

## SEVEN

# Reason and Knowledge in Spinoza

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Reason plays an extremely important role in Spinoza's overall project in the *Ethics*, bridging the metaphysical project of the first half of the work with the moral, political, and spiritual project of the second half. This chapter will investigate Spinoza's conception of reason, focusing on the distinction Spinoza draws between reason and the imagination, as well as between reason and intuitive knowledge. The central interpretive debate this chapter will consider is about the scope of rational cognition on Spinoza's view. On one popular way of presenting Spinoza's conception of reason, it is only possible to have rational cognition of properties that are pervasive throughout an attribute — properties that every mode of an attribute has simply in virtue of being a mode of that attribute — whereas intuitive knowledge may grasp the essences of particular individuals. Another prominent interpretation is that reason differs from intuitive knowledge *only* in virtue of its form or manner of apprehension, and not in virtue of the content or ideas it apprehends. However, authors on both sides of the debate have held that reason is incapable of grasping singular things. After summarizing the debate, this chapter will present an argument that Spinozan reason is *not* blind to particulars, for it is (at least sometimes) capable of grasping the causal structure that characterizes an individual.

## REASON AND THE THREE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

The passages that lay out the core of Spinoza's account of rational cognition occur quite late in *Ethics* II. Spinoza holds off on discussing or even defining reason for so long because his treatment of reason depends upon another element of his epistemology: his account of the *adequacy* and *inadequacy* of ideas. As will become clear in the remainder of this section, Spinoza's account of adequacy plays an important role in his conception of reason, and in his distinction between reason and other types of cognition.

Adequacy is widely recognized as the key concept of Spinoza's epistemology, for it seems not only to be coextensive with clarity and distinctness (EIIp35, EVp4d), but also to be coextensive with truth itself (EIIp34-5). Yet there are at least two different characterizations of adequacy in the *Ethics*. The first account of adequacy is based upon whether an idea is contained within the mind: "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" (EIIp11c). On this account, to say that an idea is adequate means, roughly, that God could derive the idea from his idea of the human mind alone. So, an idea is adequate just in case it is contained entirely within the human mind. Call this the *containment account* of adequacy.

A second account of adequacy is presented in the scholium to EIIp29. Spinoza there claims that the mind's ideas are adequate "so long as it is determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For so often as it is disposed internally, in this or another way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly..." (EIIp29s). Presumably, Spinoza intends these different accounts of adequacy to describe one and the same property. The second account, however, is described in causal terms: the adequacy of an idea is to be understood in terms of the ability of the mind to *produce* that idea by its own internal determinations. As Diane Steinberg frames this conception of adequacy, "an idea is inadequate in a mind if its sufficient cause...lies partly outside that mind; and adequate if its sufficient or adequate cause lies wholly within it."<sup>1</sup> Call this the *causal account* of adequacy. Although Spinoza will appeal primarily to the containment account of adequacy in the arguments discussed below, the causal account may help to make Spinoza's conception of adequacy easier to understand.

With his conception of adequacy in the background, Spinoza distinguishes three kinds of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> The first kind of knowledge includes ideas of things derived "through the senses in a way which is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect"

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<sup>1</sup> Steinberg (2009, 148-9); cf. Bennett (1984, 177-178). Marshall (2008) provides a longer elaboration of the distinction between the containment and causal accounts of adequacy.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza uses the Latin *cognitio*. Scholars are divided over whether to translate this as 'knowledge' or 'cognition'. Curley translates *cognitio* as 'knowledge' in his influential critical edition of Spinoza's works. Garrett (2010) uses 'cognition'. Here, I will use the terms 'knowledge' and 'cognition' interchangeably.

(EIIp40s2) as well as ideas produced “from signs, for example, from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them” (ibid). Because it has its origins in accidental or chance encounters with various sorts of external objects, cognition of this kind can (and often will) be false — indeed, it is “the only cause of falsity” (EIIp41). Spinoza seems to hold that epistemic failure occurs only in two ways. First, an idea may represent its object in a way that is confused or “mutilated,” insofar as it “indicate[s] the condition of our own body more than the nature of [its object]” (EIIp16c2). Second, an idea may represent its object “without order for the intellect,” insofar as the pattern of associations between that idea and others in our mind does not reflect the causal structure of nature (EIIp18s). Spinoza’s guiding thought, roughly speaking, is that error arises because we mistake features of our own body for features of external things, and we make this mistake only in cases where we are relying upon the first kind of knowledge.

The second kind of knowledge, reason, refers to the ability to “perceive many things and form universal notions...from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things” (EIIp40s2). The common notions are spelled out in the propositions running up to this definition of reason. In this series of propositions, Spinoza claims that “there are certain ideas, *or* notions, common to all men” (EIIp38c), namely ideas of “Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole” (EIIp38). Such ideas are guaranteed to be adequate: they are fully contained within the human mind, since they are fully contained within *every* mind.

But *are* there any such common, pervasive entities? Later propositions in the *Ethics* suggest that Spinoza has in mind a few different cases. Any idea of any mode “must involve the concept of [that mode’s] attribute” (EIIp45d), and the attribute of extension is common to the human body, to any other body that a human perceives, and to all of their parts. Hence, the idea of extension ranks among the common notions. Likewise, any body, along with all of its parts, can be conceived under the attribute of thought (EIIp7s), and so the attribute of thought will be common to both the human mind, to the ideas of the objects it perceives, and to the parts of those ideas. The idea of thought thus ranks among the common notions as well.

In addition to the attributes themselves, there are properties that follow from the nature of a given attribute, and so are pervasive throughout that attribute, though they do not

constitute its nature. For example, in his discussion of the common notions at EIIp38c, he refers back to a much earlier lemma from his brief treatment of physics: “All bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute...and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest” (EIIp13s, L2). The first point Spinoza is making here is one we have already observed, namely that all bodies involve the concept of extension. The second point, however, broadens the common notions beyond the attributes, for it indicates several properties that are pervasive throughout the attribute of extension: the property of either moving or being at rest, and the property of being *able* to move more slowly or more quickly. Since all bodies share in these properties, the common notions include the ideas of motion, rest, and variable speed.

To sum up: reason consists of the common notions along with any ideas that follow from them.<sup>3</sup> Given the examples Spinoza uses in the *Ethics*, this means that *at the very least* reason encompasses all knowledge obtained via logical or mathematical proof (in which the common notions feature as axioms), along with some very general truths about mind and matter.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Spinoza defines the third kind of knowledge, or “intuitive knowledge” [*scientia intuitiva*], as the “kind of knowing [that] proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things” (EIIp40s2). Ideas that are produced in this way are adequate, for whenever an idea “follows in the mind from ideas which are adequate in the mind,” it is also adequate (EIIp40). Yet it is not easy to understand what exactly is included in this kind of knowledge. Few examples are provided in the text, and those that are included are often ambiguous. The idea of God’s essence, for example, would seem to have the wrong sort of object to count as a common notion. So, given that we have an adequate idea of God’s

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<sup>3</sup> This interpretation, according to which reason consists of the common notions and what follows from them, is a longstanding scholarly consensus. To pick a few examples: Soyarslan (Forthcoming) writes, “reason relates to the mind’s apprehension of common notions and the general properties of things”; Steinberg (2009, 152-3) writes, “The common notions form the basis of what Spinoza calls ‘reason’”; cf. Segal (2004, 88), Garrett (2003, 51), and Allison (1987, 114-5). In his “Index of the Main Concepts of the *Ethics*,” Deleuze (1988, 105) playfully includes the entry, “**Reason.** Cf. Common Notions.” The disagreement that will be highlighted in subsequent sections concerns what precisely is included in the common notions.

<sup>4</sup> These points have suggested to some commentators a parallel between Spinoza’s common notions and the innate ideas of Descartes and other continental rationalists; see Allison (1986, 113-4) and Nadler (2006, 175-6).

essence, that idea had better be an instance of intuitive knowledge. But Spinoza *also* suggests that our idea of God's essence is derived from the common notions (at, e.g., EIIp45-47d), and if so, that idea would seem to be an instance of rational knowledge. The only clear-cut instance of intuitive knowledge that Spinoza provides comes very late in the *Ethics*: the mind's knowledge of itself "under a species of eternity" gives rise to intuitive self-knowledge, because in this way the mind "knows that it is in God and is conceived through God" (EVp30). Yet this lone example hardly provides the fleshed-out picture of intuitive knowledge that might be hoped for.

Even given what little can be said with certainty about intuitive knowledge, we can make some illuminating comparisons between intuition and reason. No error is involved in either sort of cognition; both are to be reckoned as epistemic success or goal states. Thus the distinction between them cannot be accounted for in (traditionally) epistemological terms, since both kinds of cognition give rise only to adequate ideas. Instead, the distinction must either track some difference in the way adequate ideas are apprehended by the mind, or some difference in the content of those ideas, or both.

Following Sanem Soyarslan, I will refer to the interpretation according to which reason and intuition differ only in virtue of the different processes by which they produce ideas as the *method interpretation*.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the *content interpretation* has it that reason differs from intuition both in the processes by which they produce ideas *and* in the content of the ideas. A crucial example that Spinoza provides immediately after his definitions of the three kinds of knowledge lends some credence to the method interpretation. When solving a problem of the form  $a/b = c/x$  for unknown  $x$ , Spinoza claims, we might proceed rationally on the basis of "the force of the demonstration of P19 in Book VII of Euclid, namely from the common property of proportionals" (EIIp40s2). This would be to solve the problem via rational cognition, since the solution would be formed on the basis of a common notion. Spinoza goes on to describe how this problem might also be solved via intuitive knowledge:

But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly

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<sup>5</sup> Soyarslan (Forthcoming).

because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second. (ibid)

If we take this as Spinoza's definitive statement of the differences between reason and intuitive knowledge, the key distinguishing characteristic of intuitive knowledge is its *immediacy* ("in one glance, we see..."). Reason is not immediate in this way: it is mediated by the inferences that must be performed by the mind in order to draw an adequate idea out of some others. This difference between reason and intuitive knowledge amounts solely to a difference in the way in which the mind grasps an idea, and not to any difference in the content of ideas had by reason and those had by intuition. Hence, this passage seems to support the method interpretation.

In spite of this — as we have already seen — Spinoza's definitions of reason and intuitive knowledge are not especially detailed, and remain a source of scholarly debate. Some have argued that the uses to which Spinoza applies his concept of intuitive knowledge later in the *Ethics* undermine the method interpretation. According to these scholars, there is not only a difference in the processes by which ideas of reason and of intuition are produced, but also a difference in the content of those ideas. In its most general form, the view these scholars have defended is that reason is blind to particulars, while intuition is not. The next section considers extant arguments for and against this view.

## THE SCOPE OF REASON

According to the method interpretation, the difference between reason and intuitive knowledge is a difference solely in the way that these kinds of cognition produce ideas. There is no difference, however, in the *content* of the ideas that can be produced in these two ways — that is, they do not differ in their scope. As we have seen, the primary evidence for this view comes from the examples Spinoza uses to explain the distinction. For instance, in the example at EIIp40s, one and the same idea (the solution to a mathematical problem) is grasped in different ways. Likewise, in Part V, he directs our attention to the fact that "our mind, with respect both to essence and existence, follows

from the divine nature, and continually depends on God” (EVp36s), a claim that was already proven in Part I. Why does he bring it up now? He explains:

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...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...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. (EVp36s)<sup>6</sup>

Here, the truth that we grasp — namely, that our own mind follows from the divine nature — is something that was already apparent by the end of *Ethics* I, but (Spinoza seems to hope) we become able to understand it intuitively by the end of *Ethics* V. Again, this strongly suggests that, whatever the difference between these kinds of knowledge is, it is not a difference in scope.<sup>7</sup>

Another argument that has been offered on behalf of the view that reason and intuitive knowledge must have the same scope is simply that it is wildly implausible that we could ever grasp the very essences of singular things. If intuitive knowledge is supposed to grasp the essences of singular things, then how in the world can we ever have intuitive knowledge? This is especially hard to see given Spinoza’s account of the essences of singular things in terms of their striving to persevere in their being (EIIIp6-7). To understand the striving of a finite body, for example, we would need to understand the pattern of communicated motions that individuates it (EIIp13s, Definition), since this pattern is what the thing strives to preserve. Yet, as Ronald Sandler points out, “it is implausible that anyone actually knows, or could know, any of the physical ratios that

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Singular thing’ is a technical term: “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence” (EIIId7). The common or pervasive properties cannot constitute the essence of any singular thing because singular things are limited or bounded. For example, extension cannot constitute the essence of any singular thing (per EIIId2), since every extended singular thing is of finite extent while extension itself is not. Here, I treat ‘singular thing’ and ‘individual’ as coextensive, though technically Spinoza’s definitions allow for infinite individuals but only for finite singular things; on this, see Sophie Lavéran’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Sandler (2005) and Nadler (2006) both defend this view, though for very different reasons (as will be seen below). Alexandre Matheron (1988, 581) adopts the view for reasons somewhat similar to Nadler’s, citing Parkinson (1954) as his inspiration.

individuate individuals or what it is like to strive to persevere as, for example, that bat over there strives to persevere.”<sup>8</sup> But if intuitive knowledge does *not* include the ideas of the essences of singular things, then it does not seem to extend beyond the scope of reason.

On the other side of the debate, one main argument has been offered *against* the method interpretation and in favor of the content interpretation. The thought is that the very definitions of the kinds of knowledge will entail a difference in their scope. Reason gives us knowledge of attributes and common properties, but these properties do not “constitute the essence of any singular thing” (EIIp37). However, intuitive knowledge “proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (EVp25d). On the face of it, this straightforwardly commits Spinoza to a difference between the scope of reason and the scope of intuition: reason cannot grasp the essences of singular things, while intuition can.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the variation in these arguments, many of the authors on both sides of the debate have been motivated by the thought that, given both the text and Spinoza’s philosophical commitments, it is just not possible for reason to grasp the essences of singular things. For Sandler, this thought is expressed in his general skepticism about the possibility of having knowledge of the essences of singular things. For proponents of the content interpretation, this thought follows from Spinoza’s conception of the common notions as universal.<sup>10</sup> In the final section, I will consider some textual evidence that seems to point in the opposite direction — that is, evidence that indicates Spinoza would have been open to the possibility that reason could represent the essences of at least *some* singular things. I will then suggest one way of understanding the mechanism by which rational cognition, as defined by Spinoza, could achieve such a feat.

## REASON AND THE COGNITION OF CAUSAL STRUCTURE

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<sup>8</sup> Sandler (2005, 80).

<sup>9</sup> Curley (1973, 56-7), Wilson (1996, 118), Marshall (2008), Lin (2009) and Soyarslan (Forthcoming) adopt versions of this view.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Soyarslan (Forthcoming, 4-5).



In this section, I will develop the claim that rational cognition can produce ideas of individuals, and provide some textual argument in its favor. Since many, including both proponents and the opponents of the method interpretation, have thought there is simply no way that reason (as Spinoza defines it) is up to the task of adequately representing individuals, my aim here is primarily to propose a way in which this is possible, and to show how this possibility might be grounded in the text of the *Ethics*.

In his intriguing defense of the method interpretation, Steven Nadler suggests the possibility that reason could represent individuals on the basis of their causal relationships with other individuals. After citing several of the interpretive options sketched above, Nadler writes, “A more generous (and, I believe, more plausible) reading of the doctrine is that both the second and third kinds of knowledge involve adequate knowledge of individuals and thus lead to an idea of a thing that situates it in its proper causal context.”<sup>11</sup> On Nadler’s view, Spinoza intends rational cognition to include what we would ordinarily think of as scientific understanding. For example, rational knowledge of the body “shows how and why the body is what it is by reference to the nature of Extension and the principles of physical science (or, more specifically, the principles of biology, physiology, chemistry, etc.)” (ibid).

Nadler ultimately accepts the method interpretation in light of the fact that he takes reason to be capable of grasping the essences of singular things.<sup>12</sup> However, his key insight about Spinoza’s conception of reason is that rational cognition has the material needed to represent individuals. This point does not entail the method interpretation, since it could still be that there are some individuals that are beyond rational cognition but that are accessible to intuitive knowledge. So, although I do not think it ultimately serves to justify the method interpretation, I take Nadler’s suggestion as a useful starting point for making sense of the way that reason could, at least in principle, apprehend the essences of singular things.

There is a passage in the discussion of common properties (running from EIIp38-40) that I take to be crucial in understanding Spinoza’s conception of reason, but that is often underemphasized by commentators. Earlier, I followed most commentators in focusing

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<sup>11</sup> Nadler (2006, 179)

<sup>12</sup> He writes, “The difference between the two kinds of knowledge, then, is to be framed not really in terms of content or information but in terms of their respective forms” (Nadler 2006, 181).

upon the characterization of the common notions that occurs at EIIp38 and 38c. Those passages emphasize the attributes and pervasive properties, as I touched upon above. However, among the passages Spinoza cites when he defines reason in terms of the common notions, he includes:

If something is common to, and characteristic of [*commune est et proprium*], the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body tends to be affected [*affici solet*], and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them [*quodque in cujuscunque horum parte aequae ac in toto est*], its idea will also be adequate in the mind. (EIIp39, translation modified)

What sorts of “characteristic” features does this proposition refer to? One temptation is to say that this passage is simply describing the same pervasive properties already discussed, albeit with emphasis upon the way the human body is “customarily affected” in virtue of such properties. Another possibility is that this passage is intended to set out an additional class of common notions, besides those that represent the pervasive properties of EIIp38 and 38c. To decide between these interpretations, consider the demonstration of EIIp39. The crucial piece:

Let it be posited now that the human body is affected by an external body through what it has in common with it, that is, by [property] A; the idea of this affection will involve property A (by EIIp16), and so (by EIIp7c) the idea of this affection, insofar as it involves property A, will be adequate in God insofar as he is affected with the idea of the human body, that is (by EIIp13), insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind. And so (by EIIp11c), this idea is adequate in the human mind, q.e.d. (EIIp39d)

The claim Spinoza is trying to defend is that if one mode,  $x$ , is affected by another,  $y$ , in virtue of some shared property,  $A$ , then  $x$  will have an adequate idea of  $A$ . The argument relies upon the containment account of adequacy to connect the antecedent to the consequent: since  $A$  is a property shared by *both*  $x$  and  $y$ , it follows that the idea God has of  $x$  will include the idea of  $A$ , i.e., the idea of  $A$  will be adequate in  $x$ 's mind. Notice that neither the proposition nor its demonstration requires that the property in question be

pervasive. It may simply be common to the two interacting modes. Given this fact, the most plausible interpretation of EIIp39 is the reading on which it postulates rational cognition of certain properties even though they are not pervasive throughout an attribute.

Indeed, in searching for a way to make sense of EIIp39, we are quickly led to the view that rational cognition can grasp the essence of singular things. The only thing that this passage guarantees about the property A is that it is a *causal* property: it must be the sort of property by which *y* could affect *x*. Now, Spinoza holds that causal properties of a thing follow from its “actual essence” or nature, so A follows from the nature of *y*.<sup>13</sup> But the cognition of an effect depends on, and involves, cognition of its cause (EIIa4), for Spinoza. So, *x*’s rational cognition of A will depend on, and involve, cognition of *y*. And, in general, rational cognition of causal properties (of the sort at issue in EIIp39) will always involve cognition of the essences of singular things. Hence, rational cognition can grasp the essence of at least some singular things — namely, those things that produce affections in our body of which we have adequate ideas.<sup>14</sup>

Spinoza’s aim in these passages is further clarified by a short corollary he appends to them: “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” (EIIp39c). This corollary is in line with earlier passages tying the power of the mind to the complexity of the body.<sup>15</sup> The fact that this is a corollary to EIIp39 indicates the mechanism connecting bodily complexity and cognitive power. Our own bodily complexity entails that we have many shared features with a wide range of other individuals, and our shared features make those other individuals accessible to rational cognition. How does this work? On my reading of EIIp39 and 39c, the way in which reason apprehends particular individuals might be best described as *structural modeling*. Human reason is capable of adequately

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<sup>13</sup> In this vein, he writes, “[T]he power of each thing... is nothing but the given, *or* actual, essence of the thing itself” (EIIIp7d).

<sup>14</sup> This interpretation is on the surface similar to that advanced by Deleuze (1990 [1968], 290-301), who recognizes that EIIp39 implies the existence of “less universal” common notions. However, Deleuze holds that “The least universal common notions do not however, for their part, coincide with ideas of particular essences (relations are not the same as essences, even though essences express themselves in those relations)” (398n34). As I hinted in the previous section, I do think the essences of particular individuals are the *rationes* described in the Physical Digression after EIIp13s, which are relations, and so I disagree with Deleuze’s parenthetical justification for his view. Thanks to Andrea Sangiacomo for pressing me on this issue.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., “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” (EIIp14).

representing other individuals by modeling their causal structure (or “nature”), though this requires the human body to contain all the complexity involved in that structure. Most of the time, Spinoza presumably thinks this will not be possible; the individuals in question will be too complex. However, in some cases, Spinoza apparently thinks it will be possible for reason to do the job. Spinoza’s sparse use of examples provides us with little help here, but one example of this might be the figures that we construct in the course of doing geometry. In a late letter, Spinoza implies that such “mental constructs” are extremely simple, which might allow us to comprehend them in their entirety.<sup>16</sup>

However we demarcate reason’s limited ability to comprehend the essences of particular individuals, this reading provides a clear of the cognitive advantage of having a complex body: such a body contains more resources for adequately modeling the causal structure of other bodies, and so the mind’s capacity for rational cognition is correlated with its body’s complexity. By contrast, if reason were capable of grasping *only* universal or pervasive properties, Spinoza’s proposed correlation between capacity for rational cognition and bodily complexity would have no explanation. Since such properties are by hypothesis shared alike by humans, ants, and rocks, Spinoza would be committed to the view that humans, ants, and rocks all have the same capacity for rational cognition. Yet he clearly rejects that view. So Spinoza’s claim at EIIp39c is strong evidence that reason is capable of grasping more than just the pervasive properties that most scholars take to constitute the objects of the common notions. And if reason extends beyond the pervasive properties, then presumably it will include at least some singular things within its scope.

The arguments discussed in the previous section naturally suggest various objections to this interpretation. The main objection is a textual one. We have already seen that opponents of the method interpretation like to point to Spinoza’s claim that “the foundations of reason are notions...which (by EIIp37) do not explain the essence of any singular thing” (EIIp44c2). So, it might be objected, reason cannot represent the essences of singular things: it only has universal or pervasively shared properties to work with, and one cannot grasp the essence of a singular thing on that basis.

However, Spinoza could coherently deny this last claim — that is, he could hold that although rational cognition has its *foundation* in pervasive properties, it can come to grasp

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<sup>16</sup> Ep. 83.

the essences of particular individuals on the *basis* of that foundation. In fact, this seems to be the view he actually held at one point in his thinking. In his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza writes:

The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, *or* order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things. That essence is to be sought only from the fixed and eternal things, and at the same time from the laws inscribed in these things, as in their true codes, according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered. (TdIE par. 101)

The ‘singular, changeable things’ of the *Treatise* are (roughly) the singular things or finite modes of the *Ethics*. But here, it is clear that the essences of singular things are made intelligible through “the fixed and eternal things”. So, if the fixed and eternal things are accessible to reason, then in principle so should be the essences of singular things.

*Are* the fixed and eternal things accessible to reason? One reason to think that they are is that, in these passages, Spinoza treats the laws of nature as being “inscribed” in the fixed and eternal things. The laws of nature, presumably, are common to all singular things, and so are in principle accessible to reason. (It’s true that Spinoza goes on to worry that “there seems to be a considerable difficulty in our being able to arrive at knowledge of these singular things” (TdIE par. 102) — specifically, he is concerned that we could not know any particulars without knowing the whole of nature. Yet he seems to think this is in principle soluble: after outlining the difficulty, he simply writes, “this is not the place to treat [singular things]” (ibid), implicitly suggesting that he expects such a treatment is available.) So, in spite of the fact that the foundations of reason do not *constitute* the essence of any singular thing, there is textual support for the claim that Spinoza thinks it possible to build up to knowledge of individuals starting from these foundations.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter began with an examination of the key texts in which Spinoza develops his conception of rational cognition, distinguishing it from two other kinds of cognition — imagination, on the one hand, and intuitive knowledge, on the other. However, since both

rational cognition and intuitive knowledge are adequate forms of thinking, it is difficult to see how precisely reason and intuition differ. One possibility is that reason and intuition differ in their scope: intuition is capable of representing the essences of singular things, while reason is not.

This is a tidy account of the difference between the two adequate forms of cognition. Here I have argued that it is *too* tidy, and that there is more textual evidence for the view that reason can grasp particulars than is typically appreciated. In his demonstration of EIIp39, Spinoza commits himself to the possibility of rationally apprehending some of the causal properties of other singular things. Given some of his other principles, he is also committed to the view that we apprehend the essences of singular things whenever we apprehend their causal properties. Furthermore, only by taking reason to have this wider scope can we make sense of Spinoza's view that the mind's capacity for adequate perception corresponds to the body's complexity.<sup>17</sup>

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