

Scientia Intuitiva *in the Ethics*

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## I.

What is *scientia intuitiva*, and how is it different from the other kind of adequate cognition, reason? Some have argued that reason establishes *that* something is so, while *scientia intuitiva* establishes *why* something is so.<sup>1</sup> Others maintain that only *scientia intuitiva* is cognition of essences.<sup>2</sup> I agree that both kinds of cognition provide distinct causal explanations, and that *scientia intuitiva* is cognition of essences. Nevertheless, I want to offer an alternative interpretation that better explains: (1) the epistemic superiority of *scientia intuitiva*, (2) how such cognition can be (and indeed must be) *intuitive*, and (3) how the exercise of reading the *Ethics* might itself help us attain *scientia intuitiva*.

In the next section, I will argue that reason yields adequate, clear, and distinct ideas of *how* things must be *if* those things are.<sup>3</sup> What reason does not yield, however, is the assurance that adequate, clear, and distinct representations of external things agree with extra-mental, formally real *ideata*, and so are true.<sup>4</sup> In Section III, I argue that the “formal” in Spinoza’s description of *scientia intuitiva* indicates *formal reality*, and in Section IV, I argue that what secures the assurance that one’s clear and distinct ideas are *true* is a correct conception of God (as the one and only substance) and how God is related to things (as an immanent cause of its modes).

So understood, *scientia intuitiva* looks Cartesian. Even though Spinoza dispenses with a benevolent, transcendent God, he retains the Cartesian

<sup>1</sup> See Carr, “Spinoza’s Distinction”; D. Garrett, “Spinoza’s Theory”; Melamed, “Mapping the Labyrinth”; and Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, 180–181.

<sup>2</sup> See D. Garrett, “Spinoza’s Theory”; Soyarslan, “The Distinction”; and Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Geometry*, 24–25.

<sup>3</sup> An adequate idea’s representational content is caused by, and can be fully explained by, other representational contents within the mind. See E2p11c, E2p29s, and E2p38d. E2p29s suggests that adequate ideas are clear and distinct.

<sup>4</sup> E1a6.

idea that *scientia* requires a correct conception of God and God's role as a sustaining cause. This suggests that Spinoza also thinks having clear and distinct ideas is necessary, but not sufficient, for certainty. This is surprising: passages in the *Ethics* seem to say that adequate ideas need no additional validation, and so there simply isn't a gap a skeptic could exploit. In Section V, I maintain that while reason and *scientia intuitiva* both confer certainty, the reason's certainty has a restricted domain.

If what secures *scientia* is a correct conception of God, then it may seem that one can achieve *scientia intuitiva* simply by following the *Ethics'* demonstrations for substance monism. In the last section, I argue that the way a cognizer arrives at the content *substance monism is the correct metaphysical system* must be via *intuition*.

## II.

In E2p40s2, after pointing out that human beings *perceive many things and form universal notions*, Spinoza describes cognition fitting this schema. There is "cognition of the first kind": from fortuitous perceptions, one forms categorizing universals like *dog*<sup>5</sup> and universals specifying habitual, associative transitions between ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Cognition of the second kind, or reason, is next: "we perceive many things, and form universal notions . . . from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things." A merchant seeking a missing fourth proportional *reasons* when he performs the calculation "from the force of the demonstration" of Euclid's common property of proportionals; he's not calculating mechanically, but is rather seeing that the answer follows with necessity from other adequate ideas he has.<sup>7</sup>

But how does the cognizer acquire these common notions and adequate ideas in the first place? Although he must start from confused ideas, since the human mind must initially cognize itself and its body through confused representations of bodily affections,<sup>8</sup> *reflection* on confused representations of things can deliver adequate representations of features of things, provided those features are wholly present in each part of each represented thing.

<sup>5</sup> E2p40s1. <sup>6</sup> Cf. E2p18s. <sup>7</sup> See E3p1d.

<sup>8</sup> E2p19, E2p23. I will set aside the question of how representations of things distinct from the body arise from representations of bodily affections. I agree with Della Rocca (*Representation*, 49–53) that representation of one's body and indirect representations of external bodies are not different kinds of representation.

Take *being extended*. Any body and every part of any body is extended. The representational content *body is extended* can be wholly explained by any representation of any body, so it is adequate. Furthermore, any representation of anybody whatsoever, whenever, must be a representation of something extended. *Body is extended* is universal and apodictic; even if *being extended* isn't a feature sufficient to differentiate bodies, it is a feature all bodies must have. It thus counts as a "common notion."<sup>9</sup>

Other common notions include axioms concerning bodies (e.g., "all bodies must be either at motion or at rest" (E2p13PhysDigA1')) and general axioms concerning features "equally in the part and whole" of representations of bodies or ideas (e.g., Part I's axioms, *ex nihilo nihil fit*,<sup>10</sup> the law of noncontradiction).

In addition to the general common notions, there are adequate representations of equally-in-the-whole-and-part features common to *human bodies* and external bodies that affect human bodies (E2p39). The representation of any bodily affection must implicate the nature of the external body (E1a4, E2p16), so implicated in any representation of a causal affection is a commonality between the nature of the affecting body and the nature of the affected body that can, at least in principle, be discerned.<sup>11</sup>

So, from perception and reflection on perception, a cognizer can acquire adequate representations of necessary features of things, whether logically necessary (the law of non-contradiction), necessary within an attribute ("a body must be at motion or at rest"), or necessary according to some nature ("the sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180 degrees"). A cognizer can also acquire adequate representations of necessary *relations* between features; such "universals" specify necessary – and not merely imaginative or associative – transitions between ideas. To return to the reasoning merchant, in grasping a necessary property of extension, the common property of all proportional lines, he can form a universal notion, in this case an idea of a function: given some proportionals, another proportional necessarily follows. Reason's universals can be used to infer adequate ideas of properties from given adequate ideas.

I think it's misleading to characterize reason as only proceeding from ideas of causally posterior effects, thus only yielding ideas *that* something is so. A cognizer may acquire adequate ideas from (reflection on) ideas of

<sup>9</sup> E2p37–38. An attribute is what the intellect perceives as the essence of substance, while a common notion is what the intellect perceives as equally in the part and whole of (representations) of things. "All bodies are extended" and "all ideas pertain to thought" can be common notions even if the attributes *Extension* and *Thought* are not.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cartesian "common notions" (AT VIII A 23–24, 38). <sup>11</sup> See E5p4.

causally posterior effects, but *acquiring* ideas is not reasoning – reasoning requires *using* the universal notions to infer further adequate ideas. One could use a universal notion to determine what cause necessarily follows from a given effect, but one could also use a universal specifying the inverse function.<sup>12</sup> Both are deductive reasoning; it's just that the deduction in one case is deduction to some idea about a cause while in the other it's a deduction to some idea about an effect.

Even if reason is not limited to one direction of demonstration, it is nevertheless limited in other ways. First, it does not deliver adequate ideas of individuating essences. A cognizer with common notions and adequate ideas of properties grasps *how* all of extension (or thought), or particular things in extension (or thought), must be.<sup>13</sup> But such ideas are not sufficient to individuate one thing from all other things. Reason's adequate ideas are based on reflection on bodily affections, and a body can only be affected by another body if the bodies have something *in common*; a reasoner cannot identify properties his body does not also have, so while he can have an adequate idea of a set of properties that some individuals share, it seems he cannot have adequate ideas of individuating essences.<sup>14</sup>

Because reason cannot deliver knowledge of individual essences, some commentators argue that *scientia intuitiva* is intuitive insight into individuating essences.<sup>15</sup> E2p40s2's gloss of *scientia intuitiva* does mention essences, so I can see the initial appeal of this view. But I think this proposal leaves the question of whether (and how) such intuition is possible for finite human minds unanswered; it makes *scientia intuitiva* into a sort of *deus ex machina* cognition that *somehow* delivers what reason cannot.

Yet there seems to be a second way reason is limited. Reflection on *representations* of affections of the body yield common notions and adequate ideas of properties, and a reasoning cognizer can represent *how* things must be *if* those things are formally real. But how can he know that his body, or any impinging bodies, have formal reality?

One might point to E2p11, "The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists," and E2p13, "the object [*objectum*] of the idea [*ideatum*] constituting the human mind is the body, *or* a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else," and insist that a human mind

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps universal notions are Janus-faced, with each face the inverse function of the other.

<sup>13</sup> For reasons that will be clearer later on, I do not think a reasoner thereby grasps necessary and eternal features of extension *as* infinite *modes* of extended substance.

<sup>14</sup> See E2p25d. <sup>15</sup> See Soyarslan, "The Distinction."

cannot wonder whether or not his body actually exists.<sup>16</sup> Or one might point to E2p34, “every idea which in us is absolute, that is, adequate and perfect, is true,” and E1a6’s statement that true ideas agree with their *ideata*, and insist that a cognizer cannot wonder about the veridicality of his clear and distinct adequate ideas.

Notice, however, that these propositions presuppose that the mind is 1) a mode of the one substance considered under the attribute of thought and 2) part of the infinite intellect of God. Until a cognizer is a committed Spinozist, these propositions will not be evident at all, and it would be objectionably dogmatic for him to simply assert that his adequate – clear and distinct – representations are true.

While Spinoza does not deploy the method of doubt, his account of the genesis of common notions and adequate ideas of properties invites a question from *the first-person point of view* of the reasoning cognizer: “How can I be certain that objectively real representations of bodies have formally real referents?”<sup>17</sup>

### III. Formal Essences

Cognition of the third kind “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate cognition of the [NS: formal] essence of things” (E2p40s2). On the view I develop in Section IV, *scientia intuitiva* assures a cognizer that all of his adequate representations agree with something formally real. But why think *scientia intuitiva* concerns formal reality? In this section, I argue that when Spinoza introduces formal essences in E2p8, he does so to emphasize formal reality.

E2p8 is sometimes interpreted as introducing two kinds of essences, formal and actual.<sup>18</sup> The *actual* essence of a thing, later identified as its *conatus* (E3p7), is such that when it is given as existing, the thing is posited as actually existing, while a *formal* essence of a thing is something such that

<sup>16</sup> I read *objectum* as an idea’s representational content and *ideatum* as the idea’s referent.

<sup>17</sup> A reasoner can represent any representation as *an act of thinking*, and can form a higher-order representation of that act of thinking, thus forming a representation with an objectively real *objectum* that he can know agrees with a formally real *ideatum* (that is, the original act of thinking). Spinoza, like Descartes, can allow for reflexive, performative, self-verifying ideas. But it is one thing to know that a *represented idea* agrees with an *idea*, but it is another thing to make the claim that a *represented body* agrees with a *body*, as this requires that one know that thought is related to extension in a way that licenses such claims. See Section V.

<sup>18</sup> See D. Garrett, “Spinoza’s Theory.” Others think formal essences are *eternal* and actual essences *durational*. See Huenemann, “The Necessity of Finite Modes” and Viljanen, “Spinoza’s Essentialist Model.”

when it is given as existing, the thing is posited as possible. The example in E2p8s seems to support this reading: there, Spinoza contrasts *actually* drawn lines with all *possibly* drawn ones.

I do not think Spinoza introduces two sorts of essences here.<sup>19</sup> Rather, his main point is that in God's infinite intellect, *every* objectively real representation of something, even representations of things *not* existing in duration, corresponds to something *formally real*. I think E2p8 can be read with the following interpolation, which preserves the grammatical parallelism: "The ideas of singular things . . . that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things [*that do not exist*] . . . are contained in God's attributes."

It makes sense for Spinoza to say exactly this at this point. First, he has already made formal reality salient: the point of E2p5 is that ideas have formal reality because they are modes of God caused by God (but to understand this causation, God must be considered under the attribute of thought). *Mutatis mutandis* for the formal reality of things that are not modes of thought (E2p6). Second, it makes sense for Spinoza to highlight the perfect correspondence of the infinite intellect's representations and formally real *ideata*: both E2p7, "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things," and E2p7c make explicit that there is *something* matching each idea in God's infinite intellect.

E2p8 further clarifies what an infinite intellect represents: universal, pervasive, necessary structural features of formally real extension and thought. For example, there are representations of the structural features of extension ensuring that "rectangles formed from the segments of all the straight lines intersecting it are equal to one another" (E2p8s). And there are representations of durationally existing singular things caused by other durationally existing singular things, such as representations of actually drawn lines and representations of their construction. The scholium's example, which mentions ideas of all the lines that are *not drawn*, suggests there are also representations of singular things that do *not* have actual, durational existence.

Each objectively real representation in the infinite intellect agrees with something formally real, since all ideas in the infinite intellect are true. So a representation of an actually drawn line will agree with something formally real – an *actually drawn line*. A representation of a never-to-be-actually-drawn line will also agree with something formally real,

<sup>19</sup> See Laerke, "Aspects of Spinoza's Theory of Essence," for another argument for this conclusion.

a *potential-but-not-actually-drawn line*. If “formal essences” have formal reality corresponding to objectively real representations,<sup>20</sup> then there will be formal essences of actually-drawn lines and of not-actually-drawn-but-still-potential lines. Formal and actual essences are not different kinds of essence: an actual essence, which is formally real, *is* a formal essence. Formal essences are not exclusively eternal.

I think it’s a mistake to dismiss the talk of *formal* essences in E2p40s2 as an erratum or redundancy.<sup>21</sup> True, the second “formal” in E2p40s2’s gloss of *scientia intuitiva* is found only in the Dutch translation of the *Ethics* published just after Spinoza died, so perhaps it was a misguided editor’s amendment. However, since one or more of Spinoza’s friends likely made this translation,<sup>22</sup> it’s plausible that they knew Spinoza’s work well and thought that “formal” signals something important: namely, that this highest sort of cognition involves cognition of the formal reality of God and of the formal reality of things.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV.

Cognition of the third kind “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God” (E2p40s2). On my view, it proceeds from an adequate idea of what God fundamentally is: the one necessarily formally real substance in which all things inhere as modes and that can be considered under the attributes of thought and extension.<sup>24</sup> I will say more later, but once a cognizer has this adequate idea, he can see that adequate ideas of bodily affections – the adequate representations on which all other adequate ideas of reason are based – agree with formally real extension. Having seen that *all* his adequate representations are true and agree with formal reality, he can use universals of reason to proceed to adequate ideas of *formally real things*. The certainty cognition of the third kind provides is thus a clear improvement over that granted by reason alone, which only licenses the deduction of adequate ideas about how bodies would be *if* they were formally real.

Is he thereby proceeding “to the adequate cognition of the [NS: formal] essence of things” (E2p40s2)? “The essence of things” has often been

<sup>20</sup> Cf. TIE 34. <sup>21</sup> See Garrett “Spinoza’s Theory,” p. 105. <sup>22</sup> See Akkerman, *Studies*.

<sup>23</sup> The description of *scientia intuitiva* in E5p25d does not include “formal essences.” However, its demonstration relies on propositions that do have to do with essences (E1p25 by way of E5p24).

<sup>24</sup> Human beings can consider substance only under two attributes. If *scientia intuitiva* is the highest sort of *human* cognition, then it makes sense for Spinoza to say “certain,” or “some” attributes (*quorundam attributorum*) rather than just “attributes.”

interpreted as *the essence of each thing that is sufficient to individuate it from all other things*.<sup>25</sup> Again, if one thinks of reason as capturing only what is common to things, then *scientia intuitiva* could be understood as an immediate apprehension of how the innermost individuating essence of each singular thing follows from the essence of an indivisible, infinite substance. Wilson reads Spinoza this way: “*amazingly*, the human mind is able to achieve [a] God’s-eye understanding of the essences of singular things, as they follow from the essence of God, thereby replicating the insight into the divine creative power expressed in E1p16.”<sup>26</sup>

But the “essence of things” can be read in a second way, as the essence of *things* (plural). The essence, or nature, of things is *what things, qua things, fundamentally are*. Having an adequate idea of the *formal essence* of x means having an adequate idea of what x fundamentally is that also represents x as formally real. If reason is limited to *representations* of *how* things must be if they are, then it makes sense for *scientia intuitiva* to supply knowledge *that* those things are, and *what*, fundamentally, those things are – modes.<sup>27</sup>

On this view, *scientia intuitiva* does not require a cognizer to have an adequate idea of nature that enables him to deduce exactly how nature is *modified* in all its infinite ways: all a cognizer needs is an adequate idea of nature, considered under one of the attributes, as the one substance. So an “adequate idea of the formal essence” of extension is just an adequate idea of what extension fundamentally is: it’s one attribute of the one and only necessarily existing substance. Because substance exists necessarily,

<sup>25</sup> See Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza*; Curley, “Experience”; Soyarslan, “The Distinction”; and Wilson, “Spinoza’s Theory.”

<sup>26</sup> “Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge,” p. 113. See also Nadler’s “Baruch Spinoza” and Melamed’s “Mapping the Labyrinth,” p. 112. In “Spinoza’s Theory,” Garrett agrees that *scientia intuitiva* is an at-a-glance grasp of the causal structure of nature, but limits the scope of human *scientia intuitiva* to avoid the implausible view that a human mind could achieve intuitive *exhaustive* causal knowledge of particular things. On Garrett’s view, human minds can have *scientia intuitiva* of *infinite* modes: a finite mind can understand how God’s essence causes some particular infinite mode (these infinite modes are, on Garrett’s interpretation, “formal essences.” Note that if formal essences are infinite modes, then it is, as Garrett points out, curious why Spinoza talks about the “formal essences” of *attributes*). I disagree with Garrett’s proposal that formal and actual essences are different kinds of essences (see Section III), and I do not think it makes sense to identify an *infinite* mode as the essence of a *finite* thing, but I agree with Garrett that *scientia intuitiva* is not super-insight into all of nature. Nevertheless, I think the *scientia intuitiva* Garrett thinks human minds can have is mysterious. How do we see, in a glance, *how* certain infinite modes follow from the essence of God, an essence that is just eternal existence understood under either the attribute of thought or the attribute of extension?

<sup>27</sup> This gloss of the “essence of things” is consistent with the proposition that what is “common to all” does not constitute the essence of any singular thing (E2p37). All things are fundamentally modes, but if one wants to isolate a *singular* mode, one will have to cite distinguishing properties. On my interpretation, human beings cannot come to have adequate ideas of the individuating essences of singular things, even if they can have an adequate idea of the “essence of *things*” (as modes).



understanding what substance fundamentally is is *ipso facto* to understand it as formally real.

Rather than immediate insight into individuating essences, the entire causal structure of nature, or how finite (or infinite) modes can be *deduced* from the essence of God, the *intuition* of *scientia intuitiva* is an immediate apprehension of *what* things are: *modes* of the one and only substance that can be considered under different attributes, and not, for example, Cartesian or Aristotelian substances. It also yields adequate ideas *that* things are: if reason yields representations of how all bodies *must be if they are*, then knowing *that* bodies are formally real allows a cognizer see that reason's representations are not just adequate, but also agree with formally real *ideata* and are true (E1a6).

*Scientia intuitiva* thus looks like Cartesian *scientia*. For Descartes, once we know the true metaphysical foundation of our being (the sustaining activity of a necessarily existing, benevolent God who wouldn't create creatures incapable of having true ideas), we can be certain that the ideas judged best by a phenomenal, internalist criterion (clarity and distinctness) are also judged best by an externalist epistemic criterion (they are true of an extra-mental reality).<sup>28</sup> For Spinoza, once we know the metaphysical foundation of all being (the one necessarily existing substance's sustaining activity of its modes), we can be certain that all of the ideas judged best by an internalist criterion (adequacy, as "intrinsic denominations" *excluding* "what is extrinsic, namely the agreement of an idea with its *ideatum*" (E2d4)) are also judged best by an externalist epistemic criterion (adequate ideas are *true* because they agree with formally real *ideata* (E1a6)).

How does this work? Consider a reasoning cognizer, trained in Cartesianism, who sees that *extension* is common to "the part and the whole" of any of his ideas of body. He sees that what is presupposed by any representation of body is not an indefinitely extensible, divisible-into-parts, 3-D grid in which one can imagine bodies placed – such an imaginative representation itself presupposes a conception of infinite, eternal, unique, and indivisible extension.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, he sees that, like all representations, this conception of extension has objective reality – in

<sup>28</sup> On the basis of Euclidean common notions, an atheist geometer can "clearly know" (*clare cognoscere*) that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. Yet he cannot have certain and unshakeable *scientia* because he has not yet "come to know the author of [his] being" (*Principles* 1.13).

<sup>29</sup> See E1p15. This ur-conception of extension is an idea (because anything in the mind is an idea), but it is difficult to say more about what sort of representation it is (and it is a representation, as all ideas are). It is clearly not an imagistic representation of some extended space as a unity, and it is not a representation of imagined delimitations of that unified extended space. Perhaps this ur-conception bears some resemblance to what Kant would call an a priori *form* of sensible intuition:

this case, *infinite* objective reality. He also sees that representations of affections of his body are finite, and asks where this representation of infinity comes from. He runs a Third Meditation causal argument for the existence of God and concludes that God, who has an infinite amount of formal reality, must be the cause of this representation of extension.

Having seen that God is prior to and the cause of what is finite or indefinite, he asks what this causal priority is like. He has been taught that God is a transcendent sustaining cause of creation. However, he's now bothered by a mystery: *how* does *esse* get transmitted from a transcendent God to a finite creature?

Setting aside questions of origin and adequacy for now, suppose our cognizer has the following idea in a flash: *the fundamental metaphysics is this: there is just one necessarily existing substance and its modes, and the very same substance can be considered under different attributes*. There is no mysterious transmission of *esse* from a transcendent God to a finite creature. There is causal and ontological priority of the infinite because God is the one substance; everything else is a mode that must be immanently caused by and conceived through God. Furthermore, extension and thought are not attributes of distinct substances; the one substance and its modes can be considered under different attributes.

He sees that his idea of infinite extension just is the idea of God, the one and only necessarily existing substance, considered under the attribute of extension. Since extension necessarily has formal reality, his representations of extension's necessary features agree with how formally real extension is structured.<sup>30</sup> His adequate ideas of "what is equally in the part and whole" of extension are *true* representations of the formally real *infinite modes* of the one substance, considered under the attribute of extension. He now has adequate ideas of the "formal essence" of the structural features of extension: he has adequate representations of what those features fundamentally are that also represents them as formally real.

If having the right metaphysics lets him see infinite *extension* as necessarily formally real, it also enables him to regard infinite *thought* as necessarily formally real substance, and he sees that extension and thought are one and the same formally real substance considered under different attributes. He sees that one and the same mode can be considered under the attribute

it is this ur-conception that enables us to perceive and cognize extension in the first place, but this ur-conception is not itself a representation of an extended field or figure.

<sup>30</sup> Spinoza is confident that when a reasoning cognizer discerns necessary features of represented bodies, he is accessing how bodies must be if they are formally real. Post-Kantian sensibilities might push us to resist this move.

of thought (as an idea or mind) and under the attribute of extension (as body).<sup>31</sup> It's axiomatic that he thinks (E2a2), and before his monist insight, he could form an idea of his own thinking. But now he knows that his mind has formal reality in virtue of being a mode, a mode that is *one and the same mode* as his body. He now has adequate ideas of the "formal essence" of his body and mind: he has adequate ideas of what his body and mind fundamentally are (the same mode considered under different attributes) that also represent his body and mind as formally real.

This is a powerful insight. Recall that all of the representational content of ideas of reason can be traced to the mind's consideration of the agreements, differences, and oppositions of representations of the body's affections. Reason's universals represent necessary transitions between representations, so from an adequate representation of an affection of his body, our reasoning cognizer could infer *how* an external body would have to be in order to cause that affection. But now he can see that adequate representations of *how* his body must be, adequate higher-order representations based on representations of his body, and any representations necessarily implicated by adequate representations of his body (including implicated representations of bodies distinct from his own) *are true*.

Given his monist intuition, it's not just that he can be certain about what he is thinking when he is thinking it; he can also be certain that there are bodies (and minds) besides his own, that his clear and distinct representations of how bodies and minds must be are veridical, and that his clear and distinct representations of the necessary relations between bodies and minds (universals of reason) are truth-preserving. He can thus form an idea – an adequate idea, because it can be explained wholly by other ideas he has – that *all* of his clear and distinct ideas are true.<sup>32</sup>

## V. Truth and Certainty

On my interpretation, only cognition of the third kind allows one to see from the first-person point of view that *all* of one's adequate

<sup>31</sup> I follow Della Rocca's interpretation that the "one and the same" language indicates numerical identity. See *Representation*, pp. 118–171. For criticisms of Della Rocca's view, see C. Marshall, "The Mind and the Body," and Silverman, "The Union."

<sup>32</sup> E2p47s states that from an adequate idea of God's essence and existence, "a great many things" can be deduced, thus forming the third kind of cognition. Interpreters have read this as many individuating essences can be deduced from the essence of God, but what such deductions look like is left unspecified. On my account, it is clear what these deductions look like: they are just the deductions one can perform using universals of *reason*. Once one has the intuition of monism, the results of those deductions are known to be true of extra-mental formal reality.

representations agree with anything formally real. However, Spinoza has been interpreted as obviating the need for such validation. According to the usual story, reason and *scientia intuitiva* do not differ in their level of certainty: both yield adequate ideas and all adequate ideas are necessarily true (E2p34, E2p41). Furthermore, whoever cognizes a thing truly must have an adequate idea of his own cognition, so must be certain (E2p43d). Since certainty attends both reason and *scientia intuitiva*, it seems reason and *scientia intuitiva* cannot be distinguished in the way I've proposed.

Notice, however, that E2p41 and E2p43 rely on E2p34, and E2p34's demonstration only works on the assumptions: (1) that an adequate idea in the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; and (2) that all ideas in God's mind agree with their *ideata* and are true (E2p7c). If my interpretation of reason is correct, then reason is neutral with regard to the foundational metaphysics: it seems Spinoza can allow one to have adequate ideas of *properties* of things even if one hasn't settled whether those *things* are Cartesian created substances or Spinozian modes. In the next section, I'll discuss how reason's adequate ideas can yield adequate ideas of foundational metaphysics, but for now, I just want to emphasize that a cognizer can reason without presupposing the monist framework.<sup>33</sup>

We can take two perspectives on reason's adequate ideas. The first perspective is that of the metaphysician who has accepted monism and is thinking about the reasoning cognizer: the metaphysician will see that the reasoning cognizer's adequate ideas of reason are necessarily true. The second perspective is that of the reasoner who hasn't yet read the *Ethics*: such a cognizer might see his own ideas as adequate, but lack the resources to see that all of them, including adequate ideas representing necessary features of bodies, must be true.

Yet consider E2p42. There, Spinoza says that reason and *scientia intuitiva* help the cognizer distinguish the true from the false. Here the cognizer's first-person perspective is made explicit, and it is explicit that a reasoner can have ideas both of the true and of the false.

I do not think E2p42 forces us to say that the reasoner and the cognizer with *scientia intuitiva* do not differ with respect to certainty and truth, however. While a reasoner can have true ideas, and know he has true ideas, his epistemic situation is still not optimal.

<sup>33</sup> I argue for this elsewhere, but my interpretation of 1a4 ("cognition of an effect depends on and involves cognition of its cause") does not require that any cognition of an effect depends on and involves every one of its causes. A cognizer can cognize an effect without cognizing its immanent, sustaining cause (i.e., substance); this is why a reasoner can have cognitions about transitive causes without presupposing monism.

A reasoner can know that some of his clear and distinct representations agree with *ideata*. A reasoner can discern whether a representation, R, of another one of his ideas, *i*, agrees with *i*.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, we can see how truth and adequacy coincide for a reasoning cognizer: to see that he has an adequate idea, a reasoner needs to see that a higher-order representation of an idea agrees with a lower-order idea.

If certainty is a matter of having adequate ideas of one's cognition, a reasoner can be certain about which adequate ideas he has.<sup>35</sup> Because he can be certain of adequate ideas of properties, common notions, and universals, he can also be certain of the adequate ideas that follow from other adequate ideas. Reason's certainty is *discursive*, conditional certainty: *given* certain adequate ideas, other adequate ideas must follow.

The certainty reason confers is certainty about *causae secundum fieri*, or productive efficient causes.<sup>36</sup> That is, reason yields adequate representations of the *ways* bodies and ideas must be and interact.<sup>37</sup> A reasoner can come to have ever more detailed ideas about the productive causes of things, the necessary ways in which things in nature come to be.

Yet regardless of how many details he discovers, there is another cause for a cognizer to know about: the *causa secundum esse*. Cognition of the third kind pertains to this sort of cause: God sustains the very being of things by being the substance in which all things inhere.<sup>38</sup> Knowing how the being of things is sustained by God (i.e., by being modes of the one necessarily existing substance) enables a cognizer to know that the conclusions he draws as a reasoner are not just coherently ordered constructs of

<sup>34</sup> Truth will be its own standard. If a reasoner needed to measure truth by another standard besides his recognition that a representation of one idea agrees with another one of his ideas, an infinite regress would result. See E2p43s.

<sup>35</sup> One might worry that one could have inadequate representations that masquerade as genuinely adequate representations. I think Spinoza is confident that one cannot be mistaken about which of one's ideas are adequate: only clear and distinct ideas are adequate, and clarity and distinctness are phenomenologically manifest.

<sup>36</sup> Reasoning about *abstracta* like triangles involves cognition of necessary features of extension and necessary rules concerning the transformation and construction of triangles. This is manipulation of representational contents, and can be understood as cognition of *causae secundum fieri* within the attribute of thought.

<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere Spinoza says that the essence of things is to be found in the "series of fixed and eternal things . . . and the laws inscribed in these things as in their true codes, according to which all singular things *come to be* [*fieri*] and *are ordered*" (TIE 100–101, my emphasis). As I understand it, reason is cognition of these laws; if Spinoza still thinks of essences in the *Ethics* as he did in the TIE, then cognition of the second kind *is* cognition of essences – just not cognition of individuating essences.

<sup>38</sup> Lloyd (*Part of Nature*) and Garrett ("Spinoza's Theory") think that *scientia intuitiva* is the only cognition that secures *why* and *how* knowledge; reason only gets you knowledge *that*. However, I think both reason and *scientia intuitiva* yield why and how knowledge: it's just that they provide different sorts of such knowledge, each corresponding to a different sort of efficient causation.

the human mind, but agree with a formally real, extra-mental reality.<sup>39</sup> With *scientia intuitiva*, adequacy and truth coincide, but here there is agreement of ideas with formally real extension, rather than (as was the case with reason) agreement of ideas with other ideas (some perhaps about extension).<sup>40</sup>

## VI. The Importance of *Intuitive* Cognition

In Section IV, I explained that on my view, the starting idea for cognition of the third kind, an “adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God,” is an adequate idea of what certain attributes, extension or thought, fundamentally are: attributes of the one and only necessarily existing (and so necessarily formally real) substance, in which all things inhere as modes. From this adequate idea, other adequate ideas follow (E2p40) – adequate ideas of the formal reality of things, as well as an adequate idea with the content *all adequate, i.e., clear and distinct, representations agree with formal reality and are true*.

But what ensures that this starting idea is adequate? Spinoza emphasizes that each and every human mind has an adequate cognition of God’s eternal and infinite essence (E2p47). Human minds represent *bodies* as formally real (or actual), but “equally in the part and the whole” of each of these representations is the representation of *extension* as an attribute of the one necessarily existing substance. In principle at least, everyone can “deduce from this cognition a great many things . . . and so can form that third kind of cognition” (E2p47s).

Yet one can *have* an idea, and that idea could be obscured by other, perhaps inadequate ideas. One could mistake another, perhaps inadequate, idea for the requisite idea of God. If a cognizer hopes to have *scientia intuitiva*, it’s imperative that he understand that, though he might have thought of God as anthropomorphic or transcendent, in fact God must be

<sup>39</sup> On my view, how many things a cognizer can know by the third kind of cognition depends on how many common notions, adequate ideas of the properties of things, and universals he has. *Reason* determines how fine-grained our cognitions can be. I therefore disagree with Soyarslan’s view that *scientia intuitiva* somehow reaches a “level of particularity” that reason does not enable us to reach.

<sup>40</sup> Another difference between reason and *scientia intuitiva* concerns how a cognizer recognizes agreement of ideas and *ideata*. A reasoning cognizer considers the higher-order and lower-order ideas at once, and understands their agreements, differences, and oppositions (cf. E2p29s). However, a cognizer cannot apprehend a formally real body directly to compare it to the representation of that body: that would involve a mode of extension (the formally real body) causing a mode of thought (the idea of how that formally real body and the representation of that body agree), and that cannot happen (E2p6). So recognition of the agreement of idea and *ideatum* involved in cognition of the third kind must be indirect.

the one and only necessarily existing substance that can be considered under different attributes.

All of us *have* at our disposal the materials for thinking of God in the correct monist way, but thinking of God this way is difficult and not assured. Here is how reading the *Ethics* can help: if a cognizer can “follow the force of the demonstrations” of the first part of the *Ethics*, he will arrive at the right idea of God, and will recognize that that idea of God, as substance, was in fact presupposed in any of his ideas of bodies, which he now recognizes as modes.<sup>41</sup>

But following along, even if it culminates in the correct, adequate, demonstratively certain representation of God, is still just cognition of the second kind. Furthermore, if cognition of the second kind is only cognition of *representations* that may or may not agree with formal reality, then one could complain that the demonstrations of the *Ethics* do not establish that God, the one and only necessarily existing substance, *really does have extra-mental formal reality*. Isn't it the case that all that's been established is that from certain common notions (adequate representations of representations of affections of the body), another adequate representation – a *representation* of God – can be formed?

This is a version of the Cartesian Circle: one can establish the veracity of all adequate ideas (including ideas about extension) only if one knows both *what* God is (substance) and *that* God is (has formal reality), yet one cannot really establish *that* God is unless one already assumes what one is trying to prove.

In his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Spinoza discusses the objection that Descartes's reasoning involves circularity. For Spinoza, Descartes erred in deriving the existence of God from uncertain premises, and not taking the existence of God to be known per se. Spinoza thinks that circularity can be avoided if the existence of God is known immediately, without reasoning from premises.<sup>42</sup>

Worries about whether God is a deceiver are absent from the *Ethics*: God just isn't a God that could be deceiving *or* undeceiving. On my view, what has not dropped out is the concern that in order to avoid circularity,

<sup>41</sup> In Section II, I suggested that the common notions of reason might be very general: the mind can discern that for any representation whatsoever, it will be the case that what is represented is “either in itself or in another” (Eia1), that what is represented did not come from nothing (because nothing can come from nothing), that what is represented cannot at the same time both be and not be, or logical rules of inference. I think we can add to this list Eia2, Eia3, Eia4, and the whole list of axioms and definitions that figure in Spinoza's demonstration of his substance monism in Part I of the *Ethics*.

<sup>42</sup> See Bolton's “Spinoza on Cartesian Doubt” for discussion of Spinoza's response to the Cartesian Circle. Bolton does not attempt to explain how Spinoza secures certainty, however.

apprehension of God's necessary existence must be immediate and not the result of any discursive procedure. That is, it needs to be *intuitive*.

Whether cognition can be intuitive – and temporally immediate – depends on what sort of cause is cognized. E1a4 states that cognition of an effect depends on and involves cognition of its cause. One thing I take this axiom to mean is that things (modes) can be cognized either as effects of transitive, productive causes or as effects of the immanent, sustaining cause (God qua substance).<sup>43</sup> When one cognizes a thing as the effect of a transitive, productive cause, one must cognize it in relation to a separate cause.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, when one cognizes a thing as an effect of substance as an immanent, sustaining cause, one must *not* cognize the effect as caused by a separate entity: to do so would be to misunderstand the nature of the substance–mode relation.<sup>45</sup> When a thing is cognized as the effect of a sustaining cause, there just isn't room for any discursive steps. *In uno intuitu*, one sees that the mode has its existence in virtue of inhering in the one necessarily existing substance; one cannot insert any doubt, or see much of a causal or conceptual structure to this thought. It is as indubitable and immediate as one's recognition of the ratio 1 has to 2.<sup>46</sup>

A mind's representation of God as substance can be cognized by reason as the necessary effect of transitive causes: that is, the conclusion necessitated by the demonstrations of the arguments of the *Ethics* (as the ideas involved in those demonstrations *cause* the concluding idea). But a mind can also cognize any thing as the effect of the one substance's activity as the immanent *causa secundum esse*.<sup>47</sup> A mind immediately sees that the thing has its being *as a mode inhering in the one and only substance*.

So a representation of God as Spinozistic substance can be a demonstratively certain conclusion of a chain of deductions, but this only establishes that from some adequate representations of necessary features

<sup>43</sup> I discuss this elsewhere.

<sup>44</sup> A separate cause could be another entity or a distinct state of the thing at a previous time (trans-temporal identity would be secured by the preservation of the *ratio* of motion and rest. See E2p12.). I discuss how a distinct state of a thing at a previous time can be considered a transitive cause in other work.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. E1p28s2.

<sup>46</sup> E2p4os2. "Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6 – and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance (*uno intuitu videmus*), we see the first number to have to the second." What is seen intuitively is the ratio the first number has to the second; it is not (as is usually supposed), the inference. I think the example is supposed to illustrate: (1) the immediacy and lack of inferential structure in an intuition; (2) that what one can infer on the basis of that intuition is especially certain, and that as a consequence; (3) the intuition enhances what one can do with reasoning.

<sup>47</sup> *Scientia intuitiva* crucially involves the idea of God as a cause (see E5p32). What deserves more discussion is Spinoza's claim that the mind is the *formal* cause of the third kind of cognition (E5p31).



of bodies and ideas, an adequate *representation* of God can be formed. The way out of the circle is *scientia intuitiva*, which is an immediate cognition of God that can be certain in the way reason cannot be.

The *Ethics* can help a reader reach the right representation of God, and so can do some of the work in preparing him to have the requisite intuition. However, simply reading the *Ethics* does not guarantee *scientia intuitiva*: it is one thing to have the cognition that given some axioms, definitions, and demonstrations, things must be modes caused by and inhering in the one substance. It is an entirely different thing to immediately cognize those things *as* modes caused by and inhering in the one substance.

The latter sort of cognition will affect the mind much more.<sup>48</sup> However, its power does not simply consist in its giving the non-circular epistemic assurance that all of one's adequate ideas are true: I think it's crucial that *scientia intuitiva* results in God, self, and world being *presented* in a different way.

Reason's monist-metaphysical representations of God, self, and the world seem liable to evaporate once one stops attending to the demonstrations and is merry with one's friends, as Hume might put it. More needs to be said, but I think *scientia intuitiva* is supposed to minimize the distance between a cognizer's everyday experience of the world and a more theoretical frame of mind. Once one has *scientia intuitiva*, the usual misguided ways of thinking about everything just cannot be entertained, even once one leaves the study and goes out into the world: the world is not such that it could have been otherwise; God didn't make the world because he judged it to be good; human beings cannot extricate themselves from the causal nexus of the natural world. Consequently, one's attention and energy will be directed elsewhere, and one will, if Spinoza is right, be better able to control one's affects and enjoy the peace of mind that attends a proper understanding of the world and one's place in it.

One upshot of my interpretation is that *scientia intuitiva* and its attendant beatitude are more achievable for finite minds than is sometimes supposed: it doesn't require veridical apprehension of the infinitely complex causal structure of nature<sup>49</sup> or temporally immediate insight into how some infinite or finite mode is *deduced* from God's essence.<sup>50</sup> If one knows that all there can be is the one substance and its modes, then

<sup>48</sup> Cf. E5p36s. <sup>49</sup> See especially Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory."

<sup>50</sup> See D. Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory," and Nadler "Spinoza's Ethics" and "Baruch Spinoza." I'd like to thank Colin Chamberlain, Michael Della Rocca, Dan Garber, Don Garrett, Colin Garretson, Karolina Hübner, Raffi Krut-Landau, Yitzhak Melamed, Ohad Nachtomy, Alan Nelson, Sydney Penner, Alison Peterman, Ursula Renz, Eric Schliesser, Tad Schmaltz, Daniel Schneider, and Ericka

one can know that whatever adequate ideas one has come to have through reasoning are true. Importantly, one may always be able to add to one's stock of adequate ideas through reasoning, but such incomplete causal knowledge doesn't preclude *scientia intuitiva*. This should be welcome news to those who think Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* to help finite, all too finite human beings live well.

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