

# SPINOZA AND THE ETHICS OF INDIVIDUATION

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Abstract: In this paper, I try to make simultaneous progress on understanding two pieces of Spinoza's philosophy, thereby making progress on a yet third, more general interpretive front. The more general interpretive question concerns the relationship between Spinoza's explicitly ethical claims in the latter of half of his *Ethics* with the more metaphysical, seemingly non-moral claims of the first half. How should we understand the integration of Spinoza's metaphysical and moral projects? I try to offer an instance of my general answer to this question here by considering the interplay between Spinoza's ethical egoism with his metaphysical theory of individuation. Neither, I will show, is intended to stand alone. His theory of individuation appeals to the way in which regions of powers are conceived in order to explain how substance can admit of both a plurality of individuals *and* a plurality of true ways of individuating regions. Spinoza appeals to this theory to show try to how there can be non-prudential moral motivations for pursuing the interests of others within his ethical egoist framework. His egoism, in turn, provides sufficient reasons for preferring one pattern of the individuation over all others. His intensionalist theory of individuation and his egoist ethics of self-interest here converge.

## §1.0 Introduction

As an ethical egoist, Spinoza faces an obvious worry. If self-interest is the basis of moral excellence, what are the moral motivations to pursue the interests of others? As I read him, Spinoza's answer is strikingly original and bold: challenge the individuation of moral agents that generates the dilemma. That is, Spinoza appeals to his unique (and often misunderstood) theory of metaphysical individuation in order to provide non-prudential, egoist motivations for pursuing the interests of others. More blithely, Spinoza's metaphysics of individuation shapes his egoism by challenging natural understandings of the "ego" in his egoism and the "self" in his principles of self-interest. His egoism in turn fills an important lacuna in his theory of individuation. As one might expect from a system-builder like Spinoza, his metaphysical and ethical projects converge here in mutually dependent ways. The goal of this paper is to better display this convergence on the topics of individuation and ethical egoism. The result will be a new

understanding of Spinoza's theory of individuation, the nature of his egoism and the thoroughly intellectualist character of his ethical program.

The first part of this paper (§2) will focus on developing a new account of Spinoza's theory of metaphysical individuation. I argue that Spinoza's theory has an important, but neglected *conceptualist* component. The carving up of the world into finite individuals, according to Spinoza, depends partly on how the world is conceived. In extended terms, whether an extended region  $r$  is occupied by a plurality of discrete bodies, a single body, or mere parts of a greater body depends partly on how  $r$  is conceived in relation to the rest of extension. Individuation, I will argue, invokes an intensional context for Spinoza. I will show how this appeal to the conceptual also helps solve a significant problem facing Spinoza's account of extension and bodies.

One upshot of my interpretation is that there are multiply true, but incommensurate ways that bodies and minds are metaphysically individuated. But if so, in virtue of what is one pattern to be preferred over another? Spinoza's answer involves an appeal to his ethical theory (§3). Individuals, Spinoza claims, ought to pursue their own self-interest. Spinoza then argues that satisfying our deepest interests is accomplished through adopting broader ways of conceiving the world. Combined with his conceptualist theory of individuation, this interpretation provides Spinoza a way around a standard objection to ethical egoism from altruism. By wondering how such broader ways of conceiving the world could really be in each individual's self-interest (§4), we will ultimately move deep into some of the most elusive currents of Spinoza's ethical project, ones that involve getting his readers to re-identify themselves, and in

some sense, transcend their parochial projects and pre-philosophical senses of personal identity.

## **§2.0 Spinoza's Conceptualist Theory of Individuation**

When discussing Spinoza's theory of individuation, it is tempting to begin with the somewhat muddled Cartesian picture and explore the ways in which Spinoza attempts to overcome some of Descartes' shortcomings. But in doing so, it is easy to forget just how radical the break is between Spinoza and Descartes in virtue of Spinoza's identification of extension with an attribute of God. To avoid this, I will begin by considering anew Spinoza's theory of attributes and extension (§2.1). This overview of Spinoza's ontology will yield some familiar, though perhaps controversial, conclusions about Spinoza's theory of individuation (§2.2). It will also remind us of a significant problem that Spinoza's account of extension faces (§2.3). How can Spinoza reconcile the determinate character of extended bodies with the wholly indeterminate character of the Divine attribute of extension?<sup>i</sup> But the opening discussion of Spinoza's ontology will also reveal Spinoza's previously unnoticed solution to such problems, one that will prompt us to recognize just how radical and distinctive his theory of metaphysical individuation really is (§2.4).

### **§2.1 Spinoza on substance, attributes and modes**

Spinoza (in)famously believed that extension was one of God's attributes (IIp2). His official proof of this *highly* controversial thesis in the *Ethics* consists of just eight Latin words that kindly refer the reader to his previous proof (IIp1) that thought is an attribute of God.<sup>ii</sup> For present purposes, let us grant Spinoza this remarkable thesis and

focus on some of its implications. Attributes, Spinoza explains in Ep36, “express God’s nature in some way [*aliquo modo*].”<sup>iii</sup> He similarly describes attributes in Id6 as that which “expresses an infinite and eternal essence of God.”<sup>iv</sup> So extension is one way to express an essence of God. (For the most part, I will focus here on extension and bodies; isomorphic problems and solutions will apply to modes conceived under other attributes.)

Like attributes, modes also play an expressive role for Spinoza. “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (Ip25c, emphasis mine).<sup>v</sup> Indeed, the difference between the expressive activity of an attribute and the expressive activity of a mode appears to be a matter of degree, a point that coheres well with Spinoza’s naturalism. As Spinoza points out in Ip25c, modes function as “certain and determinate” expressions of God’s nature.<sup>vi</sup> By contrast, attributes function as “perfect” expressions of God’s nature, a quality of expression that Spinoza identifies with completeness (Ep36). That is, modes function as incomplete and partial expressions of God’s nature; attributes function as complete and comprehensive expressions that same nature. My body is a very limited and incomplete way of expressing God’s extended nature; the whole of extension is one complete and comprehensive expression of God’s nature.<sup>vii</sup>

Although Spinoza frequently describes this relation in terms of “expressing,” he sometimes glosses that expressive relation in conceptual terms.<sup>viii</sup> That is, modes provide limited and determinate ways of conceiving God’s essence; attributes provide complete and comprehensive ways of conceiving God’s essence. By claiming that extension is an attribute of God, Spinoza claims that extension provides one comprehensive and sufficient way of conceiving God’s nature.

Furthermore, Spinoza explicitly identifies the nature or essence of God with God's power or activity: "God's power is his essence itself" (Ip34).<sup>ix</sup> So we can also say that extension is a complete way of conceiving or expressing the power of substance. Spinoza also links conceiving and explaining; to conceive of x is to explain x.<sup>x</sup> Accordingly, extension is one complete and self-contained way of explaining God's power; thinking is another such self-contained explanation.

Modes of extension are similarly ways of expressing God's power, only in a much more limited and qualified manner (Ip36d). Indeed, Spinoza accounts for the power of modes in terms of God's own power. In his richly packed IVp4d, he writes,

The power by which singular things...preserve their being is the power of God or Nature by Ip24c, not insofar as it is infinite but insofar as it can be explained through a man's actual essence (by IIIp7). A man's power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God or Nature's infinite power, that is (by Ip34) of its essence.

Spinoza here outright identifies the power of a finite object with the power of God, albeit God's power that is qualified in a particular way. Later, we will consider just what this qualification amounts to. If we pull together Spinoza's relations of explanation, conceiving, and expressing, we see that the power of my body is a partial and incomplete way of conceiving the power of substance, considered under the attribute of extension. Or, taking the priority of substance over its modes into account (Ip1), extended substance, qualified in a particular way, explains or provides a way of conceiving the power of my body.

What then is the relationship between the power of my body and my body itself? In the very important IIIp7 (which IVp4d refers back to), Spinoza identifies the essence, conatus, and power of objects. So the essence of an extended body just is its power,

which is itself just the power of God qualified in particular ways. If we naturally think of essences as being fundamental to the identity of objects, Spinoza's idea is that power is fundamental to extended bodies, just as power is fundamental to what it is to be God (Ip34).<sup>xi</sup> But in the case of modes, their essence is not power *simpliciter*, but power qualified in two important ways. First, it is power as conceived or expressed under some attribute. No surprises there.<sup>xii</sup> But it is also power conceived in a partial or limited way. That is, the essence of modes just is the essence of God, conceived in a limited or partial way. Or, to again get the direction of dependence correct, limited ways of conceiving God's power or essence constitute the essences of finite modes. Earlier, we saw that modes *function* as limited ways of conceiving or expressing God's power. Here, we see that the *essences* of modes are limited ways of conceiving God's power. I do not why we should avoid the combination: finite modes just are limited ways of conceiving God's power.

[[[Admittedly, matters are not *quite* this clean in Spinoza's ontology. For Spinoza also distinguishes between finite and infinite modes, and one might worry that I am running roughshod over deeply etched divisions in Spinoza's ontology by lumping all modes together as incomplete or limited ways of conceiving God's power. Ip25c, for instance, applies to "singular things," and it can be doubted that infinite modes are "certain and determinate expressions" in the way finite modes are supposed to be. Although I agree that some of Ip25c does not apply to infinite modes, I am not convinced that infinite modes, whatever they are, fail to be expressions of God's power. Why should they be wholly distinct from the functions of both attributes and finite modes? I will briefly outline an account of infinite modes that fits them into the rubric just discussed,

showing how they can be understood as limited ways of conceiving God's activity, without thereby attributing to them properties applicable only to *finite* modes. I should confess up front, however, that I do not share the opinion of some interpreters, for whom Spinoza's deeply underdeveloped doctrine of infinite modes promises a treasure trove of philosophical richness.

In a few places, Spinoza distinguishes between what are commonly called immediate infinite modes (IIM) and mediate infinite modes (MIM), both categories of which are distinct from finite modes.<sup>xiii</sup> The official basis of the distinction is the degree of ontological closeness with which they follow from an attribute. Some infinite modes follow "immediately" from an attribute (IIM); others follow less directly by following immediately from a mode that immediately itself follows immediately from an attribute (MIM). Finite modes, by contrast, do not follow in either of these more direct manners from an attribute, but follow only from other finite modes (Ip28). So what are these infinite modes? I understand an IIM to be the most basic expression of God's power within an attribute. Spinoza calls such a basic expression "motion and rest" in the case of extension (Ep64). God's activity, conceived extendedly, is immediately expressed as motion and rest. It is "immediate" in the sense that the expressive content of an IIM is the power of God qualified only by the fact that it is conceived under a particular attribute. It is still an incomplete expression, *qua* mode, because it is an *extended* expression of God's nature, i.e., it presupposes an attribute context. Nonetheless, such a mode is a more complete expression than any finite mode, since it is a basic way of conceiving *all* of extension. But again, it is still only an expression *of extension*, and so still limited.

What then of the attribute of extension? Why is it not similarly an incomplete expression of God's nature, since there are other attributes? The difference is that extension qua attribute does not presuppose any other way of expressing God's nature (Ip10). It is complete in the sense of being self-contained and comprehensive – all of God's activity is conceived extendedly. By contrast, the IIM of motion and rest is not self-contained and does require a presupposition, namely, extension. So extension qua attribute is a self-contained, comprehensive and hence complete way of expressing God's nature; the extended IIM is what gets expressed most basically and fundamentally by the attribute of extension, and so is limited to and depends upon this particular attribute context. Nevertheless, it is clear why Spinoza thought it occupied an elevated status over finite modes. It is a more complete way of conceiving God's power than my body is, but like my body, it still depends on the attribute of extension.

The mediate infinite mode (MIM) of extension is the largest and most permanent individual within an attribute. Spinoza identifies this individual in a letter as “the face of the universe” (Ep64), a rather opaque gesture that gains more content in the *Ethics*, as we will see. Although necessarily co-extensive (“necessarily eternal”) with the immediate infinite mode, it is ontologically posterior to it. Looking ahead slightly, this description of MIMs dovetails nicely with Spinoza's theory of individuation. Individuals, including these “infinite” individuals, are individuals partly in virtue of the organization of more fundamental powers. Here, this means that what the attribute of extension expresses most immediately and with the least possible qualification is God's power extendedly, “motion and rest.” This activity, so conceived, is organized in such a way that it constitutes an individual according to Spinoza's theory of individuation, an individual that he calls “the

face of the universe.” Such an individual is a doubly-qualified expression of God’s nature. First, like the IIM “motion and rest,” it presupposes an attribute context of extension. Secondly, though necessarily co-extensive with “motion and rest,” it is derivative and ontologically dependent on the arrangement of that power. We will see that finite modes share this “doubly-qualified” nature of infinite individuals. Indeed, as expected, the difference between these two kinds of individuals (infinite and finite) is itself a function of more and less expansive ways in which substance’s power is conceived.

Both of these categories of modes are distinct from finite modes only in that they are more expansive ways of conceiving God’s extended power. There remains a smoothness in Spinoza’s ontology, descending in completeness from the expressive work of attributes to the immediate and mediate infinite modes, and down to finite modes.]]]

Although such differences between these ways of conceiving God’s power are highly significant, one important upshot of my interpretation is that all differences among these ontological categories in Spinoza supervene on differences in the ways of conceiving God’s power. Insofar as, say, infinite and finite modes have different properties, those differences will be in virtue of differences in ways of conceiving God’s activity.<sup>xiv</sup>

[[[But in fact, Spinoza will go even further than mere supervenience. He will also argue that many of the varying properties are generated by these same differences in ways of conceiving that power. And so, Spinoza will conclude, there are neither problems nor surprises if different ways of conceiving one and the same activity results in seemingly incompatible predications made truly of it, since the predications are always

functions of, and hence relativized to, these different ways of conceiving one and the same thing. This is the real beauty behind Spinoza's ontology: one and the same thing, conceived in different ways, can have different properties relative to these different ways of being conceived. No contradiction results, since the different ways of conceiving is what partly generates the different properties in the first place. So Spinoza has both the diversity of predications his plenitude demands *and* the opacity between predications consistency demands built right in to the ground floor of his ontology.]]]

## **§2.2 Spinoza's theory of individuation: a first pass**

This overview of Spinoza's theory of attributes and modes is already enough to establish several conclusions about Spinoza's theory of individuation, conclusions that other interpreters have reached through a more circuitous route. (I will only rehearse these conclusions briefly here.) First, as is commonly mentioned in this context, Spinoza rejects Descartes' view that matter is inherently passive in favor of an inherently dynamic account of matter. Far from stemming from a disagreement over experimental data, Spinoza's rejection follows simply from his belief that extension, qua attribute, is a way of conceiving God's own power.<sup>xv</sup> Unsurprisingly then, matter will need no push from without, *pace* Descartes – which is a good thing, since there is nothing external to do the pushing according to Spinoza (Ip15s).

Second, Spinoza rejects a purely volumetric account of individuating material bodies (Ep81-83), an account that is plausibly attributable to Descartes.<sup>xvi</sup> This is expected if Spinoza thought – as we will see that he did – that the boundaries of a body are determined by underlying powers or forces, and not vice versa. Of course, Spinoza believes that this emendation does not require a wholesale rejection of mechanism or a

reversion to form theory. After all, mechanism is compatible with organizing principles of individuals that appeal to more than just bare Cartesian extended properties.<sup>xvii</sup> And, Spinoza asks, isn't extension's inherent power a good place to start looking for such organizing principles within a mechanic system?

Third, and most importantly, Spinoza's positive alternative for individuating bodies appeals, in part, to the ontologically prior work of forces (usually identified as "motion and rest") that instantiate and preserve qualitatively discernable patterns in virtue of which bodies are sufficiently unified, distinct, and capable of enduring change.<sup>xviii</sup> Individual bodies, as it were, are constructed out of underlying relations between forces. Exactly *what* the fundamental forces are and exactly which patterns of those forces are sufficient for individuation is an important and difficult topic that Spinoza wrestles with in some of his rudimentary physics. (Spinoza was never satisfied with his rather incomplete account (Ep83).) But such empirical details need not detain us here.

To better grasp this idea, it may be helpful to recall Spinoza's close connection between the function, essences, and powers of individual bodies with the ontologically prior power of substance. The power of substance plays a role in individuating bodies because bodies are constituted by a discernible arrangement of that power, appropriately qualified. As Spinoza puts it in his early *KV*, "every particular material thing is nothing else than a certain proportion of motion and rest."<sup>xix</sup> If we wonder how power or forces can be ontologically prior to bodies – Isn't power just a disposition of a body to act?! Aren't dispositional properties grounded in categorical properties?! Can we have relations prior to relata?! – we need only remember that *there is* a more fundamental bearer of that power: substance itself. Bodies just are qualified instances of that power, as

we saw in the previous section. If power, suitably qualified, constitutes bodies, it will be unsurprising if power, suitably qualified, also plays a role in individuating bodies. (NB: we could equally well say that essences individuate bodies, so long as we recall that bodily essences are just qualified instances of God's essence, which is just substance's power.)

In short, Spinoza's account of extension, attributes, and modes pushes him towards a theory of individuation that includes a *causal condition*. Individuals are individuals at least partly in virtue of the activity and arrangement of forces, an activity that is identified with God's own power, suitably qualified.<sup>xx</sup> At least two questions about this picture remain: what does the "qualifying" work to move us from God's complete essence or power to the qualified, limited essences and powers that constitute and individuate bodies? And, more importantly, can the qualifier block some predications made to individual bodies from also being true of extension itself? Strikingly, the very same account of attributes and modes that generates these questions makes it very difficult for Spinoza to consistently answer them. After exploring this worry in the next section, I will argue that Spinoza's best solution is to augment his causal condition for individuation with a conceptualist condition. How these regions of activity are conceived partly determines facts about individuation.

### **§2.3 The problem of determinate individuals**

Suppose we accept that extension is one complete way of conceiving the power of the sole possible substance. Up until now, I have been ignoring an important element of this thesis. In addition to being complete ways of conceiving substance, attributes are also *indeterminate* ways of conceiving substance. This is the intended contrast found in Ip25c:

modes are *determinate* ways of conceiving God. Yes, modes are incomplete and partial, but this entails that they are also determinate. By contrast, attributes like extension are indeterminate, a point Spinoza repeatedly emphasizes in Ep35-6. But how can something that is completely indeterminate in itself also admit of determination? To get a handle on this question, consider Spinoza's claim in Ep50:

...it is obvious that matter in its totality, considered without limitation, can have no figure, and that figure applies only to finite and determinate bodies...so since figure is nothing but determination and determination is negation, figure can be nothing other than negation, as has been said (emphasis mine).<sup>xxi</sup>

Extension, considered as a whole, is not a body and lacks figure. How is such a figureless plenum individuated into shaped, determinate bodies? This familiar question from Descartes' physics becomes much more pressing, given Spinoza's identification of extension as an attribute of God. For Spinoza appears to hold the following theses:

- (a) Extension is an expression of God's power.<sup>xxii</sup>
- (b) God's power is God's essence.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- (c) God's essence, in itself, is purely perfect (i.e., complete), wholly indeterminate, and involves no negation.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- (d) There are extended bodies, each of which are determinate, imperfect (i.e., incomplete) expressions of God's essence that involve negation.<sup>xxv</sup>

But given (a) – (d), how can determinate bodies arise in what is, in itself, without negation or determination? If extension in itself is indeterminate, what provides the required determinate structure for there to be individual bodies? As Hegel wondered, if Spinoza's substance is absolutely infinite (Ep12), absolutely indeterminate (Ep36), and absolutely without limitation (Ep35), how can that same substance also have a determinate structure and avoid being an "empty unity"? If determination is a necessary

condition for the existence of individual bodies, and negation or limitation is a necessary condition for having determination, then the power of substance that constitutes bodies must admit of negation, limitation, or incompleteness. But how can the extended power of substance admit of negation or limitation and still remain wholly complete and indeterminate in itself? More generally, how can Spinoza avoid predicating of extended substance what he claims must be true of extended bodies formed within that substance?

Because of the relationships between the attribute of extension, God's power or nature and extended bodies [(a), (b) and (d)], anything that would generate a plurality of determinate individuals would also seem to entail that God's own nature involves limitation, negation, or determinate structure, *pace* (c). This would upset Spinoza's account of the nature of God and God's attributes. If we instead insisted on the completeness, unity and indeterminateness of God's nature (c), it is hard to see how Spinoza could maintain the reality of determinate features of attributes, which would mean that determinate bodies themselves would be somehow illusory, unreal, or false, *pace* (d). Embracing this second horn would undermine not only Spinoza's physics, but also his ethical program, which seems to presuppose a plurality of individual moral agents. A.E. Taylor puts the point sharply: "The metaphysical framework of Ethics I thus requires, if it is to be retained, the admission that "finite modes" are mere illusions, while the whole edifice of doctrine elaborated in Ethics II-V demands that they shall be nothing of the sort."<sup>xxvi</sup>

As is frustratingly common, Spinoza never faces this worry head on. Indeed, even when he brushes up against the problem, he slips past it unconcernedly: "But whenever any of these modes puts on their particular existence, and by that they are in some way

distinguished from the attributes...then a particularity presents itself in the essences of the modes” (KV App II, 11; C 155, emphasis mine). But just what does this “putting on” amount to, and how can such particularity or determinateness be a feature of extended individuals without also being a feature of the attribute of extension itself? There thus seems to be an unresolved tension between the requirements for being a body and the requirements for being an attribute. If extension is an indeterminate attribute, how can it be carved up into determinate bodies? Or, if extension has a determinate structure, how can it be an attribute of God?

This worry is an instance of a general and familiar problem facing any serious monist like Spinoza. How can the one avoid having all the properties of the many (especially the ones that entail diversity!), if the many fundamentally inhere in and are conceived through the one? Specific versions of this problem are ubiquitous. How can he avoid attributing extended properties to substance conceived under the attribute of thought, if substance conceived under the attribute of thought is identical with substance conceived under the attribute of extension? How can my mind cause no extended effects, my body cause only extended effects, and yet my mind be identical to my body? Or, in the present case, how can particular properties of bodies – such as being determinate and limited – not also apply to substance, given the relationship between bodies and substance in Spinoza?<sup>xxvii</sup> In short, we’ve stumbled upon an instance of what is the most difficult issue facing Spinoza’s metaphysics, a concern Spinoza himself once voiced in a dialogue: “Desire: ‘It will be marvelous indeed if it should turn out that Unity is in keeping with the Diversity I see everywhere in nature. But how could this be?’”<sup>xxviii</sup> How indeed?

## §2.4 Conceptualism to the rescue

Although Spinoza does not address the problem head-on, I believe he has a very elegant solution. In fact, I think the strategy he uses to sidestep the specific problem in the case of individuation is itself an instance of a *general* strategy Spinoza uses throughout his metaphysics to overcome the *general* problem of maximizing both parsimony and plenitude. But we will focus only on the specific case of determinate bodies here.<sup>xxix</sup> I will argue that Spinoza's technique for maintaining both a real plurality of determinate bodies and the indeterminate nature of extension qua attribute of substance is to include a conceptual condition in his theory of individuation. To be an individual body is most fundamentally to be a discernible locus of God's power that is conceived in a particular way.<sup>xxx</sup> In a sense, individual bodies are conceptually constructed out of patterns of activity, an activity that is identified *in toto* with substance's power. Thus, not only is matter inherently active (*pace* Descartes), but the extended plenum is individuated into bodies partly in virtue of how the patterns of that activity are conceived (*pace* just about everyone else<sup>xxxi</sup>). (To avoid confusion, let me state up front that these ways of conceiving should not be identified with tokened mental states or mere human intellectual activity any more than attributes, as simply more complete ways of conceiving substance, are to be so identified. Conceptualism is neither subjectivism nor mentalism.)

In fact, we have already seen several hints of Spinoza's conceptualist strategy in §2.1. If ways of conceiving substance are fundamental to the identity and function of modes, then we should expect the individuation of those modes to require taking such ways of conceiving into account. Conversely, in Ep50 (quoted previously) Spinoza claims that the indefinite character of the attribute of extension was partly the result of its

“*being considered* without limitation.”<sup>xxxii</sup> Once you have an eye for it, it is stunning to see how many times Spinoza appeals to conceiving relations in the context of discussing matters pertaining to individuation.<sup>xxxiii</sup> I will highlight a few of the most central ones before pulling them together into a unified interpretation.

In Ep36, also quoted above, Spinoza explains more carefully what the determination of bodies requires. He writes, “‘determinate’ denotes nothing positive, but only the privation of existence of that same nature which is conceived as determinate.” Spinoza’s appeal to *privation* is not accidental. In Ep21, Spinoza is careful to distinguish “negation” from “privation”:

First, then, I say that privation is not an act of depriving; it is nothing more than simply a state of want, which in itself is nothing. It is only an *ens rationis* or a mode of thinking which we form from comparing things with one another... So privation is simply to deny of a thing something that we judge pertains to its nature, and negation is to deny something of a thing because it does not pertain to its nature. From this it is clear why Adam’s desire for earthly things was evil on in respect to our intellect, not God’s intellect.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

So a determinate extended body is a region of extension that is conceived in a partial, and hence determinate, manner. Although in Ep21 Spinoza is making a specific point about *human* judgment and evil, these ways of conceiving need not be identified with tokened mental states of humans any more than Spinoza’s talk of attributes being ways of conceiving means that attributes are just the postulation of finite intellects.<sup>xxxv</sup> Extension, conceived in a complete way, truly contains no discrete bodies. Extension, conceived in a partial manner, truly contains a plurality of determinate individual bodies. That does not mean that extended bodies lack something they ought to have (a “negation” in Ep21 terms). Rather, bodies are functions of extension conceived in a way that excludes features which extension, conceived in a different way, has. Spinoza can consistently

endorse these propositions if the way in which extension is conceived partly determines the individuation of bodies.

This becomes clearer in Ep32. In response to Henry Oldenberg's request that he address "the difficult investigation that hinges on our knowing how each part of nature harmonizes [*conveniat*] with its whole and in what way it coheres with the rest [*cum reliquis cohaereat*]" (Ep31), Spinoza responds with a metaphysical theory of part-whole relations. Spinoza claims that part-whole relations are determined partly by degrees of coherence: wholes are wholes in virtue of having parts that cohere together in certain ways. He then explains that coherence is a function of patterns of motion, a pattern which constitutes the existence of an individual whole.<sup>xxxvi</sup> He offers the following example:

For example, when the motions of the particles of lymph, chyle, etc. so mutually accommodate themselves to each other with respect to their magnitude and figure so as to agree completely with one another and to all together constitute a single fluid, only to that degree are the chyle, lymph, etc. considered [*considerantur*] as parts of the blood; but, to the degree that we conceive [*concipimus*] the particles of lymph, by reason of their figure and motion, to differ from the particles of chyle, to that degree we consider them as wholes and not parts.

Spinoza here claims that whether or not a given pattern of motion constitutes a single individual depends on whether the occupants of subregions are "*considered as parts of the blood.*" That is, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for individuation that regions of extension instantiate an organizing pattern of activity. (In 2.3, I called this his causal condition for individuation.) But there is also a conceptual condition, one that, depending on how it is satisfied, can yield differing accounts about the individuation of one and the same extended region. This is brought out by Spinoza's next example of a worm living in the bloodstream.

The worm, Spinoza stipulates, conceives of the bloodstream around him in a rather limited manner, excluding relations to anything outside the bloodstream. In doing so, the worm conceives the bloodstream as a mere collection of discrete bodies. The worm does not consider how the sub-regions of the bloodstream may be working together “so as to harmonize with one another in a certain manner.” And, because the worm does not conceive of any broader activities, “it would conceive each particle of the blood as a whole, and not as a part.” The pattern of activity it conceives in the bloodstream entails that the region of the bloodstream is occupied by a mere collection of individual bodies.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Spinoza then contrasts the worm’s narrow conceptual perspective with two successively broader ways of conceiving the same bloodstream. In each instance, the activities occurring in the bloodstream are conceived in relation to more and more activities that are occurring beyond the bloodstream. Spinoza explains that as the ways of conceiving the bloodstream are so broadened, the bodies occupied by the region of the bloodstream will be individuated differently. The bloodstream, conceived narrowly by the worm, is considered a mere collection of discrete individuals. Conceived in a slightly broader way, the bloodstream is conceived to be a single individual whole composed of parts. “Thus the blood would always have to be considered as a whole and not as a part.”

But Spinoza is not simply claiming that what one *takes* to be the facts about individuation varies with how extended regions are conceived. That would be an epistemic point. Spinoza’s point is much stronger and metaphysical in nature. To see this, let us follow Spinoza in supposing the bloodstream is conceived in a yet broader way, which includes relations to other regions of extension in such a way that altogether, this

larger collection of regions maintain a pattern of activity sufficient for instantiating a single individual body.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Spinoza claims that “in this way, the blood has the manner of a part, and not of a whole” (my emphasis).<sup>xxxix</sup> That is, having properties like being a whole depends on ways in which the would-be bearers of those properties are conceived.

If so, then facts about individuating bodies are sensitive to more than the presence or absence of persisting patterns of forces (his causal condition). The individuation of bodies also depends on how regions of extension are conceived in relation to other regions (if at all). The reason for this concept-sensitivity, according to Spinoza’s discussion in Ep32, is that the very presence or absence of the relevant sort of patterns for individuation depends on how broadly the relations of forces are being considered. This is what will enable him to affirm both the diversity and unity of the extended world. There exists a pattern of activity extending throughout extension such that, so broadly conceived, it is true that there exists a single individual, one that is co-extensive with all of extended space (see IIL7s). But there also truly exist other patterns of that activity – and hence distinct, pluralities of bodies – in virtue of there being narrower ways of conceiving that comprehensive pattern. Since (a) there are multiple patterns of activity, the instantiation of which varies according to how broadly or narrowly an array of substance’s extended power is conceived and (b) the presence or absence of these patterns determine facts about the existence and individuation of bodies, it follows that (c) facts about the existence and individuation of bodies varies, depending on ways in which extended regions are conceived.

Perhaps a less abstract, simple example will help flesh this out. There is a way of conceiving a region of space according to which its occupant is a collection of individual

bodily organs. The individuals are individuals in virtue the presence of a distinct pattern of physical forces. There is another way of conceiving that region, according to which its occupant is a single human body, whose parts – what had been conceived of as individual organs – are working together to preserve that body in existence over and against other surrounding forces (i.e., other bodies). Instead of a collection of individuals, there is a single persisting individual – a human body. And there is yet another way of conceiving that region, according to which its occupant is a mere part of a single, larger individual – say, an army – whose numerous parts are working together to preserve it in existence over against an opposing force – an opposing army. In this third way of conceiving the region, we are considering how the arrangement of forces within that region are so closely integrated with neighboring forces that they co-vary together in mutually supportive ways.<sup>xl</sup> And so on, Spinoza claims, until we reach a maximally inclusive way of conceiving the original region in relation to all the rest of extended space. So conceived, the region is occupied by a mere part of a maximally inclusive individual (“the universe” in Ep32), whose complex arrangement of parts co-vary in such a way that they together perpetuate the existence of that individual. None of these ways of conceiving are false, and neither are the resulting patterns of individuation, properly indexed. They are more or less limited, not more or less true or false.<sup>xli</sup> The deficiency of limited ways of conceiving the world lies elsewhere, as we will see in later sections.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza focuses mostly on sharpening the causal condition for individuation. In IId7, he writes, “By singular things I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that they are all together the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one

singular thing.” He reiterates that a necessary condition for being an extended body is to be a locus and source of causal activity. Recall that Spinoza identifies the essence of an object with its power, a power that is first and foremost expressed as a striving (conatus) to persevere in existence. Applied to IId7, this identification suggests that the most fundamental causal activity individuals are engaged in is self-preservation. Indeed, it is *because* there is an enduring pattern of activity, a conatus, that there is an individual.

In the Physical Digression (PD) following IIp13, Spinoza continues to explore exactly what the relevant pattern of forces (“motion and rest”) is supposed to be, the details of which I will not rehearse here.<sup>xliii</sup> But here in the PD, we also see the conceptual condition. In the scholium to his concluding lemma, Spinoza writes:

So far we have conceived [*concepimus*] an individual which is composed only of bodies which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness, that is, which is composed of the simplest bodies. But if we should now conceive [*concipiamus*] of another, composed of a number of individuals of a different nature, we shall find that it can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature... But if we should further conceive [*concipiemus*] a third kind of individual, composed of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways, without any change of its form. And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change to the whole individual (IIL7s).

This is similar to Spinoza’s stirring conclusion in Ep32. But why does Spinoza here refer to what we *conceive* about individuals? He could have simply said that *there are*, fixed independently in nature, different levels of individuals corresponding to the internal complexity of their parts. Or again, why does he not simply say that the entirety of the extended world *is* a single whole individual? Why does he insist on repeatedly making these claims about individuality with reference to the way in which the world is being conceived?

The reason that Spinoza is careful to speak in such qualified ways, on my reading, is because he thinks facts about individuation are not wholly divorced from facts about ways of conceiving objects. Conceived more narrowly, a region of extension will be occupied by a collection of individuals. (Keep in mind that these regions are simply extended loci of substance's power or activity that instantiate a discernible pattern.) Conceived more broadly, the same region will be occupied by a smaller number of more complex individuals. Conceived even more broadly, the same region will be occupied by a single, even more complex individual, whose complexity is a function of the fact that what had been conceived as distinct individuals are now non-individual, differently-natured parts of a single whole.

This reading of the concluding scholium of the PD is supported by Spinoza's claim in IIp24d:

The parts composing the human body pertain to the essence of the body itself only insofar as [*quatenus*] they communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed pattern (see the definition after L3C) and not insofar as [*quatenus*] they can be considered [*considerari*] as Individuals, without relation to the human body.

The demonstration begins with a seemingly straightforward, non-concept-relative claim: a body is an individual body in virtue of the instantiation of a fixed pattern of activity. But notice the contrast Spinoza immediately makes: those very same bodies do not compose a single whole Individual (the human body) if they are *considered* or conceived as individuals distinct from the human body. More carefully put, what had been conceived as an individual body is now conceived as a non-individual, mere part of a greater body.

In both passages (L7s and IIp24d), Spinoza claims that whether or not certain a region of extension is occupied by distinct individuals or non-individual parts of a larger

individual depends on how that region is conceived. But there is an even subtler point. That which, more narrowly conceived, is a distinct individual, may not be an individual more broadly conceived (and may not be identical to any individual, more broadly conceived). Though the quantified power of extended substance remains fixed, whether that power constitutes an individual depends on the pattern it instantiates (i.e., whether there is a preserving conatus here or not), which itself depends on how the locus of power is conceived in relation to other loci of power. But this means that whether or not *there is* an individual body in a given region of extension varies, depending on how that region is conceived. That is, the individuation of bodies admits of intensional variability, within a single attribute.

Although it may initially sound a bit far-fetched to include a conceptual side-constraint in a metaphysical theory of individuation, it is extraordinarily helpful for solving the earlier concern I raised about determinate bodies in Spinoza's system. I wondered how the indeterminate, undifferentiated nature of God's extended power could also have a determinate structure that individual bodies require. Here we see Spinoza's elegant solution. Let the facts of individuating bodies be sensitive to the manner in which God's extended power is conceived. Furthermore, let there be relevantly different ways of conceiving regions of that extended power. Finally, let the patterns instantiated by God's power in extended regions vary, depending on the extent to which the forces in a given region are conceived in relation to forces in other extended regions. Voila. By letting conceptual relations play a role in individuating bodies, Spinoza can generate the requisite structures for having a plurality of determinate bodies, without entailing that

extension qua attribute has any such determinate structure. After all, attributes themselves are just complete ways of conceiving substance.

If individuation is an intensional affair, extension conceived narrowly can consistently have properties that extension conceived *in toto* fails to have, despite it being one and the same set of forces across both ways of conceiving. We now have the required block between predications.<sup>xliii</sup> In this case, both “region *r* is occupied by a body” and “region *r* is occupied by no determinate body” can both be consistently true, so long as (a) the pattern of forces instantiated in *r* is conceived in different ways across the two predications and (b) the truth-values of predications of “is occupied by a body” can vary, depending on the ways in which *r* is conceived. But this is just what an intensionalist account of individuation yields. The only ontological commitments Spinoza needs to pull this off are (c) a plurality of ways of conceiving substance and (d) the existence of an overarching pattern of forces in extension that, the more narrowly one conceives instances of it, the more distinct patterns one conceives it as instantiating (think of a fractal). Regarding (c), Spinoza thinks a veritable *plenitude* of such ways of conceiving follows from the infinite nature of God (Ip16). And if science doesn’t yet confirm (d), perhaps Spinoza could argue transcendently that such a pattern is the necessary condition for the very possibility of a plenitude of individuals, a plenitude guaranteed *a priori* by Ip16 itself.<sup>xliv</sup>

In a looser sense, Spinoza’s appeal to the mediating work of conceiving relations allows what is undifferentiated, conceived in the broadest way – extended substance – to also be differentiated into all manner of discrete patterns and individuals, conceived in narrower ways. Elegantly, the ways of conceiving simultaneously generate the

determinate structure *and* block any entailments from extension narrowly conceived having determinate structure, negation, and limitation to extension conceived broadly also having determinate structure, negation, and limitation.<sup>xlv</sup> Such appeals to ways of conceiving is what allows Spinoza's otherwise undifferentiated extended substance to give rise to a plurality of discrete finite bodies without making those bodies unreal or illusory. After all, extension is itself but one way of conceiving God's power; if relativizing properties to ways of conceiving entails illusion or falsity, then the attributes are in just as much trouble. But, as I claimed earlier, conceptualism does not entail subjectivism or idealism in the case of attributes; and so neither does it in the case of individuating bodies.<sup>xlvi</sup> These broader and narrower ways of conceiving are not products of a human mind; in fact, human minds are just particular and determinate ways of conceiving God's power as thinking!

If we still wonder whether "extension in itself" or "extension as it is independent of how it is conceived" is determinate or not, then we have forgotten Spinoza's account of attributes (§2.1). Extension itself is just one complete way of conceiving substance; there is no "way of conceiving"-free standpoint available here. So extension, qua a complete way of conceiving substance, is without limitation or negation, and extension qua an incomplete and partial way of conceiving substance involves limitations – *limitations that are themselves partly generated by the incomplete way in which extension is being conceived.*<sup>xlvii</sup>

There are many unsettling aspects to such an account of individuation, a few of which I will consider in the final section of this paper. In particular, it may seem odd that there are multiply true ways of metaphysically individuating the world into bodies.

Shouldn't one of them be privileged over the others? Are we stuck in some relativist quagmire? But to understand Spinoza's reply and privileging mechanism, we need to make a quick detour through some of Spinoza's ethics. For, as we will see, it is within his ethical theory that Spinoza offers grounds for preferring broader ways of conceiving the world over others, though not in virtue of greater correspondence to the way-of-conceiving independent truth of the matter. Additionally, we will see in our detour how Spinoza applies his metaphysical theory of individuation in order to overcome an objection facing that very ethical theory. (The discussion of Spinoza's ethical theory will necessarily be quite selective and narrow in scope, however.)

### **§3.0 Egoism and Self-Interest in Spinoza**

It would be very easy to miss the ethical dimensions of the early parts of the *Ethics*. In Parts I-III, Spinoza seems to be discussing the ontological structure of the world, the relation between the mind and the body, and the nature of the emotions in value-neutral terms. It is not until Part IV that Spinoza begins to write about explicitly value-laden topics. However, the content of Part IV reveals that this simplistic division of the *Ethics* into the metaphysical and the normative is false. Consider IVd8:

By virtue and power I understand 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 through the laws of his nature alone.

With this single stroke, Spinoza infuses the rich metaphysics of the first three parts of the *Ethics* with a dimension of value. "Virtue" is Spinoza's term for the fundamental, intrinsically desirable good, a good that he identifies with power.<sup>xlviii</sup> More specifically, virtue is here identified with a set of intertwining notions that constitute an important core

of Spinoza's metaphysics: essence, power, explanation and adequate causation. The most salient point for us is that the virtue of an individual is a function of her activity in the world and the extent to which that activity is an act of self-expression.

As we might have expected, by identifying virtue with other fundamental notions such as power and essence, Spinoza thinks virtue is a very basic property of individuals.

As he summarizes it:

(i.) that the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being, and that happiness consists in a man's being able to preserve his being; (ii.) that we ought to want virtue for its own sake, and that there is not anything preferable to it, or more useful to use, for the sake of which we ought to want it (IVp18s).<sup>xlix</sup>

Spinoza believes that the successful accrual and exertion of power is the intrinsically most desirable and fundamentally best activity that individuals can pursue. (He expands the conatus doctrine from an effort to sustain oneself in existence to an effort to flourish in existence.<sup>1</sup>) The official status of his conatus doctrine as a conceptual truth entails that individuals in fact do pursue such power (though perhaps very confusedly); linking it to virtue implies that they *ought* to do so as well.

Spinoza later adds that the essence or conatus of an individual is the sole source of all derivative virtues: "No virtue can be conceived prior to this [virtue] (viz. the striving to preserve oneself)" (IVp22). Although this could be interpreted as an attempt by Spinoza to ground all goods in something value-free (virtue in self-preservation), his point is stronger. Spinoza thinks that self-preservation and flourishing are inherently virtuous and valuable activities. Indeed, he thinks these are the most fundamentally excellent activities in which individuals could engage. The possession and increase of power does not merely lead to one's excellence; rather, one's degree of virtue *just is* one's degree of power.

Spinoza's ethical egoism falls out of this identification of virtue and conatus. If the fundamental source of an agent's virtue is that individual's efforts to remain in existence and increase her power, then the fundamental moral interests and motivations of an individual will be generated by self-interested concerns.<sup>li</sup> Any morally appropriate motivations for pursuing the interests of others must ultimately be based on self-interested concerns (IVp20).

In the very important scholium to IVp18, Spinoza summarizes these egoist foundations of his theory of virtue in a passage I will refer to as [A]:

[A] Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead a man to greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can...[Further,] the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being, and that happiness consists [in doing so] (IVp18s).

This scholium is important for several reasons. It contains a rare acknowledgment by Spinoza that he is departing from his geometrical method of presentation. Prior to [A] in the scholium, Spinoza states that he will briefly summarize the rest of Part IV (55 more propositions), a fact that will be very important later:

But before I can begin to demonstrate these things in our prolonged [*prolixus*] geometrical order, I should like to show briefly here the dictates of reason themselves, so that everyone may more easily perceive what I think.<sup>lii</sup>

Why does Spinoza break out of his geometrical presentation in order to offer such a forward-looking summary? At the conclusion of the scholium (43 lines later), he explains:

I have [summarized the conclusions of reason on these matters] to win, if possible, the attention of those who believe that this principle – that everyone is bound to seek his own advantage – is the foundation, not of virtue and morality, but of immorality (IVp18s).

Spinoza seems well aware that his readers will have significant concerns about the egoist framework for his theory of virtue and happiness. (Spinoza unfortunately phrases his conclusion in psychological terms: “everyone is *bound* to seek his own advantage.” But as the rest of Part IV indicates, Spinoza also thinks that everyone *ought* to seek their own advantage.) As the context indicates, Spinoza has in mind the obvious concern that ethical egoism cannot provide appropriate motivations for developing other-regarding virtues, at least in cases where pursuing the interests of others would impinge on one’s self-interests.

And yet, Spinoza claims in the scholium, the egoist foundations of his virtue theory are not only *compatible* with a host of seemingly other-regarding duties and virtues; they provide sufficient moral reasons for agents to *wholeheartedly pursue* them. Spinoza articulates some of these principles later in Part IV: “The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men...” (IVp37). “A free man always acts honestly, not deceptively” (IVp72). Even within the scholium, a few lines after announcing his egoist program in [A], Spinoza claims in a passage I will refer to as [B]:

[B] From this it follows that men who are governed by reason – that is, men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage – want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honorable.

Spinoza thinks that the value and desirability of a host of other-regarding virtues follows directly from his starting point of ethical egoism. But how does he get from the self-interested basis of [A] to the other-regarding interests of [B]? I think this is one of the more interesting and innovative elements of Spinoza’s moral theory. Spinoza does not appeal to prudential concerns that might motivate a Hobbesian egoist toward a

contractarian basis for pursuing the interests of others.<sup>liii</sup> Rather, Spinoza's argument for pursuing the interests of others from the starting point of ethical egoism runs squarely through an applied version of his metaphysical theory of individuation.

To see this, let us look at Spinoza's argument in the scholium between [A] to [B]. He begins by claiming, immediately after [A], that there are "many things outside us which are useful to us, and on that account ought to be sought." Although this may sound like the start of a prudential argument, the very next line suggests that Spinoza has something different in mind: "Of these [external goods], we can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely [*prorsus conveniunt*] with our nature." Although Edwin Curley's translation, "agree entirely," is correct, a more telling translation of *prorsus conveniunt* might be "harmonize entirely."<sup>liv</sup> Spinoza is not making a contractarian point; his claim has little to do with what we would normally think of as intentional or tacit agreements between agents. His point is more metaphysically loaded, as his reference to "natures" suggests.

The most excellent goods, Spinoza claims, are those which harmonize with our natures, language that is reminiscent of his correspondence with Oldenburg on part-whole relations. Things that are maximally useful and excellent for me are things which can be so integrated with my own interests and abilities that together we function as integrated parts of a greater whole. That Spinoza has his theory of individuation in mind is reinforced by Spinoza's next sentence: "For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined [*junguntur*] to one another, they compose [*componunt*] an individual twice as powerful as each one."

According to Spinoza's theory of individuation, discrete individuals can compose a single, more powerful (and now, more virtuous) individual to the extent to which they are "joined" together in appropriate ways and jointly bring about effects. I noted earlier that Spinoza states a causal condition in IId7 for individuation. This condition states that seemingly discrete individuals together compose a single individual to the degree to which they participate in cooperative causal activity together.<sup>lv</sup> That is, their seemingly distinct natures or essences so harmonize and integrate that "they" work together in order to preserve the fused, greater individual in existence. More carefully, what *had been* a region of activity occupied by two distinct individuals becomes a region occupied by a single individual with its own essence, conatus, and power.<sup>lvi</sup> By comparison, the new individual has greater essence, conatus, and power than either of the previously distinct occupants had alone. Spinoza can now add the axiological dimension: the new individual is simultaneously more virtuous.

It may sound like I am reading a great deal into the space between [A] and [B], but consider Spinoza's next claim:

[C] Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so harmonize [*conveniunt*] in all respects that the minds and bodies of all should compose [*componant*], as it were [*quasi*], one mind and one body and that all should strive [*conentur*] together, as far as they can, to preserve their being and that all together [*simul*] should seek for themselves the common advantage [*utili*] of all."<sup>lvii</sup>

Passage [C] is then followed immediately by [B]. So [C] contains the core argument for why self-interested agents have morally appropriate reasons to pursue the interests of others, and I hope it is clear why I think Spinoza appeals to his theory of individuation in [C]. His description of the ideal echoes the picture from PD L7s, quoted earlier.

Spinoza's argument in [C] is simple enough. An agent's fundamental self-interest is to maximize her own power. Spinoza has already warned his readers that this endeavor is unlikely to succeed. There will always be antagonistic forces with sufficient strength to eventually overcome and thwart an individual's pursuit of self-interest (IVAx1; IVp4s). And, insofar as we understand the world to be a world of mutually hostile agents, each seeking to gain at the expense of others, it is difficult to see how our deepest self-interests will ever be fully accomplished. There exists, however, an individual whose power is so immense and whose nature is so complex that it is ever-successful in its striving for existence. This is the maximal individual of L7s and [C].<sup>lviii</sup> Spinoza's claim is that it would be in an agent's self-interest to be, or be a part of, such a maximally powerful and great individual. We will later worry about whether this really is in an agent's self-interest. Let us postpone this worry for just a little while longer.

If [C] is correct, what are the means by which we, as self-interested individuals, can become a part which works in perfect harmony with all the other parts of nature to bring about the perpetual power, adequate causal activity, and virtue of this maximal individual? Spinoza's answer again harkens back to his theory of individuation: conceive of oneself and others in a broader manner. That is, use reason to a greater and greater degree (IVp24), such that one conceives of oneself and others in a broader and more adequate way, according to which the seemingly "vain, disordered, and absurd" nature of the world is conceived more broadly as a harmonious whole whose parts "accommodate themselves in harmony together."<sup>lix</sup> Given his theory of individuation, this broader way of conceiving the world partly generates this "one body and one mind" pattern of individuation. According to such a pattern of individuation, what had been conceived as a

collection of antagonist, self-seeking agents is reconceived as integrated, mutually accommodating parts of a much greater whole. More dramatically, on my interpretation Spinoza's deepest reason for why we should each pursue the interests of our fellow human beings is that it is in each of our own interests to conceive others in relation to ourselves in such a way that we are not wholly individuated from one another.

This means that Spinoza's egoism, when combined with his metaphysics of individuation, does not promote pursuing the interests of others so much it promotes expanding the scope of the "ego" involved in traditional *egoism* and the "self" of *self-interest*. I do not, strictly speaking, have non-prudential moral reasons to pursue the interests of my neighbor. Rather, I have self-interested reasons to adopt broader, more adequate ways of conceiving the world such that the single individual which had previously been narrowly conceived of as two distinct individuals (my neighbor and myself) is in fact a larger whole that is more capable of sustaining itself in existence and increasing *its* power. The persistence of this greater individual requires, according to Spinoza's theory of individuation, that its parts so harmonize and cooperate that it continues to engage in integrated causal activities<sup>lx</sup> and to instantiate certain patterns of forces.<sup>lxi</sup> Hence, as such a part, I have reasons, based on the self-interests of the greater individual of which I am conceived to be a part, to pursue harmony and assist my neighbor in all sorts of ways. And, we saw him claim in [C], I have self-interested reasons for pursuing the interests of this greater whole.

Spinoza also emphasizes in the PD that the parts of individuals are non-essential ingredients; only the overall persistence of the patterns and activities of the individual whole is necessary for the persistence of the individual (and hence its conatus, power,

virtue, and self-interest). Hence, the part that, narrowly conceived, is me might be called to sacrifice itself for the part that, narrowly conceived, is my neighbor, for the sake of the greater individual of which “we” are “both” parts. Such an act of sacrifice, while appearing to be an altruistic action, is in fact an act grounded in Spinoza’s expansive egoism. The self-interested *ego* in this case is the greater, composite individual.<sup>lxii</sup> Admittedly, on my interpretation Spinoza does not really provide non-prudential grounds for developing other-regarding virtues. Nonetheless, he is able to capture the form of other-regarding virtues (including self-sacrifice) within an egoist framework. Spinoza’s innovation is in arguing that the self-interested moral agent can be much broader than what we would naturally think of as the distribution of moral agents, in virtue of his conceptualist theory of individuation. What makes his efforts here so exciting is how the cogency of this move turns on the cogency of the underlying bold metaphysics of individuation.

Indeed, what may sound like a metaphysically extravagant solution to a problem facing ethical egoism is really just a case of Spinoza systematically applying his theory of individuation to the individuation of moral agents. In normal ethical discussions, there is an implicit antecedent commitment to a particular way of individuating moral agents. But why should Spinoza assume that moral agents are carved up only in ways that identify agents with a particularly limited set of extended and mental properties (what, outside philosophy, we would naturally refer to as “my body” and “my mind”)? Spinoza does not deny that there is such a way of carving up the world into agents; he simply observes that, so individuated, those agents are doomed to failure in their most important pursuits. But,

Spinoza's intensionalist approach to individuation does not entail that *that* carving up of the world into agents is the only true – or even best – one available.

#### **4.0 Objections and Replies**

I suspect that the preceding account raises at least as many questions as it tries to answer. I imagine that some, if not most, of the concerns will be about the independent plausibility of what I have called Spinoza's conceptualist theory of individuation. I also suspect, however, that many of these concerns are generated less by the theory of individuation and more by Spinoza's ontological account of what it is to be a mode, an attribute, and a body. Other worries may attach to Spinoza's causal condition on individuation: can patterns of basic forces like motion and rest really be sufficiently discrete and yet malleable enough to be the full account of what it is to be an individual body? I will not try to defend Spinoza on independent grounds here. But I do want to briefly consider objections that are willing to grant much of Spinoza's systematic set-up and still argue that there are considerable problems. In considering how Spinoza would respond, we will also see more clearly the impressively systematic character of his thought.

Let us begin by returning to the conceptual condition on individuation. If a given region can be conceived in multiple ways, and the existence and individuation of bodies varies across these different ways of being conceived, is any one individual scheme privileged over the others? There may well be some existential angst behind this question. For there are ways of truly conceiving a region that, narrowly conceived is occupied by my body, according to which that same region is *not* occupied by an

individual body at all. Granted, the region occupied by my body shares lots of properties with the same region that is not occupied by my body.<sup>lxiii</sup> But they don't share *all* their properties; that's the whole point of an intensionalist theory of individuation. The latter lacks at least the property "is occupied by a body." But that means that under very broad ways of conceiving extension (PD L7s), my body – qua distinct individual body – doesn't exist! Egad! So does Spinoza have a means of privileging some ways of conceiving and some individuation patterns over others, and do the privileged ways include my body qua distinct individual?

We have already seen Spinoza's general answer in the previous section. The privileging mechanism is broadly moral in character. Some ways of conceiving the world are better than others, not because they more faithfully report the way-of-conceiving-independent facts. The broader ways of conceiving do not have the market on truth, I have argued, lest Spinoza give up on the plenitude of modes that he is clearly committed to. So of these multiple ways of conceiving extension, which should I, qua conceiver, adopt? How should we conceive of our place in the extended world, given the plenitude of ways of conceiving God? Should we each conceive of ourselves as having an individual body that is surrounded by a host of other bodies, each struggling to remain in existence over against and to the detriment of all the others?

It is here that we discover one of the most significant roles that Spinoza's ethical theory plays in his metaphysics. We saw Spinoza claim that we naturally strive to maintain and increase our own individual power of acting. He added that we *should* do so also; the very foundation of virtue is grounded in pursuits of self-interest, cashed out as an interest in increasing my own power. Later in Part IV, Spinoza argues that my own

power is increased to the degree to which I conceive of the world from a broader and more adequate vantage point (IVp24ff). Or, to better highlight the non-subjectivism, my power and virtue is increased to the extent to which I come to identify myself with that broader and more adequate way of conceiving the world. (In Spinoza's terminology, it is the extent to which I am identified with a mind that has more adequate ideas and a body that has greater power of acting.) We have seen him give an application of this very point in IVp18s, where he claimed that it is in our own interests to pursue a maximally broad way of conceiving the world, according to which there is only a single individual. So Spinoza believes that some ways of conceiving the world are better than others, and their superiority is grounded in the facts that (a) the array of individuals that exist according to broader ways of conceiving are more powerful and stable and (b) having more power and stability is the basis for all normativity in Spinoza.

But this only serves to re-raise a lingering objection from the previous section. We gave Spinoza his claim that it is in each of our self-interests to conceive of the world in the broadest, most adequate way. But consider just what this amounts to in the light of his theory of individuation. For according to broader ways of conceiving the world, the region that had been occupied by my body is occupied by no individual body at all, and contains only a mere part. But how can it be in *my* best interest to not exist as an individual? My life isn't that bad, we might say! Less dramatically, is my narrowly conceived individual self-interest identical to the self-interest of the greater whole that I am being urged to consider myself a mere part of? The answer seems to be "no," in which case the proposed integration of Spinoza's egoism and individuation is in peril.

However, the objection contains a false premise, according to Spinoza. The objection assumes that my individual self-interests are inextricably tied to the interests of one fairly unstable, relatively weak and short-lived pattern of forces, narrowly conceived. But, Spinoza asks, why should I identify myself with that particular way of conceiving the world and that particular pattern of individuation? *If* my personal identity was so deeply tied to my parochial features and interests, then Spinoza's egoism would hardly lead me to pursue broader ways of conceiving the world. However, the cost of such ties, Spinoza gently reminds us, would be an inevitable failure to ever secure those narrow interests in a lasting way. But I take the thrust of Spinoza's *Ethics* to be a concerted effort to deny that our self-understanding must be so inextricably tied up with such a limited body and mind.

Indeed, I take Spinoza's ethical program to be, at bottom, a program of re-identification.<sup>lxiv</sup> Spinoza's metaphysics, if true, teach us just how thin our individual natures really are. Our minds are not souls, or substances, or loci of noumenal freedom, or anything of the sort. Minds are simply collections of ideas that are often considered in inadequate and incomplete ways. There is no deeper fact or nature beyond custom and confusion that makes a particular collection of such ideas "mine." Similarly, my body is just a locus of forces that are arranged in a particular pattern; a pattern that is itself just one possible pattern imbedded within many others. There is no deeper basis for identifying one localized pattern of forces over any other as in some deep sense "mine," other than custom and confusion. But, Spinoza presses, why should we base our personal identities are something as thin as custom and confusion? Instead of pursuing projects of self-expression (where that "self" is just a limited mode), we ought to pursue projects of

self-transcendence, whereby we overcome the tendencies to identify ourselves with bodies and minds that cannot endure.

Happily, Spinoza tries to not only awaken his readers to the rather confused sense of self they naturally have, but also to show them how they can begin the process of re-identifying themselves with a much more stable, enduring individual. Spinoza's ethical program focuses on teaching his readers how to acquire more and more adequate ways of conceiving the world, expressed mentally as gaining more adequate ideas, expressed physically in gaining a more versatile body. But the intellectualist hue of Spinoza's ethical program follows quite readily from the intensionalist structures he sees organizing the world. Precisely because individuation admits of intensional variability, the road to re-identifying oneself with an eternal, ever-powerful individual is both open and accessible through an improved understanding. It is here we discover how the elegant interplay of Spinoza's ethics of individuation brushes up against some of the deepest and most elusive aspects of Spinoza's vision in Part V of the *Ethics*. I will be content if I have shown more clearly in this paper how Spinoza's theory of individuation and egoism intersect in mutually supportive ways. Personal identity and personal immortality – well, that will have to wait for another occasion.<sup>lxv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> This problem is *prima facie* distinct from the problem that Spinoza worries the most about, namely, reconciling the divisibility of extended bodies into parts with the indivisibility of an extended God. But I will show that these are both instances of the same general problem, and I will suggest that Spinoza's favored response to the divisibility problem is just an applied insight from his theory of individuation. (For more on Spinoza and extended parts, see my (unpublished) "Spinoza on Conceivability, Extension, and Mereology: A Reply to Shannon Dea," presented at the 2006 Central APA.)

<sup>ii</sup> Most of Spinoza's real work in defending the extended nature of God consisted in rebutting potential objections. (See, for instance, his animated discussion in Ip15s.)

<sup>iii</sup> For Spinoza's letters, I quote from Shirley's translations (sometimes with slight modifications for emphasis). An exception is Ep32, which is my own translation. For all other passages, I quote from Curley's translations, except where noted.

<sup>iv</sup> There is considerable interpretive controversy about whether we should supply a definite or indefinite article in Id6 ("*the* essence" or "*an* essence"). Some English translators (such as Shirley and Elwes) even

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go so far as to omit an article altogether, proper English be damned. (I have discussed the relation between substance, attributes, and essences elsewhere, and nothing of significance will turn on it here.)

<sup>v</sup> See also his definition of a body in IId1.

<sup>vi</sup> There are already two simplifications in this formula. First, it is unclear whether Spinoza is referring to only finite modes in Ip25c, or to both infinite and finite modes. In general Spinoza says very little about the infinite modes and in later parts of the *Ethics* he uses “modes” to refer to just finite modes. If infinite modes are included in the account of Ip25c, then there must also be a sense in which infinite modes are “unlimited,” in that they express an attribute in a pervasive and eternal way. (Thanks to Don Garrett for raising this point in personal correspondence.) I have little to say directly about infinite modes, preferring silence to conjecture in the face of Spinoza’s scant textual remarks. The second simplification comes in my referring to modes as “limited expressions of the nature of substance,” whereas Ip25c claims that they are limited expressions of *attributes* of substance. But a failure of transitivity would only occur, I think, in cases of cross-attribute modes. A mode of thought is a limited expression of substance conceived under the attribute of thought, but never an expression of substance conceived under the attribute of extension (despite all the identities of objects in that statement). So long as we stay within an attribute however, there is no reason not to think of modes as limited expressions of a given nature of substance. This reading is supported by IId1, which defines a body as “a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing (see Ip25c).” Here Spinoza does not include the reference to attributes and claims bodies directly express substance, though always conceived under the attribute of extension. So we should not read much into the less direct wording of Ip25c itself.

<sup>vii</sup> It is, nonetheless, “incomplete” in the sense that it is only one such comprehensive expression.

<sup>viii</sup> For instance, see IIp1d and TTP 4 (G III/60).

<sup>ix</sup> “The power to do what?” we might wonder. Spinoza’s answer, I take it, is that God’s power is ultimately the power to remain in existence; it is the power to *causa sui*. So God’s power has both a bearer (substance) and an object (the existence of substance). Spinoza also thinks that, in the case of God at least, there is no purely dispositional or unrealized power (Ip17s). All of God’s power is actively exercised (and ever succeeds in self-causation), and hence all of it is expressed under each attribute.

<sup>x</sup> Michael Della Rocca makes a good case for this in Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>xi</sup> See also KV II, xxvi, 8; C 148

<sup>xii</sup> From here forward, I will just assume that this “under some attribute” qualifier is always observed. What is interesting (and underappreciated) is that Spinoza appeals to the work of conceiving relations not just *across* attributes, but *within* each of them as well, as we will see. I do not here consider the question of whether God’s power also must always be conceived under some attribute or other (as Ip10d suggests), or whether there is an “attribute-neutral” way of conceiving God (as Id6 suggests).

<sup>xiii</sup> The clearest instance of the ontological distinctions is also the least informative as to what these modes actually are (Ip21-23). By contrast, Ep64 gives a few rather obscure examples, but offers almost no elaboration or ontological discussion. Other commentators have seen traces of the infinite modes in Spinoza’s early writings, most notably KV (G I/31ff.) and TIE (G II/36-37).

<sup>xiv</sup> For similar reasons, I also do not see the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in Spinoza’s ontology as some deep divide, over and beyond a division between ways of conceiving one and the same activity or power. I would, therefore, heavily emphasize Spinoza’s claim in Ip29s that the difference between the two natures follows “insofar as [*quatenus*] God is *considered* as a free cause.”

<sup>xv</sup> In his early KV, Spinoza rejects the Cartesian claim that bodies are simply collections of extended properties (“length, breadth, and depth”) by appealing directly to the nature of attributes and their powers (KV I, ii, 27; C 72).

<sup>xvi</sup> See especially the early propositions of Part Two of Descartes’ *Principles*. Descartes does later suggest a more dynamic basis for individuating bodies (see especially *Principles* II.23ff.), but it is not clear how this could be successful if the dynamic properties in question are extrinsic to matter. Shouldn’t individuation be an intrinsic affair, if anything is?

<sup>xvii</sup> Alexandre Matheron nicely brings out Spinoza’s need for such organizing principles, what he calls a “formal” element for individuating bodies alongside the “material” element (Alexandre Matheron, *Individu Et Communauté Chez Spinoza* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), 35ff.).

<sup>xviii</sup> The best discussion of how this might work is Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” in *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. K. Barber and J. Garcia

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(Albany: SUNY Press, 1994). I will later show, however, that this relational account is not the complete story for Spinoza.

<sup>xix</sup> G I/120 (From KV, Shirley translation)

<sup>xx</sup> In IId7, Spinoza emphasizes how the way in which forces of motion and rest bring about effects – as opposed to how they are arranged – partly determines facts about individuation. But in a causally closed, determinist world like Spinoza’s, the differences between the arrangement of forces at a time and the effects that an arrangement brings about (namely, changes in other regional activity) is insignificant.

<sup>xxi</sup> See P II.21

<sup>xxii</sup> §2.1

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ip34

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ep35, 36, 50

<sup>xxv</sup> There are dozens of passages in which Spinoza appeals to the existence of a plurality of finite bodies (e.g., most of Part Two of the *Ethics*). For the abovementioned character of bodies, see §2.1, Ip25c, Ep50, Ep36, and Ip34.

<sup>xxvi</sup> A.E. Taylor, "Some Incoherencies in Spinoza (I)," in *Studies in Spinoza*, ed. Paul Kashap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 200. See also Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 33.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Bayle famously raised simpler versions of this worry that could readily be handled with spatial or temporal qualifiers, but it is hard to see how such qualifiers could help in the cases just mentioned. Much of the recent discussion surrounding Spinoza’s pantheism and his theories of modes and inherence are wrestling with this very issue. How do we block certain properties that are truly predicated of modes from also being truly predicated of substance itself? Curley despairs of finding such a blocking mechanism, and proposes that Spinoza’s modes do not inhere in and so are not predicable of God. With Curley, we get the many, but at the cost of the one (Curley is clearest about his motivations and proposal in Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* and Edwin Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation of Spinoza's Monism," in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991). See also Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza*, vol 1 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 22ff.). At the other extreme, H.H. Joachim also believes that there is no consistent position for Spinoza, but he suggests biting the other bullet. The particularity of individual bodies becomes fundamentally illusory, according to Joachim’s Spinoza. Here we save the one, but at the cost of the many. (Harold H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1901), 107ff. I will have more to say about Joachim in n44). John Carriero has tried to disarm at least some of the impetus of Curley’s interpretation by denying the inference from inherence to predication and trying to capture a form of substance-mode inherence that nonetheless allows for the existence of individual, particular things through an historically informed appeal to trope theory (John P. Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995): esp. 256ff.). Putting aside questions we might well have about such curious ontological entities, Carriero is forced to maintain strong distinctions between causation and inherence, on the one hand, and subject and substance, on the other, though it is not obvious that Spinoza himself had such “deeply etched” distinctions as Carriero requires. (Indeed, one way of understanding many of Spinoza’s opening definitions and demonstrations in the *Ethics* is as a concerted effort to collapse these inherited distinctions in virtue of finding no principled reason for maintaining primitive co-extension without identity. I argue for this reading in my (unpublished) “Spinoza’s Conceptualism.”) Jonathan Bennett purses an elegant reconciliation strategy with his “field metaphysic” proposal (Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1984), ch. 4 and Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 142-50). Bennett explicitly tries to block the transfer of problematic bodily properties to being properties of substance. However, he achieves this by making the divide between unanalyzed bodily properties and the “properly analyzed” properties of substance so deep that it is hard to see how they are to be reconnected. That is, Bennett blocks predications of bodily properties to substance only by making the general identification between any property of substance and any property of a region constituting a body quite mysterious. I remain unconvinced with Bennett’s textual evidence that Spinoza intended there to be such a deep divide between say, the force of motion and some *je ne sais quoi* wave function in yet-to-be-discovered fundamental physics. It is also difficult to see how his field metaphysic solution would work for isomorphic problems in the attribute of thought. Indeed, *all* these responses share the drawback that they work, at best, in specific instances of the problem (in extension), or for specific relations (substance to

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mode). But they all fail to be applicable to all instances of the same problem, such as inter-attribute versions mentioned above. My proposal will have the added benefit of being generalizable and uniformly applicable to all instances of the one-and-the-many problem in Spinoza, and the fact that he appeals to it in a wide range of contexts seems all the more reason to recommend it as Spinoza's own general solution.

<sup>xxviii</sup> First Dialogue, KV I (S 46).

<sup>xxix</sup> I present and defend Spinoza's general strategy in *Reconceiving Spinoza* (ms), and apply it to a number of places in his metaphysics. This interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysical program (and, ultimately, its integration into his ethical program) draws on ideas previously developed in my dissertation, *Spinoza's Intensionalist Metaphysics: The Convergence of Metaphysical and Moral Perfection* (UMI, 2006).

<sup>xxx</sup> Again, to avoid confusion, I am not here concerned about cross-attribute ways of conceiving individuals, a picture that, while certainly bizarre in itself, is already familiar to Spinoza's readers.

<sup>xxxi</sup> David Wiggins has perhaps the greatest affinity with Spinoza's position, though the differences remain quite deep (David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Wiggins's conceptual realism concerns epistemic individuation ("singling out"), whereas I take Spinoza's account to be thoroughly metaphysical. Wiggins also embraces a hierarchy of Aristotelian natural kind concepts to do the sortal work, whereas Spinoza appeals only to the inclusion of more or less efficient causal relations within a given attribute. Undoubtedly, Spinoza's world of individuals will consequently be quite a bit blander, but it is a well-earned blandness, according to Spinoza (cf Ep55). (Of course, some of the lack of variety will be compensated for by Spinoza's postulation of an infinite number of attributes under which each individual will fall.)

<sup>xxxii</sup> Spinoza uses "to consider" and "to conceive" interchangeably throughout his corpus.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> In Spinoza's case, at least, I do not think this is due to what Jorge Gracia has diagnosed as a widespread problem in the early modern period of confusing epistemic and metaphysical issues in individuation (Jorge J.E. Gracia, "Christian Wolff on Individuation," in *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Kenneth F. Barber and Jorge J.E. Gracia (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 220). If nothing else, we have Spinoza's widespread use of conceiving relations *throughout* his ontology, which he clearly took to be metaphysical in character. Spinoza has very little interest, so far as I can tell, in developing anything like a theory of epistemic individuation.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> There is another sense in which Spinoza wants to *deny* the difference between privation and negation, namely when we are tempted to think about evil as a privation of some independent standard of excellence (see Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 266ff. and Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 228ff.).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Though, of course, some interpreters have suggested just this reading of Id4. It is widely held now, however, that the so-called "subjectivist" reading of the attributes is wrong, and I would agree. But it doesn't follow from the fact that Spinoza is not a subjectivist that he is not a conceptualist. It will be natural for limited individuals to adopt less adequate and more incomplete ways of conceiving things, and so it is natural to associate ignorance and incomplete ways of conceiving with human endeavors. But the existence of more and less complete ways of conceiving is not *just* a matter of human judgment.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Spinoza's KV, which predates Ep32, contains a more nuanced argument that a single force of motion alone would be insufficient to individuate matter. The force of motion must have friction, as it were, with the force of rest in order to generate the requisite patterns that constitute bodies (KV II.App2; C 155).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Whether or not Spinoza would agree with a principle of unrestricted mereological composition is a delicate matter. One might think that he would disagree, since the fusion of two regions occupied by individuals is insufficient in itself for the existence of a third individual. The two individuals must be conceived as standing in appropriate causal relations, relations which they will not always be conceived of as having. Nonetheless, there is another sense in which Spinoza agrees with the upshot of the principle. For it will be true on Spinoza's account that for any two regions, those regions can be conceived in a way such that they each instantiate distinct individuals, and they can also be conceived in a *different* way such that their fusion composes a single individual. So whether or not Spinoza would endorse this currently popular principle depends on whether we count it as an endorsement if someone is committed to the extensional upshot of a principle while disagreeing with its usual motivations and most careful formulations. (I am inclined to say it does *not* count.)

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Later in the letter, Spinoza identifies the relevant pattern as one that maintains "the same ratio of motion to rest," his favored formula in the *Ethics*.

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<sup>xxxix</sup> This tri-level schematic is not limited to these three tokened ways of conceiving a region. There is no reason why there could not be an even narrower perspective than the worm's (say, from an organism living inside a lymph). The downward division of a region into further subregions can continue indefinitely, in principle at least. Likewise, the middle perspective in Spinoza's example could be contrasted with a similar but only slightly broader perspective that conceives of the bloodstream as part of a further whole (say, one's body). And this too can be contrasted with a slightly broader perspective yet that sees *that* whole (the body) as itself a mere part of a further whole...and so forth. However, Spinoza thinks that we ultimately reach a maximum in the broadening direction: a whole which is itself a part of nothing greater but is "absolutely infinite." In the conclusion of this letter, Spinoza calls this maximal whole "the universe" or "substance."

<sup>xi</sup> The actual physical details of all this aren't anything Spinoza had much to say about, but he has something like this in mind with his talk of "mutual accommodation" and "harmonizing" of motions in Ep32.

<sup>xli</sup> William Sacksteder makes a similar point more elegantly in William Sacksteder, "Spinoza on Part and Whole: The Worm's Eye View," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert Shanah and J.I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1978).

<sup>xlii</sup> Almost all other discussions of Spinoza's theory of individuation focus on his remarks in the PD and exactly how they might be drawn out to outline a rudimentary set of physical principles. I have nothing new to add to such discussions. See Matheron, *Individu Et Communauté Chez Spinoza*, 143-189; M. Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974), 143-89; Lee C. Rice, "Spinoza on Individuation," in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Eugene Freeman and Maurice Mandelbaum (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1975); David Lachterman, "The Physics of Spinoza's Ethics," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and J.I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1978); Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," 84-89; Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 232-33.

<sup>xliii</sup> Notice that this block does not require Spinoza to reject inherence talk or particulars talk, or to posit mysterious lower level properties of substance, or to insist on a firm causation-inherence distinction. Furthermore, it is an instance of what others have seen Spinoza invoking to explain the coherence of a substance with multiple, self-contained attributes or a mode having distinct, otherwise inconsistent causal powers. (The best case for the cross attribute reading is found in Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Argument for the Identity Theory," *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993).)

<sup>xliiv</sup> I will not here consider Spinoza's argument for Ip16. See my "The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz" and chapter one of *Spinoza's Intensionalist Metaphysics* for ways of motivating this plenitude principle by appeal to the principle of sufficient reason. If that account is correct, such a marvelous pattern would be guaranteed for Spinoza, strikingly, by the very demands of reason itself.

<sup>xliiv</sup> It is very similar to one of the ways Spinoza preserves the divisibility of extended bodies without entailing the divisibility of extended substance. He writes, "matter is everywhere the same, and that parts are distinguished in it only insofar as [*quatenus*] we conceive matter to be affected in different ways, with the result that its parts are distinguished only modally, but not really" (Ip15s). Properties like divisibility are concept-sensitive in the way Spinoza here suggests precisely because the very individuation of matter into bodies depends partly on ways in which matter is conceived.

<sup>xliiv</sup> Here lies the great error in idealist interpretations of Spinoza, which would otherwise have strong affinities with my account here. Joachim is clear that finite modes are not illusory for Spinoza (though sometimes he is read as thinking just that). Rather, their individuation or distinctness is illusory, according to his reading. An important assumption that gets him this stark conclusion is vivid in the following passages. The first passage expresses a similar sentiment to the one I am advancing here: "On the other hand, if you take the particular things out of the system and regard them as particular, their completeness vanishes and their eternity disappears...and though everything in its context – in its dependence on its modal system – is complete, yet everything by itself is but a part which is incomplete in essence and power, or finite in nature and transitory in existence" (Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*, 78-9). But he also claims that "If we treat the parts of 'natura naturata' as independent of the whole, as having a distinctive character of their own, we are necessarily negating some of their real being: and that means that they have become to us finite or incomplete realities" (80; see also 77). That is, Joachim assumes that the true or "the real" corresponds only to the broadest way of conceiving things, according to which mode monism is true. But why should we attribute *that* view to Spinoza? There is something defective in the narrower, more limited ways of conceiving the world (and so conceiving as populated by a plurality of distinct finite

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bodies), but it is not a lack of truth or a failure of correspondence with the concept-independent facts. Part of the very nature of Spinoza's substance is to admit of limited ways of being conceived (Ip16 and Ip25c). The broadest perspective does not have a monopoly on truth, which is why Spinoza needs facts about individuation to be sensitive to varying conceptual perspectives. As we will see shortly, there will be, however, broadly *moral* reasons for favoring the broadest over the narrower according to Spinoza, providing him a privileging mechanism without losing the plenitude.

A second significant disagreement with Joachim is over the status of these ways of conceiving. Joachim unnecessarily emphasizes the subjective character of individuation. For instance, he writes, "The 'real world' as we thus apprehend it, is a world of separate things..." (79, emphasis mine). But the relevant point is not who is doing the apprehending. It is not that the world is full of separate things for us and not so for God – at least, not primarily. Rather, it is a function of conceptual relations (and their content) that determines whether the world is full of separate things or not – though it may very well be that we often assume a conceptual standpoint less adequate and narrower than God's and so tend to see separation and individuation where God would not. This is a similar error to the one committed by subjectivist interpreters of the attributes. The problem with the subjectivist reading is not that it affirms the conceptual relativity of attribute contexts; rather it is that it makes them relative *to us*, whereas the attribute contexts are relative to ways of conceiving substance (i.e., a mistaken blurring of subjectivism and concept-sensitivity).

<sup>xlvii</sup> Only partly, since the existence of this pattern of forces plays a role.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Bennett is surely right in objecting to Spinoza's quick, almost stipulative route to this conclusion (Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 297-99). I take Spinoza's identification in IVd8 (and its subsequent uses) to be one of the most under-argued points in the *Ethics* – and that is saying quite a lot.

<sup>xlix</sup> This is one of the few passages in which Spinoza speaks of happiness (*felicitas*), which he elsewhere links to blessedness (*beatitudo*) (IIp49s and IVApp).

<sup>l</sup> See especially IVp45s. (See Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*, 113-15.)

<sup>li</sup> Various nuances are required to spell out precisely the scope of Spinoza's ethical egoism here; but for present purposes, the general principle will suffice.

<sup>lii</sup> Curley is probably correct that *prolixus* is supposed to have a negative connotation (*pace* other English translations, which usually have "detailed"), but his "cumbersome" seems too strong. A more faithful rendering might be "prolonged" or "copious."

<sup>liii</sup> At other points in Part IV, Spinoza makes more Hobbesian appeals (see especially IVp35s).

<sup>liv</sup> It is the sense of "convenire" found, for instance, in Cicero's famous presentation of stoicism in Book III of *De Finibus* (e.g., III.73: "Nec vero potest quisquam de bonis et malis vere iudicare nisi...cognita...utrum conveniat necne natura hominis cum universa").

<sup>lv</sup> Although I have not mentioned it previously, it is clear that Spinoza thinks the causal condition can be partially satisfied, in which case some regions are occupied by what is an individual to a certain degree.

<sup>lvi</sup> This is one place where it is important to remember that IVp18s is supposed to be a summary of the later propositions. Bennett and Della Rocca have each struggled to make sense of Spinoza's later talk (esp. IVp29-35) of the "agreement" of natures as the basis for egoist agents to pursue to interests of others (Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 299-307; Michael Della Rocca, "Egoism and the Imitation of the Affects," in *Spinoza on Reason and the 'Free Man'*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 2004)). And they have each criticized Spinoza on the assumption that he is appealing to something like an alleged *similarity* between self-interested agents. But Spinoza's idea in IV18s is much stronger, and it is the stronger claim that we should read forward into IVp29ff. It is not two distinct natures being sufficiently similar that grounds usefulness and interpersonal morality. Rather, the very facts about individuation change when an agent embraces something maximally useful to her. We will see Spinoza draw the metaphysical picture in the moment, but consider an everyday example, such as the relationship between Roger Federer and his tennis racket. Spinoza's idea is that there is a literal sense in which Federer and his racket can unite to form a single individual, Federer-cum-racket, a "new" individual that pursues a single goal (broadly, increasing the power of Federer-cum-racket, or, more prosaically, winning a point). Having seen Federer play, I believe there is something intuitively right here, captured by my expression, "Wow, Federer's racket is just an extension of his arm; they became one on that point!" Or we might think of a team that works together in such a way that "they" become a single-minded individual in pursuit of a goal. In other words, Spinoza is claiming that there are instances in which an agent can become so integrated with aspects of her environment (including other agents) that they literally cease being distinct

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individuals. (Diane Steinberg comes to a similarly strong reading of these “joining” passages in Diane Steinberg, "Spinoza's Ethical Doctrine and the Unity of Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (1984).

<sup>lvii</sup> Although Curley's translation does not make it clear, the referent of “all” here is “men,” not “everything.” This represents a very puzzling aspect of Part IV, in which Spinoza focuses on species-specific individuation and virtues (see especially IVp37s1). Not only does this seem to cut against his thorough-going naturalism (IIIPref.), it cuts against his earlier claim in IIL7s (which I take [C] to be gesturing towards) that *all* of nature can compose a single individual with a single essence. Perhaps his emphasis on the harmony of *human beings* in [C] is textually driven by his discussion of specifically *human* goods in the later parts of the *Ethics*.

<sup>lviii</sup> Spinoza's use of “quasi” in [C] has prompted some interpreters to take his claim at less than face value (Steven Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?" in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101 and Judith Butler, "The Desire to Live: Spinoza's *Ethics* under Pressure," in *Politics and the Passions: 1500-1850*, ed. Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano, and Daniela Coli (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 125). But the “quasi” is simpler to understand, especially in the light of the previous section. This maximal individual is not, strictly speaking, a body or a mind, which are two ways of being that require determination and negation. But the strict metaphysical point is correct by Spinoza's lights: all of humanity – indeed all of nature – can be conceived as forming a single whole individual.

<sup>lix</sup> Ep30 and Ep32, respectively.

<sup>lx</sup> IIId7

<sup>lxi</sup> PD

<sup>lxii</sup> It is loosely analogous to a case where a soldier smothers a loose grenade in the presence of his commanding officer, thereby seeming to sacrifice himself for the benefit of another. If the soldier was a Spinozist and asked about his activity, he might say something like the following, “Yes it seemed like an act of self-sacrifice for the interests of my commanding officer (an other-regarding action). But my *real* motivation was to contribute to the flourishing of the greater army of which my officer is a fellow part” (an egoist action, but where the benefits accrue to the larger individual).

<sup>lxiii</sup> For ease of readability, I will now try to suppress many of the “conceived as” qualifiers.

<sup>lxiv</sup> It has broad affinities with the work of Harry Frankfurt on agency, commitment and identification, though with a wilder metaphysical picture behind it than Frankfurt has ever endorsed.

<sup>lxv</sup> <Acknowledgements>