

Vulnerability and the Common Good – Spinoza on Imagination, Reason and Politics

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Abbreviations for the works of Descartes & Spinoza

I use abbreviations that are standardly applied in the Descartes and Spinoza scholarship.

With Descartes's works *AT* refers to the authoritative editions of Descartes' original texts: *AT* = *Œuvres*, edited by Charles Adam et Paul Tannery. 12 vols. Paris: Vrin, 1964–1976.

while the following refer to the standard English translations:

CSM = *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited and translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991.

CSMK = *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, edited and translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1991.

To help readers to follow which work I cite, I include abbreviations as follows:

Med. = Meditations on First Philosophy, preceded by Roman numeral designating number of the meditation.

PP = Principles of Philosophy followed by § and Arabic numeral designating the paragraph.

PS = Passions of the Soul followed by § and Arabic numeral designating the paragraph.

In abbreviations and references of Spinoza's work I follow Curley in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*¹, except when referring to *Ethics* I slightly differ from Curley for aesthetic reasons. When referring to Curley's editorial notes in the Collected works I use 'C' and page number.

KV = *Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch, en des Zelfs Welstand* (*Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being* = Short Treatise). Not part of *Posthumous Works*, found first time in 1851. Composed somewhere early 1660s. [Note to self; check this.]

TIE = *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* = Treatise on the Intellect)

Ep. = Epistolae (Letters)

PP = *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum philosophiae, Pars I & II, More geometrico demonstrata* (Parts I and II of Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy" = Descartes' Principles), published in Latin in 1663, and in a Dutch translation in 1664.

CM = *Cogitata metaphysica. (Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts)*. Published as appendix to *Descartes' Principles*.

TTP = *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*). Roman numeral = Chapter. Arabic numeral = section. Page number given to Curley's translation in Collected Works. Reference to Gebhardt's edition is square brackets. Published anonymously in 1670.

E = *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (*Ethics*) = E followed by Arabic numeral refers to the part in *Ethics*, a = axiom, p = proposition, d = definition, d after p and arabic numeral = demonstration, 1, 2, 3, etc., refer to axioms, definitions, propositions, etc. c = corollary, s = scholium, Post = postulate, L = lemma, exp = explanation, Pref. = Preface, App. = Appendix, Def.Aff = the definitions of the affects at the end of Part III. NB! "NS" in brackets, see below.

¹DE SPINOZA, B. (2016), *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume II*. Princeton University Press, SPINOZA, B.D. and CURLEY, E.M. (1985), *The collected works of Spinoza: Vol. I*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

TP = *Tractatus politicus* (*Political Treatise*).

OP = *Opera posthuma* (*Posthumous Works*), published in 1677, containing the first printed editions of the *TIE*, *Ep.*, *E*, *TP*, and a(n incomplete) grammar of the Hebrew Language.

NS = *De nagelate schriften*, a Dutch version of the *OP*, published in the same year but without a translation of the Hebrew Grammar. Note that in Curley's translation the additional remarks that appear in *NS* but not in *OP* are marked in parentheses beginning with "NS".

Note to the Reader

The structure of this thesis-draft follows quite faithfully the way in which Spinoza's lays things out in his masterpiece *Ethics*. At many points this makes sense, but as Spinoza himself notes, following the geometrical order is not always the best way of putting things due to its cumbersomeness. For such reasons, it might be better that many passages would be more incorporated according to their thematic questions than to the order in which they appear in Spinoza – but I would like to hear feedback on this.

As an example, I am thinking especially the short metaphysical introduction. As it stands now, it is quite schematic and it might be a good idea to skip completely that kind of introduction, and rather give the relevant metaphysical premises as I go. But let me hear what you think of this.

Lastly, Spinoza is a tricky thinker in that there is a million little things one can get stuck in the foundations. I would have liked to present a lot more concerning his ethical and political ideas, but I simply got in many points stuck to his philosophy of mind, epistemology and philosophy of language, so that I managed to write very little concerning ethics and politics

proper. This is of course the reason why in the commentaries many scholars focus either on Spinoza's theoretical philosophy or on his practical philosophy. But, I see such approach problematic because, after all, Spinoza is, or at least tries to be, as systematic thinkers as it gets. Therefore, I try as much as I can to keep the theoretical and practical philosophies in dialogue and show the reliance of the one to another.

Accordingly, the importance of what Spinoza calls beings of reason to his view concerning the interaction of imagination and reason occurred quite late for me. I touch this topic, but especially what beings and reason and the corresponding dichotomy between nominal definitions and real definitions means for Spinoza's method and the proper interpretation of his philosophy remains to large extent a future work.

I will not have a separate section concerning the course of future thesis-work as I indicate my intentions in the text as I go.

Naturally, there will be occasional (only occasional I hope) defects in language which I apologize. What comes to references, I would really like to find a function in endnote which would allow the first reference to present the complete work while the subsequent references to a work already cited could appear with a shortened form – if any one knows how to do this, please let me know. Also, some of the references do not fit to the regular space – I do not why, some bug in endnote.

1. Introduction

“If men were born free they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free.” (*E4p68*).

This somewhat bewildering claim of Spinoza will be a good guide into the major questions of this thesis. The hypothesis itself immediately turns out a counterfactual conditional as one attends to Spinoza's definitions of men as necessarily limited beings and freedom as pure self-determination. But despite of its hypothetical nature, the proposition nonetheless expresses a fundamental truth in Spinoza's ethics: the crucial concepts of ethics are not

divine nor based on natural law or on some innate moral sense. Rather, normative concepts are human made. Moreover, because absolute freedom for Spinoza is a condition of pure activity, self-realisation and complete absence of suffering and passivity, ethics can be seen as a direct consequence of human finitude and vulnerability. In a sense, we can perhaps say that suffering is the experience of finitude and vulnerability is the permanent condition for finite beings.

Yet, while the goal of Spinoza's ethics is to construct a set of adequate reactions to the limitations of human striving which are experienced as sadness, at the outset Spinoza excludes any intellectualist conception of morality. The normative concepts like good and evil are not initially given as products of human reasoning and deliberation. Rather their meanings are constituted by the emotions that arise in human bodies as a consequence of the actions of other bodies on our bodies. These of course include the encounters with other human beings. Initially then, our conception of what is good for us is inadequate and reactionary: it is based on how other things act on us. Because such a condition is a necessary consequence of the way in which human beings come into and live as part of the world, many scholars have pointed out the seemingly impossible leap or miraculous transition from the initial passive state characterised by inadequate cognition of the world and ourselves, to the adequate cognition, activity and reason. In this thesis, I will argue for an understanding of this leap in terms of cooperation between imagination and reason, rather than seeing the leap in terms of reason enabling the breakout from inadequate imagination once and for all – as Spinoza's ethics is sometimes formulated in Spinoza scholarship,

Furthermore, the opening citation demonstrates something crucial about the style of Spinoza's philosophical exposition in the master piece *Ethics – Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*. There is within Spinoza's argumentation, even in the midst of the most rigorous deductions, a continuous, if often latent, appeal to the imaginative capacities of the readers. For example, to understand the proposition above requires abstracting human nature away from the causal network that in reality determines its being – simply because no human, according to Spinoza, is born nor remains free. Such an act of abstraction is essentially an act of imagination for Spinoza. For contemporary readers used to all kinds of hypothetical thought experiments in philosophical texts this hardly strikes as odd or problematic. But with Spinoza the appeal to imagination invokes questions. This is because the *Ethics*, at least on a somewhat standard reading, shows us a way leading out of the inadequate imaginative

perception of the world and guides us to reason and adequate understanding instead. Such a reading is supported with Spinoza's explicit claims according to which imagination is the source of human bondage to passions, gives rise to conflict within and between individuals, and leads, minimally, to constant emotional fluctuation but plausibly to full-fledged misery. Why then, one begins to wonder, Spinoza wants to constantly direct the minds of his readers back to imaginative ways of regarding things?

The answer lies, I believe, in the fact that imagination is not a defect in itself for Spinoza. On the contrary, it is a power of the mind. But despite being a power, imagination makes us vulnerable to not being able to make the best out of this power but to end up with actions that actually are contrary to this power and thus diminish it. In other words, imagination in the broad sense is the locus for human vulnerability. But on the other hand, it is also the locus where the human vulnerability can be lived in an empowering rather than disempowering way. In my reading, I will thus argue that Spinoza's ethics involves an emendation of not just intellect, as one of his celebrated works is titled, but above all imagination. In effect, I will argue that Spinoza's ethical aims turn out fully inadequate if they are seen, as some commentators do, as constituted only by reason. This means that Spinoza's philosophy is not itself free from imagination either. Rather it seems to me, that at times there is a need for persuasion of the readers by other means than purely rational; or, in Susan James's words:

“Philosophy, in short, cannot rely on judgement alone, and must borrow the tools of the Poet, who ‘doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter it’. She must use eloquence to move people to reason, and to embrace the conclusions to which their reasoning leads.”²

My research-questions are therefore the following:

1) What is Spinoza's conception of imagination and how does it relate to other types of cognition in Spinoza?

[In this draft I stick to the two first kinds, imagination and reason, and will not address yet the third one, namely intuition.]

² JAMES, S. (2000), *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated.p.216. James's citation is from Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie*.

2) How does Spinoza's account of imagination play out in his own philosophical method? Does Spinoza utilize imaginative means in order to persuade his readers of philosophical arguments? If there are such passages that show that he does use imagination in his philosophical argumentation, what does this mean for the interpretation of Spinoza's works?

3) What are the ethical-political implications of Spinoza's account of imagination and affects? What can Spinoza's ideas here tell us about human vulnerability and its relation to politics in general?

Lastly, my title for this dissertation reads *Vulnerability and the Common Good – Spinoza on Imagination, Reason and Politics*. At this point, it is only imagination and reason that will get a deeper analysis in this draft. As far as can, I try to make the connections to vulnerability, common good and politics transparent, but a more proper account is to be done in the future.

I leave this introduction intentionally short because the two following chapters 2.1. & 2.2. will offer plenty of introductory material before I move into the details of the Spinozistic system.

2. Imagination

I will start this section with a general introduction to the problems posed by imagination in Spinoza's thought. I present briefly the Spinozistic oeuvre and some of the main scholarly traditions concerning their interpretation. Finally, I aim to show briefly how this very question reflects our own "imaginative investments" or hopes and fears, and will thus pave our way to the next chapter where I consider different interpretative lines that different scholars have taken in order to answer the question how should Spinoza be read. [As the following two chapters are based on old ones, there will be quite much repetition later. But that might also be a good thing, because, I assume at least, that the two following chapters are rather easy to read and follow. But after them things get considerably more technical and possibly harder to follow.]

2.1. Introduction to the Problem of Imagination in Spinoza

The aim and focus of Spinoza's philosophy remains remarkable similar from the early works to the last. One of the most persistent themes is Spinoza's thorough and in many ways radical critique of imagination. It should be emphasised from the beginning though, that even if it is not hard to find pejorative references to imagination in Spinoza's works, imagination is not in itself bad for Spinoza. Quite the opposite indeed, as he calls it virtue of the mind insofar as it depends only of the nature of mind.³ Yet, even if imagination has powers that can be harnessed for the ethical goal of Spinoza, namely, the augmentation of power of acting, imagination by its very nature tends to reinforce vulnerability and lead people to act against their individual and the common good.

During the 17th century's rise of mechanistic world-view and its accompanying philosophical determinism many famous natural philosophers, including Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza were accused of jeopardizing people's commitment to traditional morals. With Hobbes and Spinoza especially, the accusations concerned their denial of free will of humans which was seen as leading into fatalism undermining moral responsibility.

It can hardly be said though, that Spinoza himself occupies a fatalist position. Even though he surely is a dedicated determinist,⁴ his philosophy puts from the outset enormous weight on the improvement of human capacities through human action. How is this seemingly paradoxical position to be understood? One way of approaching this problem would be through Spinoza's theory of imagination. This is because, on the one hand, imagination occupies such a central place in constituting human desires and strivings. On the other hand, imagination forms an important aspect of the mental that is open to cultivation, which according to Spinoza, will help us to live better lives.

³ This is of course another counterfactual conditional, because imagination is necessary tied to the affections of the body.

⁴ By determinism I here mean the commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason which states that all things or effects have a cause. One practical implication of such principle is that it rules out creation ex nihilo – a power which Spinoza famously denied of God. On some of the ambivalences concerning the sense in which Spinoza committed to the principle of sufficient reason see LIN, M. (2017), "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza" in *The Oxford Handbook on Spinoza* Ed. Michael Della Rocca'. Spinoza's formulation of the principle see *E1p11d* and *E1p8s2*.

In effect, if one reads Spinoza's works as a whole one cannot but notice the persistence of the problem of imagination. The very first published work of his, *The Metaphysical Thoughts* which appeared as an appendix in his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (1663)⁵, has a lengthy discussion on tackling questions concerning creations of imagination such as fictitious beings, beings of reason and transcendentals.

Furthermore, in the earlier manuscripts of the unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (circa 1659-62) and the *Short Treatise* (circa 1660-61) imagination establishes the kind of cognition which needs to be improved in order that the passage to adequate understanding and thus to human well-being is opened. These two works anticipate the grand work on imagination done in the *Ethics* (written between circa 1661-75).

While the weight in these works is in the epistemological problems posed by imagination (surely without politico-ethical implications, as we will see), Spinoza masterpiece in political philosophy, the *Theological-political Treatise* (written between 1665-69, published anonymously in late 1669 or early 1670) poses the openly political, one is tempted to say ideological, question of why do people fight for their servitude as if it was their liberation. While *TTP* was intended as a pledge for republican freedom and freedom of thought including freedom to philosophize, the Year of Catastrophe⁶ in 1672 threw the problem of imagination, as ugly as ever, straight back on Spinoza's face. The unfinished *Political Treatise* (written 1675-77) is the last attempt by Spinoza to check the destructive aspects of imagination by a well-ordered political state (*civitas*). The reader of *TP* will notice that emphasis is on security rather than on freedom, as it had been in *TTP*.

⁵ The dating of the early works of Spinoza is a matter of some scholarly dispute. It was long thought that the *Short Treatise* would be Spinoza's first work, but especially the work of Filippo Mignini has convinced much of the scholarly community that the *Emendation of the Intellect* is slightly earlier. On dating issues see Edwin Curley's "General Preface" in SPINOZA, B.D. (1985), 'The Collected Works of Spinoza', in CURLEY, E.M. (ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁶ France's Louis XIV tried to integrate the Netherlands into his sphere of influence which was long prevented by the skilful diplomacy of Johan de Witt. His efforts were nonetheless cancelled out as Louis finally completed his plans for the encirclement of the Provinces with an alliance with England, Cologne and Münster in January 1672. Their armies occupied much of the Provinces in 1672 and this year ended the first stadholderless period as De Witt brothers were murdered by an angry mob and William III made stadholder. See ISRAEL, J.I. (1995), *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness and fall : 1477-1806*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. p.803.

It is, I think, fruitful to keep in mind that there are at least four different aspects that one should take into account while studying the theory of imagination in Spinoza. The first two I've just mentioned, namely, the epistemological and the political, the former concerning what kind of knowledge and understanding are involved in imagination, while the latter deals with the questions of what role does imagination play in human action and to what extent that role can be modified. The third raises the question concerning the extent to which the imaginative means are used in Spinoza's own writing – a question which is inherently tied with the question of how should one read Spinoza and what kind of implication one can draw from his thought. This last point connects to the much-debated argument between reading history of philosophy in its own terms or for contemporary needs.

[The question of Spinoza's use of imaginative writing is a tricky one. I will address this question in various instances, but in order to say anything definitive of other than the political works, like TTP (see Ch. 4.2.), remains a future effort.]

But, following Quentin Skinner, it seems that the answer to the third question has direct consequences to the ways in which we understand Spinoza's intentions with the former two. This is to say, that the interpretation of Spinoza's epistemological and political points concerning imagination are intertwined with our understanding of Spinoza's historical situation, with its specific problems and the normative vocabulary it made available.⁷ And here a fourth aspect lurks in. The third question concerning the proper method of interpretation seems to be, at least partly, constituted by the interest of looking at Spinoza in the first place. To what extent then, we might ask, it is possible to read Spinoza in order to try to sincerely understand him as he himself wanted to be understood, and to what extent, on the other hand, we read Spinoza with the expectations, coloured by our own imagination, of understanding our own present through him.

It seems thus, that dealing with Spinoza's theory of imagination, one is from the outset dealing with a complex interplay of not just theoretical and practical philosophy but also rhetoric and historical hermeneutics – not to mention psychology and philosophical anthropology.

⁷ SKINNER, Q. *The foundations of modern political thought: Vol. 1, The Renaissance*. P. xii – xiv.

What is obvious from Spinoza's writings is, not too differently from the Stoics, that imagination makes human beings vulnerable to interpret the world in ways that diminish their capacity to govern their emotions and to cooperate with others. The ancient problem of *akrasia* is at the heart of Spinoza's problem with imagination witnessed by the words of Ovid's Medea quoted in a crucial point in *Ethics* where Spinoza wonders the power of passions over reason: "*Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor*"⁸. But the locus of imagination is not just an individual as the problem of imagination is from the outset rather in the public sources of imagination. In effect, Spinoza poses the problem of collective imagination with such a depth that Louis Althusser finds in Spinoza "the first historical form a theory of ideology."⁹ Other great thinkers of imagination often said to have been influenced by Spinoza's theory of imagination include Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan¹⁰. Friedrich Nietzsche accordingly admits the similarity of his own ideas and those of Spinoza – although Nietzsche apparently read Spinoza rather late in his life.¹¹

Be the direct influences as they may, what all the mentioned thinkers share is the material conception of imagination of fantasy or ideology. Being truthful to his determinism Spinoza thinks that imagination cannot create anything completely new outside the causal framework of which the human body and the mind are part of. Everything that imagination produces is based on the affections that other bodies have caused in the body of the imagining individual. Imagination surely produces fictions, such as winged horses, but this is only because the elements of which the fictions consists of have been produced by the mind in the material

⁸ *E4p17s*, "I see and approve the better, but follow the worse." Trans. Curley in *Collected Works*, vol. I, p. 554.

⁹ ALTHUSSER, L. (1998), *The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza in The new Spinoza*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P. 9. The reader might wonder in what sense the notoriously difficult meaning of 'ideology' corresponds to imagination or the other Spinozist terms prejudice and superstition. I will come back to the terminology issue below. Suffice it here to say, that if we by ideology intend to mean 'neutrally' and generally a belief system which includes certain notions concerning human nature, society and politics which produce particular problems and specific concepts and actions by which such problems are to be solved, then it is, I think, unproblematic to speak of Spinoza as a theorist of ideology. This characterization does not yet take any stance towards the specific nature of a given ideology or what kind of function it might play in social affairs. But these latter questions are also an integral part of Spinoza's framework of explanation.

¹⁰ Marx read *TTP* as a young man and composed his own version of it by clipping and arranging Spinoza's passages anew in his notebook. The extent to which Freud read Spinoza has been a matter of scholarly debate. [Fix Reference].

¹¹ Nietzsche praises Spinoza for example in his letter to Franz Overbeck, written on July 30, 1881. For a detailed contextualization of Nietzsche's sources regarding Spinoza see SOMMER, A.U. 'Nietzsche's Readings on Spinoza: A Contextualist Study, Particularly on the Reception of Kuno Fischer', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 43, 156-84.

encounters via senses. As Cornelis de Deugd remarks, here Spinoza stands in a palpable contrast to the romantic tradition (Kant, Schelling etc.) in which “imagination has been conceived of in terms of mental activity and creative power.”¹² For the Romantics, imagination is not just imitation, even if ‘creative’, but essentially creating completely new worlds. Nevertheless, Spinoza is but adhering to the standard view in early-modern philosophy which was already put forward by Descartes in the *Discourse* and can be found as late as in David Hume’s *Enquiry* (1748).¹³

For a contemporary reader, Spinoza’s conception of imagination (*imaginatio*) might nonetheless seem hopelessly broad as it includes everything from sense-perception and memory to dreams and hallucinations. The immediate problem with this is that it seems odd to place things under same category when they seem to differ greatly with one another. Take for instance fictitious ideas, such as the winged horse, or false ideas such as imagining¹⁴ that the sun is only 200 feet away, and modes of thought which Spinoza calls aids of imagination or modes of perceiving, like number, time, measure and species.¹⁵ Now what do these have in common? Obviously, the idea of a winged horse and the idea of the number ten have

¹² Deugd, C. d. (1966). *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge*, Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V. p.74, 79-80.

¹³ Fix reference to Descartes. Hume writes: “But though our thought seems to possess this unbounded liberty, we shall find, upon a nearer examination, that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience. When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted.” *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section II:5. For similar ideas about the associative power of imagination in Descartes see *Discourse on the Method*, part IV:40 in CSM vol 1.

It might be worth noting here that Kant seems to stand another foot in the early modern conception and the other in the Romantic one. For example, in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant gives imagination an essential part in the transcendental synthesis and thus in the transcendental possibility of knowledge itself (A 119), while in the second edition six years later transcendental synthesis has been replaced with transcendental schematism which distinguishes figurative synthesis of the imagination from the intellectual one, namely the transcendental schema (B 152). For illuminating remarks on this see Chiara Bottici: “Another Enlightenment: Spinoza on Myth and Imagination” in *Constellations* Volume 19, No 4, 2012, p- 592-593. Later in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) Kant presents imagination as a mediator between the sensible and the non-sensible or intellectual: on the one hand imagination can represent former sensations, on the other, it can produce completely new presentations. On this double role of imagination see Samantha Matherne: “Kant’s Theory of Imagination” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*. Ed. Amy Kind. Routledge 2016.

¹⁴ ‘Imagining’ here means the same as believing i.e. affirming an idea as truth or adequate. But it should be noted that for Spinoza the imagination itself never contains error. The error is a consequence of the mind not having another idea which would prevent the mind from affirming the thing which the imaginary idea posits as really existing (E2p17s).

¹⁵ ‘Aids of imagination’ see Letter 12 to Lodewijk Meyer, Rijnsburg 20 April 1663. ‘Modes of perceiving’ see CM, 1/235, 37 - 1/236, 2, p. 300-302 in *The Collected Works*.

different kind of epistemological status. But their ontological status is the same as they both are ideal entities dependent on the mind that entertains them, not objects in the world. This is what explains Spinoza's categorization of the stuff that belongs to the "knowledge of the first kind" that consist in opinion or imagination (*opinion, vel imagination*) (E2p40s2).

Such knowledge springs primary from two sources: from confused and mutilated ideas that the fortuitous sense experience (*experientia vaga*) presents us with, and second, from signs (*ex signis*) corresponding to the recollection of things imagined in the past that are associated with symbols and words. The classification of different kinds of knowledge serves to highlight a dichotomy of tremendous importance in Spinoza's thought; namely, that there are in the human mind two different orders – one subjective, that is, the order of imagination which follows the order 'of the affections of the human body' or the 'fortuitous experience', and one objective¹⁶, namely the order of the intellect which produces ideas that explicate the nature of their objects (*ideatum*). The former order necessarily produces ideas according to individual experiences and emotions which render such ideas particular, or tied to the mind that produces them. This explains their imperfect epistemological nature as such ideas do not reproduce real beings but fortuitous human experiences. The latter, in contrast, produces ideas in an identical manner to the perfect intellect, or God. Such ideas express the formal being of their object perfectly in the attribute of thought (see Ch. 2.3.).

Focusing on such epistemological matters some of the dogmatic rationalist interpretations of Spinoza have long seen Spinoza as hostile to the "lower" kinds of cognition (or knowledge) and taken his philosophical aim to be the demonstration of the elevation from the emotional, imagination governed, way of life towards the life of reason purified from passion and imagination.¹⁷ Such one-sided readings were forcefully argued against already in the 1960s

¹⁶ Here I use 'objective' in its contemporary sense. I wish to remind the reader that in early modern vocabulary both of the mentioned orders are objective in the sense that they are in the mind (hence the distinction is between what I call subjective and objective is properly speaking between imagination and reason). The early moderns contrasted the formal being of a thing which is the mind-independent being of the thing outside the mind, while the objective being is the being of the object as it is ideated in the mind, i.e. ideal being.

¹⁷ A good example of such reading is found from James C. Morrison: "Spinoza's moral rationalism means that the emotions, which are linked to the imagination and senses, are the source of unfreedom, vice, and unhappiness. This implies that the good life is possible only if the passions are mastered; and this, Spinoza holds, can only be done by reason and the intellect. Herein lies, I believe, the ultimate basis of Spinoza's philosophical neglect of aesthetics. For once the good life is identified with the life of reason, and reason is opposed to emotion, imagination, and sense, art and beauty become suspect. They are regarded as either irrelevant or hostile to man's highest and deepest interests. This leads to their being either trivialized into

and 70s by, for example, Edwin Curley, Gilles Deleuze and C. de Deugd¹⁸, but they tend to keep popping up every now and then. Nonetheless, the tradition that emphasizes the role of experience and imagination in Spinoza's thought continues in the works of, for instance, Pierre Francois Moreau, Laurent Bove and Chantal Jaguet.¹⁹ In the Anglo-American literature the works of, especially Susan James, Michael Rosenthal and Justin Steinberg, have recently complicated the somewhat received view according to which imagination is a mode of thought without inherent value and which needs to be cultivated into reason.

The gist in these recent works is to show that imagination and sense-experience is much appreciated by Spinoza even in the epistemological issues. But the importance of imagination becomes all the more tangible when one moves to the field of ethics and politics. This is because reason can never occupy an exclusive position in governing human affairs. As powerful a tool reason is, imagination needs mostly to be fought by means of imagination: "That's how men are made:" writes Spinoza, "what they conceive by the pure intellect, they defend only with the intellect and reason; but what they think because of affects of the heart, they defend with those affects."²⁰ Now, this is not to say that we should turn our back to the affects of the heart, as the rationalist interpretation would have it, but to combine the powers of the imaginative and rational cognition into something which one might call a rational use of ideology²¹. Such an effort, of course, requires the science of the affects which will not just explain why people tend to think certain things on basis of the affects they suffer, but also demonstrate the origins of the affects and how one can modify them.

harmless distractions or vilified as corrupting seducers." MORRISON, J.C. (1989), 'Why Spinoza had no aesthetics', *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 47, 359-65. P. 363.

¹⁸ CURLEY, E. (1973), 'Experience in Spinoza's theory of knowledge', DELEUZE, G. (1968), *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, DEUGD, C.D. (1966), *The Significance of Spinoza's First Kind of Knowledge*. Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V.

¹⁹ MOREAU, P.-F. (1994), *Spinoza: l'expérience et l'éternité*. Paris: Presses univ. de France. BOVE, L. (1996), *La stratégie du conatus: affirmation et résistance chez Spinoza*. Vrin. JAQUET, C. (2018), *Affecs, Actions and Passions in Spinoza: The Unity of Body and Mind*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press [2015].

²⁰ TTP VII/5, p. 170-171 [III/98].

²¹ The fully rational use of ideology taken as a realizable goal is a promise that Spinoza's philosophy will not fulfil (such a Platonic position is not available); but it is to be taken as a regulative ideal, something towards which to work our belief and value systems. In fact, such a dichotomy between constructive and destructive use of imagination is essential for Spinoza. The former is what I mean with rational use of ideology.

As he was living in a society burdened by an intense ideological strife, Spinoza experienced first-hand both the constructive and destructive functions of collective imagination. While the former, such as the idea of the Dutch liberty²², helped the Dutch to fight for common goals in the precarious early times of the Republic, the latter, such as religious orthodoxy, led into numerous violent uprisings and purges in the political, intellectual and religious institutions of the United Provinces.²³ Consequently, the possibility of a philosophical life itself is proved to be dependent on the collective imaginations cultivated in the society of which the philosopher is a member. At the same time, if philosophy is to have any effect to the society as a whole, the strictly philosophical arguments must be accommodated to the level of understanding of the audience – as Spinoza himself puts this in a lengthy quote from his *Theological Political Treatise*:

“But because deducing a thing solely from intellectual notions very often requires a long chain of perceptions, plus extreme caution, mental perceptiveness, and restraint—all of which are rarely found in men—men would rather be taught by experience than deduce all their perceptions from a few axioms and connect them together. It follows that if someone wants to teach a doctrine to a whole nation—not to mention the whole human race—and wants everyone to understand him in every respect, he is bound to prove his doctrine solely by experience, and for the most part to accommodate his arguments and the definitions of his teaching to the power of understanding of ordinary people, who form the greatest part of the human race. He should not connect his arguments, or give definitions, according as they serve to connect his arguments better. Otherwise he will write only for the learned, i.e., he will be intelligible only to very few men, compared with the rest.” (*TTP*, V:36, III/77).

Now what is Spinoza’s position in all this? As we remember ‘proving by experience’ is part of the imaginative register. But to whom is Spinoza writing: the learned, the religious, the common (Dutch) people or, better, the whole of human race? This question seems to have a privileged place in forming the interpretative framework for grasping Spinoza’s doctrines.

²² During the Dutch Revolt the idea of Dutch liberty was often used to oppose the Spanish slavery, and the Dutch people framed as freedom loving. Furthermore, the idea of liberty was tightly interwoven with the Dutch privileges that the provinces and their towns had been extorting and collecting from the late Middle-Ages onwards. The privileges were written assignments of certain freedoms and rights in production of goods, commerce, taxation and especially decision-making and formation of the political institutions of the cities. Later the Dutch republicanism drew from this conception of liberty and argued for republican principles against the Monarchical power strivings of the Orangists. See GELDEREN, M.V. (1992), *The political thought of the Dutch revolt, 1555-1590*. Cambridge [England];New York; : Cambridge University Press. P. 26-29, 116-118.

²³ The irony in the insisting of the Dutch freedom by the Arminians was of course their aim of purging the Counter-Remonstrants from public positions in the Church, hence proving that the common goal of the Dutch did not necessarily include all the interests of the Dutch. See ISRAEL, J.I. (1995), *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness and fall : 1477-1806*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. p. 499.

But it also takes us back to the methodological questions that I mentioned early in this paper: what kind of interests or audiences are we in general serving when we turn back to study historical figures? What am I doing with Spinoza? What kind of pitfalls does one face in interpreting past doctrines? Let me thus try to clarify some of the relevant positions that one might need to consider when forming the method of reading Spinoza on imagination.

2.2. How Should One Read Spinoza?

We should begin by noting that Spinoza's writing strategy seems to be itself based on his theory or imagination, reason and more generally on human nature.²⁴ This is illustrated at various points where Spinoza either gives guidelines for his readers or hints to the intended audience of his writings. Such comments often include reference to the prejudices and passions of certain groups of people, like theologians or the commoners.²⁵ Moreover, it can hardly be stated that even Spinoza's individual works form an easily graspable coherent whole, not to mention his whole corpus. Consequently, the answer to the question of how should one read Spinoza can, and should, vary from work to work – sometimes, perhaps, even from passage to passage.²⁶

For instance, it is commonly agreed that *TTP* is meant as an intervention to the specific political predicament of the Dutch Republic of the 1660s and that its correct interpretation bears a relation to the knowledge of the circumstances that the works tries to address. Furthermore, Spinoza writes explicitly in the introduction to *TTP* that he aims to address those educated minds, the potential philosophers, who nonetheless affirm the authority of the Scripture and think that philosophy should be the handmaiden of theology.²⁷ But we should not think such an audience to be univocal nor that it constitutes the only target of Spinoza's²⁸.

²⁴ At a very general level this statement sounds like stating the obvious as any given writer imagines at least a possible audience for the text, and such imagination surely is constituted by the author's ideas concerning the faculties and temperaments of his/her audience. But to show a detailed support for this claim would need a lot more careful work that I can do at the moment.

²⁵ See for instance *TTP* preface 33-35, p.75, [III/12], E1app., E3pref., E4pref.

²⁶ See JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. pp.4-5.

²⁷ *TTP* preface 33-34, p.75, [III/12].

²⁸ As Michael Rosenthal notes, in the Letter 30 to Oldenburg Spinoza mentions three motivations to write the book of which one is to remove the opinion of common people claiming Spinoza to be an atheist. The other two mentioned are to counter the prejudices of the theologians and to defend freedom to philosophize. Rosenthal draws the conclusion from this that the intended audience of *TTP* was 'most

Rather the *TTP* moves at various different levels and throws critique also to groups that were close to Spinoza and certainly did not think that philosophy should be the handmaiden of theology, such as the Dutch Cartesians and Republicans of the States-party. Nor is Spinoza keeping himself exclusively to the question of authority of the scripture as he delivers arguments against the political strivings of the strict Calvinist and Royalist factions of the United Provinces.²⁹

On the other hand, the *Ethics* is equally often seen as addressing untimely philosophical questions where the context of writing does not seem to demand as urgent attention. Yet any careful reader of *Ethics* will soon notice that the flow of the geometrical demonstrations is frequently interrupted by freer, and at times polemical, expression of the scholia, prefaces and appendixes³⁰. It seems clear that some of the material develop in *TTP* finds its way into the *Ethics* – as the appendix of the Part I concerning some common prejudices hints³¹ – but the question remains to what extent the rhetorical tools and imaginative means utilized in *TTP* are used in *Ethics*. It has been suggested, and I tend to agree, that the *Ethics* itself utilises in its textual expression all the three kinds of knowledges namely imagination, reason and intuition.³² But this amounts then to admitting that the imaginative means of expression play a role even in the *Ethics*.

people'. This conclusion is slightly problematic in the light that, which Rosenthal oddly enough notes, Spinoza prevented the translation of *TTP* into Dutch in February 1671, only a little more than a year after its publication (see *Ep.* 44). At this time, the efforts of banning *TTP* were already considerable although the official ban had to wait until 1674. See ISRAEL, J.I. (2001), *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. pp. 275-285.

²⁹ See JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. P. 4-5.

³⁰ Deleuze famously declared that “There are thus as it were two *Ethics* existing side by side, one constituted by the continuous line or tide of propositions, proofs and corollaries, and the other, discontinuous, constituted by the broken line or volcanic chain of the scholia.” DELEUZE, G. (1990), *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza*. NY: Zone Books. P.345.

³¹ See for instance BALIBAR, E. (1998), *Spinoza and politics*. Verso. P. 9 On the relationship between the metaphysics of *Ethics* to the *TTP* see MELAMED, Y.Y. (2010), 'The metaphysics of the Theological-Political Treatise', in MELAMED, Y.Y. and ROSENTHAL, M.A. (eds.) *Spinoza's' Theological-Political Treatise': A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Here one should also remember Negri's thesis according to which the two first parts of the *Ethics* were finished before writing the *TTP*, while the latter three were worked after the publication of *TTP*. See NEGRI, A. (1991), *The savage anomaly: the power of Spinoza's metaphysics and politics*. Minneapolis;Oxford; : University of Minnesota Press.

³² See PARKINSON, G.H.R. (1969), 'Language and knowledge in Spinoza', *Inquiry*, 12, 15-40. Gilles Deleuze “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics’” in MONTAG, W. and STOLZE, T. (1998), *The new Spinoza*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Spinoza's works hence beg the question of a proper method of interpretation. This question has been an object of colourful debate ever since Leo Strauss claimed in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), that due to the risk of persecution Spinoza needed to write between the lines, sometimes obscurely, and when he actually says orthodox things the intelligent readers should understand that he does not believe what he says.³³ Strauss's thesis has been objected to harsh critique and most of the Spinoza scholars today tend to reject his claims. This is due to, as Skinner among others argues, Strauss not giving any valid criteria for what counts as criteria for books to be written under a risk of persecution nor criteria for establishing the proper interpretation – other than being an intelligent, careful reader.³⁴ But even though Strauss might have formulated his thesis poorly, it is clear, as Curley shows, that the fundamental point of Strauss, according to which Spinoza does say things which he does not believe to be true, is valid.³⁵

Consequently, it seems essential to everyone who aims at doing rigorous work on Spinoza's theory of imagination – and of the political framework to which it is fundamentally related – to argue for the line of interpretation they choose. Otherwise, as Strauss worries, one risks of producing understanding of “not Spinoza, but a figment of one's imagination.”³⁶

Schematically put, and following Richard Rorty's categorization³⁷, the works written on Spinoza have tended to follow the following genres of interpretation: rational

³³ STRAUSS, L. (1988), *Persecution and the art of writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³⁴ SKINNER, Q. (1969), 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8, 3-53. P.21

³⁵ Curley also criticises Strauss of arguing his position badly and leaving the door too wide open for imposing whatever doctrines to Spinoza, but he agrees with the fundamental point Strauss was trying to make, nicely captured in the following: “Not only does Spinoza not always write what he thinks, he also does not always think what he writes.” (“Editorial Preface” in *The Collected Works vol. II*, p. 54). See the referred passage for a good example given by Curley.

³⁶ In the light of Strauss' later reception, there is certain kind of irony in this statement. STRAUSS, L. (1988), *Persecution and the art of writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P. 159

³⁷ RORTY, R. (1984), 'The historiography of philosophy: four genres', in R. RORTY, J.B.S., Q. SKINNER (ed.) *Philosophy in history: essays on the historiography of philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Rorty actually locates *Geistesgeschichte* as part of historical reconstructions, and presents intellectual history as the fourth genre. Paradigmatic examples of *Geistesgeschichte* include Hegel, Heidegger and Foucault, see pp. 56-60, 70-74.

reconstructions³⁸, historical reconstructions³⁹, canonical history writing⁴⁰, and *Geistesgeschichte*⁴¹. Rorty notes further that most of the works in history of philosophy have a tendency to be mixtures of all the positions, but one of the genres usually dominates the given text. Following Skinner Rorty agrees that historical reconstructions give us a picture of thinker in their own terms and therefore serve to promote our self-awareness concerning the contingent nature of our current problems and the variety of moral and political positions available.⁴² But the rest of the genres essentially serve a legitimating function of contemporary positions (rational reconstruction), contemporary problems (*Geistesgeschichte*) or function with the aim of canonizing given historical thinkers such that they were anticipating contemporary solutions (canon-writing).⁴³ The risk with these genres is then, according to Rorty, that they lead into a situation in which “our self-justifying conversation is with creatures of our own phantasy rather than with historical personages.”⁴⁴

Skinner sees this tendency of building imaginary creatures as originating in the fact that we never meet a historical text without bringing our own expectations of what the writer must have meant to bear on the correct interpretation. And such expectations are constituted by our own familiar ways of understanding and categorizing things.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, in addition to Rorty’s genres I would like to name a fifth, namely ideological or strategic reconstruction. This genre tends to overlap with the legitimizing function and it surely shares similarities with the rational reconstruction. However, what I have in mind with this genre is not

³⁸For instance see BENNETT, J. (1984), *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.
 BENNETT, J. (2001), *Learning from six philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. New York;Oxford; : Clarendon Press.

³⁹ JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Canon building tends to focus on peaks of philosophy while skipping the low lands in between, and sees philosophy of all times as answering to the same perennial questions. Such interpretation of Spinoza see WOLFSON, H.A. (1934), *The philosophy of Spinoza: unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning*. Vol. II. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Vol. 1-2.

⁴¹ ISRAEL, J.I. (2001), *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. ‘Geistesgeschichte’ is often claimed to be untranslatable word. It literally means the history or the science of the movement of the spirit. So *Geistesgeschichte* presents the unfolding of a given idea, concept or system of thought.

⁴²See SKINNER, Q. (1969), 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8, 3-53.

⁴³ RORTY, R. (1984), 'The historiography of philosophy: four genres', in R. RORTY, J.B.S., Q. SKINNER (ed.) *Philosophy in history: essays on the historiography of philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ SKINNER, Q. (1969), 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8, 3-53. P.6.

reconstructing a thinker by some contemporary valid philosophical standard, as rational reconstruction would have it, but rather the act of making a thinker, Spinoza, into a political ally in some contemporary political struggle. And this effort includes more or less conscious attempt of making Spinoza to talk to the contemporary needs.⁴⁶

The very nature of ideological genre or to call it such is obviously a matter of controversy because all the authors who privilege one genre over the other will think that genre, all things considered, as the most valid one and tend to see the others, especially if the fundamental aspirations differ, as more ideological. Needless to say, the accusation of writing ideologically rather than scientifically is a common insult and forms a basic weapon in the struggles of intellectual hegemony between schools of thought.

Nonetheless, the worry that Spinoza interpretations have commonly become too ideological has indeed been central in the recent Renaissance of Anglo-American interest in the *TTP*. For example, the ideal of the 'non-ideological' interpretation is put forward by Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal in the *Critical Guide to TTP*:

“Indeed, Spinoza has been taken to be the hero of many, perhaps too many, irreconcilable ‘isms,’ from Zionism through Conservatism, Liberalism, Materialism, Idealism, Secularism, Federalism, etc. In the current collection, we would like to set aside these great ideological debates and try to read Spinoza on his own terms, without reducing his thought to any of the ideologies with which he shared some (admittedly interesting) ideas.”⁴⁷

Similarly, after listing some of the established interpretations of Spinoza as part of a specific canon, an early advocate of our contemporary values such as free speech and democracy⁴⁸ or

⁴⁶ Althusser gives us a good methodological illustration of this: “And by attributing to the author of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethics* a number of theses which he would surely never have acknowledged, though they did not actually contradict him. But to be a heretical Spinozist is almost orthodox Spinozism, if Spinozism can be said to be one of the greatest lessons in heresy that the world has seen!” (ALTHUSSER, L. (1976), 'Essays in self-criticism'. P. 132.) Other works that could be mentioned here are Deleuze's usage of Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* and *The Two Volumes of Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. GATENS, M. (2009), *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*. Penn State Press. LORDON, F. (2014), *Willing slaves of capital: Spinoza and Marx on desire*. Verso Books. NEGRI, A. (1991), *The savage anomaly: the power of Spinoza's metaphysics and politics*. Minneapolis;Oxford; : University of Minnesota Press.

⁴⁷ MELAMED, Y.Y. and ROSENTHAL, M.A. (2010), *Spinoza's 'Theological-Political Treatise': A Critical Guide*. Cambridge University Press. P.2

⁴⁸ James gives, as one would expect, the most famous example of this: ISRAEL, J.I. (2001), *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

an answer to given contemporary problems⁴⁹, Susan James sets her aim at following carefully the context of the struggle that Spinoza engages with. By this she intends to show the full complexity and the different audiences and levels at which Spinoza's text proceeds, rather than to make him a forerunner of a specific unified tradition.

But what is it to read Spinoza in his own terms and to what extent are such reading free from ideology? In what way can we avoid of making Spinoza but a figment of our imagination? Skinner's well known guideline for such a reading is "that no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done".⁵⁰ As we recall, for Skinner the value of such reading in author's own terms is the augmentation of our self-awareness. But as he himself thinks, following Collingwood, that philosophy has no perennial problems and that history of ideas is always only presenting particular answers to particular problems in a given historical context⁵¹, we might wonder how far the increasing self-awareness will satisfy our contemporary needs. If one thinks along the lines with Spinoza, this becomes a problem because it is not like all the political struggles, or even the intellectual, are possible to be won with growing understanding or self-awareness.⁵² Consequently, it gladdens me that James, as an ambitious historian of philosophy and clearly sympathetic to Spinozistic ideas, is ready to admit that there is a more direct value in reading of Spinoza's *TTP* in his own terms than what Skinner is seemingly willing to grant: "The benefits of this approach are partly historical." Writes James,

"It enables one to reconstruct, at least in part, the ground-clearing aspect of Spinoza's enterprise, by revealing what he regards as the main obstacles to an empowering way of life, and what he takes to be wrong with them. It allows us to see the *Treatise* not just as a set of more or less appealing claims, frozen in the past, but as an active theologico-political intervention in the politics of its time and a bid to redirect the course of power. Perhaps this should be enough; but in the case of such a wild and suggestive work as the *Treatise*,

⁴⁹ James's examples include "On Spinoza" in ALTHUSSER, L. (1976), 'Essays in self-criticism'.

⁵⁰ SKINNER, Q. (1969), 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8, 3-53. P. 28.

⁵¹ "Any statement, as I have sought to show, is inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention, on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and thus specific to its situation in a way that it only be naive to try to transcend. The vital implication here is not merely that the classic texts cannot be concerned with our questions and answers, but only with their own" *ibid.* p. 50.

⁵² And Spinoza knew this well from the Dutch contemporary history. One example is given by Israel of the outcome of the intellectual-political fight between the Arminians and the strict Calvinists: "The Arminians won the intellectual battle but lost the political." ISRAEL, J.I. (1995), *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness and fall : 1477-1806*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. P. 441.

approaching it systematically and contextually also yields insights of general philosophical interest, which bear on our own predicament as much as on that of the Dutch state in the second half of the seventeenth century.”⁵³

For my part I agree with James. But what now are the insights that Spinoza yields us? One of the lessons we should draw from Spinoza is that one does not learn from history in any straightforward manner – at least if by that one means something like looking the history of some analogous social-political situation and drawing conclusions concerning what should we do in the present. Rather, one uses history as an imaginative tool to inspire certain interpretations of the present.⁵⁴ And what one can learn from history is how certain imaginative means have worked in certain contexts. Another lesson we should draw from Spinoza concerns the view that human orientation in the world is thoroughly affective. This means that on a very general level everything we do is based on the strive towards things we (imagine we) enjoy and to avoid those that (we imagine) sadden us (see Ch. 3.2.). From this follows a related thesis according to which words are themselves compressed histories of affections and emotions (see Ch. 2.6.1.)⁵⁵ And writing is itself a means of triggering certain associations of ideas as well as certain affects. Conversely, reading itself is an act always partly constituted by our individual interpretative patterns that bear relation to imagination. It is thus in the human nature that we should read Spinoza as talking of things familiar to us. But awareness of the historical context may give us more adequate understanding, as Skinner thinks, of the patterns by which we interpret the past thinkers according to our own imagination. Such knowledge, indeed, plays a crucial part in learning how we tend to read past thinkers and how our imagination works. But to answer to the questions how we should

⁵³ JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. P .6.

⁵⁴ In this sense history consists always of narratives and, actually forms one of the main categories by which the particular circumstances of the present will gain universal significance for the communities in question. See JAMES, S. (2010), 'Narrative as the Means to Freedom: Spinoza on the Uses of Imagination', in MELAMED, Y.Y. and ROSENTHAL, M.A. (eds.) *Spinoza's theological-political treatise: A critical guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ROSENTHAL, M.A. (2008), 'Spinoza and the philosophy of history', in HUENEMANN, C. (ed.) *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁵ In an interesting remark in *CM*, Spinoza notes that ideas are themselves narratives or mental histories of nature: “The first meaning of true and false seems to have had its origin in stories: a story was called true when it was of a deed that had really happened, and false when it was of a deed that had never happened. Afterwards the Philosophers used this meaning to denote the agreement of an idea with its object and conversely. So an idea is called true when it shows us the thing as it is in itself, and false when it shows us the thing otherwise than it really is. For ideas are nothing but narratives, or mental histories of nature. But later this usage was transferred metaphorically to mute things, as when we call gold true or false, as if the gold which is presented to us were to tell something of itself that either was or was not in it.” (*CM* VI/24-34; I/246).

read the past thinkers, and perhaps even more crucially, how should we write of their ideas, depends on the struggles we ourselves are engaging in.

Let these general remarks function as background against which the more technical and detailed passages should be read. I will now move on to the presentation and analysis of Spinoza's account of imagination. I begin with a short introduction of the metaphysics that is fundamental for understanding Spinoza's mind-body-interaction and human interaction with other beings.

2.3. The Metaphysics Behind Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge

This is not a study in Spinoza's metaphysics, but because the latter plays major role in Spinoza's philosophy of mind and epistemology, we need to summarise the main points. Here I will restrict my presentation to areas that I see as essential for understanding Spinoza's view of mind-body-interaction and imagination and reason. Nonetheless, as Spinoza thinks that "Ethics [...] must be founded on metaphysics and physics" (Letter 27; IV/161), the metaphysical arguments will keep playing a role in most of the subjects in the following chapters as well. Before I begin with Spinoza's system I would like to point out, that in my interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology I am committed to two principles, namely univocity of being and particularism concerning essences. This is worth mentioning because in recent decades there have been an increasing Platonizing tendency according to which there is in Spinoza's system two different kinds of essences: formal and actual. The former then are taken to be eternal essences of which the actual essences are realizations. Furthermore, a related issue concerning essences is the reading that in addition to singular essences Spinoza posits also species-essences. My interpretation denies both of these readings. Since being is univocal there cannot be different, formal and actual, ways to be. Nor do I think that scholars have presented enough strong arguments that we should think species as something else than a mind-dependent concept, which is also Spinoza's conception as I see it.

As is well known, for Spinoza there is only one infinite, eternal and immutable substance identified with God or Nature – *Natura Naturans* or the active naturing nature as opposed to *Natura naturata*, the created, natured nature or the modes following from substance as a

cause (*E1p29s*). The eternal infinite essence or nature of substance is then expressed by its attributes that comprehend the necessary laws according to which substance can be modified. These involve thought and extension – the only attributes of which humans can have knowledge as they themselves participate only to these two attributes with their minds and bodies, even though the substance, according to its definition as infinite, consists of an infinity of attributes (*E1p11*). Now, because Spinoza defines everything following from the nature of attributes as eternal and infinite (*E1p21*), there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the immutable and eternal and the particular beings that are subject to change, corruption and destruction. The latter Spinoza calls modes (*modus, modi*) or affections (*affectio, affectiones*) of substance.

By introducing modes, Spinoza replaces the old scholastic term accident with affection, modifications or simply mode to designate the modifications of substance, i.e., the particular beings (*E1d5*). As Spinoza specifies in *E1p16* such modes follow from the divine nature in infinitely many modes: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).”

This proposition, often considered as one of the crucial turning points of the *Ethics* as it shifts from substance and attributes to the modes,⁵⁶ also introduces a crucial notion for us, namely the infinite intellect. The infinite intellect is an infinite mode for Spinoza, that is, a mode that follows immediately from the nature of thought. The doctrine of infinite modes is of immense importance in Spinoza’s metaphysics because it is precisely this doctrine that supposedly answers to the problem of how the finite can follow from the infinite (*E1p22-23*).

Unfortunately, Spinoza is very austere in his comments concerning the infinite modes and there is no agreement in the commentaries of their exact meaning.⁵⁷ For our purposes it

⁵⁶ See for instance MELAMED, Y.Y. (2013), *Spinoza's metaphysics: substance and thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.114-115.

⁵⁷ Some have identified them with laws of nature, others like Don Garrett, with formal essences. Other scholars suggest that Spinoza’s conception of infinite modes is influenced by Neoplatonic doctrines. For instance, Martin Gueroult thinks that Spinoza followed Philo and the Neoplatonists in introducing the infinite modes as intermediaries between the infinite cause and its finite effects. Hubbeling has similar remark: “Spinoza’s hierarchy of infinite, immediate modes; infinite mediate modes; and finite modes is of a Neo Platonic structure.”⁵⁷ But, according to Melamed this suggestion does not address the obvious consequence of the Third Man problem: if intermediaries are introduced, why wouldn’t we need another

suffices to note, as Melamed suggests, that the infinite modes are meant to bridge the causal relation between the infinite (substance and attributes) and the finite (modes) – a derivation which Hegel famously considered as inadequately demonstrated by Spinoza, and claimed that Spinoza is only repeating the Eleatic monism according to which there is no true change in the world.⁵⁸ This reading rests on the following points: because Spinoza has already defined substance and attributes as non-divisible (*E1p13, E1d4, E1d6*), and he is committed to efficient causation instead of occasionalism,⁵⁹ the infinite modes establish the framework in which finite modes can be causally related to other modes. Modes in this sense are not parts of substance directly, because having parts already implies limitation (*E1d2, Ep. 12*). But modes are parts of the whole in the sense that their causal interaction in total equals the infinite modes.

Furthermore, Spinoza thinks that some infinite modes follow directly from the nature of God's attributes. These he calls *immediate infinite modes* of which he gives as examples “in Thought, absolutely infinite intellect, and in Extension, motion and rest”.⁶⁰ Then there are *mediate infinite modes* of which Spinoza given example only in the attribute of extension, namely “the face of the whole Universe, which, however much it may vary in infinite ways, nevertheless always remains the same.”⁶¹ What is important in this obscure characterization is that Spinoza seems to think that infinite modes form a causal chain in which the mediate modes modify the immediate ones. So, for instance, from the nature of the attribute of extension motion and rest follow directly. They are the immediate modifications of extension, while motion and rest are themselves modified by different degrees of speed and

intermediary between the infinite and the original intermediary? In other words, the Platonic interpretation of intermediaries seems unlikely to be able to solve the derivation of finite from infinite.

See, in order, GARRETT, D. (2010), 'Spinoza's Theory of Scientia Intuitiva', in SORELL, T., ROGERS, G.A.J. and KRAYE, J. (eds.) *Scientia in early modern philosophy: seventeenth-century thinkers on demonstrative knowledge from first principles*. New York, N.Y; Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

GUÉROULT, M. (1968), *Spinoza: I, Dieu (Ethique, I)*. Paris Georg Olms. P. 309. HUBBELING, H.G. (1964), *Spinoza's Methodology*.

. Groningen: Van Gorcum & Comp. endnote d, p. 128. MELAMED, Y.Y. (2013), *Spinoza's metaphysics: substance and thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.130.

⁵⁸ Melamed gives the following references to Hegel on this point: *Science of Logic*, 98. Cf. 84; *History of Philosophy*, 3:257–258. Cf. 1:244 and *Philosophy of Religion*, 1:376.

⁵⁹ The most famous expression of occasionalism, i.e. the doctrine which explains all changes as occasions in which God's will is expressed as he directly causes all individual events, is found from Nicholas Malebranche, see for example *Entretiens sur la Métaphysique* (1688), VII:10. MALEBRANCHE, N.D. and CUVILLIER, A. (1947), *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion: suivis des entretiens sur la mort*. Paris Librairie philosophique, J. Vrin.

⁶⁰ Letter 64 to Tschirnhaus in Curley I p.439.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

slowness. In the end the whole of nature involves all modal expressions of motion and rest as the 'face of the whole Universe'.

Infinite modes therefore collect all the finite modes into one causal chain (*E1p21-22*). This is to say, that all modes of thought are comprehended in the infinite intellect, just as all bodies are modifications of motion and rest, or as Spinoza puts it "the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God." (*E2p11c*).

Spinoza famously posits a strict parallelism between the attributes: as the attributes express in their own characteristic way God's unique essence, all modes need to be expressed in all of the attributes (if the modifications of the attributes were not identical, the uniqueness of substance would be hard to argue for). Here Spinoza tries to avoid any such embarrassment which the Cartesians were exposed to while trying to explain the interaction between the mental and physical substances. Spinoza strictly denies any such interaction: the attributes do not stand in causal relationship which simply means that the mind cannot determine the body to act any more than the body can determine the mind to think (*E2p7*, *E3p2s*). Yet, the modes expressed in different attributes are one and the same being just conceived under different aspects of reality (or God). Despite the anti-Cartesian aims, Margaret Wilson reminds us, Spinoza nonetheless presents the parallelism-doctrine in unmistakably Cartesian terms:

"Here he simply expresses in Cartesianese the notion that in whatever order things follow from God's nature, in that same order God thinks, knows, or (so to speak) ideates them: Their order considered as caused things ("formal" order) is the same as their order considered as objects of understanding ("objective" order)."⁶²

In order to grasp Spinoza's metaphysics rightly one cannot emphasise too much that Spinoza uses the notions of formal-objective reality in the orthodox Cartesian sense.⁶³ That is, formal being refers to the actual being defined in terms of causal efficacy while objective being refers to such things as they are in the mind, as ideated that is. Hence, and perhaps counter-

⁶² WILSON, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P.97.

⁶³ On Descartes' use of formal and objective reality see Third Med. CSM II, pp.28-29. On Spinoza's use see an excellent article by LÆRKE, M. (2017), 'Aspects of Spinoza's Theory of Essence', in SINCLAIR, M. (ed.) *The actual and the possible: modality and metaphysics in modern philosophy*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

intuitively, ideas have formal reality too insofar as they can be *ideatum* for other ideas and also cause other ideas (see *E2p20-21* on idea of an idea). Furthermore, Spinoza modifies the Cartesian terms so that the human body belongs to the formal order while its idea, the mind, is the objective reality of the body. But how are we then to understand the mind-body union? According to Spinoza, mind is the idea of an actually existing body (*E2p13*), and because of the causal order of the attributes is identical, everything taking place in the body must be contained in the mind (*E2p12*)⁶⁴. But very crucially what is contained in the mind, or modes of thought, can be of three different kinds. Spinoza identifies ideas as knowledge or cognition (*idea sive cognitio*, *E2p20*) which, just like in Descartes, are divided in terms of the reality or perfection they express. The first kind of knowledge is confused and involves the least reality of the human ideas. Such erroneous knowledge is further identified as opinion or imagination (*opinio, vel imaginatio*, *E2p40s2*,) in contrast to reason and intuitive knowledge, or the second and third kind of knowledge.

With this short metaphysical introduction as a background I will next turn towards a more detailed analysis of the relevant passages concerning Spinoza's first kind of knowledge or imagination, and the second kind or reason. I will begin with a presentation of the problems that Spinoza sees as rooted in imagination. These concern essentially the fact that imagination gives rise to prejudice and superstition.

2.4. Superstition and the Three Constitutive Illusions

“My account of the cause of superstition clearly entails, first, that all men by nature are subject to superstition.” (*TTP*, Pref.:7; III/6).

While the early modern period in Western Europe was a time characterized by intense scientific progress, it was also a period marked by fierce forms of superstition. A typical

⁶⁴ Just in what sense everything is contained in the mind is a matter of debate in Spinoza-scholarship. The extreme interpretation, known as the pancreas-thesis, holds that according to Spinoza we must have conscious ideas of the minute functionings of our organs – which is clearly absurd and thus according to this reading Spinoza must be wrong. I think such a problem will not arise because Spinoza allows degrees of confusion in ideas to the extent that such clarity what 'being conscious of' is usually taken to mean is not needed in order to have ideas. For illuminating remarks on this see ALANEN, L. (2011), 'Spinoza on the Human Mind', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, 35, 4-25.

contemporary explanation of superstition reduced it to one main cause: fear. This is understandable as things to fear surely were not absent in early modern Europe: the period was plagued with all kinds of atrocities from religious wars and persecution to civil wars and plague itself.⁶⁵ According to Susan James one of the main sources for the analysis of superstition as springing from fear is found from Plutarch's *Moralia*.⁶⁶ On Plutarch's account the specific type of fear that grounds superstition finds its expression in objectless fear of God or differed kind deities, demons and spirits. Such objectless fear makes people who suffer from it unstable, and furthermore, leads them to seek objects for their fear from signs or omens. Since such people will try to convince others of their own superstitious beliefs, superstition quickly turns into a theological-political problem as James puts it:

“Moreover, superstition is quick to spread: once an individual or group has acquired an emotional investment in a superstitious practice, they will try to bolster their confidence by persuading other people to share their outlook, even at the cost of making them ‘as wretched as themselves’”.⁶⁷

Early modern thinkers like Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes saw superstition as deformation of religion.⁶⁸ Superstition is something which turns the pious devotion into religious zeal and fanaticism, or as James puts it: “It is a form of obsession that disempowers the self by shutting down its capacity to modify its own beliefs and affects and making it resistant to external remedies.” In *TTP* Spinoza adheres to this kind of analysis, but he is quick to point out that the affective range which generates superstition does not in any way restrict itself to fear. Rather, all affects or emotions that have to do with uncertain goods and evils are prone to support superstitious beliefs. Like Spinoza's says, “[superstition] is protected only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but

⁶⁵ See for example PARISH, H. (2015), *Superstition and Magic in Early Modern Europe: A Reader*. London: Bloomsbury. CAMERON, E. (2010), *Enchanted Europe: superstition, reason, and religion, 1250-1750*. New York;Oxford [U.K.]; : Oxford University Press. For different kinds of religious sects and superstition, like millenarianism see Nadler. Also for plague: there were three severe outbreaks of plague in Spinoza's life time in the Netherlands leaving tens of thousands of dead. NADLER, S.M. (1999), *Spinoza: a life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For the economic-political consequences of wars and plague see ISRAEL, J.I. (1995), *The Dutch Republic: its rise, greatness and fall : 1477-1806*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

⁶⁶ JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. Pp. 15-17.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.18. James cites Spinoza in *E4p63s*.

⁶⁸ BACON, F. (1996), 'Of Superstition', in VICKERS, B. (ed.) *Francis Bacon, The Oxford Authors* Oxford: Oxford University Press, HOBBS, T. and MALCOLM, N. (2012), *Leviathan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. See JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. pp. 14-15.

only from the most powerful affects.” (*TTP*, Pref.:7; III/6). But Spinoza also emphasizes that it is often fear that makes superstition last. Indeed, it might even be in the interests of some, like the church and the governing elites, to provoke fear in order to govern the multitude by superstition. But as Spinoza also points out, it is difficult to make the multitude to persist in one and the same superstition and therefore politics that revolves around superstition becomes fickle and vulnerable of being hijacked by bigots that introduce “what is new, and has not yet deceived them [the common people].” (ibid.8).

Now, while the *TTP* can be viewed as an analysis of how religion and politics invoke and generate superstition by means of rituals, narratives and rhetoric, the *Ethics* in its part consists of a thorough analysis of those things in the very human nature that render people prone to prejudice and its extreme form superstition. Spinoza’s starting point there is to explain the declaration of the *TTP* that “all men by nature are subject to superstition” (ibid. 7). The *Appendix* to the first part of *the Ethics* gives thus a preliminary exposition of the causes for prejudice and superstition as they are grounded into the human nature.

In the *Appendix* there is a clear influence of Descartes who often emphasises the fact that the human mind is constantly drawn to the inadequate ways of perceiving related to the senses. This is because, Descartes thinks, from the early childhood onwards the human mind first registers only what happens to the body but is unable to attend the external causes the give rise to body’s states. Then when the mind becomes more capable it judges the external things in accordance as they affect the human body. Furthermore, even when the mind knows the true order of things it cannot erase the prejudices from its memory. Such prejudices are constantly triggered with different association; and even the meaning of words reflect the prejudices from childhood. Finally, as the mind has grown in a close union with the body, it is by nature easier to attend to sensory perception than to things conceivable by intellect. In short, the Cartesian mind, even an enlightened one, is naturally drawn back to prejudice. (*II Med. CSM II*, p.20; *PP*, §71-75.)

Spinoza takes this Cartesian position as his point of departure in his critique of imagination. For him the most fundamental source of prejudice is precisely that we are born with awareness of our appetites but not of their determining causes: “all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that they all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite.” (*Elapp.*) But Spinoza, as we will see, draws much more radical conclusions

from this shared starting point than Descartes. For Spinoza, the two cornerstones of Cartesian philosophy, namely God as free creator and human free will, turn out nothing but prejudices that also function as one of the main sources of superstition. In the *Appendix* then, Spinoza illustrates how from the initial ignorance concerning causes, the mind is led to form three other constitutive illusions that plague the psychic life of the mind, namely illusions of free will, final causes and an anthropomorphic God that acts for the sake of men (theological illusion).

Now, the kind of life that follows from entertaining these triple illusions, as Gilles Deleuze, calls them, is not a condition of happy ignorance but rather, anxious slavery to the affections of the body that the consciousness regards, as it were, as conclusions without premises. Thus, to calm the anguish of its palpable vulnerability to the fortuitous external forces, consciousness produces the triple illusion, which is quite nicely summarised by Deleuze:

“Since it only takes in effects, consciousness will satisfy its ignorance by reversing the order of things, by taking effects for causes (*the illusion of final causes*): it will construe the effect of a body on our body as the final cause of its own actions. In this way it will take itself for the first cause, and will invoke its power over the body (*the illusion of free decrees*). And where consciousness can no longer imagine itself to be the first cause, nor the organizer of ends, it invokes a God endowed with understanding and volition, operating by means of final causes or free decrees in order to prepare for man a world commensurate with His glory and His punishments (*the theological illusion*).”⁶⁹

In *E3* Spinoza introduces a third source of superstition. This source is constituted by a mechanism that Spinoza calls imitation of the affect. By such imitation Spinoza’s means a natural tendency of humans to identify with the emotions of things that they imagine as similar to themselves. Such imagined similarity can extend to objects, animals and even to God which leads people to project their own emotional life to those things they regard similar to themselves (see chapter 3.4).

Importantly then, even if such illusions jeopardise the rational understanding of the world according to real causes, it is not there the problems stop because, it turns out, a great deal of the normative language which constitutes politics and theology is derived from such illusions. “Hence”, writes Spinoza, “they [men] had to form these notions, by which they explained

⁶⁹ DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. p.20.

natural things: good, evil, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, ugliness. And because they think themselves free, those notions have arisen: praise and blame, sin and merit.” (*ElApp.*). Spinoza’s key argument here is that people form such evaluative notions according to the ways in which given objects affect the human bodies. And “For although human bodies agree in many things, they still differ in very many.” This leads to infinite variation on the judgements concerning the objects attended by our senses or imagination. In this sense imagination introduces doubt in the heart of men: “[...] each one has judged things according to the disposition of his brain; or rather, has accepted affections of the imagination as things. So, it is no wonder that we find so many controversies to have arisen among men, and that they have finally given rise to skepticism.” (*Elapp.*, quote modified).

Such scepticism had enormous political consequences in the early modern period. Against the Thomist conception of the natural law, which was carried to the 17th century by such major late scholastics like Francisco Suárez, scepticism became a real epistemic position that often invoked libertarian conceptions of morality.⁷⁰ The latter sees no fundamental difference between the good of an individual human being and the common good. They are, as it were, part of the same normative ideal built into the human nature itself. Yet, the antagonistic religious division of the early modern societies made the whole idea of the common good deeply suspicious. Writing forty years before Spinoza began his *Ethics*, (1625) the Dutch legal-political scholar Hugo Grotius summarises the political challenge of modernity in terms of scepticism towards any kind of natural common good or justice:

“[...] men have established *iura* according to their own interests [*pro utilitate*], which vary with different customs, and often at different times with the same people. So there is no natural *ius*: all men and the other animals are impelled by nature to seek their own interests. Consequently, either there is no justice, or if there is such a thing, it is completely irrational, since pursuing the good of others harms oneself.”⁷¹

Grotius immediately denies that we should believe what the sceptic asserts. But then the ‘Grotian problematic’, as Stephen Darwall puts it, consists of the following attempt:

“Lacking hope of agreement on a common good rooted in a shared religious outlook, Grotius attempted to articulate a conception of moral and political order that could be convincing to

⁷⁰ **References.**

⁷¹ “Prolegomena to the first edition” in GROTIUS, H., TUCK, R. and PROJECT, M. (2005), *The rights of war and peace*. Indianapolis, Ind: Liberty Fund. P. 1747, [1625].

people without a common vision of the good life or any reason to believe that outcomes that would be good for one must be good for all.”⁷²

Spinoza, it can be said, occupies a double position in respect to this problematic. On the one hand, Spinoza is entirely classic thinker in the sense that he believes that there is a common good inherent in the human nature that amounts to the rational life leading to perfection that is equally open to all human beings. On the other hand, in a closer inspection such an idea turns out to be nothing but an abstraction derived from human nature considered apart from the rest of nature. Without this abstraction human nature, seen as it is in reality, is always determined by partial interests, egoistic drives and subjective emotions. This is then the point in which imagination gets its tremendously important role because it is imagination that constitutes the common conception of the good. But, as the sceptic points out, any understanding of the common good is vulnerable of being reduced to the interest of some part, *and not all*, of society.

It is here then, I argue, that we must see the inherent connection between imagination in Spinoza’s philosophy of mind and in his political writings. As he writes in the *Political Treatise* (1:1-4), the fault in political theory is, up to Spinoza, Hobbes and Machiavelli at least, that it is based not on how people really are, but on how the given philosopher wants them to be. To avoid writing any such utopian hopes, Spinoza aims at to deduce politics straight from the laws of human nature itself. What follows from this effort is the maxim that politics must take into account the affects that most often govern human motivation to participate in politics in the first place: hope and fear.

Any successful conception of the common good or the vision of society must therefore address the inevitable experience of the members in a plural society, that sometimes the collective decisions and actions taken do not serve their interests, thus breaking the balance between individual’s hopes and fears. Some well-known early modern attempts to reconcile the indignation related to such experiences include the social contract theory of Hobbes, Spinoza and Rousseau. The purpose of the idea of a social contract is to function as powerful ‘auxiliary of imagination’ that remind the citizens of the fact that as long they remain part of

⁷² DARWALL, S. (2006), 'The Foundations of Morality: Virtue, Law, and Obligation', in RUTHERFORD, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to early modern philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 223.

a political body, they are better off, even if occasionally suffering harm to their private interests, than without that political order. The latter state would amount to the continuous possibility of violence, or worse, as Hobbes puts it, *bellum omnium contra omnes*.⁷³

What follows then, is my attempt to clarify why Spinoza thinks imagination and affects naturally lead humans to inadequate knowledge about themselves and the world around them. The scepticism concerning politics based on common good is a direct consequence of this account. But Spinoza does construct an elaborate answer to this problem in his ethical-political philosophy. Despite the fact that much of the previous research sees an unbridgeable gap between Spinoza's ideal version of rationality and his comments concerning imagination and the actual human condition, I will argue that there are many passages which actually support the view that Spinoza sees *a right kind of interaction* between imagination and reason as necessary for successful practice of ethics and empowering politics. [Much of this work remains to be done in the future. But I will touch this topic here and there, and especially in the final chapters 4.-4.2.]

2.5. The Order of the Body: Confusion, Mutilation and Error

In this chapter I will address imagination as it is related to sense-perception, which we shall see, is one type of inadequate cognition for Spinoza. The following chapter then deals with adequate sense-perception or common notions – the foundations of reason as Spinoza puts it. After the analysis of common notions, I will tackle imagination as it relates to signs and language – the second type of inadequate cognition. The distinction between two kinds of inadequate knowledge springs from *E2p40s2* where Spinoza separates between imagination as constituted by sense experience and fortuitous encounters with external bodies, and imagining things by recollecting certain ideas through signs.

In proposition *E2p17p* and its scholium Spinoza gives his definition of imagination as a mode of thinking by which the mind regards external bodies as actually existing or as present to the

⁷³ *Leviathan*, Book I, ch XIII. Readers who think of Rousseau's 'noble savage' here are guided to consult *Social Contract* Book III, Ch. 16 "...and the body politic, thus deformed, would soon become prey to the violence against which it was instituted." ROUSSEAU, J.-J. (1997), *Social Contract in The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1762].

mind. Such imaginings, as I will show in detail below, confuse the properties of the external bodies with the condition of the human body.⁷⁴ Consequently, the confused imaginings explain why the imaginings can contain error. I will begin by quoting the crucial passages in proposition 17 and its scholium and then explain what the passages imply.

“If the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard the same external body as actually existing, or as present to it, until the body is affected by an affect that excludes the existence or presence of that body.” (E2p17p).

“Next, to retain the customary words, the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, though they do not reproduce the [NS: external] figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.” (E2p17s).

The first thing to note in these passages is that, as De Deugd illustrates, when Spinoza introduces imagination he immediately clarifies, that by images of things (*rerum imagines*) he means the corporeal changes in the body, in other words, the affections of the body.⁷⁵ The mental counterparts for these corporeal images are then called imaginations of the mind (*imaginatio mentis*). Such imaginations are modes of thought or ideas. In addition to the already mentioned three ontological-epistemological kinds, mental contents can also be divided to ideas proper representing things and to affective modes of thought (that Descartes calls volitions) (E2a3). But they can also be divided, as Lilli Alanen remarks, according to activity-passivity of the mind as idea-concepts produced by the active mind and idea-perception produced by the passive mind.⁷⁶ I will explain the nature of the idea-concepts as actions of the mind in chapters concerning common notions and activity (2.5. and 3.3. respectively). Here I focus on the latter idea-perceptions that are the ones corresponding to the corporeal images or affections of the body, in other words, they are imaginations.

⁷⁴ **Note to Self:** Mention Shapiro’s view concerning Descartes’s evolution in Meditations and influence on Spinoza concerning sense-perception.

⁷⁵ DEUGD, C.D. (1966), *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge*. Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V. p. 198-199. Even though the word ‘image’ certainly invokes association with sight, I think it is best to think what Spinoza means by corporeal images, as that which is imprinted on our bodies through all our senses. This meaning is clear from e.g. E2p17cd where Spinoza speaks of the modifications of the surfaces of human body enabling it to be affected in different ways. For the emphasis, again, on sight see E2p48s: “For by ideas I understand, not the images which are formed at the back of the eye (and, if you like, in the middle of the brain), but concepts of thought [NS: or the objective being of a thing insofar as it consists only in thought.”

⁷⁶ ALANEN, L. (2011), ‘Spinoza on the Human Mind’, *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, 35, 4-25.

What then explains the passive and erroneous character of imaginative ideas? Spinoza gives two major arguments for this, one ontological, the other psychological. The former is based on a causal explanation demonstrating how body's interaction with external bodies necessary leads to ideas that represent only very inadequately the real natures of the external bodies. The latter is based on a psychological law of association according to which the different affections of the human body are associated with other bodily affections, including signs like words. Later we will see that the association-principle creates a foundation for complex meaning-making patterns rendering lingual meaning rather subjective (Ch. 2.6.) and joining affects to objects (Ch. 3.3.). I will begin with the ontological argument here while the association-principle in relation to language is presented in the chapter after common notions (Ch. 2.6.).

Firstly then, Spinoza gives us an explanation of the origins of confused and mutilated cognition of things (*confusam tantum et mutilatam habere cognitionem*) – confused in the sense that such perceptions mix together various things, mutilated in the sense that they do not express or represent their object in a complete manner. Here Spinoza relies on causal explanation, and in particular on *E1x4* stating that “The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.” On the basis of this axiom Spinoza argues that the affections of the human body involve both the natures of the human and the external body as their causes. Hence the affection of the human body is the effect of two different causal powers: that of the human body and that of the external body. The affection thus involves the respective natures in a confused or mutilated manner (*E2p16*). From this it follows also, as Spinoza indicates in *E1App*. “that the ideas which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies.” (*E2p16c2*). Let me already here point out, that the “condition of our body” is essentially represented in terms of affects or emotions in Spinoza. Here Spinoza hints towards principles which he states later in part three of the *Ethics*, like the conatus-doctrine⁷⁷. Conatus-doctrine essentially states that our awareness of our surroundings is structured by two factors: how we feel about things, including other humans, around us; and how we imagine things will affect us.

⁷⁷ Conatus is the strive to persist in being that each mode involves. According to this doctrine all beings will strive towards what they take as being conducive to their well-being and avoid what is harmful. I do not mean to imply that this “taking” requires any sort of intellectual judgement as Spinoza thinks that what we call volitions are only appetites. And because “appetites” do not even require consciousness, conatus will apply to non-animate beings as well. On volitions see Ch. 3.1; On conatus, see Ch. 3.2.

Accordingly, Spinoza seems to be reasoning along the following, rather Aristotelian, lines⁷⁸: the mind cannot, at least initially, think itself nor its body without the imaginations (or *phantasma*) but it only knows itself and its body through the ideas of the affections of the body. This is to say that self-consciousness is nothing but perception of the affections of the body by the mind (*E2p19*), but such ideas do not involve adequate knowledge either of human body or of the external bodies (*E2p24-25*). Yet, it should be stressed that here Spinoza does not give very clear answer to the question of what determines the focus of our attention or awareness in the stream of the infinity of affections. Lisa Shapiro calls this problem “endemic to any causal account of representation”, and concludes that: “Spinoza owes us an explanation of why we are aware of the things we are, of why we affirm the existence of what we do, of why the external bodies which are presented to us as present are so presented.”⁷⁹

Shapiro makes a strong case in showing that it is the affects that determine the targets for our attention in the causal nexus. This is because, as will be clearer later (see Ch. 3.2 – 3.3.), affects represent how external bodies affect the human body and its power of action – some will increase its capacity to act and some will harm and hinder it. It is such feelings and our anticipations of such feeling, in other words our hopes and fears, that govern our attention for the objects in our surroundings. Shapiro surely has a point, but to my mind there are problems in her argument.⁸⁰ Above all, her reading ends up cancelling out a distinction that Spinoza, following Descartes⁸¹, clearly makes between non-affective states of the mind and volitions or affective states of the mind:

“There are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind, unless there is in the same individual the idea of the thing loved, desired,

⁷⁸ In *De Anima* Aristotle holds that “all sensations are true, but most imaginations are false” (428b) and further that knowledge or intelligence are always right, he needs to argue that distinguishes imagination or *phantasia* as a distinct capacity from sensation and intelligence while he nonetheless makes the claim that all thinking requires *phantasma* or images. In other words, Aristoteles denies the Platonic argument for the possibility of pure thought separate from the contents derived from sense-experience (427b). ARISTOTLE (1957), *On the Soul. Parva Naturalia. On Breath*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁷⁹ SHAPIRO, L. (2012), 'Spinoza on Imagination and the Affects', in EBBERSMEYER, S. (ed.) *Emotional Minds*. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER.

⁸⁰ In addition to Shapiro not reflecting what consequences *E2a3* could have on her argument, I think she over-emphasises the importance of the word “affect” in *E2p17*. As Curley points out in his translation of *Ethics*, it is probably a mistake and should be read as “affection” (p. 464 in C vol. I). Also, I do not find the reference to affects in *E2p17s* which Shapiro uses as support for her argument.

⁸¹ Descartes, unlike Spinoza, makes this distinction explicitly between ideas proper and volitions. See *III Med. / CSM II*, pp.25-26.

and the like. But there can be an idea, even though there is no other mode of thinking.”
(*E2a3*).

“The human body can be affected in many ways in which its power of acting is increased or diminished, and also in others which render its power of acting neither greater nor less.”
(*E3Post.1*)

It is true that Spinoza might just want to point out in *E2a3* that emotional states of mind necessarily refer to other ideas or their objects, while non-emotional or volitional ideas can be conceived without any external relations. Hence, *E2a3* does not necessarily confirm against Shapiro that there can be ideas of affections without affects. But if most of our ideas represent body’s affections *E2a3* seems at least not to rule out the possibility of affect-free ideas of affections, and *E3Post.1* in its part seems to state quite clearly that Spinoza thinks there are affections without affects. My reading then tries to maintain the distinction between non-emotional and emotional states and goes against the rather extreme position of Shapiro’s: “[...]we cannot become aware of any particular thing in the world without our power to act being differentially impacted, that is, without the affects.”⁸² In other words, on Shapiro’s reading the distinction between an *affection as a modification of the body* and *affect as the register of how such modification affects the human power of acting* somewhat collapses – or, at least it is nothing but a conceptual distinction if the former cannot in real experience be distinct of the latter. To me this appears too strong and counter-intuitive, simply because there seems to be a great amount of sense-perceptions of which we are aware but which do not affect our power of action in any straightforward way – just as Spinoza confirms in *E3Post.1*.

On my reading then the affections of the body can be represented by the mind without having to give rise to affects – so there is no conceptual relation between the two.⁸³ Leaving the

⁸² SHAPIRO, L. (2012), 'Spinoza on Imagination and the Affects', in EBBERSMEYER, S. (ed.) *Emotional Minds*. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER. p.99. Gilles Deleuze actually confirms this as well: “An idea of *affectio* always gives rise to affects” DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. p.50.

⁸³ I admit that a lot here depends on how we define the emotional states of mind. It seems clear that we cannot be all-together without emotions – we always find ourselves as being emotionally tuned, as Heidegger puts it. Descartes hints toward the distinction between clearly emotional states of mind and those which do signify that “nothing very beneficial or harmful was happening to the body” (*PP §71, CSM I*, 218). My point is just that I do not want to make a necessary link between all possible sense-perceptions and affects. On Heidegger see *Being and Time* §39.

representational issues behind for now let us turn to Spinoza's argument concerning the inadequacy of the knowledge related to body's affections.

Even though Spinoza's jargon in explaining the reasons for inadequacy are extremely foreign to contemporary readers,⁸⁴ the idea is relatively simple: imaginations are not in themselves false, but while they are not related to other ideas which would show them either as true or false, our judgement concerning them lacks valid criteria for deciding their truth-value. But because part of having an idea is to either affirm or negate its content, as will be shown in detail in (Ch. 3.1.), we necessarily make judgements concerning all the ideas we entertain in our mind. But now, Spinoza thinks, ideas are true when they express the relevant causal network on the basis of which a given idea can be adequately understood. Ideas in this sense are thus relational, and while the human mind lacks the ideas needed for establishing the truth of a given idea, it necessarily makes its judgements on inadequate bases, that is, on the basis of what it has: mutilated and confused ideas.

Spinoza in his part puts this in terms of his ontological explanation according to which human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God. A crucial part of Spinoza's argument that the human mind is part of the infinite intellect is to address the question of how inadequate ideas can follow in the finite minds even though they are comprehended in the *idea Dei* – that supposedly cannot involve inadequate ideas. What Spinoza has in mind is that while the human mind is part of the infinite intellect, God does not have the inadequate ideas in the confused or mutilated manner as the human mind possesses them, but, on the contrary, always has them as complete adequate ideas. How is this apparent contradiction to be understood? As Wilson has beautifully demonstrated⁸⁵ here Spinoza distinguishes between what is available to the finite human mind, and thus to God “insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind” (*E2p11c*), and what is available to the infinite intellect or “God insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things” (*E2p24d*) – the latter involving the true order causes:

“And so the idea, or knowledge, of each part will be in God (by P3), insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing (by P9), a singular thing which is

⁸⁴ And as Lærke has shown, for many of Spinoza's contemporaries as well. See LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47.

⁸⁵ WILSON, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.105-106.

prior, in the order of Nature, to the part itself (by P7). The same must also be said of each part of the individual composing the human body. And so, the knowledge of each part composing the human body is in God insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things, and not insofar as he has only the idea of the human body, that is (by PI3), the idea which constitutes the nature of the human mind.” (E2p24d).

This quotation, certainly not one of the easier ones to grasp, makes the point that even when human mind has inadequate ideas, God’s having access to the objective reality of such ideas does not depend on God having the idea of human mind, but rather, God knows adequately “insofar as he is affected with a great many ideas of things”, namely, by those ideas that directly explain the idea of which the human mind has only partial knowledge.

This point is further illustrated by the famous sun-example:⁸⁶ We are bound to imagine the sun as being 200-feet away on the basis of how the sun affects human bodies. Such imagining is not false as a bodily affection itself (which is obvious), but only when we lack the knowledge of the true distance of the sun and take it really to be at the distance of 200-feet. But even when we have adequate knowledge of the distance, we will still experience the sun as 200-feet away. Now, the human mind might easily take the distance of the sun as it appears to us as truth, while God always has both the ideas explaining the real distance of the sun but also the ideas explaining why it appears to human body as it does.

The ontological argument thus culminates in distinguishing between two different orders of ideas in the mind: first, “a connection which is in the mind according to the order and connection of the affections of the human body”, and the second “the order of the intellect by which the mind perceives things through their first causes, and which is the same in all men.” (E2p18s).⁸⁷ As long as the mind thinks things according to the first order, it imagines. This is because it does not have access to the causes determining the affections of the body, but rather, thinks them like “conclusions without premises” (E2p28d), and encounters the world according to the fortuitous stream of things and their ideas determining it to think now this and now that (E2p29s). The latter order of the intellect however, is to attend to things through their causes and therefore to have ideas just like they are concatenated in the infinite intellect.

⁸⁶ Famous as it can also be found from Aristotle’s *De Anima* (428b2-4) and Descartes’s *Meditations (III Med., CSM II, p.27)*.

⁸⁷ “*hanc concatenationem fieri secundum ordinem et concatenationem affectionum corporis humani, ut ipsam distinguerem a concatenatione idearum, quae fit secundum ordinem intellectus, quo res per primas suas causas mens percipit, et qui in omnibus hominibus idem est.*” (E2p18s).

The crucial distinction that Spinoza makes here is between the ideas that are linked (*concatenare*) according to the affections of the body and merely involve (*involvere*) the natures of the external things without explicating (*explicare*) their natures.⁸⁸

At this point the reader might wonder how the human mind could ever have access to the adequate ideas – in effect, have we not just demonstrated that “The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of an external body.” (*E2p25*)?

There is however, against what Spinoza states in *E2p25*, affections of the body that correspond to the mind producing adequate ideas of such affection. This Spinoza proves with his theory of common notions that are the foundation of reason or the knowledge of second kind. I will go into detail to the theory of common notions and its interpretation in the scholarly literature, but to anticipate, I will give a short summary of the adequate-thesis involved in the argument concerning common notions. Hence, according to Spinoza, common notions are necessarily adequate because they concern common properties of bodies, like movement and rest. And such ideas, by the argument that the mind involves ideas of everything of which the body consists (*E2p12*), already exist in the mind – but according to the consciousness-thesis of *E2p19 & p23* in order for the mind to become aware of such property it has to be involved in the affections of the body. Thus, when the mind is affected by another idea expressing the affecting common property of the external body, the mind has an idea of an affection whose causes are partly in the human body and partly in the external body, but because the idea now expresses what is common in the both bodies, no mutilation or confusion takes place, hence enabling the mind to form adequate idea of the given property (*E2p37-p40*).

2.6. The Foundations of Reason: Common Notions

The importance of the theory of common notions for Spinoza’s reasoning in the *Ethics* is enormous. By the same token, they can be taken as expressing Spinoza’s mature account of reason as common notions are absent from the earlier epistemological treatises of *KV* and *TIE*. Now, common notions are taken by Spinoza to establish the first principles or axioms

⁸⁸ See WILSON, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge ', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 102-103.

for demonstrative deductive reasoning. They are furthermore, the first adequate ideas that the human mind supposedly produces – ideas, that is, that involve certainty that is beyond doubt. In addition to such epistemological-methodological functions, common notions have substantial role to play in Spinoza’s ethical and political theories as the human mind only acquires control of its own power of action through the understanding that the common notions provide. Because Spinoza understands activity as actions caused by human power of acting alone without external determinations, common notions enable active actions as opposed to the passivity characteristic to actions motivated by imagination. Moreover, common notions enable the control over passive affects constituted by imagination, and they ground the agreement between human desires – without which human co-existence and politics would be haunted by constant conflict.

In this sense, Spinoza’s theory of common notions can be seen as one version trying to explain the origins of social-political agreement and offer possibilities to answer to the ideological divisions that tore the Republic apart.⁸⁹ But before moving to the properly ethical and political implications of the theory [This remains a future work], I will address the epistemological issues related to common notions.

Since common notions are the first type of ideas, according to Spinoza, that give us adequate and true ideas it might be a good starting point to define the sense that Spinoza gives to these notions. Thus, Spinoza first defines truth in terms of classical correspondence: “A true idea must agree with its object.” (*E1a6*). This is obviously an externalist criteria, but perhaps a bit surprisingly in defining adequacy Spinoza gives it strictly internal criteria: “By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.” I will not go into the

⁸⁹The political atmosphere in which the radical Cartesianism developed and of which Spinoza can be seen as part is characterised by Van Bunge as follows: “Although the Republic did extremely well during the 1650s and 1660s, its educated classes seem to have been haunted by the fear that, as Lipsius had already put it in the early 1590s, the Republic might not be able to afford religious pluriformity, and by the recognition that the lack of coherence of the not so United Provinces might, in the end, turn out to be fatal. How wonderful it would be if the theological and political insecurities of life in the Republic could be solved once for all in the ‘clear and distinct’ fashion Descartes had formulated his famous laws of collision.” VAN BUNGE, W. (2001), *From Stevin to Spinoza: An essay on philosophy in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic*. Brill. p.93.

extensive literature concerning the interpretation of these definitions.⁹⁰ It suffices to our purposes to note that it seems that the correspondence-criteria concerns the ontological relation of the *idea* to the *ideatum* or *the parallelism of the intellectual and extensive orders of things*, while adequacy concerns the psychological experience of certainty – seeing the truth as it were⁹¹ – that is constituted purely by *the internal order of the divine intellect*.

We can note in passing that Spinoza opposes here the theories of truth that depend exclusively on some external standard leading either to problems of infinite regress, like Plato's third man, or to circularity, like in the Cartesian case of making truth dependent on non-deceiving God and knowledge of God dependent on truth. This is perhaps why, in the propositions following the demonstrations of the common notions, Spinoza highlights adequacy as a standard of truth rather than correspondence:

“For he who knows how to distinguish between the true and the false must have an adequate idea of the true and of the false, that is (P40S2), must know the true and the false by the second or third kind of knowledge.”

Furthermore, the ‘seeing’ of truth or the certainty involved in adequate ideas is based on Spinoza's theory of the necessary reflexivity involved in all ideas. All ideas are objects to other ideas and thus there is an idea of a true idea designating that we have such idea:⁹² “For as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity.” (*E2p21s*). From this it follows, as Wilson notes, that for Spinoza the Cartesian “hyperbolic doubt” is misguided.⁹³ We do not need an external guarantee, like non-deceiving God, to establish the truth of our ideas, because simply “truth is its own standard”. And here, after invoking the critique towards the externalist-views, Spinoza goes as far as to establish that the adequate true ideas are in our mind exactly as they are comprehended in the divine intellect:

“For no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the highest certainty. For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way.

⁹⁰ For some illuminating remarks see WILSON, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. On extrinsic/intrinsic denominations of truth and adequacy see p.109.

⁹¹ “For the eyes of the mind [...] are the demonstrations themselves.” (*E5p23s*).

⁹² **Note to self:** this formulation sounds a bit like infinite regress type of argument, check later!

⁹³ WILSON, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 120.

And of course no one can doubt this unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, namely, the very [act of] understanding. And I ask, who can know that he understands some thing unless he first understands it? That is, who can know that he is certain about some thing unless he is first certain about it? What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false. [...] Add to this that our mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God (by P11C); hence, it is as necessary that the mind's clear and distinct ideas are true as that God's ideas are." (*E2p43s*).

Having adequate ideas thus amounts to us knowing things like God knows or ideates them, that is perfectly. Let us now turn to the subject of how the human mind can produce such ideas. Here I must emphasise from the outset that both Spinoza's way of introducing the common notions and his constant use of mathematical examples is, if not rightly misleading, at least ambiguous. This has led many commentators, especially in the Anglo-American Spinoza scholarship to think common notions as purely scientific notions establishing axioms for demonstrative science. In this sense, common notions are taken to be universal notions representing pervasive features of all bodies, such as motion and rest. Some scholars further identify them with laws of motions⁹⁴ or more generally as ideas of laws of nature⁹⁵. This interpretation has its roots in the most influential Anglo-American Spinoza commentaries of the 20th century, namely Harry Austryn Wolfson and Edwin Curley. Both of them define common notions as ideas of the universal properties of all bodies.⁹⁶

Surprisingly, by reading the most iconic commentaries of the great 1960s revival of Spinoza research in France, namely Martial Gueroult and Gilles Deleuze⁹⁷, we have a drastically different interpretation of common notions.⁹⁸ Both Gueroult and Deleuze argue that there are

⁹⁴ CURLEY, E. (1979), 'Experience in Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GRENE, M.G. (ed.) *Spinoza: a collection of critical essays*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press [first published 1973].

⁹⁵ MILLER, J. (2004), 'Spinoza and the "A Priori"', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 34, 555-90.

⁹⁶ WOLFSON, H.A. (1934), *The philosophy of Spinoza: unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning. Vol. II. Cambridge, Massachusetts*. Common notions linked to physics see p. 125, common notions or reason linked to infinite modes see p. 162. See also related footnote three.

CURLEY, E. (1979), 'Experience in Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge', in GRENE, M.G. (ed.) *Spinoza: a collection of critical essays*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press [first published 1973]. pp. 50-51.

⁹⁷ Martial Gueroult: *Spinoza: I Dieu* (1968) & *II L'Âme* (1974). Gilles Deleuze: *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (1968) (engl. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*).

⁹⁸ It can be added that the differences in interpretation are not limited to common notions. They reach from the method of Spinoza to the relationship of his ideas to earlier thought. Wolfson famously tried to reduce Spinoza's innovative thinking into already existing sources of Aristotelian scholasticism, Medieval Jewish philosophy and Cartesianism. The French scholars in their part often exaggerated Spinoza's originality by limiting his relation to tradition to a relation to Cartesianism. On this issue see MALINOWSKI-

degrees of generality in common notions. In other words, common notions are not restricted to be ideas of properties applying to all entities, but express minimally the agreement between certain property between two bodies. Deleuze even argues that “the first common notions we form are thus the least universal, those, that is, that apply to our body and to another that agrees directly with our own and affects it with joy.”⁹⁹

The controversy related to the interpretation of common notions springs therefore, to great extent, from either emphasizing the role of common notions in Spinoza’s theory of knowledge, or from highlighting their practical value in the passage to good life. In my reading, I will argue for the latter interpretation according to which common notions designate power increasing encounters with other bodies. The idea is not, however, to downplay the epistemic importance of common notions, but rather to show how the epistemic aspect is inherently intertwined with the ethical or power increasing aspect in Spinoza’s thought as a whole. Hence, in my reading, common notions give us adequate knowledge of the good and the sources of our happiness which is expressed as different affects of joy [again, how this exactly plays out in Spinoza’s political theory is a matter of future work].

In fact, such practically oriented function of common notions is hinted towards just before Spinoza moves to the demonstration of the doctrine. In *E2p29s* he writes that adequate knowledge enables the human mind to regard “a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions.” In this sense, the theory of common notions connects directly to adequate understanding of the finitude and vulnerabilities of the human body.¹⁰⁰

CHARLES, S. (2004), 'The Circle of Adequate Knowledge: Notes on Reason and Intuition in Spinoza', in NADLER, D.G.S. (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 144-145; STEENBAKKERS, P. (2009), 'The Geometrical Order in the Ethics', in KOISTINEN, O. (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge Cambridge University Press. pp. 43-44.

⁹⁹ *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, p. 282. “*Les premières notions communes que nous formons sont donc les moins universelles, c'est-à-dire celles qui s'appliquent à notre corps et à un autre corps, qui convient directement avec le nôtre et qui l'affecte de joie.*” Les éditions de Minuit. 1968. P. 261 [fix this ref.]

¹⁰⁰ On bodily vulnerability and adequate understanding see JAMES, S. (2014), 'Spinoza, the Body, and the Good Life', in KISNER, M.J. and YOUPA, A. (eds.) *Essays on Spinoza's ethical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. SCHMITTER, A. (2012), 'Responses to Vulnerability: Medicine, Politics and the Body in Descartes and Spinoza', in STRUEVER, S.P.N.S. (ed.) *Rhetoric and Medicine in Early Modern Europe*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

I will first give reasons that support the universalist reading of common notions and then demonstrate why such reading is implausible in the light of the roles that Spinoza later assigns to common notions.

2.6.1. Common notions: The Varying Degrees of Generality

Common notions appear in a few passages in *TTP*, but it is only in the *Ethics* where the doctrine is developed.¹⁰¹ There they are introduced in the second part of the *Ethics* - and, indeed, in a way that seems to support the universalist reading. Spinoza argues that “there are certain ideas, or notions, common to all men.” (*E2p38c*). This conclusion is based on the claim that “all bodies agree in certain things” (*E2p13L2*), that is, that they must involve the same conception of their attribute, namely extension. In *E3p37-p38* Spinoza demonstrates that what is common to all things “and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing.” and that what is common to all things “can only be conceived adequately”.

Even if the demonstration of the crucial *p38* is extremely abstract and seemingly obscure,¹⁰² the idea is simple: while the confusion and mutilation related to imagination is a result of an idea involving many natures but all of them only partly, the idea that represents a common property between bodies represent fully or adequately that property. How so? Well, as the mind is the idea of the body, there is in the mind all the ideas of the parts and properties of the body. When such a property is brought into mind’s awareness by the affection that involves the common property, there is no room for confusion nor mutilation. Instead, the

¹⁰¹ In *TTP*: III/61, 64, 84, 88, 99, 179.

¹⁰² “P38: Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.

Dem.: Let A be something which is common to all bodies, and which is equally in the part of each body and in the whole. I say that A can only be conceived adequately. For its idea (by P7C) will necessarily be adequate in God, both insofar as he has the idea of the human body and insofar as he has ideas of its affections, which (by P16, P25, and P27) involve in part both the nature of the human body and that of external bodies. That is (by P12 and P13), this idea will necessarily be adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the human mind, or insofar as he has ideas that are in the human mind. The mind, therefore (by P11C), necessarily perceives A adequately, and does so both insofar as it perceives itself and insofar as it perceives its own or any external body. Nor can A be conceived in another way, q.e.d.”

mind's becomes directly and adequately aware of the body's real properties. Consequently, there is in the mind an idea that explains the nature of the body, and therefore also of the mind, adequately. In addition to the concept of the attribute or extension, there are common notions concerning motion and rest, speed and slowness that apply to all bodies.

By relying on the *p38* Spinoza notes a little later in *E2p40s1* that common notions form “the foundations of our reasoning” (*rationicii*). Due to the tremendous influence of Wolfson and Curley in the Anglo-American scholarship I will briefly summaries their reading. Wolfson takes Spinoza's account to be a “restatement of what Aristotle conceived to be demonstrative knowledge.”¹⁰³ Demonstrative reasoning then, according to Wolfson, must begin with principles that are “true, primary, immediate, more known than, prior to, and the causes of the conclusion.”¹⁰⁴ Aristotle called such principles, that can function as the immediate propositions in syllogisms, axioms. Because Aristotelian axioms are divided according to their proper field of application Spinoza's common notions, according to Wolfson, are then the axioms of the science of bodies or physics. Consequently, on Wolfson's reading common notions are universal ideas that function as self-evident basis for physics. There is surely textual support for the claim that Spinoza thought common notions as axioms. I will consider this issue in the following chapter concerning Spinoza's use of language and geometrical method (2.6.). Here I want just to show the grounds for the universalist reading.

Curley follows Wolfson's interpretation in this matter as the following quote makes more than clear:

“I take it that the laws of motion would be examples of common notions. Motion-and-rest is a universal property of bodies; our idea of motion, therefore, will be a common notion; and on Spinoza's theory that every idea involves an element of affirmation, our common idea of motion will involve a series of affirmations about things which possess this property—i.e. it will involve the laws of motion.”¹⁰⁵

Both Wolfson and Curley¹⁰⁶ rely on Spinoza's methodological claim presented in his *Theological-Political Treatise* which states that, when we interpret natural things

¹⁰³ Wolfson, vol 2, p.119.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.118. Wolfson's reference to Aristotle is *Analytica Posteriora*, I, 2, 71b, 21-22.

¹⁰⁵ Curley, “Experience in Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge”, p. 51. [FIX ALL REF]

¹⁰⁶ Wolfson, vol 2, p.126; Curley *ibid.* p.51.

“[...] we must first try to investigate those most universal things which are common to the whole nature, namely motion and rest, and their laws and rules, which nature always observes and by which she necessarily acts. From them we can come by degrees to those other things which are less universal.”¹⁰⁷

From this it seems rather straightforward that Spinoza is subscribing to the mechanistic ideal of science of his time which aims at to explain all natural phenomena in terms of movements of bodies. In this reading common notions are the universal properties of all bodies which ground our understanding of the causal laws pertaining to natural events.

As we have seen, such reading has some convincing textual support. The most obvious problem to this reading is, I think, that identifying common notions with mechanistic laws of bodies, actually renders the claim to be that all humans have adequate understanding of the laws of motion. This is obviously not true. Curley notes this, but does leave the question open.¹⁰⁸

But the most crucial problem in this reading is, however, that it neglects the affectivity of knowledge.¹⁰⁹ A strong case can be made for the claim that common notions are not the foundation of reason because they represent the most general aspects of nature, but because the ideas called common notions increase the human capacity to act – and they do so more than ideas located in the *experientia vaga* or imagination. Common notions simply correspond to more enjoyable experiential states of the mind than confused ideas. Hence, there is a kind of automatic process involved in production of reason.¹¹⁰ According to the

¹⁰⁷ Chapter VII, p. 460 in Complete works.

¹⁰⁸ “How Spinoza might have reconciled this view with the fact that people did, for many centuries, have inadequate ideas about motion, I do not know.” Curley, “Experience in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge”, p.54). Another objection can be made to Wolfson’s interpretation which seems to assume that Spinoza posits a similar common sense or faculty as Aristotle for perceiving the common sensibles. Curley notes that there is no such separate faculty in Spinoza, which is true – common notions are perceived adequately because of the pervasiveness of their objects in experience, not because of a specific perceptive capacity. [fix REFERENCE].

¹⁰⁹ The role of affects involved in knowledge becomes of tremendous importance later in the *Ethics*, because Spinoza does not think that adequate knowledge or reason can in themselves, only by the truth involved, control any passions. The reason can only have concrete role in turning passions to actions if it can produce more powerful affects that are involved in passions. See *E4p14*.

¹¹⁰ The famous expression for mind as spiritual automaton, as it too follows fixed laws, is found from Spinoza’s early work *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, paragraph 85. On the quasi-automatic character of the progress of knowledge see MALINOWSKI-CHARLES, S. (2004), ‘The Circle of Adequate Knowledge: Notes on Reason and Intuition in Spinoza’, in NADLER, D.G.S. (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

conatus-doctrine¹¹¹, once we have formed the first adequate ideas or common notions, we desire more of such ideas. Indeed, it is through the doctrine of common notions that Spinoza establishes reason as the agreement of human desire. Yet, the ethico-political implications of the doctrine of common notions are often neglected in the Anglo-American literature. Consequently, in order to understand the role played by the doctrine of common notions in the properly ethical doctrines that Spinoza presents later in the *Ethics*, we need to look more carefully into the way in which they are produced by the mind.

One of the key points in Gueroult's and Deleuze's reading of common notions is the emphasis of the actual encounters or circumstances in which common notions appear in the mind. But what is symptomatic to the Anglo-American commentaries is that they jump often quickly over the proposition 39 that follows the foundation for the universalist reading – and questions it, as I show below. It is rather surprising that even such immensely careful commenters as Margaret Wilson make very little of the *p39*.

In the middle of Spinoza's exposition of common notions we can read passages that are very difficult to incorporate to the idea that common notions correspond only to the universal properties of all bodies. For example, corollary to the *E2p39* states the following: "From this it follows that the mind is the more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its body has many things in common with other bodies."¹¹² In other words, bodies share common properties to different extents. This much might be rather obvious. But the key is that the amount of the common properties shared with other bodies that affect and can be affected by our bodies constitute the amount of adequate ideas that the mind is capable of forming. This suggests that there are properties of bodies that can trigger the production of common notions which, nonetheless, are not shared by all the existing bodies.

As already mentioned both Gueroult and Deleuze draw this conclusion. Especially the former makes an extensive analysis of the Latin adjective, *proprium*, that Spinoza uses in proposition 39: "If something is common to, and peculiar [*proprium*] to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in

¹¹¹ "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (E3p6). See Ch. 3.2.

¹¹² *Hinc sequitur, quod mens eo aptior est ad plura adaequate percipiendum, quo eius corpus plura habet cum aliis corporibus communia.*

the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind.”¹¹³ In dictionaries *prōprius* is usually rendered as own, individual, special, particular, characteristic. This choice of words by Spinoza lets us assume that some properties of given bodies are typical to them, and only them, and can still be object of common notions. Moreover, the structure of *p39* is so similar to *p38* that it is hard to make sense why *p39* needs to be stated unless it adds something new to the already stated adequacy-thesis in *p38*. According to Gueroult¹¹⁴ then, there are two types of common notions: those which apply to all bodies, be they simple or composite, such as extension, motion, rest, speed and slowness. Yet, the composite bodies constituted by the simple ones produce properties that the simple bodies do not have. Such properties are then the object of peculiar common notions.

Common notions therefore play a crucial role not just in a mechanistic theory of bodies but biological theory of composition between organisms as well. That is, living organism’s power of action (*potentia*) is constituted by how well it can adapt and combine its constitutive relations with other bodies – a process on which its persisting in being depends.¹¹⁵ Especially in Deleuze’s reading common notions designate the combining or composition of bodies that share an agreeing property. Deleuze, in fact, anticipates the focus on the mathematical or mechanical content of common notions (typical to contemporary Anglo-American interpretation), and warns us against it. “There seems to be a danger” he writes “of two mistaken interpretations of the theory of common notions: overlooking their biological sense in favor of their mathematical one, and, above all, overlooking their practical sense in favor of their speculative content.”¹¹⁶ Deleuze locates the reason for the possibility of such misreading into Spinoza’s way of presenting the theory. When common notions are introduced in the part two they are given in logical and hypothetical order summarized by the formula: when the mind produces common notions such and such are the effects. Their actual production is taken for granted, but it is not explained.

¹¹³ *Id quod corpori humano et quibusdam corporibus externis, a quibus corpus humanum affici solet, commune est, et proprium, quodque in cuiuscumque horum parte aequae ac in toto est, eius etiam idea erit in mente adaequata.*

¹¹⁴ Spinoza: L’âme (Ethique, 2), p. 338. **Fix reference.**

¹¹⁵ Cf. “The human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated.” (*E2p13Post.4*).

¹¹⁶ DELEUZE, G. (1990), *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza*. NY: Zone Books.p.281.

Due to lack of time I will leave Gueroult's monumental exposition of this subject aside for now, and focus on Deleuze's interpretation of the less-than-universal common notions. The key argument here is that the practical content of common notions is located above all at the level of the finite modes. In other words, the most universal common notions are not those which are most useful from an individual modal point of view. They simply state what is common to all bodies, while the persisting in being of individual modes seems to require also, and perhaps above all, notions that can express what is common to them and a given other body – not just to the whole of nature. The practical content of common notions, emphasized by Deleuze, is hinted already in *E2p29s*. There Spinoza, without yet having demonstrated how human mind can have adequate ideas, says that when the mind is determined internally, that is, has adequate ideas it understand the agreements, differences, and oppositions involved in the modal interaction.¹¹⁷

Now, the most universal common notions that apply to all the bodies obviously can teach us nothing of the differences and oppositions between bodies. Yet Spinoza takes this knowledge to be an essential part of reason. How should this be understood? Here we need to remember the affectivity of knowledge. Any given encounter between bodies involves something in common – otherwise the causal interaction would not be possible. Yet, an affection involving a sad affect does not enable the mind to focus on the common properties involved in the encounter, but determines the mind to focus on that which diminishes its power of action. This is always something contrary, some disagreeing property inherent in the affecting body. The situation becomes the opposite when an encounter involves a joyful affect. Things are joyful by virtue of a common property which agrees with the composition of our body, and hence by definition increases the power of action. This joyful empowering affection induces the mind to form the common notion that correspond to the common property.¹¹⁸

Consequently, there seems to be good reasons to think that the most universal common notions are not the first that we form. In effect, they can only be formed once there are such

¹¹⁷ “I say expressly that the mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [NS: and mutilated] knowledge, of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of Nature, that is, so long as it is determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that, and not so long as it is determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For so often as it is disposed internally, in this or another way, then it regards things clearly and distinctly, as I shall show below.” (*E2p29s*).

¹¹⁸ DELEUZE, G. (1990), *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza*. NY: Zone Books.p.282.

favourable circumstances that involve a peculiar property that directly agrees with the human body. Simply put, the universal common notions of motion and rest cannot be formed in cases in which the bodies affecting our bodies involve contrary properties (at least when the contrary modes of power are strong). It is here then, that we need to take the modal point of view into account. From the point of view of the whole of nature everything is combined into a one single individual with no internal oppositions (*E2p13L7s*). But this is never the point of view of any single mode. Their persisting in being is dependent on avoiding those external properties that have the power to decompose their constituting relations, and uniting with properties that agree with their composite nature.

Hence the proper formulation of the *E2p38* would be “Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.” Added with: “Insofar there are no contrary properties involved in the affection in which the common things are communicated.”

Yet, the argument that I have been proposing here following Deleuze might seem to contradict the *E5p4* which states that “There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept.” But when one attends to the demonstration and the scholium following it, it becomes obvious that this is the case only when the mind already has at least some common notions at its disposal – including the most general ones. So once the mind has produced the most universal common notions it can, even in the case of sad affects, attend to that which is common to the external body and its own. As Deleuze points out, from this procedure follows the practical function of reason that was anticipated in *E2p29s*: the common notions applying to any given body will be the most general. However, when a common notion is formed in the case of sad affects “it makes us understand why these two bodies in particular do not agree from their *own* viewpoint. [...] But when a very universal common notion makes us understand a disagreement, a feeling of active joy again flows from this: *an active joy always follows from what we understand.*”¹¹⁹

Consequently, Deleuze gives us the following order of forming common notions: first there are passive joys that increase human power of action, but the desires following from such affects are still passive. From the said passions, the mind is nonetheless able to form a

¹¹⁹ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 286. Italics original.

common notion. The forming of coming notion is followed by active joy that is explained by human power of action. Finally, the active joy adds to the passive one, but, very importantly, “replaces the passions of desire born of the latter by desires belonging to reason, which are genuine actions.”¹²⁰

[This chapter is based on an older text, and as I see it, it needs to be reworked substantially by making the main argument more condense and that argument needs to be related more concretely to the main arguments of the thesis. For example, one could make much more of the nominal-real definition tension (see next chapter) in relation to common notions. Deleuze’s reading can also be questioned to some extent in the light of what Spinoza says in E4 about the necessarily inadequate character of knowledge concerning sad affects or evil. This of course makes another tension to Spinoza’s own theses in the Ethics, because it seems to question E2p29s. Also, I think that the vulnerability point of view needs to be worked more explicitly out in relation to common notions.]

2.7. Imagination, Memory and Language

In this chapter including its three sub-chapters I will raise questions on the relationship between language as inadequate medium to communicate ideas and to what extent it can reflect adequate meaning. The former type of language is constituted by imagination while the latter expresses reason and common notions. Thus, the states lie in the possibility of purifying language from its initial imaginative contents. I will begin by presenting Spinoza’s view of language as constituted by imagination (Ch. 2.6.1.). Then I’ll move into considerations of how common notions can be communicated in language, and whether they should be seen as axioms in Spinoza’s demonstrative reasoning. I’ll raise some of the difficulties linked to such an aim, and analyse the geometrical method itself as a tool to answer to these difficulties. The geometrical method itself, however, poses some further problems (Ch. 2.6.2.). Finally, I will present Spinoza’s view of so called beings of reason that, I argue, mediate between imagination and reason, and how their use in Spinoza’s reasoning is exemplified by the so called nominal definitions, as opposed to real definitions (Ch. 2.6.3.).

¹²⁰ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 285

In *E2p40s2* Spinoza argues that we perceive many things “from signs, for example, from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, like those through which we imagine the things.” What Spinoza has in mind here is the account of memory and language which he has introduced in *E2p18* and its scholium. This, we might remember, is the proposition following Spinoza’s definition of imagination. In effect, from the earliest works of his Spinoza has seen an intimate link between imagination, memory and language, as we can note, for example, from the following passage in *The Emendation of the Intellect*:

“Next, since words are part of the imagination, i.e., since we feign many concepts, in accordance with the random composition of words in the memory from some disposition of the body, it is not to be doubted that words, as much as the imagination, can be the cause of many and great errors, unless we are very wary of them.” (*TIE* §89; II/33)

Spinoza’s argument here is in a nutshell the following: memory is a capacity that tracks and records imaginations that correspond to the affection of the body. This association or linking (*concatenatio*) of ideas according to the order of the affections of the body then, constitutes the meaning of words. This is because, as I will explain in detail below, memory associates two series of corporeal affections, namely, those that represent the natures of external things and those that designate such things in corporeal symbols and sounds. But due to the fact that the content of bodily affections of different individuals differ from one another, this seems to lead to the view that lingual meaning is inherently subjective and that language in general is, for Spinoza, an inadequate medium for expressing adequate ideas. This then has the further consequence that philosophy expressed through natural language is doomed to be an impossible trial to communicate that which cannot be communicated in words.¹²¹ The latter position is in effect, taken by some commentators, and for reasons that will be clear below, I think that it is not an easy position to completely refute – even if some of the most eminent

¹²¹This problem goes of course back to at least Plato. Morris Henry Partee has given a nice summary of the problem in Plato: “Since words are already a physical imitation of reality, both poetic manipulation and critical study of language can only fix man's attention on a level inferior to reality itself. Other physical imitations, through their mathematical proportions, can express the necessary harmony. But in language ordinary human convention provides a necessary modification of the correspondence to nature. This inherent human element prevents language from being completely faithful to reality. Expressing only a partial truth, language is neither beautiful nor trustworthy.” PARTEE, M.H. (1972), 'Plato's Theory of Language', *Foundations of Language*, 8, 113-32. p.114.

Spinoza scholars take it as refuted¹²². Accordingly, I begin with explaining why such a position would follow from Spinoza's theory of language, and the present the difficulties I see in refuting it completely.

2.7.1. Words as Mental Histories of Nature

In *E2p18* Spinoza defines the psychological law of association which I above mentioned as the other source for the inadequate cognition or imagination. According to Spinoza, this law of association governs the ways in which meaning is attached to words and objects: "If the human body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, then when the mind subsequently imagines one of them, it will immediately recollect the others also." (*E2p18*). This proposition leads Spinoza to define memory as the capacity to link together the imaginings corresponding to the affections of the body (*E2p18s*). The concatenation of the ideas in the mind, as it happens according to the particular experiences or affections of each individual human being, is furthermore, supposed to explain the differences in understanding signs. According to Spinoza, we learn the meaning of words from the context of their use:

"[...] the mind, from the thought of one thing, immediately passes to the thought of another, which has no likeness to the first: as, for example, from the thought of the word *pomum* a Roman will immediately pass to the thought of the fruit [viz. an apple], which has no similarity to that articulate sound and nothing in common with it except that the body of the same man has often been affected by these two [NS: at the same time], that is, that the man often heard the word *pomum* while he saw the fruit." (*E2p18s*).

In an important recent paper titled "Spinoza's Language" Mogens Lærke draws attention to the crucial statements included in this passage.¹²³ According to Lærke, Spinoza establishes here first, that there are no shared causal properties between the apple and the word *pomum* which would determine their relations. Rather, the relation of words to their objects is completely arbitrary and relative to the individuals who know the meaning of the words from their use. Second, lingual signification is a result of coordination of two series of images, namely, *images of things* and *images of words*. They are both corporeal traces on the body that, when experienced together, lead to *image-conjunctions*, to borrow Lærke's

¹²² E.g. Parkinson, Curley, Laerke. See below.

¹²³ LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47.

expression;¹²⁴ that is, to association between certain things and certain words. These image-conjunctions correspond to the imaginations of the mind as the mind registers the affections of the body, and will be linked associatively in the mind according to the order of the traces of the body. Furthermore, “Such recollections of image-conjunctions” writes Lærke,

“contribute to the establishment of something we can term a ‘habit of the mind,’ namely a constant inclination towards associating the corresponding imaginations, that is, the imagination of the fruit and the imagination of the word. Each new repetition of the image-conjunction contributes to reinforcing that habit.”¹²⁵

Now, the contexts in which the image-conjunctions are formed naturally varies from one individual to another. Consequently, the meaning that different people have for the same words can differ considerably, as Spinoza notes:

“In this way each of us will pass from one thought to another, as each one’s association has ordered the images of things in the body. For example; a soldier, having seen traces of a horse in the sand, will immediately pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a horseman, and from that to the thought of war, and so on. But a farmer will pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a plough, and then to that of a field, and so on. And so each one, according as he has been accustomed to join and connect the images of things in this or that way, will pass from one thought to another.” (*E2p18s*).

There is then an important sense in which, for Spinoza, language seems incapable of transferring meaning adequately or objectively. Furthermore, in *CM* Spinoza refers to the content of words¹²⁶ as “narratives or mental histories of nature” (*CM VI, I/246*). As Lærke argues, such description of words captures well Spinoza’s idea in the *Ethics*, that the meaning of words reflects the mental histories of the collectives who use given words in their own specific cultural-historical contexts.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the affections that constitute the meaning of words often involve affects, which explain why words also involve emotional attachments, and why “It’s extremely difficult to change the meaning of a word.” as Spinoza notes in *TTP* (*VII:40; G III/105*).

¹²⁴ Ibid. P.534.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Lærke notes here the resemblance to Hume.

¹²⁶ In this passage Spinoza uses the word “idea” to refer to the referent of the word. But such referent, it is clear from the passage I think, here is the affections of the body which are the mental histories of nature.

¹²⁷ LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47. p.534.

The view according to which words are but mental histories of nature seems to be confirmed in the *Ethics* by Spinoza's critique against transcendental terms and universals or species – crucial philosophical concepts for the Schools and the Ancients alike. But for Spinoza the former, such as *Being*, *Thing* and *Something* turn out to be nothing but auxiliaries of imagination that the mind forms when the number of things exceeds body's capacity of forming clear images of them. Likewise, the species like 'man' is formed when the mind cannot attend to the excessive differences between individual humans but focuses on those properties that most often have affected the body. Consequently, "each will form universal images of things according to the disposition of his body. Hence it is not surprising that so many controversies have arisen among the philosophers, who have wished to explain natural things by mere images of things." (*E2p40s1*).

What should we then think of the fact that Spinoza uses a natural language, Latin, to express his philosophy? Furthermore, is there not also, as Hubbeling has argued, a real tension between Spinoza's nominalism and his deductive method?¹²⁸ Spinoza clearly uses such universal terms as 'man', 'being' and 'reason' in his own reasoning in ways that seem to fall under the use that he himself judges completely inadequate in *E2p40s1*. This has led some commentators to think that there is a blatant contradiction between Spinoza's view on language and his own philosophical language. The most famous example of this is found from David Savan who sees Spinoza arguing that language is nothing but bodily motions and therefore completely inadequate for useful philosophical usage, that is to express truth.¹²⁹ Savan's position is based on the conviction that for Spinoza imagination is not just altogether inadequate perception but that the confusion related to words is a "necessary consequence of the action of external bodies upon our body" and therefore no knowledge can "eliminate the imaginative and confused generality of words."¹³⁰

As pointed out by Lærke, there is textual evidence that the extreme position suggested by Savan is not actually the one Spinoza occupies.¹³¹ For example, in *E2p47s* Spinoza writes

¹²⁸ HUBBELING, H.G. (1964), *Spinoza's Methodology*. Groningen: Van Gorcum & Comp.p 21-22.

¹²⁹ SAVAN, D. (1958), 'Spinoza and language', *The philosophical review*, 67, 212-25. pp.213-215.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.214.

¹³¹ LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47. pp.524-525.

that “most errors consist only in our not rightly applying names to things”¹³² clearly implying that there is also an adequate way of referring to things with words. Spinoza’s letter to Balling gives additional evidence for this as there Spinoza thinks that it is possible that the imagination “follows the traces of the intellect in everything and links its images and words together in order, as the intellect does its demonstrations” (*Ep.* 17; IV/77). Further weight against Savan’s interpretation is provided by both G. H. R. Parkinson and Lærke by arguing for the possibility of referring to common notions with words.¹³³ They both argue that, when Spinoza criticises the transcendental and universal terms he is criticising a particular use of those words, not saying that such words *however* used will refer only inadequately to things. Now supposedly, as we saw above, the common notions can only be conceived adequately (*E2p38c*). Consequently, defining a word in such a way that it succeeds to refer to a common notion would solve the problem of inadequate reference. I think, in agreement with both Parkinson and Lærke, that this is partly what Spinoza is trying to do in the *Ethics*. But as the reception of his written ideas suggests, from his own time to ours, he was not always successful in turning the mental histories of nature into adequate description of common notions.

2.7.2. Axioms and the Geometrical Order: The Problem of Self-evidency

A suitable example of Spinoza’s struggle of putting adequate ideas into words is, neatly enough, the theory of the common notions which should be the very answer to the fluidity of meaning. As we saw above (Ch. 2.5.), to our day there is no agreement within Spinoza-scholarship on how we should interpret Spinoza’s common notions. But here it suffices to draw attention to a specific methodological function of common notions, namely their role as axioms. As I mentioned, there is considerable textual evidence of the fact that part of the function of common notions in *Ethics* is to provide a model for axioms on which a demonstrative science can be build.¹³⁴ The most fundamental criteria for axioms in this sense

¹³² *Et profecto plerique errores in hoc solo consistunt, quod scilicet nomina rebus non recte applicamus.*

¹³³ PARKINSON, G.H.R. (1969), 'Language and knowledge in Spinoza', *Inquiry*, 12, 15-40. LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza’s Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47. p.525. Curley adheres to Parkinson’s interpretation as well, see CURLEY, E. (1979), 'Experience in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge', in GRENE, M.G. (ed.) *Spinoza: a collection of critical essays*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press [first published 1973]. p.33.

¹³⁴ See especially Spinoza’s comment in E1p8s2: “But if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of P7. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone, and would be numbered among the common notions.”; and Letters with Oldenburg 1-4. The reading of

is, as Lodewijk Meyer puts it in his introduction to Spinoza's *PP*, that they are self-evident for anyone who has rightly understood the terms involved in the definition of the axiom (I/127). But then there is still the problem to which I hinted above and which Spinoza acknowledges in *E2p47s*: because of the arbitrariness and differing imaginations involved in the meaning of words, people interpret different lingual formulations as self-evident. This is to say, insofar as common notions are expressed in language, there is always a risk that they do not in fact communicate the self-evidence that they should.

Spinoza faced this problem in his early correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, the secretary to the recently established Royal Society. The latter troubles Spinoza to the limits of the philosopher's patience by insisting that Spinoza's axioms should not be called common notions because, well, not all of them are immediately known and thus neither common to all minds (*Ep. 3, IV/11*). To this Spinoza answers that his axioms follow from his definitions of substance and accident (mode). Here Oldenburg reveals that he is reluctant to approve Spinoza's redefinition of the crucial concepts as he for instance claims that "Surely God has nothing formally in common with created things, yet nearly all of us regard him as their cause." (ibid.) Obviously, in Spinoza's univocal metaphysics the formal reality of God is precisely the same kind of reality as the formal reality of modes, even if infinite and eternal.¹³⁵

But Spinoza faces much worse resistance to his definitions concerning first principles in his correspondence with a grain broker and an amateur theologian Willem van Blijenbergh (1632-1696) and with the legal scholar Hugo Boxel (unknown?)¹³⁶. Van Blijenbergh takes as his point of departure the conviction that the holy Scripture must be seen as the ultimate authority in philosophical matters as well. While defending such position Van Blijenbergh puts forward practically all the superstitious beliefs concerning an anthropomorphic God that

common notions as axioms see WOLFSON, H.A. (1934), *The philosophy of Spinoza: unfolding the latent processes of his reasoning. Vol. II*. Cambridge, Massachusetts. pp.118-130. Reading of Spinoza's axioms as flexible hypothesis tested as one goes on in the deductive system see BENNETT, J. (1984), *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. pp. 18-22. KLEVER, W. (1986), 'Axioms in Spinoza's Science and Philosophy of Science', in E. CURLEY, W.K., F. MIGNINI (ed.) *Studia Spinozana Vol. 2. Spinoza's Epistemology*. Hannover: Walther & Walther Verlag.

¹³⁵See for instance LÆRKE, M. (2017), 'Aspects of Spinoza's Theory of Essence', in SINCLAIR, M. (ed.) *The actual and the possible: modality and metaphysics in modern philosophy*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

¹³⁶Note to self: check this!

Spinoza will later criticize in *ElApp.* (*Ep.* 20; see esp. IV/96-98; 117-120). In his response Spinoza's notes the distance between himself and his opponent:

“When I read your first Letter, I thought our opinions nearly agreed. But from the second, which I received on the 21st of this month, I see that I was quite mistaken, and that we disagree not only about the things ultimately to be derived from first principles, but also about the first principles themselves. [...] For I see that no demonstration, however solid it may be according to the Laws of Demonstration, has weight with you unless it agrees with that explanation which you, or Theologians known to you, attribute to sacred Scripture.” (*Ep.* 21; IV/126).

Boxel in his part, among other things, while insisting that spirits and ghosts exists, denies that Spinoza can have as clear knowledge concerning the divine as he might have of geometrical figures:

“I say that spirits are like God, because he is also a spirit. You require as clear an idea of spirits as you have of a triangle. This is impossible. Tell me, I beseech you, what idea you have of God, and whether, for your intellect, it is as clear as that of a triangle. I know that you don't.” (*Ep.* 55; IV/257).

After trying to explain his position in three letters Spinoza cannot but conclude that no agreement is possible because he and Boxel follow completely different principles in their reasoning. “There are a great many people” Spinoza notes laconically

“who are such lovers of contradiction that they have mocked geometrical demonstrations themselves. Sextus Empiricus and the other skeptics whom you mention say it is false that the whole is greater than its part, and they judge similarly concerning the other axioms.” (*Ep.* 58; G IV/260).¹³⁷

The citations from these letters draw our attention to a major problem in early modern philosophy that has to do with the introduction of the standard of truth from mathematics to philosophy. While the certainty involved in mathematical demonstrations might be absolute, as Spinoza's favourite example “the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.” would have us to think, the fact remains that the even the mathematical terms must be, in order to be understood, translated into natural language. And here the problems of

¹³⁷ Concerning Spinoza's reference to Sextus, Curley notes the following: “Sextus does not say quite this in any writing which has come down to us, and indeed, says the opposite in *Against the Physicists* I, 310. (See Akkerman in AHW, 494.) He does, however, use certain paradoxes about the nature of wholes and parts to deny that there are such things as wholes and parts (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III, 98–101; *Against the Physicists* I, 338–49).” See ft.108, p.422 in C vol. II.

equivocalness of meaning related to natural languages seems to persist. We have seen that Spinoza, like many other early modern philosophers including Descartes, experienced this problem first hand with their contemporaries. This should come as no surprise because, as Lærke points out, the early modern philosophy is generally marked by its opposition to the philosophical language of the Schoolmen, as it was widely argued that the latter invented obscure and objectless words.¹³⁸ This meant, on the one hand, that there was an attempt to ground the philosophical language on the common usage of natural languages. On the other hand, natural languages were equally seen as involving all kinds of obscurities – a fact that led Descartes and Hobbes and Spinoza all to revise the established meanings and to give them new definitions. But because “words have a definite meaning only from their usage”, Spinoza notes, “it is very difficult to change the meaning of a word.”¹³⁹ The effort to revise the meaning of established use is therefore difficult and requires the fine art of persuasion.

The geometrical order of demonstration (*geometrico ordo demonstrationis*) is of course part of such persuasion. But in order for the persuasion to achieve its goals the philosopher has to be able to free people of the prejudices related to language and imagination. Descartes puts this problem very acutely in the *PP* after he has just named some of the most evident axioms or common notions, like the principle of non-contradiction:

“Eternal truths are clearly perceived; but, because of preconceived opinions, not all of them are clearly perceived by everyone.

In the case of these common notions, there is no doubt that they are capable of being clearly and distinctly perceived; for otherwise they would not properly be called common notions. But some of them do not really have an equal claim to be called 'common' among all people, since they are not equally well perceived by everyone. This is not, I think, because one man's faculty of knowledge extends more widely than another's, but because the common notions are in conflict with the preconceived opinions of some people who, as a result, cannot easily grasp them. But the selfsame notions are perceived with the utmost clarity by other people who are free from such preconceived opinions.” (*PP* §50, SCM I, p. 209; AT VIII).

Probably having similar problems in mind Spinoza writes in the *Ethics*, right after having demonstrated common notions, the following:

¹³⁸ LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47. pp.529-530, 536-537.

¹³⁹ First quote: *TTP* XII; III/160. Second one: *TTP* VII; III/105.

“[...] from these [explanations] it would be established which notions are more useful than the others, and which are of hardly any use; and then, which are common, *which are clear and distinct only to those who have no prejudices*, and finally, which are ill-founded.” (E2p40s1; my emphasis).

In other words, it seems that the so called common notions or axioms, when expressed in language, can be taken as such only when the preconceived opinions or prejudices that hinder the mind from perceiving them are removed. But here, I think, we must take the axioms and definitions themselves as both hypotheses and tools of persuasion which are later supported by other data partly, at least, drawn from experience and other imaginative means. In fact, here we must pay some attention to an immensely important distinction in Spinoza's use of definitions, namely to that between nominal and real definitions. I will analyse the implications of Spinoza's use of these two different kinds of definitions at greater length in the next chapter. Here it suffices to note that nominal definitions in general are free from the burdens of reality, because they can involve abstract or ideal properties as parts of the definitions, such as properties and universal or transcendental terms. As examples of such definitions we can give the Aristotelian definition of man as rational animal (universal) or Euclidean definition of circle as an equality of straight lines drawn from one point to the extreme (property). The beings produced by such nominal definitions Spinoza calls entities of reason (see next chapter), because they do not define any real beings, but only abstractions. As opposed to such definition, real definitions must involve and explain the causes by which the entity described is produced. In other words, real definitions must be genetic. In general then, nominal definitions can be taken as stipulative: they allow the introduction of all kinds of entities into the system and their adequacy can be tested in due course by giving support as one goes with one's demonstrations. (see *TIE* § 95-97; II/34-35.)¹⁴⁰

In the *Ethics* Spinoza makes extensive use of such nominal definitions. There are thus good reasons to believe, as Lærke well demonstrates, that Spinoza meant his geometrical method as a tool by which he could purify the philosophical language of the imaginative contents essential to natural languages. In this he might have been influenced not just the revisionism of language that was an integral part of Cartesianism, but perhaps also such Port Royal

¹⁴⁰ Deleuze gives a nice summary of the two definitions and Spinoza's use of them, see DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. pp.61-62.

Logicians as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole who, in their famous *Logique ou l'art de penser* (1662), describe the advantages of the geometrical method as follows:

“The best way to avoid the confusion of words that one finds in ordinary language is to make up a new language and new words that are attached only to the ideas that we wish that they represent. But, in order to do that, it is not necessary to make up new sounds, for one can employ those that are already in use, while considering them as if they had no signification, in order to give them the [signification] that we want them to have.”¹⁴¹

The crucial thing for Spinoza in the *Ethics* then, according to Lærke's reading, is not just to give new *definitions of things* but also new *definitions of names*. The introduction of new nominal definitions enables the philosopher to uproot the meaning of words from their etymological history that reflects the collective imaginations of the people who have been using the given words – the mental histories of nature. If this succeeds, then language actually is capable of communicating philosophical truths; and because such truths in Spinoza correspond to the way in which things are actually comprehended in the divine intellect, such language can itself be said to reflect the order of the divine intellect. Lærke thus sees a sharp difference in the ways in which Spinoza puts language to use in his two masterpieces:

“[...] If the *TTP* ventures to show how Scripture “accommodates” the divine Word to the human understanding and “speaks in a human way” about divine things, the ambition of the *Ethics* is arguably to do exactly the opposite of what Spinoza takes the Bible to do, namely putting the geometrical method to the task of teaching us to speak in a divine way about human things.”¹⁴²

The geometrical method is therefore, according to Lærke, a means of leading the reader to link the meaning of words, not according to the order of the body or the more general etymology of the words, but according to the order of the intellect. For the most part Lærke's reading seems to me accurate and very convincing. The only doubt I have concerns the imaginative use of language in the *Ethics* – of which Lærke rather surprisingly does say very little. The first point is, that if we follow Lærke's reading about the real and nominal definitions, then it seems that all the words of natural language, or Latin, that Spinoza uses

¹⁴¹ Translation is Lærke's, quoted in LÆRKE, M. (2014), 'Spinoza's Language', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 52, 519-47. p. 537. As Lærke points out the *Logique* was listed as belonging to Spinoza's library but because we do not know how well Spinoza could read French the direct influence is a matter of speculation rather than certain knowledge.

¹⁴² Ibid. p.529.

but does not define bear with them the mental histories of nature – and in the *Ethics* these are plenty. But even more interesting case can be made from Spinoza’s own remarks in the *Ethics* where he clearly sees it advantageous to leave the “cumbersome” geometrical method and to put things in natural language “so that everyone may more easily perceive what I think” (*E4p18s*). In other places Spinoza wishes to confirm the things he has proved in geometrical manner by experience so that “men can be induced to consider them fairly” (*E3p2s*). This is because, I believe, Spinoza thinks similarly to Descartes that it is easier for the mind to think those things by which the body is more often affected, while to follow the order of the intellect requires arduous efforts (*E2p40s1*, *E2p47s*), or as Spinoza puts it in *TTP*:

“But because deducing a thing solely from intellectual notions very often requires a long chain of perceptions, plus extreme caution, mental perceptiveness, and restraint—all of which are rarely found in men—men would rather be taught by experience than deduce all their perceptions from a few axioms and connect them together.” (*TTP*, V:36; III/77).

Consequently, it seems to me that there is in the *Ethics*, parallel to the rigorous aim of *teaching us to speak in a divine way about human things*, another language consisting of sometimes more delicate, sometimes more aggressive ways of appealing to the imaginative capacities of the readers. This claim might seem as repeating Deleuze’s famous thesis that “the *Ethics* was written twice. [...] one constituted by the continuous line or tide of propositions, proofs and corollaries, and the other, discontinuous, constituted by the broken line or volcanic chain of the scholia.” But Deleuze’s dichotomy between the strictly deductive passages and those appearing in appendixes, prefaces and scholia cannot, from the point of view of imaginative language, be maintained. This is because Spinoza uses also in his propositions such abstractions that he calls entities of imagination or in other places as entities of reason, as examples could be given the definitions of affects of hope and fear in relation to time, the various definitions of good and evil, free man etc.

[NOTE: To really make this point needs more textual evidence and reflection, that I am able to do now. Let me then just summarize the argument that needs to be developed in the future.

First of all, there are many propositions in the *Ethics* that seem to state ideal conditions for the exercise of human power of thinking and acting. At the same time, there are other passages that directly contradict such propositions. For example in *E5p4* Spinoza states that:

“There is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct concept”. But he has already in E4p64 stated that “Knowledge of evil is an inadequate knowledge.” Now, because knowledge of evil is the experience of sadness itself (p64d), this seems to make it impossible that we could form a clear and distinct concept of such affection of the body. In the literature passages similar to this has led some scholars, especially Dan Garber,¹⁴³ to make a sharp distinction between the rationalist ideal ethics of Spinoza in the one hand, and the real human condition which appears as to make the former completely inadequate to guide ethics and practical reason in the real life. My aim in the future is to make an analysis of all of these passages in the light of Spinoza’s use of beings of reason and nominal definitions as rhetorical tools, and to suggest that rather than seeing the seemingly opposed passages as contradicting Spinoza’s overall ethical theory, we should see them as tools by which the imaginative mind can be directed to way of thinking that is not yet rational, but mimics and thus prepares the mind for thinking things according to common notions, rather than imaginative abstracts.

In order to give some hint of the ideas behind this reading, I will give a short summary of the entities of reason and nominal definitions as something that mediates between imagination and reason proper.]

2.7.3. *Entia imaginationis, Entia Rationis*: Between Imagination and Reason

Reminiscently to Descartes’s comments concerning mind-dependent beings like time, numbers and universal (*PP* §57-59), Spinoza distinguishes between real properties and natures of things and those mind-dependent categories that our mind produces in order to organise the variety of our ideas and imaginations – especially concerning sense-perceptions. Such notions Spinoza calls most often beings of reason (*entia rationis*), but sometimes beings of imagination (*entia imaginationis*) or aids of imagination (*auxilia imaginationis*).¹⁴⁴ Even if

¹⁴³ GARBER, D. (2004), 'Dr. Fischelson’s Dilemma: Spinoza on Freedom and Sociability', in YIRMIYAHU YOVEL, G.S. (ed.) *Ethica IV : Spinoza on reason and the "Free Man"*. New York: Little Room Press. Fix reference, damn endnote!

¹⁴⁴ Fix references. There are certain differences in them, but I have no time to go into them here. See especially DEUGD, C.D. (1966), *The Significance of Spinoza’s First Kind of Knowledge*. Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V.

beings of reason are necessary for the limited human mind to produce order for the world, these notions should never be confused with real things in nature. This means also that they should not be used to explain nature as they are but figments of our minds. Anyhow, one of Spinoza's most interesting remarks concerning being of reason is that it is "[...] nothing but a mode of thinking, which helps us to more easily retain, explain, and imagine the things we have understood." (*CM I:I; I/233*). I believe that here Spinoza presents the already familiar view according to which our mind needs special constructions that help it to distinguish between the things it has adequately perceived and those that are completely fed for it thought imagination. It is in this like, I think, that we should interpret the following passage in the *Ethics*:

"But that men do not have so clear a knowledge of God as they do of the common notions comes from the fact that they cannot imagine God, as they can bodies, and that they have joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing. Men can hardly avoid this, because they are continually affected by external bodies." (*E2p47s*).¹⁴⁵

Here Spinoza points to a very important fact: the ideas of reason that spring from experience, i.e. common notions, are much more easily retained than intellectual notions conceived apart from experience. From this follows a need to be able to transit the strength that the ideas constituted by experience have to those which we reflect by reason but which are not activated by experience just at that moment. This would explain some of the passages in the *Ethics* where Spinoza refers to proving by experience (e.g. *E3p2s*). On the other hand, because most of the beings of reasons are produced by imagination,¹⁴⁶ they can be used to modify the way in which we grasp things by imagination [clarify, examples...]. Consequently, even though Savan's view concerning Spinoza's theory of language has been on some aspects convincingly refuted (see above), he presents extremely interesting and provocative speculations of the relation between entities of reason and the general method of expression in *Ethics*. According to Savan, all Spinoza's uses of abstract and universal terms, as well as his use of ethical ideals, should be seen as *entia rationis* or auxiliaries of imagination which "enable us to use words correctly in comparing the experiences which our

¹⁴⁵ Compare with: "To your question, whether I have as clear an idea of God as I do of a triangle, I answer "yes." But if you ask me whether I have as clear an image of God as I do of a triangle, I'll answer "no." For we can't imagine God, but we can indeed understand him." (*Ep. 56; G IV/261*). **Note to self:** this contradicts the previous identification of God's essence as the concept of attribute as common notion.

¹⁴⁶ Note to self: are all? Cf. Hobbes in *Objections* who questions that the mathematical idea of triangle could be formed without sensory experience of triangle.

imagination provides us. They enable us to see how our adequate ideas of substance, thought, extension, motion and rest, and so on, ideas which are native to the intellect, operate within our experience.”¹⁴⁷

Now, Savan is not the only scholar who sees a link between beings of reason and our adequate ideas. Theo Verbeek has even gone as far as to suggest that those less-than-universal common notions referred to in E2p39 are nothing but beings of reason. Verbeek argues that they allow us to construct a common framework for natural sciences and ethics, and that such a “framework is ultimately centred in our own body”¹⁴⁸. Consequently, Verbeek sees an inherent link between imagination and reason:

“In sum, the general purpose of propositions 38–40 is to suggest a strategy for the handling of *entia rationis*, that is, of all those principles, concepts, and notions which, without being ideas of things, are indispensable for the construction of a theory of reality. In a general way, therefore, reason can be said to be the faculty of devising and handling *entia rationis*. [...] At the same time, however, it should be pointed out that *entia rationis* are actually *entia imaginationis* and, by implication, that reason is closer to the imagination than to the intellect.”¹⁴⁹

A closer analysis of Verbeek’s theses will have to wait for the future. But to give an idea for the reader of how Spinoza thinks concerning beings of reason, let me summarise Spinoza’s presentation of them in the *CM* and Ep.12.

In *CM* Spinoza criticizes the scholastic way of distinguishing between two types of Being, namely real being and being of reason. In demonstrating the faulty in this distinction Spinoza distinguishes between three categories of beings that we can think, but which do not exist outside the mind. These are, in order, firstly, beings whose nature involves a contradiction, like Chimaera; secondly, fictitious beings whose ideas are produced by either connecting or disjoining existing elements available to imagination or perception; and finally, the being of

¹⁴⁷ SAVAN, D. (1958), 'Spinoza and language', *The philosophical review*, 67, 212-25. pp. 223-224.

¹⁴⁸ VERBEEK, T. (2009), 'Imagination and Reason in Spinoza', in HEINÄMAA, S. and REUTER, M. (eds.) *Psychology And Philosophy: Inquiries Into The Soul From Late Scholasticism To Contemporary Thought*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. p.94.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

reason which “is nothing but a mode of thinking, which helps us to more easily *retain, explain, and imagine* the things we have understood.” (*CM*, I:I; I/233).

Of these three classes that concern the beings of reason the first involves the tools by which we aid our memory and imagination to organise new entities that we encounter with our previous experiences, like already mentioned genus and species. The second class of explanatory tools involves modes of perception that we form by comparing things. These include time, number and measure, of which “time serves to explain duration, number discrete quantity, and measure continuous quantity.” (*CM*, I:I; G I/234). In a letter written by the time *CM* was in preparation for printing Spinoza specifies the difference between attending to things thorough imagination or abstractly and through intellect as follows:

“We conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, or superficially, as we [NS: commonly] imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone [NS: without the help of the imagination]. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens [NS: seldom and] with great difficulty, then (as we have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.” (*Ep.* 12; G IV/56).

Accordingly, as we abstract quantity and duration as they flow from eternal things “we can determine them as we please” (*ibid.*). From this it follows that time is used to measure duration and numbers are used to divide modes of Substance into classes so that we can more easily imagine them without attending to how they are determined, caused and depended on the Substance. Hence, even if such notions are to some extent necessary as aids of imaginations we will never understand things right if we think such beings of reason as real entities or if we try to understand the modes of substance through such notions (*ibid.* G IV/57).

However, Spinoza’s phrase in the above citation saying that we can determine abstract entities as we please, points to an important characteristic of the definitions of beings of reason. In *TIE* §95-97 Spinoza distinguishes between the nominal definitions and real definitions. The former give us definitions of abstract beings or beings of reason, while the latter describe real beings in nature and therefore has to involve the cause the produces the essence of the being in question.

[NOTE: the importance of the nominal / real definitions occurred a bit too late for me. Therefore, somewhat unfortunately I have made a more robust analysis of this distinction in Ch. 3.2. where Spinoza's definition of the conatus doctrine functions as an example of the importance of the distinction in interpreting Spinoza. I understand that as the paper stands now, the proper place for the presentation with examples would be here, but I do not have time to fix this now. So, dear reader if you need to understand this distinction more properly already here, I advise to consult Ch. 3.2.]

Now, as Spinoza says, it does not matter with abstract entities or beings of reason whether we give them definitions which express their essence or only some of their properties. But the situation is quite the contrary with real definitions:

“[...] it matters a great deal concerning Physical and real beings, because the properties of things are not understood so long as their essences are not known. If we neglect them, we shall necessarily overturn the connection of the intellect, which ought to reproduce the connection of Nature, and we shall completely miss our goal.” (*TIE* §95; II/35).

So the first requirement for real definition is that it involves the proximate cause by which the being described is produced. Spinoza then gives another requirement for the definition as follows: “We require a concept, or definition, of the thing such that when it is considered alone, without any others conjoined, all the thing's properties can be deduced from it.” (ibid.) In other words, “To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing.” (ibid.). Now, this is one of Spinoza's methodological rules that will prove very problematic when thinking of, not geometrical figures, but real beings in nature. This is because, the moment when their “essence” (later to be identified with power), is considered as apart from other beings of which that essence depends, their definitions will not be real but abstract. This is to say, that following Spinoza's rules concerning real definitions in *TIE* we end up with nominal definitions in *Ethics*. Why this is problematic I demonstrate in more detail in Ch. 3.2. [I am not yet sure if this reading holds. Needs more work.].

Before I close this chapter let me point to a one more important aspect in Spinoza's view concerning beings of reason. This is the fact that already in *KV* Spinoza develops a metaethical theory concerning normative concepts according to which such concepts are only possible to be produced through a comparison with an ideal human being. According to this theory, both the ideal that enables the comparison and the concepts of good and evil that

follow it are beings of reason. I will touch this topic in my last chapter (4.2.) but the proper combination of Spinoza's views concerning beings of reason/imaginings and his ethical models needs to wait for future.

3. Affects and Imagination

“An affect, therefore, is an imagination, insofar as [the affect] indicates the constitution of the body.”(E4p9d).

The things really get interesting and a whole lot more concrete when we get to the third part of the *Ethics*. There Spinoza introduces, finally, the conatus-doctrine that begins to flesh out the principles by which real human beings actually think and act in contrast to the abstract universalism of the part II. But before moving to the conatus and the affects let me present briefly Spinoza's account of the will which ties his philosophy of mind directly to the affects. To anticipate, this is due to will being on the one hand, nothing but the appetite determined by affects. On the other hand, will is mind's strive to affirm those things that we imagine are the causes of our joyous affects.

Furthermore, in part three of the *Ethics* Spinoza begins his analysis of the proper stuff of ethics: the notions of good and evil. Before he can proceed to the full presentation of these notions in the fourth part he has however to tackle various obstacles that determine human thinking and acting in ways that lead them to think good in terms that actually are *not good for them*. As one can conclude from the few definitions and postulates in part three, what Spinoza is most concerned of in dealing with the affects is, on the one hand, their nature as expressing the augmentation or diminution of body's power of acting and mind's power of thinking. On the other hand, affects can be either passions or actions themselves. With this important distinction, to which I come back below, Spinoza ties together his epistemological theory with ethics as it turns out that active affects result from having adequate knowledge while passions correspond to or express the mind having inadequate knowledge, in other words, that it imagines.

It should be noted here also, with Wolfgang Bartuschat,¹⁵⁰ that Spinoza's comments about the good in *E3* should be taken in direct relation to the conatus-doctrine. This is to say, that *E3* excludes any idea of the good which would preclude human striving, and that *good* just is that which we by our affects desire and strive for. But because our striving is inherently constituted by imagination it gives us only inadequate picture of our *good*. Consequently, the theory of the good of *E3* is considerably modified in *E4* where Spinoza presents the model for a rational construction of the good. The function of such construction is to transcend the individual understandings of the good and enable a common conception of the good.

In addition to the already mentioned, several other important things take place in the beginning of the part three of the *Ethics*. In the *Preface* Spinoza argues that the same necessity and force of nature that governs Substance, attributes and modes applies equally to affects which makes it plausible to “consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies.” In the definitions Spinoza introduces the important distinction between activity and passivity. This is followed by reiterating that there is no causal relation between the mind and the body, or as Spinoza puts it, “The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion” (*E3p2*); which is to remind the reader that the Cartesian account of passions and especially governing one's passions is out of the Spinozistic palette. This applies with equal force to the doctrine of free decision, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, are nothing but the human appetites themselves. But if decisions or affirmations of given ideas are not in the human power, what determines our choices? The answer to this question is one of the most important aims of part three, and roughly put, it consists of and explication of two doctrines: the conatus-principle and the theory of the affects.

I will begin by first explaining Spinoza's conception of the will. I then move to the role of the conatus doctrine, and then, finally, proceed to the discussion of the affects.

¹⁵⁰ BARTUSCHAT, W. (2011), 'The Theory of the Good in Part 4 of the Ethics', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

3.1. Dream with open eyes – Will, affirmation, intellect

The question of the sense in which human will is free and can direct human actions as a causally efficient capacity was a topic of extensive debate in early modern philosophy. According to much of the philosophical tradition human action was explained in terms of the mind's capacity to determine body's movements through the will of the agent. This account of action is nonetheless dependent on two interrelated possibilities: freedom of the will and the causal efficacy of mind toward the body.¹⁵¹ It can be reminded, that this model of action in which the body is subjugated to the will of the mind works also a model for political obedience, or as Étienne Balibar puts it:

“There was a tradition that extended from Aristotle to Descartes, and that was far from being exhausted, according to which the relationship of obedience that renders certain men subject to others (the slave to his master, the wife to her husband, children to their father, subjects to their prince) had to be understood in the light of the body's obedience to the soul, that is, in the light of the “voluntary” power of the soul (or mind) over the body. To command is first of all to will and to “subjugate” bodies to one's will.”¹⁵²

In order to maintain this traditional model Descartes, perhaps having been influenced by his Jesuit-teachers at Le Flèche, adopts the view according to which the mind has two distinct faculties, namely of understanding and volition, of which the latter enjoys unlimited freedom [*IV Med., CSM II*, p.39]. In effect, Descartes sees the freedom of the will to be so manifestly demonstrated by our experience that he thinks it as the most fundamental common notion.¹⁵³ As we saw above, Spinoza does not think that Descartes grasped things right here, and for the latter the Cartesian self-evidency of our free will turns out nothing but ignorance of the causes that determine such will (*E3p2s*). In third part of the *Ethics* such causes in turn are identified as affects. As a consequence, I would like to guide the reader into the discussion of affects by briefly demonstrating why Spinoza denies both that there is anything like a distinct

¹⁵¹ See KOISTINEN, O. (2009), 'Spinoza on Action', in KOISTINEN, O. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 167, 174-175.

¹⁵² BALIBAR, E. (1998), *Spinoza and politics*. Verso.

¹⁵³ “That there is freedom in our will, and that we have power in many cases to give or withhold our assent at will, is so evident that it must be counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us.” (*PP* § 39, *CSM I*, pp. 205-206). *Quôd autem fit in nostrâ voluntate libertas, & multis ad arbitrium vel affentiri vel non affentiri possimus, adeô manifestum est, ut inter primas & maxime communes notiones, quae nobis sunt innatae, fit recensendum.* (AT VIII, p.19).

capacity of the will, and that such a will is nothing but a name for human desires. A matter of future research will be showing how Spinoza constructs political obedience when the traditional model is not available for him. As imagination, and especially the imaginative constructions called exemplars, play a crucial role in this, I will nonetheless touch the topic in chapter 4.2.

Let us begin then by Spinozist account of the will as affirmation or negation of ideas. Faithful to his nominalism, Spinoza invokes the critique concerning beings of reason (see Ch. 2.7.3) and points it towards the volitions of the mind that often are put under the special faculty of the *will*. According to Spinoza there can be no absolute faculties of understanding, willing nor desiring. In contrast, there is only particular acts of the mind:

“From this it follows that these and similar faculties are either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings, or universals, which we are used to forming from particulars. So intellect and will are to this or that idea, or to this or that volition as ‘stone-ness’ is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul.” (*E2p48s*).

One might wonder then, whether there is any difference in such different acts of understanding and believing which would allow us to speak, in a Cartesian fashion, of ideas on the one hand, and volitions, like judgements and desires on the other. Spinoza, of course, denies any such difference. Will and intellect are simply one and the same, because “The will and the intellect are nothing apart from the singular volitions and ideas themselves (by P48 and P48S). But the singular volitions and ideas are one and the same (by P49).” (*E2p49cd*).

In fact, Spinoza specifies that “by will I understand a faculty of affirming and denying, and not desire. I say that I understand the faculty by which the mind affirms or denies something true or something false, and not the desire by which the mind wants a thing or avoids it.” (*E2p48s*). It should be emphasised that here Spinoza denies the possibility of simple empiricism where our ideas would be given to us directly through our senses. Our ideas are not the same things as the bodily images (affections of the body). Rather, ideas are produced as the mind affirms or negates something of the corporeal images of things or words: “idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation.” (*E2p49s*).

Here Spinoza thinks he has shown that the Cartesian account of falsity and error is inadequate. Once the distinction between intellect and will collapses, there can be no will that

produces the error by extending itself beyond the matters that the intellect perceives clearly and distinctly, as the Cartesian model has it (see *IV Med.*). Instead, as we have already seen “falsity consists only in the privation which mutilated and confused ideas involve.” (*E2p49s*)

In order to give one final refutation to the common view, also put forward by the Cartesians, according to which experience teaches us that we are free to abstain from judgement, Spinoza proves his point by drawing counter examples from experience: “But although these things are such that no reason for doubt remains, still, I hardly believe that men can be induced to consider them fairly unless I confirm them by experience.” (*E3p2s*). Again, Spinoza needs to step out from the geometrical method and accommodate his ideas to the *ingenium* of the people. And since Descartes also affirms such common opinions, there is no assurance that a philosopher would stand outside the prejudices that spring from thinking things according to the “affects of the heart” (*TTP*, VII:5; III/98). These passages are located at the very beginning of the third part of the *Ethics* where, we can assume, Spinoza wants to warn his readers that the Cartesian account of governing one’s passions by free will capable of abstaining from judgement is not available to him.

So, what Spinoza aims to show with appealing to common experience is again that, first, the mind has no power to determine the body to act, and second, that the mind has no free will. The first Spinoza establishes by showing, against the common idea that without the thinking mind the body would remain inactive, that the body does all the time things that the mind does not determine but, on the contrary, wonders at. A case in point is dream walkers who do things that they would never dare or could do awake. Furthermore, the very structure of the human body far surpasses what the human skill can construct leading Spinoza to conclude that “no one has yet determined what the body can do” (*E3p2s*). To the second point denying the freedom of the will, Spinoza raises similar examples that we have already seen in the *E1App.*, namely, that we are conscious of our appetites but ignorant of their determining causes:

“So the infant believes he freely wants the milk; the angry child that he wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. So the drunk believes it is from a free decision of the mind that he speaks the things he later, when sober, wishes he had not said. So the madman, the chatterbox, the child, and a great many people of this kind believe they speak from a free decision of the mind, when really they cannot contain their impulse to speak.” (*E3p2s*).

From this it follows “[...] that the decisions of the mind are nothing but the appetites themselves, which therefore vary as the disposition of the body varies. For each one governs everything from his affect.” (*E3p2s*). Spinoza thus reminds us, against the doctrines of non-determined volitions, as Koistinen forcefully puts it, “that free decision is, in fact, not distinct from imagination or memory, and that free decision is not distinct from the affirmation that is essential to an idea.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, what we normally take as our free choices are nothing but modifications of our desire that Spinoza calls affects. And such affects and decisions arise in us by the same necessity as the corporeal images: “Those, therefore, who believe that they either speak or are silent, or do anything from a free decision of the mind, *dream with open eyes*.” (*E3p2s*, emphasis mine).

The fact that decisions are not just based on affects, but that they essentially are affects themselves, will have tremendous importance for Spinoza’s view on the self-control related to passive affects. This is because truth and reason cannot have any control over the passions insofar as they are considered in themselves, but only to the extent that they themselves *produce more powerful active affects than the passions*. Since Spinoza thinks that “From the laws of his own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil.” (*E4p19*), the challenge is then to show just how reason can have those sorts of affective powers that the good which everyone necessarily seeks is rather rational good instead of being determined by each own imagination and passions.¹⁵⁵

3.2. Conatus – “Desire is nothing but the very essence of man”

¹⁵⁴ KOISTINEN, O. (2009), 'Spinoza on Action', in KOISTINEN, O. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.p. 180.

¹⁵⁵ Here a cynical reader might see a point to question the fact that philosophers tend to think that the thing they value the most, namely understanding, is the greatest good for all. Just like Plato in the *Republic* thinks that there are three governing pleasures for the three classes of citizens, namely, sensual pleasures, pleasures from success and honour and pleasures from wisdom, Spinoza divides personalities according to their differing governing affects (*E3p39s*) and thinks that there is a major difference between the joys that a philosopher enjoys compared to a drunk (*E3p57*). On the relation of philosophizing and emotions see JAMES, S. (2016), 'Why Should We Read Spinoza?', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 78, 109-25. On Plato see PLATO (2013), *Republic, Volume II: Books 6-10*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 580d-

First of all, then, the conatus-doctrine is defined in *E3p6* as follows: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” The immediately following proposition identifies the strive to persevere with the actual essence of each thing (*p7*). What follows from these two propositions most importantly is that the strive to persevere includes being opposed to everything which can take the mode’s existence away and that each mode strives to realise only those things that follow directly from their essence – by which Spinoza means the power of action or causal efficacy that is maintained by the fixed ratio of movement between body’s different parts.¹⁵⁶

[say something about the historical sources: Thomas cook 2011; Viljanen 2011, Miller 2015, Hobbes, Stoics, Descartes...]

Now, the interpretation of conatus-doctrine is subject to some controversy in the commentaries. I will mention briefly the main points of the controversy, but as I am mostly interested in the role that conatus-doctrine plays in structuring human imaginations and reason, and not in the internal consistency of Spinoza’s system, I will not pay too much attention to these disputes here.

[Or, I am interested of inconsistencies to the extent that they might tell us something crucial about the relation of imagination, language and reason. In this sense, any inconsistency that we might find in Spinoza’s system would call for, according to my reading, a careful study that would address the question if Spinoza would be using imaginative ways of reasoning rather than strictly demonstrative ones. This approach would benefit from an analysis of those passages where Spinoza takes certain issues as given and does not bother to pay much toil in demonstrating them. But as we have seen, what is taken as given or evident is not a matter of universal agreement, and thus we should analyse the grounds for Spinoza’s claims that some things are self-evident - as I see it there is often more than a hint of rhetoric persuasion in such claims. But to state this matter in more exact terms is a matter of future research.]

¹⁵⁶ Karoline Hübner has recently questioned the identity between essence and power. I do not have time now to address her arguments. See HÜBNER, K. (2017), 'The Trouble with Feelings, or Spinoza on the Identity of Power and Essence', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 55, 35-53.

So, for example, the conatus doctrine has been argued as being false by Bennett and that it cannot be true in all circumstances by Della Rocca.¹⁵⁷ These objections concern mostly the claim that Spinoza's derivation of the doctrine is invalid. But I think that Valtteri Viljanen has convincingly shown that once Spinoza's causal view of power and the role Spinoza's conceptions of essence and definition play in it, are properly understood there is indeed a way of constructing the adequate derivation of the conatus principle by Spinoza's premises.¹⁵⁸

Besides the question of derivation another interpretative controversy concerns whether we should see conatus in the light of the principle of inertia. Spinoza's version of the argument that, all things equal, each body strives to persevere in its present ratio of movement is given in *E2p13L3c*. But most commentators that argue for the importance of inertia as a model for the conatus doctrine in fact, refer to Spinoza's geometrical exposition of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* where Spinoza speaks of inertia by using the verb *conatur*.¹⁵⁹ Other textual support for the inertia-interpretation can be found from the *CM* (1:6; I/248) and *TTP* where Spinoza formulates the conatus principle in terms of persevering in one's state (*in suo statu*): "Now the supreme law of nature is that each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself." In *Ethics* however, the focus is not put on "state" but *in being* (*is suo esse*). As Viljanen points out, this being consists not just in positing a given essence but essentially in a strive to realise the properties that follow from such essence or nature.¹⁶⁰ This reading casts doubt to the reading that the formulation in *Ethics* should be understood as inertia. This point is further supported strongly, I think, by the fact that even though Spinoza presents the principle of inertia in *Ethics* he does not refer to it in the demonstration of conatus doctrine.

¹⁵⁷ BENNETT, J. (1984), *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. p.234-. ROCCA, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's metaphysical psychology', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵⁸ VILJANEN, V. (2008), 'On the Derivation and Meaning of Spinoza's Conatus Doctrine', in GARBER, D. and NADLER, S.M. (eds.) *Oxford studies in early modern philosophy*. New York;Oxford;: Clarendon Press.

¹⁵⁹ See for example ROCCA, M.D. (1996), 'Spinoza's metaphysical psychology', in GARRETT, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to Spinoza*. Cambridge University Press. COOK, T. (2011), 'Conatus: A Pivotal Doctrine at the Center of the Ethics', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill. p.154.

¹⁶⁰ VILJANEN, V. (2008), 'On the Derivation and Meaning of Spinoza's Conatus Doctrine', in GARBER, D. and NADLER, S.M. (eds.) *Oxford studies in early modern philosophy*. New York;Oxford;: Clarendon Press. p.105-106. Viljanen names also Alexandre Matheron and Chantal Jaquet as the few other scholars who emphasise the shift from "state" to "being" and that being includes the strive to affirm and express all the properties contained in given mode's essence rather than conserving present state. See

Also, *E3p12* states clearly that the mind does not strive to persist only in its present state but that “The mind as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body’s power of acting”.

Finally, the conatus doctrine has been interpreted as introducing a teleological framework of explanation into Spinoza’s thought. This is then taken as to contradict Spinoza’s claims that nature never acts for some ends but all natural phenomena are only explicable through efficient causes (*E1App.*). But as Viljanen points out, in his antipathy towards teleological explanation Spinoza is mostly concerned arguing against the Aristotelian doctrine of final causes, and because the Aristotelian final causes preclude other causes, it is clear that Spinoza is not putting forward any teleological causation on the standards of his own time.¹⁶¹ This is clear because in the *E4d7* Spinoza simply defines the “final” cause as efficient cause or appetite: “By the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite.”

I will now leave the matters concerning interpretation and move to the analysis of conatus as the principle driving human imaginations. I will be rather brief here, because this account will need to be perfected in the next chapter together with the analysis of the affects.

It should be noted at the outset that Spinoza’s definitions concerning human striving points immediately towards a tension which will haunt the *Ethics* all the way to its end. This is due to the fact that when Spinoza introduces conatus as the essence of all modes, he does it abstractly without the real expression of the striving in actual modes. This has led some commentators, like Viljanen, to speak of conatus as the “principle of perfect essence realization” which essentially means that each thing “*strives to exist and to bring about things derivable from its own definition alone.*”¹⁶² I argue that here we witness the tension between nominal and real definitions, and accordingly between abstract and real essences, in its fullest. For example, Viljanen draws the identification between a thing’s definition and its essence from *TIE* §95: “To be called perfect, a definition will have to explain the inmost essence of the thing”.

¹⁶¹ VILJANEN, V. (2011), *Spinoza's geometry of power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* pp.127-128. Italics his.

Now, to my mind Viljanen does not make a sufficient distinction between the nominal definition and the real one [NB¹⁶³]. But as Curley points out, this is essential for Spinoza. Any adequate definition of a real thing must include the proximate efficient cause which explain how the thing in question has come into being. In other words, the real definition must explain why a being has the nature it has and to “give a true description of its object.”¹⁶⁴ Now, in *TIE* Spinoza unfortunately gives as an example of such real definition the definition of a being of reason, namely circle: “a circle would have to be defined as follows: it is the figure that is described by any line of which one end is fixed and the other movable.” (*TIE* §96; II/35). Against the Euclidean definition of a circle¹⁶⁵, which is not generative or it does not express proximate causes, Spinoza’s definition will fulfil the requirement of real definition in this sense that it expresses how a thing comes into existence. But as Deleuze points out: “[...] No circle or sphere is engendered in this way by Nature; no singular essence is assigned thereby; and the concept of a line, or a semicircle, does not in any way contain the motion that is ascribed to it.”¹⁶⁶ The geometrical definitions, which so often constitute Spinoza’s examples, will thus only give ideal models for real definitions. Furthermore, the real definitions cannot be given in a priori reasoning¹⁶⁷, but, as Curley convincingly demonstrates, must be worked out by observing the real things in nature; or as Spinoza puts it in *TTP*: “[...] definitions of natural things are to be inferred from the different actions of nature.” (VII:13; III/99).

Accordingly, immediately after having given the nominal definition of conatus as the essence or power by which each thing perseveres in their being, Spinoza takes a step towards real definition by pointing out that, in fact, the mind strives in its being both “insofar as the mind has dear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas” (*E3p9*), in other words “The essence of the mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas” (*E3p9d*). This is to

¹⁶³ As I have not had enough time to reflect Viljanen’s book, my critique might be uncharitable or simply wrong.

¹⁶⁴ CURLEY, E. (1979), 'Experience in Spinoza’s Theory of Knowledge', in GRENE, M.G. (ed.) *Spinoza: a collection of critical essays*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press [first published 1973]. p.44.

¹⁶⁵ “A circle is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure equal one another.” *Elements, Book One*, def. 15 in EUKLIDES, NIKOMACHOS FRÂN GERASA, PERGA, A.O. and ARKIMEDES (1952), *Great Books of the Western World. The thirteen books of Euclid's Elements: The Works of Archimedes including The Method. Etc.* Chicago : Encyclopædia Britannica.

¹⁶⁶ DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. p.47.

¹⁶⁷ Note to Self: Deleuze gives examples of a priori real definition. Fix Later.

say, that even if the mind ideally strives to augment its power of thinking according to the power it has, such power is, in reality, always partly constituted by inadequate ideas, that is, by imaginations and passions. The human desires are then from the outset impregnated by the things external to the nominal definition of a given human being.

[This is the reason why Hübner (see footnote above) thinks the identity between essence and power is problematic: to the extent that the human power of acting is continuously modified, are the essences also? What meaning can essence have in this case or the real definition? Do we necessarily end up with the Humean picture concerning essences and selves? In a sense, these questions would seem to lead to the other extreme from the one that Hegel suggested: instead there being no real change in the world, there would be no real (at least modal) essences. These are relevant questions, and I need to address them in the future. But here I leave them open.]

Consequently, the abstractly given characteristic of conatus as designating the given mode's opposition "to everything which can take its existence away" (*E3p6d*), is not at all true when predicated of actual modes. In effect, we will see in moment that there are great number of affects that determine our striving in ways that lead us to desire things that are harmful for us – indeed, in *E4* Spinoza will treat it as axiom, or self-evident truth, that humans will remain determined by passive desires. This then, it seems to me, is the heart of Spinozistic view to vulnerability. Because the striving to persevere is not limited to rational action but precedes it, there is no guarantee that the power by which we strive would be maintained or augmented; or, as Susan James puts it, "Since many of our ideas remain inadequate, this vulnerability never goes away, and even the most devoted philosopher may misinterpret the world in a way that diminishes his or her power."¹⁶⁸ And still we are bound to act and make choices; from the very beginning of our existence we continue to desire things even with only very inadequate knowledge. But surely, as we will later see, this infinite generation of desire opens us humans to modification of such desire – for better or worse.

While moving to the more realist description of the human condition, Spinoza introduces three different aspects of the human striving distinguished from one another in their relation

¹⁶⁸ JAMES, S. (2000), *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated. p.202.

to mind, body and consciousness. Spinoza calls striving *will* when it is related to mind only, and *appetite* when it relates to both body and mind, and finally, *desire* is defined as conscious appetite. We need to pause for a few remarks concerning these definitions: As Koistinen properly points out¹⁶⁹, to identify will as a form of striving and so as power might seem odd when Spinoza has already defined will as merely a name for the appetites themselves (*E3p2s*). But in *E3p9s* *will* means something different, namely, it means mind's striving to affirm the existence of the body (*E3p10d*) which is the only way for the mind to be aware of it self (*E2p19*).

What comes to the definition of appetite, we should note that it is given a nominal definition: "This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation." (*E3p9s*). That this turns out to be only a nominal definition of appetite follow from two reasons: one follows only latently from the reasons I have already presented above: it is impossible that human nature would be modified only by its own active affections and that therefore that only those things that promote its preservation would follow from its nature (*E4p2-p4*). The other reason is that we cannot be unconscious of the striving because to strive is to have affections. And having affections means being conscious, as we have already seen. Therefore, when Spinoza defines consciousness of the appetite as desire (*p9s*), he explains later that this was because of the methodological reasons, and not because there would be any real difference between appetite and desire.¹⁷⁰ But, as Deleuze rightly argues,¹⁷¹ in order to make the definition of desire a real one Spinoza needs to add "insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determine," (*E3Def.Aff.*) because only this will give the cause for consciousness. In fact, when desire is given the real definition Spinoza immediately thinks it as the most fundamental form of striving and also as the most fundamental affect:

¹⁶⁹ KOISTINEN, O. (2009), 'Spinoza on Action', in KOISTINEN, O. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.183.

¹⁷⁰ "But in the same scholium I also warned that I really recognize no difference between human appetite and desire. For whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same. And so—not to seem to commit a tautology—I did not wish to explain desire by appetite, but was anxious to so define it that I would comprehend together all the strivings of human nature that we signify by the name of appetite, will, desire, or impulse. For I could have said that desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined to do something. But from this definition (by IIP23) it would not follow that the mind could be conscious of its desire, or appetite. Therefore, in order to involve the cause of this consciousness, it was necessary (by the same proposition) to add: insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determined, and so on."

¹⁷¹ DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. p.61.

“Desire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something. [...] Here, therefore, by the word desire I understand any of a man’s strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions, which vary as the man’s constitution varies, and which are not infrequently so opposed to one another that the man is pulled in different directions and knows not where to turn.” (*E3Def.Aff.*)¹⁷²

What is extremely important for our purposes is that Spinoza identifies the striving of the mind to consist in an attempt to affirm anything that is conducive for body’s power of acting (*E3p12*), and accordingly, “the mind avoids imagining those things that diminish or restrain its or the body’s power.” (*E3p13c*). This is because from Spinoza’s account of imagination and memory, it follows that

“So long as the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard the same body as present (by IIP17) and consequently (by IIP7) so long as the human mind regards some external body as present, that is (by IIP17S), imagines it, the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of that external body.” (*E3p12d*).

And conversely:

“So long as the mind imagines those things that increase or aid our body’s power of acting, the body is affected with modes that increase or aid its power of acting.” (*E3p12d*).

We should be careful to note the order of things and ideas here. Because there is no causal influence between the mind and the body, what Spinoza merely says here is that mind’s power to imagine those things that aid our body’s power of acting, actually corresponds to those things actually present to the body (this presence should be measured by the power of the trace that a given body leaves on our bodies – some traces hinge on our bodies longer than other, see *E2p17cd*). Consequently, the mind’s striving to think such things, and conversely, to think things that exclude the existence of those things that hinder body’s power of acting corresponds to body’s striving to be affected by the power-increasing things and to avoid the power-diminishing things.

¹⁷²*Cupiditas est ipsa hominis essentia, quatenus ex data quacumque eius affectione determinata concipitur ad aliquid agendum.[...] Hic igitur cupiditatis nomine intelligo hominis quoscumque conatus, impetus, appetitus et volitiones, qui pro varia eiusdem hominis constitutione varii et non raro adeo sibi invicem oppositi sunt, ut homo diversimode trahatur et quo se vertat, nesciat. II/190.*

But how does the mind know what increases and what decreases the capacities of the body? This knowledge is determined by the two other fundamental affects in addition to desire: joy and sadness. Because joy and sadness directly modify our desire and thus determine our striving, Spinoza defines the term good as completely constructed by the laws of our striving: “[...] we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.” (*E3p9s*). As already mentioned, this non-cognitivist definition of the good will be modified in *E4*. But in Spinoza’s anatomy of the affects, to which we now turn, the definition of the good as mind’s projection on things it desires will be fundamental

3.3. Affects and the Foundations of Sociability

[This chapter is pretty preliminary and suffers from being a schematic summary of some important affects in relation to the political doctrines, or foundations of the state, that Spinoza draws from them. Unfortunately, I do not have much possibilities to tie the affects concretely to the political doctrines that rest on them, but that is the aim in the future. Such work will consist in building a more robust relationship between *Ethics* and the political treatises *TTP* and *TP*, ideally spiced with the historical contextualization appropriate for understanding Spinoza’s political thinking.]

“It’s true that in this world we are feeling our way.” (*Ep.* 56, IV/261)

We have already referred to affects in various passages, but they have not yet been really analysed as fundamental part of Spinoza’s theory of imagination. This chapter does then precisely that. It should be noted that my analysis here concerns mostly part three of the *Ethics* where Spinoza sets to explain the laws or principles that govern the production of, mostly passive, affects. Spinoza does mention briefly affects that are active at the end of part three (*E3p58-59*), but the real role of the latter is reserved to parts four and five. I should also be mentioned that even if Spinoza has been celebrated lately as one of the founding fathers of

the materialist or non-cognitive account of the affects,¹⁷³ it is very important to note that the cognitivist aspect is also constitutive for Spinoza's conception of affects. Not least because affect for Spinoza really is an act of the mind, by which it affirms more or less power of acting of its body. Furthermore, there seems to be an serious imbalance in the affects that threatens the parallelism of the mind and the body. This is because some affects appear clearly more related to the mind, like ambition, while others to the body, like desire for food. In fact, Chantal Jaquet has lately put forward a reading according to which affects really differ in their relations to mind and the body.¹⁷⁴ Reflecting her work more substantially remains nevertheless a future work.

In this chapter I will follow Pierre-François Moreau's classification of the affects.¹⁷⁵ But before going to the classification I will begin with the defining of affects and activity and passivity. Let me take the latter first:

"I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is (by D1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone. On the other hand, I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause." (E3d2).

Let us clarify Spinoza's reasoning by taking common notions as example of something that fulfils Spinoza definition of activity. As we remember, common notions are necessarily adequate because their formations, or rather becoming-conscious-of-them, is triggered by affections involving a common property between a human body and an external body. In such an encounter no confusion and mutilation can take place (see Ch. 2.6.). Now, a common notion can clearly be understood clearly and distinctly through our nature alone, as it, as an effect, expresses only causes that are comprehended in human nature (the cause of the common notions being the common property which is in the body). Clearly, this is not the

¹⁷³ See for instance DAMASIO, A.R. (2003), *Looking for Spinoza: joy, sorrow and the feeling brain*. London: Heinemann, MASSUMI, B. (2015), *The Politics of Affect*. John Wiley & Sons, GREGG, M. and SEIGWORTH, G.J. (2010), *The affect theory reader*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press. For the problems of especially Massumi's reading of Spinoza and Deleuze see my KRISTENSEN, K. (2016), 'What Can an Affect Do? Notes on the Spinozist-Deleuzean Account', *LIR.journal*, 12-33.

¹⁷⁴ JAQUET, C. (2018), *Affects, Actions and Passions in Spinoza: The Unity of Body and Mind*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press [2015].

¹⁷⁵ MOREAU, P.-F. (2011), 'Imitation of the Affects and Interhuman Relations', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

case with imaginations and passive affects which always involve the cause, or as Spinoza puts it, nature, of something external rendering the human nature only a partial cause.¹⁷⁶

What then comes to the definitions of affects, it is well known that Spinoza gives two rather different definitions for affect: one at the beginning of part three and one at the end under the title *General Definition of Affects*. The first definition reads as follows:

“By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.

Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion.” (E3d3).

The General Definition of Affects in its part gives the following definition:

“An affect which is called a passion of the mind is a confused idea, by which the mind affirms of its body, or of some part of it, a greater or lesser force of existing than before, which, when it is given, determines the mind to think of this rather than that.” (*E3Def.Aff.*)

A lot could be said about the differences between the two definitions.¹⁷⁷ For my purposes, however, it suffices to note the following general remarks concerning Spinoza’s definitions: first of all, affections (*affectio*) are experienced as affects (*affectus*) in so far as the affection involves modes of power that either increase or diminish the body’s power of acting. Second, *affect* in such a case refers both to the modifications taking place in the body as well as to the ideas of such modifications in the mind. There is therefore a causal relation between the image-affection and modification of body’s power of acting (*affect as mode of extension*) on the one hand, *and* between the idea of the affection and the idea of the modification it gives rise to (*affect as mode of thought*) on the other. In the latter definition, Spinoza only speaks of passive affects while the first invokes both active and passive ones. But what is crucial in the latter definition is that it excludes any intellectualist account of affect: the mind does not

¹⁷⁶ A good general account of the activity in Spinoza and its differences to Descartes’s view is found from JAMES, S. (2000), *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated. pp. 196-206.

¹⁷⁷ See DELEUZE, G. (1988), *Spinoza: practical philosophy*. City Lights Books. pp. 48-50. JAQUET, C. (2018), *Affects, Actions and Passions in Spinoza: The Unity of Body and Mind*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press [2015]. MOREAU, P.-F. (2011), 'Imitation of the Affects and Interhuman Relations', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill. pp. 176-177.

compare the different states that the body has, but it actually lives through the augmentation or diminution of its own power which is the cause of joy or sadness. In other words, joy and sadness are just the experiential transition to greater or lesser power of acting. And whatever the mind affirms of the causes related to the modifications of its own power, they will determine the mind to think and, especially, to desire certain things. I will next move to the analysis of what governs the principles by which the mind is determined *to think of this rather than that*.

As Moreau points out, we can identify various mechanism that govern the ways in which we are lead to think and feel about different objects. But as he also notes, Spinoza introduces a completely new principle, imitation of the affects, which was totally foreign to the preceding tradition including Descartes and Hobbes.¹⁷⁸ Firstly then, we can identify four different mechanisms that determine the nature of our affects towards objects: objectification (*E3p12&13, p13s*), association (*3p14-17*), temporalization (*3p18, and p50*) and identification (*3p19-24*). These mechanisms have not necessarily anything to do with other humans, but can concern whatever object. However, in *E3p27* Spinoza moves from external objects to things we imagine to be like us, that is, other human beings, where “The central issue” writes Moreau,

“is now the reconstruction of an entire region of behaviour on the basis of a single, fundamental process which has nothing to do with the object: it is an imitation of the affects. He [Spinoza] now describes passions that appear in us not because of some external object, but because of the behaviour of something, or rather someone, with regard to this object.”¹⁷⁹

Now, the mechanisms named above function essentially by organising things according to what we take as the causes of joy and sadness. Spinoza defines joy and sadness in terms of perfection – which for Spinoza simply means reality insofar as the latter is understood as power (*potentia*): “By joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection. And by sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection.” (*E3p11s*). Love and hate are then defined as joy and sadness accompanied with an idea of an external cause – and, as we recall from *E2a3* all affects invoke objects, and therefore love and hate necessarily follow from joy and sadness. Accordingly, it is the affects

¹⁷⁸ MOREAU, P.-F. (2011), 'Imitation of the Affects and Interhuman Relations', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill. p. 170.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p.168.

of love and hate that determine our attitudes towards the things we think as their causes: “[...] one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves; and on the other hand, one who hates strives to remove and destroy the thing he hates.” (*E3p13s*).

In the following passages, Spinoza posits exactly the same association-principle that we saw earlier to constitute memory, to apply also to affects (Ch. 2.7.1.). From this it follows, that an affect that we have experienced together with another affect will subsequently, if emerging alone, give rise to the other also. Therefore, a mere similarity with a thing which usually affects us with joy or sadness leads us to love or hate objects which do not necessarily have any causal connections with the real efficient causes of our affects. This in its part explains how “Any thing can be the accidental cause of joy, sadness, or desire.” (*E3p15*) and that we can “love or hate some things without any cause known to us” (*E3p15s*). But sometimes it happens that a thing we are accustomed to affect us with sadness is alike to an object we love. Hence the mind is subject to emotional vacillation:

“This constitution of the mind which arises from two contrary affects is called vacillation of mind, which is therefore related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination (see IIP44S); nor do vacillation of mind and doubt differ from one another except in degree.” (E3p17s).

Such vacillation of the mind is reinforced when the mind joins the things it imagines to images of past or future time. Such joining of images does not, however, influence the affect itself, because the mind will anyway regard the cause of the affect as present in so far as it necessarily affirms its existence when it lacks another idea that excludes its existence. We are thus given definitions of hope and fear, but they will change as the doubt related to them is removed:

“For hope is nothing but an inconstant joy which has arisen from the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt; fear, on the other hand, is an inconstant sadness, which has also arisen from the image of a doubtful thing. Next, if the doubt involved in these affects is removed, hope becomes confidence, and fear, despair—namely, a joy or sadness which has arisen from the image of a thing we feared or hoped for. Finally, gladness is a joy which has arisen from the image of a past thing whose outcome we doubted, while remorse is a sadness which is opposite to gladness.” (E3p18s).

It should be noted that, the affects of hope and fear make people especially prone to superstition. This is because Spinoza thinks that we strive to affirm everything we imagine to affect us with joy and negate everything we imagine to affect us with sadness. Hence “we

easily believe the things we hope for, but believe only with difficulty those we fear.”(*E3p50s*). Finally, the identification principle designates a process by which we end up loving those who love what we love and hate those who hate what we love. This has also the consequence that we are gladdened by everything that affects the things we love with joy, and saddened by everything that affects them with sadness. But to the contrary, if a hated thing is affected with sadness we rejoice and love everything that hurts the things we hate. (*E3p19-p24*.) Spinoza describes here a process that could be called a specific type of emotional vulnerability: as our affects are by their nature indeterminate, we are constantly exposed to sad affects that do not depend on what we do by ourselves, but arise in us because of our emotional attachments in the world. The strive to rid of oneself of this kind of emotional vulnerability is one of the fundamental driving forces of politics, as Spinoza will later point out in the *TP*: “For certainly men are guided by nature to unite in one aim, either because of a common [hope or] a common fear, or because they long to avenge some common loss.” (III:9; III/288)

But in order to dive even deeper to the political implications of the mechanisms that govern our affective attachments and dislikes, we have look into a mechanism specific to humans which today is often called contagiousness of emotions. But Spinoza calls it the imitation of the affects (*imitatio affectuum*), and defines it as follows:

“If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect. [...] “This imitation of the affects, when it is related to sadness is called pity (on which, see P22S); but related to desire it is called emulation, which, therefore, is nothing but the desire for a thing which is generated in us from the fact that we imagine others like us to have the same desire.” (*E3p27-p27s*).

Moreau draws attention to the political nature of the passages that directly follow the definition of the imitation of the affects, which, in his words, are “essential to an understanding of the world of religion and politics.”¹⁸⁰ Let us look why this is the case. First, the immediate consequence of the imitation of others emotions are pity and emulation: we are simply saddened by injuries and suffering of beings we imagine to be like us. But at the same time desire is also contagious and the desire of others immediately generates desire in us. But

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 170-171.

Spinoza also establishes, among other things, that there is a natural tendency by which everyone tries to please others – including avoiding to do things we imagine others to dislike. This is a consequence of, firstly, that we love and hate things simply because others do, and secondly, because in such cases we regard joy or sadness accompanied the idea of ourselves as a cause. Therefore, we will regard ourselves with joy or sadness.¹⁸¹ (*E3p29-p30*).

Furthermore, we strive towards the constancy of our emotions and are averse to fluctuation of our affects as the former in fact increases our power of acting, while the latter diminishes it. In effect, by the very fact that others share similar affects as we do, our affects are enforced and involve greater constancy.¹⁸² (*E3p31*). Consequently, “From this and from P28 it follows that each of us strives, so far as he can, that everyone should love what he loves, and hate what he hates.” (*E3p31s*).

This strive to affect, modify and direct other’s emotions so that they would support and amplify our own, is of course well known characteristic of political life. But Spinoza introduces a few principles more to which we should pay attention. For example, as people will want to enjoy what they love, they are directly opposed to the private possession of things that only few or one can enjoy, and so “shall strive to bring it about that he does not possess it” (*E3p32*). When this does not succeed, envy and jealousy follow (*E3p35*). Finally, Spinoza points out that we strive to bring it about that “When we love a thing like ourselves, we strive, as far as we can, to bring it about that it loves us in return.” As Moreau notes, this might appear as a banal fact, but for Spinoza it is not, because he demands a causal explanation of it. And indeed, according to Spinoza’s account of the affects, to the extent the object of our love is similar to us and does not love us back, that is, does not recognise us as the cause of its joy, our effort to realise our love or to affect what we love with joy is hindered. Now importantly, the imagination of similarity is not limited to other human

¹⁸¹ The similarity of this to Hume’s account of indirect passions has not gone unnoticed. For a thorough account of Spinoza’s possible influence on Hume and the points of similarity between the two philosophers’ theories of emotions see KLEVER, W. (1993), 'More About Hume’s Debt to Spinoza', *Hume Studies*, XIX, 55-74.. See also KLEVER, W. (1990), 'Hume Contra Spinoza?', *Hume Studies*, 16, 89-105.

¹⁸² This is because by the law of imitation we will be affected with similar emotions as other people we not have affects towards. Now, if others love what we do, our emotion will be enforced because to the already existing affect of love is added as a cause the love springing from the fact that we imagine other person to love it as well. The case is contrary if the other person has opposite affects to ours: then we will vacillate in our emotions. (*E3p27, E3p31*)

beings, but as Spinoza will demonstrate in some length in *E4* is often directed to animals. Yet, even more severely, it is directed to God. This is the foundation of the theological illusion of the anthropomorphic God. Such a God is imagined to be subjected to same passions that humans, and expected to love what we do and hate what we hate. The imaginary similarity between us and other beings is thus another source of superstition added to those mentioned in *E1App.* and in *Preface to TTP.*

It seems then, that the natural emotional condition of humans lead them to vacillate between love and hate towards one another. “And so we see” writes Spinoza “that each of us, by his nature, wants the others to live according to his temperament; when all alike want this, they are alike an obstacle to one another, and when all wish to be praised, or loved, by all, they hate one another.” (*Ep31s*). On these premises then even the passion of love turns out to be a significant source of hate. Étienne Balibar captures this fact well: “Men hate each other insofar as they love the same object in different ways, or love incompatible objects, or (more fundamentally) imagine in different ways those objects which they all love.”¹⁸³ Therefore, imitation of the affects does not lead into natural morality, or as Moreau puts it: “Far from being able to found a spontaneous sociability and harmonious concord among men, the feeling of similarity and the *imitatio affectuum* is rather a source of jealousy, rivalry, intolerance and fanaticism.”¹⁸⁴

However, even though this analysis is right, it remains incomplete. This is because Spinoza will later rely of the doctrine of imitation of the affects, and especially ambition, in order to show that in addition to rational sociability there is another one based on passions. Namely, in *E4p37s1* Spinoza introduces two separate foundations for the state (*civitatis fundamenta ostendi*). Such foundations correspond, as Balibar has well illustrated,¹⁸⁵ to two different types of sociability: one born from reason and the other from passions themselves. Let us look at Spinoza’s reasoning behind this. In *E4p31-p35* Spinoza establishes two senses of the good: that which aids our understanding and that which agrees with the human nature is, according to Spinoza, necessarily good. What is most conducive to our understanding and

¹⁸³ BALIBAR, E. (1998), *Spinoza and politics*. Verso. p.85.

¹⁸⁴ MOREAU, P.-F. (2011), 'Imitation of the Affects and Interhuman Relations', in HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF, R. (eds.) *Spinoza's Ethics: a collective commentary*. Leiden: Brill. p.172.

¹⁸⁵ My reading here owes much to Balibar’s. See BALIBAR, E. (1998), *Spinoza and politics*. Verso. pp. 78-88.

what agrees with our nature to the utmost degree are other human beings – insofar as they live under the guidance of reason (*E4p18s*). These then, understanding and human cooperation, are good for the human nature in general;¹⁸⁶ and by the dictates of reason humans seek the aids of society as an answer to their ignorance and vulnerability.

But as Spinoza insists, reason cannot define human nature alone, and thus there always remains part of human nature that is contrary to another human nature (*E4p32*). Here then emerges a specifically Spinozistic paradox: insofar as humans share the same nature, that is, insofar as their essence is determined by both imagination and reason, they will not be alike; their desires will not mutually correspond to one another and they will, on the contrary, always partly decide things according to their particular temperament (*ingenium*) and affects. This, nevertheless, does not mean that imagination and passions would be straightforwardly contrary to sociability. As surprising as it might seem, even hate turns into an affect which serves sociability. This striking fact is demonstrated through the passages concerning ambition:

“We shall strive to do also whatever we imagine men to look on with joy, and on the other hand, we shall be averse to doing what we imagine men are averse to.” (*E3p29*).

“This striving to do something (and also to omit doing something) solely to please men is called Ambition, especially when we strive so eagerly to please the people that we do or omit certain things to our own injury, or another’s.” (*E3p29s*).

Ambition, which is also later defined as “a desire by which all the affects are encouraged and strengthened” (*E3Def.Aff.*), leads men to seek the external recognition even for their hate. But in so doing, they need to accommodate their own desires and temperament (*ingenium*) to the desires and temperaments of others. That is, in order to make others to think like us, we need first to learn to think like them and to please them. This complex interplay of the strive to impose one’s own desire and opinions on others, on the one hand, and the need to accommodate oneself to please the others leads into a real, if fragile, harmonizing of the

¹⁸⁶ In what sense there can be a common or general human nature is an object of heated debate in the commentaries. This reference to a general human nature seem to contradict Spinoza’s claim concerning essences as particular. Furthermore, it contradicts with the reading of the theory of common notions that I have defended according to which there are common notions that correspond to beneficial properties that do not belong to tall human bodies. Consequently, there would be rational goods to which we strive according to the dictates of reason, but which are not good for everybody. A simple example would be nutrition which agrees with my body, but not with another allergic person’s body. I need to address this issue in the future.

individual passions. According to Balibar, it is precisely ambition “which is able to bring it about that, for a time at least, men have the same tastes, the same morals, judgements or opinions (IIP29S). It is in this way that a common good, that is, a common object of love, can be imagined.”¹⁸⁷ Needless to say, a common good imagined through the mechanisms of ambition is inseparable from the vacillation which springs from the hopes and fears concerning the imagined intentions of others.

This analysis of the affective-imaginative foundations of the state and the common good will allow us to point towards a specific problem regarding reason’s role in Spinoza’s conception of politics. This problem, as I will demonstrate in a moment, makes it absolutely necessary to find ways of combining imaginative-affective means for representing the good in a for rationality to have-----

The answer to this problem I will argue is given in the form of the theory of rational constructions concerning the common good.

The short summary that Spinoza gives of his views concerning political philosophy in the *Ethics* are found from *E4p37s2*. What one learns there consists essentially in two things: firstly, in order to have a functional society the citizens need to give up their natural right to decide for good and evil according to their own temperament and affects.¹⁸⁸ But this transferring of right cannot be a rational choice, because, on the one hand, reason cannot control affects but only a more powerful affect can control another one (*E4p7, p14*); on the other hand, if men possessed reason and acted on its guidance, no state would be needed. In other words, for Spinoza state is not a creation that would rest on reason.¹⁸⁹ To the contrary, the motivation to be a citizen comes from the hopes one has for the advantages that follow from this. Also, the confidence in others that is needed for a harmonious life together, is gained through rewards and threats. That is, to the extent that the citizens are not perfectly rational, the state has to maintain itself through the affects of hope and fear – the two crucial affects behind superstition, we shall remember.

¹⁸⁷ BALIBAR, E. (1998), *Spinoza and politics*. Verso. p.87.

¹⁸⁸ Spinoza identifies right with power: everything one can do, one has the right to do – until a society decides otherwise.

¹⁸⁹ It can of course be argued that the state is a rational solution to govern passions by passions. But this strategy comes with problems: the Platonic position is not available for Spinoza. [cannot say anything more substantial to this now – fix later.]

Now, the second teaching in *E4p37s2* concerns the fact that there is no commonly conceived good or evil outside the state. Accordingly, justice and injustice, just like merit and sin are completely vacuous concepts outside the state. It is only through the common agreement that the meaning of good and evil is decided. Consequently,

“Sin, therefore, is nothing but disobedience, which for that reason can be punished only by the law of the state. On the other hand, obedience is considered a merit in a citizen, because on that account he is judged worthy of enjoying the advantages of the state.” (*E4p37s2*).

Now, if the state is not a construction of reason but one of passions, then we can at least assume, that the way in which the good and evil and sin and merit are defined bear with them the mental histories of the deciding parties. On such grounds, how can a state prescribe such a common way of life (*communem vivendi rationem praescribendi*) which reflects to a sufficient degree the hopes and fears of the parties involved? The prescriptions of a common way of life include the definition of good and evil reflected in the laws of the state, but they need to be, or at least to appear as, just and legitimate from the point of view of the citizens. Otherwise the citizens become indignant and want to overthrow the powers that be. Yet, importantly, if all citizens, the rulers and the ruled, are part of the multitude that is always governed more by passions than sound reason (ref.), then the Platonic position is not available for Spinoza. There simply is no possibility that some sages could provide the right kind of myths by which the lower classes could orientate themselves for the common good. But how then, is the common conception of the good and the way of life that it entails decided on?

[To answer this question properly, would require a substantial study in Spinoza’s political philosophy, especially on his conception of the production of the civic virtue of obedience. This will largely remain a future work. However, in the chapter 4.2. I will present shortly Spinoza idea of the exemplars or models that should be imitated in action, and which therefore provide the grounds for the collective imaginations necessary for the common way of life.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ For collective imaginings see GATENS, M. and LLOYD, G. (2002), *Collective imaginings: Spinoza, past and present*. Routledge.

Furthermore, if one follows the ideally rationalistic interpretation of Spinoza's ethical models in the last two parts of the *Ethics*,¹⁹¹ there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between Spinoza's ethics and his political philosophy. This provides me another point to demonstrate the advantages of my reading: when we understand correctly the role of imagination in Spinoza's ethical models, these models become usable in politics as rational exemplars. Thus my account enables the reading of Spinoza's normative theory as a unified whole instead of separate ethical and political theory.]

4. Imagination and Reason

[some introduction here in the future]

4.1. The Principle of Accommodation

I have referred to accommodation a few times already, but as it is such a tremendously important concept for my study of the interaction between imagination and reason, it deserves a chapter on its own. [this will be only a sketchy summary for a topic that will receive lengthier analysis in the future].

The principle of accommodation is an ancient principle concerning the interpretation of divine communications. In the Western tradition, it concerns especially the interpretation of Scripture, and this principle tries to explain the gap between the omnipotent, infinite and perfect character of God and his communications in the Bible which are expressed in a less-

¹⁹¹ For such an interpretation see GARRETT, D. (1990), 'A Free Man Always Acts Honestly, Not Deceptively': Freedom and the Good in Spinoza's Ethics', *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, 221-38. LEBUFFE, M. (2007), 'Spinoza's normative ethics', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 37, 371-91, LIN, M. (2006), 'Spinoza's account of akrasia', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44, 395-414, BENNETT, J. (1984), *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. For a rebuttal of the ideal rational reading, see STEINBERG, J. (2014), 'Following a Recta Ratio Vivendi', in KISNER, M.J. and YOUNG, A. (eds.) *Essays on Spinoza's ethical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

than-perfect finite human language. That is “The scriptures speak the language of man” (the Latin *Scriptura humane loquitur* translates the Hebrew *dibra tora kileshon bne 'adam*).¹⁹²

In the wake of Reformation, as the question concerning the right interpretation of Scripture became rather acute, the discussion of the right determination of the extent of accommodation in scripture gained new impetus. For instance, according to James, Calvin thought “that certain revelations are not literally true, but reflect the personalities and understanding of individual prophets and their audiences.”¹⁹³ This topic was discussed practically by all early modern philosophers and it was especially heated topic among the Dutch Cartesians like Lambert van Velthuysen and Christopher Wittich. Even the Voetian preachers agreed with the Cartesians on that the prophets sometimes speak in the vulgar. But the problem of accommodation is in no way limited to theology.

As we saw above, Spinoza thinks that he who wants to teach a doctrine to others than to the learned alone is bound to “for the most part to accommodate his arguments and the definitions of his teaching to the power of understanding of ordinary people.” (*TTP*, V:36, III/77). As we also saw above, even the educated minds were not always open for Spinoza’s divine language of reason. It is clear that Spinoza accommodates his own language to the temperament and understanding of his audience at least in *TTP*.¹⁹⁴ In the next chapter I will give as examples Spinoza’s tenets of true religion and the Hebrew-allegory as they appear in the *TTP*. But an interesting question concerns if such accommodation happens in the *Ethics* – this was, at least indirectly, denied by Laerke’s reading above (Ch. 2.7.2.).

Now, as I have indicated to put forward such a claim systematically would need more work than I can present here. However, let me give one example where Spinoza explicitly suggests that in order to be able to apply the ethical maxims given us by reason into particular

¹⁹² See FUNKENSTEIN, A. (2018), *Theology and the scientific imagination: from the middle ages to the seventeenth century*. Princeton University Press [1986].

¹⁹³ JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. p.54.

¹⁹⁴ Spinoza’s view of accommodation is influenced fundamentally by one of the greatest Jewish Medieval Biblical commentators, Abraham Ibn Ezra (c.1093 – c.1167) to whom Spinoza refers more than any other thinker in *TTP*. I will write about this relationship more in the future. On Spinoza and Ibn Ezra see CURLEY, E. (1994), 'Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece: Spinoza and the Science of Hermeneutics', *Spinoza: The enduring questions*, 64-99. And FUNKENSTEIN, A. (2018), *Theology and the scientific imagination: from the middle ages to the seventeenth century*. Princeton University Press [1986].

situations, we must accommodate such maxims into our imagination and memory. This is partly because for Spinoza reason concerns general or abstract rules, but their application in particular situations requires input from imagination:

“[...] the true knowledge we have of good and evil is only abstract, or universal, and the judgement we make concerning the order of things and the connection of causes, so that we may be able to determine what in the present is good or evil for us, is imaginary, rather than real.” (*E4p62s*).

Justin Steinberg has recently argued, convincingly I think, that in order for the general ethical maxims to work in particular situations, they need to be accommodated to the particular situations of the deliberative agents. The outcome of his argument is the following:

“For, even if the broad features of a good life—in which one knows and loves God, adopts a temperate (though not ascetic) lifestyle, participates in harmonious relationships with others, and so forth—hold for all humans, the means by which the good life may be best achieved will depend on one’s circumstances and one’s particular cast of mind, one’s *ingenium*. Consequently, the moral teachings and deliberative strategies for enhancing the power of individuals must be suited to one’s situated position.”¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, according to Steinberg, there is a double accommodation necessary for an adequate ethical life. The first accommodation concerns the need for an even an ideally rational and ethical person (see next Ch.) to suit themselves to the temperament, mentality and use of language of the other people with whom they live. This is because Spinoza thinks, that no one can really live a good life without the help of others. Therefore, in order to live in harmony with the less than ideally rational fellow citizens, the ethical maxims might sometime require one to act against the universal rule and accommodate one’s behaviour the situation. [Of this dilemma and the possible hierarchy of ethical maxims in Spinoza, I will do some work in the future.] The second need of accommodation then, concerns the agents themselves. In order that one can apply the ethical maxims adequately one needs to know oneself: one’s specific *ingenium*, the contents of one’s affects and imagination which reflect one’s specific life history. Only then one can follow Spinoza’s suggestion in *E5p10s* where he presents the general account of ordering one’s imaginations so that the ethical maxims are always at hands when needed in particular situations.

¹⁹⁵ STEINBERG, J. (2014), 'Following a Recta Ratio Vivendi', in KISNER, M.J. and YOUPA, A. (eds.) *Essays on Spinoza's ethical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.184.

These techniques involve mediating the common wrongs of men against the general ethical principles like “[...] hate is to be conquered by love, or nobility, not by repaying it with hate in return.”(*E5p10s*). The common wrongs need then to be associated with the general imaginings concerning the goods of the collective life, such as “our own true advantage” as “the good which follows from mutual friendship and common society” (*E5p10s*). But in ordering our imagination and memory in this way, Spinoza notes “we must always (by IVP63C and IIIP59) attend to those things which are good in each thing so that in this way we are always determined to acting from an affect of joy.” (ibid.)

This was just a brief demonstration of the importance of imagination in concrete ethical practice in Spinoza. Imagination, as we have seen, is needed in order that the principles leading to good life can be accommodated into concrete particular situations. I will now close this thesis-draft by presenting some examples of how Spinoza thinks that certain models constructed by the help of both imagination and reason can help to bridge the gap between subjective imaginations and universal reason.

4.2. Exemplars as Objective Value Judgements

“[...] Knowledge of good and evil is nothing but the affect itself.” (*E4p8d*).

[This is an old chapter which will be considerably extended in the future. For example, there is a vast research literature concerning the exemplars of human nature and free man which I do not have a possibility to touch here.]

Let me show briefly with a couple of examples of how imaginative exemplars work to bridge the gap between reason and imagination. The first example concerns the construction of exemplars presented in *Ethics* and a concrete example of such an exemplar, namely, Spinoza’s use of the Hebrews as an allegory for the Dutch Republic in *TTP*. After it I will

briefly mention the example of the 'true religion' in *TTP* and of the 'free man' of *Part Four of the Ethics*.

A great deal of Spinoza's critique of imagination is based not on the fact that people imagine, but to the 'reification' of imaginary constructions into real entities of nature. In effect, it is in the nature of our striving to build models that guide our action. In the *Preface* to the fourth part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza offers an etymology of some normative vocabulary which explains how such reification happens. According to Spinoza the word 'perfect' originates in people constructing models for things they were preparing. In this sense, when somebody saw a house in construction while being aware of the intentions of the builder, he/she called the house imperfect, and perfect when it was finished. When on the other hand, people saw things that they did not know what they were and neither knew the mind of the author, they could not tell whether they were imperfect or perfect. But in due course, people abstracted properties of houses, buildings etc. and made universal models of them. They then called things imperfect and perfect according to how well the things they saw agreed to the images they had formed. In this way, the universal exemplar becomes a standard which things should imitate in order to be perfect while at the same time allowing people to judge the perfection of things without having to know the intentions of the author.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, this kind of usage was extended to the things not made by humans. Consequently, people started to evaluate beings of nature in the light of the universals they had made and projected teleology to nature, i.e., that there were final causes in nature and that nature would act with an end in mind. Accordingly, Spinoza defines the meaning of 'good' and 'evil' in similar subjective terms: "By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us. By evil, however, I shall understand what we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some good." (*E4d1&2*). Spinoza, however, immediately refers back to the *Preface* where he has proposed the necessity of forming an ideal of human nature to guide and to be able to compare our action in terms of good and evil.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ ROSENTHAL, M. (1997), 'Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews: The exemplary function of prophecy in the Theological-Political Treatise', *History of Political Thought*, 18, 207-41. P.213.

¹⁹⁷ "For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model." (*E4pref.*)

Now, as Michael Rosenthal nicely summarizes, “if the value terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ [or evil] are to mean something more than the mere subjective utility of an individual, then it is necessary to find a basis for this kind of judgment that transcends the particular judgment of the individual. That is the specific purpose of an exemplar of human nature.”¹⁹⁸ And “The structure and function of such an exemplar”, he writes, “is exactly parallel to the structure and function of prophetic language in the *Theological-Political Treatise*: it provides a bridge for the transition from personal interest or utility to general interest.”¹⁹⁹

To prevent this text from growing into inappropriate lengths I will summarize the Hebrew-example in very concise terms. Spinoza begins his argument by noting that because people are most commonly led by immoderate desire and affects of the mind, society must be governed by laws that can check the destructive passions of individuals. However, such laws cannot be grounded on mere oppression. Violent rule does not last long, because it makes people hateful and indignant towards their rulers. In order to build a lasting social order, the laws must at least appear just. Now, the story of the Hebrew state constitution was one of the most widely used public myths in the Dutch Republic. Just as the Hebrews had liberated themselves from the Pharaoh, the Dutch had fought their freedom from the Spanish. Furthermore, people with influence in the Dutch society, from the politicians of all parties to the ministers of the Reformed Church, were eager to draw analogies between the Hebrews as the God’s chosen people and themselves as the Dutch were now building their own society according to the rule of God. The story of the Hebrews thus formed a privileged example by which Spinoza could advance his own arguments concerning the republican separation of powers and of the misuse of ideology in the Dutch society.²⁰⁰

So, the general question Spinoza poses is how to produce obedience so that people act according to the laws from their own will and not from mere fear of punishment. According to Spinoza, almost all of the Hebrew people were “unsophisticated in their mentality and

¹⁹⁸ ROSENTHAL, M. (1997), 'Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews: The exemplary function of prophecy in the *Theological-Political Treatise*', *History of Political Thought*, 18, 207-41. P.213.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 212.

²⁰⁰ Accordingly, each political party tried to draw parallel with Moses and their own heroes, such as Oldenbarnevelt and William of Orange. The Dutch Republic was framed as New Canaan and Amsterdam as new Jerusalem. See *ibid.* 231-234; JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. Pp.265-267.

weakened by wretched bondage”,²⁰¹ and therefore incapable of raising proper laws. Moses, nevertheless, was successful in binding the individual interest of his people together with the narrative of the chosen people. Such narrative gave the Hebrew-experience a significance and located it into a meaningful history. Accordingly, religious tenets were laws and commands materialised in ceremonial practices whose proper function was to keep the social pact alive and thus maintain the Hebrew state. In addition, Moses carefully distinguished between the political power of administering and reinforcing the law from the religious power of interpreting the law.²⁰²

But just as the strength of the Hebrew state was founded on its imaginary origins so was its weakness. This was simply because the narrative of God’s chosen people was all too easy to transform into narrative of the chosen people within the chosen people. Already in his lifetime had Moses established the Levites as privileged priestly caste, but after his death there was nothing to prevent the Levites to extent their right of interpretation to the right of reinforcement. The priests then turned religion, which aims at the good of the state and its people, to superstition which turns religion into control of the masses by fear and punishments. Needless to say, in the latter case the common interest is replaced with the private interests of the priests.²⁰³

As Rosenthal argues²⁰⁴, the Hebrew state is not just an illustration of a theoretical point but constitutes an exemplar – something to be imitated in action. On the other hand, it has many messages to deliver: one is surely an argument for the privileged authority of the civil government over the church. Another one is against the superstition by which the Voetian preachers tried to usurp the common people against the States Party and reinstate the Stadholder as the eminent head of the Republic. But in general, it is also an argument for the necessary ‘ideological constitution’ of the state. Since it is in the human nature to build models and narratives that give signification for their collective existence, such narratives

²⁰¹ TTP V:27; III/75. The allegory is of course to the Dutch people suspicious towards republican rule and yearning for Monarchy and a strong leader.

²⁰² TTP XVII/37-43, p.303-306, [III/207-208]. ROSENTHAL, M. (1997), 'Why Spinoza chose the Hebrews: The exemplary function of prophecy in the Theological-Political Treatise', *History of Political Thought*, 18, 207-41. pp.225-227.

²⁰³ TTP/93-104,317- 320, [III217-219]. Ibid. 228-229.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.237-239.

must be formed so that they contribute to the common good and not to the private interest of a given class.²⁰⁵

This latter project is taken by Spinoza himself who builds such exemplars or narratives in both of his main works the *TTP* and the *Ethics*. In *TTP* the argument concerns establishing the tenets of 'True Religion'. Due to the turmoil caused by differing interpretations of the Reformation and the Christian faith, there was already in Spinoza's times an ecumenical tradition trying to form as minimal church doctrine as possible to avoid the controversy that sprang from the strict tenets laid down in the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechisms.²⁰⁶ The latter were the doctrinal foundations of the Dutch Reformed Church. Now, an important aim in *TTP* is to demonstrate so simple doctrine for faith that everybody can understand and agree to it. Spinoza's tenets of True Religion require thus no special knowledge and he takes pains to demonstrate that the teachings of the Bible do not concern truths of nature (philosophy) but only moral truths, such as love your neighbour – and this is in fact all that the obedience to God requires.²⁰⁷

Spinoza then gives the principles of True Religion which consist of seven beliefs.²⁰⁸ What one should note about them is that they are beliefs that in best imaginative ways motivate

²⁰⁵ I do not have time to present the work of Chiara Bottici here, but suffice to say that she has done some interesting work on the role of political myths in Spinoza. See BOTTICI, C. (2012), 'Another Enlightenment: Spinoza on Myth and Imagination', *Constellations*, 19, 591-608, BOTTICI, C. (2007), *A philosophy of political myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, BOTTICI, C. (2009), 'Philosophies of Political Myth, a Comparative Look Backwards: Cassirer, Sorel and Spinoza', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 8, 365-82.

²⁰⁶ One influential minimal doctrine was composed by Hugo Grotius, consisting of four tenets: "The first is that there is a God, and but one God only. The second, that God is not any of those things we see, but something more sublime than them. The third, that God takes care of human affairs and judges them with the strictest equity. The fourth, that the same God is creator of all things but himself". Beyond these principles, other doctrinal points should be investigated 'without prejudice, preserving charity and under the guidance of the Holy Scriptures'. (The Rights of War and Peace, ed. Richard Tuck) quoted in JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. P.190.

²⁰⁷"From Scripture itself we have perceived its most important themes without any difficulty or ambiguity: to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself." (*TTP* XII/34, p.255, [III/165]).

²⁰⁸These are: "I. *God exists, i.e., there is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, or a model of true life*. Anyone who doesn't know, or doesn't believe, that God exists cannot obey him or know him as a Judge.

II. *He is unique*. No one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration and love toward God. For devotion, admiration and love arise only because the excellence of one surpasses that of the rest.

III. *He is present everywhere, or everything is open to him*. If people believed some things were hidden from him, or did not know that he sees all, they would have doubts about the equity of the Justice by which he directs all things—or at least they would not be aware of it.

obedience to the Law of God i.e. love for one's neighbour. For Spinoza love of one's neighbour is the absolute foundational doctrine the Bible teaches and everything else that the Bible says should be interpreted in the light of that aim. Similarly, it is not what people say or think that should be used to measure their obedience, but only their works. At the same time, all the fundamental tenets of True Religion are so general that everybody can project in them the specific meaning as they imagine it.²⁰⁹ In this way, the True Religion functions as an exemplar which universalises the particular understandings of piety. Consequently, it enables the religious-minded citizens to act according to the True Religion serving the social cohesion of the Republic, instead of the superstition of the Calvinist preachers.

Another exemplar concerns the ideal of human nature in the *Fourth Part of Ethics*. Now what happens in due course of the Part IV is the construction of an ideally rational human being, 'free man', who desires nothing that he/she would not equally desire for everyone else. The ideal rationally humans thus live in complete harmony so that "all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all." (*E4p18s*). Now, such an ideal rationality cannot be deduced from actual human nature, but is rather an abstraction which is imagined apart from Nature, without the determining powers of passions and confused ideas that necessarily follow from the interaction of human bodies and minds with other bodies and minds.²¹⁰ This makes the ideal of a rational human being a being of reason, or an exemplar to

IV. *He has the supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by a law, but acts only according to his absolute good pleasure and special grace.*

V. *The worship of God and obedience to him consist only in Justice and Loving-kindness, or in love toward one's neighbor;*

VI. *Everyone who obeys God by living in this way is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost.* If men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures;

VII. *Finally, God pardons the sins of those who repent.* No one is without sin.¹³ So if we did not maintain this, everyone would despair of his salvation, and there would be no reason why anyone would believe God to be merciful." (TTP XIV/25-28, pp.268-269 [III/177-178]; quotation slightly shortened).

²⁰⁹ JAMES, S. (2012), *Spinoza on philosophy, religion, and politics: the theologico-political treatise*. New York;Oxford; : Oxford University Press. P.214.

²¹⁰ At least the following passages are relevant for this claim that reason cannot alone determine the content of our ideas and course of action: 1) Human beings always suffer from external affections (*E4p4*). 2) Human conatus itself strives to persist with means of both imagination and reason. This includes Spinoza's statement that value-terms, like good, which are essential for reason's striving will nonetheless be conceived imaginatively (*E3p9, E3p12, E4pref.*). 3) Reason concerns universal principles such as laws of nature, but human action is always located within particular circumstances (*E4p62s*). Hence the application of reason's dictates requires the recognition of particular instances as their proper

which we can turn when we are assailed by passions and egoistic desires. In other words, such imaginative exemplars are to guide our practical reason. Without such exemplars, the universal dictates of reason would remain highly abstract and general. But when such dictates are incorporated into imaginative models and narratives concerning the right conduct, the general precepts become possible to be applied in the particular situations where all ethical and political principles need to be realised – in less than ideal conditions.²¹¹

circumstances of application. This recognition is in its part dependent on the associations delivered by imagination (*E2p18s*, *E5p10s*).

²¹¹ STEINBERG, J. (2014), 'Following a Recta Ratio Vivendi', in KISNER, M.J. and YOUNG, A. (eds.) *Essays on Spinoza's ethical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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