Chapter 7
"Nemo non videt": Intuitive Knowledge and the Question of Spinoza's Elitism

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Summus Mentis conatus, summaque virtus est res intelligere tertio cognitionis genere.

-Ethica, Vp25

Scientia Intuitiva in Spinoza's *Ethics* is often claimed to be incomprehensible and to belong to an elitist doctrine of rarefied knowledge available only to a small class of philosophers. Jonathan Bennett has famously identified it as one of the three doctrines in the final part of the *Ethics* that can only be considered "an unmitigated . . . disaster" (Bennett 1984, 357). While several commentators have objected to Bennett's complete dismissal of the three final doctrines (intuitive knowledge, the intellectual love of God, and the eternity of the mind),[1] it is generally agreed upon that intuitive knowledge is one of the most difficult concepts in all of Spinoza's philosophy. At least two interpreters have proposed that, by virtue of being intuitive knowledge it cannot be an object of reason and, therefore, remains unavailable to discursive description and analysis (Floistad 1969, 60; Klein 2002, 300). The difficulty of grasping precisely what Spinoza means by it is one reason philosophers reserve any experience of such knowledge to themselves, and only the "happy few" philosophers at that.[2] It is as though commentators presume that, if cannot understand what Spinoza means by intuition, it must be a mystical or otherwise inaccessible phenomenon.

Yet, although Spinoza's words about intuition, also called "the third kind of knowledge," remain among the most difficult to grasp, I argue that he succeeds

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[1] Yovel (1989, 232–233 n.2), for example, notes that Bennett's remarkably impassioned objections betray that he is in fact quite affected by what he calls mere "rubbish which causes others to write rubbish," and it cannot therefore be completely dismissed.

[2] Yovel (1989, 154). The notion that intuition is exclusively reserved for the sage who is not only intellectually privileged but also solitary, protected from the influence of the vulgar, is shared by a number of commentators, including Smith (1997), and Jon Wetlesen (1979).

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in providing an account of its distinctive character. Moreover, the special place that intuition holds in Spinoza's philosophy is grounded not in its epistemological distinctiveness, but in its ethical promise. I will not go as far as one commentator to claim that the epistemological distinction is negligible (Malinowski-Charles 2003), but I do argue that its privileged place in Spinoza's system belongs primarily to its ethical importance, by which I mean that intuition's value is prized by virtue of the agency it confers upon those who enjoy it. Spinoza often notes that what distinguishes the "wise man" is that he is more powerful, able to *do* more. That is, the wise and free person with whose description the *Ethics* culminates is set apart not, first and foremost, by virtue of possessing a scientific account of the true cosmological order. The *Ethics* is perhaps called an ethics, rather than a treatise on metaphysics or knowledge, because it concludes with a demonstration of how one comes to be able to do what is best and to live a more joyful life. Intuitive science is essential to the characterization of the power to think and live well.

In reconstructing an account of intuition's distinctive character, I contend that the doctrine should not be understood as elitist for two reasons. I understand the charge of elitism to consist not merely in a descriptive claim that the enjoyment of intuitive science is, like all things excellent, "difficult and rare" (Vp42s).[3] Rather, an elitist doctrine is comprised of the generic claim that, in all or most circumstances, the sage *ought to* avoid the many and that wisdom is and ought to remain a private virtue. I interpret the claim that ethical perfection is difficult and rare to assert that "sagesse," to borrow a French word, or wisdom and the agency to which it belongs, is difficult and rare for anyone, not that any society will include only a few sages whose tremendous virtue enables them to rise above the crowd. I base this understanding on the following textual evidence. First, the intuitive grasp of the mathematical proportional used to describe the three kinds of knowledge in *Ethics* II is something that no one fails to see (*nemo non videt,* IIp40s2). While it has been argued that the mathematical examples perhaps should only be taken to represent a "partial analogy" with the genuine intuitive apprehension of concrete particulars (Curley 1973, 30), I claim that the model of mathematics is essential to Spinoza's rationalism, albeit not in the way it is often taken to be. One reason Spinoza sits both obviously and uneasily within the rationalist tradition is by virtue of the prominent but peculiar role played by mathematical truths throughout his philosophy.

The second reason the third kind of knowledge should not be taken to comprise an elitist doctrine of exclusive this-worldly salvation for the wise and happy few is that the "higher" expression of intuition described in *Ethics* V is not the privilege of any human types, or class of persons, but rather depends upon an arduous transformation of character and intellect contingent upon myriad factors beyond the control of any individual, or class of individuals. The difficulty of experiencing intuition in its highest form is attributable to the fragility of the knowledge of *any* finite being

[3]I will proceed to cite Spinoza parenthetically in the body of the paper with the standard notation, using Edwin Curley's edition and translation (1985). Citations refer to the part (= Roman numeral), proposition (= p), demonstration (= d), scholium (= s), corollary (= c), appendix (= app), preface (= pref), and definition (= def). The Latin is from Benedict de Spinoza's works (1925).

amidst infinitely many powers greater than itself (cf. IVp3). If the difficulty of regular enjoyment of intuitive knowledge is attributable to our finitude, the possibility of its cultivation and enjoyment is nevertheless ontologically presupposed by the eternity of the mind, which is a universal feature of mental life. Therefore, the character of our lives as finite modes, radically dependent both on God and one another for our existence and action, makes the full enjoyment of intuitive knowledge both universally possible and arduous.

My argument rests partly upon my claim that we can distinguish between two "moments" of *scientia intuitiva*.[4] The first moment is one that everyone experiences, while the second one, described in the second half of *Ethics* V is, indeed, difficult and rare. Commentators who stress its unattainability pay attention only to the second moment, but acknowledgement of the first forces one to conclude that it is at least an overstatement to claim that intuition is scarcely available to the many. Moreover, if one disregards the first moment on the basis of its mathematical character in favor of the intuition of singular existent beings emphasized in the second moment, one loses the importance of the *experience* of mathematical verities as an alternative and salutary "norm of truth" (Iapp; my translation) essential to Spinoza's rationalism. Thus, much of the paper will comprise an argument for understanding intuition along a continuum of basic mental experience, on one end, and the ethical cultivation of agency ("virtue") in concert with ambient modes, on the other. One can thereby understand intuition as both universal and rare, as long as one grants qualitatively distinct experiences of the same phenomenon. Understanding intuition with respect to either moment entails including it as part of "the true good, capable of communicating itself," in every sense, sought by the narrator of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.

I will conclude, finally, with a very brief discussion of the many times that Spinoza expresses doubt about the abilities of individuals to achieve mental freedom and peace of mind. Although Spinoza expresses these worries most often about the common man, the multitude, or the crowd (*vulgus*), he explicitly affirms that "all men share in one and the same nature"[5] and that the more people that are included in decision-making bodies, the more likely it is that the resulting decisions will be rational.[6] In both the *Ethics* and especially the *Political Treatise,* however, Spinoza blames the difficulty of living wisely upon the way lives, commonwealths, and institutions are "organized" or "constituted." Thus, I will claim that the difficulty inherent in attaining a life of wisdom and enjoying the full benefits of *scientia intuitiva* belongs to the relative powerlessness of any finite individual rather than expressing some ineradicable tendency prevalent among the ignorant masses alone.

[4]By two "moments" I mean to identify two analytically separable, yet intrinsically related aspects of intuition. Malinowski-Charles (2003, 2004) similarly identifies two "models" of intuition.

[5]Spinoza (2000, Ch.7, par. 14). Hereafter, TP.

[6]See TP, Ch. 9, par. 14, and Spinoza (2001, 178). Hereafter to be cited as TTP.

7.1 *Nemo non videt*: Scientia Intuitiva, Part I

Within the inventory of knowledge types in Part II of the *Ethics,* the third kind of knowledge appears almost as an afterthought. The description of the second kind of knowledge begins by noting that "*finally*, [knowledge] from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things . . . I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge" (IIp40s2, my emphasis). Reason appears to be the ultimate way of knowing. In his edition of the *Ethics*, Curley inserts a roman numeral, which does not exist in the Latin, to mark a distinction when Spinoza proceeds to say that "Beyond [*prœter*] these two kinds of knowledge, there is (. . .) a third, which we shall call intuitive knowledge [*scientiam intuitivam*]" (translation modified). Given that Spinoza inserts a "finally" prior to his definition of reason, the third kind of knowledge appears to be either tacked onto the other two or meant as a mere extension of rationality.[7] Spinoza proceeds to define intuition in the following way, which he will repeat verbatim in Part V: "this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the formal essence of things."

Spinoza continues by providing the well-known example of three ways of arriving at the fourth number given in the following mathematical problem: Find the fourth number with the same ratio to 3 as 1 is to 2. Spinoza proceeds to illustrate how one can arrive at the correct number using each of the three kinds of knowledge. In this example, the three kinds of knowledge do not pertain to different objects, but rather to different relationships toward the same object. Each way of knowing eventually arrives at the correct fourth number, is capable of being true, and yet designates a different means of reaching the same conclusion. Upon describing the third kind of knowledge, Spinoza remarks that in the case of this simple proportional, *no one* fails to *intuit* the right answer. Thus, this phenomenon, notorious for being so "difficult and rare" in the fifth part of the *Ethics,* is universally accessible vis-à-vis a simple mathematical proportional. "Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, *no one* fails to see [*nemo non videt*] 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 intuito*], we see the first number to have the second" (IIp40s2; my emphasis).

Only by regarding the mathematical example as irrelevant can commentators continue to consider the third kind of knowledge to be a highly elusive and even mystical doctrine, experienced as both private and incommunicable, irreducible to either signification or rational discourse, and available only to the few. In this

[7] Several commentators treat rationality as inclusive of the second and third kinds of knowledge, rendering intuitive science a kind of sub-species of reason. This is partly due to the fact that Spinoza indifferently applies the term "intellect" to both kinds of knowledge and because both kinds consist in "adequate ideas." While it is important to acknowledge the "ethical superiority" of the third kind of knowledge, I share the view that there is meaningful continuity between what is called reason and intuition. Moreover, it is appropriate to identify both as proper to Spinoza's peculiar rationalism. I will clarify my understanding of the ethical virtues of intuition below.

example, the intuitional inference is something *no one* fails to make, and the fourth proportional is seen clearly in one act of the mind. Nevertheless, commentators legitimately puzzle over the fact that, upon providing the same mathematical example (with some variation in the account of knowledge) in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect,* Spinoza notes that "the things I have been able to know by this kind of knowledge are very few."[8] It would seem that mathematics would offer a great many "things" to be known intuitively, and the impossibility of not knowing simple mathematical truths in this way seems to entail a highly accessible experience of intuitive knowledge. Let us first interrogate further how intuition is characterized in *Ethics* II before determining the status of the mathematical example.

Spinoza establishes some differences between the third kind of knowledge and the other two. He immediately indicates a couple of them: "Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, whereas knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true" (IIp41). Both reason and intuition are considered "adequate ideas." An adequate idea "considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, *or* intrinsic denominations of a true idea" (IIIdef4). While the doctrine is complicated and a full account of it is beyond the scope of this paper, I will note that the truth of an adequate idea is not validated by apprehending its correspondence to an external object—that is, it is not true by virtue of grasping it insofar as it represents the world of the extension—but rather depends upon a relationship to its cause. An adequate idea includes the idea of its cause. By virtue of including their proximate cause adequate ideas can only beget adequate ideas, and thus the procession from an adequate idea—be it of common properties (reason) or the essences of certain attributes (intuition)—is necessarily true. Therefore, intuition, along with reason, is distinguished from imagination by virtue of its necessary truth, its ontological status as adequate idea.

Spinoza follows this proposition with what might seem to be an unnecessary addition: "Knowledge of the second and third kinds, and not of the first kind, teaches us to distinguish the true from the false" (IIp42). Whereas the first kind of knowledge can happen to be accurate, as in the example of a merchant who imitates what someone has shown him in order to perform a calculation, it does not have the *force* of a true idea, and it cannot thereby *teach* one to distinguish between what is true and what is not. The merchant is satisfied by the idea that the fourth number in the series is 6 by virtue of his faith in his teacher, an external authority. The first kind of knowledge is largely sufficient for daily functioning, but the idea that explains its truth is not internal to one's mind. Most importantly, imagination does not carry with it the *feeling* of certainty (even if Spinoza worries that it often includes the passion of conviction, as with superstition). "He who has a true idea at the same time knows he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (IIp43). As Spinoza emphasizes in the *Ethics* as well as the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect,* truth must be its own standard. If something outside a true idea is

[8] Also in Spinoza (1985, §22).

required in order to measure its veracity, one will be met with an infinite regress. A true idea is a compelling force by which the mind experiences its own power, by which the mind experiences itself as the "adequate cause" of its own idea (IIIdef1), and is thereby unable to doubt it. When one intuits, in one glance, the fourth number in the proportional, the undergoing of the force of this act suffices to indicate to the knower that her idea is true. This very experience of certitude becomes the teacher, the standard, by which one distinguishes between the true and the false. At a minimal level, there is "no one" who has not intuited the most basic proportions, the most fundamental structural relationships, and, therefore, *every one* has some measure—an internal criterion or experience—by which to distinguish true and false ideas.

Mathematics appears elsewhere in the *Ethics* as a teacher. Moreover, unlike the teachers of merchants, mathematics offers the "force of demonstration" by which one can understand the causes of ideas and thus inspires "the eyes of the mind" to see their truth for themselves. In the appendix to *Ethics* I, for example, Spinoza outlines the universal tendency to imagine God or nature as a reflection of one's own idiosyncratic disposition (*ingenium*). Our native ignorance of causes and experience of our own appetites disposes us to apprehend nature or God as capricious, goal-oriented actors like ourselves. Humans tended to be guided primarily by their particular prejudices until they arrived at "another standard [*normam*] of truth." The truth that final causes in nature are nothing but human fictions would have remained "hidden from the human race to eternity, if mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with essences and properties of figures, had not shown man another standard of truth" (Iapp).

Curley, for example, aims to diminish, or at least exercise utmost caution with respect to the mathematical examples, for fear that exclusive attention to them supports the erroneous image of Spinoza as an extreme rationalist who denies the importance or validity of human experience altogether. Curley is undoubtedly correct to combat the notion that Spinoza is a radical rationalist who aspires to a science on the model of pure mathematics, cleansed of all human passions, partiality, and lived experience.[9] To call Spinoza a rationalist, in this sense, according to Curley, "is not just mildly inaccurate, it is wildly inaccurate" (1973, 26). I agree. Yet, his wariness of the role of mathematics is likewise unwarranted, since Spinoza is clear that, far from providing *the* standard of truth, mathematics offers "another standard of truth." Mathematical knowledge is not meant to replace experiential knowledge, and neither is it to become the paradigm of any and all rationality. The dichotomy between mathematics and experience is a false one, for Spinoza. In fact, I would like to argue that mathematical knowing is valuable precisely *as an experience* of a different way of knowing. Mathematics offers the feeling of a verity grounded not in one's appetites with respect to empirical objects, but rather grounded in the pleasure

[9]While this may sound like a caricature, such an interpretation of Spinoza is not rare and is shared by a number of his detractors (and even some of his admirers). Two detractors in this line of thought include Alquié (1981) and Nussbaum (2001).

the mind takes in experiencing its own power. When one thinks in terms of the model of mathematics, one considers things with respect to their proper definitions, or essences, and not primarily with respect to how they affect the self. One apprehends that a triangle's angles, by definition, must add up to 180°. While one presumably assents to this truth independent of one's feelings about triangles, one is *affected* by the pleasure of contemplating something as it necessarily is. Since the mind is characterized by a desire to posit its activity, mathematics is an often simple way to enjoy the power to generate adequate ideas. Likewise, it has the added benefit of providing an alternative model with which to engage the often turbulent and messy human world. Thus, Spinoza encourages his reader, famously, to "consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (IIIpref). Thinking of things in terms of what follows necessarily from their essences, as one does with mathematics, teaches one to consider even the most painful human phenomena, not as essentially mathematical, but as analogous to mathematical truths. Mathematics, not as the truth of being but as a model of knowing, has an ethical function in that it enables us to cultivate an ability to affirm that "men, like other things, act from the necessity of nature." If we can do this, "the hate usually arising from [encountering the frequent wrongs of men] will occupy a very small part of the mind" (Vp10s). If, as I will discuss further below, the ethical superiority of intuition lies in its greater affective power, the mathematical example of this kind of knowing should be viewed in terms of the affects it generates and makes possible. If one illuminates this feature of the mathematical model, one can affirm that Spinoza's rationalism privileges mathematics without in any way diminishing experience, or even human emotions. Mathematics, in other words, is valuable not because it is a way of knowing independent of experience, but rather because it is a particular experience of knowing.

Before proceeding to treat the ethical superiority of intuition, I must discuss what it means to consider things in terms of their essences, since this is arguably the important epistemological distinction between reason and intuition. My argument is not that there is no epistemological difference between intuition and reason. Rather, I am claiming that the privileged place that intuition holds in Spinoza's thought is based on its ethical superiority. From the point of view of truth, reason and intuition are peers. From the perspective of power, as I will argue below, intuition is superior. Yet, the power of intuition arguably flows from its ability to grasp singular essences rather than common properties. Thus the epistemology is not as distinguishable from the ethics, as my formulation makes it seem. Nevertheless, I think it is worth making the heuristic distinction between the truth and practical values proper to ways of knowing. I will thus proceed to outline the peculiar epistemic character of intuition before arguing for its ethical priority.

Whereas reason is grounded in adequate ideas of "common notions"—what is shared among bodies—intuition sets off from an adequate idea of common *essences* to an adequate idea of singular *essences.* Reason generates ideas from basic rules and universal properties, but intuition operates from an apprehension of something universal or common (essences of certain attributes of God) to something singular (the essence of a thing). Everything that the human mind perceives is a modification

of the attribute of thought or of extension. Nothing falls outside of a relationship to an attribute of God and, therefore, nothing exists that cannot, in principle, be intuited.

Attributes, or divine essences, are particular ways in which nature exists, particular forms of nature's power and self-expression. They are the determinate force that attributes to other beings their character as ideas or bodies. These essences, or powers, are intrinsic rather than extrinsic determinations of beings. Thought and extension are not "common notions" or properties existing equally in the part and the whole, like motion and rest, because they do not exist by virtue of the extrinsic determination and heteronomy that belongs to interaction among finite modes.[10] Attributes follow from the definition of substance, God, or nature. They are pure activity, pure attributive essence, necessarily flowing from infinite being, and giving their way of being to their modifications, or modes. There is nothing which is not a modification of an attribute of substance, and therefore attributes are common to all beings; that is, attributes are ontologically universal.

From an adequate idea of the essence of certain attributes of God—that is, from an adequate idea of this substantial activity constitutive of bodies or ideas as such—the human mind proceeds to an adequate idea of the singular essence of a thing. The essence of any given thing is its *conatus,* its effort to persevere in its being (IIIp7). Because human beings only conceive the attributes of thought or extension, they proceed from the essence that is thought, or the essence that is extension, to the essence of a particular idea or body. One proceeds from an adequate idea of a common power to a singular instantiation of that power, insofar as it strives to persevere in its being. In contrast to either the first or second kind of knowledge, we have left the realm of existence and are following a chain of essences. We are operating in the realm of a being's power insofar as it is intrinsically determined and remains *in Deo.*

Intuition begins from the basic proposition already affirmed by reason: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (Ip15). Essence is defined very similarly to this fundamental proposition of the *Ethics:* "that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing" (IIdef2). No being can be or be conceived without God, but the definition of essence adds the notion that "the thing" must also be given in order for the essence to be conceived. Thus, we do not conceive pure essences, or pure divine expressive power, without things that persevere in singular, distinctive ways. The third kind of knowledge includes an adequate apprehension of *natura naturans* and the conception of a singular, finite expression of the infinite power of thought or extension. Intuitive knowledge thus, concomitantly, apprehends the thing, its unique striving (*conatus*), and the primordial source of its striving.

[10] "Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity" (Ip28).

This description, as abstract as it is, may seem applicable exclusively to living beings, beings we recognize as endeavoring to persevere in existence. Yet it includes mathematical knowledge as striving ideas. *Conatus,* essence or striving, does not apply only to human or living beings. Any and every mode in nature exerts a kind of effort to be what it is, to distinguish itself against the background of other modes, to be among the infinitely many diverse ways that nature exists. Ideas, no differently from bodies, strive to exist and thrive within an infinite force field of other ideas. Our minds are ideas, which aim to fortify themselves through producing increasingly many ideas. Mathematical ideas, like all other ideas, are not mute, dead, or passive reflections of some independently existent truth. They are endeavoring parts of our minds' efforts to exist and act effectively. The essences of triangles, albeit in a different way than biological organisms, should be understood to strive and act as modes within the attribute of thought.[11]

From the perspective of the second kind of knowledge, however, one does not begin with essences, or the activity of striving. Although the knowledge is likewise adequate, the order of reason's discovery reverses the order of being. From an experience of things in the world, we are able to deduce that they are all in God and all contain certain basic characteristics. As I noted, this procedure is not mistaken, and the second kind of knowledge remains necessarily true. We require the conception of things, or particular modifications of nature's power, in order to have the idea of nature at all. In the moment of intuition, however, the idea grasps the genetic metaphysical order by proceeding from the intrinsic and infinite power of nature to its singular instantiation, from universal essence to singular essence.[12] It grasps, then, not only *that* everything is in God, that every being involves and expresses the infinite power of nature, but *how* a singular thing is in God.[13] It grasps the finite singular as a modification of the infinite, and, at the same time, the particular limits of its power—the thing's essential striving to remain indefinitely what it is and to amplify its powers within the constraints of its peculiar nature. To apprehend something's essence, one must grasp, concomitantly, its source of power and its singular constitution, which entails some sense of its particular limits. One must apprehend it as a modification of the infinite self-affirmation of nature and as differentiated from every other modification. Thus, the third kind of knowledge proceeds from

[11] I develop this somewhat "vitalist" account of thought and ideas in Sharp (2007).

[12] Carr (1987, 246) argues that intuition's superiority to other kinds of knowledge belongs to it by virtue of its being correctly ordered.

[13] For a different approach, see Sandler (2005). Sandler shares Carr's view that reason and intuition are distinguished by the order of cognition rather than the object of cognition, but he rejects my claim that one actually has knowledge of a finite being's essence on the grounds that this involves improbable cognitive feats. Although I cannot justify this claim here, his argument that intuition must be restricted to knowledge *that* rather than knowledge *of* rests on his insistence that ideas are representational in nature for Spinoza. Sandler denies that one might represent to oneself, for example, the precise proportion of motion and rest that comprises a body's essence. A representation of m:n for mode X, however, would still remain at the level of imagination. Intuitive ideas, strictly speaking, are not representations of essences, but intellectual and affective apprehensions of them in terms of both their causal source and power.

the infinite "efflux" of substance (the attributes) to the finite intensity of singular beings.[14] It proceeds from what is concretely universal in all beings to what distinguishes them from anything and everything else. It is the single apprehension of both universality and singularity. It is universality and singularity at once, as the intrinsic power by which beings strive to persevere in existence, strive to express in their determinate way the infinite power of nature.

It is not difficult to imagine how one could do more with such knowledge. Individuals, of course, have their being in nature, and their strength comes from a common power to persevere in existence. They depend, however, not only upon God, but upon the infinitely many singular modes with which they necessarily interact. Individual strength and power emerges out of, rather than against, common power and striving, be it infinite or finite. There is no conflict between the singular and whole, in Spinoza's portrait of existence. The singular being is in the whole, and thereby strives to persevere *in* being. The third kind of knowledge apprehends precisely this co-existence of the common power (essence) of nature and the singular power to be what one is, irreducible to any other particular organization of that power. Intuition sees the singular power emerging out of the common, and what follows from it. It apprehends the essence of the singular as a productive, constitutive, causal force in and of nature, or God. As we will see in the following section, the full expression of intuition entails knowing increasingly many singular beings in this way, and thus enabling the knower all the more to interact with them in mutually beneficial ways.

To return briefly to Spinoza's example in *Ethics* Part II, the third kind of knowledge sees "much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in *uno intuito,* we see the first number to have the second" (p40s2). We see clearly, because *from a relationship*, from a ratio, we see that the first *has* the second. The ratio is in a relationship of immanent belonging, and when that relational structure is "seen," we, easily and with the full feeling of certainty, grasp what follows from it. Relationships are causal. They bring things into being, like parents generating offspring, interlocutors producing ideas, or chemicals inciting reactions. Thus, the ratio of two terms—the modal essence within the attribute—entails a self-reproducing proportion, a kind of conceptual activity that continues to produce effects through the relational structure of ideas in which we are all implicated. On some level, however inchoate, "no one" fails to apprehend the ratio and what it involves.

7.2 Intuitive Superiority: Scientia Intuitiva, Part II

What distinguishes intuition, however, is not merely its epistemological power to apprehend being as it is, as something that flows from the infinite to the finite. Rather, as others have recognized, intuition is related to beatitude, the apex of human

[14] Spinoza asserts, in Letter 12, that modes cannot be understood if they are separated from substance and "the manner of their efflux from eternity."

freedom, and the power to organize one's affects in the most enabling way. That is, intuitive superiority is related to the height of ethics, where ethics is understood as the maximization of one's power (*potentia*) to think, feel, and act in and as a part of nature. Whereas the example from part II of the *Ethics* suggests that intuitive science is a relatively banal act that "no one fails" to accomplish, the second half of part V portrays it as a source of great power, dependent upon the ability of the sage to "remedy" her affects. While I mention the remedy for the affects, I do not analyze it since it merits its own discussion. I confine myself here to a discussion of the propositions naming the third kind of knowledge (Vp25 – p28, p31 – p33, p36s, and p38) in the attempt further to furnish a description of its distinctive characteristics.[15] In this section, I aim to describe the third kind of knowledge as it appears in part V, and in what its superiority consists.

Spinoza identifies several aspects of the superiority of the third kind of knowledge. Firstly, he notes that the "greatest striving of the mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge" (Vp28). Virtue, for Spinoza, is coextensive with power:

> By virtue and power I mean the same thing, that is (by IIIp7), virtue insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood from the laws of his nature alone. (IVdef8)

"The greatest striving of the mind [*summus mentis conatus*]," the mind's essential activity, its constitutive desire and intrinsic drive is to cultivate its proper "virtue" or power. Due to the constraints imposed by the doctrine of the attributes, such that ideas can act only on other ideas, the power that belongs to the mind is nothing other than understanding. In contrast to a Cartesian morality where the mind aims to master the unruly passions of the body,[16] Spinoza holds that the mind's desire, properly understood and enjoyed, is strictly confined to the optimal augmentation of its particular agency within the realm of ideas. The summit of its own self-expression, the affirmation and cultivation of its own power as a modification of the attribute of thought, is *scientia intuitiva,* the third kind of knowledge.[17]

Spinoza proceeds to demonstrate proposition 25 by repeating the definition of intuition from part II, and asserting that "the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God." Because we apprehend the essence of things from the essence of a divine attribute, and because everything is in God, we understand God more as we understand more singular things intuitively. This assertion requires that God be internally differentiated. Understanding the essence of God in the form of attributes, which are ontologically universal, does not provide the human mind with exhaustive knowledge of God or nature. Rather the mind understands more of God's power by understanding more singular differentiations, or modes. The more

[15] I do not address the vexing questions of the eternity of the mind and the nature of blessedness. On eternity, I can think of no better account than Jaquet (1997).

[16] See, for example, René Descartes (1985).

[17] The doctrine of the attributes, however, likewise entails that the power of the mind is the power of body and each is equally and concomitantly augmented by the development of the other.

I know about my peculiar striving to persevere in being and that of ambient modes, especially those with the greatest impact on my own power (e.g., loved ones, institutions that immediately affect me, etc.), the more I know God. God's essence is not uniform. Rather, divine essence is a productive power that yields infinitely many singular variations, infinitely many unique organizations of its power.[18]

The next proposition follows naturally: "The more the mind is capable [*aptior*] of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, the more it desires to understand them by this kind of knowledge" (Vp26). Spinoza demonstrates this proposition with a characteristic remark: "This is evident. For insofar as we conceive the mind to be capable of understanding things by this kind of knowledge, we conceive it as determined to understand things by the same kind of knowledge." One ought to note that the capacity or aptitude of the mind emerges not by virtue of freedom from determination but the contrary. As one knows intuitively, the force of those ideas serves as a kind of momentum that cannot but yield more ideas of the same kind. The mind's power is activated by knowing in this way and continues to produce ideas that "follow from its nature." Since Spinoza often uses "nature" and "essence" interchangeably, to say that from this knowledge springs the "desire" to know still more from it is tantamount to saying that from one's (the mind's) essential nature follows its own nature. While this sounds tautological, the idea is that, with intuition, the mind better coordinates itself with external, ambient nature such that it can most effectively and ably amplify its striving, and thereby be what it essentially is. Moreover, this "desire [*cupit*]" that is the mind's essence may be called a determination (rather than, for example, a volition) for two reasons. First, the mind is determined by its very nature, its particular constitution as a complex mode of thought, to strive to understand as much as its nature allows. The mind aims to reproduce its joyful, or enabling experiences of knowing. Second, one may think of such knowledge as determined, or caused, because it depends upon the cultivation of a milieu of encounters, or relationships with ambient beings that enables it to maximize its power of understanding. This is evident if one recalls Spinoza's definition of essence: "the power [*potentia*] of each thing, *or* the striving [*conatus*] by which it (*either alone or with others*) does anything, or strives to do anything . . . is nothing but the . . . actual essence of the thing" (IIIp7d; emphasis added). Beings, even in their essence, act and strive "either alone or with others." Essences, then, often include the concurrent forces of other beings that enable one to act. A complex singular being cannot be said to have a discrete, isolable agency, or source of activity. The power of the mind depends not only upon recognizing, for example, the proper character of the universe, but also upon having the kind of corporeal and affective disposition that enables the mind to be ever more determined by its own pleasure of understanding than by anxiety, jealousy, hatred, greed, or other affects that tend to preoccupy the minds of social creatures like ourselves. Thus, Spinoza emphasizes that, rather than experiencing the illumination of the truth of existence

[18] Cf. Macherey (1979, Ch. 3).

all at once, each of us must strive, little by little, to know more and more singular things, especially those that contribute to and comprise our very power to exist.

Since the desire to know intuitively involves the actualization of the mind's essential power, it likewise discloses the mind's essence to itself. As others have emphasized, intuition involves, perhaps most centrally, a kind of self-knowledge. *Ethics* II emphasizes throughout, however, that the mind only knows itself by way of bodily encounters and the affects that they entail. If knowledge of more and more singular things includes knowledge of things other than oneself, it is nevertheless the case that the better one understands how one is situated the more knowledge of others is concomitantly knowledge of oneself. As Spinoza notes in part II, "the ideas we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of external bodies" (p16cor). The knowledge of more and more singular things, therefore, must depend upon knowledge of one's own body. Likely, the first part of *Ethics* V emphasizes corporeal and affective knowledge, or the "remedy for the affects," since it must serve as a precondition of the full enjoyment of intuitive knowledge. Intuition is thereby primarily a kind of self-knowledge, which both depends upon and generates an increased capacity to know external things and God, or nature.

The proposition that follows in Part V affirms the notion that the third kind of knowledge is firstly a form of self-knowledge: "The greatest peace of mind [*mentis acquiescientia*] there can be arises from this third kind of knowledge" (p27, translation modified). Spinoza sometimes attaches the term "*acquiescentia*" to the mind (*mens* or *animi*) and sometimes to the "self" (*in se ipso*). "*Acquiescentia*" is a neologism of Spinoza's that is not easily translated. Commentators often claim that Spinoza advocates a kind of Stoic rejection of human emotions,[19] but, given his criticism of Stoicism in the preface to part V, *acquiescentia* should be considered to be a revision of late Greek and early Roman notions of inner peace and self-possession. Curley does not render it consistently throughout his translation (translating it sometimes as "self-esteem" and others as "satisfaction of mind"), and thereby does not treat it as a term of art.[20] The term contains the Latin "*quies,*" and is thus related to "rest." I understand it to describe a condition of being at peace with one's self, affirming one's nature as it is, a kind of acquiescence to the constraints of one's particular essence, which resembles a Stoic notion. Yet, at the same time, it names an activity and an increased power, by virtue of acting out of, and in harmony with such constitutive constraints. It involves the liberation from bondage that belongs to knowing "both our nature's power and its lack of power" (IVp17s).

In part IV of the *Ethics,* Spinoza claims that "Peace in one's self [*acquiescentia in se ipso*] is really the highest thing for which we can hope" (p52s). He defines

[19] See, for example, Nussbaum (2001).

[20] I prefer the most common French translation *apaisement de l'âme,* yet the English rendering of *apaisement* as either "appeasement" or "pacification" has such negative connotations that I was forced to use a substantive "peace" when I would prefer a word suggesting transition and activity. I will maintain the word "peace," which resonates with "peace" as "strength of mind" and "unity of minds" in the *Political Treatise,* or leave it in the Latin.

"*acquiescentia in se ipso*" as "a joy born of the fact that a man considers himself and his power of acting" (p52d). From intuition arises this joy by which a person affirms her own power to act, to bring about effects in the world. Intuition begets this greatest peace of mind, this joyful experience of considering one's own effective and affective power, as part of the infinite power of God or nature. It thereby does not represent an overcoming of affective life, as for Stoicism, but an activation of the most enabling affects, especially those related to the self-love that flows from affirming oneself as a singular force of nature, or a unique expression of God's power (*gloria,* in its rational form, Vp36s). Whereas in part IV Spinoza asserts that "*acquiescentia in se ipso*" is born from reason, "*mentis acquiescentia*" arises from intuition. Donald Rutherford suggests that Spinoza "must be speaking loosely" when he claims that the former is "the highest thing we can hope for," since it is clear that salvation is that highest thing, and it belongs not merely to reason but to the mind insofar as it is eternal (Rutherford 1999, 459). He, therefore, makes the novel and interesting suggestion that these terms must not be equivalent. Given that it is also of the nature of reason to conceive things "*sub specie æternitatis,"* however, I do not see why the mind could not apprehend its own eternity by means of reason (IIp44). Thus, the nearly parallel assertions about reason (IVp52) and intuition (Vp27) giving rise to an enabling and liberating satisfaction of the self as it reflects upon its own power of action raises a question, I would argue, not about the distinct affects or forms of joy, but rather about the nature of the distinction between the second and third kinds of knowledge.[21]

The demonstration to proposition 27 of part V only confirms the parallel formulation from Part IV: "So he who knows things by this kind of knowledge passes to the greatest human perfection, and consequently (. . .), is affected with the greatest joy, accompanied (. . .) by the idea of himself and his virtue." Reason and intuition both produce an "*acquiescentia*" by which the mind rejoices in the apprehension of its own causal power. In the case of the third kind of knowledge, however, this includes the assertion that the knower "passes [*transit*] to the greatest human perfection." In what does this transition consist?

Spinoza's formulation echoes his definition of "joy" from part III: "By joy, therefore, I shall understand . . . that passion by which the mind passes [*transit*] to a greater perfection" (p11s). Joy entails passing to greater perfection and intuition entails the superlative claim that, with the greatest joy, one passes to "the greatest

[21]I do not explore the problem of the validity of the distinction between reason and intuition in this paper. Malinowski-Charles makes a strong argument for treating them as "in reality the same knowledge, but simply under two modalities" (2003, 142). While I am not prepared to join this provocative argument, I certainly recognize the continuity between reason and intuition, especially by virtue of the fact that they both name "adequate ideas," and thus have the same ontological relationship to the mind that enacts them. Yet, there remains the question of whether knowledge of essences entails a meaningful epistemological distinction and, even more importantly, Spinoza recognizes a significant affective difference between the experience of intuition and that of reason. The affective difference is important for recognizing something like the ethical superiority of intuition, which may or may not be detachable from any epistemological privilege.

human perfection." This moment of highest human perfection is notably characterized by "an affection" of the greatest kind. Later in part V, Spinoza asserts that the superiority of intuition lies not in the fact that it contains or reveals more truth than reason, but in the fact that it *affects* the mind more powerfully. Spinoza claims that he aims here to show

> how much the knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, *or* knowledge of the third kind (see IIP40S), can *accomplish*, and how much *more powerful* it is than knowledge of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not *affect our mind* as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God. (Vp36s; my emphasis)

The advantage is thus that the intuitive knowledge of singular things involves a more powerful affect and "accomplishes" more than reason. Spinoza's notion of intuition, in contrast to the post-Kantian one, is not devoid of any sensible content.[22] Although if one describes this solely from the point of view of the attribute of thought, one observes that intuition involves a great affection, an action of the mind upon itself such that it passes to the greatest power or perfection, the body concomitantly enjoys its greatest perfection. Although the second half of part V seems to focus on intellectual perfection and the eternity of the mind, it ends with discussion of the body (see, e.g., p39), as if to remind the readers of the "parallelism" of mind and body and that beatitude involves the whole person. Likewise, the note to proposition 39 reminds the reader that perfection is a developmental process of becoming increasingly capable of accomplishing more. "In this life, then, we strive especially that the infant's body may change (as much as its nature allows and assists) into another, capable of a great many things and related to a mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things." Intuition, then, does not indicate an exclusively intellectual power and does not mark an exit from the realm of sensuous affectivity. Indeed, the consummate force of the joyful affection distinguishes intuitive from rational knowledge. The increased agency such joyful wisdom involves accounts for the ethical superiority of intuitive knowing.

Proposition 27 circumscribes the particular character of intuitive affection, which proposition 36 reformulates. As I mention above, the affection by which one passes to the greatest perfection and enjoys the greatest joy is *acquiescentia* of the mind. *Acquiescentia* is a name for the joy experienced upon the contemplation of one's own power of action. One passes to the greatest affection by rejoicing in her own ability to produce effects and act in the world. Love, defined in Part III, "is nothing but joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause" (p13s). *Acquiescentia* is the self-love, the immanent joy by which one affects oneself with pleasure by affirming one's essence. In other words, *acquiescentia* consists in rejoicing in one's causal power in and of nature. It can be genuinely understood as self-love, but only

[22]For a brief account of intuition from the seventieth to the early twentieth century, see Rotenstreich (1972).

on the condition that one re-conceives the nature of this "self." It is one's singular power understood as an instantiation of the infinite power in and by which all beings exist and act. By acting, one is, at the same time, expressing divine, or natural power in a particular way, and is always acting within and by virtue of a causal community of infinitely many other finite beings. Moreover, because the infinite world of modal interaction participates in the actual determination of the character of divinity or nature, the mind can grasp itself as genuinely constitutive of, to borrow a phrase, "the real movement" of things.

The highest joy and passage to the greatest perfection emerges from the affirmation of oneself as a causal agent, a real constituent of nature, whose power is determined intrinsically by virtue of being a modification of divine attributes, and extrinsically by virtue of the co-affection of ambient modes. According to Spinoza, intuition always involves, simultaneously, an apprehension of causal relationality, divine or natural dependence, and a feeling of pleasure. "Whatever we understand by the third kind of knowledge, we take pleasure in, and our pleasure is accompanied by the idea of God as a cause" (Vp32). He continues in the demonstration, after linking intuition again to *acquiescentia,* "this joy is accompanied by the idea of oneself, and consequently (by P30) it is also accompanied by the idea of God, as its cause." We are pleased that our actions and our essence express the essential activity of God or nature. Our actions please us, then, not because we consider ourselves to be the unique authors of events in the world, imposing our imprimatur upon existence, but insofar as we express something eternal, definitive, and real. We are pleased in that we take God to cause our existence, and in that we concomitantly constitute nature, or being. Such causal power is equally intellectual and corporeal. With intuition, we are related to a greater number of existent ideas just as we become increasingly capable of affecting a greater number of existent bodies. We become, mentally and physically, increasingly "capable of a great many things" (Vp39s).

The first section of this paper demonstrates that intuition should be considered an act by which the mind grasps a singular essence as an instantiation of the common power of nature. Intuition reveals no more truth than reason, but "can accomplish more" (Vpref) and affects the mind more powerfully. I would like to suggest that it is more powerful in two senses. Firstly, knowledge of one's own essence as a modification of the essence of divine attributes delivers an indication of the particular limits and quality of one's power to think and act. Moreover, as one comes to know more and more singular essences, singular intensities of force, one can act more effectively than if one generates ideas from the consideration of universal properties, as is the case with reason. Intuition yields knowledge of how other singular essences affect one's own. It potentially discloses which beings are enabling and which are destructive. Since our power depends not only on our intrinsic determination by God, but also on our horizontal determination by ambient modes, knowledge of more and more singular essences begins to illuminate how collective, composite bodies can be constructed so as to increase the capacity to determine oneself and constitute more definitively the shape of nature.

Secondly, intuition is more powerful than reason because it corresponds to opening the body and mind to being affected more determinately by other essences

(cf. IVp38). Such a phenomenon is not really distinct from the one described immediately above, but rather names the receptive rather than active aspect of activity immersed within a causal network. Intuition involves the affirmation that one's ability to act and think effectively in the world depends upon coordinating powers—be they intellectual or corporeal—that are necessarily involved with one another by virtue of being modifications of a single nature. The greatest joy and pleasure for humans emerge from our finite singularity as an instantiation of the infinite power of nature, in relationship to which there is no absolute interiority, no reserve that remains untouched. Knowledge of oneself as fully permeated by the divine essence brings the greatest joy and the most satisfying love, which are affects that name an increase in agency. Spinoza's intuitive knower, however, is not dissolved or disintegrated by this constant infusion, as the mystical interpretation would have it, but rather singularized, rendered more autonomous (albeit in a pre-Kantian sense) by such an affirmation. As one comes to affirm oneself as ineluctably, essentially a determinate force of nature, one can direct oneself more effectively. One is not lost, but empowered to the maximum extent by appropriating one's power of striving through understanding one's unique character. Such appropriation requires the simultaneous sense of oneself as determined intrinsically to express the power of God with one's activity, and, at the same time, dependent upon the concurrent activity of other modes—ideas as much as bodies—in order to carry out particular actions.

Intuition, then, is the joyful knowledge of singular powers that flow from the common power of nature. It is the pleasant affirmation of difference within the common. It is the thrill of finitude infused with the infinite. It is the maximization of the power to think and to act by virtue of knowing the self as it really is, and not as we might like it to be. On my interpretation, one of the greatest marks of distinction of Spinoza's rationalism is its emphasis upon power and capacity over the justification of belief. The conclusion of the *Ethics* promises to demonstrate not merely the virtues of understanding the cosmological order and one's place in it, but of disclosing "how much more the wise man can *do*" (Vpref). An ethics conceives of knowledge as an activity rather than a reflection. Thus, knowing more is an index of the mental and corporeal action, a concomitant of "doing" more. The mind strives, then, not simply to represent, to serve as the speculum, or mirror, of divine creation. Rather, the mind, from the point of view of Spinozan ethics, yearns to compose increasingly more of being itself with its active production of ideas. Thus, Spinoza's major work is called an *Ethics* rather than a physics, metaphysics, or a treatise of man and nature *simpliciter*. Moreover, the highest kind of knowledge is not distinguished by virtue of its superior truth value, but rather by the greater mental and corporeal capacity it delivers. Spinoza's rationalism might be peculiar in that it is the affect and not only the content of knowledge delivered by reason and intuition that is "the greatest thing for which we can hope." Likely due to our contemporary division of philosophical labor, students of Spinoza's *Ethics* treat his rationalism in isolation from the ethics or politics. This has resulted in a portrait of Spinoza as an "extreme rationalist" who restricts this "hope" to the solitary and disciplined sage who has no passion other than the drive for truth. Spinoza scholars

often presume that the "we" who can hope for this greatest experience of freedom is precisely "us" philosophers, and is strictly denied to the *vulgus,* or even the *multitude,* the collective as such. In the final section, I will offer some brief suggestions that aim further to dismantle the view of Spinoza's rationalism as one that belongs to the dispassionate scientist who extirpates all emotional, experiential, and sensuous elements from his quest for eternal truths.

7.3 Wisdom for the Many?

It is not mere self-admiration that causes philosophers to assert that the height of knowledge and human freedom is to be enjoyed only by ourselves. Spinoza often makes assertions that, despite the fact that rationality issues from human community and the shared striving to live and know well, "it rarely happens that most men live according to the guidance of reason. Instead their lives are so constituted that they are usually envious and burdensome to one another" (IVp35s). Likewise, he suggests that a rational, "free man who lives among the ignorant strives, as far as he can, to avoid their favors" (IVp70). Thus, although Spinoza emphasizes the importance of human community, the rational desire to join oneself to others (IVp18s), and the profound value of mutual friendship (IVp71),[23] he often pairs such remarks with a voice of caution about "most men" and "the ignorant." Famously, in the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza invites philosophers to examine his argument, but discourages the superstitious *vulgus,* the emotional crowd that prizes religious doctrine over reason, from reading the text at all.[24] Indeed, it sometimes appears that, while the *Ethics* promises that, under the guidance of reason, "man is a God to man," emphasizing the potential for harmony and sociability, the political works seem to show how "men are. . .by nature enemies" (TP, Ch. 2, par. 14).

While the issue of Spinoza's attitudes toward his own potential readers and the many in general is too complex to treat adequately in these brief concluding remarks, I would like to indicate a few reasons to question the assumption that intuition is in principle reserved for philosophers, the solitary sage, or the happy few. First, there are no metaphysical reasons that intuition ought to be confined to an intellectual elite. Intuition is conceptually and intimately linked to beatitude, the eternity of the mind, and freedom in *Ethics* V. While a full account of the doctrine of mental eternity remains beyond the scope of this analysis, it is beyond doubt that all minds, for Spinoza, are eternal in substance (Vp22). Any mind is an eternal idea whose eternity is metaphysically co-extensive with its existence. That is, one does not *achieve* eternity in the way one might earn immortality by way of one's actions. The eternity one enjoys in beatitude for Spinoza has nothing to do with a theological notion of the immortality of the soul (more akin to sempiternity). In other

[23] See also Spinoza's Letter to Blyenbergh, 5 January 1665.

[24] Spinoza, TTP. Leo Strauss discusses the question of the audience of the *Theological-Political Treatise* in detail in his (1988, Ch. 5).

words, each and every being is always already eternal by virtue of comprising a part of the infinite power of God or nature, but one can be more or less conscious of such eternity. As Jaquet demonstrates, while *discovery* of the eternity of the mind follows from intuitive knowledge, it does not depend upon it ontologically. Rather, the dependence is the other way around. Intuition "is not the cause but the active expression of salvation," as Spinoza conceives it.[25] Thus, there is no metaphysical barrier to anyone cultivating the kind of relationship to oneself and the world that enables the highest expression of intuition.

Rather, the barriers to becoming the supremely capable wise person with a "body capable of a great many things" are primarily social, political, and environmental. Moreover, such obstacles to freedom and agency impinge upon everyone, whether one is learned, mature, and strong, or ignorant, young, and undisciplined. Certainly, a number of people are inhibited at various points in their lives from enjoying the height of their mental powers by virtue of youth, illness, or infirmity of various kinds, over which no one has any power.[26] In general, however, Spinoza affirms that "all men share in one and the same nature; it is power and culture that mislead us." Indeed, "everywhere truth becomes a casualty through hostility or servility, especially when despotic power is in the hands of one or a few."[27] Spinoza proceeds to advocate large deliberative bodies and the transparency of state policies. He suggests that people are kept ignorant not only by being terrorized, but also by being excluded from the activity of decision-making and learning the rationales behind them.[28] Thus, the *Political Treatise* aims to furnish the objective structural principles that would allow as many people as possible are able to act *as if* they were guided by reason, and thereby cultivate a disposition that can think and act well. "If it is to endure, a government must be so organized that its ministers cannot be induced to betray their [constituents'] trust to act basely, whether they are guided by reason or passion."[29] Providing the structural conditions that will habituate the ministers as well as the citizens to acting in the interest of the whole serves as an education for all actors as well as a buttress against unanticipated misfortune. Thus, it is not the case that the political writings represent a more critical appraisal of humans as natural enemies. Rather, they comprise an analysis of those circumstances and institutional conditions that engender either enmity or solidarity (acting as "one mind").

The ability of each of us to think and act well is fragile and vulnerable to the turbulent passions which can inevitably befall any of us by virtue of misfortunes such

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[25] See Jaquet (1997, 105). I recommend this text as the most precise account of eternity in Spinoza.

[26] Spinoza repeatedly mentions the inability to control whether one has a sound body (e.g., TTP, Ch. 16, and TP, Ch. 2, par. 18). In the *Ethics,* he also mentions the Spanish Poet who suffers such a grave illness that he loses his memory and therefore ought to be considered a different person (IVp39s).

[27] TP, Ch. 7, par. 27.

[28] See also, TP, Ch. 9, par. 14.

[29] TP, Ch. 1, par. 7.

as illness, natural catastrophe, war, and broken hearts, to name a few. Such vulnerability belongs to our finitude and is ineradicable. Moreover, we are vulnerable not only to what befalls us as individuals, but to what arouses and plagues those who surround us. Our susceptibility to being affected by others at any and every moment of our existence is the source of both our power and its ineradicable fragility. As Spinoza notes in the *Ethics,*

> It is impossible for man not to be part of nature and not to follow the common order of nature. But if he lives among those who agree with his nature, his power of acting will thereby be aided and encouraged. On the other hand, if he is among men who do not at all agree with his nature, he will hardly be able to accommodate himself to them without greatly changing himself. (IVappVII)[30]

One "agrees in nature" with those with whom one "agrees in power," or striving (IVp32d). The extent to which one lives among those with whom one can join powers and combine agencies toward living and thinking well, one can become more and more powerful and enjoy intuitive knowledge. Even if one has cultivated great mental and corporeal power, if the political and social environment becomes very hostile to one's striving, one cannot avoid being changed.

Those who disagree with one's nature, however, cannot be described as a natural kind (e.g., many fellow humans disagree with any individual's nature), and should not be viewed as a characteristic of collectivities as such. On the contrary, Spinoza regularly expresses hope that the commonwealth will combine into a massive "union or harmony of minds,"[31] or that "all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body" (IVp18s). Rather than betraying anxiety toward collectives as such, both the *Ethics* and the political treatises detail the principles by which vital and enabling collectivities might be formed. While it is often true that a society includes many ignorant, violent, and hostile people, "*their lives are so constituted* that they are usually . . . burdensome to one another" (IVp35s). Among those whose life activities promote the most violent passions and within a government that is not "so organized that its ministers cannot be induced to betray their trust," the wise will "avoid the favors of the ignorant." That is, the wise will strive not to become dependent for their mental or material well-being on those who cannot act according to reason. Such dangerous individuals, for Spinoza, include not only the uneducated and superstitious masses, but also the unconstrained and capricious state ministers, as well as merchants preoccupied with financial gain. When circumstances are hostile to mental and corporeal fortitude, which is very often the case for Spinoza at the time he wrote his philosophy, he recommends striving not to rely upon the forces of those who disable one's efforts to think and act. In such cases, he might, with Machiavelli, counsel those who can to rely on their own forces. Yet, humans "can hardly live a solitary life" (IVp35s) and "it is vain for one man alone to guard himself against all others."[32]

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[30] For a detailed discussion of this passage, see Beyssade (1994).

[31] TP, Ch. 6, par. 4.

[32] TP, Ch. 2. par. 15.

While this section has been all too brief, I hope to have established, first, that there is no metaphysical reason that intuition cannot be enjoyed by each and every individual. Second, I hope to have suggested that the difficulty that attends any efforts to enjoy reason as well as the highest expression of intuition belongs to the universal condition of our finitude. Because each of us remains ineradicably finite, a part of nature, each of us depends upon ambient modes for a vital and powerful mind and body. The modes that impact our well-being are innumerable, but include those circulating in the environment, such as air and water quality, major events such as wars, famines, plagues, or bumper crops, as well as social relations and customs. It is thus, indeed, "difficult and rare" to enjoy the highest expression of intuition and the peace of mind it brings. Yet Spinoza's doctrine of intuition should be understood to be neither an elitist program nor a solitary pleasure. While Spinoza often qualifies his hope for the blossoming of mass wisdom and collective harmony, such a community of agencies is precisely the aim of his philosophy. While it may not be possible for everyone to enjoy the heights of wisdom, it is also the case that no one will enjoy it all of the time. Optimal conditions and maximal cooperation will enable many people to experience it. Even if intuitive science will remain difficult and rare within the course of individual lives, it need not be a scarce good within a population. Intuitive knowledge, as an expression of the apex of ethical power, includes love toward God, and "the more men we imagine to be joined to God by the same bond of love, the more it is encouraged" (Vp20).

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