

Adequate and Inadequate Ideas in Spinoza

Adequate and inadequate ideas play a central role in Spinoza's system. A number of recent commentators have suggested that the internality or externality of an idea's immediate cause is a necessary and sufficient condition of the idea's adequacy or inadequacy, respectively. I show that this thesis is subject to counterexample and briefly explore the significance of this critique for recent interpretations. I offer an alternative interpretation on which adequate and inadequate ideas are characterized by the manner in which they grasp their objects. Adequate ideas conceive of their objects as following from God. Inadequate ideas conceive of their objects as affecting the body at a time and place.

§1 Introduction

For Spinoza¹, ideas can be divided into two kinds—namely, those that are adequate and those that are inadequate. Adequate ideas involve complete knowledge or understanding of their objects; inadequate ideas do not. The issue at hand is this: What fundamentally characterizes (in)adequate ideas? Jonathan Bennett has suggested that an (in)adequate idea be defined with respect to the internality or externality of the idea's immediate cause.² A number of recent commentators, e.g. Henry Allison, Michael Della Rocca, Charlie Huenemann, Steven Nadler, Diane Steinberg, and Yirmiyahu Yovel, have agreed that the internality or externality of an idea's cause is a necessary and sufficient condition for the idea's adequacy or inadequacy, respectively.³ Bennett, however, makes this thesis central to his discussion of (in)adequate ideas in a way that these other commentators do not. For this reason I will use Bennett as my primary foil.

In the first part of the paper, I will offer counterexamples to Bennett's analysis. I will then offer my own interpretation: namely, adequate and inadequate ideas should be

characterized by the *manner* in which they grasp their objects. Adequate ideas conceive of their objects as following from God. Inadequate ideas conceive of their objects as affecting one's body at a certain time and place. I will demonstrate how this interpretation avoids the pitfalls of Bennett's account while exceeding it in explanatory power. In the final section I compare my interpretation to Steven Nadler's. Our interpretations share important similarities. Where we differ most prominently is precisely on the issue of whether the cause of an adequate/inadequate idea must be internal/external to the human mind. Therefore, a brief comparison of Nadler's interpretation and my own will be instructive regarding the broader importance of rejecting Bennett's analysis.

§2 Bennett on Adequate and Inadequate Ideas

Bennett correctly notes that Spinoza's definition of an adequate idea at 2d4 is unhelpful despite the fact that the notion of adequacy is central to Spinoza's thought.⁴ Though Spinoza uses the notion of adequacy with high frequency, 2d4 remains one of the least-used definitions in all of the *Ethics*.⁵ The meaning of (in)adequacy must be garnered from Spinoza's usage of the term throughout the rest of the *Ethics*. Bennett suggests that we understand (in)adequacy as follows:⁶

An idea is adequate for P iff the cause or causes of the idea are completely internal to P's mind.

An idea is inadequate for P iff the cause or causes of the idea are at least partially external to P's mind.

The context implies that Bennett intends for this to be an analysis of (in)adequacy. To be fair, there is indication that Bennett does not take this to be a perfect analysis. He admits

that “Spinoza stretches the boundaries of adequacy,” and that he’s “not sure what the stretch consists in.”⁷ Perhaps, then, it is most charitable to interpret Bennett as offering only a first approximation of (in)adequacy. Despite this, I will treat the above analysis as Bennett’s for lucidity.

There are a few things to note about Bennett’s analysis before evaluating it. First, by “cause” Bennett means the immediate or proximate cause rather than the entire infinite chain of causes leading up to the idea.⁸ Second, Bennett’s account is relative in that an idea that is inadequate with respect to one mind may be adequate with respect to another. This is motivated by passages such as 2p36pr, which says that all ideas are adequate with respect to God and are inadequate only with respect to some particular mind.⁹

The last thing to note is that Bennett’s account has considerable initial appeal. Consider the following passage from 2p29s:

I say expressly that the mind does not have an adequate knowledge, but only a confused and fragmentary knowledge, of itself, its own body, and external bodies whenever it perceives things from the common order of nature, that is, whenever it is determined externally—namely, by the fortuitous run of circumstance—to regard this or that, and not when it is determined internally, through its regarding several things at the same time, to understand their agreement, their differences, and their opposition. For whenever it is conditioned internally in this or in another way, then it sees things clearly and distinctly.

At first blush, Spinoza seems to be suggesting that adequate ideas are those whose immediate cause is internal while inadequate ideas are those whose immediate cause is external, in accordance with Bennett’s interpretation. Any interpretation that hopes to supplant Bennett’s must be able to explain why Spinoza seems to stress the externality or internality of the cause of an idea as important to the (in)adequacy of the idea.

There are a number of other reasons to find Bennett's account initially plausible, but I'll just mention one more. Consider the three kinds of knowledge that Spinoza introduces at 2p40s2. The first kind includes knowledge from symbols and testimony (or heresy) as well as those things "presented to us through the senses." The second kind of knowledge is that of reason and the third is that of intuition. At 2p41pr Spinoza tells us, "All those ideas which are inadequate and confused belong to the first kind of knowledge" and "to knowledge of the second and third kind there belong those ideas which are adequate." The upshot here is that adequate ideas come only from the second and third kind of knowledge, which seem to be wholly internal processes, while inadequate ideas arise from knowledge of the first kind, the sources of which involve external causes. Thus the (in)adequacy of an idea seems to fall neatly in line with the internality or externality of its immediate cause, at least initially.

The problem with Bennett's account is that there are counterexamples. That is, there are (i) adequate ideas for P the immediate causes of which are external to P and (ii) inadequate ideas for P the immediate causes of which are internal to P. Though I think there is reason to endorse both of these claims, the truth of either one is sufficient to falsify Bennett's understanding of (in)adequacy. Interestingly, Bennett explicitly acknowledges that there are adequate ideas for P the immediate causes of which are external to P, or at least that Spinoza thought so.¹⁰ Perhaps this is where Bennett's hesitation with his own analysis originates. In defense of Bennett's interpretation, the example Spinoza gives of this sort of idea is confusing and has little importance to Spinoza's system as a whole. Given these considerations, we might not fault an interpretation too severely for failing to provide a perfect explanation of this example.

Still, giving an imperfect explanation of Spinoza's example and altogether dismissing it are two very different things. And I see no reason why this counterexample, if genuine, should be dismissed—especially if the example comes from Spinoza himself.

Spinoza explicitly argues that an idea can be adequate for P when the immediate cause of that idea is external to P in the following sort of situation:

Let A be that which is common and proper to the human body and to some external bodies, and is equally in the human body as in those same external bodies, and, finally, is equally in a part of any external body as in the whole. ... Let it now be supposed that the human body is affected by an external body through that which is common to them both, that is, A. The idea of this affection ... will also be adequate in the human mind. (2p39pr)

This passage illustrates that, as Spinoza understood it, the immediate cause of an idea being internal to P is not a necessary condition for the idea being adequate for P. Further, it shows that the immediate cause of an idea being external to P is not a sufficient condition for the idea being inadequate for P. This is a problem for Bennett's account, which says that the immediate cause of an idea being internal/external to P is a necessary and sufficient condition for the idea being adequate/inadequate for P.

A second problem for Bennett is that memories are inadequate ideas for P the immediate causes of which are internal to P. Let's first look at why memories are inadequate for Spinoza. At 2p40s2 Spinoza notes that "knowledge from causal experience," which comes "from individual objects presented to us through the senses," is inadequate. As we'll discuss in more detail later, perceiving these external bodies through the senses involves the ideas of affections of our bodies. Memory is just the linking of bodily affections that occurs when one experiences more than one bodily affection at a time (see 2p18s). If the ideas of these bodily affections are inadequate when

they are first occasioned, then they will be inadequate when they are recalled. Thus, memories are inadequate ideas.

Now consider an example of memory from Spinoza (2p18s). A veteran soldier comes across a set of hoof prints. In his past experience, hoof prints have most often been accompanied by a horse, which have been accompanied by a soldier riding a horse, which have been accompanied by war. Thus, these ideas are linked in his mind. So when the soldier comes across these hoof prints, he first forms an idea of the hoof prints—more precisely, he forms an idea of an affection of his body that is caused by the hoof prints. The immediate cause of this initial idea is clearly external. However once the idea of hoof prints is present, other ideas begin to form such as the idea of a horse. And the idea of a horse then brings about the idea of a rider and so on. The immediate cause of the idea of a horse is the idea of the hoof prints—there is no horse present causing him to have that idea; but the idea of the hoof prints is not external to the soldier but is something wholly internal to him. In the same way, the idea of a horse (which is completely internal) then brings about the idea of a rider. Thus the immediate cause of this memory is also internal, and yet, as a memory, the idea is inadequate. So the immediate cause or causes of memories are wholly internal to oneself, but memories are still inadequate ideas. This indicates both that the immediate causes of an idea being internal to P is not a sufficient condition for the idea being adequate for P, and that the immediate causes of an idea being external to P is not a necessary condition for the idea being inadequate for P.

In summary, the immediate causes of an idea being internal to P is not a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the idea being adequate for P; and the immediate causes of

an idea being external to P is not a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the idea being inadequate for P. It is a mistake, then, to “equate inadequate ideas with exogenous ones” and adequate ideas with endogenous ones.¹¹

I’ve already acknowledged that there are some passages (like the one from 2p29s that I quoted above) that emphasize internality and externality. In what follows, I will defuse these passages by explaining how the internality or externality of the proximate cause serves as a highly reliable indicator of adequacy or inadequacy, respectively, but it is not *in virtue* of the proximate cause being internal/external that an idea is adequate/inadequate. There is a deeper feature generally present in ideas resulting from wholly internal processes that explains the adequacy of those ideas; and there is a deeper feature generally present in ideas resulting from external processes that explains the inadequacy of those ideas.

§3 Duration and Eternity

I will argue that (in)adequate ideas are characterized by the way in which they conceive of (or grasp) the nature or essence of the thing of which they are ideas. An adequate idea grasps the formal essence of a thing as following from God. An inadequate idea grasps the nature of its object as expressed through the temporal existence of the object—that is, as expressed by how the thing happens to affect one’s body at a certain time and place. This is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of (in)adequate ideas, nor will I argue for my interpretation’s superiority to all other available interpretations. Such would require a book-length effort. Instead, I will focus my efforts on two primary fronts: first, showing how my interpretation improves on Bennett’s

account both by avoiding its pitfalls and exceeding it in explanatory power; and second, comparing my interpretation to Steven Nadler's, which will illustrate the broader importance of rejecting Bennett's thesis.

The first clarification that must be made is about the nature of an idea. For Spinoza, ideas are not the images we hold in the mind's eye (what he calls "some dumb thing like a picture on a tablet"); rather ideas are very much a sort of activity—that is, "a mode of thinking, to wit, the very act of understanding" (2p43s). This last line is telling: an idea just is the mind's conceiving of a thing. (These things that the mind grasps are other ideas. For clarity and lucidity, I want to avoid the need to constantly distinguish between the idea that is grasped and the idea that is doing the grasping. Thus, I will continue referring to the idea that is grasped by the unimaginative terms "thing" or "object"). If an idea is the conceiving of a thing, then the way in which the mind conceives of its object will determine the sort of idea it is. An idea of *x* that grasps *x* in a certain manner will be distinct from an idea of *x* that grasps *x* in a different manner, even if both ideas belong to the same individual. It is not the object of the idea but the manner in which the object is conceived that characterizes ideas.

With this in mind, consider the following passage:

We conceive things as actual in two ways: either in so far as we conceive them as related to a fixed time and place, or in so far as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. Now the things that are conceived as true or real in this second way, we conceive under a form of eternity, and their ideas involve the eternal and infinite essence of God. (5p29s)

Since ideas are the conceiving of a thing, Spinoza is in effect saying that there are two kinds of ideas. A few lines before (at 5p29pr) Spinoza writes, "There belongs to the essence of mind nothing but these two ways of conceiving." Thus, there are two and only

two kinds of ideas. Since adequate and inadequate ideas are central to Spinoza's thought, we can infer that the above passage is a characterization of adequate and inadequate ideas.¹²

Adequate ideas, according to the above passage, conceive of their object in relation to God. I suggest that we understand this in the following way: We know that adequate ideas conceive of their object in such a way that they "perceive things truly, to wit, as they are in themselves," (2p44pr), and from 1a4 we know that "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause."¹³ From this we see that an adequate idea of some object x must grasp not only the formal essence of x but also that from which it follows, else it be like a conclusion without premises (2p28pr). We are not, however, interested in the causes of x in "the common order of nature" (2p29s) but in "the order of the intellect whereby the mind perceives things through their first causes" (2p18s). From 1p25 we know that "God is the efficient cause not only of the existence of things but also of their essence." It follows that an adequate idea of x conceives the formal essence of x *as following from God* (see also 2p45). It is conceiving of the formal essence of the thing in this manner—as following from God (conceived under the appropriate attribute)—that is the defining feature of an adequate idea.

According to the 5p29s passage, inadequate ideas conceive of things "as related to a fixed time and place." I suggest that we understand this in the following way: Inadequate ideas conceive of the nature of their objects as expressed through the objects' temporal existence. More specifically, inadequate ideas grasp the nature of their objects as affecting one's body at a certain time and place in "the common order of nature" (2p29s). This is in contrast to adequate ideas, which follow "the order of the intellect"

(2p18s) and conceive things “under the form of eternity” (5p29s). At this point I should clarify that, for Spinoza, one does not directly perceive external objects. Rather one directly perceives an affection of one’s body that is caused by the external object. One’s idea, then, is only indirectly of the external object.¹⁴ Bennett calls this the “indirectly-of” relation.¹⁵ With this clarification in mind, I can now say that the defining feature of inadequate ideas is that they conceive indirectly of their objects as existing at a time and place—i.e. they conceive of their objects as existing things affecting one’s body.¹⁶

Characterizing inadequate ideas as I suggest gives us insight into why inadequate ideas are inadequate—that is, we can explain why inadequate ideas involve only an incomplete understanding of their objects. Spinoza defines duration as “the indefinite continuance of existence” (2d5). So if an object is grasped in so far as it presently exists, it is conceived of under a form of duration. Now in order to completely understand something one must grasp its formal essence, and therein is the problem. Spinoza writes at 1d8e:

For [eternal] existence is conceived as an eternal truth, just as is the essence of the thing, and therefore cannot be explicated through duration or time, even if duration be conceived as without beginning and end.

We learn two key things from this passage: that the formal essence of thing is an eternal truth, and that eternal truths cannot be “explicated through duration or time.”¹⁷ What Spinoza means by the latter is that no acquaintance with an object’s temporal existence will provide one with complete knowledge of the object’s essence. For complete knowledge, one must conceive of the object as following from God and his eternal attributes (for the reasons discussed above); but when one conceives of an object in relation to a particular time and place—e.g. conceiving of an external object in so far as it

happens to affect one's body—one is unaware of the intellectual order by which the object follows from God.

Spinoza presents a similar line of reasoning at 2p25pr. After asserting at 2p25 that “The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of an external body,” Spinoza writes,

We have shown that the idea of an affection of the human body involves the nature of an external body in so far as the external body determines the human body in some definite way. But in so far as the external body is an individual thing that is not related to the human body, the idea or knowledge of it is in God in so far as God is considered as affected by the idea of another thing which is prior in nature to the said external body. Therefore an adequate knowledge of the external body is not in God in so far as he has the idea of an affection of the human body; i.e. the idea of an affection of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body.

When Spinoza says that “knowledge of [the external body in itself] is in God in so far as God is considered as affected by the idea of another thing which is prior in nature to the said external body,” he is asserting that complete knowledge of the external body in itself requires conceiving of the body as following from a chain of causes tracing back to God. But as Spinoza notes, an affection of the human body, which is indirectly of the external body, only explicates the nature of the external object in so far as it affects the human body at some particular time and place. The idea that is indirectly of the external body (and directly of an affection of the human body) does not reveal anything about the eternal *causes* of the external body. It is for this reason that inadequate ideas provide only incomplete knowledge of their objects.

An example will be helpful here. Consider a well-known example from Spinoza:

When we gaze at the sun, we see it as some two hundred feet distant from us. The error does not consist in simply seeing the sun in this way but in the fact that while we do so we are not aware of the true distance and the cause of our seeing it

so. For although we may later become aware that the sun is more than six hundred times the diameter of the earth distant from us, we shall nevertheless continue to see it as close at hand. For it is not our ignorance of its true distance that causes us to see the sun to be so near; it is that the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun only to the extent that the body is affected by it. (2p35s)

The perceptual image involved in seeing the sun is an idea in one's mind. More specifically, it is an inadequate idea in one's mind that is directly of an affection of one's body and indirectly of the sun itself. Spinoza explains that this idea is inadequate because "the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun only to the extent that the body is affected by it." In other words, our idea of the sun grasps the sun only as it affects our bodies at a certain time and place. But we have seen above that a complete understanding of the sun requires that we see its essence as following from God. The affection of our bodies does not reveal the causes of the sun and so does not allow us to conceive of the sun as following from a chain of eternal causes leading back to God. Since our idea of the sun does not grasp the sun as following from God, but as affecting our bodies at a certain time and place, our idea is inadequate.¹⁸

§4 Comparison with Bennett

In this section I'll discuss how my interpretation improves on Bennett's. I'll begin by showing how my account handles the examples to which Bennett's interpretation falls prey. I'll then show how my interpretation explains the initial plausibility of Bennett's account while exceeding it in explanatory power.

Consider first the memory case in which the sight of hoof prints causes one to have the idea of a horse which causes one to have the idea of a soldier which causes one to have the idea of war. The immediate causes of these later ideas are other internal ideas

and yet they are inadequate. This is a problem for Bennett's interpretation but not for my own. The memory of, say, the horse conceives of the horse as affecting one's body in some particular way. Spinoza writes about memories, "They are in fact ideas of the affections of the human body which involve the nature of both the human body and of external bodies" (2p18s). Our memories, then, are directly of affections of our bodies and indirectly of the external bodies. As such, our memories conceive of the external body (in this case the horse) as existing and affecting us in some way. This is in contrast to adequate ideas, which conceive of the essence of the external body as following from God and his eternal attributes. As discussed earlier, the problem with conceiving of an external body as it affects us at some time and place is that we do not thereby grasp the *causes* of the external body in the intellectual order of things, which is necessary for understanding the object in itself. Thus, memories are clear instances of inadequate ideas on my interpretation.

Things get stickier with the second counterexample to Bennett's theory, but such is to be expected given the confusing nature of the example. The example is one in which there is some property A that is (i) common to both the external body and the affected human body, and (ii) as present in any part of these bodies as it is in the whole (see 2p39). Spinoza claims that when the external body affects the human body by that which is common to both, the idea of the affection of this body will be adequate in so far as it involves the property A (but not, presumably, in so far as it involves any other property). Bennett's theory, on which all ideas whose immediate causes are external are inadequate, cannot explain this situation. On the other hand, my interpretation can make at least some sense of it. Temporal interaction with an object usually leads to an inadequate idea

because such interaction does not inform us about the causes of the object. If our only information about the object comes from how that object happens to affect our bodies, then any idea we form about that object will be inadequate. In this case, however, the property A is already wholly present in the human body. More specifically, property A is wholly present in the part of the body that is affected by the external body, just as it was wholly present in the part of the external body that caused that affection.¹⁹ Thus, the information involved in our idea of A does not come solely from this particular interaction with the external body. We have independent access to A and its causes from its presence in our own body apart from any interaction with the external body. This allows us to conceive of A as following from a chain of causes leading back to God and not just as the property of an external body that happens to affect us at some time and place.

My account also explains why we might find Bennett's interpretation plausible in the first place. Except in very rare cases, ideas whose immediate cause is external will be ones that conceive of their objects as affecting the human body at a particular time and place; and with the exception of memory (and maybe some other kinds of imagination), those ideas that conceive of their objects as affecting the human body will have external proximate causes. Thus the correlation between the inadequacy of an idea and the externality of its immediate cause is strong. In the same way, reason and intuition, the processes that produce adequate ideas, are internal processes, so there will also be a strong correlation between the adequacy of an idea and the internality of its immediate cause. On my interpretation, however, reason and intuition do not produce adequate ideas *because* the immediate cause of the resulting ideas is internal, but because reason and

intuition conceive of their objects under the form of eternity—i.e. as following eternally from God. This strong correlation between the internality/externality of the immediate cause and the adequacy/inadequacy of the idea explains why Spinoza emphasizes the internality or externality of an idea's cause at various points. The internality or externality of an idea's immediate cause reliably *indicates* whether the idea is adequate or inadequate, but it is not the defining feature of adequate or inadequate ideas.

So far we have seen how my interpretation escapes the counterexamples to Bennett's interpretation while accommodating the core of truth in Bennett's analysis. It also offers us greater insight into Spinoza's thought than Bennett's account does. Consider, for instance, Spinoza's frequent description of inadequate ideas as ideas that grasp their objects in "a fragmentary (mutilate) and confused manner" (2p40s2). At times, Spinoza seems to equate inadequate ideas with mutilated and confused ideas. For instance, Spinoza writes at 2p35, "Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate ideas, that is, fragmentary and confused ideas, involve."²⁰ It is clear, then, that mutilation and confusion are central concepts in Spinoza's understanding of (in)adequacy. This is especially fitting if we think of mutilated and confused ideas as juxtaposed to clear and distinct ideas. Inadequate ideas are mutilated and confused just as adequate ideas are clear and distinct.

While Bennett acknowledges the importance Spinoza places on the notions of mutilation and confusion, Bennett's interpretation of (in)adequacy makes it difficult to explain why Spinoza thinks of all inadequate ideas as mutilated and confused.²¹ Bennett concludes that Spinoza "gives no reason to think that all such ideas, just because they are caused from outside, are damaged goods [mutilated]" and that Spinoza "has not argued

that every image—every physical state caused from outside—is confused.”²² Perhaps this is because Spinoza did not intend for inadequate ideas to be characterized by simply the externality of the idea’s proximate cause. If my interpretation does a better job of explaining why all inadequate ideas are mutilated and confused, then this is a mark in favor of my account.

We must first characterize mutilated and confused ideas. Mutilated, or fragmentary, ideas are ones that involve only an incomplete part, or fragment, of their object’s essence. This part has been severed from the whole and is therefore “mutilated”. Confused ideas are harder to characterize. We might get a clue by contrasting mutilated and confused ideas with clear and distinct ones. Distinct ideas allow one to clearly differentiate the multiple objects represented by that idea. So a distinct idea of an affection of one’s body (which we do not have) would allow one to precisely pinpoint what aspects of that idea represent the essence of the external body rather than the essence of the affected body. Confused ideas are plausibly characterized as being the opposite of distinct ideas. In other words, confused ideas do not allow one to clearly differentiate between the multiple objects represented by those ideas.²³ It would seem that confused ideas and mutilated ideas are coextensive since Spinoza everywhere uses them as a joint pair.

When inadequacy is characterized as I suggest, there is good reason to think that all inadequate ideas are mutilated and confused. Inadequate ideas conceive of their objects in so far as those objects happen to affect one’s body at a certain time and place. The complete essence of the object cannot be explicated through such temporal interaction. As we’ve seen before, this sort of interaction does not reveal the causes of

the external object, but only provides information about the object's relation to the human body at a particular moment. Such information is insufficient to provide a clear conception of the object. In short, ideas that conceive of their objects in this manner are mutilated. They are also confused. Our ideas of external objects, conceived insofar as these objects affect us at a particular time and place, are only indirectly of the external objects: they are directly of affections of our bodies. These ideas, then, represent the essence of our bodies more than they represent the nature of the external body (2p16). We are unable, however, to clearly differentiate what represents our body and what represents the external body. Thus our ideas of external bodies, when conceived in this way, are confused. As we can see, my account explains why Spinoza sees the concepts of inadequacy and mutilation/confusion as coextensive—an area in which Bennett's interpretation struggles.

At this point I'll conclude that, at least *prima facie*, my interpretation improves on Bennett's. My account escapes the counterexamples to Bennett's analysis and gives us greater insight into surrounding issues such as mutilation and confusion. Importantly, my theory also provides a greater understanding of *why* adequate ideas involve complete knowledge of their objects and inadequate ideas involve incomplete knowledge of their objects; and these are precisely the sort of central insights we should expect when picking out the characterizing features of (in)adequacy.

§5 Comparison with Nadler

Bennett is not the only commentator to endorse the thesis that ideas are adequate or inadequate insofar as their causes are internal or external to the human mind,

respectively. How does my critique of Bennett's analysis affect the work of these additional commentators (beyond the obvious fact that they should not longer endorse that particular thesis)? Much of what these commentators say about (in)adequate ideas is unscathed by my critique; however, the objections I raise should serve to push the emphasis of the discussion in a somewhat different direction. I will make that direction more clear as I compare my interpretation to Steven Nadler's. Our interpretations are importantly similar. Where we differ, most prominently at least, is on the importance of the externality/internality of the idea's proximate cause. Along with further explicating my own account, quickly exploring this difference between our interpretations will illuminate the broader significance of my critique.

As I stated earlier, adequate knowledge of an object requires knowledge of its cause. What I did not state earlier, and what is important for understanding both Nadler's interpretation and my own, is that each finite mode, as Nadler puts it, "stands at the intersection of two causal nexuses: a 'horizontal' nexus within which a thing is temporally and causally related to (infinitely many) prior and posterior things; and a 'vertical' nexus within which a thing and its relationship to other things is causally related to eternal principles, culminating in Nature's attributes."²⁴ I referred to this horizontal causal network—what I will call the *temporal order*—when I argued that the objects of inadequate ideas are conceived *in relation to time and place*. In contrast, I argued that the objects of adequate ideas are conceived *in relation to God*: that is, conceived in accordance with the vertical causal network, which I will call the *intellectual order* (2p18s). Ideas, then, are differentiated by whether their objects are conceived in accordance with the temporal order—known "from the common order of nature"

(2p29s)—in which case they are inadequate, or in accordance with the intellectual order—known “under the form of eternity” (5p29s)—in which case they are adequate.

Nadler also focuses on the relation of inadequate ideas to the temporal order. His emphasis, however, is on the haphazard manner in which we encounter bodies in the temporal order. He writes,

The ideas that we acquire through the senses and the imagination are connected not as they are in the infinite intellect, according to God or Nature’s absolute knowledge of things, but according to the random and relative ways in which we happen to be affected by the objects around us. The ideas that we have of external bodies, our own bodies, and our minds are ordered by the manner in which we experience the world as durational beings occupying a particular place in space and time.²⁵

When our ideas result from random encounters with external bodies, those ideas are “highly limited and perspectival.” Nadler explains, “These ideas give us only a relative knowledge of such objects—how they appear from one particular point of view and how they affect us through our bodies.”²⁶ This limited information is not sufficient to communicate the full essence of the external object. We do not possess the causal history necessary to see why the external body is as it is.²⁷ Hence, ideas that result from sense experience are inadequate.

Nadler, like myself, also stresses the importance of adequate ideas following the intellectual order. That is, adequate ideas are ordered in the mind as their objects are situated in the intellectual order of things. This involves understanding the idea’s object “in relation to their infinite and eternal causes rather than in the context of their temporal determinations.”²⁸ Nadler explains that ideas in the intellectual order “follow other ideas inferentially through connections established by the intellect.”²⁹ Thus, adequate ideas are situated in one’s mind as following inferentially from God and his eternal attributes.

In these regards, our interpretations are very similar. Where we differ most significantly is that Nadler defends an additional condition for (in)adequate ideas. Nadler writes,

Another way to look at the distinction between the adequacy and inadequacy of ideas is to consider the issue in terms of the causes of the idea in the mind. An idea is adequate if its causal antecedents lie in other adequate ideas possessed by the mind. ... [My idea of an object is adequate] if the mind itself, in other words, is the cause of the idea. ... On the other hand, if my idea of an external body is generated in me not by other ideas in my intellect but by my sensory experiences ... then the idea of the external body essentially comes disconnected from true and adequate understanding.³⁰

Here Nadler apparently endorses Bennett's thesis that an idea is adequate iff it is caused internally and an idea is inadequate iff it is caused externally. The causes referenced here are causes within the temporal order. So for Nadler, an adequate idea is properly situated with respect to both the intellectual order *and* the temporal order. Likewise an inadequate idea is improperly situated with respect to both the intellectual and temporal orders.

What my counterexamples to Bennett's thesis show, however, is that an idea's causes in the temporal order are not of fundamental importance to an idea's adequacy or inadequacy, though it generally serves as a good guide. There are instances in which an idea's cause in the temporal order is external, and yet the idea is adequate; and there are instances in which the idea's cause in the temporal order is internal, and yet the idea is inadequate. What ultimately matters, then, is whether the idea is properly situated in the *intellectual* order of things. Is the idea conceived as following from its eternal and infinite causes leading back to God? If so, then the idea is adequate. If not—i.e. if the idea is conceived according to

the temporal order instead—the idea is inadequate. The idea’s causes in the temporal order are of secondary importance. It is this shift away from the idea’s causes in the temporal order and towards the idea’s relation to the intellectual order that is recommended by my critique.

Consider the explanations Nadler and I offer as to why inadequate ideas are inadequate. Nadler and I agree that our temporal interactions with external bodies do not provide complete information about the external body. In particular, the body’s causal data is missing. But what *type* of causal data? Is the idea inadequate because we are missing information about the object’s causes in the *temporal order* or in the *intellectual order*? Nadler, it seems, points to ignorance of the temporal order as at least part of the root problem. I pinpoint ignorance of the intellectual order as the fundamental issue. The source of inadequacy, as I see it, has nothing to do with lacking information about the temporal order of things. Inadequacy stems merely from conceiving of an object in relation to the temporal order *in the first place*. Spinoza claims at multiple places that “Eternity cannot be explicated through duration” (5p29pr), and he insists that this remains true “even if duration be conceived as without beginning and end” (1d8e). Hence, *no* amount of temporal interaction with an external body will provide one with the information necessary to adequately understand the object. This is because information about the temporal order is not the right kind of information. What matters is the object’s relation to the intellectual order of things, and that sort of data is not gained through temporal interaction with a body.

To summarize, the defining feature of (in)adequacy is whether the object of an idea is conceived according to the intellectual order—i.e. as following from God—or

whether it is conceived according to the temporal order—i.e. in relation to its interactions at a particular time and place. Inadequate ideas are inadequate not because they lack information about their objects' causes in the temporal order, but because they are conceiving of things in relation to the temporal order at all. The idea's temporal causes are important only insofar as they are generally indicative of the way in which the idea is conceived. The proper response, then, is to turn our focus away from an idea's causes in the temporal order, as this is secondary to the defining features of (in)adequacy.

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¹ All Spinoza texts and translations come from *The Ethics; Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect; Selected Letters*, translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992). References will follow the following formula: the first number will designate the part, 'd' will designate a definition followed by the definition number, 'p' will designate the proposition followed by the proposition number, 'pr' will designate a proof or demonstration, 'c' will designate a corollary followed by the corollary number if necessary, 's' will designate a scholium followed by the scholium number if necessary, 'e' will designate an explication. E.g. The scholium of the second corollary of proposition fifty five in part three will be cited as follows: 3p55c2s.

² Bennett 1984, 2001.

³ Allison 1987, 112; Della Rocca 1996, 53-7, and 2008, 114; Huenemann 2008, 96, 101-108; Nadler 2006, 167; Steinberg 2009, 148-9; Yovel 1993, 160.

⁴ Bennett 1984, 176-177; 2001, 198. This is not to say that 2d4 does not yield *any* important insights into the nature of adequacy. For instance, we can glean from it that Spinoza intended adequacy to be an internal mark of truth.

⁵ For data and graphs on the “fecundity” of claims in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, see Alexander Pruss’s blog at <http://alexanderpruss.blogspot.com/2011/11/fecundity-of-spinozas-claims.html> (this data was generated using data from <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~rbombard/RB/Spinoza/tredwell.html>). A claim is more fecund the more claims logically depend on it.

⁶ Bennett 1984, 178; 2001, 198.

⁷ Bennett 2001, 201.

⁸ Bennett 1984, 178; 2001, 199. To Bennett’s knowledge, Spinoza never addresses this issue. Bennett concludes that limiting “cause” to the proximate cause is justified because otherwise Bennett’s account would entail that no idea would be adequate except with respect to God. Though I will not return to this, it should be noted that there may not be a relevant difference between the immediate cause of an idea being external and a cause somewhere further back in the chain being external. If this is the case, then Bennett’s account leads to some very undesirable conclusions. My account, on the other hand, would be unscathed.

⁹ Bennett 2001, 199.

¹⁰ Bennett 2001, 201.

¹¹ Bennett 2001, 201.

¹² We reach this same conclusion by considering that the second and third kinds of knowledge—reason and intuition—conceive things under the form of eternity (2p44c2; 5p33pr), and the second and third kinds of knowledge produce only adequate ideas.

¹³ Interestingly, 1a4 is the most fecund claim in the *Ethics* with over 300 claims logically dependent on it (see Pruss’ blog post cited above).

¹⁴ For Spinoza, there seem to be multiple ways in which an idea can be the idea *of* something. An idea can be of an affection of one's body, for instance, because the idea, when conceived under the attribute of Extension, is identical to a bodily affection. Or an idea can be of an affection of one's body because it *represents* that bodily affection (see, e.g., Nadler 2006, 157). An idea that is of a bodily affection in the former sense can be of an external body in the latter sense. See Daisie Radner 1971 for an interpretation of (in)adequate ideas that centers on this distinction between the extensional counterpart of the idea and that which the idea represents.

¹⁵ Bennett 2001, 153.

¹⁶ Spinoza is clear that ideas indirectly of objects are inadequate. For instance, he writes at 2p25, "The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body."

¹⁷ See also 5p29pr: "Eternity cannot be explicated through duration."

¹⁸ It is also worth noting that in this example Spinoza seems to allow for the possibility of having both adequate and inadequate ideas of the sun simultaneously. One who has complete knowledge of the sun's formal essence can still look into the sky and thereby possess an inadequate idea of the sun as well. This supports my earlier point that it is the manner in which the object is conceived rather than the object itself that characterizes the idea.

¹⁹ This is where the fractal nature of property A (being as equally in the part as in the whole) comes in. The human body interacts with only one part of the external body; but if A is in every part of the external body, then we can be sure that the part of the external body that affected the human body involved all of A.

²⁰ See also 2p29s and 3p1pr where Spinoza contrasts adequate ideas with mutilated and confused ideas.

²¹ Bennett 2001, 199-203; 1984, 178-182. Some of the other commentators who endorse Bennett's thesis—Della Rocca 1996, 57-64, for instance—think they can do a better job than Bennett at explaining the confusion of inadequate ideas.

²² Bennett 1984, 179, 182.

²³ Bennett's own discussion of confusion is helpful here, particularly his wax illustration. See 1984, 181. See also Della Rocca 1996, 60-61.

²⁴ Nadler 2006, 100-1.

²⁵ Nadler 2006, 173.

²⁶ Nadler 2006, 168.

²⁷ Nadler 2006, 164.

²⁸ Nadler 2006, 177.

²⁹ Nadler 2006, 174.

³⁰ Nadler 2006, 167.