

Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory

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Abbreviations

This volume uses the following abbreviations for referring to primary literature.

AT	<i>Oeuvres de Descartes</i> , 11 vols., eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–74).
C	<i>The Collected Works of Spinoza</i> , vol. i, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
CM	<i>Metaphysical Thoughts (Cogitata Metaphysica)</i> , Spinoza's appendix to his <i>Principles of Cartesian Philosophy (Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae, Pars I et II, More Geometrico demonstratae)</i> .
CSM/K	<i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. iii, trans. Anthony Kenny (1991).
G	<i>Spinoza Opera</i> , 4 vols. (vol. v, 1987), ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).
KV	Spinoza's <i>Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand)</i> .
S	<i>Spinoza: Complete Works</i> , trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002).
TIE	Spinoza's <i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)</i> .
TP	Spinoza's <i>Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)</i> .
TTP	Spinoza's <i>Theologico-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)</i> .

The *CM* is cited by part and chapter number. The *KV*, *TP*, and *TTP* are cited by chapter number and sometimes also by the section numbers introduced in the Bruder edition of Spinoza's works and reproduced in many subsequent editions. The *TIE* is cited by section number from the Bruder edition. *G* is cited by volume number, page number, and sometimes by line number. Some of the essays employ further abbreviations which are explained within the notes of those essays.

Spinoza's *Correspondence* is cited by letter number from J. Van Vloten and J. N. Land's 1882 edition of Spinoza's collected works. References to Spinoza's *Ethics* first cite the Part, and then use the following abbreviations:

a	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
d	demonstration
l	lemma
D	definition
DOE	Definition of the Emotions (end of Part 3)

Spinoza on Being Human and Human Perfection

Karolina Hübner

1. Introduction¹

The notion of a 'model [*exemplar*]' of human nature in Spinoza's ethics is something of a puzzle. Certain aspects of the doctrine are relatively clear. It's clear for example that the notion of a model is important for Spinoza's overall moral picture.² This is because in Spinoza's view it is models that make moral value judgements possible: properly understood, concepts like 'good' and 'evil' signify the degree to which the thing being judged as 'good' or 'evil' approximates the greatest perfection or flourishing that an entity with its nature can attain.³ This ideal standard of the greatest possible perfection is what the model represents.

It's also clear that Spinoza believes that models can be better or worse. Thus the ignorant 'multitude' has its inadequate models of things, and metes out judgements of 'good' and 'evil' accordingly.⁴ The search for a better model of human nature, and thus for a superior conception of the human good, is one of Spinoza's principal tasks as a philosopher: 'This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me' (*TIE* 14).⁵

¹ I'm grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this essay to the editors and other contributors of this volume, as well as to the participants of the Human Nature and Agency workshop at Uppsala University, the Midwest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the audience at University of Western Ontario.

² Even this relatively innocuous claim has not gone uncontested: see Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics [Study]* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), §68.4.

³ More accurately, they signify the degree to which this thing is *determined* to approximate its ideal, or the degree to which it determines something *else* to meet its ideal. See *KV* II, 4, *G* I.60 and Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction [Introduction]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218. I will not address here other aspects of Spinoza's notion of good and evil.

⁴ See *TIE* 3–9.

⁵ The qualities with which Spinoza endows his ideal human point to a debt to Stoicism. For accounts of Spinoza's Stoic heritage, see e.g., Don Rutherford, 'Salvation as a State of Mind: The Place of *Acquiescentia* in

This much is relatively clear about what Spinoza may have in mind when he introduces his model of human nature in 4pref (*G* II.208). But the notion is puzzling in at least two other respects. Both of them have to do with the metaphysical foundations of Spinoza's doctrine, insofar as any 'model' by definition is a model of a certain 'nature'—or, to put it in what are equivalent terms in Spinoza's metaphysics, of a certain 'essence'.

The first puzzle has to do simply with how Spinoza understands this notion of 'essence' or 'nature'. More specifically, it has to do with Spinoza's stance on the *universality* of essences. Namely, it's not clear whether Spinoza's metaphysical framework admits the existence of more general species-essences, or whether, even if we can use general *terms* such as 'human being', only the unique essences of particulars, natures shared with no other thing, can be said to exist in metaphysical rigour.

The second puzzle concerns Spinoza's conception of 'human' nature specifically: it's not clear how Spinoza understands this notion. There are several factors that contribute to this lack of clarity. First, there is the fact that in the *Ethics* Spinoza never offers an official 'definition' of a human being. (In contrast, both 'mode' and 'finite' thing, for example, receive early and prominent definitions.) Second, Spinoza's naturalistic and scalar conception of being further complicates matters.⁶ For if all things in nature observe the same laws and differ from one another only by degree, then we cannot expect to find some *sui generis* property the exclusive possession of which would neatly separate 'human' beings from other kinds of beings. In particular, this conception of being seems to make it highly unlikely that Spinoza would consent to the traditional definition of human being as the being who reasons, as Leibniz for example does.⁷ For, from the perspective of the attribute of thought, Spinoza's scalar naturalism implies that all individuals, not just human beings, will be 'animated' or minded to some degree (2p13s). Thus it's perhaps unsurprising that Margaret Wilson for example concludes that Spinoza doesn't allow for enough of a difference between human minds and the minds of 'brutes' for reason to characterize the former alone.⁸

A third complicating factor is that Spinoza repeatedly makes assertions that *prima facie* look the part of a definition of 'human being', but, on closer inspection, turn out to apply equally well to other things. Consider, for example, these initially promising statements:

1. 'The essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes' (2p10c);
2. 'Man consists of a Mind and a Body' (2p13c);

Spinoza's Ethics', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1999): 447–73; Susan James, 'Spinoza the Stoic', in *The Rise of Modern Philosophy*, ed. Tom Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 289–316.

⁶ See 3pref, *G* II.138; 1app, *G* II.83; 2p13s, *G* II.96.

⁷ See also Spinoza's rejection of Aristotle's definition of human being as a 'rational animal' (2p40s1). For Leibniz, see *New Essays on Human Understanding*, eds. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸ Margaret Wilson, "For They do not Agree in Nature with us": Spinoza on the Lower Animals' ['They do not Agree'], in *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 342–4.

3. 'Man thinks' (2a2);⁹
4. 'What constitutes the form of the human Body consists in this, that its Parts communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed proportion' (4p39d).

The problem with all these claims is that in Spinoza's naturalistic and panpsychist framework all of them are equally true of many other, highly composite modes—of frogs, trees, wheelbarrows. Hence they fail to state the necessary and sufficient conditions of being 'human'.

Without a clearer grasp of how Spinoza understands 'nature' generally, and 'human' nature specifically, there is little hope of progress in understanding the model of human nature he proposes in the *Ethics*, and adopts as his standard of the human good. What follows is an attempt to solve these two puzzles, starting with the problem of the universality of essences.

2. Essences¹⁰

2.1

Let me start by saying a few general words about how Spinoza understands 'essence'. He defines this notion as follows:

to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: 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. (2D2)

We can paraphrase this definition as the claim that an essence is a set of properties necessary and sufficient for the actual existence of the thing. Spinoza himself prefers to gloss 'essence' as 'power [*potentia*]'. More precisely, in his view the 'actual essence' of any thing—that is, the essence of any existing thing—consists in its power to persevere in existence and produce effects (3p7).¹¹ Spinoza also identifies 'power' with being a 'sufficient' cause of some effect (CM I, 12, C 280). So a Spinozistic 'essence' is just the causal power necessary and sufficient for a thing to exist and produce effects.

With this initial characterization of essence on the table, let's turn to the first puzzle identified above: Spinoza's stance on the universality of essences. Some commentators have concluded that no consistent doctrine emerges from Spinoza's writings on this

⁹ For the claim that 2a2 identifies the universal human essence see Francis Haserot, 'Spinoza and the Status of Universals', *Philosophical Review* 59, no. 4 (1950): 488.

¹⁰ I develop material in this section more fully in 'Spinoza on Essences, Universals and Beings of Reason' (manuscript).

¹¹ See 1p34; DOE 1. 'Actual essence' contrasts with formal essence, or essence qua eternal but *indiscernible* (2p8c; KV II, 20, note c, G I.97) implication of God's essence. So Spinoza's claim that 'actual' essence is 'power' is not merely a *partial* description of essence, or an account of essence in a certain state, since the essence of any creature is discernible as that essence only when actual.

point.¹² And, indeed, at first blush, the textual evidence seems to point in two opposite directions. Some passages suggest that Spinozistic essences are unique, characterizing, and individuating a particular *res* and only that *res*. (This is clearly true of God's essence. It is also how the above definition of essence is typically construed.¹³) However, other passages suggest that Spinozistic essences are more general species-essences, such that several modally distinct things can share what is qualitatively one and the same nature.¹⁴

In the context of an inquiry into Spinoza's ethics, it's worth noting that this second (and far more numerous) group of texts appears primarily in the course of Spinoza's reflections on moral questions. In the *Ethics*, the universal sense of 'essence' takes center stage as the focus of Spinoza's investigations shifts from the problem of determining the true nature of the one divine substance, to that of determining the true nature of the human good. Here are two examples of texts suggesting that Spinozistic essences are to be understood as species-essences:

the greatest good of those who seek virtue is... a good that is common to all men, and can be possessed equally by all men insofar as they are of the same nature... *Schol...* [I]t is not by accident that man's greatest good is common to all... it is deduced from the very essence of man. (4p36d, 4p36s, G II.234–5)

Of ['things outside us'], we can think of none more excellent than those that agree entirely [*prorsus conveniunt*] with our nature. For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. (4p18s, G II.223)

What Spinoza seems to be hinting at in passages such as these is that there is indeed a common essence to being human, possessed by all particular human beings, even if we may actualize it to different degrees. And it is because we share this common nature that we can also have a common good, be beneficial to one another, and together compose a more powerful society. In short, Spinoza's key moral (and political) doctrines seem to hinge on the possibility of distinct particulars partaking in one and the same nature.

2.2

The question then is, how do we square this line of thought with Spinoza's apparently concurrent commitment to the uniqueness of essences, such that any essence exists iff

¹² See Michael Della Rocca, 'Egoism and the Imitation of Affects in Spinoza' ['Egoism'], in *Spinoza on Reason and the Free Man*, eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel and John Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 2004), 132.

¹³ E.g. Bennett, *Study*, §16.2; Della Rocca, 'Egoism', 133; Olli Koistinen, *On the Metaphysics of Spinoza's Ethics* (Turku, Finland: University of Turku, 1991), 13–14.

¹⁴ E.g. 1p8s2, G II.50; TIE 95; 1p17s, G II.63; 2p10, 2p10s; KV IIpref, G I.53; 4app9; 4p35c1, 4p35c2. Likewise, Spinoza mentions in his writings both particular models (4pref, G II.205) and general models; and, among the latter, both species-standards (such as the model of human nature) and universal standards (such as the model of 'being [*ens*]' in general, which allows us to conceive of 'goodness' as such, applicable to any being [4pref, G II.207]).

a particular with that nature exists? To be clear, it's not a matter of defending Spinoza from a charge of inconsistency. Such an accusation could only get off the ground if we had a compelling reason to conclude that it would be inconsistent for Spinoza to posit both particular and more general species-essences in his metaphysics. But no such reason seems to be forthcoming: purely conceptual considerations do not demand commitment to *either* particular *or* general essences; there is clear historical precedent for not treating universal and particular essences as mutually exclusive;¹⁵ and textual evidence for attributing to Spinoza this sort of exclusive commitment is also lacking.

Nonetheless, even if it's not a matter of defending Spinoza from accusations of inconsistency, we still need to determine how exactly his outwardly divergent statements about essence all fit together. I would like to suggest that on the view that underlies all his statements in nature there are only the unique essences of particulars, but these formally real essences coexist with mind-dependent more general species-essences, endowed with objective reality alone.¹⁶ Let me explain this in more detail.

The basic premise of this view is that only particular things have formal reality. That is, only what is metaphysically incapable of existing in, or as a constituent of, many distinct things at one and the same time is caused by God and thus has being.¹⁷ By 2D2, all such particulars are endowed with essences. These essences must therefore also be understood to possess a reality independent of the activity of any finite mind. Now, if we also grant that Spinoza is committed to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), and to a multiplicity of distinct particulars, we can infer that in his view there must be an answer to the question, 'What makes particular *x* different from particular thing *y*?'¹⁸ Assuming that this answer will refer to the essential properties of *x* and *y*, the essences of particulars will be unique to them.

A further premise of the view I'm attributing to Spinoza here is that the properties of these formally real particulars can nonetheless *resemble*—or, as Spinoza more often puts it, 'agree' with—one another, to various degrees.¹⁹ This resemblance genuinely obtains *in re*, prior to and independently of any finite mind's activity.

Given these premises, a universal cannot be a formally real entity, an *ens reale* produced by God. So the ideas that refer to such universals, if they are to form part of a valid metaphysical account, can represent only 'beings of reason [*entia rationis*]'²⁰ The reality of such beings consists solely in the temporary objective reality they possess when represented by our ideas. As Spinoza sums up this ontological picture, 'some

¹⁵ For example, some medieval thinkers hold that a given nature exists as one as a universal in the intellect, but as many in things in nature.

¹⁶ For Spinoza's use of the formal reality/objective reality distinction see 1p17s, G II.63; 2p7c; *TIE* 33–5, 41–2.

¹⁷ See *KV I*, 6, G I.43; *KV I*, 10, G I.49; *KV II*, 16, G I.81–2.

¹⁸ For PSR, see 1a2, 1p11ald1. For doubts whether Spinoza's metaphysics can ground a multiplicity of finite particulars, see e.g., G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. iii (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), *passim*.

¹⁹ See e.g., *CM I*, 5–6, G I.245; *TIE* 76; 2p40s1, G II.121.

²⁰ For the distinction between these two kinds of *entia*, see *KV II*, 16, G I.81–2; 2p49s, response to third objection, G II.135/C 489.

things are in our intellect and not in Nature... these are only our own work' (*KV I*, 10, G I.49).

On Spinoza's account, we form representations of such more general, merely ideal kinds on the basis of actual resemblances that obtain among the properties of formally real particulars, through comparison and abstraction. Thus, 'from the fact that we compare things with one another certain notions arise which nevertheless are nothing outside the things themselves but modes of thinking'; for example, the notion of 'unity' is 'only a mode of thinking by which we separate the thing from others which are like [*similes*] it or agree [*conveniunt*] with it in some way' (*CM I*, 5–6, G I.245).²¹ On this view, membership in a 'species' identifies the highest degree of resemblance among particulars (4app9, G II.368).

In short, in metaphysical rigour, for Spinoza kinds 'are' only insofar as they constitute ways we think of certain sets of particulars as the same in some respect. But they do not contribute to any particular's metaphysical constitution, as they would for an Aristotelian.²² And the ideas that represent such kinds refer distributively only to these particulars. Thus, universals 'neither exist nor have any essence beyond that of singular things' (*CM II*, 7, G I.262–3).

2.3

There is one more aspect of this view that I want to look at in more detail. This is that, according to Spinoza, notions that represent such kinds vary in their degree of adequacy. Both 'imagination' and 'reason,' explains Spinoza, are ways we 'form universal notions [*notiones universales formare*]' (2p40s2). But 'imagination' is nothing more than an idiosyncratic and indistinct record of past modifications undergone by our bodies (2p40s1, G II.120–1). Such ideas represent distinctly 'only what [particulars] all agree in, insofar as they affect the body' (2p40s1, G II.121). That is, they represent distinctly only the relative properties of collections of bodies that vary from individual to individual. What they do not represent distinctly is how the particulars being represented are in themselves. They also cannot tell us which of the properties are more fundamental, and which derivative.

This imaginative process is precisely how, according to Spinoza, the multitude forms the universal notion 'man [*homo*]':

[This notion has] arisen... because so many images... are formed at one time in the human Body that they surpass the power of imagining... to the point where the Mind can imagine neither slight differences of the singulars (such as the color and size of each one, etc.) nor their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body... [NS: the mind] expresses this by the word *man*, and predicates it of infinitely many singulars... [T]hese notions are not formed by all [NS: men] in the same way, but vary from one

²¹ See letter 2 (G I.9); 2p48s, G II.129–30; 2p40s2, G II.122; 4pref, G II.207–8; 4p62s, G II.257; *TIE* 76.

²² For this point, see John Carriero, 'Spinoza on Final Causality' ['Final Causality'], *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. ii, eds. Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 127–31.

to another, in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by... For example, those who have more often regarded men's stature with wonder will understand by the word man an animal of erect stature. But those who have been accustomed to consider something else, will form another common image of men—e.g., that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal. (2p40s1, G II.121)²³

In short, if mere experience is our pilot, this will lead us to treat properties like risibility and featherlessness as the essential properties of this less determinate, ideal entity that we call a 'human' being.

According to Spinoza, it's impossible for a finite mind to avoid forming such inadequate general ideas. This is because the fundamental intentional object of any such mind is the corresponding body (2p13). Given the finitude of every 'body' (2D1), and the fact that other bodies are constantly acting on it (4p18s, G II.222), it's inevitable that the impressions it receives will become superimposed and confused. But what matters most for Spinoza's moral-philosophical project is that not *all* general notions are of this sort.

In the first place, some of the general notions that any mind forms immediately in sense experience will be necessarily adequate. This happens, claims Spinoza, whenever we perceive properties that are either universally instantiated (notions formed in this way Spinoza calls 'common'), or at least pervasive—present in every part of a given subset of bodies (2p40s2, G II.122; 2p38–9).²⁴ To 'reason' is just to 'form' further 'universal notions' on this foundation (2p40s2, G II.122). Since an adequate idea can give rise to only other adequate ideas (2p40), if we can secure this starting point of grounding our thinking in adequate representations of intrinsic properties, then all the thinking that proceeds from this foundation will likewise be necessarily adequate. This formation of adequate general ideas on the basis of adequate ideas of intrinsic common or pervasive properties just is 'reasoning' for Spinoza.

Typically common notions are thought to be the *only* adequate general ideas in Spinoza's framework. The thought is that Spinoza rejects all other general notions. But I want to suggest that in fact there are *two* types of adequate general notions in Spinoza's framework, and more specifically that among the further adequate general notions formed on the foundation of common notions and adequate ideas of pervasive properties are *rational representations of universals*. These are adequate general notions that represent, as some more general abstract nature, a property or set of properties because of which certain particulars in fact resemble one another when compared as they are in themselves. Unlike inadequate general notions, such ideas don't reflect merely how a body was affected. Unlike common notions, these ideas represent not omnipresent intrinsic properties, but properties that genuinely render formally real particulars similar. It's clear that Spinoza's epistemology must have room for this

²³ See 4p35c2s, G II.234. One reason Spinoza rejects the definition of human being as 'rational animal' is that it operates by genus and differentia.

²⁴ I won't examine Spinoza's argument for this conclusion here.

second sort of adequate general notions. Otherwise Spinoza could not say for example that we can have 'true' but 'abstract, or universal' knowledge of 'good and evil' (4p62s). As we know, ideas of 'good and evil' do not represent any intrinsic property: instead, they are constructed by us in reference to merely ideal and artificial models.²⁵

My suggestion is that we see Spinoza's own notion of a 'human being' as this second type of adequate general notion, that is, as a rational representation of a universal. In other words, I propose that for Spinoza a 'human being' is just the way a reasoning mind abstractly represents certain similar, formally real particulars as the same (in many cases, particulars we are already 'accustomed', without rational grounds, to labelling 'human'). Unlike the multitude, in constructing her idea of a 'human being' the philosopher doesn't rely on indistinct and relative 'universal images'. Instead, she recognizes how particular things resemble one another when compared as they are in themselves—that is, ultimately, when we have deduced their natures from God's essence. The philosopher's idea of what it means to be 'human' and the multitude's ideas will thus differ in their degree of adequacy. They will also likely disagree about which property should be viewed as the essence of this kind of being.

But if not risibility or featherlessness, as the multitude proposes, then which property distinguishes human beings as human beings on an adequate, rational account of 'human nature'? This is the question we'll address next.

3. Being Human

3.1

Which property, according to Spinoza, is then the one without which a 'human being', understood rationally and adequately, cannot exist, and which conversely cannot exist without a 'human being'?

The first part of Spinoza's answer to this question is found in his aforementioned doctrine that the essence of any thing is its 'power' to be and act. This implies that the rational universal notion that adequately represents 'human beings' as a kind will identify a certain causal power. And I want to propose that, despite his commitment to universal mindedness, the power Spinoza singles out as specifically human is the power to *reason*—that is, as we've seen, to produce adequate general notions on the basis of adequate ideas of common and pervasive properties. That is, according to Spinoza, on a rational, adequate account of human nature, the causal power necessary and sufficient for there to be a 'human' being—i.e., the specifically 'human' way of being a 'sufficient cause'—is a certain causal power under the attribute of thought: namely, the power to reconstitute one's own mind by adding adequate general ideas to the collection of ideas that for Spinoza is this mind.²⁶

²⁵ See also *TIE* 57.

²⁶ Given Spinoza's definition of 'power' as 'sufficient' causation, there is one other way to exercise genuine power in thought: intuition. I return to intuition in section 5.3. Since every idea has some implications

The textual evidence for attributing this definition of human nature to Spinoza is quite abundant. For example, echoing the wording of 2D2, Spinoza writes that the 'very essence of man... is defined by reason... because man could neither be nor be conceived if he did not have the power to enjoy this greatest good', i.e. to have knowledge of God (4p36s). And again: that 'man acts entirely from the laws of his own nature when he lives according to the guidance of reason (by 3D2), and only to that extent must he always agree with the nature of the other man' (4p35c1, G II.233).²⁷

Let me put my proposal in terms of Spinoza's theory of general notions, sketched in section 2. I suggested there that for Spinoza rational representations of universals such as 'human' will belong among the adequate general notions formed on the foundation of common notions and adequate ideas of pervasive properties. I also suggested that such abstract but adequate representations are constructed on the basis of adequate representations of properties that render in fact certain formally real particulars similar. In this light we can now say that for Spinoza to conceive of 'human nature' adequately is to recognize that certain particulars, considered in themselves, resemble one another insofar as all of them to some extent produce adequate general notions. If we consider this resemblance abstractly—in isolation from the particulars in question—on its basis we can construct a representation of a less determinate entity (a 'human being') whose essence lies just in this power to produce adequate general ideas. We can then use this idea to refer distributively to the original collection of similar particulars, treating them as identical with respect to this abstract notion.

3.2

This, in a nutshell, is how I suggest Spinoza understands human nature. I'd like to now address two potential difficulties with this account.

The first difficulty is that it appears that in Spinoza's framework *all* minds reason to some degree. This is because all minds will form common notions (2p38) and any idea necessarily gives rise to a further one (1p36). This is all it takes, as we've seen, for 'reasoning' to take place. In this sense all minds, it seems, could be said to resemble each other with respect to the power to reason. This threatens to make the proposed definition of human being as a reasoner as broad and ineffective as the four claims considered in the introduction.

How do we answer this objection? It doesn't suffice to point out that Spinoza introduces common notions in the context of human cognition specifically, since nothing stands in the way of applying the line of reasoning he uses in 2p37–8 to *all* minds. We

(1p36), from this representation of human being as a reasoner we can derive further properties that will necessarily belong to every 'human' being—for example, risibility. In this way we can rationally ground some of the 'vulgar' representations of 'human nature'.

²⁷ To be 'guided' by reason, I take it, is to have reason as the principal cause of what one does. See also 4p35d, 4app9; *TTP* XX, G III.241; 3p57s, G II.187. In 4p35d Spinoza speaks of human nature 'insofar' as it is defined by reason to remind us, I suggest, that we're dealing only with a mental construct, and there are other ways to define human nature.

can certainly say, however, that given the kind of cognitive capacities we have—capacities to pick up on some properties and some resemblances and not others—even if all beings in fact reason to some degree, most exercise this power to such a negligible degree that we do not become aware of it. (For example, we do not typically regard rocks as reasoning.) Thus we also have no reason to treat such beings as similar with respect to the power to reason and so include them in the category 'human'. So the proposed definition of human being does not lose its power to discriminate among beings.²⁸ We can see here how the existence of a distinct human kind (which pertains to things solely qua represented) doesn't contravene Spinoza's commitment to a scalar naturalism (which pertains to things in their formal reality).

Does this mean that when we take human beings to be essentially reasoners we are thereby *in error* about other kinds of things, which in fact also reason? No. We commit an error only if we deny that other things reason; but this is *not* implied by the claim that it is human *essence* to have the power to reason. For to claim that it is the essential property of one kind of thing to ϕ is not to deny that other kinds of things can also ϕ .

Let me turn to the second potential difficulty with the account of human nature I've attributed to Spinoza. This difficulty is that Spinoza's decision to privilege the perspective of a single attribute—that of thought—in articulating the essence of a 'human' being doesn't seem to sit well with his other metaphysical commitments. In particular, it seems to be at odds with Spinoza's doctrine of 'one and the same connection of causes' under every attribute, and with his belief in the numerical identity of every mode to some other mode under every attribute (2p7s). According to Spinoza we know being not only under the attribute of thought but also (and indeed more fundamentally) under the attribute of extension (2a5). Since reasoning as we've seen is just a certain kind of a causal process, why doesn't Spinoza define human nature from the point of view of *both* attributes?²⁹

I don't think this second objection identifies a genuine difficulty either.³⁰ What it does is highlight a way in which Spinoza's account of human nature in the *Ethics* is not comprehensive. But such comprehensiveness isn't one of Spinoza's objectives in the treatise. As he announces, his aim there is to lead us to 'knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness' (2pref), not to knowledge and blessedness of the human being under every or any attribute.

²⁸ But consider also a human infant with 'a mind... conscious of almost nothing' (5p39s). If we regard such infants as 'human', on the proposed account this can be only insofar as we rely on the first kind of knowledge—for example, because we know that creatures of this sort tend to grow into beings capable of reasoning (see *TIE* 20).

²⁹ Spinoza talks explicitly about the human 'good'—which can be defined only by reference to the relevant nature—from the perspective of extension (4p38–9). But in fact what Spinoza describes as the human good in extension is the good of *any* complex individual.

³⁰ A third possible objection to the claim that Spinoza identifies human nature with a certain kind of thinking is that 3p3d seems to make minds dependent on bodies, such that thinking has to be explained by extension. (Thanks to John Carriero for pressing this point.) But Spinoza's prohibition on inter-attribute causal and explanatory relations (1p3, 2p6) rules out the possibility that minds could genuinely depend on bodies for causation or explanation.

I take this attribute-specific formulation of Spinoza's fundamental objective in the *Ethics* to be the primary reason why Spinoza wished to consider human nature first and foremost from the point of view of thought. But let me offer two further suggestions as to what may have motivated him. First, this focus on thought is also likely due to his fundamental metaphysical orientation, on which thought has a metaphysical significance incomparably greater than that of any other attribute, as a causal power equal to formal reality under *all* the attributes (2p7c). Finally, this privileged status of thought may also reflect a practical concern, insofar as according to Spinoza what we must try to 'emend' is how we think.³¹ Our 'bondage' is the inadequacy of our ideas.

All of these proposals would of course need further development. But what is more immediately relevant is that even if Spinoza himself doesn't explicitly define human nature under the attribute of extension, he does give us resources to begin filling in this gap in his account ourselves.³² If 'reasoning' is just a certain self-sufficient causal process in thought, given Spinoza's commitment to 'one and the same connection of causes' and to the numerical identity of modes under different attributes, under the attribute of extension, it will be of the essence of a 'human being' to 'act', and to 'act' at least in part on the basis of properties shared with other bodies.³³

4. The Origin of Models

At this point we know something about the ontological status of kinds in Spinoza's philosophy; we also know what Spinoza takes to be essential to being 'human'. But all this is not yet enough to shed light on Spinoza's idea of a 'model' of human nature. For the idea of a model is not merely a descriptive general idea, identifying certain particulars as similar with respect to the power to reason, no matter the degree to which they actually produce adequate general ideas. A model of human nature will represent an *exemplary* state of being a 'human', the highest perfection of an essential reasoner. So our remaining task is twofold. First, we need to explain how Spinoza accounts for the fact that we come to form not just descriptive general ideas of this or that nature, but also ideas that represent standards for those natures. Secondly, we need to explain how Spinoza understands the highest degree of specifically *human* perfection.

³¹ See 5p20s, G II.293. It's also possible that Spinoza chose to define human nature under the attribute of thought because he believed that we're better at recognizing our similarity under that attribute. On the privilege of thought see Yitzhak Melamed, 'Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought: Parallelisms and the Multifaceted Structure of Ideas,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming).

³² For the view that there are 'two distinct and independent ways that the essence of a particular human being can be expressed' see Lilli Alanen, 'Spinoza on the Human Mind,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 35 (2011): 14.

³³ I will focus on 'human being' only under the attribute of thought in the remainder of the essay. The numerical identity of modes across attributes commits Spinoza to the claim that a given human being will be identical to a mode under *every* attribute. But for Spinoza relations of numerical identity seem irrelevant to the question of what constitutes a 'human being', which isn't an extensional designation. This is why 2p13c describes a human being as consisting of mind 'and' body, which is redundant if understood extensionally. See also letter 66.

Let's start with the first question. The short answer is that for Spinoza it's inevitable that we come to treat certain ideas as models, just as it is inevitable, as we've seen, that any mind will form general ideas. The fact that we also inevitably come to think of natural things in terms of standards—whether species-standards, such as the model of human nature, or unique standards applicable to a single particular—stems, in Spinoza's view, from our teleological misunderstanding of the nature of causality. Our tendency to judge natural things in terms of species-standards is thus a cumulative product of these two cognitive tendencies: our tendency to generalize, and our tendency to attribute ends to natural things.

In fact, Spinozistic nature is not structured by ends, whether God given or not.³⁴ But, in Spinoza's view, for the most part we're ignorant of the efficient-causal character of causality, just as we're ignorant of the infinite series of causes necessary for each being and each change in nature (1p16c1; 1p28). In our ignorance, we conclude that it is the volitions, desires, and appetites of which we are in some degree 'conscious' that must be the 'first', or undetermined, causes of all we do (1app, G II.78). In other words, we mistake what is merely a necessitated effect (a particular volition or desire) for the fundamental cause (1app, G II.80). And in this way, we arrive at a teleological conception of human agency, according to which what we do is fundamentally explicable by reference to the uncaused ends at which we aim in willing and desiring.³⁵

As long as we have no other explanatory model available, and remain ignorant of the true nature of causation, we make use of this teleological model. Thus we make use of it when we represent God's actions, and when we inquire into the causes of natural events and the workings of natural things: we 'turn toward [our]selves, and reflect on the ends by which [we] are usually determined' (1app, G II.78). So we generalize our teleological self-misunderstanding to all of nature and come to see all things as end-directed agents, with God himself as the universal craftsman. Hence we 'seek to know only the final causes of what has been done, and 'suppose that all natural things act . . . on account of an end . . . [and] God himself directs all things to some certain end' (1app, G II.77–8). In this way, we come to judge each kind of thing according to what we imagine God intended it to be. That is, we come to judge each thing in terms of its model (4pref, G II.206).³⁶

Once in place, models enable us to compare particulars with the presumed intention of its maker. We compare things before us with the imagined divine intention for that

³⁴ For the contrary view that Spinoza's metaphysics admits teleology see Don Garrett, 'Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism' ['Teleology'], in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, eds. Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310–35; Martin Lin, 'Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza,' *Philosophical Review* 115, no. 3 (2006): 317–54.

³⁵ For the view that our self-understanding as end-directed agents is endorsed by Spinoza, see e.g., Garrett, 'Teleology,' 313.

³⁶ There is a further dimension to Spinoza's account which has to do with the anthropocentrism of these models; I ignore it here.

species. It is in such comparisons that Spinoza locates the origin of evaluative notions like 'good' and 'perfect' (4pref, G II.205–7):³⁷

[O]ne cannot have an idea that is perfect from any particular creature; for the very perfection of this Idea, [i.e., the judgement by which one decides] whether it is perfect or not, must be deduced from a perfect universal Idea, or Being of Reason. (KV II, 4, note c, G I.61)

In Spinoza's view, all models, particular and general alike, are merely mind-dependent constructs. Just as there are no ends in nature, there are no models to be found outside our minds, whether it be in the species-essences constitutive of particulars, or in the archetypes within a divine mind.³⁸

5. Spinoza's Model

5.1

According to Spinoza, the fact that we think of natural things in terms of models at all can thus be traced to our ignorance of causal truths. But for Spinoza such origins do not mean that it's impossible for us to make a philosophically legitimate use of models—so long as we recognize that we're dealing only with mind-dependent constructs. Hence we can rehabilitate the idea of a 'model' just as we can rehabilitate the traditional notion of 'substance' when we affirm substance-monism and the existence of infinite attributes. This search for the right model of human nature is one of Spinoza's principal tasks as a moral philosopher.

What makes a model 'right' for Spinoza, is, I suggest, the fact that it is grounded in metaphysical truths about a thing's nature, truths ultimately derived from adequate knowledge of God.³⁹ This kind of model, unlike the multitude's merely imaginative models, allows us to determine the *true* nature of a thing's 'good'. (As Spinoza notes, 'what we judge to be good or evil when we follow the dictate of reason must be good or evil' [4p35d].) Thus, if Spinoza is able to ground his claims about the human good in adequate knowledge of human nature, such claims will amount to genuine moral truths on which all those who think adequately could be rationally expected to agree. As Spinoza explains, he 'shall understand by good what we *know certainly* [*certo scimus*] is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves' (4pref, G II.208; my emphasis). Even this very general, preliminary claim, which leaves the nature of the human good still undetermined,

³⁷ See KVI, 10, G I.49; TIE 12.

³⁸ See Carriero, 'Final Causality', 129–31.

³⁹ For another reading of Spinoza's model as an objective truth, see Nadler, *Introduction*, 218–19. For the claim that this model is a merely pragmatic expedient or imaginative construction see John Carriero, 'On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (1995): 272; and Don Garrett, 'Spinoza's Ethical Theory' ['Ethical Theory'], in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 289. For the claim that Spinoza is a proponent of an error-theory, see the introduction to *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, eds. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

lays down a criterion that the multitude's reasoning about the 'good' fails to meet. For the relation between the multitude's models and such normative concepts is not a matter of 'certain knowledge',⁴⁰

We can start to fill in the details of Spinoza's view by noting that in his view the true model of a thing represents the highest degree of perfection possible for a thing with a certain nature. Here degree of 'perfection' is understood as degree of *causal autonomy*, or—in Spinoza's preferred terminology—'activity':

the main thing to note is that when I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed [*mutatur*] from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. Rather, we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or diminished. (4pref, G II.208)⁴¹

In short, the highest degree of a thing's perfection is found in the state of causal autonomy or self-determination. This is a state in which a thing is determined solely by its own essence, and so is free both from external 'compulsion' and reliance on the contributions of external causes to its effects.⁴² Given this identification of the degree of a thing's perfection with a degree of activity, for something to be genuinely 'good' for a thing is for it to further this thing's power of acting, allowing it to approximate its ideal more closely.⁴³

Applying this general schema to human nature will produce the claim that the ideal state of a human being will consist in the highest degree of activity possible to attain qua human. Given the conception of human nature I've attributed to Spinoza, for a human being to be active or autonomous is to be so qua possessor of the power to reason specifically. Thus to increase a human being's power of acting 'insofar as it is understood through his nature', is to increase the degree to which this being reasons. And this can be spelled out in terms of increasing both the absolute number of adequate general ideas the human mind produces, and their proportion in relation to inadequate ideas that will also compose this mind.⁴⁴ But this is why Spinoza describes his model human both as a 'free man' and 'one who is led by reason alone' (4p68d).⁴⁵

It follows from this that the true 'good' of a human being will be whatever 'leads to understanding [*intelligere*]' (4p26–7).⁴⁶ Since Spinoza agrees with the Aristotelians that

⁴⁰ For this position see also Matthew J. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* [*Human Freedom*] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 98–9, 164. For a different suggestion about why Spinoza privileges his model over other models see Nadler, *Introduction*, 219–20.

⁴¹ See 5p40; 5p42s.

⁴² See 1D7. The degree of a thing's perfection is also its degree of 'reality' (2D6). This is also what the traditional concept of 'virtue' reduces to (4D8).

⁴³ See 4p8; 4p8d; 3p39s, G II.170; Nadler, *Introduction*, 218–19.

⁴⁴ See 4p68d.

⁴⁵ However, we should distinguish both of these figures from the 'wise man' who *isn't* led by reason alone (see n. 49). For the claim that Spinoza's 'free man' is not identical to his 'model', see Kisner, *Human Freedom*, ch. 8.

⁴⁶ I return to the relation between understanding and reasoning in section 5.3.

true knowledge requires knowledge of causes (1a4), it's adequate knowledge of God—'[t]he greatest thing [*summum*] the Mind can understand'—that is our '*summum bonum*' (4p28d). For, without adequate knowledge of the universal first cause nothing else can be known adequately; conversely, an adequate representation of divine nature allows us, in principle, to infer all truths. Thus, the state of total causal autonomy qua human will lie in the possession of the explanatorily most powerful idea.

5.2

Let me say a little more about how precisely Spinoza grounds his model of human nature in metaphysical truths about human beings, such that this model can make possible a 'certain knowledge' of the human good.

I suggest that Spinoza's model of human nature is grounded in rational truths—that is, in the second kind of knowledge—about human nature, which, I've proposed, is knowledge of a certain rationally constructed being of reason.⁴⁷ This grounding can be understood more specifically in terms of a derivation from the descriptive general idea representing human beings as a kind. In combination with other adequate, abstract general ideas (for instance, ideas of 'cause' and 'effect', or 'increase' and 'decrease'), the rational general idea of a human being as reasoner allows us to form further general ideas. Among these is the idea of an unhampered exercise of reason, a state in which a pure reasoner self-sufficiently produces all possible adequate general ideas. And this is what Spinoza's model of human nature represents, I suggest: a pure reasoner—an ideal being who *is* only qua reasoning—in hypothetical conditions in which external causes are neither needed, nor obstruct one's 'actions'.⁴⁸ The true judgements about the human good that this model enables us to make will represent the necessary consequences that different kinds of causal interactions have on the power to reason. Some of these interactions nurture this sort of power; others hinder it. Our 'true' and 'abstract' knowledge of human good will consist of such abstract, conditional, and species-relative causal truths.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See KV II, 4: 'whatever we require of man, must relate only to his genus, and this is nothing but a being of reason... I must conceive a perfect man, if I want to say anything regarding man's good and evil... Since we are not aware of Adam's end, or of that of any other particular creature, except through the outcome, it follows that what we can say of man's end must be grounded on the concept in our intellect of a perfect man, whose end we can indeed know, because it is a being of reason' (GI.60).

⁴⁸ There is thus an analogy between Spinoza's model of human nature and his description of God in 1p16 as producing infinite things in infinite ways. Both 1p16 and the model depict an unfettered exercise of a certain causal power, though the model is constrained to a single attribute.

⁴⁹ In addition to the 'free man', Spinoza also describes a state of *near* human perfection, the 'wise man' who still 'require[s] new and varied' things, and exercises his causal powers in moderation (4p45s, G II.244). The activities in which the wise man engages—music, theatre, sports—are all ways of exercising reason, applying adequate general ideas to possible objects of such ideas. Spinoza also describes much less perfect reasoners—human beings made 'contrary' by inadequate ideas (4p33), and even the near-complete *absence* of reason: one who 'like an infant... has a mind... conscious of almost nothing' (5p39s). What all these figures have in common is that they are true, conditional descriptions of how a being whose essence, rationally understood, consists in the power to reason will act, with what necessary consequences, to the extent that it acts or fails to act from its essence.

This doesn't mean that a particular reader cannot relate to Spinoza's model through the imagination—not as a representation of certain abstract truths but as a future goal, something to be emulated, a source of practical maxims to memorize.⁵⁰ In this sense it's possible merely to 'look to [*intueri*]' (4pref, G II.208) the model. But this is a matter of how a mind guided not by reason but by inadequate ideas is determined to relate to a certain rational representation of itself. It remains that in itself such a model represents a metaphysical truth whose adequacy is on par with that of other general metaphysical truths Spinoza lays out in the *Ethics*. Recognizing this helps us see how in the *Ethics* Spinoza's metaphysical and moral doctrines can indeed form a single, deductively connected system.

5.3

Let me now turn to two potential objections to this construal of Spinoza's model.

The first objection has to do with the fact that in Spinoza's metaphysical framework only God can be purely active. Finite modes are free only in some ways, some of the time.⁵¹ This has led some commentators to claim that Spinoza's idea of 'one who is led by reason alone' is a contradiction, hence an inadequate idea.⁵² For the 'free man' seems to be endowed with qualities that in fact can belong only to the divine substance. By virtue of being free, the 'free man' is no longer a finite 'part of nature' (4p4), and hence genuinely 'human'.

I'm not convinced that Spinoza is guilty of contradiction here. There are at least two reasons to demur from this conclusion. The first is that by definition every way of conceiving of a mode is ultimately a way of conceiving of God (see 1D5),⁵³ even if this essential existential dependency can be made more or less explicit in any given representation. As Spinoza writes, we can conceive of a human being 'born free' if 'we attend... to human nature, or [*seu*] rather to God... insofar only as he is the cause of man's existence' (4p68s).

Secondly, the notion of a 'free man' is also not contradictory because being a finite 'part of nature' is *not* part of Spinoza's definition of human nature. What is essential to being 'human' on his account is, as we've seen, solely the power to reason. (In this sense 'finitude' is arguably hardly better as a *definiens* of rationally understood 'humanity' than 'featherlessness'.) I take the point of Spinoza's notion of a 'free man' to be in part precisely that such an entity—which, to recall, exists only from the point of view of reason—is *no longer finite*. To be sure, any actually existing particular whom we can rationally classify as 'human' will always be a finite and dependent part of nature,

⁵⁰ See 5p10s, G II.287.

⁵¹ 4p18s, G II.222; 4a; 4p45s, G II.244; 4p4.

⁵² See Garrett, 'Ethical Theory', 289; Daniel Garber, 'Dr. Fishelson's Dilemma: Spinoza on Freedom and Sociability', in *Spinoza on Reason and the Free Man*, eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 2004), 196–203.

⁵³ This has been rightly emphasized by Andrew Youpa, 'Spinoza's Model of Human Nature', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (2010): 61–76.

eventually overcome by other, more powerful modes. But what the 'free man' represents is not some particular state of a 'human being' as we *ordinarily* understand such a being—as a multidimensional creature who eats, sleeps, and walks. The 'free man' represents instead simply the unlimited exercise of reason, a certain merely objectively real, ideal entity that 'is' only qua reasoning.

The second objection has to do with Spinoza's conception of the human good. As we saw, Spinoza locates the *summum bonum* of his pure reasoner in adequate knowledge of God. This may seem to create a difficulty for my account insofar as such knowledge, as knowledge of a particular essence, seems to belong to 'intuition' more than to reason, which represents the domain of *general* truths.⁵⁴

The appearance of a contradiction is, I suggest, again merely superficial. This is because for Spinoza reasoning and intuiting are closely intertwined: reason makes intuition possible; and, conversely, intuition continues and perfects reason. This is because a better grasp of things by means of adequate general notions leads us ultimately to see God's essence clearly and distinctly, and thus puts us in a position to deduce the essences of modes, i.e., to achieve the third kind of knowledge.⁵⁵ To put this differently, a posteriori knowledge (inference of causes from effects, of God from his modes) makes possible a priori knowledge (inference of God's effects from their universal cause). This is why Spinoza describes both our 'good' (in 4p27), and the wise man's objective (in 4p45s) simply as 'understanding'; that is, without distinguishing between the two kinds of adequate knowledge.

Wrestling with this objection thus allows us to formulate Spinoza's notion of human nature more precisely. For this inseparability of intuition and reason means that the property by virtue of which human beings resemble one another, and which identifies us as a kind from the point of view of reason, is not the causal power for 'reasoning' understood *simply* as the capacity for adequate general notions *tout court*. Rather it is the causal power for reasoning as thought capable of culminating in intuition. In short, it is causal power for adequate thought as such.⁵⁶

6. The Importance of Similarity

On the view I've attributed to Spinoza it seems possible that there will be a disparity—even conflict—between what is truly 'good' for me qua human (which is how reason represents me) and what is truly 'good' for me qua particular, given my unique essence

⁵⁴ See 5p25.

⁵⁵ See 2p47s. Thanks to John Carriero for an exchange on this topic. For a different account of the difference between reason and intuition see Nadler, *Introduction*, 181ff.

⁵⁶ Why then does Spinoza associate human beings primarily with 'reason'? Arguably because intuition is too rare an occurrence to suffice as a property on the basis of which we could construct the idea of 'human' kind. If the essence of being human is to think adequately, then, given that inadequate ideas have no positive reality of their own (2p35), and only adequate ideas genuinely 'are', we could perhaps also say that human essence lies simply in thinking. See 2p11d.

(what I am in my formal reality). Likewise, it seems possible that the highest degree of my perfection qua particular might be due to some property other than reasoning (for example, brute physical force). And as long as we are considering particular things in isolation from one another, finding that on Spinoza's account such conflicts are possible will be the end of the story we can tell. But as we know, in fact no Spinozistic particular ever escapes entering into causal relations with other things. Once we take this into account, it becomes clear that on Spinoza's account every human being will have a compelling reason to pursue the common, rather than the particular, good if the two come into conflict.

This follows from how Spinoza understands the importance of similarity among particulars. As noted, in his view membership in a 'species' identifies the highest degree of possible resemblance among particulars. Such similarity matters for Spinoza because he believes that the more we act and think *like* other particulars, the greater the likelihood that we will be 'good' to one another, i.e., make one another more powerful in some respect. In his view it is the power to reason that makes it possible for beings like us to become most similar to other particulars, and thus achieve maximum power that causal relations with other things could provide. As Spinoza writes, 'nothing can agree more with the nature of any thing than other individuals of the same species. And so . . . nothing is more useful to man in preserving his being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason' (4app9, G II.368).

This understanding of the consequences of similarity follows in turn from Spinoza's belief that we can discover causal truths by investigating logical relations among the essences of things and that in particular it is logically impossible for a thing endowed with a certain nature to bring about the destruction of itself qua thing with this nature, and even to lead to any decrease in its power. This, he claims, would be tantamount to a contradiction: an essence giving rise to its own negation (3p4ff.).⁵⁷ So insofar as from the point of view of reason we are entitled to regard certain particulars as instantiating the very same abstract nature (for example, humanity), we are also rationally entitled to regard them as to that extent logically incapable of destroying and even enfeebling one another. This to be sure is only an abstract guarantee that cannot predict the outcomes of interactions between actual particulars who aren't just pure reasoners. But insofar as we take one of the central tasks of ethics to be clarifying the conditions under which we can achieve greater perfection or flourishing, Spinozistic ethics will concern itself with such rationally constructed identities, and thus with conditions of possibility of resemblance.

Finally, Spinoza's understanding of what it means to have a common human nature has interesting implications for the customary classification—and occasional denunciation—of Spinoza as an 'ethical egoist'. For it suggests that at least in the context of exclusively human interactions the label 'egoism' might be misleading. It's misleading

⁵⁷ For more detail, see my 'Spinoza's Unorthodox Metaphysics of the Will', in *Oxford Handbook on Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

if we mean by it a preference for *my* interest to the disadvantage of the interests of other human beings; or if we take the contrary of egoism to be acting for the sake of another human being at all. To call Spinoza an egoist in these senses is misleading because, from the standpoint of a rational conception of human nature, there is no longer any distinction between me and other members of my species, or between what is good for me and for anyone else of the same nature. Whenever I act for my own interest qua human I'm acting for the interest of *any* human being.

Spinoza, the Body, and the Good Life

Susan James

The best kind of life for human beings, Spinoza argues, is one in which we are powerful enough to ensure that we live joyfully and resist sadness.¹ As far as possible, we should try to make ourselves resilient in the face of trials and setbacks, and eager to embrace new pleasures and experiences. For example, 'if someone sees that he pursues esteem too much, he should think of its correct use, the end for which it ought to be pursued, and the means by which it can be acquired, not of its misuse and emptiness, and men's inconstancy, and other things of this kind, which only preoccupy someone with a sick mind' (5p10s). Such a life-affirming outlook is not beyond our grasp. However, in order to pursue it we need to come to terms with our own nature. Without a knowledge of what we are like, and thus of what we can and cannot do, we are liable to make damaging mistakes about how to live.

Understanding our nature as human beings is therefore of supreme ethical importance. Moreover, an essential part of this undertaking lies in coming to see how our minds and bodies are related. In the *Ethics* Spinoza offers a metaphysical argument to the effect that a human body and mind cannot exist independently of one another (3p11–13), and defends the view that the power of one waxes and wanes with that of the other. 'The idea of anything that increases or decreases, diminishes or restrains, our Body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our Mind's power of thinking' (3p11). This conclusion must be brought to bear on the issue of what constitutes a good life. If the power of the mind and body increase and decrease together, learning to live in the way that is best for us will be a matter of empowering our bodies as well as our minds.

As it turns out, Spinoza has more to say about the mental than the physical aspect of this process. Discussing the empowerment of the mind, he argues that our greatest

¹ For a defence of this interpretation see Matthew J. Kisner's *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).