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## A Fresh Look at the Role of the Second Kind of Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

Considering the second kind of knowledge in terms of everyday epistemic situations proved to be especially hard for scholars of Spinoza because of the obscure status of common notions. There are two classes of common notions: general common notions, which are properties that everything has, and particular common notions, which are properties shared by specific individuals. Obviously, the former class does not provide comprehensive informative knowledge about the given durational individual, and the latter has also been interpreted as providing general properties. The two most important rival interpretations in terms of the attribute of extension have identified particular common notions with very basic physical/geometrical properties of matter (Brandom 1976) or infinite modes (Marshall 2008; Wilson 1996; Curley 1973; Steinberg 2009). In addition, a novel interpretation of modal properties has also been proposed (Schliesser 2014). There is a twofold problem with these interpretations concerning the scope of practically available adequate knowledge. On the one hand, they seem to radically restrict the possible objects of knowledge of the second kind which—combined with the fact that attaining the third kind of knowledge is almost practically impossible—makes us very reliant on knowledge of the first kind. On the other hand, interpretations identifying common notions with infinite modes or modal properties imply that—in accordance with Spinoza's rationalism—the objects of the second kind of knowledge are ultimately eternal truths. Since this reading gives no room for adequate knowledge about durational entities, it is hard to see how could knowledge about particular durational entities rather than eternal truths be acquired with regard to durational entities. In other words, it is hard to see how knowledge of an adequately known eternal truth about a given durational particular can be of a given durational entity if sufficient knowledge

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only concerns eternal truths. Even though both lines of interpretation correlate well with Della Rocca's influential interpretation, which denies the possibility of actual knowledge in finite subjects (Della Rocca 1996; Della Rocca 2008), they are at odds with Spinoza's rather optimistic statements concerning the possibility of human cognition.

In this paper a reading of the second kind of knowledge which reconciles knowledge derived from common notions with the practical usefulness of this kind of knowledge is presented. Three claims are argued for by developing the interpretation of Renz and Boros. First, contrary to the claims of Schliesser, experimental science is indeed part of the second kind of knowledge (Boros 1997, 128; Renz 2010, 289). Second, by using Renz's reliabilist conception of adequacy for the interpretation of common notions it is shown that adequate knowledge about durational individuals in finite minds can be rendered practically possible (Renz forthcoming). Third, Boros' metaphysical distinction between general and particular common notions shows that the second kind of knowledge presupposes imaginative experience (Boros 1997, 131).

In order to achieve this, first, the second kind of knowledge is examined through the close reading of propositions E2p38–40, which are cited in the official definition of the second kind of knowledge. Based on these texts, the process by which the second kind of knowledge is generated is presented. Second, in order to have a better grasp of this, those places where Spinoza describes the production of rational knowledge are examined: since the second kind of knowledge is identified with reason this should yield an insight into the actual epistemic situations in which it is useful. Reliance on these loci is necessary since Spinoza hardly refers to the second kind of knowledge as such. Finally, in the third section my personal interpretation is outlined which argues that adequate knowledge of durational particulars is possible and the second kind of knowledge is practically useful.

## II. THE SECOND KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

Spinoza defines the second kind of knowledge in E2p40s2,<sup>2</sup> where he identifies it with reason: “we perceive many things and form universal notions: [...] from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of

<sup>2</sup> All references to Spinoza's works are from Curley's translation (Curley 1988, 2016) with the usual abbreviations: E stands for *Ethics*, prae – preface, a – axiom, p – proposition, s – scholium, c – corollary, app – appendix, L – lemma, and d – definition if it immediately follows the number of the part and demonstration in all other cases. Ep. stands for letters followed by the number and year in parenthesis.

things (see P38C, P39, P39C, and P40). This I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge." The referenced propositions together present the general outline of the second kind of knowledge which will be examined in this section.

### 1. E2p38c

According to E2p38c: "From this [E2p38] it follows that there are certain ideas, *or* notions, common to all men. For (by L2) all bodies agree in that, which (by P38) must be perceived adequately, *or* clearly and distinctly, by all".<sup>3</sup> The main proposition of E2p38 states that: "That which is common to all, and which is equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately."<sup>4</sup> The demonstration states that the human mind includes ideas concerning the parts of the body (E2p12–13) and since certain "things"<sup>5</sup> are equally in the part and the whole (according to E2p11c) God will consider these insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind. Also, since these are common to every body, even in the case of affections which involve the natures of the human and external bodies, their idea will be in God insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind.<sup>6</sup> Since having an adequate idea is defined in E2p11c as God having an idea insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind, the human mind must have adequate ideas of these.

This demonstration consists of two interesting features. First, the readings presented in the introduction presuppose an understanding of the causal axiom in line with Della Rocca's interpretation, according to which to know something adequately entails knowing adequately all of its causes, as well as the causes of its causes. Of course, this requirement is very hard to meet concerning actually existing finite things of which efficient causes are part of the infinite causal chains constituting the order of nature and as such these readings deny the possibility of adequate knowledge concerning actually existing durational entities.

<sup>3</sup> Hinc sequitur, dari quasdam ideas, sive notiones omnibus hominibus communes. Nam (per Lem. 2.) omnia corpora in quibusdam conveniunt, quæ (per Prop. præced.) ab omnibus debent adæquate, sive clare, & distincte percipi. (The translation of Curley has been modified.)

<sup>4</sup> Illa, quæ omnibus communia, quæque æque in parte, ac in toto sunt, non possunt concipi, nisi adæquate. (The translation of Curley has been modified.)

<sup>5</sup> Spinoza does not use the term "res" in these propositions and "proprietas" is only introduced in E2p39d. By highlighting the ambiguity of the status of general common notions, referring to them as either things or properties was avoided—this is reflected in my modification of Curley's translation—but wherever grammar requires, they will be referred to as "things"—using the term common notions would have introduced circularity in Spinoza's argument—emphasizing this ambiguity.

<sup>6</sup> For an interpretation of Spinoza's use of God having ideas see Renz 2010; Renz 2011; Renz 2015.

In this context it is worth noting that causal history does not play any part whatsoever in the demonstration of adequacy.

Second, these common notions are treated in a suspiciously similar manner to universals, which seems to be problematic given Spinoza's adherence to nominalism (E2p40s1, Hübner 2016; cf. Gabbey 1995). It seems that these "things" are numerically the same in everything or, to be more technical, the same "things" inhere in everything. The demonstration—at least the part concerning the knowledge of affections of the body—works only if it does not matter whether someone has an idea of his or her instance of this "thing" or someone else's instance of this "thing". By knowing the "thing" in one's own body that person already knows it in the external body and therefore the fact that in the affection of the body that person's nature and the external nature are mixed is of no significance.

On the one hand, this makes sense in terms of the broadly Cartesian physics employed by Spinoza, since according to E2L1 the simplest bodies are only distinguished by their most basic physical properties—motion and rest, speed and slowness—and nothing rules out the possibility that some of the simplest bodies exhibit the same basic physical properties (cf. Gabbey 1995; Melamed 2010; Gaukroger 2011). Yet, this still does not answer the question concerning whether common "things" are the same "thing" in everything or different instantiations of the same property. The second option in my view is untenable: if multiple instantiations of the same essence are not ruled out on the level of general common notions. How can it be ruled out on higher physical levels since the principle of individuation relies on the same notion and rest as in the case of complex bodies. Also, would there be any means by which the two different instantiations could count as two different bodies since it seems that the identity of matter also depends on instantiated physical properties. Thus, the tentative conclusion that common notions refer to "things" which feature as parts in everything can be drawn.<sup>7</sup>

Given this conclusion, the corollary follows rather seamlessly from the proposition: it basically repeats the claim that since there are "things" that are in everything and the human mind has an idea of everything which is in it, the human mind will have an idea of these "things". In this context the phrase "equally in the part and in the whole" seems to indicate that even though these "things" are in everything they are fully and not only partially inherent in everything, an

<sup>7</sup> Of course, it is notoriously difficult to decide how to interpret the metaphysical category of modes: whether they are properties, events or tokens (cf. Lin 2006; Melamed 2013b; Renz 2010, 58 ff.). What is important with regard to the present discussion is that whatever the common "things" are, they are numerically the same in every individual.

adequate idea of them can be formed based on this relation. The interesting component of this corollary is its reference to E2L2, which seems to point to the physical description of these “things”:

All bodies agree in certain things.

Dem.: For all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest. (E2L2)

This reference seems to limit rather radically the scope of “things” that are common to all: namely to being extended and exhibiting the single property which was used to individuate the simplest of bodies in E2L1 and which features as the “immediate infinite mode” in Ep.64 (1675). Since the immediate infinite mode of extension is supposed to follow from the essence of the attribute of extension (E1p21–23), this enumeration might point to the mode of interpreting the common notions as referring to them as infinite modes. However, the fact that the “mediate infinite mode” of extension, the “face of the whole universe”, is not mentioned might point us in the opposite direction (though this might be because the universal individual is not “equally in the part and in the whole”).

## 2. *E2p39&c*

The second locus cited in the definition of the second kind of knowledge is E2p39: “If something is common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind”. This demonstration starts with the supposition that there is something which is equally in the part and in the whole of both the human and external bodies, but not in everything. If the external body affects the human body in this regard, the resulting affection will involve it. Also since this involvement is the result of both the affecting body and the body affected, the idea of the resulting affection can be conceived through the nature of the human mind alone and therefore the human mind will have an adequate idea of it.

There are a number of interesting points in this demonstration. First, while in E2p38 Spinoza discusses unspecified “things”, in E2p39d he identifies that which is “common to, and peculiar to” the human and external bodies as a property.<sup>8</sup> Second, since in this demonstration there is no mention of the frequency

<sup>8</sup> Of course, how important this is depends on our metaphysical understanding of modes and whether modes and properties are distinguishable, see note 7.

of affection, the term “usually affected” is probably better read as “actually affected”. Third, and contrary to the previous point, it is not immediately clear what role the affection actually plays: the demonstration explicitly states that the common property was adequately conceived by God insofar as He had established the idea of the human body prior to the affection and that the idea of the resulting affection is adequate only as far as the common property is concerned. This might suggest that the new element is the association of the common property with the external body: the belief that property A of the human body is also a property of a particular external body. The status of this new element is, however, not clear: do the ideas of the common property belong to the human body and does the affection consist of ideas composed of two different properties or of the same property? If they are different what individuates them, if they are the same what has changed? For the same reason as in the case of common “things” in E2p38, it can be argued that they must be the same idea. But most importantly the interpretation of the third locus that is cited, the corollary to E2p39, depends on the answer to this question. The corollary is as follows: “From this it follows that the mind is the more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its body has many things in common with other bodies.” As mentioned previously, in some sense the adequate perception of many things—where many things is understood as properties of external bodies—depends on the adequate perception of the properties of the human body, since in this demonstration the property “common to, and peculiar to” the human and external bodies was already in such a relationship with the body that an adequate idea could be formed of it (which could have been conceived through the essence of the mind alone). That is, on the assumption that the property is numerically the same in both the human and external bodies. The fact that the human and external bodies have a mutual property does not seem to increase the “things”—understood as properties—perceived adequately, but rather it increases the number of bodies of which the given property can be truthfully predicated. However, by paying attention to the language of E2p39d and E2p11c, a slight difference can be seen: namely in E2p11c possessing an adequate idea that is described as God having an idea insofar as He is constituting the essence of the human mind, while in E2p39d God only has the idea insofar as He has an idea of the human body. This indicates that affecting is indeed necessary for forming adequate ideas. Even though the human body had previously possessed a property which was in it “equally in the part and in the whole”, it could not form an adequate idea of it without the stimulus of an external body affecting it with the same property and therefore God could not have an idea of this insofar as He was constituting the essence of the human mind, only insofar as He had an idea of the human body. This is also supported by my interpretation of the phrase “usually affected” in the main proposition.

The status of this corollary is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it is used only once, in the definition of the second kind of knowledge in E2p40s2. On the other hand, its claim is repeated several times in *Ethics* in a slightly modified form: as the link between the body's capability to affect and be affected and between the mind's ability to understand. Since this claim is central to the understanding of the second kind of knowledge as reason, it will be elaborated on in the final section. But it is important that the usual claim is about affecting and being affected and in E2p39d there is nothing that presupposes that the external body is affecting the human body and not vice versa. Therefore, an interpretation can be proposed in which the corollary could be rephrased more precisely as the following claim: the more the body is capable of having affections with properties common to external and causally related bodies, the more the mind is capable of perceiving many things adequately.

### 3. E2p40

The fourth and last locus cited in the definition of the second kind of knowledge is E2p40: "Whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas which are adequate in the mind are also adequate". According to the demonstration the claim follows from E2p11c: since adequate ideas are in God insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind, whatever follows from these ideas will be in God in the same fashion. The interesting question which remains unanswered here is whether an adequate idea that follows from another adequate idea necessarily exists in the subject, or does conceiving an idea, for which sufficient conceptual resources are present, still require some extra effort from the subject. In my opinion the considerations concerning E2p39d&c suggest that extra effort is needed: it is possible that one has an adequate idea of x, namely that y is the logical consequence of x, yet still fails to entertain the idea of y (cf. E2p47s).

These four loci show us the basic structure of the second kind of knowledge. The human mind has adequate ideas of those extended modes which fully inhere in an affection of the human body and in an unmixed manner. This can happen (i) if the extended mode is ubiquitous (E2p38), (ii) if the extended mode is fully in the external and human bodies in an unmixed manner (E2p39), or (iii) if the extended mode occurred in the human body where the causal chain involves only modes of types (i) and (ii) (E2p40).

### III. REASON IN ACTION

Spinoza identifies in the definition of E2p40s2 the second kind of knowledge with reason as opposed to imagination—the first kind of knowledge—or intuitive knowledge—the third kind of knowledge. This is a very strong claim, since in E5prae he identifies power of the mind with power of reason and in E4app4 identifies reason with intellect. Also the free man, Spinoza’s ethical ideal, is one “who is led by reason alone” (E4p68d). These claims do not seem to facilitate the third kind of knowledge: after all, if the ethical ideal can be reached by using reason alone and since reason is understanding according to the second kind of knowledge, then striving for the third kind of knowledge seems to be an epistemological and ethical luxury. The third kind of knowledge is beyond the scope of this paper; but it should be pointed out that the claim is less strong if the fact that Spinoza does not recognize distinct faculties (imagination, reason, intuition, intellect, will, etc.) in the human mind (cf. Hampe 2011) is taken into consideration. Instead, Spinoza’s claims concerning reason and rational knowledge will be used to get a better grasp of the intended practical scope of the second kind of knowledge. This is necessary because—as discussed in the previous section—the description of the knowledge-producing mechanism of the second kind of knowledge is very abstract and theoretical. Since it is not clear what can be regarded as a common notion, especially a property “common to, and peculiar to” human and external bodies, the practical import of the second kind of knowledge has been called into question. In this section, based on the uses of the loci cited in the definition of the second kind of knowledge and on the relevant references to reason, it is argued that if rational knowledge is indeed knowledge of the second kind, it is central to Spinoza’s ethical project.

#### *1. Reason, Common Notions and the Second Kind of Knowledge*

In order to justify my reliance on the use of reason for describing the scope of the second kind of knowledge it has to be shown that the identification of the reason and the second kind of knowledge in E2p40s2 was not a fleeting thought on Spinoza’s part but in fact he did indeed use them interchangeably. The relationship between knowledge from common notions—which in my view can be undoubtedly described as the second kind of knowledge—and reason is supported by E5p7d and E5p12d:

an affect arising from reason is necessarily related to the common properties of things (see the Def. of reason in IIP40S2), which we always regard as present (for there can be nothing which excludes their present existence) and which we always imagine in the same way (by IIP38). (E5p7d)



Things we understand clearly and distinctly are either common properties of things or deduced from them (see the Def. of reason in IIP40S2), and consequently (by P11) are aroused in us more often. (E5p12d)

Each of these claims has an interesting element, besides restating the relationship of common notions and reason. In E5p7d a new element is introduced by referring to E2p38, namely that ideas related to the common notions are very powerful since they are always regarded as present (cf. E2p44).<sup>9</sup> In this context regarding something as present is not in accordance with the contemporary notion of apparent belief, rather it is part of our set of standing beliefs and excludes the possibility of having ideas contrary to it. In E5p12d Spinoza states that clear and distinct ideas are derived from common notions, as described in the definition of the second kind of knowledge. This raises a question concerning the relationship between the second and third kinds of knowledge, which, however, is outside the scope of this paper.

The same identification of reason and adequacy is stated in E4p27d, even though the interpretation of the claim is hindered by the equivocal reference to the scholium of E2p40: “the mind (by IIP41, P43 and P43S) has certainty of things only insofar as it has adequate ideas, or (what is the same thing, by IIP40S) insofar as it reasons”. If it is assumed—following Mignini’s and Sangiacomo’s editions of the text (Spinoza 2007, 2011)—that the reference is to the second scholium of E2p40, then Spinoza cites the definition of the second kind of knowledge for supporting a claim about reason. This lends more support to the claim that reason and the second kind of knowledge were indeed synonymous as far as Spinoza was concerned.

This claim about reason is reiterated in E4p26d in terms of a reference to E2p40s2:

The striving to preserve itself is nothing but the essence of the thing itself (by IIP7), which, insofar as it exists as it does, is conceived to have a force for persevering in existing (by IIP6) and for doing those things which necessarily follow from its given nature (see the definition of appetite in IIP9S). But the essence of reason is nothing but our mind, insofar as it understands clearly and distinctly (see the definition of this in IIP40S2). Therefore, (by IIP40) whatever we strive for from reason is nothing but understanding. [...]

The identification of reason with the second kind of knowledge is further supported by the reference to E2p40, which was cited in E2p40s2 as one of the propositions describing the operation of the second kind of knowledge. The

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper the difficulties arising from the use of the word *imagine* and its relation to the first kind of knowledge have been disregarded.

claim of this passage—namely that rational ideas follow from the essence of the human mind and therefore the working of reason is understanding—also fits nicely with my interpretation of E2p39, according to which the second kind of knowledge through the generation of affections turns ideas which were in God, insofar as He had an idea of our body, into ideas which are in God insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind.

## *2. Reason is the Virtue of the Mind*

The relationship between the essence of the mind and rational ideas is used several times to identify reason with the virtue of the human mind:

man's true power of acting, or virtue, is reason itself (by IIP3), which man considers clearly and distinctly (by IIP40 and P43). (E4p52d)

Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage. (E4p24)

In both E4p24 and E4p52d virtue is defined by citing E3p3, which shows that whatever our rational ideas are they are adequately caused by the essence of the human mind.

This is further supported by the inference made in E4p35, namely that humans share their nature—essence—and rational ideas follow from the essence of the human mind which according to the parallelism/identity doctrine is identical to human essence: “insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature”. Finally, the same reference to E3p3 is used in E4p59 in order to support the claim about the power of reason.

To every action to which we are determined from an affect which is a passion, we can be determined by reason, without that affect.

Dem.: Acting from reason is nothing but doing those things which follow from the necessity of our nature, considered in itself alone (by IIP3 and D2). But sadness is evil insofar as it decreases or restrains this power of acting (by P41). Therefore, from this affect we cannot be determined to any action which we could not do if we were led by reason.

The interpretation of this proposition is somewhat hindered by the ambiguity of its wording: action is defined in E3d3 as something which is adequately caused by the body, while passion is defined there as something of which the body is an inadequate cause. This seems to exclude the possibility that an inadequately

caused affect can cause an adequately caused affect, therefore action is best read colloquially what the body does.<sup>10</sup> As a result, this renders the proposition important since on this reading it shows that if reason is indeed identical to the second kind of knowledge, its scope is rather large and able to motivate anything. And it seems trivial that neither knowledge of general geometrical properties nor of eternal properties can motivate actions directed at durational ends.

### 3. *What Can Be Understood from Common Notions?*

This conclusion about the practical consequences of rational ideas can be interpreted in two different ways: either Spinoza was not consistent in his identification of reason and the second kind of knowledge after all, or the scope of the knowledge acquired from common notions is broader than is usually thought. The scope of the second kind of knowledge is defined most unambiguously in E5p36cs:

Again, because the essence of our mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and foundation (by IP15 and IIP47S), it is clear to us how our mind, with respect both to essence and existence, follows from the divine nature, and continually depends on God.

I thought this worth the trouble of noting here, in order to show by this example how much the knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, or knowledge of the third kind (see IIP40S2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the universal knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not affect our mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God.

Unfortunately, Spinoza does not use the term reason in this context. He, however, repeats the claim made in E2p40s2, namely that the second kind of knowledge yields knowledge of general properties, while the third kind of knowledge provides knowledge of particular essences. The fascinating element is that he provides an example of this distinction: without providing an exact reference, Spinoza points towards a claim made in the first part of *Ethics* as an example of a less powerful and universal, but still indubitable, knowledge, while the appli-

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, this reading seems to imply the questionable claim that rationally motivated suicide is possible; but this topic is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Garrett 2002; Viljanen 2011; Della Rocca 1995).

cation of this knowledge to a particular essence is the third kind of knowledge. If this claim can be taken seriously, it provides us with a very concrete example of the second kind of knowledge: it shows that the propositions made in *Ethics*—not qua being part of *Ethics* but qua being absolutely certain (cf. Ep.76 (1675))—belong to the body of knowledge of the second kind. This may lend further credence to the otherwise seemingly careless claim in E1p8s2 according to which E1p7 is actually a common notion, of which the ignorant are, however, unaware. E2p46d reinforces the need to take this seriously where—based on E2p38—Spinoza indeed demonstrates that knowledge of God’s infinite and eternal essence is a common notion. The fact that a claim outlined in *Ethics* turns out to be knowledge of the second kind indicates that in Spinoza’s view the definitions and axioms of *Ethics* are precisely those common notions which are in God insofar as He has an idea of the human body and which have to be transformed by a stimulus into one He has insofar as He is constituting the essence of the human mind (cf. Gabbey 1995, 157). If this interpretation is indeed correct, then the claim of E4p59 does not seem to be problematic at all.

This broader scope of knowledge acquired by the second kind of knowledge, compatible with the claim of E4p59, is reinforced by E5p4:

There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form [some]<sup>11</sup> clear and distinct concept.

Dem.: Those things which are common to all can only be conceived adequately (by IIP38), and so (by IIP12 and L2 [11/98]) there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form some clear and distinct concept, q.e.d.

Here the references to E2p38 and E2L2 show that Spinoza uses common notions to justify his claims about knowledge. Unfortunately, the wording is again very general and theoretical, and the proposition is not cited very often (once in E5p14) so it does not provide a clear example of knowledge of the second kind. But its scholium is referenced in E5p20s as the first strategy against the rule of passions. This proposition clearly concerns knowledge gained from common notions, which is knowledge of the second kind: the fact that this knowledge is included in the five most useful strategies against the passions shows that Spinoza clearly intended knowledge of the second kind and not just rational knowledge—which may or may not be identical to the second kind of knowledge—to be of practical importance.

<sup>11</sup> Curley’s translation has been modified following the Latin original in order to reflect the repetition of the claim before the QED. The original term is *aliquem*.

#### IV. ROLE OF THE SECOND KIND OF KNOWLEDGE IN SPINOZA'S ETHICAL PROJECT

So far in this paper it has been shown that the general working of the second kind of knowledge and presented support for my claim that its scope is wide, including the propositions demonstrated in *Ethics*, are able to motivate any human activity and provide a practically useful remedy for the passions. In this final section an interpretation based on these findings that can overcome the difficulties mentioned in the introduction and account for the widespread use of rational knowledge in *Ethics* is developed.

##### 1. Possibility of Adequacy

The first difficulty concerning the practical use of the second kind of knowledge is Della Rocca's claim according to which finite subjects are not able to form adequate ideas about anything other than very general properties. The argument is based on the causal axiom (E1a4) according to which: "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause." Since almost all causes—except for God and the attributes—are simultaneously effects, the causal axiom can be applied repeatedly and therefore it seems that for the knowledge of any given effect the knowledge of an infinitely long causal chain would be required. This is practically impossible for any finite mind and therefore no finite object can be known adequately.

While the argument is valid, it is striking that nowhere does Spinoza seem to be particularly bothered by this (Garrett 2014): as has been seen in section two he happily embraces claims about the mind's adequate knowledge of both theoretical principles (like God's causal power) and particular entities (like human affects). According to my interpretation this is because Della Rocca's reconstruction does not appreciate the particularity of common notions: as has been seen both in E2p38 and E2p39 it is not the case that the common properties of the human and external bodies are two instances of the same property, but are rather numerically the same property. This allows the formation of adequate ideas even in the face of the causal requirement of E3p3: the human mind can only form an adequate idea of the resulting affection if the human body is the adequate cause of the affection. This seems to be incompatible with the fact that there are numerically two causes: the external and human bodies, even though they share the given property. As has been seen in E2p39 and E2p40 it is not the case that the external body just happens to affect the human body at the same instance when the human body autonomously produces the same effect: the stimulus of the external cause is necessary to connect the given property to the essence of the human body and thereby transform the idea in God from His

idea of our body into an idea in God insofar as He constitutes the essence of the human mind.

This means that those infinitely long causal chains may not be that long after all: even though countless causes have contributed to my existence, those causes were a result of the same simple bodies of which all of us are formed and therefore it is not necessary to understand physically and temporally distant objects in order to acquire self-knowledge. This does not mean that the comprehensive understanding of the given particular's essence and existence—as required by the third kind of knowledge (Renz forthcoming)—would be possible without understanding an infinite number of causes, but understanding properties of particulars can be achieved without knowing an infinite chain of finite causes.

By taking the analogy of E5p36cs into consideration, knowing how this particular bowl came about—made of glass, fragile in nature, green and shaped in a specific way—is something that requires complete knowledge and involves knowing an infinite number of finite causes that contributed to these effects (Shein 2015). Knowing, however, that this particular bowl made of glass is fragile requires far less knowledge which can all be traced back to the physical properties of the given object which—according to the assumption—it shares with the physical properties of the human body and for which the conceptual resources are available in the finite human mind.

## *2. Possibility of Knowledge of Durational Objects*

The second difficulty concerning the second kind of knowledge has been the claim that it concerns knowledge of eternal entities: infinite modes or modal properties. If unmitigated this would mean that Schliesser's characterization of Spinoza—someone who is rather sceptical about the existence of scientific knowledge and is more interested in the knowledge of the eternal substance furnishing the mind with impersonal eternity (Schliesser 2014)—would be justified. Schliesser's claim is founded on two aspects of Spinoza's philosophy. First, according to him experience provides only imaginative ideas which—because of both the synchronically and diachronically infinite causal chains—are necessarily inadequate, therefore knowledge of the durational world is impossible. Second, what can be known adequately are eternal truths, which are unchanging: since the durational world is characteristically changing—duration only exists because there is change—this knowledge does not yield much information concerning this world.

The argument presented in the previous paragraph even seems to support this line of thought: knowing both the essence and existence of a particular object would require knowledge of its efficient causes which is only possible once complete knowledge is attained, but properties of objects—what the ob-

ject would be in itself, its formal essence—can be known, since they are eternal truths. However, it can be argued that this argument does not take into account the phenomenological consequences of Spinoza's parallelism doctrine: there are no free floating ideas, every idea is an idea in the mind of an actual finite subject (Renz 2010; Renz 2011; Renz 2015; Zigouras 2007). Therefore every idea of intellect has to be somehow connected to the idea of which object is the actually existing human body—the human mind—which means that its object has to be related to the actual human body. That is, as has been seen in the case of E2p39–40, besides the logical relationship required for having an adequate idea an additional physical/cognitive effort is needed. It is not enough that the human mind has the conceptual resources to come up with an idea, it has to actually have that idea. No matter whether common notions refer to infinite modes or not—I agree with Renz that the less an interpretation relies on the doctrine of infinite modes, the better it is (Renz forthcoming; cf. Melamed 2013a)—they cannot be entertained without thinking them of an actual object. That is, one cannot entertain the idea of extension as such, only the idea of extension inhering in this or that object; one cannot entertain the idea of the essence of man in general, only the idea of the essence of this or that man: otherwise one has a confused and mutilated universal idea (E2p40s1).<sup>12</sup> This shows that even if what is known adequately is an eternal truth, it is cognized by the finite subject as an eternal truth about a durational particular, which implies that adequate knowledge about durational objects cannot be attained.

### *3. Reliability of the Second Kind of Knowledge*

Having thus addressed the two main difficulties concerning the possibility of adequate knowledge of the second kind with regard to durational objects, where knowledge is a prerequisite of any practical application, let us now focus on the reliability criterion for knowledge of the second kind (Renz forthcoming).

When Spinoza introduces the way inadequate ideas are produced in E2p16–18 he shows that the problem with ideas of imagination is that they: “indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies” (E2p16c2). As a result of this “mixing” or “blending” of natures (Della Rocca 1996; Garrett 2008) they do not present the object as it is in itself, but rather as perceived by us, that is, as our body reacts to the given external body. Therefore, depending on the physical condition of the body, as well as the experiential history of the given individual (Renz 2010), the same external cause can produce

<sup>12</sup> Discussion of the admittedly problematic conception of our idea of God is beyond the scope of this paper (E2p47s).

contrary effects in the same subject (cf. E1app, E4prae) thereby hindering the rational coordination of the subject's actions.

On the other hand, when the human body is affected by a property that it shares with the affecting body, this situation does not arise and there is no mixing or blending of causes or essences: the resulting affection is an adequate effect of the given property which is already fully in the human body and adequately known, as such an adequate idea of it can be formed. The degree to which the human body has this ability to share properties with external bodies is its aptitude to affect and be affected in many ways (Sangiaco 2013; Sangiaco 2015; Sangiaco 2016). These shared properties allow the human mind to acquire knowledge of the external body as it is in itself and not as they affect the human body. A slightly anachronistic formulation of this is that rational ideas refer to the primary, while imaginative ideas to the secondary qualities of objects. Therefore rational ideas are always perceived in the same way—as long as they refer to the same individual: my imaginative idea of the same music can be helpful or harmful depending on the constitution of my body (E4prae), but my rational idea of the music indicates its physical structure which does not change, unless the music itself changes. In this sense rational ideas are more reliable than imaginative ideas: not because the imaginative ones are all fictitious—like the idea of talking trees—since they can be grounded in the relationship between very real physical properties, but rather because the properties determining the quality of this relationship are unknown—i.e. they are inadequately caused.

The fact that aptitude as the foundation of the second kind of knowledge plays a crucial role in Spinoza's epistemology shows that contrary to appearances this epistemological project is part of mainstream epistemology. In contrast to Gabbey, Marshall and Schliesser (Gabbey 1995; Marshall 2008; Schliesser 2014), Spinoza does not discard experiential knowledge and try to produce adequate ideas by reflecting on indubitable innate ideas; rather he aims to make the subject's representations conform to the world by exhibiting outward directed epistemic efforts (cf. Pritchard 2013). In the language of the parallelism/identity doctrine this means that the order of the human body is made to conform to the order of the world by reordering the images according to the order of intellect instead of the order of affections. The fact that this epistemic project can be pursued is evident from E2p39c, which describes how properties common to external objects can be acquired, as opposed to E2p38, which describes the shared properties common to all (Boros 1997, 131).



#### 4. *The Virtuous Circle of Nourishment and Scientific Knowledge*

Having established the possibility of producing practically relevant knowledge of the second kind, let us focus on its benefits and evidence that there are two separate uses of the second kind of knowledge. One is nourishment, which relies on the adequate knowledge produced by the second kind of knowledge and although beneficial in itself it does not produce knowledge. It makes the body more powerful and thereby more capable of using the other benefit, scientific inquiry, which is both beneficial and produces knowledge. The role of nourishment is best summarized in E4app27:

The principal advantage we derive from things outside us—apart from the experience and knowledge we acquire from observing them and changing them from one form into another—lies in the preservation of our body. That is why those things are most useful to us which can feed and maintain it, so that all its parts can perform their function properly. For the more the body is [apt to] affecting, and being affected by, external bodies in a great many ways, the more the mind is [apt to] thinking (see P38 and P39).

But there seem to be very few things of this kind in Nature. So to nourish the body in the way required, it is necessary to use many different kinds of food. Indeed, the human body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which require continuous and varied food so that the whole body may be equally [apt to do] everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently, so that the mind may also be equally [apt to] conceiving many things.<sup>13</sup>

Here both benefits are mentioned: the clause within the dashes evokes E2p29cs which describes scientific knowledge production, when adequate ideas can be “determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions” (cf. Gabbey 1995, 170). Also, Spinoza links the effect of nourishment to the aptitude of the body. A body which is well nourished—all of its constituent parts receive the necessary degree of nourishment—is more capable of affecting and being affected. As has been seen, this implies that the body is able to have more in common with external bodies and therefore it is more active and less passive. Therefore, the mind is able to understand more things clearly and distinctly. In order to obtain the necessary level of nourishment that includes “pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater” (E4p45c2s) one is required to possess a good working knowledge of the properties of these nutrients and their effects on our body. If this knowl-

<sup>13</sup> Curley's translation has been modified to reflect the ubiquity of the term aptitude in the text.

edge is lacking, nourishment can turn into poison just as music—which would be normally good for someone who is melancholy—can become harmful if the same person starts mourning (E4prae). As the aptitude of the body increases as a result of proper nutrition, the body becomes more capable of possessing properties common to external bodies. This on its own does not produce knowledge: scientific investigation in E2p29cs, E4app27 and Ep.37 (1666) is described as reflecting on and comparing a number of already acquired adequate ideas. Thus, the more apt the body, the more adequate ideas will be available from which—as a result of the epistemic effort—further adequate ideas can be deduced.

According to my interpretation, this is the virtuous circle of the second kind of knowledge: existing adequate ideas concerning the properties of the human body and external bodies are grounded in the scientific knowledge of the physical properties of these bodies and facilitate proper nourishment of the body. Proper nourishment is both beneficial for the overall health of the body and nourishes all the different parts of the human body. Proper nourishment enhances the aptitude of the body and therefore it is able to possess more properties in common with external bodies. These properties are its actions rather than its passions. In terms of attribute of thought this can be described as the mind's increased ability to entertain numerous adequate ideas simultaneously (cf. E2p40s1). This ability allows the mind to understand the “agreements, differences and oppositions” of its ideas and from these to produce by scientific knowledge production further ideas “determined internally”. These new ideas will in turn facilitate a better understanding of the external bodies and their effects on the human body. Therefore the more scientifically informed a human individual is, the more capable it will be of nourishing its body more effectively (cf. Renz forthcoming). This virtuous circle is only broken if a very powerful and unmitigated external cause reduces the aptitude of the human body—which can happen quite often in the durational world. However, this unfortunate circumstance does not change the general aim of Spinoza's ethical project: “In this life, then, we strive especially that the infant's body may change (as much as its nature allows and assists) into another, [apt to] a great many things and related to a mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things” (E5p39s).

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