[229] where for *x* to be the adequate cause of *y* is for *y* to be wholly explicable in terms of *x.* While the notion of being an adequate cause might remain perplexing, we can place this difficulty aside, given that we are here concerned with Spinoza's weak sense of action. In the weaker sense, "the mind acts just in case it causes (either adequately or not) some effect y."[230] That is, the mind can be said to act insofar as it, either alone or in conjunction with other causes, produces some effect. For instance, if my desire for chocolate produces some effect – perhaps it causes me to scheme about how I might acquire a chocolate bar – then this desire can be said to be a mental action. This remains the case even if this desire is itself the result of some external cause, such as my having watched a commercial, since to be an action in the weak sense is simply to participate in the causal history of some effect, rather than to fully determine that effect.

The final step in Della Rocca's argument is to demonstrate that all ideas are mental actions in the weak sense of the term. To do this, Della Rocca argues that all ideas produce

[228] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 206.
[229] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 205.
[230] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 206.

effects. By demonstrating that all ideas produce some effect in the mind, Della Rocca is able to argue that all ideas must be regarded as mental actions. As Della Rocca puts it, "actions […] occupy a place in a causal network, and, by seeing what ideas cause, we can achieve at least a partial understanding of the causal role that ideas play and of why Spinoza regards ideas as actions and, hence, as beliefs."[231] Della Rocca begins his argument by claiming that, for Spinoza, "all actions are a function of our striving to do things." Spinoza maintains that anything that exists strives to persevere in its existence and that this striving, or *conatus*, is the "actual essence of the thing."[232] Further, Spinoza maintains that nothing by its own power seeks its own destruction.[233] That is, if a thing is destroyed or impaired in its striving, this is necessarily the result of an external cause. From these claims it follows that all actions aim at contributing to the *conatus* of a thing, or, put negatively, that "any action that is not somehow a manifestation of the striving to benefit an individual is not an action of that individual."[234] Thus, Della Rocca maintains that, for Spinoza, something is an action of *x* by virtue of its contributing to *x's conatus*. At this point, if Della Rocca can demonstrate how all ideas contribute to a thing's *conatus*, he can claim that all ideas are actions, and hence beliefs.

However, this initial characterization of the connection between actions and the *conatus* is overly strong, as it excludes the possibility of ideas counting as actions in the weak sense of the term. Recall that for something to act in the weak sense is for that thing to be the partial cause of some effect. That is, even if a thing is largely determined to produce an effect by external forces, so long as it contributes to that effect to some extent, it can be said to act. But it is also possible for something to act in the weak sense of the term, while also failing to

[231] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 208.
[232] E3p7. Cf. E3p6.
[233] E3p4.
[234] Della Rocca, "Power of an Idea," 208.

contribute positively to the *conatus*. For instance, smoking a cigarette might fail to contribute to my striving to persevere in being, but could still be considered an action in the weaker sense.[235] Given that Della Rocca has only argued that all ideas are actions in this weaker sense, if he is to explain the causal role ideas play by reference to the *conatus*, he must provide an interpretation that allows ideas to participate as partial, or inadequate, causes.

To achieve this, Della Rocca draws our attention to E3p28 where Spinoza claims that "we strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy whatever we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.'' The importance of this passage is that, according to Della Rocca, Spinoza uses it to weaken his initial claims about striving. It is not that we strive to do all those things that necessarily contribute to our persevering in being, but rather that we strive to do whatever we *imagine* will contribute to our *conatus*. Thus, our striving is not infallible but rather is guided by our imagination of what is beneficial. An idea does not need to contribute positively to our well-being in order to be considered an action, it must only effect – to some extent – the form our striving takes. To put it otherwise, if an idea contributes to our imaginative constitution, then it will necessarily have an effect on how we strive (by E3p28) and can thus be regarded as an action.

Della Rocca provides several examples in order to demonstrate that all ideas, even if they appear to be causally inert, contribute to the form that our striving takes. Suppose that there is a glass that I imagine to be filled with water, although a reliable source has told me that it is actually filled with turpentine. Further, suppose that even though I am thirsty, I refrain from drinking from the glass. Della Rocca argues that such restraint is a result of the latter idea, the idea that the cup is filled with turpentine, determining what form my striving takes. However,

[235] That is, it fails to contribute to my striving in the long run.

this is not to say that the former idea is causally inefficacious, for its power to determine my behaviour must be kept in check by the idea of turpentine. If I had not been informed that there was turpentine in the glass, I would have drunk from the glass. Thus, even though the former idea is overcome, it nonetheless exerts a certain force on my *conatus*, a force that must be kept in check by opposing ideas. As such, Della Rocca argues that all ideas exert some amount of causal pressure on my striving and, consequently, that all ideas are actions. Being actions, all ideas are affirmations; and, as affirmations, all ideas are beliefs.

(4.2) The Dominance Model

Unlike the UM, the DM maintains that not all ideas are beliefs. Rather, only the mind's dominant ideas qualify as beliefs. In this section, I explain the DM as developed by Dianne Steinberg and contribute to Steinberg's account by further developing a key notion on which it relies, namely, the notion of exclusion.

According to Dianne Steinberg, we should interpret Spinoza as committed to the claim that "A believes that p iff A has the idea that p and A's idea that p is stronger than every idea q, which A has, which excludes p."[236] Dianne Steinberg arrives at this position after examining Spinoza's notion of suspending judgment. Spinoza explains that suspension of judgement is not a Cartesian "[act of] free will,"[237] whereby one refrains from judging the truth or falsity of a proposition, but is rather a type of inadequate idea: "when we say that someone suspends judgment, we are saying nothing but that he sees that he does not perceive the thing adequately."[238] Dianne Steinberg points out that Spinoza explains "his analysis of suspension of

[236] Steinberg, "Belief," 151.
[237] E2p49c.
[238] E2p49c.

judgment by contrasting it with a simpler state of mind in which a person merely perceives a thing."[239] What is important about the explanation provided by Spinoza is that he claims we perceive something only when that perception isn't excluded by another idea. Spinoza writes "let us conceive a child imagining a winged horse, and not perceiving anything else. Since this imagination involves the existence of the horse (by P17C), and *the child does not perceive anything else that excludes the existence of the horse*, he will necessarily regard the horse as present."[240] From this example of perception, Dianne Steinberg concludes that "an idea is a belief unless it occurs in a certain context of other ideas that prevents its being a belief."[241]

Unlike Della Rocca, Dianne Steinberg provides a more explicit explanation for why this type of idea constitutes a belief: "in a quite ordinary sense, a belief is an idea of whose truth we are convinced, one that has a certain hold on us or that exerts a certain kind of force in our mental life."[242] This common-sense description of belief combines both the idea of a belief as something we regard as true, as well as the intuition that beliefs influence our mental economy in a particularly forceful way. If, for instance, I believe that it is raining outside, this will exert a force on the other ideas I have, such as what type of jacket I believe I should wear if I leave. [243] Thus, for Dianne Steinberg perceiving a winged horse constitutes a belief since (a) when we are perceiving a winged horse we are convinced of the truth of the claim "the horse is winged," and

[239] Steinberg, "Belief," 148.
[240] E2p49c, emphasis added.
[241] Steinberg, "Belief," 148.
[242] Steinberg, "Belief," 149.
[243] Pascal Engel argues for a "dispositional functional conception" where ideas exert a certain influence on our mind by disposing us to assent to or accept certain claims (Pascal, "Believing"). It might appear as if this has an affinity to Dianne Steinberg's account, however, for Steinberg, beliefs are necessarily active and thus constantly exert pressure on our mental economy, rather than simply disposing us to certain future mental actions. It could perhaps be made compatible with a dispositional account if beliefs were regarded as active potentialities in the Aristotelian sense.

(b) this idea will exert an influence on my mental life, for instance, by encouraging me to make other affirmations, e.g., affirming that "certain mythical creatures exist."

However, not all ideas on the DM meet these criteria since it is possible for certain ideas to be excluded by other ideas. If, for instance, my perception of a winged horse is excluded by another idea, I will neither be likely to regard the proposition "the horse is winged" as true, nor will this idea exert significant influence on my mental life. For this reason, Dianne Steinberg concludes that our beliefs are our most dominant ideas, or those ideas that are strong enough to exclude competing ideas. A full explanation of the DM requires that we explain what it means for an idea to exclude another idea, and what determines the strength of an idea.

Throughout the *Ethics* Spinoza speaks of ideas excluding one another. This occurs, for instance, in the above mentioned case of the winged horse, where Spinoza claims that the child perceives a winged-horse "since this imagination involves the existence of the horse (by P17C), *and the child does not perceive anything else that excludes the existence of the horse*."[244] Spinoza also makes use of the notion of exclusion in his theory of error, writing that "the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack an idea *which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to it*."[245] Dianne Steinberg argues that in "virtually all of the passages where *secludo* [i.e., excludes] is used, it appears to denote incompatibility between the contents of, or states of affairs expressed by, ideas. An idea excludes some state of affairs p, if and only if the state of affairs it expresses, q, cannot coexist with p, or q implies -p."[246] Thus, for one idea to exclude another is for those ideas to be mutually incompatible. For example, I cannot simultaneously affirm that "the horse is

[244] Ep49c.
[245] E2p17s, emphasis added.
[246] Steinberg, "Belief," 149.

winged" and that the "horse is not winged," since those ideas express mutually incompatible states of affairs. While I agree with Dianne Steinberg's understanding of exclusion, it can be further developed by turning to Spinoza's understanding of contrariety.

Spinoza claims at E3p4 that things which "are contrary in nature […] cannot be in the same subject, insofar as one can destroy the other."[247] There are two aspects of this proposition that are important for understanding Spinoza's concept of contrariety. First, when things are contrary, they cannot simultaneously exist in the same subject. To rely on a grammatical analogy, we can say that *x* and *y* are contrary if we cannot simultaneously predicate *x* and *y* of subject A. For instance, given that we cannot simultaneously predicate 'is blue' and 'is not-blue' of the same subject, these two qualities are contrary to one another.

The second important aspect of E3p5 is that contrary things can destroy each other. For instance, since white blood cells can destroy viral infections, we can say that these two things are contrary to one another. While we are comfortable with talking about destruction when it comes to physical things, the notion of ideas destroying one another might strike us as odd. However, for Spinoza ideas are things, just as apples, rocks, and books are things, albeit thinking things rather than extended things; and just as apples, rocks, and books can destroy and be destroyed, so too can ideas. For as Spinoza says, "there is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Wherever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed."[248] As such, an idea does not simply foreclose the possibility of the presence of a contrary idea in a merely logical sense, but rather contrary ideas risk destroying each other in an ontological sense.

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[247] E3p5.
[248] E4a1.

As was said above, every idea for Spinoza is an actually existing thing and, as such, each idea has an essence, or that which being given "the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away."[249] If you change or remove the essence, or nature, of a thing then you destroy it. Spinoza provides the example of changing a horse into a man, claiming that "a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect."[250] Spinoza argues that the horse is destroyed precisely because you would need to change its essence in order to "transform" it into a human. Incompatible ideas, insofar as they are capable of destroying each other, must therefor conflict on the level of their essences, or natures.

I contend that Spinoza's notion of exclusion is the conceptual counterpart to the notion of involvement. As discussed in Chapter 1, Spinoza argues that ideas can be conceptually dependent on one another, and he articulates this dependence in terms of one idea involving another. If idea *x* involves idea *y*, then *x* will be conceptually dependent on *y*. For example, since we cannot think of a body without conceiving of it as a mode of extension, our concept of a body involves the attribute of extension. Further, the type of dependence that involvement captures is not only conceptual, but also ontological. That is, not only are modes of extension conceptually dependent on the attribute of extension, but they are also ontologically dependent. The notion of exclusion works in the opposite direction: when idea *x* excludes idea *y*, it is because the content of *x* is incompatible with the content of *y*. Moreover, when one idea conceptually excludes another, there is a corresponding ontological exclusion. Although ideas causally interact with each other *qua* modes, the particular way that ideas bump up against one another has to do with their representational content, or their objective reality. What determines how bodies, *qua* modes

[249] E2d2.
[250] EIVpreface: G II/208/26-29.

of extension, interact is their size, shape, velocity, and direction of travel – all qualities that are predicated on the extended nature of bodies. Analogously, it is the ideational qualities of ideas that determines how they interact with one another: ideas have content and it is this content that determines how ideas interact when they come into contact.[251]

If the notion of exclusion has to do with the incompatible contents of ideas, we can further elucidate Spinoza's notion in terms of logical contradiction: we cannot simultaneously predicate P and ¬P of the same object and thus an idea that affirms P of *q* will be contrary to an idea that affirms ¬P of *q*. However, it is worth repeating that for ideas logical contradiction is equivalent to ontological opposition. Insofar as contrary ideas are logically contradictory, they cannot occupy the same mind and are at risk of destroying each other. Elaborating on this spatial metaphor, we can say that ideas occupy space in the mind and contradictory, or contrary, ideas are like opposing forces that vide with one another to occupy the same grounds.[252] Just as two positive poles of a magnet repel one another when placed in close proximity, so too do ideas attempt to force from the mind their contraries. And with no existence outside a mind, ideas that are forced completely from this mental space are destroyed.

To explain which ideas win out in the struggle to occupy the mind, the DM relies on the notion of the strength, or power, of ideas. Dianne Steinberg argues that for Spinoza every idea, *qua* finite mode, "has its own force of existing" and "like any other individual, however transitory, its power consists in its ability to produce effects and be a factor in its interactions."[253] By emphasizing that Spinoza regards ideas as singular things, Dianne Steinberg draws our

[251] Here I agree with Martin Lenz's reading of contrariety, that is, that contrariety is not merely a logical concept but also has ontological force. See Lenz, "Biased beliefs," 59-60.
[252] For a reading of Spinoza's passions that supports this position, see Rovere, "Oscillating Affects."
[253] Steinberg, "Belief," 151.

attention to the fact that every idea must have a certain amount of power by which it can exist and produce effects. Moreover, Dianne Steinberg argues that *qua* singular things each idea must have its own conatus, i.e., that each idea "strives to persevere in its own being, or has a force of existing of its own."[254]

By turning to Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine, Dianne Steinberg is able to situate ideas in Spinoza's larger metaphysical project, arguing that ideas, just like rabbits or humans, strive to maintain their existence. Further, approaching ideas as singular things allows us to better understand how ideas come into conflict with one another. In *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, Viljanen argues that Spinoza's notion of power implies "that if any thing, whether finite or infinite, encounters opposition, it strives against that opposition to cause effects determined by its own essence alone."[255] In other words, Spinoza maintains that power expresses itself as a resistance to oppositional forces and that things strive, as far as they can, to maintain themselves as the things they are, what was referred to earlier as the homeostatic dimension of a thing's *conatus*. What is important to note is that the striving to maintain in being that all things exhibit is always a striving *against* oppositional forces, forces that threaten to harm that thing or cause its destruction. Consequently, ideas are always striving to maintain themselves against other ideas opposed to their essence, i.e., contrary ideas.

We can now connect our earlier discussion on contrariety to Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine. Insofar as ideas are contrary to one another, they are capable of destroying each other, and insofar as each idea strives to persevere in being, ideas necessarily resist contrary ideas. As Viljanen argues, since "things are expressers of power [i.e., singular things], the exclusion of

[254] Steinberg, "Belief," 150.
[255] Viljanen, *Geometry of Power*, 102.

logical opposition amongst a subject's essential effects or properties is converted into real impulsion against opposing forces."[256] That is, given that contrary ideas are capable of destroying each other and given that ideas are singular things striving to persevere in being, the striving of an idea converts itself into a "real impulsion against opposing forces," i.e., the struggle to exclude contrary ideas from the mind. Martin Lenz similarly concludes that Spinoza "blends the opposition of physical forces into the contrariety of ideas, thus allowing for a metaphysically conative (rather than merely logical) understanding of contrary relations between ideas. One idea being contrary to another can now be read as one idea fighting or resisting another."[257]

Ideas conflict with one another when they impede or oppose each other's striving, and ideas oppose each other's striving if they have logically incompatible content. Since all ideas *qua* things strive to maintain their existence, and since maintaining their existence requires that they continuously affirm a particular propositional content, ideas will necessarily exclude contrary ideas, given that contrary ideas affirm a contradictory content and thus cannot coexist with the initial idea.

As Spinoza says, "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in being."[258] The power of an idea will thus determine its ability to successfully resist, and thus exclude, contrary ideas. Hence, when two contrary ideas come into conflict, it is the power, or strength, of each idea that determines which idea will win out in the struggle to occupy the mind. This struggle is not necessarily a zero-sum game: an idea may exert significant power over a contrary idea while nonetheless failing to completely destroy or exclude that idea. For instance, I

[256] Viljanen, *Geometry of Power*, 103.
[257] Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 157.
[258] E3p6.

may affirm that the "earth is flat" and this idea will strive to destroy and exclude the idea that the "earth is round." However, the latter idea may retain enough power so not to be completely destroyed or excluded from my mind: despite my constant and triumphant avowals that the earth is flat, the possibility that it is round might never fully leave my mind. The extent to which an idea will be able to exclude its contraries will be determined by how much power that idea has relative to the ideas to which it is in opposition: the more power an idea has relative to a contrary idea, the more it will be able to completely exclude that idea.[259]

We can now return to the DM's initial definition of a belief. Recall that "A believes that p iff A has the idea that p and A's idea that p is stronger than every idea q, which A has, which excludes p."[260] Ideas can exclude each other when they are contrary, i.e., when they predicate contradictory properties to the same subject, and the more powerful an idea the more it can exclude contrary ideas. According to the DM, a belief is not any idea, but the dominant idea among a set of contrary ideas.

(4.3) Why Believe the Dominance Model?

We have before us two models of belief: the Universalist Model and the Dominance Model. I contend that, for Spinoza, we adopt our beliefs based on how they affect us rather than

[259] Martin Lenz develops a similar notion of contrariety within a universalist – what he refers to as a holistic – theory of belief. Lenz explains that "this understanding of ideas as rooted in contrariety should not be seen as a refutation of the holistic understanding of ideas, as urged for instance by Della Rocca; rather it provides a refinement of how this holism is taken to work. Since contrariety of ideas relies on the assumption that a competing idea cannot belong to the same mind (E3p10) and since contrariety does not in itself determine what it is that turns out to enhance or weaken another idea, the applicability of contrariety always requires more than one idea" (Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 61-2). The main gap between my own position and Lenz is that Lenz advances a Universalist Model, assuming that the Dominance Model doesn't sit well with Spinoza's assumption that all ideas involve affirmations. The Dominance Model, however, does not deny that all ideas involve affirmations, it only argues that there is more to a belief. As was noted above, I also harbor some doubts as to whether Spinoza is using affirmation in the sense of having a certain type of propositional attitude.

[260] Steinberg, "Belief," 151.

on the basis of their epistemic merits. So long as we accept the ATI, then both the UM and the DM allow us to make this argument about beliefs. If all our ideas are beliefs, and, following the arguments from Chapter 3, all our ideas are adopted or rejected based on how they affect us, then all our beliefs are adopted or rejected based on how they affect us. Likewise, if our beliefs are only our most powerful ideas, as maintained by the DM, then our beliefs are still adopted or rejected based on how they affect us, insofar as this is the case for all ideas. As such, both models allow us to argue that what determines whether we strive to adopt or reject a given belief is how that belief affects us, rather than its epistemic merits.

Let us develop this argument more fully. Recall that, according to the ATI, our ideas are adopted or rejected based on how they affect us. Spinoza is committed to the claim that our mind is a thing that strives both to maintain itself as the thing that it is and to increase its power. What determines whether the mind will join with a given idea or resist it as something harmful, will depend on how that idea affects us: if an idea causes us joy, this indicates a transition to a greater power and the mind will strive to adopt this belief into its causal system; if an idea causes us sadness, this indicates a transition to less power, and the mind will strive to resist this idea as far as possible. The mind, then, strives to adopt joyful ideas and to reject saddening ideas. This is not to say that we are always successful; after all, it is possible to be overcome by saddening ideas. However, even in this case what determines that a saddening idea wins out against our resistance is its affective power: if the idea is more powerful than the mind, then it can overcome the mind and cling to it. As Spinoza claims, "the force of any passion, or affect, can surpass the other actions, or power, of a man, so that the affect stubbornly clings to the man."[261]

[261] E4p4.

For both the UM and DM beliefs are ideas, and so we can advance the same argument as above for beliefs. To ask what determines if we have this belief rather than that belief, is to ask why we have one idea rather than another. The answer, I argue, boils down to how that idea affects us. If I am presented with a given belief, my mind will either strive to adopt or reject that belief, and which form my mind's striving takes will depend on whether that belief causes joy or sadness. Again, this is not something that can be determined by the content of the belief alone: the same belief might cause one person joy, another person sadness, and cause neither joy nor sadness to a third. What will determine how my mind interacts with a given belief, will depend on the ideas that already comprise my mind, and how these ideas are related to each other. If I already believe the earth is flat, and this belief brings me great joy, my mind will strive to resist the belief that the earth is round. Even if the belief that the earth is round is true, its truth adds nothing to its affective power, and thus truth makes the idea no more or less likely to win out in the struggle to occupy my mind.[262] What will matter is which belief, *qua* idea, is more powerful. The UM and the DM must accept this claim if the ATI is correct, since what ideas become part of our mind will be determined on the affective level, and thus it will be affective power that determines belief.

Moreover, there is a normative dimension to this theory of belief, just as there is for the ATI. As was discussed in the introduction, there is a tendency to think that to believe correctly is to believe something true. If we believe something false, or, even worse, maintain our false beliefs in the face of contrary evidence, we are acting as bad believers. That is, if the aim of belief is to affirm a proposition with the aim of thereby affirming something true, we have failed in our task as believers if we end up affirming false ideas. This claim is too harsh. Beliefs, like

[262] E4p7 and E4p14.

any other ideas, can serve a positive role in our mental ecosystem even if they fail to be true. For example, many of our current scientific beliefs might turn out to be false, but they are nonetheless useful insofar as they help lead us towards a greater understanding.

Although the UM is compatible with my overall argument, I think preference should be given to the DM for reasons that I shall discuss below. Before I discuss these reasons, however, I should like to note a few things that I think the UM captures very well. Della Rocca argues that all ideas are beliefs because all ideas involve affirmations. The notion of affirmation, as developed by Della Rocca, helps explain a feature of beliefs, namely, that we are predisposed to regard our own beliefs as true. If all ideas are propositional in character and involve affirmations, as Della Rocca argues, then all ideas involve asserting the truth of some content. If this is the case, then it helps explain why we take truth to be constitutive of belief: it is because, as a matter of forming an idea, we affirm something of a given object. As such, regardless of the actual truth status of our belief, we will regard our beliefs as true. What the ATI shows us, however, is that truth does not enter into the mechanisms that determine whether we adopt one idea over another, since truth does not influence the affective power of an idea.

This point can be connected to Spinoza's comments in the appendix to E1 in an interesting way. In this appendix, Spinoza explains that the myth of free will in part stems from being able to recognize our desires but being unable to recognize the origin of these desires. Since we do not understand the causal history of our desires, we take ourselves to be the author of these desires. A similar argument can be advanced about beliefs and truth. Since all our ideas involve affirming that something is the case, all the content of our ideas involves the notion of truth, and we intuitively recognize this. However, because we fail to see the cause of our ideas, i.e., because we fail to see that our ideas are adopted or rejected based on how those ideas affect

us, we think that we must be the cause of our ideas. Thinking that we cause our ideas and recognizing that our ideas involve the notion of truth in their content, we mistakenly think that we form a belief because of its truth value. We conclude that "I believe this because it is true," when we should rather conclude that "I think this is true, because I believe it."

In arguing for an affective theory of belief, I do not wish to suggest that truth does not play an important role in how we conceive of our beliefs. What I maintain is that which beliefs we adopt or reject is a matter of how they affect us, and, following the normative arguments of the ATI, that we are not committing any doxastic errors for adopting beliefs in this way. This is compatible with the claim that our common sense notion of belief is deeply interconnected with the notion of truth and the claim that we are predisposed to regard our beliefs as true.

The UM also nicely demonstrates the causal nature of ideas: ideas are things that produce effects and contribute to the mind's striving. Moreover, I agree with the claim that ideas must necessarily have some causal influence on the operations of the mind. As I argued in the previous chapters, there can be no idea that is causally inert, and all ideas must exert some causal pressure on the mental ecosystem in which they are embedded. Moreover, Della Rocca's treatment of affirmation helps support certain claims made in the previous chapter. More specifically, Della Rocca argues for an identity relation between affirmation, volition, and willing. Spinoza clearly denies that we have a faculty of free will, and if we are not free to direct our will then we will likewise not be free to direct our affirmations. If we cannot freely affirm or deny some given proposition, then the advent of a given idea must be accounted for elsewhere, namely, in the causal history of that idea.

To put it another way, if we adopted ideas, and hence beliefs, on the basis of their truth, then either (a) we would require a faculty that allowed us to freely adopt or deny ideas, or (b)

truth would have to play a pivotal role in the causal history of the idea. Spinoza denies both options, since we do not have a free will necessary to support (a) and since (b) requires that truth add something to the affective power of an idea, a claim that Spinoza rejects. Our beliefs are not freely formed but rather originate as do all ideas, *via* their causal histories. To claim that we form beliefs based on their epistemic content, i.e., on the basis of their truth or adequacy, would require that this content have some impact in determining the causal history of an idea. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, the mind strives after joyful, empowering ideas, rather than after true ideas, and, moreover, since inadequate ideas are sometimes more empowering than their adequate counterparts, it is not the case that we ought always to prefer adequate or true ideas. The same can be said about beliefs.

I would like to briefly provide two reasons for endorsing the DM in preference to the UM. First, the DM captures the intuition that beliefs exert a special kind of influence on our mental lives. This intuition is shared by advocates for the UM and DM alike. For instance, Della Rocca's assertion that all ideas are belief-like is supported by his assertion that all ideas exert an influence on our mental activities. In the example of the glass of water, Della Rocca is concerned with emphasizing that even ideas that do not exert the greatest influence on our mind, nonetheless exert some influence. While I agree with Della Rocca that all ideas exert some influence on our mental economy, our common sense understanding of a belief is much closer aligned to the DM, in that beliefs are typically regarded as having a more substantial influence than other ideas, such as feigned or entertained ideas.

Consider the scenario where the idea "the earth is flat" and the "earth is round" are competing with one another to occupy Jill's mind. Jill is adamant that the earth is round, and constantly makes this affirmation; when pressed on the shape of the earth, Jill will reliably

answer that "the earth is round;" and all of Jill's external actions indicate that she operates according to this idea.[263] Now suppose Jill decides to watch a documentary on flat-earthers, and while doing so she entertains the idea that the earth is flat. In such a scenario, both ideas might exert some influence on Jill's mental economy, and insofar as she has entertained both, she can be said to have these two ideas. According to the UM, both ideas are "beliefs" that Jill holds. Even if Jill repeatedly rejects the idea that the "earth is flat," even if the idea that the "earth is round" consistently (and successfully) strives to exclude the other idea, they can both be considered beliefs. I think this conclusion does not properly align with our common understanding of beliefs. A belief is not any idea that enters the mind, even one entertained for a second, but those ideas that exert a special influence on our mental economy. I contend that this intuition about beliefs is much better captured by the DM, since in characterizing beliefs as our dominant ideas the DM can explain that beliefs are those ideas that exert the most substantial influence on our mental economy. Even though Jill might have briefly entertained the idea that "the earth is flat," the fact that this idea was reliably excluded from her mind indicates that it was not a dominant idea, and thus not a belief.

Following this, I contend that beliefs are predominantly understood as a proper subset of ideas. To claim that all ideas are beliefs both fails to properly capture the differences between mental phenomena and fails to provide our notion of belief with any explanatory power. A theory that claims that all ideas are beliefs reduces the concept of belief to a vacuous qualifier, since there is nothing in a belief that distinguishes it from any other idea, such as a dream, a feigned idea, or intuitive knowledge. Admittedly, the question of which theory is more

[263] Jill does not, for instance, monitor flight patterns attempting to prove that circumnavigating the globe is impossible.

explanatorily useful and which Spinoza ascribed to are different questions, for it may be the case that Spinoza simply had a theory of belief that lacked any substantial explanatory power. However, both Della Rocca and Dianne Steinberg locate a theory of belief in Spinoza by way of assuming properties about what it is to be a belief and then demonstrating where these properties can be located in Spinoza's epistemology.[264] While this might appear to be begging the question,[265] I contend that belief should not be universalizable, that as a conceptual category it should distinguish certain ideas from others, for otherwise the concept risks becoming vacuous.[266]

Neither of these arguments for endorsing the DM over the UM are premised on the claim that the UM is an erroneous interpretation of Spinoza. There is, as I have discussed, much that I agree with in Della Rocca's reading. However, when discussing beliefs in Spinoza, I believe we are inevitably doing something somewhat anachronistic. That is, we are looking to find where a notion of belief can be found in Spinoza and what this theory would look like. Spinoza was not explicitly concerned with establishing a theory of belief and many of our assumptions about what constitutes a belief might not have been shared by Spinoza. In other words, we are starting with certain assumptions about what a belief is and trying to determine where this notion could be

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[264] This is also the case for Bennett, *Spinoza's Ethics*, Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," Lin, Spinoza's Account of Akrasia," and Matson, "Spinoza on Belief."

[265] There is a greater risk of begging the question if we do not explicitly acknowledge that we are operating in this manner. For instance, Martin Lenz pushes against Dianne Steinberg's reading by arguing that the claim that "not every idea is a belief […] does not sit well with the fact that Spinoza assumes every idea to involve an affirmation. To say that some ideas are not beliefs would require a distinction between kinds of ideas that Spinoza does not provide" (Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 58). Here Lenz has moved from the assumption that a belief is nothing more than an affirmation of a proposition, through the claim that all ideas involve affirmations, to arrive at the conclusion that the Dominance Model does not "sit well" with Spinoza's position. However, this can only be the case if we assume that belief is simply an affirmation of a proposition, and nothing more. We should be cautious not to naturalize our contemporary assumptions about beliefs and then read them back into Spinoza's theory.

[266] Both Daniel Gilbert et al. "Unbelieving the Unbelievable," and Chris Street et al. "Aligning Spinoza with Descartes," rely on Spinoza's concept of belief for psychological studies. While these studies employ a somewhat naive reading of Spinoza, the use of Spinoza's theory of belief in modern psychology points to the utility of developing a non-vacuous account of belief in Spinoza's philosophy.

located in Spinoza's philosophy. For this reason, it is fair to say that a theory that better maps onto certain assumptions that we have about beliefs is a better theory, even if both the UM and DM are viable readings of Spinoza. Most contemporary philosophers assume, for instance, that a belief is not just another term for any idea that we have, but that it picks out a specific type of mental phenomenon. The DM is better able to preserve this assumption, as well as the assumption that beliefs exert a special type of force on our mental activities.

The purpose of looking at the notion of belief in Spinoza is that it allows us to take philosophical insights developed by Spinoza and place them in contact with contemporary philosophical discussions. We allow ourselves to mobilize Spinoza's insights in contemporary philosophical discussions by mapping a contemporary notion, namely, belief, onto Spinoza's philosophical system. Doing so allows us not only to discover interesting aspects of Spinoza's philosophy, but also allows us to disrupt certain contemporary assumptions, such as the assumption that truth is central to the notion of belief. This is a delicate process, however, since in order to displace certain assumptions about our notion of beliefs, we must take care to preserve other assumptions, otherwise we might end up with a notion that entirely fails to map onto our contemporary notion of beliefs. For this reason, I contend that the DM is a better theory for our purposes.

(4.4) The Power of a Belief

I would now like to discuss the ways that we can mobilize our insights from previous chapters to expand on this model. Dianne Steinberg emphasizes that ideas, *qua* modes, strive to persevere in being, and that the power of an idea is connected to its ability to produce effects that contribute to this striving. Ideas can be more or less powerful, insofar as they have a greater or

lesser ability to maintain themselves in the face of oppositional forces. Beliefs are our most powerful ideas, but the question remains what makes one idea more powerful than another. In other words, why is the *conatus* of one idea more successful than the *conatus* of an idea that it excludes. In resolving this question, I shall draw upon insights developed in previous chapters and use those insights to expand on the DM; for once we have developed a more robust understanding of what constitutes an idea's power, we will have a better understanding at how the mind comes to have a given belief.[267]

As we have seen, the power of a thing has to do with its ability to produce certain effects and to play a role within causal interactions. Viljanen explains that for Spinoza "power is first and foremost a metaphysical concept that refers to a things' intrinsic capacity to cause effects."[268] As demonstrated in Chapter 1, all things, whether bodies or ideas, are ultimately expressions of God's existential power. As Spinoza claims, "whatever exists expresses the nature, *or* essence of God in a certain and determinate way, i.e., whatever exists expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God, which is the cause of all things."[269] God's power is conceived of as a kind of productive force, an ability to bring about determinate effects. God is

[267] In the article "Two Puzzles," Justin Steinberg introduces a potential dilemma faced by the DM. The dilemma arises because Spinoza allows for cases where there is an apparent "discord between one's beliefs and one's affective-behavioural responses" (Steinberg, "Two Puzzles," 261). That is, although a person can be said to believe x, their behaviour is nonetheless determined by a non-dominant idea. Given that the DM supposes that a person believes x when the idea of x is most powerful, it is unclear how a non-dominant idea, i.e., a less powerful idea, can come to determine a person's behaviour. Justin Steinberg argues for a distinction between the "doxastic strength (strength of belief) and affective strength (strength of affect or desire) of one and the same idea" (Steinberg, "Two Puzzles," 267). That is, what determines whether an idea is a belief is not the same as what determines if it causally determines our affective-behavioural responses: the doxastic strength of an idea determines whether it will become a belief, whereas the affective strength of an idea determines our affective-behavioural responses. I contend that the supposition that ideas have two distinct types of power introduces an unjustified dualism into Spinoza's philosophy of mind. Seeing that Spinoza treats the essence of a thing as the same as its power, introducing a dualism into the notion of power risks also introducing a dualism into a thing's essence. I argue that we can overcome this dilemma simply by rejecting the claim that there is a direct causal connection between our dominant ideas and our affective-behavioural responses. We should instead maintain that our affective-behavioural responses are determined not by any one idea, but by the overall constitution of our mind, understood as a composite of ideas.

[268] Viljanen, *Geometry of Power,* 177.

[269] E1p36d.

omnipotent precisely because "from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes."[270] All finite things are expressions of this power, participating in it as finite bearers of this infinite causal power.

Power is thus conceived of as an ability to produce effects, and each thing, in virtue of its existence has its own share of power. From this it follows that "nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow."[271] To exist is to exhibit a certain amount of power, and to exhibit this power is to produce effects. Ideas, in virtue of their existence as things, must necessarily have power. However, Spinoza specifies that not all effects that a thing participates in producing should be properly conceived of as expressions of that thing's power. Rather, an effect is an indication of a thing's power only to the extent that the effect follows from that thing's nature or contributes to its *conatus*.[272]

Take, for example, the power of a human being. Spinoza explains that "by virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e. virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, *or* nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone."[273] In this passage, Spinoza specifies that it is not all effects that a person produces that constitute their power, but only those "which can be understood through the laws of [their] nature alone." Given that the actual essence of a thing is its *conatus,* or its striving to persevere in nature, for an effect to count as indicative of a thing's power it must be understood as contributing to that thing's striving. Put negatively, since nothing

[270] E1p16.
[271] E2p36.
[272] This maps onto Della Rocca's distinction between the weak and strong sense of actions: only actions in the strong sense constitute our power.
[273] E4d8.

seeks its own destruction, i.e., "no thing can be destroyed except through an external cause,"[274] any effect that contributes to the destruction of a thing cannot be understood as an effect that follows from its nature. An effect can only be understood as following from a thing's nature when that effect can be traced back to that thing's striving to persevere in existence. When it comes to ideas, the story is no different. In virtue of existing, all ideas must have a certain modicum of power. This power is expressed through the production of effects that promote the continued existence of that idea. When an idea resists a contrary idea, this can be understood as an expression of that idea's power.

The question remains, however, as to where this power arises from. Dianne Steinberg's account tells us that it is the most powerful ideas that become beliefs, and that this power is connected to an idea's *conatus*, but we still must explain why one *conatus* is more successful, more powerful, than the next. Recall that for Spinoza all finite modes exist in an interdependence relation with other modes. As I discussed in the first chapter, Spinoza maintains that all things exist and produce effects in virtue of being part of an infinite causal nexus:

> Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence.

Consequently, if power is an ability to produce certain effects, then power itself is relationally constituted. That is, what determines something's power is precisely the location that it occupies

[274] E3p4.

in Nature. A thing gains power by existing in relation to sympathetic forces and loses power by existing in relation to antithetic forces.

I can, for example, feed myself, cook, avoid dangers, accrue the material means of existence, develop friendships, and so on. While all of these effects can be understood as expressions of my power, insofar as they contribute to my existence, they also require that I am embedded in a complex causal network. The food that I eat is grown by others, my ability to cook was taught to me by my parents, I live in a home that others built, I make my living with skills that I have been taught by numerous teachers. Even putting aside the role of other people in contributing to my power, there are countless other forces that daily secure my existence. If there were no sun, no water, no trees, no bees to pollinate, then I could not continue to exist as I do. As finite modes, we are embedded in a complex causal system that constantly promotes and secures our power to act. I am, after all, ontologically dependent on other things and on nature as a whole for my existence, an existence which expresses itself as a type of power to produce effects. The point of this example is that my power, like the power of all things, depends on how I exist in relation to other forces: things strive to enter into empowering relations and avoid disempowering relations as far as possible, and ideas are no different.

Recall that minds are complex ideas. All my ideas taken together form a type of mental ecosystem. That is, the ideas that I have are not discrete thoughts that pop in and out of existence through the spontaneous effort of my will but are entities that exist in relation to the other ideas that I have. What determines the power of any given idea, at least in part, will be the other ideas that I have in my mind. As I argued in Chapter 2, ideas in the mind are connected to one another according to reason or according to the imagination. Ideas comprise the mind not as discrete

units, but as interconnected nodes within a causal network. When we inquire after the strength of a particular idea, we must consider how this idea is connected to other ideas in the mind.

I contend that ideas in the mind which are more deeply entrenched, that are more interconnected with other ideas, will be more powerful than ideas that lack these types of connections. Here I expand on claims explicitly made by Spinoza to develop a more detailed picture of how ideas gain power. These are not arguments that can be found in Spinoza's *opus* but claims that I contend follow from, and are consistent with, Spinoza's metaphysics and philosophy of mind. I am attempting, that is, to provide a more robust account of the way ideas become interconnected with other ideas in the mind and how this influences the power of a given idea.

By virtue of being interconnected with other ideas in the mind, an idea will be more resilient to exclusion by external ideas; this is because in order for that idea to be excluded, the external idea would need to produce a greater restructuring of the mind. As was mentioned earlier, ideas can be connected in the mind either according to reason or according to the imagination. Ideas that are connected will mutually support each other in the face of contrary ideas. That is, if idea *x* is connected to idea *y*, than it will be impossible to exclude x without either altering the connection between *x* and *y*, or excluding the idea with which it is connected. In the case of ideas connected according to reason, these two changes will occur together, but they can come apart when ideas are connected according to the imagination.

Take, for example, the idea that "a triangle is a geometric figure composed of three points connected by three straight lines and with internal angles equalling 180°." Our idea of a triangle is connected by reason to our idea of points, our idea of lines, our idea of numbers, and our idea of angles, given that the idea of a triangle involves these other ideas. Now suppose that someone

shows me a triangle in a non-Euclidian space that is comprised of three right angles. Given that this idea is contrary to my idea of a triangle, the two ideas will try to exclude one another. How might my mind respond to this new idea? First, my mind might maintain its current understanding of triangles, and reject the new idea: for instance, I might deny that this non-Euclidian figure is actually a triangle. Second, my mind might eliminate any incompatibility between these two ideas. Recall that Spinoza contends that error is the result of lacking certain understanding that would render an idea adequate. As such, perhaps reason would allow me to supplement my current idea of a triangle so as to render it consistent with the claim that this non-Euclidian figure is also a triangle. If I add that caveat that "in a Euclidean space, a triangle is a geometric figure composed of three points connected by three straight lines and with internal angles equalling 180°," then my idea will no longer be incompatible with this non-Euclidean geometric figure.

But suppose that my mind is either unable to reject this new idea nor is it able to render this new idea compatible with the ideas that I hold. What will my mind do if compelled to accept this non-Euclidean figure as a triangle? If I accept that this non-Euclidean figure is a triangle, then I must reject my previous understandings of triangles. This will require, however, either destroying connections to other ideas, or also adjusting these other ideas. For example, I might destroy the connection that I have between triangles and angles: I could conceive of triangles as essentially geometric figures formed by connected three points with three straight lines. This would allow me to conceive of the new figure as a triangle, although it would require that I break the conceptual connection between triangles and their internal angles. Or perhaps I maintain the connection between triangle and angles, but change my idea of angles, such that three internal 90° angles are now able to be conjoined so as to form a three-sided geometric figure. In other

words, if my idea of triangles remains linked with my idea of angles, then my current idea of angles must go as well.

While this analysis could be developed further, it is sufficient to establish the point at hand. Namely, that ideas connected according to reason are interdependent, such that you cannot destroy one idea without either destroying the ideas with which it is connected or by breaking that connection itself. Consider a physical analogy. Imagine we have a board that, by itself, cannot support our weight: if we were to stand on the board, then it would break. However, if we take two such boards and connect them to one another with screws, then we can make a plank that is much stronger. This is because the force encountered by the one board will be partially transferred to the second board. Fasten enough of these board together, and eventually we will have a structure that can resist our weight. In other words, boards that have been connected can work together to resist external forces; these boards will act together, since affecting the one board will necessarily affect the other.[275] As emphasized in Chapter 2, ideas act analogously to physical bodies. Just as interconnected bodies work together to resist external forces, so too will interconnected ideas.

Like reason, the imagination also connects ideas together, however the imagination establishes bonds of varying strength. For Spinoza, the imagination connects ideas by way of random experience: if I experience two things together, then these ideas will become interconnected, such that the idea of the one thing will lead to the idea of the other. The more that I experience these two things together, the stronger their connection will become. Spinoza provides the example of a farmer and a soldier's idea of a horse. The farmer, always having seen horses during farm work, will associate the animal with farming, such that if they see a horse

[275] E4p18s.

their mind will think of ploughing a field. In contrast, the soldier always encounters horses in war, and, as such, if they see a horse in a different context then their mind will think of war.

The more two ideas are associated with one another through experience, the stronger the connection between those ideas will be. Ideas with very strong imaginative connections will support one another when one idea faces exclusion by a contrary idea. For example, suppose that I, like the farmer, come to strongly associate the idea of horses with the idea of farming. This association might become so strong that I mistakenly believe that all farms have horses. These ideas are not connected according to reason, since there is nothing essential about horses that necessitates that they occur on farms, nor is there anything essential about farms such that they necessitate having horses. Yet if the imaginative connection is strong enough, if my idea of horses is strongly associated with my idea of farms, then the fate of these ideas will be interconnected in much the same way as ideas connected according to reason. For example, if someone shows me a farm and they have no horses on it, I might deny that it is a farm. I might also weaken my association with horses and farms, thinking that usually horses are found on farms, but not always. Or I could be forced to reject my idea of horses, but if the connection between horses and farms remains intact, then I would also need to reject my understanding of farms.

Ideas connected according to the imagination are not as intrinsically interconnected as are ideas according to reason. Since ideas connected according to the imagination are associated with one another, but are not logically connected, I can form imaginative connections that pull in different directions. I can, for instance, associate horses with both farming and war, if I encounter them in both scenarios. I could not do this if the idea of horses and farms were

logically connected: if it were the case that *x* is a horse if and only if *x* is on a farm, then it would be impossible for me to conceive of horses existing outside of farms.

While the details of this picture could be further developed, the point is that both reason and imagination form connections between ideas such that affecting an idea will have consequences on the ideas that it is connected with: either these connections will need to be broken or weakened, or the connected ideas will need to undergo some change. Since all things are more powerful if they are able to strive in conjunction with similar things, the more interconnected an idea is in the mind, the more powerful it will be. This is because the striving of an entrenched idea is bound up with the striving of other ideas in the mind in such a way that these ideas will work together to resist contrary ideas. Ideas with more and stronger connections will be more powerful than ideas that have fewer and weaker connections.

We can reformulate this argument in the vocabulary introduced in Chapter 1. We know from Spinoza's treatment of the notion of involvement, that conceptual dependency relations correspond to ontological, causal relations. As such, we know that it is the case that conceptual relations can correspond to causal relations. I am arguing that ideas that are connected according to reason or the imagination, that is, ideas with certain conceptual relations, also have corresponding causal relations. Further, we know that power is an ability to produce an effect that follows from a thing's nature, and that nothing produces an effect without being determined to do so by preceding causes. I contend that the more causally interconnected an idea is, the more powerful it is, since the more it can produce effects sympathetic with its nature. Put conversely, if an external idea is striving to exclude an idea in the mind, the more and stronger connections that idea has, the more powerful the external idea will need to be to succeed. This is because the external idea will need to produce more effects: it will need to adjust more connections in the

mind, or it will need to exclude other, interconnected ideas. The power of a belief, therefore, is relational, insofar as it is dependent on the causal relations that it has with other ideas in the mind.

This is, of course, only part of the story. The same narrative can be extended to ideas outside of the mind. That is, external ideas will be more powerful the more they are supported by and interconnected with other ideas. Likewise, the ideas in my mind will be more powerful the more they are supported by and interconnected with other ideas. This is precisely the claim made by Hasana Sharp in "The Force of Ideas in Spinoza." Sharp claims that

> For Spinoza, a *mens* is a radically dependent singular thing, an idea composed of many ideas, which desires to persevere in being. It can only preserve and enhance its being by coordinating its activity and undergoing enabling encounters with other ambient ideas. The ideas of any given individual are the result both of some bare measure of its proper activity, its singular "essence," and the accumulation of haphazard and deliberate encounters with other ideas. The ideas that gain force and power in the mind are, to a large degree, indifferent to the particular mind, or its strivings. That is, they are not necessarily the truest ideas, but the ideas with the most life support, as it were, from fellow ideas.[276]

What determines the power of an idea will be how it is connected and supported with other ideas – both inside and outside the mind. Dianne Steinberg is correct to claim that the power of an idea is connected with its striving, and we must add that this striving is more or less powerful depending on if an idea strives alone or strives together with ideas to which it is connected.

Our most powerful ideas, therefore, will be those that are thoroughly interconnected with the other beliefs that I hold, or those that are thoroughly supported by what Sharp refers to as

[276] Sharp, "The Force of Ideas," 745.

ambient ideas. In other words, while a belief is our most powerful idea, the power of an idea will depend on its causal connections with other ideas, both those inside and outside the mind. This, however, only partially tells the story of why we adopt the beliefs that we do. We must recall that the mind, as a complex idea, has its own striving to persevere in being and to increase its power. As argued in the last chapter, the mind's striving is oriented towards joy, since joy is indicative of our empowerment. This orientation towards joyful ideas ensures that the mind works to adopt those ideas that are joyful, and reject those ideas that are saddening, that is, the mind mobilizes in favour of joyful beliefs and against saddening beliefs.

Suppose that we are introduced with two competing beliefs, idea *j* that causes us joy and idea *s* that causes us sadness. Insofar as we recognize that *j* is a cause of joy and *s* is a cause of sadness, we will come to love *j* and to hate *s*.[277] Further, Spinoza claims that one will "strive to have present and preserve the thing he loves; and on the other hand, one strives to remove and destroy the thing he hates."[278] Consequently, if the mind identifies *j* as a source of joy and *s* as a source of sadness, it will seek to adopt *j* and to reject *s*. Beliefs that cause joy, or that we mistakenly think cause joy, will thus be at an advantage when struggling to exclude their rivals from the mind, since they will be encouraged by the mind. All other things being equal, beliefs that cause joy will have an advantage over those that cause sadness, since joyful ideas will be encouraged by the mind's striving whereas saddening ideas will be resisted.

Consider the case of how the mind relates to inadequate ideas, or passions. Spinoza claims that "the force and growth of any passion, and its perseverance in existing, are not defined by the power by which we strive to persevere in existing, but by the power of an external cause

[277] E3p13s.
[278] *Ibid.*

compared with our own."[279] Spinoza's claim is that, since inadequate ideas don't follow from our nature in the same way that adequate ideas do, we cannot account for the power of these ideas in terms of the power of our *conatus*. Rather, we need to compare the power of the "external cause" with our own power. Saddening ideas will be less powerful when compared to joyful ideas, because the mind will resist saddening ideas while conjoining with joyful ideas. In other words, the power of a saddening idea is less, since it is reduced by the mind's resistance.

As such, not only will those ideas which have more and stronger connections be more powerful, but also those ideas that are sympathetic to the striving of the mind, i.e., ideas that cause joy, or are thought to cause joy. If our most powerful ideas are our beliefs, then we are predisposed to adopt ideas that bring us joy, since joyful ideas will be encouraged by the mind's striving. In other words, when we look at which of two ideas are more likely to become a belief, we cannot simply compare the power of the one against the power of the other; we must also examine how those ideas will interact with the other ideas that comprise the mind, since this will determine whether the power of an idea will be encouraged or resisted by the overall striving of the mind. We are predisposed, in other words, to believe things that conform to our current beliefs and things that cause us joy, and to resist antagonistic ideas. The mind strives to adopt joyful beliefs and to reject saddening beliefs, and its success is determined on the affective level. The process of belief formation is thus not guided by a desire for truth or adequacy, but a desire for joy and empowerment.

There are, of course, certain advantages held by adequate ideas over inadequate ideas. For instance, adequate ideas, or true beliefs, will not lead us astray in the same way that inadequate ideas can. We can, for instance, be mistaken about the cause of a given joy, and

[279] E4p5.

erroneously strive for something that does not help us persevere in being. Adequate ideas will also be more resilient to external pressures, since the bonds that they form are stronger.[280] Moreover, adequate ideas don't conflict with one another, and so adopting adequate ideas allows for a potentially greater degree of mental harmony and stability. But the advantages that adequate ideas have should still be thought of in terms of how they contribute to the mind's *conatus*. Truth and adequacy are of instrumental value, insofar as true or adequate ideas are typically more advantageous than their alternatives. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, this is not always the case. Consequently, we cannot condemn an idea for being inadequate or false, only for being inadequate, false, and disempowering. For example, Spinoza is a determinist and denies that we have free will. As such, it would be false to believe that we have the power to direct our lives by force of will. However, there are times when such a false belief might be useful, or preferable to the alternative. If I am trying to overcome a substance abuse problem, it might be most empowering to believe that I have the ability to determine my own behaviours, rather than thinking they are the result of a causal history in which I cannot intervene. I think it would be mistaken to say that this is an instance of incorrect believing, or that we have failed as doxastic agents, because we have adopted a false belief.

(4.5) Conclusion

[280] We might wonder if we are able to lose adequate ideas at all or, given that they follow from the mind's nature, once we obtain an adequate idea it becomes impervious to dislodgment. If we are talking about actually existing minds (rather than conceiving of minds under a species of eternity) it seems all too possible to lose adequate ideas. Memory loss, for instance, provides a ready example of when we might lose adequate ideas that we once possessed. We also might consider the example of Dr. Rosaria Butterfield who, during the course of her life, went from advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, working as an academic in queer theory, and being in a committed lesbian relationship to converting to Christianity, advocating for gay conversion therapy, and claiming that "homosexuality and trangenderism are sins" (Butterfield, "Reparative Therapy," 2). During this transition, I would argue that there was a loss of some adequate ideas and their replacement by inadequate ones. Perhaps you could claim that there was a lack of adequate ideas all along, but this seems like a less charitable reading than the claim that external pressures caused Butterfield to lose some adequate ideas. To be clear, I am not suggesting that conversion to Christianity necessarily involves inadequate ideas but that using the bible as a means of justifying hate and bigotry does.

We began this chapter by examining two theories of belief: the Universalist Model and the Dominance Model. Throughout the chapter, I have expanded on the Dominance Model and provided reasons for why we ought to prefer it as Spinoza's theory of belief. I have argued that my thesis can be advanced both on the basis of the UM and the DM. That is, given that beliefs are a type of idea, then they will necessarily operate according to the same rules as all other ideas. Since, as I argued in Chapter 3, all ideas are adopted or rejected based on how they affect us, so too must our beliefs be affectively underpinned. As such, we are joyful believers, striving to believe things that are empowering and to avoid saddening, disempowering beliefs. Spinoza's philosophy thus provides the basis for an alternative approach to beliefs, one where truth is not central. This is not to say that truth and adequacy are not important to Spinoza's theory of belief, only that they must be understood in terms of how they contribute to the affective power of an idea, if at all.

I have argued that beliefs, for Spinoza, are a species of ideas, and as ideas they are adopted or rejected by the mind based on how they affect the mind: the mind strives to empower itself by adopting joyful ideas and resisting saddening ideas. Beliefs are our most powerful ideas, and they gain their power by virtue of the relation to other ideas and how they contribute to our mind's *conatus*. A belief that is more entrenched in the mind, that has several strong connections with other ideas, will be more capable of resisting exclusion from the mind. However, external ideas can be supported by ambient forces in such a way as to make them powerful enough to exclude even the most joyful ideas in our mind. Belief formation is a causal process, one that has to do with how systems interact. As such, belief formation can be understood in terms of causation, power, and affect.

While truth and adequacy remain important concepts, they are not what guides the mind. As Spinoza says, we strive on the basis of both adequate and inadequate ideas. That is, our mind is driven not only by truth and adequacy, but also by the passions. But since the passions can be joyful and empowering, and since inadequate ideas can sometimes be better suited to our striving than their adequate counterparts, it is not a problem that our minds operate in this way. In other words, we are not bad believers for adopting our beliefs based on how they affect us, rather than on the basis of their epistemic merits.

Our mind, like anything else, wants to persevere in being, and if it can do this by way of inadequate ideas better than it can by way of certain adequate ideas, than it ought to do so.[281] Things might be different if we were capable of avoiding the passions all together: if it were possible that our minds could be comprised exclusively of adequate ideas, then it might be best to always avoid inadequate ideas. However, our minds are finite things and are necessarily embedded in Nature and subject to the passions.[282] As such, there can be no avoiding inadequate ideas and no avoiding the use of our imagination. Our task lay not in avoiding such things, but in searching after those inadequate ideas that are most joyful, most empowering.

[281] There are restrictions on this claim, as I shall discuss in the following chapter.
[282] E4p3 and E4p4.

Chapter 5: Bad Beliefs, Good Believers

(5) Where to Go from Here

In this chapter, I develop some of the consequences of Spinoza's affective theory of belief. The claims made in this chapter are not intended to be definitive or conclusive. Rather, my efforts here are intended to begin outlining a project for future study. This chapter is intended to show where Spinoza's theory of belief can lead, and thus why we should be interested in seeking after a theory of belief in Spinoza. Spinoza's theory of belief furnishes us with a useful and interesting theory, one that disrupts the ways that we tend to approach beliefs by shifting the focus from truth to affect.

I begin this chapter by exploring what makes a bad belief. I argue that if beliefs are not evaluated in terms of their epistemic merits, then the goodness or badness of a belief hinges on how that belief affects the believer. More specifically, I argue that a bad belief is one that disempowers the mind, and a good belief is one that empowers the mind. In other words, joyful beliefs are good and saddening beliefs are bad. However, I qualify this initial claim in order to accommodate Spinoza's comments about excessive joys and in order to avoid certain problematic consequences: if we define a good belief simply as one that is accompanied by joy, this would imply that even harmful beliefs, such as a belief in white supremacy, can be good if they are joyful for the believer. To avoid this undesirable consequence, I introduce Spinoza's sociability thesis, that is, the claim that there is nothing more powerful to human minds than other human minds. Using the sociability thesis and Spinoza's claims about excessive joys, we can conclude that certain beliefs are bad because they are antisocial. What makes a belief antisocial, I argue, is that it portrays the bodies of others in a way that is necessarily

disempowering, and thus prevents the believer from establishing empowering social relationships.

Having established what makes a belief bad for Spinoza, I turn my attention to discussing the advantages of such a position. I argue that conceiving of the goodness or badness of a belief in terms of joy and sadness allows us to emphasize the fact that beliefs can be salutary or harmful for both the believer and those with whom they are in contact. This allows us to approach intervention into beliefs from the lens of harm reduction. I argue that there is a *prima facie* moral justification for intervening in beliefs when they cause harm to the believer or to others. Following this, I examine to what extent Spinoza would allow for state intervention into beliefs. I conclude by examining some strategies for intervention suggested by Spinoza's affective theory of beliefs.

This chapter demonstrates that Spinoza's affective theory of belief allows us to treat beliefs as objects of moral and political concern, rather than simply as objects of epistemological concern. For Spinoza, beliefs are not neutral objects evaluated only in terms of their truth-value, nor are they of concern simply because they potentially contribute to certain beneficial or detrimental actions. Rather, they are of direct concern since they are indices of power or disempowerment. This is not to say that we shouldn't be concerned with the downstream or bodily consequences of bad beliefs. In fact, due to the connection between minds and bodies, mental disempowerment must necessarily correspond to bodily disempowerment. However, the current approach to beliefs allows us to pick out harm of a belief without connecting that belief to specific ramifications. Establishing a causal story that connects a belief to specific harmful behaviours or actions can be extremely difficult. If we are only justified in intervening in beliefs when they can be shown to cause harmful behaviors, our attempts at harm reduction can be

easily thwarted by problematizing the connection between beliefs and specific actions. This frustration can be avoided, however, if the beliefs are immediately harmful. Taking this approach will thus allow us to directly merge the doxastic with the moral and political.

(5.1) Bad Beliefs

What makes a belief bad? The answer, I contend, does not lie in the truth value of a belief, even though this is a tempting line of thought. If we were to assume that truth is constitutive of belief, i.e., if it were the case that "to believe a proposition is to accept it with the aim of thereby accepting a truth," then it would quickly follow that bad beliefs are those that involve falsity, since accepting a false belief would be contrary to the purpose of believing. This is a very Aristotelian argument: a bad doctor fails to heal the body, a bad cup does not hold liquids, and a bad belief does not get things right. A good believer, on the other hand, would be one that regularly and consistently accepts true propositions, or engages in those types of epistemic activities that typically yield true beliefs.[283] [284] However, if we accept Spinoza's theory

[283] Martin Lenz explains that "in contemporary philosophy, the question whether beliefs are normative is often treated with regard to the fact that beliefs can be true or false. If I believe or say something false, I seem to break a rule or deviate from a standard of semantic correctness. Accordingly, the dispute is about whether there is some sort of social normativity involved here or whether we just happen to deviate from the facts" (Lenz, "Thick Beliefs," 37).

[284] Another approach that we might take is looking at what makes for "bad thinking" rather than what constitutes a bad belief. For example, in *When Bad Thinking Happens to Good People,* Nadler and Shapiro examine different ways in which people can engage in bad thinking, such as epistemic stubbornness: "in characterizing someone as "epistemically stubborn," we are highlighting a particular sort of bad thinking. Stubbornness, we all know, involves a sort of resistance or defiance in the face of reason […] A person is epistemically stubborn when he refuses to give up his belief when readily available and easily acquired evidence—perhaps even right in front of his nose—reveal that belief to be false" (Nadler and Shapiro, *Bad Thinking*, 17). However, we might argue, as does Martin Lenz, that this type of stubbornness is constitutive of how Spinoza thinks we form beliefs. As Lenz claims, "there is no non-biased mode of believing. Overcoming false beliefs or a therapy against harmful thoughts would rather lie in gaining an understanding of how bias works and what motivates bias in the first place" (Lenz, "Biased Beliefs," 69). If we take ourselves to be affective believers, then a certain sort of "stubbornness" or bias towards joyful beliefs is to

of belief as I have presented it, then truth is not constitutive of belief. Rather, the mind adopts beliefs with the aim of adopting joyful, or empowering ideas, rather than necessarily adopting adequate, or true ideas. A bad belief, on this account, would be one that is saddening, or disempowering, rather than one that was merely false. Since some inadequate or false ideas can be joyful and empowering, the goodness or badness of a belief does not hinge on whether it is adequate or inadequate, true or false. What matters is that the belief, *qua* idea, positively contributes to our mental striving.

In Chapter 3, I argued that Spinoza is committed to the claim that something is good for *x* if it contributes to the striving of *x* to persevere in being. We can make use of this claim again when it comes to what makes a belief good or bad. The argument is as follows: a belief can either empower our mind, disempower our mind, or be neutral. The more powerful our mind is, the more it is able to persevere in being. Since joyful beliefs are empowering, they contribute to our mind's striving, and are therefore good. A good belief, is thus a joyful belief, and, by way of the same argument, we can claim that a bad belief is a saddening belief.

However, the story cannot remain this simple. As was also discussed in Chapter 3, Spinoza claims that certain pleasures can be excessive and, ultimately, harmful. While Spinoza denies that joy can be directly evil,[285] it can be evil indirectly, by preventing us from securing a greater joy. For instance, Spinoza explains that "pleasure can be excessive and evil, whereas Pain can be good insofar as the Pleasure or Joy, is evil."[286] In the demonstration to this proposition, Spinoza explains that "Pleasure is a Joy which […] consists in this, that one (or several) of its

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be assumed. The goal would then shift from diminishing bias, or stubbornness, and instead working with this stubbornness to encourage good beliefs.

[285] E4p41.

[286] E4p43

parts are affected more than the others. The power of this affect can be so great that it surpasses the other actions of the Body, remains stubbornly fixed in the Body, and so prevents the Body from being capable of being affected in a great many ways."[287] In other words, certain joys, such as pleasure, can disproportionately affect parts of our body such that while they strengthen those parts, they result in an overall disempowerment for the body. For the same reason Spinoza claims that "love and desire can be excessive."[288] Spinoza's argument is that we cannot call a joy good if it empowers a part of the body while disempowering the whole. This argument also applies to our empowerment over time. That is, if a current joy prohibits us from experiencing a greater joy in the future, then it cannot be called good.[289][290]

The same reasoning can be applied to beliefs and the mind. A good belief is a joyful idea that does not prevent us from experiencing a greater joy, either presently or in the future. We can also use Spinoza's comments about excessive joys to avoid a solipsistic account of what makes a belief good. For Spinoza, notions of good and bad must be indexed to a particular *conatus*, since what is good for one thing might be bad for another. This is likewise the case for beliefs, a belief might be joyful for one person and saddening for another. However, to determine whether a belief is good or bad, we cannot only look at a mind in isolation: we must also attend to the

[287] E4p43d.
[288] Ep44.
[289] Ep60s.
[290] Although I contend that adequacy and truth are not as primary as affectivity in Spinoza's theory of belief, it is again worth emphasizing that I am not trying to entirely disavow the importance of reason, truth, and adequacy in Spinoza's philosophy. When it comes to the comparing joys with one another, for example, reason plays an important role. Spinoza claims that "from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils" (E4p65) As was mentioned earlier, reason allows us to compare joys in such a way that we can be led by the greater joy, thus allowing us to avoid being trapped by excessive joys. But even here affectivity is still present. Reason allows us to be guided by the greater joy by allowing us to be affected by things that aren't present as if they were (E4p62). Reason thus allows us to compare future joys with present joys on the affective level, which enables us to strive for the greater good. The mind strives after joyful, powerful ideas, rather than after true or adequate ideas, and reason ensures that this striving does not become fixated on current joys by allowing the mind to be affected by other joys as if they were present, even when they are not.

social existence of that mind. If we fail to approach minds as social entities, then we risk arriving at problematic conclusions. While a belief in white supremacy might be joyful to a white supremacist – for example by portraying the believer as innately special and powerful – we do not want to conclude that this is a good belief. We can avoid such a conclusion by adding what I refer to as the sociability thesis to Spinoza's comments about excessive joys.

The sociability thesis claims that what empowers humans the most is their social relations with other humans. This thesis is epitomized in the claim that "to man […] there is nothing more useful than man." Spinoza elaborates on this claim by saying that a person

> can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all.[291]

Spinoza's claim is that the most beneficial affective relationships that we can enter into are social relationships with other human beings. Hence, those "things which are of assistance to the common society of men, or which bring it about that men live harmoniously, are useful; those, on the other hand, are evil which bring discord to the state."[292] If we are seeking our own empowerment, there is nothing that can aid us more than striving alongside other humans in a "common society."

Like many of Spinoza's claims, the sociability thesis follows from his metaphysical commitments. Spinoza establishes the sociability thesis by claiming that if "two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one." If I can join with something that has the same nature as I do, then I stand to

[291] E4p18s.
[292] E4p40s.

increase my power in proportion to the power of the thing with which I join. Consequently, minds that strive together are more powerful and thus are better at resisting harmful forces. To put it another way, Spinoza thinks that humans have a shared nature. Although not all our properties will be the same, our essential properties agree, i.e., what makes us human rather than what makes us this or that human. When I strive to maintain my essence, I perform actions that also promote the existence of things with similar essences. That is, if an action promotes my essence, or nature, and I share this nature with other people, then these actions will likewise promote their nature. For instance, if I dig a well to access clean drinking water, not only will this be a benefit to me, it will also benefit all those who can access the well. Entering into social relations with other humans is empowering because we are able to strive together towards mutually shared ends, and we come to benefit not only from our individual striving but from the striving of others as well.

Spinoza admires the empowerment gained by living in a state to such an extent that he claims it is advantageous to always carry out the commands of the Sovereign, even if they are occasionally absurd. Spinoza writes "if a man who is guided by reason sometimes, by the command of the commonwealth, has to do something he knows is incompatible with reason, that harm is far outweighed by the good he derives from the civil order itself. For it is also a law of reason that we should choose the lesser of two evils."[293] The Sovereign may occasionally pass disadvantageous laws, but since obedience is a prerequisite for maintaining state power and living in a state is more empowering than living independently, we ought to obey.

However, the demand to always obey the state is premised on the assumption that the state is acting towards its highest ends, "which is nothing other than peace and security of

[293] TP, G|III/286/29-34.

life."[294] We ought to always obey the Sovereign, but with the caveat that the state is promoting the right sort of social formation. Spinoza claims that the best state is "where men pass their lives harmoniously and where the laws are kept without violation," that is, where the laws are maintained by citizens because these laws contribute to their empowerment. So while Spinoza thinks that it is always advantageous to be obedient to the Sovereign, even when they occasionally pass absurd laws, this claim is made with the assumption that the state is generally directed towards securing "peace and security of life," i.e., directed towards securing those conditions under which citizens can most empower themselves.

This caveat is revealed by Spinoza's comments on violent or tyrannical states. Spinoza assumes that extreme or violent rule will not be tolerated and that this has a tempering influence on Sovereign power. Spinoza claims that

> human nature does not allow itself to be compelled in everything. As the Tragic poet, Seneca, says, no one has sustained a violent rule for long; moderate ones last. For as long as men act only from fear, they act very unwillingly, and don't recognize the advantage, even the necessity, of doing what they're doing. All they care about is saving their necks, and avoiding punishment. They can only rejoice whenever some evil or harm happens to their ruler, however much evil it may bring them; they can't help wanting all sorts of bad things to happen to him; when they can, they help to bring them about.[295]

If Spinoza believes that sociability is generally empowering, it is with the further assumption that disempowering social formations, ones premised on violence and fear, are unsustainable and will inevitably face resistance. While we always benefit from striving in conjunction with

[294] TP, G|III/295/16-17.
[295] TTP, G|III/74/3-10.

humans that share a nature with us, we are also naturally compelled to strive against social formations that are antithetical to our empowerment. In other words, the sociability thesis assumes a certain kind of social formation, namely one that generally facilitates "peace and security of life."

I make these observations to foreclose the possibility of arguing that sociability is always empowering, regardless of the form it takes. Spinoza is clear that the most empowering relations that we can enter into are ones with other humans. However, this does not imply that any social formation will necessarily be empowering: Spinoza allows for the possibility of bad states that promote more wickedness, sin and discord than they do joy and empowerment.[296] Humans are strongest when we can strive together to mutually promote our shared essence, but not all states will successfully promote this joint striving, and some can actively hinder it. A demand for sociality, then, does not give *carte blanche* for any and all social formations. To put it another way, not all joint activity can properly be called sociable, but only that joint activity that is harmonious, and allows for "peace and security of life." Nazis may act together, but a Nazi regime cannot properly be called social, insofar as it is premised on war, violence, and exclusion.[297]

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[296] TP, G|III/295/15-31.

[297] Even if the belief in white supremacy might ground certain connections and joint activities between minds, these beliefs cannot be properly considered sociable in the sense that we have defined the term. Nazis might organize and act together on their shared belief in white supremacy, but these beliefs remain antisocial. This is because these beliefs cannot secure "peace and security of life," since they are necessarily destructive and violent. Even had the Nazis been successful in their attempts to create a "pure" Aryan society, and even if they managed to produce a stable social formation purged of any "undesirable" elements, it would be a farce to claim that this state promotes harmony, peace, or the security of life. A Nazi regime is one of death and violence, and a quiet after a genocide could never, in good faith, be described as peace. Further, it is unlikely that the beliefs which constitute Nazi ideology could never allow for tranquility, since this type of political machine always requires a new enemy to be purged from the social fabric: the demand for racial purity has no upward bound since it is a mythical ideal that can never be achieved, only violently sought after. However, we should recognize that even harmful beliefs can be immediately empowering for those who engage in them. Nazis are indeed empowered by these beliefs to the extent that they both allow them to represent themselves as powerful, and insofar as it allows them to act in conjunction

Spinoza's sociability thesis allows us to clarify what constitutes a bad belief. If the most powerful relations that a human mind can enter into are with other human minds,[298] then antisocial beliefs will be bad.[299] That is, if I stand to gain the most by striving in conjunction with other minds, then a belief that prevents this from happening is preventing my empowerment and is thus bad. Our criteria for evaluating a belief thus cannot be restricted to how that belief affects a given mind, but also must take into consideration how it will affect that mind's social relationships. Spinoza's sociability thesis allows us to readily explain what is wrong with beliefs like the belief in white supremacy. This belief is bad because it is antisocial, that is, because it prevents the mind from potentially entering into empowering relationships with other minds.[300] The nature of this belief is such that it will cause other people harm, and if a person maintains this belief, they will be hated by and alienated from other minds. These types of beliefs both harm others and harm the believers: they immediately reduce the power of other minds, and indirectly reduce the power of the believer by preventing them from entering into empowering relationships.

Our notion of antisocial beliefs must also be able to trace the antisociality of a belief back to the belief itself, rather than to the tension between conflicting beliefs. For example, if the

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with other fascists. Yet these beliefs are still excessive, prevent greater empowerment, and are harmful – both to the believers and to others. As Žižek points out in *the Sublime Object of Ideology*, there is a pleasure involved in engaging in fascist ideology (Žižek, *Object of Ideology*, 90). It is important to acknowledge this joy, despite how repugnant it might be, so that we can combat these types of beliefs. If we don't acknowledge the joy found in racism by racists, or in fascism by fascists, we will fail to understand why these ideas cling so stubbornly to people.

[298] This is not to say that entering into relationships with non-human minds is not also empowering, but it is not necessarily as empowering as the relationships that we have with other humans.

[299] To qualify this claim, antisocial beliefs are bad because they prevent us from generating empowering social relations and social formations of the right sort. I reserve the term "antisocial" belief for this type of idea. While a rejection of racism might lead me to break ties with racist acquaintances, I would not call the denial of racism an "antisocial" belief.

[300] These sorts of beliefs are also immediately harmful to other minds. I am not claiming that the harm of a belief in white supremacy has to do solely with it being antisocial – these types of beliefs are certainly immediately harmful for those people that they negatively portray. What is less clear is why these are also harmful to those who endorse these beliefs.

belief in white supremacy is antisocial, we want this antisociality to be rooted in the belief itself, rather than stemming from the fact that others reject white supremacism. Otherwise, we leave open the possibility that the white supremist can claim that sociability could be restored if others adopted their beliefs. Our response should also not be so broad so as to transform any belief that causes another person sadness into an antisocial belief. If my belief that the earth is round makes Paul sad, for example, this does not necessarily mean that this is a bad belief. As we have seen, part of the harm of antisocial beliefs is that they prevent the development of properly empowering social formations, but we must further explain how they do this. I argue that we can trace the harm caused by antisocial beliefs to how they represent other peoples' bodies.

I contend that antisocial beliefs strike at ideas that are central to the mind's identity by targeting the mind's representation of the body. Recall that the first idea that constitutes the mind is the idea of an actually existing body. This constituting idea is not merely a bare-bones representation of a body: it contains not only the representation of the body's existence but also ideas about the body's sensitivities, functions, dispositions, abilities, etc. Some of these ideas will be fixed and cannot be changed without destroying the mind, while others can only be changed with great difficulty. Because the mind's idea of the body is constitutive of the mind, beliefs that disempower the mind's idea of the body are intrinsically harmful. A belief which forces me to regard my body as lacking power, for example, will necessarily be disempowering to me. There is nothing more potentially harmful to the mind than its destruction, and since a mind which has its constituting idea diminished is at risk of destruction, there are no beliefs more harmful than those that negatively affect the mind's constituting idea, namely, the idea of the body.

Insofar as certain beliefs can limit this constituting idea, those ideas are disempowering, and are bad. Moreover, these beliefs are harmful in a way that more innocuous beliefs are not, since they conflict with an aspect of my mind's identity that either cannot be easily changed or cannot be changed at all. For instance, a mind cannot change that they perceive their body's skin as having a certain amount and type of pigment. Beliefs that render this intractable idea harmful are bad beliefs, such as the racist belief that those with more skin pigment of a certain type are inferior. While being confronted with the belief that the earth is round might cause someone sadness, it does not cause them sadness in the same way, since this belief is not necessarily connected to a mind's disempowerment. For Spinoza, there are certain ideas that are central and constitutive of the mind's identity. Beliefs that affix to these ideas in a way that renders them harmful, are necessarily antisocial, even if they cause no harm immediately to the believer.

Let us consider a more detailed example of how beliefs can limit and constrict a mind's constituting idea by reflecting on how social pressures can constrain how a person comes to understand the nature of their own body. In the essay "Power and Desire: The Embodiment of Female Sexuality," Janet Holland *et al.* argue that "the material body and its social construction are entwined in complex and contradictory ways that are difficult to disentangle in practice."[301] Holland *et al.* suggest that social pressures encourage young women to form certain ideas of their own femininity, sexuality, and embodiment such that "young women experience social pressures to construct their bodies as passive and fragmented objects."[302] In short, it is argued that the way in which young women come to experience and understand their own bodies is shaped by

[301] Holland *et al.* "Power and Desire," 22.
[302] Holland *et al.* "Power and Desire," 25.

various "social pressures," such as the pressure to maintain a "modest, feminine reputation."[303] Now supposing that some of these "social pressures" take the form of beliefs, such as certain beliefs of what constitutes femininity and how this femininity ought to be articulated, we can understand how the constituting ideas of young women can come to be limited by these beliefs. These beliefs about female sexuality can restrict and limit how young woman come to understand their own bodies by preventing them from being able to form empowering ideas of their bodies. Conceiving of your own body as a "passive and fragmented object" is contrary to your constituting idea,[304] and ideas that encourage this understanding of embodiment are harmful insofar as they impede the mind's ability to maintain itself as the thing that it is.[305]

Moreover, bad beliefs can force people to conceive of their own bodies in such a way that it restrains their bodily capabilities. For example, in "Throwing like a Girl," Young explores the "modalities of feminine bodily existence" in patriarchal societies, that is, how women learn to experience their bodies and the way this experience shapes and constricts their bodily capacities. Young claims that

> Women in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified. As lived bodies we are not open

[303] Holland *et al.* "Power and Desire," 24.
[304] There are strong reasons why Spinoza would be committed to the view that conceiving yourself as something passive would be problematic. For Spinoza, things are essentially active and so if you view yourself as merely a passive agent, then you have not formed an adequate idea of your own being.
[305] Similarly, Michael Mack argues that the anti-Semitic genocide perpetuated by the Nazi's was premised on dehumanizing the Jewish body. Mack writes "Spinoza critiqued the fictions that come to shape socio-political reality. The most brutal fiction is the genocidal anti-Semitism which the Nazis enacted. Nazism thus brings to the fore the cultural or, in other words, subjective / fictive construction of the body; it fabricated the Jewish body as the non-human body. This harnessing of the term 'humanity' in order to exclude groups of people from the human highlights the importance of our cultural engagement with deleterious fictions that determine the empirical core of the social sciences and the sciences" (Mack, "Spinoza's Non-Humanist Humanism," 37).

> and unambiguous transcendences that move out to master a world that belongs to us, a world constituted by our own intentions and projections.[306]

Young argues that this way of experiencing the body has its source "in neither anatomy nor physiology, and certainly not in a mysterious feminine essence" but in "the particular *situation* of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society".[307] We can place Young's observations in Spinoza's framework and claim that the way women come to understand their own bodies in patriarchal society is, at least partially, a result of the beliefs that they are encouraged to form about their bodies. These beliefs are disempowering, harming the constituting idea of the mind, and, consequently, they impede the bodily capabilities of women.

While the source of these particular "modalities of feminine bodily existence" might not be reducible to holding specific bad beliefs, it is plausible that certain beliefs play a role in how women come to experience their bodies phenomenologically.[308] Consider the following example provided by Young:

> Women often approach a physical engagement with things with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy. Typically, we lack an entire trust in our bodies to carry us to our aims. There is, I suggest, a double hesitation here. On the one hand, we often lack confidence that we have the capacity to do what must be done. Many times I have slowed a hiking party in which the men bounded across a harmless stream while I stood on the other side warily testing my footing on various stones, holding on to overhanging branches. Though the others crossed

[306] Young, "Throwing like a Girl," 43.
[307] *Ibid.*
[308] These modalities might also result from the activities that feminine bodies are encouraged to perform, which might involve certain beliefs but cannot be reduced to those beliefs.

> with ease, *I do not believe it is easy for me*, even though once I take a committed step I am across in a flash.[309]

Certain beliefs, such as the belief that an activity will be more difficult, can hinder the way we engage with the world. Certain beliefs are bad because they portray the body negatively, i.e., as lacking power, which has the affect of reducing the believer's power. As Spinoza puts it, "when the Mind imagines its own lack of power, it is saddened by it."[310] Consequently, if we are overwhelmed by beliefs that have us imagine our bodies as lacking power, we will necessarily be disempowered. Antisocial beliefs force people to form negative conceptions of their bodies, which is necessarily disempowering for both mind and body. These beliefs are antisocial insofar as they are antithetical to the striving of others and do not allow for a mutually empowering sociability.

According to Spinoza, we naturally strive against our own disempowerment. What these examples highlight is that some beliefs are necessarily disempowering for my mind because they portray my body as lacking power. If my mind strives against disempowering ideas, then it will necessarily strive against these types of beliefs. In other words, antisocial beliefs prevent people from striving together for mutual empowerment because the beliefs are intrinsically disempowering for some minds. What makes certain beliefs antisocial, and thus bad, is that they are unavoidably disempowering to other people. Tracing antisocial beliefs back to the body in this way is useful because it explains why the harm produced by these beliefs is more significant than the sadness produced by more innocuous beliefs. These beliefs are intrinsically antisocial

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[309] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 34. Emphasis added. Similar analyses can be extended to other types of bodies and bodily experiences. For example, Fanon argues that "[i]n the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity" (Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 83). Racism, like sexism, ableism, gender discrimination, etc., negatively constrains how people can come to understand and experience their bodies.

[310] E3p55.

because they necessarily disempower certain minds based on aspects of those minds that either cannot be changed or cannot be changed without great difficulty. Instead of producing harmony, peace, and security of life, these antisocial beliefs promise strife, discord, and instability.

Describing antisocial beliefs in this manner does a good job of allowing the concept to demarcate significantly harmful beliefs from more innocuous beliefs. That is, we want our notion of antisocial beliefs to pick out those beliefs that necessarily prevent minds from striving together, rather than picking out what beliefs might occasionally do so. I might occasionally not get along with someone who believes the earth is flat, but because this belief is not central to their mind's identity, it is not necessarily antisocial. On the other hand, misogynistic, racist, ableist, ageist, and similar beliefs have to do with aspects of people's identity that is either essential or nearly so. Consequently, these are beliefs that will necessarily disempower others and are thus properly regarded as antisocial, and thus bad.[311]

This notion of antisocial beliefs also correctly traces back the antisociality to the content of that belief, rather than to the fact that this belief is in conflict with the beliefs in others. A racist belief, for example, is necessarily antisocial because of how it represents the bodies of others, affixing to those bodies properties that are disempowering. There is harm intrinsically contained in racist beliefs because of how they represent the bodies of others, and this harm stems from the belief itself rather than the fact that it conflicts with the beliefs of others. In other words, someone who is the target of a racist belief, cannot be confronted with this belief without

[311] I wish to make it clear that I do not endorse anything resembling biological essentialism. When I say that certain ways of perceiving the body are essential to the mind, I mean only to say that we cannot help but perceive ourselves as embodied in a certain way. I believe that this embodiment can be rendered either joyful or saddening, depending on how we begin to conceptualize it – while we perceive the body immediately, we also come to understand it through the imagination. Social pressures and socially constituted beliefs transform our experience of our body by affecting our imagination: we are born with bodies, but we become racialized, gendered, etc.

being caused harm, even if their current beliefs are more powerful and allow them to resist this harm.

This is an initial sketch of what makes a belief antisocial, and more will need to be said down the road, since this treatment leaves room for many gray cases. For instance, I am inclined to think that beliefs that are prejudicial based on language are also necessarily bad for reasons similar to why racism is harmful. We can, of course, connect language to the power of the body, and thus say that certain beliefs about linguistic communities will negatively impact certain minds by conflicting with the constituting ideas of their bodies. But can the same be said about beliefs that pertain to athletic abilities, for instance? Professional athletes who have dedicated their entire lives to a sport are likely to consider their athletic abilities central to their identities. I don't think it would be good to believe that all soccer players are hooligans, but the harm seems less significant than that of racist or sexist beliefs. Perhaps these types of vocations strike us as elective in a way that other characteristics of our body are not: I can choose to be a soccer player, but I cannot choose my height. However, since Spinoza denies free will and supports determinism, it is not entirely clear how these two things differ. All is to say, that while I have provided the outline of what makes a belief antisocial, and thus bad, more could be said to fully develop this position in the future.

We can conclude that a belief is bad for Spinoza because it is either immediately disempowering or because it prevents us from obtaining a more empowering belief. Certain beliefs can be excessive and prevent the mind from experiencing greater joys. Likewise, antisocial beliefs might be joyful to the believer but nonetheless bad because they prevent the believer from entering into empowering relations with other minds. Antisocial beliefs do this by targeting the bodies of others and representing these bodies in a way that is necessarily harmful.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that those beliefs which dominate a given society are not necessarily going to be those that encourage sociability. Beliefs gain their force on the affective level and harmful beliefs often overcome us. What beliefs become affectively powerful are not necessarily those that are empowering for all minds.[312] Here, again, the importance of reason in Spinoza's philosophy is worth commenting on. Spinoza is clear that it is "only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature."[313] In other words, the ideal of sociability is of people striving together according to the guidance of reason, since when we act according to reason we ensure that our actions are empowering for things of our nature. However, this should not lead us to conclude that only true beliefs, or beliefs grounded in reason, are empowering for our social relations. As Spinoza frequently points out in his political discussions, "men rarely live from the dictate of reason," and so it is often advantageous to encourage certain inadequate ideas.[314]

My point here is twofold. First, although acting according to reason necessarily promotes social harmony and empowering collective striving, it is not the exclusive means of promoting these harmonious social relations. Given the fact that humans are finite and our power to act according to reason is limited, there is a wide array of inadequate beliefs that can serve us better than a demand to only maintain adequate beliefs. If we cannot live exclusively according to the guidance of reason due to our finite natures, then what beliefs will serve us best will not necessarily correspond to adequate beliefs, since it might be that inadequate beliefs – such a

[312] To explain why this is the case would require its own sustained discussion. To gesture at a response, I would say that many affectively powerful beliefs are sustained by what Althusser refers to as "ideological state apparatuses," and that these ideas are empowering for those in privileged social positions, such as wealthy white men.
[313] E4p35
[314] E4p54s.

belief in the virtue of repentance – are more useful in our non-ideal circumstances. We can do this by approaching the merit of beliefs in terms of how they empower or disempowering minds.

Second, I do not wish to suggest that social harmony predominates or that antisocial beliefs are more susceptible to being rejected. Our collective existence is unfortunately all too overwhelmed by disempowering, antisocial beliefs. I do not think that there is any general or necessary movement towards social harmony. Both contemporary and historical events furnish us with ample examples of how social discord and bad beliefs often predominate. The point of this section is to provide a tool for determining what constitutes a bad belief, not to suggest that these beliefs will naturally lose their power over time. Although antisocial beliefs are bad, we often fail to successfully pursue the good. We need to be able to identify bad beliefs precisely because of how persistent and pervasive they are and because there is a need to actively resist these beliefs. As I shall argue in the following section, I contend we are justified in intervening into bad beliefs, but to account for this justification requires articulating the harm constitutive of bad beliefs.

There is also the fear that if we abandon reason, we abandon our guide to life, as if we were to dismiss Virgil while in the depths of the inferno. In other words, there is a fear that replacing reason with empowerment renders everything permissible: we would be justified in adopting absurd, ludicrous, and monstrous positions, so long as those positions were “joyful.” A white supremacist might argue that their joy and empowerment would be maximized by an Aryan state, and that, in the name of joy and empowerment, they would be justified in undertaking all kinds of atrocities. But, as Isaiah Berlin has suggested, fascists can just as easily

supress people in the name of reason and liberty, as they can in the name of empowerment.[315] If we are concerned with the empowerment of all, rather than just a few, then there will be a demand to attend to the mental empowerment of others, not just our own. Moreover, if we recognize that we only stand to benefit from the empowerment of our community, if we recognize our interconnectedness and dependency on other minds, then we can allow that our mental striving only stands to be encouraged by empowering other minds. I am not arguing that we do away with reason or knowledge, but that we let ourselves be guided by joy and recognize that this joy is not exclusively constituted by affirming true propositions.

(5.2) A *Prima Facie* Justification

By focusing on the affective dimension of belief – how beliefs contribute to a mind's empowerment or disempowerment – we can approach intervention into bad beliefs as a matter of harm reduction. On this account, the badness of a belief is not grounded in its epistemic qualities, but in how it diminishes the power of the believer, as well as those with whom they come into contact. Consequently, intervening into a bad belief isn't reduced to correcting someone for having made an epistemic error, i.e., for erroneously endorsing a false proposition. Rather, intervening in bad beliefs promotes joy and empowerment, insofar as it seeks to remove saddening and disempowering beliefs.

I argue that there is a *prima facie* moral justification for interfering in another's life if such an intervention reduces harm to that agent or prevents that agent from harming others. I should note that I am not trying to establish this moral justification on the basis of Spinoza's moral philosophy, although this could readily be done. Instead, my goal is to appeal to our

[315] Berlin, *Liberty*, 118.

common moral intuitions. I take this approach because the suggestion that we are justified in interfering with another's beliefs is a contentious one. Unless one is already committed to Spinoza's moral philosophy, then appealing to Spinoza's position to justify intervention does not provide my claim with more intuitive plausibility. However, by shifting the argument into the territory of harm reduction, I hope to garner more sympathy for my arguments.

As a *prima facie* moral justification, intervention remains defeasible: there are instances where other considerations will override our justification for intervening into the beliefs of others. For example, if the harm experienced by the believer is trivial and intervention risks significantly undermining the believer's autonomy, then we would no longer be justified in our interference. To motivate this *prima facie* moral justification to interfere in the lives of others in cases where it will reduce harm, I provide the following example. Suppose that I were at the climbing gym and noticed that someone had tied onto their harness incorrectly and that, as a result, they were at risk of taking a ground fall and seriously injuring themselves. This is an instance where I would be justified in preventing that person from climbing, until they had correctly tied their knot. Likewise, if I noticed that a person was belaying their partner in an unsafe fashion, perhaps by paying out a dangerous amount of slack, then I would be justified in intervening. While normally I would not be justified in obstructing the climbing of others, in these circumstances I am justified because doing so would prevent possible harm. What I wish to establish with this example is that harm reduction provides a justifiable reason for interference, even if it can be defeated by other considerations.

The claim that there is at least a *prima facie* justification to intervene in cases of harm reduction does not strike me as a contentious one. In many facets of our lives this *prima facie* justification already operates. For example, it is expected that psychologists, psychotherapists,

and related mental health practitioners, retain their patient's confidentiality unless they believe their patient might harm themselves or others. In this case, harm reduction operates as a *prima facie* justification for overriding other moral obligations, such as the obligation to maintain confidentiality.[316] If beliefs are capable of causing harm, of disempowering the believer and other minds with which they come in contact, then beliefs are potential candidates for intervention. If we conceive of the goodness or badness of a belief in terms of its truth value, however, then we lose this *prima facie* justification. If someone believes that the earth is flat, they might have committed a doxastic error, but it is unclear if we would be justified in intervening in their beliefs. In such a case, non-intervention would appear more preferable, insofar as intervention might risk unnecessarily interfering with the agent's autonomy. Or, at the very least, if we are to intervene in this instance it is preferable to do it in a manner that is less invasive: we might engage the flat earther in conversation and try to dissuade them of their beliefs, but mandating that they be re-educated would be excessive. However, my goal here is not to outline what forms of intervention are justifiable for what kinds of beliefs, only to argue that there are occasions where we are justified in intervening in beliefs. Approaching beliefs from the perspective of empowerment and disempowerment, thus allows us to readily justify intervention into certain beliefs.

Suppose that we accept that bad beliefs are harmful, and that we are justified in intervening in beliefs when they cause a sufficient amount of harm, either to the believers or to

[316] As Dea states, "no particular justification is required for [harm reduction] interventions paired with uncontroversial behaviours. We only cite intractability and seek to mount reasons when [harm reduction] interventions are proposed for harms attendant upon controversial behaviours" (Dea, "Harm Reduction," 308). For instance, legalizing prostitution on the grounds that it reduces harm would require further justification since prostitution is a "controversial behaviour." However, where harm reduction doesn't involve "uncontroversial behaviours," such as when we prevent someone from falling of a ladder, there is a *prima facie* justification for intervention.

others. If this is the case, then it appears that intervention is justifiable, at least when the disempowerment of a belief is sufficiently strong. Much more would need to be said to develop this picture fully. For instance, we would need to determine a sufficient threshold for justifying intervention. While the notion of a bad belief developed above provides some guidance, it is in need of further specification. Moreover, we would need to determine when the justification for intervention is defeated by other moral considerations. For example, we might wonder how far respect for individual autonomy should go in restraining intervention, or how much self-harm is acceptable. We might also wonder if there is a moral obligation to intervene in bad beliefs, or whether intervention is always supererogatory. Again, my purpose here is to suggest a path for future study by demonstrating that approaching beliefs from an affective perspective allows us to ask just these sorts of questions.

(5.3) State Intervention

Another major question for future exploration is whether or not this justification to intervene in bad beliefs can and should be extended to the state. Spinoza's political theory provides us with reasons to answer both in the affirmative. While I do not wish to develop these arguments in detail here, I will briefly outline an argument for why the state would be justified in intervening in bad beliefs. I will also discuss some of the limitations that Spinoza places on what acceptable state intervention can look like.

The argument proceeds on the basis of Spinoza's claims about the rights of the Sovereign. Spinoza claims that "each individual has a supreme right to do everything it can, *or* that the right of each thing extends as far as its determinate power [*potentia*] does."[317]This right

[317] *TTP*, G| III/189/23-25.

extends to the Sovereign, meaning that the Sovereign has the right to do whatever is in their power. There are certain things that a Sovereign cannot do, but this is only because it is not in their power. For instance, Spinoza contends that "the supreme 'power [*summa potestas*] would act in vain if he commanded a subject to hate someone who had joined the subject to himself by a benefit, or to love someone who had harmed him, or not to be offended by insults, or not to desire to be freed from fear, and many other things of this kind, which necessarily follow from the laws of human nature."[318] As such, so long as it is in the Sovereign's power to interfere with the beliefs of its citizens, it has the right to do so.

The question then shifts to whether the Sovereign has the power to interfere with the beliefs of its citizens. Spinoza's answer is that it depends on how the Sovereign attempts to interfere with beliefs: the Sovereign cannot directly command that a person belief *x*, but they can influence their beliefs more indirectly. That is, while Spinoza denies the Sovereign has the power to command belief, he allows that the Sovereign can control belief. Let us look at this distinction. At the beginning of Ch. 20 of the *TTP,* Spinoza makes the following remarks regarding controlling beliefs:

> I confess that someone can get prior control [praeoccupari] of another person's judgment in many ways, some of them almost incredible. So though that person *does not directly command* [imperio directe] the other person's judgement, it can still depend so much on what he says that we can rightly say to that extent it is *subject to his control* [ejus juris].[319]

[318] *TTP*, G| III/201/17-22.
[319] *TTP*, G| III/239/20-24. Emphasis added.

In this passage, Spinoza differentiates between directly commanding (*imperio directe*) thought and influencing thought in a less direct manner, i.e., by having previously seized control of (*praeoccupari*) another's judgement.

By directly commanding thought, Spinoza has in mind something like the Sovereign declaring certain dogmas as orthodox and demanding that its citizens believe those dogmas. Spinoza writes

> "if it were as easy to command [imperare] men's minds [animis] as it is their tongues, every ruler would govern in safety and no rule would be violent. Everyone would live according to the mentality of the rulers; only in accordance with their decree [decreto] would people judge what is true or false, good or evil, right or wrong."[320]

As this passage indicates, commanding thought is an attempt to control the mind by decree. That is, by demanding that the citizens believe *x*, the Sovereign hopes to make the citizens actually believe *x*.

However, commanding that someone believe *x* is bound to fail, since beliefs, as we have seen, are not things that we can spontaneously adopt or reject by an act of freewill. As Rosenthal explains, "if I am incapable of changing my belief in any direct way, then it must be the case that some outside agent, such as the Sovereign, would also be incapable of it."[321] That is, commanding belief would require that a citizen be able to adopt new beliefs at will, but given that this is not in a citizen's power – for their beliefs are not determined by their will – then the Sovereign cannot command the belief of its citizens. To put it another way, humans are not constituted so as to be able to reform their beliefs on command, and therefore it is not in the

[320] *TTP*, G | III/239/4-8.
[321] Rosenthal, "Tongues not Minds," 64.

Sovereign's power to demand that they do so. Thus, "no one can surrender [rule over their mind] even if he wants to."[322]

Further, Spinoza warns that there are dangers for the Sovereign in attempting to command beliefs. Spinoza suggests that attempts to command a citizen's beliefs often lead to intolerable levels of violence. This is suggested by Spinoza's discussion in the sixth paragraph of Ch. 20, wherein Spinoza immediately – and without an apparent transition – moves from comments on attempting to completely control the judgments of citizens to admonitions of a Sovereign's use of extreme violence. Underlying this sudden transition is an assumption that Sovereigns will turn to violence and coercion as a means to command beliefs when attempts at unenforced commands fail. [323] That is, in lieu of the ability to command beliefs, Sovereigns can attempt to prevent citizens from holding certain beliefs by violently sanctioning commitment to those beliefs. Suppose that a Sovereign wanted its citizens to believe that Monarchical rule was the only legitimate form of government. While it is not in their power to directly command the adoption of this belief, they might be tempted to pursue its promotion by penalizing the adoption or expression of any contrary opinion. So while a Sovereign may not have the right to directly command beliefs by way of decree, they may nonetheless attempt to exercise a closely related right, i.e., the right to violently persuade citizens to ostensibly adopt certain beliefs.

Unfortunately for the Sovereign, attempts to control the beliefs of citizens through violence is ineffective because the Sovereign can only sanction the expression of beliefs rather than the beliefs themselves. Violence allows the Sovereign only to restrain people from expressing their beliefs rather than forcing them to adopt new beliefs. Thus, violence is simply

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[322] *TTP*, G|III/239/17-18.

[323] It is also likely that attempting to command beliefs directly will be met by violent resistance on the side of citizens, thus encouraging an equally violent response from the Sovereign.

an ineffective means for controlling the beliefs of citizens. Further, Spinoza contends that violently sanctioning freedom of expression has the effect of encouraging vice in citizens:

> suppose this freedom could be suppressed, and men so kept in check that they didn't dare to mutter anything except what the supreme 'powers [summarum potestatum] prescribe […] The Result? The good faith especially necessary in a Republic would be corrupted. Abominable flattery and treachery would be encouraged, as would deceptions and corruptions of all liberal studies [bonarum atrium].[324]

Even if the Sovereign could successfully restrain the expression of all opinions contrary to their prescribed beliefs, this would only encourage vice. If the goal of intervention is to reduce the harm of beliefs, then the use of violence and the increase of vice are certainly antithetical to this goal.

While the Sovereign does not have the right to command belief, the same cannot be said about controlling beliefs. We can better understand Spinoza's notion of controlling belief by turning to a passage from the Political Treatise. Spinoza states that

> one person has another in his power [a] if he has him tied up, or [b] if he has taken away his arms and means of defending himself or escaping, or [c] if he has instilled in fear in him, or [d] if he has so bound to himself by a benefit that the other person would rather conduct himself according to his benefactor's wishes than his own, and wants to live according to his benefactor's opinion, not according to his own. Someone who has another person in his power in the first or second of these ways possesses only his Body, not his Mind. If he has

[324] *TTP*, G|III/243/25-32.

> him in his power in the third and fourth way, then he has made both his Mind and Body subject to control [sui juris fecit] – but only while the fear or hope lasts.[325]

This passage indicates that controlling someone's beliefs is a matter of manipulating their affective constitution – particularly their propensity for hope and fear – in order to influence their thoughts. While commanding belief is an attempt to demand that someone adopt a certain way of thinking, controlling belief encourages someone to adopt that way of thinking by manipulating their affective dispositions. It is important to note that Spinoza's use of the term *praeoccupari* suggests that controlling beliefs requires already having come to occupy someone's mind. That is, in order for the Sovereign to have the power to control beliefs they must already have bound their citizens to them by way of their hopes or fears. The Sovereign cannot spontaneously control beliefs, for they must have previously gained control of the minds of their citizens by having manipulated their affective constitutions.

Spinoza attributes this power of controlling beliefs to Moses, claiming that Moses "had gotten the greatest prior control [*praeoccupari*] of the judgment of his people, not by deception, but by virtue with the result that he was believed to be divine, and speak and do everything by divine inspiration."[326] This power to control beliefs derives precisely from Moses' ability to influence his citizens affective constitutions. Moses was perceived as "the sole promulgator and interpreter of the divine laws, and hence, also the supreme Judge, whom no one could judge."[327] Being perceived in this way allowed Moses to influence some of the most powerful hopes and fears of his citizens, namely the hope of divine reward and fear of eternal punishment. As Spinoza states, "everyone knows how highly the people value the right and authority regarding

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[325] *TP*, G| III/280/6-13.
[326] *TTP*, G| III/239/25-28.
[327] *TTP*, G| III/207/7-9.

sacred matters, and how much weight everyone attaches to the utterances of the one who has it. So we can say that the person who has this authority has the most powerful control over their minds [*animos*]."[328] Had Moses publicly announced that he believed a certain act to be pious, his citizens would likely come to believe the same – even if Moses did not directly command them to form such a belief – because they would have hoped that such conformity of belief would merit divine reward and likewise feared that God would punish heretics.

It is clear that although Spinoza denied that the Sovereign has the power to command belief, the Sovereign nonetheless has the power to control beliefs, by influencing the affective constitutions of their citizens. Consequently, since right is extensive with power for Spinoza, we can argue that the Sovereign has the right to control beliefs in this way. This power to control the beliefs of citizens, I argue, is something that already takes place. The whole purpose of political campaigns is, to a large extent, to have citizens come to belief something without commanding them to do so. Political advertising, which operates on the affective level – the level of hope and fear, for example – is intended to sway the beliefs of viewers without directly commanding that they believe one thing or another. Public education is another way that the state can affect belief formation without directly commanding this or that belief. In the political domain, controlling beliefs is already a practice people are engaged in, the question is can it be done morally and with the aim of benefiting citizens. In other words, is interfering in beliefs something the state ought to do?

I contend that it is. As I have argued, the good for Spinoza is that which promotes our striving to persevere in being. As Spinoza says, "no virtue can be conceived prior to […] the

[328] *TTP*, G| III/235/9-12. Translation altered. Curely translates '*animos'* as 'hearts.'

striving to preserve oneself."[329] The more powerful we are, the more we are capable of preserving ourselves and resisting contrary forces. As such, something is good insofar as it contributes to our empowerment, and does not interfere with a greater empowerment. Humans enter into a state for the simple reason that it is more empowering than living in solitude. As Spinoza claims, "if two men make an agreement with one another and join forces, they can do more together, and hence, have more right over nature, then either does alone. The more connections they've formed in this way, the more right they'll all have together."[330] We are substantially less powerful when we act as individuals, and so we join a common social order to avoid the wretchedness of solitary existence.[331]

The role of the state is to ensure "peace and security of life" so as to allow for mutual cooperation and empowerment. As Spinoza explains, "the end of the Republic […] is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but to enable their minds and bodies to perform their functions safely, to enable them to use their reason freely, and not to clash with one another in hatred, anger, or deception, or deal inequitably with one another."[332] If the role of the state is to prevent citizens from clashing "with one another in hatred, anger, or deception," the state would be justified in interfering with bad beliefs. Recall that part of harm of bad beliefs stems from the fact that they are antisocial, that they prevent us from joining with others in empowering ways. If the state can promote social harmony by interfering with bad beliefs than it ought to do so, because doing so positively contributes to the end of the state, i.e., minimizing conflict so as to allow citizens to be empowered by cooperative activities. Consequently, not only does the state have the right to intervene in beliefs, they also ought to do so, insofar as it

[329] E4p22.
[330] *TP*, G| III/281/5-11.
[331] *TTP*, G| III/191/11-18.
[332] *TP*, G| III/241/3-8.

promotes the end of the state, namely, the empowerment of citizens. Further, influencing what beliefs become affectively dominant is something that the state cannot help but doing; however, there is an advantage to doing it openly, intentionally and with a goal towards minimizing bad beliefs.

I do not take these arguments to be fully developed. Rather, they are intended to sketch how we might justify state intervention into bad beliefs. The main point that I wish to highlight is that what allows these arguments to get off the ground is the fact that we've approached beliefs as things that can empower and disempower. By viewing beliefs as something capable of causing harm, we can view them as potential candidates for political intervention. If we were to approach the goodness of a belief purely in terms of its truth value, we would not be able to describe the harm of beliefs, and thus would not be able to view them as candidates for intervention. I would like to end this chapter by considering some of the strategies for intervening in beliefs suggested by Spinoza's theory of the affects.

(5.4) Affective Intervention

Spinoza's theory of belief provides us with useful tools for intervening into bad beliefs, and thus provides avenues towards harm reduction.[333] It does so by allowing us to recognize that beliefs are the results of affective forces, rather than something we freely elect to adopt or reject. Intervening into bad beliefs must occur on the affective level: we cannot simply introduce alternative beliefs, we must ensure that these beliefs affect the believer in the right way, i.e., that

[333] I use the term intervention because it has the connotations of a type of active disruption. I think this term is appropriate because when we combat bad beliefs, we are attempting to dislodge these beliefs from the mind of the believer. I intervene in a bad belief by coming between the believer and the belief. Although the term intervention might strike us as more forceful than some alternative, such as persuasion, this forcefulness seems appropriate for the types of beliefs I take us to be justified in targeting, such as racist beliefs.

they are joyful and more powerful than their current beliefs. If Spinoza's theory of beliefs is correct, then attempting to remedy harmful beliefs without attending to their affective underpinnings will be fruitless. In what follows, I explore some consequences of Spinoza's affective theory of belief and what it can teach us about successfully intervening into bad beliefs. As was said above, this is intended as an initial foray into a domain of future research, rather than a fully developed theory. What follows is intended to demonstrate what possibilities adopting Spinoza's theory of belief can offer to those interested in the moral, political, and social dimensions of belief.

To begin with, this conception of belief allows us to condemn beliefs without condemning the believers. Certain beliefs are bad: they are bad because they harm the believer and others. But a mind that adopts a bad belief is no more intrinsically evil than a mind that only adopts good beliefs. We can make this claim because the mechanisms underpinning all minds is the same: all minds strive to increase their power and do so by adopting joyful ideas and rejecting saddening ideas. However, minds can be overwhelmed by external forces, and led to adopt saddening beliefs because they are not strong enough to overcome them. Minds can also become trapped in systems of thought constituted by bad beliefs, because their joy comes to depend on those systems.

All minds want to be as powerful as possible, and so if a mind is weakened, either immediately by saddening ideas, or indirectly by excessive or antisocial beliefs, this is not a fault to be attributed to the mind. Rather, maintaining bad beliefs is an indication that the mind has been overcome by external forces. Consequently, a mind that has been seized by bad beliefs is not acting maliciously but has been overtaken by disempowering ideas. As Martin Lenz argues,

> given that we grow up in societies that reinforce conventional associations of ideas, we can be constantly misguided and might fail to form beliefs in accordance with successful striving. Believing is thus a naturally normative affair in that we can fail to believe (and will) what is actually in accordance with our essence as it is located within the order of nature. In other words: if we fail in such ways, we live in accordance with convention. The beliefs we form are not wholly our beliefs, as it were, but those reinforced by conventional patterns of associations and the use of language.[334]

In other words, when we adopt harmful beliefs, these ideas should not be regarded as the product of our striving but as the result of our being overcome by external forces, what Lenz refers to as the "conventional associations of ideas." To be in the grip of harmful beliefs is to have had our beliefs formed by social forces that are antithetical to our striving and, consequently, our well-being. It is when beliefs fail to promote our *conatus* they are bad beliefs, but since no one seeks their own destruction, we are never intentionally bad believers.

Recognizing that minds do not freely will themselves to adopt bad beliefs allows us to shift from condemnation to rehabilitation. Spinoza maintains that our love and hate "towards a thing will be greater if we imagine the thing to be free than if we imagine it to be necessary."[335] If we take someone to be free, then we consider them to be the sole cause of the joy or sadness they produce, and we thereby love or hate them more completely; but if we see that they are not free, that they are determined in their actions by preceding causes, then we will see that the joy or sadness they produce does not stem from them alone.[336] By thinking of beliefs in terms of power and affect, we can treat them as the consequences of causal processes, rather than the

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[334] Lenz, "Thick Beliefs," 44.
[335] E3p49.
[336] E3p49d.

products of benevolent or malicious wills. That is, if someone holds a bad belief, such as a belief in white supremacy, we must recognize that, while this idea is harmful, it does not make the believer bad. This is because no mind freely adopts the beliefs that it has, and all minds strive to empower themselves with joyful ideas. A mind that has adopted a bad belief has been overwhelmed by harmful forces, rather than having acted maliciously. There is a need to combat bad ideas in society, insofar as doing so is a direct means of reducing harm and increasing joy. Spinoza's theory of beliefs allows us to target bad beliefs without requiring that we condemn the believer, since, as a believer, they are operating according to the same laws as everyone else. We can look at beliefs as ideas that have a causal history. When we ask, why does John have a bad belief, we do not need to reply that John is a bad person but can rather ask what has encouraged the adoption of this bad belief.

By focusing on bad beliefs, rather than bad believers, we can alleviate some of the hate that we feel towards those who are overtaken by bad beliefs, which can allow us to successfully transform bad beliefs into good ones. If we are motivated by hate for the believer, if we mistakenly take the believer to be the sole source of harm, then we will strive to remove ourselves from them or to destroy them. If we take the first approach, we leave the bad beliefs to fester and grow, and if we take the second approach, we will be met by resistance. If we are to target the source of harm itself, then we must target bad beliefs for intervention rather than the believer, and if we allow ourselves to be guided by hate, such intervention becomes impotent. This is not to condemn those who hate people who propagate bad beliefs: it is an unavoidable affective response to hate those whom we perceive as the source of sadness for ourselves or

those we love.[337] But if our goal is to intervene in bad beliefs, then it is counterproductive to approach the believer with hate.[338] To put it another way, if a believer is not the source of a bad belief – which must be the case since bad beliefs are disempowering and nothing seeks its own destruction – then targeting the believer is both unnecessary and ineffective: unnecessary because the believer is not the source of the bad belief, and ineffective because it will necessarily be met with strong resistance. Further, if our justification for intervening into bad beliefs is premised on harm reduction, then we lose this justification if we seek to cause believers harm, i.e., if we are guided by hate.

If we are to successfully intervene in bad beliefs, we must target the beliefs themselves, not the believers. To do so, we must address the beliefs on an affective level. Since we do not adopt ideas on the basis of their epistemic merits, it is not enough to confront bad beliefs with corresponding true beliefs. That is, if someone maintains a bad belief, I will do little to dissuade them of this belief simply by pointing out its inadequacy. Rather, we must oppose the bad belief on the affective level. Our strategies for intervention must both counteract bad beliefs with joyful ones and attend to the affective constitution of the believers.

For example, suppose that John has white supremacist beliefs. To counteract these beliefs, we must understand the affective character of these beliefs. First, we need to determine whether or not these beliefs cause John immediate joy. If these beliefs are saddening for John, then we know that his mind must be resisting the beliefs but being overwhelmed by external

[337] E3p12c and E3p19.

[338] For a thorough discussion of blame and hatred in Spinoza, see Green “Spinoza on Blame and Hatred.” Green argues that “Spinoza will say that reasoning to our own real interests and promoting those interests lead us to see that we must hold each other accountable, but never hate and, thus, never blame or feel sorrow that we are blamed by others. In fact, since blame is a form of hatred, and feeling hatred or being hated never actually redounds to genuine flourishing, but very seriously compromises its achievement and 'enslaves' those who are subject to it, we must aim to 'rise above' it—to "get beyond good and evil” (Green, “Spinoza on Blame and Hatred,” 229).

forces. For instance, John might be saddened by racist beliefs but maintain them because of the pressures of his social community – perhaps John fears isolation from his community if he were to disavow white supremacy. In this situation, we can intervene in John's bad beliefs either by encouraging his ability to resist these beliefs or by dampening the strength of these external forces. We might positively encourage contrary beliefs, such as the belief in racial equality. If the belief in racial equality becomes powerful enough, it would be able to overcome the bad belief. We might also decrease the power of external ideas by providing John with new communities in which to exist, communities that do not encourage these bad beliefs.

Intervention will have to take a different form, however, if John takes joy from these beliefs. Although the belief in white supremacy is ultimately disempowering for the believer, insofar as it is an antisocial belief, it might provide John with immediate pleasure. For instance, John might take joy by the suggestion that he is inherently powerful because of his race. If John takes pleasure in such a belief, he will strive to resist intervention if it does not provide him with a joyful alternative. For instance, suppose we attempt to proceed by shaming John, for making him feel bad for maintaining beliefs that harm others. We might think that, if we can make John feel sufficiently bad for maintaining a belief in white supremacy, he will be motivated to give it up. But without providing anyplace for this mind to go, John's response to such an approach will be adamant resistance: he will resist the shame since it will cause him sadness, and if he is not provided with a greater joy to compensate for this sadness, then his mind will become blocked to intervention. We must therefore ensure that John has a joyful alternative set of beliefs that can be adopted upon rejecting white supremacy. Since an affect cannot be opposed except by an opposite affect, adopting an alternative belief will involve some sadness. This sadness, however, can be good if it leads to greater empowerment for the believer. If we do not provide any

alternative, joyful belief, however, then the sadness will simply be resisted. In other words, although John might experience a loss of power when made to abandon a belief that has brought him joy, this loss can be compensated for if John is provided with an joyful alternative.

In the case where bad beliefs cause joy to the believer, intervention requires a twofold process. We must transform the bad belief into a source of sadness, so that the mind can become opposed to it, but we must simultaneously provide a joyful belief to replace it. For instance, if we can provide John a narrative where rejecting racist beliefs if praiseworthy, we are more likely to successfully intervene in these beliefs than if we shame him for having held those beliefs. The problem is not in having John's racist beliefs become a source of sadness, if John recognizes these ideas are disempowering then he will strive to overcome them. However, John will not readily abandon these beliefs as a source of joy if he is not given some alternative source of joy to replace it. The difference is analogous to telling someone not to socialize with their friends because their friends cause harm while not providing them with a new social group into which they can enter, or doing the same thing but providing them a new source of friendship. Since no one is inclined towards isolation or to lose a source of friendship, the first option will be regularly opposed, where the second can be more readily adopted.

The purpose of the above examples is not to outline a definitive approach to intervention. Rather, it is to argue that strategies for intervening in bad beliefs must be attentive to the affective constitution of the believer, as well as to our affective dispositions. We are disposed to resist things that are viewed as a source of sadness, and so if intervention attempts to operate through the affective registers of hate and sadness, it will be opposed. Intervention is not a matter of overwhelming other minds, but in supporting other minds so that they can participate in more empowering beliefs. If someone is in the grip of a bad belief, it is harmful to that mind, as well

as to others. If intervention is to be successful, the mind must be aided in overcoming this harmful belief – they must recognize this belief is a source of disempowerment and they must be aided in their resistance, in part by being provided with joyful alternatives. Moreover, intervention into bad beliefs does not have to be direct. Since ideas gain their power from both other ideas in the mind and ambient ideas, a bad belief can be indirectly adjusted by disentangling it from those ideas that give it power. If a bad belief brings the believer joy, it will sometimes be easier to target those supporting beliefs which are immediately saddening. Doing so can allow for an indirect intervention into the bad belief.

I began this chapter arguing that bad beliefs are those that are either disempowering, or those that prevent us from experiencing greater joys, such as antisocial beliefs. From this, I argued that there is a *prima facie* obligation for intervening in bad beliefs: if beliefs cause harm, both to the believer and to others, then we have a *prima facie* justification for interfering in these beliefs. I further sketched some arguments for why Spinoza might allow for state intervention into bad beliefs. In this final section, I have argued that intervention into bad beliefs must be approached affectively. The purpose of this chapter has been to bring the readers attention to some areas of future study, such as how to articulate the harm of beliefs, our moral obligations towards bad beliefs, the role of the state when it comes to intervening in belief, and the strategies we might take for successful intervention. I hold the conviction that there is something wrong about certain beliefs, that there is something wrong with the belief in white supremacy, for instance. But I also maintain that this is not a straightforward epistemic error. Rather, certain beliefs are bad because they cause harm. By approaching beliefs through Spinoza's philosophy, we can explain what makes a bad belief without reducing this badness to its truth-value. Doing so allows us to approach beliefs directly as a matter of moral and political concern.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Let us return to the question with which we began: "why do we believe what we do?" I have argued that, for Spinoza, a resolution to this question is to be found as much in his metaphysics as in his epistemology. Our beliefs are shaped and formed by the mind's striving to persevere in existence. It is this striving, or *conatus*, that constitutes the mechanism by which the mind adopts, maintains, rejects, and resists ideas. The mind strives, like everything else, to empower itself as far as it can. Since joy indicates a transition to a greater power, the mind strives to experience joy and to avoid its opposite, i.e., sadness. Beliefs, *qua* ideas, are capable of empowering or disempowering the mind, and their ability to do either is not dependent on their truth value or adequacy. While reason is important, while knowledge is necessarily empowering and reason allows us to be properly affected by ideas, mental empowerment need not be reduced to adopting adequate ideas. There are times when engaging in fictions and the imagination is to our benefit and we can occasionally be best served by maintaining inadequate ideas. Because we are imperfect, because we are finite minds that can never live exclusively according to the guidance of reason, we must select among imperfect options. If the choice were between having solely adequate ideas and solely inadequate ideas, then surely we ought to chose the former. However, since our options are varying sets of inadequate ideas, we cannot be guided by which

set contains more adequate ideas, but by which set best serves our *conatus*. Beliefs are good to the extent that they empower the believer, but this empowerment must take into consideration the social relations that constitute and maintain our empowerment to a great extent.

We arrived at this position by first considering the metaphysical dimension of ideas. As argued in Chapter 1, Spinoza maintains that ides are modes expressed under the attribute of thought. As modes, ideas are things that exist in the world, that have a modicum of causal power, that are embedded in causal relations with other ideas, and that strive to persevere in being. Ideas are not the ethereal products of the mind nor the shadows of the world, but are the very things that constitute minds, in an analogous way to how bodies are comprised of smaller, interconnected bodies. Moreover, just as bodies exist in a physical system and are constituted and maintained by their relations in that system, so too do ideas exist in a system of interconnected ideas. The importance of this observation is that, for Spinoza, we must account for the existence of an idea and the power that it has by placing it within the context of other ideas. All finite modes gain their power to exist and produce effects by being affected by other finite modes. This means that we must conceive of ideas in terms of their place within a system of thought. Just as the velocity and direction of an atom is explained in terms of the causal history of that atom *qua* mode of extension, the power of an idea is explained in terms of its place within a system of ideas.

This metaphysical characterization of ideas was carried through to our discussion of minds in Chapter 2. Minds are complex ideas, and thus act and exist according to the same laws that constrain ideas. Minds are things that exist in the world and that strive to maintain homeostasis while also expanding their power. Certain ideas are antithetical and harmful to the mind while other ideas are sympathetic and empowering: just as the body struggles to maintain

its constitution by integrating other bodies, so too does the mind unite with ideas that allow it to maintain its being. The body sustains itself with the use of "pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind,"[339] while the mind does so by integrating empowering ideas.

We also discussed in Chapter 2 how the mind has a constituting idea, namely, the idea of the body. Without this idea, the mind cannot exist, and so the striving of a mind is fundamentally a striving to maintain and empower this constituting idea. Moreover, just as we emphasized that ideas *qua* modes exist within a system of thought, the mind can be viewed as a type of system onto itself. This is not to say that the mind can be treated as distinct or separable from other ideas, but to emphasize that the power of the mind is constituted by the many interconnected ideas that comprise it. This observation played a crucial role in later arguments since it explains why we cannot account for the virtue of an idea simply by looking at the adequacy or inadequacy of that idea. What makes an idea empowering or useful is how it contributes to and interacts with the mind as a system. We must look at how ideas affect my mind as a system of interconnected ideas in order to understand whether that idea is beneficial or detrimental. An idea might empower one system while disempowering another, depending on how those systems are comprised and arranged.

In Chapter 3, we turned our attention to the ATI and to arguing that minds adopt and maintain ideas on the basis of how those ideas affect the mind, rather than strictly on the basis of their epistemic merits. To be sure, Spinoza often praises truth, knowledge, and reason, but this should neither cause us to overlook the affective mechanisms that underpin the mind's striving, nor to conclude that we ought only to strive after adequate ideas. Inadequate ideas can be

[339] E4p45s.

empowering, and they are occasionally preferable to their adequate counterparts. This is not intended to denigrate the benefits of reason, but to orient our thinking towards joy and empowerment.

If joy and empowerment cannot be reduced to adequate ideas, which I have argued is the case for Spinoza, and if the mind strives after joy and empowerment, then the mind's striving cannot be reduced to a striving after adequate ideas. Spinoza often bemoans the fact that humans rarely live exclusively according to the guidance of reason, and it is easy to conclude from these observations that the best life must be a life of reason. However, if a life of reason is an impossibility for finite minds, then our evaluation of the benefits of a given idea cannot be equated to the truth or adequacy of that idea. Reason is important: it allows us to be affected by ideas in such a way that they can properly affect us, thereby allowing us to strive for long-term empowerment rather than just immediate, and sometimes excessive, joys. Further, it is because truth, adequacy, and knowledge are affectively joyful that they can entice our striving. But true or adequate ideas are not the only ideas that can empower us, nor will they necessarily empower us more than their inadequate counterparts. The imagination can be good, and sometimes it is best. This is not to say that we must dismiss truth and reason as irrelevant, only to claim that they are not the exclusive standard for mental empowerment. If the good of the mind is based on its continued existence and empowerment, and if a life exclusively led by reason is foreclosed, then we must measure the worth of ideas based on how they contribute to our striving, whether they be true or false, adequate or inadequate.

Following our discussion of the ATI, we turned our attention to Spinoza's theory of belief. Chapter 4 examined two prominent ways of articulating a Spinozist theory of belief: the Dominance Model and the Universalist Model. The UM argues that all our ideas are beliefs for

Spinoza, where the DM argues that it is only those beliefs that are most empowering. Both these positions, I argued, provide valid readings of Spinoza. However, we must ask ourselves why we are trying to locate a theory of belief in Spinoza. To a large extent, the concern with belief reflects a contemporary tendency in philosophy. Spinoza did not use the term 'belief' to designate a general epistemic category but locating a theory of belief in Spinoza's thought is useful precisely because it allows us to conceptually bridge his philosophy with contemporary philosophical discussions. We currently frame many of our epistemological considerations in terms of belief, and so establishing a Spinozist theory of belief allows us to bring his philosophical observations into contemporary discussions. As such, we are better served by adopting the DM, since the UM does not allow us to pick out beliefs as distinct from other ideas. While the UM highlights important aspects of Spinoza's epistemology, the DM allows us to preserve the intuition that beliefs are separate from other ideas, such as feigned ideas or fantasies. However, regardless of which theory we adopt, it is clear that, if we accept the ATI, beliefs must be adopted on the affective level, rather than because the mind seeks only after true, or adequate ideas. In other words, we believe something because it is empowering or joyful, not because it is true; when we do maintain saddening beliefs, it is because we have been overwhelmed by external forces.

Chapter 5 was dedicated to explaining how we can make use of Spinoza's affective theory of belief. In particular, Spinoza's theory of belief allows us to treat beliefs as objects of immediate moral and political concern. In contrast, if we view beliefs strictly through the lens of truth, then the merit of a belief bottoms out in their epistemic merits: a good belief is true, a good believer maintains true beliefs. When we shift this into political or moral terrain, we are forced to conclude that bad belief systems are bad because they get things wrong. If we adopt Spinoza's

theory of belief, however, then the political or moral merits of a belief or system of belief is not reducible to is truthfulness. Beliefs are good to the extent that they cause joy and empowerment, keeping in mind that we must avoid excessive or antisocial beliefs. Shifting beliefs into the domain of affect and joy thus helps us to understand the moral and political dimension of beliefs. Holding racist beliefs is harmful and morally problematic, in a way that maintaining false beliefs about mathematics is not. If we only look at the truth of beliefs, rather than how they contribute to our collective and individual striving, it is unclear why this should be the case. Moreover, Spinoza's theory potentially provides us with useful strategies for combating harmful beliefs. If a bad belief clings to a mind, we must understand why this is so: we must determine if that belief causes the believer joy or if it is sustained by external forces. We will need to engage in different strategies for intervention depending on what determines the persistence of a bad belief, such as either providing joyful alternatives or alleviating the influence of external pressures.

We are in an era where truth and reason seem to have fallen by the wayside, where knowledge is deeply politicized, and opinion is often construed as fact. We can bemoan this situation and think it is for the worst; but Spinoza's philosophy reveals that perhaps our insistence on the dominance of reason was always a fiction. It is possible that instead of entering a "post-truth" political era, we never operated strictly according to the truth to begin with. Spinoza was deeply concerned with taking humans as they were, finitude and all. Part of this concern involved demonstrating that both our virtues and vices are natural, that we are affective beings striving after empowerment and acting according to natural laws. Spinoza introduces his *Tractatus Politicus* with the following observation:

> Philosophers conceive the affects by which we're torn as vices, which men fall into by their own fault. That's why they usually laugh at them, weep over them, censure them, or (if they

> want to seem particularly holy) curse them. They believe they perform a godly act and reach the pinnacle of wisdom when they've learned how to praise in many ways a human nature which doesn't exist anywhere, and how to bewail the way men really are. They conceive men not as they are, but as they want them to be. That's why for the most part they've written Satire instead of Ethics, and why they've never conceived a Politics which could be put to any practical application, but only one which would be thought a Fantasy, possible only in Utopia, or in the golden age of the Poets, where there'd be absolutely no need for it.[340]

Spinoza's desire was to take humans as they are and to go from there, rather than working from an unobtainable ideal. The ideal of truth, reason, and knowledge is often dominant in epistemology, and focusing on these ideals can obscure the affects by which our minds are actually determined. To adopt an affective theory of belief is to take believers as they are, as driven towards joy and empowerment, rather than towards truth and knowledge. We can laugh, weep or curse those who fall short of reason, or we can recognize that we all fall short of this ideal. Recognizing that we are affective believers might require emphasizing our limitations as minds, but this is a fair price to pay if it allows us to better promote our striving as interdependent beings. Let us attend to our joy and the joy of all those with whom we strive.

[340] TP, G|III/273/4-17.

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Abbreviations for Works by Spinoza

CM: Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts.
E: Ethics.
KV: Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being.
PPC: Parts I and II of Descartes' Principles of Philosophy.
TIE: Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect.
TTP: Theological-Political Treatise.
TP: Political Treatise.

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